



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Health

### Minutes of Proceedings

**26 February 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
- Nuala McAllister MLA
- Colin McGrath MLA
- Alan Robinson MLA

**Apologies:** Órlaithí Flynn MLA

**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**

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

**2. Chairperson's Business**

**3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meetings held on 19 February 2026.

**4. Matters Arising**

There were no Matters Arising.

**5. SR- 2026/16 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Member Contributions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.**

The Committee noted the proposal for this statutory rule at its meeting on 15 January. A call for views on the proposed rule was issued on 16 January and closed on 28 January. No responses were received and no issues were identified.

The Department has confirmed that there have been no changes to policy content since the SL1 was submitted to the Committee.

**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.

**6. SL1- The Pharmaceutical Society Northern Ireland (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.**

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note receipt of the SL1 and proposed statutory rule and that these will be published on the Assembly website and social media as part of the call for views on the proposal.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the SL1 will be scheduled for consideration at the meeting on 26 March and will write to the Department to inform them of this decision.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request Department officials to be available on 26 March should Members require clarification.

**7. Community Pharmacy NI - Oral Briefing.**

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.11pm:

- Ms Marie Smith, CPNI Chair & NI Regional Lead, Boots;
- Mr Gerard Greene, Chief Executive, Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland;

- Mr Nigel Kelly, Chairperson, Ethigen Ltd; and
- Dr Turlough Hamill, Vice Chairperson, Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Community Pharmacy NI and outlined the significant challenges currently facing the sector, particularly in relation to clawback pressures and ongoing medicines-supply issues.

*Colin McGrath MLA joined the meeting at 2.15pm.*

*Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.27pm.*

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their briefing.

The briefing was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to request the following:

- Engagement with Community Pharmacy to explore negotiating a contract similar to GP's contract;
- A response on how the funding gap in Community Pharmacy will be addressed; and
- Clarification on funding for Community Pharmacy within the Neighbourhood Model.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with the Department in relation to pharmacy in May/June.

## **8. Written Briefing from the Department - Children's Social Care Services.**

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department regarding Children's Social Care Services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request information on how the Minister intends to fund this proposal. If a three-year budget is agreed, clarification on how this will be financed within that allocation and the proposed timescale for implementation.

## **9. Written Briefing from the Department- Elective Care Framework Implementation.**

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department regarding the Elective Care Framework Implementation.

## **10. Written Briefing from the Department- Autism Strategy.**

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department regarding the Autism Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on when a response to the Emotional Wellbeing Consultation will be published, to enable the Committee to undertake appropriate scrutiny.

## **11. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding further information on waiting lists.
- ii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding further information on substance use strategy.
- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding transfers from children to adult pain management waiting lists.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the Departments response to the individual.

- iv. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding National Autistic Society NI Forgotten Voices campaigners.
- v. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding cancer and paediatrics waiting lists.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that in order to support the Committee's scrutiny ahead of the briefing on 23 March, it would request that the Department provide further information on the following areas:

- A breakdown of the reasons why individuals leave lists, including any trends or patterns identified;
  - An explanation of why the Department and Trusts are unable to access or collate the information required to assess population need accurately;
  - Clarification on whether Trusts' standard operating procedures include the routine collection of reasons for leaving lists, and if not, why this is not currently captured;
  - Confirmation of whether any evidence exists to support the collection of data on late diagnosis, and if not, the reasons for this gap;
  - Information on whether a patient audit relating to late diagnosis has been undertaken or is planned, and what methodology would be used.
- vi. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding acute mental health inpatient centre responses.
- vii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding community care and patient flow- self-directed support.
- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding ADHD services.
- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding ADHD Needs Assessment Report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further information in relation to the timeline for recommendations.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the public consultation on 'Free- From' places in England with regards to the Tobacco and Vapes Bill's
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding Spring Supplementary Estimates.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding gambling related harm- policy support paper.
- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from Haemochromatosis UK with a request to brief the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include Haemochromatosis UK in the next Committee Clinic.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from Diabetes UK with a request to formally brief the Committee.
- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from Royal College of Nursing with a copy of correspondence to Minister regarding recognising the value of the nursing profession.
- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for Finance regarding a review of Arm's Length Bodies.
- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from Public Accounts Committee regarding a Memorandum of Reply in relation to access to GP services.

- xviii. The Committee considered a reply from The Executive Office regarding legislation on minimum unit pricing for alcohol and noted their disappointment that this has not received Executive approval.
- xix. The Committee noted correspondence from Muscular Dystrophy UK and Spinal Muscular Atrophy UK regarding newborn screening for Spinal Muscular Atrophy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Muscular Dystrophy UK and Spinal Muscular Atrophy UK to the next Committee Clinic.

- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from Belfast Works Connect regarding the local growth fund: sustaining place based on support.
- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the Department for Education 5 year budget.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Western Health and Social Care Trust regarding Emergency General Surgery data.
- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual with a copy of a letter to the Minister regarding Gallbladder Surgery Waiting Times.
- xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Adult Protection Bill.

xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding Calebs Cause NI.

xxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding Pharmacy Funding Emergency.

xxvii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the supply of medicines.

## **12. Forward Work Programme**

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

The Chair noted that a email invitation will be sent to all Members ahead of the Health Committee's visit to St. Francis Hospital in Dublin on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May.

## **13. Any Other Business**

Members noted their disappointment at learning from guests about the absence of MLAs and the Committee at the Department's 'Eating Disorder Managed Care Network' launch in the Long Gallery on 23 February, and that Members themselves had not been aware that the event was taking place.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on the recent eating disorders event held on 23 February, specifically whether invitations were issued to MLAs and to the Committee.

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

The Committee moved to closed session at 4.54pm.

#### **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 following matters:

- Assessment of the Southern HSC Trust's proposed amendment to Clause 3, seeking to extend the duty to co-operate so that it applies to both the inquiry and any subsequent investigation;
- Concerns that leaving the provision of independent advocates to Trusts could result in inconsistent access and that advocates may not be provided in all cases where required;
- Noting that while Clause 3 requires Trusts to have regard to the provision of an independent advocate, this is not explicitly referenced in Clauses 5, 6, 7 or 8.

**Agreed:** To request assurances from the Assembly Bill team on how consistent provision of independent advocates will be ensured.

**Agreed:** To write to the Department to ask whether it would consider strengthening the wording in Clauses 5–8 to address these concerns.

**Agreed:** To schedule an extra meeting during the week, on Tuesdays, to allow time for further deliberations.

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

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place in Room 29 at 9.30am on 3 March.

*The meeting was adjourned at 5.33pm.*

**Phillip McGuigan MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**5 March 2026**