Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 22 October 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Donnelly (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)
Michael Doran (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Roisin Donnelly (Senior Assistant Clerk)

Shannen Lofthouse (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Aidan Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)
Caroline Devlin (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.05 pm in closed session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Closed Session – Informal Briefing with MindWise Lived Experience Group

The Committee met with staff and members of the MindWise Lived Experience Group and heard about the group's activities and the benefits of its work.
The Committee heard about the organisation's ongoing work to support people diagnosed with cancer and their families.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.14pm
Órlaithí Flynn joined the meeting at 2.18 pm.
Linda Dillon joined the meeting at 2.25 pm.

The Committee moved to public session at 3.04 pm.

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3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson noted the publication of Section 6 of the COVID-19 Inquiry report yesterday, highlighting aspects of particular importance to healthcare settings and care homes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on any proposals or work being undertaken in relation to these issues and to request that the Committee be copied into the Executive's response to the Inquiry.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2026.

5. Matters Arising

The Chairperson noted that the Safe Staffing Bill was not included on the Executive agenda this week and that it is now expected to be considered at the next Executive meeting on 5 November. Members expressed concern regarding the impact of the delay on the legislative timetable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Health and the First Minister and deputy First Minister seeking clarification on the reasons why the Safe and Effective Staffing legislation was not included on the agenda of the Executive meeting on 21 October and the steps required to progress the Bill.

6. Oral Briefing from the Belfast Trust– Capital Projects, Savings Plans and Winter Preparedness

The following Trust representatives joined the meeting at 3.16 pm:

- Ms Jennifer Welsh, Chief Executive;
- Mr Alaistair Campbell, Interim Deputy Chief Executive;
- Ms Claire Corry, Executive Director of Finance;
- Ms Olga O'Neill, Executive Director of Nursing & User Experience; and
- Mr David Porter, Director of Strategic Development

A question and answer session followed in relation to capital projects, savings plans and winter preparedness.

Danny Donnelly MLA declared an interest as a bank nurse.

Nuala McAllister MLA left the meeting at 4.42 pm.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Trust on a number of issues discussed.

7. Written Briefing from the Department – Implementation of Maternity Services Review

The Committee considered a written briefing on the Implementation of Maternity Services Review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding consultant staffing pressures in maternity services and to request an update on the implementation of the Birthrate Plus recommendations.

8. Written Briefing from the Breast Cancer Now and 'Wear it Pink' Campaign

The Committee considered a written briefing on the Breast Cancer Now and 'Wear it Pink' Campaign.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding capacity and waiting times for breast cancer services.

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9. Correspondence

i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding Extern's relocation of services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward Extern for information.

ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Regional Balance Bill.

iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Regional Balance Bill.

iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Business Plan RAG Status.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an assessment of progress against last year's priorities and their impact on current-year priorities.

v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the delivery of a facial palsy service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Facial Palsy UK for information.

vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the update on arrangements for the introduction of lung cancer screening.

vii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding Haemochromatosis screening.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Haemochromatosis UK for information.

viii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding fostering services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Barnardo's and Action for Children for information.

ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding Save Our Acute Services concerns in relation to RQIA recommendations.

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

x. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding mesh removal procedures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Mesh Ireland for information.

xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding Knockbracken refurbishment costs.

xii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding cancer waiting times.

xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding diabetes prevention work

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Diabetes UK for information.

xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding costs of the Independent Reconfiguration Committee.

xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Anti – Poverty Strategy

xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the 'HSC Workforce Strategy Action Plan' progress report.

xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a UK consultation on adrenaline nasal sprays for the treatment of anaphylaxis.

xviii. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding the New Maternity Hospital.

xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the South Eastern Trust thanking the Committee for the opportunity to attend on 15 October.

xx. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding Neurology Justice Collective and Protective Mothers NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Justice seeking sight of Departmental responses for comment.

xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding Departmental Five Year Plans.

xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from Neurology Justice Collective detailing their response to RQIA and a request for scrutiny.

xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Police Service Northern Ireland regarding Right Care Right Person.

xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from HEART UK following their drop in event at Parliament Buildings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department of Health for comment.

xxvi. The Committee considered correspondence from IncredABLE regarding adult short breaks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to RQIA for comment.

xxvii. The Committee considered correspondence from NICCY regarding their research report 'Rights Without Borders' and a request to meet.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment.

xxviii. The Committee considered correspondence from Extern with an update regarding the needle exchange service relocation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust regarding temporary arrangements for Extern services.

xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Professional Standards Authority regarding an invitation to a Research conference.

xxx. The Committee considered correspondence from Hear Our Voices regarding Non Speaking Awareness.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment.

xxxi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding lack of awareness in relation to PANS/PANDAS.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment.

xxxii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding regulatory concerns.

xxxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding referral, knowledge and data recording of rare cancers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Clerk took Members through the Forward Work Programme and outlined the proposed plan for forthcoming Committee business.

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

11. Any Other Business

A Member raised concerns about emergency evacuation procedures in care settings, including care homes, following the recent bomb threat affecting schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking assurances that robust procedures are in place to protect residents in the event of such emergencies.

A Member raised the issue of access to specialist treatment for pectus deformities (chest wall deformities) and highlighted the model of care available in Scotland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask whether it has considered establishing a regional service and to provide details of any plans to develop such a service in Northern Ireland.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 5 November at 2.00 pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.04 pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health
5 November 2026