



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 2 July 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
Alan Chambers MLA
Diane Dodds MLA
Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Alan Robinson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:
Danny Donnelly (Deputy Chairperson)

Apologies: Linda Dillon MLA
Nuala McAllister MLA
Colin McGrath MLA

In Attendance: Keith McBride (Clerk)



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Michael Doran (Senior Assistant Clerk)

Roisin Donnelly (Senior Assistant Clerk)

Shannen Lofthouse (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Aidan Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 2.06 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. SL1 – The Feed and Food (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The following officials from the Food Standards Agency joined the meeting at 2.08 pm:

- Firth Piracha, Head of EU Relations, Trade and Legislation; and
- Richard Annett, Head of Food Standards, Compositional Standards and Nutrition Labelling.

Officials outlined the practical and operational aspects of the proposed statutory rule.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.



The Chairperson advised that we would return to the outcome of the proposed rule as there was no decision making quorum.

3. Oral Briefing from the Department – Encompass within the Transformation Agenda

The following officials from the Department of Health and the South Eastern Trust joined the meeting at 2.14 pm:

- Dr Paul Rice, Chief Digital Information Officer, Department of Health; and
- Pippa McCabe, Chief AHP Information Officer, South Eastern Trust.

The officials briefed the committee on progress in relation to the Encompass system within the Transformation Agenda.

Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.23 pm.

Órlaithí Flynn MLA joined the meeting at 2.31 pm.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to request information on the work undertaken by Health and Social Care Trusts to assess patient harm arising from the 50,000 lost letters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to request further information on the findings of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report, including a comparison with the assumptions, costs, benefits, and conclusions set out in the Department's Business Case.

4. Chairperson's Business

Oral Briefing with National Autistic Society and Forgotten Voices

The Chairperson noted that Members had received an oral briefing from the National Autistic Society and parents from the Spotlight programme on Tuesday 30 June. A number of issues were highlighted during the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request detailed information on current and planned residential capacity, including proposals to expand residential beds and facilities; the number of parents awaiting needs assessments; ongoing work to develop life-long planning for children with complex needs; the extent of work with families in shaping plans and services; clarification of the transport issue within the South Eastern Trust that prevented access to respite care; further detail on the scoping exercise, including purpose and expected outputs; and



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information on advocacy support services available to assist families during meetings and discussions about their children's care.

Summer Recess

The Chairperson advised the Committee that it is standard practice to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson during periods of recess to submit the Committee's views on the release or withholding of information in response to any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received.

The Chairperson further advised that any views submitted under this delegated authority would be reported to the Committee at its first meeting following the summer recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2026.



6. Matters Arising

Report on Committee Visit to London

Members were referred to the report on the Committee's visit to London with the Permanent Secretary on 2 – 3 June to examine primary care and the neighbourhood model. The report outlines the Committee's key findings, including the benefits of integrated neighbourhood teams, improved access through multidisciplinary working, and the importance of using data to manage demand and support preventative care.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the event report to the Department of Health for comment and specifically request an update on the practitioner health and wellbeing service.

Report on Mental Health Champion Event

Members were also referred to the report on the Committee's joint event with the Mental Health Champion held on Thursday 4 June. The report summarises discussions on the neighbourhood model's relevance to mental health provision, the need for stronger alignment with the Mental Health Strategy, and the sector's emphasis on early intervention, crisis pathways, and workforce pressures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the report to the Department of Health for comment and to share the report with the organisations that attended the Mental Health Champion event.



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7. SL1 – The Feed and Food (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee resumed its consideration of the SL1 once a quorum had been restored.

The Committee considered a proposal by the Food Standards Agency to make a statutory rule to amend existing delegated legislation regarding food and animal feed safety and standards to enhance consumer protections and clarity (including amending typographical errors).

The DUP reserved their position on the proposed rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the statutory rule.

8. Oral Briefing from the Department – Access to Palliative Care Services Scoping Exercise

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 3.38 pm:

- Gearóid Cassidy, Director of Primary Care;
- Roger Kennedy, Programme Director Community Care Directorate; and
- Paul Cavanagh, Director of Neighbourhood Directorate

The officials briefed the Committee on a number of specific matters relating to access to palliative services including progress on the scoping exercise report.



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Alan Chambers MLA left at 3.47 pm.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

**9. Written Briefing from the Department – Elective Care Framework:
Governance, Delivery and Outcomes**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health on the Elective Care Framework: Governance, Delivery and Outcomes.

**10. Written Briefing from the Department – Children’s Social Care Services
Review**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health on Children’s Social Care Services Review

**11. Written Briefing from the Department – Rural proofing and regional access
to services within the Transformation Agenda**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health on Rural proofing and regional access to services within the Transformation Agenda.



