



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

**27 March 2025**

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Linda Dillon MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

**Apologies:** Colin McGrath MLA

**In Attendance:** Keith McBride, Clerk

Oliver Bellew, Assistant Clerk

Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk

Stephen McGlennon, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in public session.

## **1. Apologies**

Colin McGrath MLA.

## **2. Chairperson's Business**

### All Party Group on Terminal Illness

Members noted that the Chairperson and the Clerk had attended a meeting of the All Party Group on Terminal Illness to discuss the Committee's Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care Services.

Members noted that the Chairperson had undertaken to update the APG on the draft recommendations of the Inquiry and that the Group had commended the Committee for its work and agreed to support the Committee in lobbying to have its recommendations implemented by the Department.

### Save Our Acute Services

The Chairperson thanked those Members and support staff who attended an informal meeting with representatives of the Save Our Acute Services group to discuss issues relating to the South West Acute Hospital.

### Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre

Members noted that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson had visited the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre in Belfast to discuss the ongoing work required at the

building and the Committee's concerns around the proposed temporary rehousing of some of its patients.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister and representatives of the Trust would be attending the next meeting of the Committee to discuss those matters in greater detail.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request written briefings from the Trust and Department, and a copy of the latest building report on the facility in advance of the meeting scheduled for 3 April 2025.

Linda Dillon MLA joined the meeting at 2.11pm.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025.

### **4. Matters Arising**

None.

### **5. Budget 2025-2026: Oral Briefing by the Department**

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.13pm:

- Brigitte Worth, Director of Finance, DoH;
- David Keenan, Head of Financial Planning, DoH;
- Preeta Miller, Investment Director, DoH; and,
- Jessica Tsang, Capital Resources Unit, DoH.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Budget 2025-2026.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request further information on:

- Whether the rollout of Encompass will include all arms-length bodies, independent sector and agencies, and when the rollout is expected to be completed;
- The latest assessment on the use of Personal Protective Equipment within the Department;
- A breakdown of the underspend within the Trusts for 2024/25;
- Details of the £12m allocation for research in the Public Health Agency;
- The target for reducing sick absence in the workforce;
- The action to be taken to reduce sick absence rates;
- The impact and cost of sick absence within the workforce and projected savings;
- The extent of savings made since the rollout of the Medicines Optimisation Regional Efficiencies Programme and an explanation for the recent difficulties in making savings;
- The capital programmes to be progressed over the next three years following the reviews which are scheduled for April 2025;
- Further information on the funding of MDTs in Out of Hours settings.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

## **6. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Representatives of the All-Ireland Institute of Hospice & Palliative Care Services**

The following representatives joined the meeting at 3.46pm:

- Fintan Fagan, Chairperson, AIHPC;
- Melanie Nugent, Programme Manager – Education and Practice, AIHPC;
- Paula Pinto, Programme Manager – Policy and Engagement, AIHPC ;and,
- Prof. Joanne Reid, Chair of Cancer and Palliative Care, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Queens University Belfast.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care Services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Órlaithí Flynn MLA left the meeting at 4.20pm.

**Agreed:** The representatives agreed to provide further detail on developments in the Republic of Ireland in facilitating nurses as prescribers, including any evaluations carried out on the matter.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

## **7. General Dental Services Reform – Written Briefing by the Department**

The Committee noted a Departmental written briefing on General Dental Services Reform.

Diane Dodds MLA left the meeting at 4.42pm.

## **8. Draft Statutory Instrument – Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) Regulations 2024**

The Committee considered draft SI Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) Regulations 2024.

The Statutory Instrument seeks to progress amendments aimed at improving legislative provisions relating to clinical trials following the UK's exit from the EU.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered the draft SI Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 and recommended that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

## **9. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of concerns raised by an individual on the Food Information Regulations (NI) 2014. Members noted that the Food Standards Agency would be responding to the Committee in respect of these concerns.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Food Standards Agency in respect of the Food Information Regulations (NI) 2014. The Committee noted that the FSA had been in liaison with the individual who had raised the concern.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the individual for information.

- iii. The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the removal of on-site nurses from special schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to await the outcome of the joint PHA/EA review of health needs of children that attend Special Education schools before considering the matter further. The Committee also agreed to share a copy of the correspondence with the Committee for Education.

- iv. The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of Right Person, Right Care.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request details of the timeframe for the implementation of the governance structures and RPRC model. The Committee also agreed to request the Department's assessment of the impact of strike action by social workers.

- v. The Committee noted a copy of the Autism Strategy 2023-2028 Monitoring Report 23/24.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the University of Ulster in respect of its review of the Implementation of Abortion Services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an informal meeting with the group to discuss the issue further.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from Community Pharmacy NI in respect of its concerns around the validity of figures provided by Departmental officials during the Committee meeting of 6 March 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request the Department's views to the questions contained in the paper.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly's Engagement Office in respect the Balmoral Show 2025.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual in respect of concerns about the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre in Belfast.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider the correspondence further in the scheduled engagement with the Minister.

- x. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence between an individual and the Minister in respect of concerns around the RQIA and River House.
- xi. The Committee noted a Departmental response in relation to its questions around Community Pharmacy.
- xii. The Committee noted a Departmental response to its concerns around doctors receiving incorrect exam results following a Membership of the Royal College of Physicians exam.
- xiii. The Committee noted the 35<sup>th</sup> Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Business Office which amended a typographical error.
- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the PHA in respect of lessons learned and pandemic preparedness.

- xvi. The Committee noted a copy of the Alzheimer's Society's response to the 2025-2026 draft budget consultation.
- xvii. The Committee considered an invitation to attend an informal meeting with Auditory Verbal UK.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add Auditory Verbal to its Forward Programme for informal meetings.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the visit to St Francis Hospice in Dublin which had been confirmed for Wednesday 2 April 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

## **11. Any Other Business**

None.

## **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 3 April 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.51pm.

**Philip McGuigan MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**3 April 2025**