



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 20 August 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Donnelly (Deputy Chairperson)
Alan Chambers MLA
Diane Dodds MLA
Nuala McAllister MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Colin McGrath MLA
Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies: Linda Dillon MLA

In Attendance: Keith McBride (Clerk)
Shannen Lofthouse (Assistant Assembly Clerk)



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Aidan Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)

Caroline Devlin (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 1.31 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Oral Briefing from the Permanent Secretary

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 1.31 pm:

- Mr Mike Farrar, Permanent Secretary; and
- Ms Tracey McCaig, Interim Chief Operation Officer, SPPG

The officials briefed the Committee on a number of specific matters relating to the appointment of a new Minister of Health following the resignation of Mike Nesbitt MLA. The Committee discussed ongoing issues relating to proposals for the reconfiguration of Emergency General Surgery services within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Danny Donnelly MLA declared an interest MLA for East Antrim.



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A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Northern Trust on surgical activity across the two hospital sites, including a breakdown of surgical operations, activity levels between the hospitals, and length of stay data for patients undergoing procedures at each site.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update on the Trust's plans for the development of robotic surgery, including whether there are proposals to introduce robotic surgical systems, details of any work currently underway, and anticipated timelines for implementation.

3. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Committee staff would liaise with the Department throughout the week to identify a suitable date and time for a meeting with the new Minister of Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the incoming Minister of Health, Robbie Butler MLA, to congratulate him on his appointment and wish him well in his new role.



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Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the outgoing Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt MLA, to express its thanks for his engagement and for the work undertaken during his tenure.

The meeting was adjourned at 2.49 pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health
17 September 2026