



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

12 December 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson),

Alan Chambers MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Linda Dillon MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies:

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

In Attendance:

Keith McBride, Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, 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

Apologies were received from and Órlaithí Flynn MLA and Nuala McAllister MLA.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked Linda Dillon MLA for taking the Chair at last week's meeting at short notice.

The Chairperson acknowledged that, Wednesday 11 December 2024, had been promoted by the Public Health Agency (PHA), through Organ Donation Northern Ireland, as 'Organ Donation Discussion Day', and reminded Members that Donate4Daithí is one of the stakeholder organisations that the Committee is to hold an informal meeting with on Thursday 9 January 2025.

The Chairperson advised Members that she had visited Willowbank Surgery in Keady, Armagh, earlier that morning, by invitation of the Royal College of GPs, to learn about the pressures that General Practitioners are currently facing and the large volume of work practices undertake daily.

The Chairperson referred Members to the Committee's informal meeting with the Patient Client Council Serious Adverse Incidents (SAIs) Engagement Platform, held on Wednesday 3 December 2024. The Committee considered the informative

discussions held with members of the Platform on the current SAI process and the redesign of the SAI Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health (DoH) to receive: a detailed timeline on progress of the SAI redesign work; how recommendations from the various Inquiries will be implemented by the Framework; and further information on what co-design work has taken place and who has been involved in the co-design work.

The Committee discussed that two key reports on the Cervical Cytology Review had been published the day before, on Wednesday 11 December 2024, by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) and the PHA, and the Review is now complete. The Committee expressed its sadness to learn of the devastating impact on the women affected, and their families, from smear test misreading and stated its concern over the reported fundamental flaws and delays of appropriate action by the SHSCT and the PHA.

The Committee noted that Ladies with Letters has called for a statutory public inquiry and an informal meeting with the group is to be scheduled for the New Year.

The Committee discussed concerns over delays in the roll out of HPV (Human Papillomavirus) screening.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to request that the Committee receive the Terms of Reference for both the independent expert Review of the Trust's Report and the Review of the health care system of NHS England.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive an oral briefing on the Cervical Screening Review, and on the timing of the roll out of HPV screening, from the relevant SHSCT, PHA, and DoH officials.

The Chairperson referred Members to the Committee's visit to the NI Hospice the previous week, on Thursday 5 December 2024. The Committee thanked the NI Hospice for providing the opportunity for Members to meet with patients and hold

detailed discussions with palliative care consultants to inform its Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care. The Committee noted that the engagement exercise had given Members an important understanding of the provision of palliative care within a hospice setting, in terms of pain relief for patients, improvement in quality of life, and the vulnerability of the patients.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to carry out further visits to hospices in the New Year, and reschedule a visit to the Children's Hospice.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting on 5 December 2024.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered correspondence received from the Belfast Health and Social Service Trust, bringing an error to the Committee's attention in regards to information provided at the previous week's briefing, on 5 December 2024, on the new Maternity Hospital. The Committee also considered a revised written briefing from the Trust.

The interim Belfast Trust Chief Executive had stated that her predecessor had accepted the handover of the building in March 2024. The Chief Executive has now corrected this to state that she had accepted the building on behalf of the Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to request that he address with the Committee, as a matter of urgency, the manner in which the Committee has received information regarding handover of the Hospital. To include how a correction had not been made by any party during Members' questioning at the briefing on 5 December 2024, considering that the Trust official was accompanied by the Chair of the Belfast Trust's Board and the DoH Deputy Secretary.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DoH to receive clarification on:

- which individuals within both DoH and the Trust, besides the interim Chief Executive, also had sight of, at the time of handover, the

information on which the interim Chief Executive accepted the handover and the roles and responsibilities of these individuals regarding the handover; and

- any conversations within DoH, and within the Trust, and inter Trust and DoH regarding the handover, to include confirmation as to whether there was any dissent from any parties on the handover at the time.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.21pm

5. Waiting Lists Six Monthly Update – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:21pm:

- Dr Tomas Adell, Director of Elective Care and Cancer Policy, DoH;
- Lisa McWilliams, Director of Performance, Strategic Planning & Performance Group (SPPG), DoH;
- Joanne Elliott, joint Head of Elective Care Policy, DoH; and
- Catriona O'Connor, joint Head of Elective Care Policy, DoH.