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12. Retention and Disposal Schedule – Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry

The Chairperson noted that a schedule has been produced following completion of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Retention and Disposal Schedule for the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry.

13. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding shared care arrangements for ADHD prescribing.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the cost and timeline of the mother and baby unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request regular updates.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding children's palliative care services.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Children's Hospice for information.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the implementation of the Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Law Society NI for information.

- v. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health to the Communities Committee regarding homelessness prevention.
- vi. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health to the Education Committee regarding the Benedict Blythe Foundation.
- vii. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health to the Education Committee regarding nursing cover for special educational needs summer schemes.
- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health to the Education Committee regarding Caleb's Cause.
- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding the Ministers attendance at the Committee event with Macmillan in November.



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- x. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding an individual's concerns around Childline.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a revised code of practice in relation to the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a consultation on reducing the claim period for the day care foods scheme.
- xiii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence sent to Department of Health from NI Indian Nurses Forum regarding the latest racist attacks on health and social care workers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek permission from NI Indian Nurses Forum to publish the correspondence onto the Assembly website.
- xiv. The Committee considered a response from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust regarding early supported discharge for stroke patients.
- xv. The Committee noted a copy of a letter sent to the Department of Justice from Neurology Justice Collective in relation to neurology recall, access to justice and patient safety concerns.



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- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding the consistency and effectiveness of Child Rights Impact Assessments and Equality Impact Assessments following a response from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).
- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding an update on the timeline for cashflow forecast and spend profiles.
- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the outturn and forecast outturn of April (R13).
- xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Examiner of Statutory Rules regarding SR 2026/103 The Jam and Similar Products (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026.
- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from the Economy Committee regarding the Regional Balance Bill.
- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding Finance Committee's Inquiry into Performance and Culture of the NICS and a copy of the Public Service Performance Report.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs regarding the Hunting with Dogs Bill – Call for Evidence.



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xxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from NI Neurological Charities Alliance regarding a request to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise that, due to the current legislative workload, there is no availability to schedule further briefings at this time. Committee staff will add requests to a waiting list should capacity arise.

xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence NI Fiscal Council regarding the NI Fiscal Council Sustainability Report 2026.

xxv. The Committee considered correspondence from SOAS with a request to receive a copy of the Elective Care Briefing from 23 April 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to SOAS for information.

xxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Food Standards Agency regarding relation to precautionary allergen labelling.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the individual for information.

xxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Professional Standards Authority regarding the General Osteopathic Council Report 2025 – 2026.



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- xxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from Hospice UK regarding a follow up on hospice sector priorities following the Department of Health's response to the Palliative Care Inquiry recommendations.
- xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care regarding a parliamentary bulletin.
- xxx. The Committee noted correspondence from Alzheimer's Society regarding a new report: 'Delivering Care for People with Dementia'.
- xxxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Strategic Investment Board Ltd regarding an investing activity report for the Department of Health.
- xxxii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a copy of an email to Belfast Trust in relation to tribunal cases.
- xxxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a copy of an email to Belfast Trust in relation to corporate governance failures.
- xxxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a copy of an email to Belfast Trust in relation to a concern with a board response.
- xxxv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a copy of an email to Belfast Trust in relation to a public inquiry and external investigation request.



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xxxvi. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding an update on a new vision plan for South West Acute Hospital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to SOAS for information.

xxxvii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding future support arrangements for adults with learning disabilities post transition from children's services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Caleb's Cause for information.

xxxviii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the impacts of staff within Royal College of Nursing following issues raised by NI Covid Bereaved Families for Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Royal College of Nursing for information.

xxxix. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the Extern Prisoner Exchange Support Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Extern for information.



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- xl. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding a turning 18 checklist and English model for the Care Act Assessment following a briefing from Caleb's Cause 11 June.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Caleb's Cause for information.

- xli. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding violence and aggression against staff.
- xlii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Health and Social Care workforce census publication.
- xliii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a joint written statement from the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice. This includes a written statement from the Minister of Health.
- xliv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a copy of the Minister of Health's speech from the Quality and Safety Summit on 30 June.
- xlvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service regarding additional information on issues discussed at the oral briefing on 21 May.
- xlvi. The Committee noted correspondence from The Northern Ireland Marine



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Task Force Sea Across Society regarding their launch event being held in the Long Gallery on Tuesday 3rd November.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would RSVP individually.

xlvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office regarding the Health Estate in Northern Ireland Report.

xlvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Professional Standards Authority regarding the Health and Care Professions Council performance review.

xlix. The Committee noted a response from the Western Trust regarding urgent concerns regarding A&E conditions at Altnagelvin.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the individual for information.

14. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the draft forward work plan.



15. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

16. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 3 September at 2.00 pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.27 pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health
17 September 2026