



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Health

### Minutes of Proceedings

**19 March 2026**

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

**Present:**

- Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
- Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Alan Chambers MLA
- Diane Dodds MLA
- Linda Dillon MLA
- Órlaithí Flynn MLA
- Nuala McAllister MLA
- Colin McGrath MLA
- Alan Robinson MLA

**Apologies:** None.

**In Attendance:** Keith McBride, Clerk  
Roisin Donnelly, Senior Assistant Clerk  
Michael Doran, Senior Assistant Clerk  
Shannen Lofthouse, Assistant Clerk  
Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk  
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor  
Caroline Devlin, Clerical Officer.

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in public session.

### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

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

The Chair advised that he and the Deputy Chairperson met with Dr McClean, Director of the Public Health Agency, yesterday regarding the meningitis outbreak in England. The Director confirmed that there is no link to any cases in Northern Ireland. The Chair further noted that the PHA has engaged with GPs, pharmacists, hospitals, schools and further education to reinforce symptom awareness and guidance.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meetings held on 10 and 12 March 2026.

#### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no Matters Arising.

#### **5. SL1 - The Pharmaceutical Society NI (General) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026.**

The Committee considered the SL1 - The Pharmaceutical Society NI (General) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with the merits of the proposal and that the Department make the rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further information from the Pharmaceutical Society in relation to the Professional Standards Authority Report.

#### **6. SR- 2026/21 - The Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026.**

The Committee considered SR 2026/21 - The Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026. The rule increases the value of optical vouchers by 4% for eligible patients, based on their financial circumstances, to help cover the cost of glasses or contact lenses.

**Agreed:** The Committee has considered SR 2026/16 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Member Contributions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the rule.

#### **7. SI- Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2026.**

The Committee considered Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2026. The SI amends the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 to support the safe supply, distribution and administration of vaccines across the UK.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Health has considered draft SI The Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2026 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

## **8. Oral Briefing from Northern Ireland Ambulance Service - An Overview.**

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.14pm:

- Ms Maxine Paterson, Chief Executive, NIAS; and
- Mr Neil Sinclair, Chief Paramedic, NIAS.

*Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.15pm.*

*Diane Dodds MLA joined the meeting at 2.44pm.*

*Nuala McAllister MLA joined the meeting at 2.45pm.*

The representatives briefed the Committee with an overview of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their briefing.

The briefing was reported by Hansard.

## **9. Business Office Departmental Minutes on Contingent Liabilities.**

The Committee considered a departmental Minute from the Department of Health, dated 12 March 2026, outlining a proposal for an indemnity relating to a centre for digital healthcare technology delivered through a City Deal collaboration between Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Ulster University.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further detail on the project to enable the Committee to make an informed decision.

## **10. Written Briefing from the Department- ADHD Services for Adult and Children Overview.**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department on ADHD Services for Adult and Children.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding:

- The timeframe for commissioning a future ADHD service that ensures equitable regional access for children and adults;
- The impact of the withdrawal of shared care arrangements and the steps the Department will take to address reports of GPs ceasing prescriptions, including any engagement with the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Pharmaceutical Officer;
- How the number of estimated referrals was arrived at, whether the estimated 3,417 annual referrals include individuals who pay privately for their medication, and to confirm the figure for those receiving medication following a private diagnosis.

## **11. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Medical Cement Shortages.
- ii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to receive a further written update following publication of the final version on 30 April, to include additional detail on the Department's work on funding and implementation.

- iii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Foundation Year 1 Local Medical Graduates.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Community Pharmacy NI.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to Community Pharmacy NI for comment.

- v. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Car- T Cell Therapy.

- vi. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding concerns around non commencement of Clause 8 of the Justice Bill.

- vii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the impact of potential welfare cuts on mental health and social care sectors.

- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Royal College of Psychiatrists.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request detail from the Department on what services have been withdrawn and what mitigations are being put in place.

- x. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Equality Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a summary of responses when they become available.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Examiner of Statutory Rules regarding the 59<sup>th</sup> Report.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding Chancellors 2026 Spring Forecast Summary.
- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the NI Assembly Business Office regarding the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.
- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Law Society of NI regarding the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 20216.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for a response.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a briefing from the Law Society and the Department on this matter.

- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman regarding Healthcare Waiting List Communications Recommendations- Follow Up Report 03/36.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider further with written briefing on Patient Client Council on Waiting Lists on 26 March 2026.

- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from Neurology Justice Collective regarding a response to Independent Neurology Inquiry Implementation.
- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from SOAS regarding responses on RQIA on SWAH and Western Health and Social Care Trust.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider further at oral briefing by the Minister on 26 March 2026.

xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee with a copy of a letter to Dr Zubir Ahmed MP regarding Unique Device Identifiers for Spectacles.

xix. The Committee noted correspondence from Mesh Ireland regarding a request to present to the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Mesh Ireland into its Forward Work Programme.

xx. The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom regarding action from social media firms to protect children.

xxi. The Committee considered correspondence from Calebs Cause regarding

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with Calebs Cause into its forward work programme.

xxii. The Committee considered correspondence from Inspire regarding supported housing and a request to brief the Health and Communities Committees.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Inspire to partake in a roundtable event with Mental Health Champion on 4 June.

- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual with a copy of a letter to Northern Health and Social Care Trust.
- xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding Minimum Unit Pricing.

## **12. Forward Work Programme**

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the forward work plan.

## **13. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move to closed session.

The Committee moved to closed session at 3.42pm.

## **14. Closed Session- Committee Deliberations on the Adult Protection Bill.**

The Committee resumed its informal deliberations of the Adult Protection Bill.

The Committee discussed the clauses and the Committee and Departmental amendments.

*Colin McGrath MLA left the meeting at 5.07pm.*

*Alan Chambers MLA left the meeting at 5.48pm.*

## **15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place in Room 30 at 9.30am on Monday 23 March.

*The meeting was adjourned at 6.00pm.*

**Phillip McGuigan MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**26 March 2026**