Linda Dillon left the meeting at 2.25pm

The officials briefed the Committee on waiting lists.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DoH to receive:

- on the Shared Island Fund, further information, especially regarding the “high profile” cancer project funding;

- on mega clinics, information on decision-making around where, when, and how, resources are focused, especially in regards to breast clinics in the first instance, in order to allow the Committee to gain an understanding of the roll out of these clinics;
- on elected care centres, detail of what information DoH currently holds, and is collating, for its decision making on the provision of elected care centres;
- on parents of children waiting on PEG insertion surgery, with the utmost urgency the Committee to receive details on how many of these children are waiting on the surgery, for how long are they waiting, and whether there is a distinction made between children waiting for the initial insertion surgery and those needing a follow up surgical intervention; and
- data regarding the number of patients removed from surgery waiting lists due to having died (noting that DoH is unable to provide definitive figures on the reasons for any decrease in surgery waiting lists, for example the number of patients taking themselves off waiting lists in order to receive private care).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on the Encompass IT system.

6. Children's Social Care Services – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.11pm:

- Eilís McDaniel, Director of Family and Children's Policy, DoH;
- Maura Dargan, Director of Children's Services/Executive Director of Social Work, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT);
- Colm McCafferty, Executive Director of Children's Services/Executive Director of Social Work, (SEHSCT); and
- Michael Burns, Office of Social Services, DoH.

The officials briefed the Committee on Children's Social Care Services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DoH to receive:

- detail of the figures of unallocated cases;
- information on the post-14 children transitional programme in regards to Pilot 2025; and
- further information on cross-border child protection processes in regards to North South Ministerial child protection arrangements, in particular on those already known to social services.

7. Draft SI The Human Medicines (Amendment) (Modular Manufacture and Point of Care) Regulations 2024

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.31pm:

- Chris Garland, Senior Principal Pharmaceutical Officer; and
- Sean Curley, Principal Pharmaceutical Officer.

There was a question and answer session regarding the draft Statutory Instrument The Human Medicines (Amendment) (Modular Manufacture and Point of Care) Regulations 2024 having been notified to the EU, as required under Directive 2015/1535 insofar as the UK-wide SI applies to Northern Ireland. The Committee having already been briefed by officials on the merits of the policy on 21 November 2024.

Agreed: The Committee considered draft SI The Human Medicines (Amendment) (Modular Manufacture and Point of Care) Regulations 2024 and recommended that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

8. SR 2024/196 The Bread and Flour (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024/196 The Bread and Flour (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

This Statutory Rule includes provision for the mandatory addition of folic acid to non-wholemeal flour to help reduce the number of Neural Tube Defects affected pregnancies and for changes to the required quantities of calcium carbonate, iron and niacin. There are exemptions provided for wholemeal flour and flour produced by small mill.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2024/196 The Bread and Flour (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and has no objection to the Rule.

9. SR 2024/00 Period Products (Free Provision) The Period Products (Department of Health Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024/00 Period Products (Free Provision) The period Products (Department of Health Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

This Statutory Rule specifies the bodies within DoH that must supply period products free of charge for persons on their premises who need them.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2024/00 Period Products (Free Provision) The period Products (Department of Health Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and recommended that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from DoH regarding the launch of a public consultation on the sustainable use of medicines in Northern Ireland

“Valuing Medicines: A Strategy for the Sustainable Use of Medicines in Northern Ireland”.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from DoH on why it has requested that the briefing on Home Care Services, scheduled for 5 December 2024, be postponed.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from DoH regarding its intention to launch a targeted consultation on the policy proposals to update the member contributions structure in the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from DoH regarding a press release on raising awareness of the public consultation “Hospitals - Creating a Network for Better Outcomes”.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities on a briefing by the Commissioner for Older People and a discussion regarding the need to urgently bring forward an Adult Protection Bill.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Mental Health Champion providing an update on work on the implementation of Right Care, Right person.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from Peace Summit Partners regarding its call for the Northern Ireland Executive to prioritise peacebuilding.
- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain on the Children’s Social Care Services and agreed to forward the correspondence to DoH for comment.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual on an issue regarding ADHD medication in terms of the NHS Shared Care Agreement for medication.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from DoH regarding the Executive Monitoring Round and Health and Social Care staff pay.
- xi. The Committee noted a response from DoH regarding how services are commissioned between Trusts and DoH.
- xii. The Committee noted a response from DoH providing further information following a briefing on Reform and Transformation on 28 November 2024.
- xiii. The Committee noted a Ministerial Written Statement 'The Introduction of a UK-Wide Indefinite Order to Prevent New Patients Aged Under 18 from Taking Puberty Blockers for the Purposes of Gender Incongruence and/or Gender Dysphoria Under the Care of Private Prescribers'.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from DoH providing an update on the launch of a public consultation on the proposed new framework for learning and improvement from Patient Safety Incidents (PSIs).
- xv. The Committee noted a copy of a response from DoH to the Committee for Communities on an update on the Adult Protection Bill.
- xvi. The Committee noted a press release from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) regarding new data on nursing and midwifery practice.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 16 January 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.42pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

16 January 2025