



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

6 March 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Apologies: Linda Dillon MLA

In Attendance: Keith McBride, Clerk
Oliver Bellew, Assistant Clerk
Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor
Stephen McGlennon, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked the staff of the Southern Area Hospice Services for the Committee's extremely informative visit, the previous afternoon, to its premises in Newry.

The Committee expressed concern at the recent announcement in the media that patients of the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre in Belfast may have to be rehoused due to essential remedial work which is required to the building. Members expressed concern at the uncertainty facing patients who suffer with serious psychiatric conditions and that the Committee had not been informed of the situation directly nor in advance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Minister, officials and representatives of the Trust are called to provide an urgent oral update and to answer Members questions on the matter.

Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.09pm.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2025.

4. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

5. Implementation of the Community Pharmacy Strategy – Oral Briefing from Community Pharmacy NI

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.11pm:

- Gerard Greene, Community Pharmacy NI;
- Marie Smith, Community Pharmacy NI;
- Dr Turlough Hamill, Community Pharmacy NI; and,
- Richard Grahame, Community Pharmacy NI.

The representatives briefed the Committee on the Public Health Bill.

Nuala McAllister MLA joined the meeting at 2.57pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

6. Implementation of the Community Pharmacy Strategy – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.34pm:

- Prof. Cathy Harrison, Department of Health; and,
- Kathryn Turner, Strategic Planning and Performance Group, Department of Health.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Implementation of the Community Pharmacy Strategy.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee discussed the need for greater digital innovation to support improvements within the Health Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ascertain the source of the £50m capital spend which will be required for the implementation of the e-Prescription development and whether the Department is considering a bid to the Transformation Fund for this capital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request information on any bids the Department intends to make to the Transformation Fund.

Agreed: Following a request from the Committee, the officials agreed to provide:

- A copy of the up-to-date results of the most recent Margin Survey; and,
- An overview of the methodology used to select contractors and drugs for the Margin Survey.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

7. SL1 The draft Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.46pm:

- Sean Curley, Principal Pharmaceutical Officer, Department of Health; and,
- Karen Simpson, Head of Medicines Legislation Unit, Department of Health.

The Committee considered the SL1 and briefing papers by the Clerk and the Department. The SL1 is for a UK-wide Statutory Instrument on the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 aimed at improving and strengthening the current legislative provisions relating to UK clinical trials following the UK's exit from the European Union.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

The Chairperson thanked the Officials and asked them to remain for the next agenda item.

8. SL1 – Medicines (Products for Human Use) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2025

The Committee considered the SL1 which seeks to update fees paid to the Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) as part of its full cost recovery service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Department in respect of its concerns around the removal of on-site nurses from schools containing children with additional healthcare needs. In his response, the Minister indicated that a comprehensive assessment of healthcare needs had been commissioned and that a final report would be published in June 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to:

- request an update from the Department following the publication of the report;
 - request details on the terms of reference for the assessment;
 - request a list of consultees of the assessment; and,
 - forward a copy of the correspondence to the Committee for Education.
- ii. The Committee considered an update from the Department in respect of the projected costs of the implementation of the Right Care Right Person model.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek a timeline of work on the Right Care Right Person model and for information on when anticipated costs are expected to be identified.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance in respect of the Northern Ireland Civil Service quarterly sickness rate from October to December 2024.
- iv. The Committee noted a call for evidence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in respect of its Agriculture Bill.
- v. Members noted that the Alzheimer's Society had written to the Chairperson to wish him well in his new role and to indicate that it looked forward to a continued working relationship with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the organisation to its Forward Work Programme of informal engagements.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Co-Chair of the Mental Health Policy Alliance seeking an opportunity to address the Committee on its work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the organisation to its Forward Work Programme of informal engagements.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from OFCOM in respect of "A safer life online for woman and girls – Practical guidance for tech companies".
- viii. The Committee noted an invitation to members to attend the Children's Law Centre Annual Lecture 2025. The Chairperson advised members to respond directly to the invitation.
- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual in respect of an alleged breach of the Windsor Framework regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Food Standards Agency and the Department for comment.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in respect of an RQIA Judicial Review in May 2023.
- xi. The Committee considered a departmental response in respect of the business case for £13m for the cost of respite and therapeutic care.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence and agreed to re-visit it at the meeting scheduled for 13 March.

- xii. The Committee noted a departmental response in respect of vaccination funding for GPs and Pharmacists.
- xiii. The Committee noted a departmental response in respect of GP practices in receipt of financial support packages.
- xiv. The Committee considered a departmental response in respect of the Cervical Cytology Screening Review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to:

- forward the correspondence to Ladies with Letters for information;
- request a comprehensive breakdown from the Department on figures per individual and per trust;
- detailed timeline in relation to the independent reviews which are taking place; and,
- re-visit the matter, once a response has been received, to explore the contingency plans to ensure no recurrence of the issue.

Alan Robinson MLA left the meeting at 4.58pm.

- xv. The Committee noted a departmental response in respect of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) training.
- xvi. The Committee considered departmental correspondence in respect of the cost of period products.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to establish which buildings will/will not have period products available.

- xvii. The Committee noted a departmental response in respect of Domiciliary Care Packages.
- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister to the First Minister and Deputy Minister in respect of the Programme for Government.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

Alan Robinson MLA rejoined the meeting at 5.03pm.

11. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed those organisations unable to avail of recent core funding and the impact this would have on the organisations and health services provision in general.

Agreed: It was agreed that the Clerk would circulate a draft committee motion in respect of this, for Members consideration.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on Thursday 13 March 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.08pm.

Philip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

13 March 2025