Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 5 November 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Donnelly (Deputy Chairperson)
Alan Chambers MLA
Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Alan Robinson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:
Linda Dillon MLA
Diane Dodds MLA
Colin McGrath MLA

Apologies: Nuala McAllister 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)

The meeting commenced at 2.12 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson noted attendance at various events, including the Advancing Care Awards and the launch of the Occupational Therapy Manifesto. The Chairperson thanked the organisations for the invitations and highlighted the important contribution of Allied Health Professionals, including Occupational Therapists, to the delivery of health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson welcomed developments in women's health services, including investment in endometriosis services and the introduction of robotic surgery for women with complex conditions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to highlight to the Department of Health that at next week's briefing on waiting lists, the Committee would ask questions on waiting times for endometriosis surgery and information

on any plans to commission services through the Department of Health. The Committee also agreed to ask about any plans for provision of services on a cross-border basis.

The Chairperson welcomed the expansion of bowel cancer screening and encouraged eligible individuals to avail of screening when invited.

The Chairperson highlighted concerns regarding stakeholder engagement in the development of policy and service improvements, particularly in light of IncredABLE's recent correspondence with the Committee, and emphasised the need for comprehensive engagement with relevant organisations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health requesting details of the stakeholder engagement and consultation process being undertaken as part of this work.

The Chairperson highlighted newborn screening for Spinal Muscular Atrophy and the current position in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health expressing concern that families in Northern Ireland may be disadvantaged by the absence of SMA screening and requesting a detailed update on progress towards implementation.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2026.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson noted the written ministerial statement on Daisy Hill Hospital and Members discussed the potential implications for services at the hospital and for the wider Health and Social Care workforce.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health seeking clarification on the reasons for not proceeding with the proposed moratorium and the implications of this decision for services at Daisy Hill Hospital and the wider Health and Social Care workforce.

5. Oral Briefing from the Northern Trust – Savings Plans, Winter Preparedness and Hospital Reconfiguration

The following Trust representatives joined the meeting at 2.29 pm:

- Suzanne Pullins, Chief Executive;
- Gillian Traub, Director of Operations;
- Stevie Lennon, Director of Finance; and
- Lynne McCartney, Director of Surgery, Women's Health and Diagnostic Services.

Representatives briefed the Committee with an update on trust savings, winter preparedness plans and reconfiguration.

A question and answer session followed.

Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.27 pm.

Colin McGrath MLA joined the meeting at 3.02 pm.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

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

Colin McGrath MLA left the meeting at 3.43 pm.

6. SL1 – The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 (Age of Sales Notices and Consequential Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2026.

The Committee noted that the Department of Health is proposing to make a statutory rule that will to prescribe new requirements for the physical notice which tobacco retailers will be required to display from 1st January 2027.

Alan Chambers MLA declared an interest as a tobacco retailer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the SL1 papers on the Assembly website and to issue a call for views on the proposal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule consideration of the proposed SR at its meeting on 26 November.

7. SL1 – The Medicines (Pharmacies) (Applications for Registration and Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026.

The Committee noted that the Department of Health is proposing to make a statutory rule that will increase the fees payable by pharmacy premises to the Pharmaceutical Society of NI (PSNI), the statutory regulator for pharmacists and pharmacy premises.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the SL1 papers on the Assembly website and to issue a call for views on the proposal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule consideration of the proposed SR at its meeting on 26 November.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask Departmental officials and Pharmaceutical Society NI to brief the Committee on the proposed rule.

8. Legislative Consent Motion – UK Health Bill

The Committee noted the Legislative Consent Motion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the draft report and take a position on the motion at its meeting on 19 November 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that officials attend to brief the Committee on the motion at its meeting on 12 November 2026.

9. Written Briefing from the Department – Implementation of the Adoption and Children's Act

The Committee noted a written briefing on the Implementation of the Adoption and Children's Act.

10. Written Briefing from the Department – Public Inquiries and Implementation Programme Management Board

The Committee noted a written briefing on Public Inquiries and Implementation Programme Management Board.

11. Written Briefing from the Independent Autism Reviewer – An Overview

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Independent Autism Reviewer.

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

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12. Correspondence

i. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding delayed discharges and mental health support.

ii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding SOAS Group Equality Screening.

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

iii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the British Dental Association.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the British Dental Association for information.

iv. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the Palliative Care Scoping Exercise.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Hospice Alliance for information.

v. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding issues discussed at the budget briefing on 8 October.

vi. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding HRT medications.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Nurse Practitioners for information.

vii. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding the Mental Health Strategy Investment and Expenditure Update.

viii. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding Mental Health Data Transparency.

ix. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding Endometriosis UK.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Endometriosis UK for information.

x. The Committee noted a copy response from the Department of Health to the Justice Committee regarding safeguarding, accountability and justice in faith organisations.

xi. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding IncredABLE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to IncredABLE for information.

xii. The Committee noted a copy response from the Department of Health to the Justice Committee regarding Protective Mothers NI.

xiii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the SHE Women's Health Forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the SHE Women's Health Forum for information.

xiv. The Committee noted a copy response from the Department of Health to the Communities Committee regarding the cost and budget for homelessness.

xv. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health State of Child Health Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health for information.

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xvi. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the COVID-19 Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to NI Covid Families for information.

xvii. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding maternity services, savings plans and winter preparedness.

xviii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding issues raised by B Positive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to B Positive for information.

xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the independent review of unfitness to plead.

xx. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the revised Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Infected Blood Inquiry Northern Ireland Memorial Consultation.

xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Strategic Framework on Reducing Offending and Reoffending.

xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust regarding the Health Committee meeting of 15 October 2026.

xxiv. The Committee noted a response from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust regarding the Health Committee's additional queries.

xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from the AERA Committee regarding the Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill.

xxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Economy Committee regarding the Credit Unions (Amendment) Bill.

xxvii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Executive Committee regarding the Truth Recovery Independent Panel.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request to be copied into a response from the Department of Health.

xxviii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Executive Committee regarding waiting times for childhood abuse victims.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request to be copied into a response from the Department of Health

xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding the Outturn and Forecast Outturn for September 2026.

xxx. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Committee regarding maladministration by the Ministry of Defence.

xxxi. The Committee noted a response from CPNI regarding a Department of Health Community Pharmacy briefing.

xxxii. The Committee considered correspondence from Visual Artists Ireland regarding arts-health capacity and the shift-left agenda.

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

xxxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from Visual Artists Ireland regarding 'The Visual Artist in Northern Ireland' report.

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

xxxiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Mental Health Champion in response to the Committee for Health.

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

xxxv. The Committee noted correspondence from The Burn Pit Lounge regarding concerns raised with the Committee for Health.

xxxvi. The Committee noted the Strategic Investment Board's Investing Activity Report for the Department of Health.

xxxvii. The Committee considered correspondence from the NI Youth Forum regarding Your Voice, Our Future research results.

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

xxxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from PIPS regarding Right Care Right Person readiness concerns.

xxxix. The Committee considered correspondence from SOS Causeway Hospital Campaign requesting a meeting with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to SOS Causeway to schedule an informal briefing.

xl. The Committee considered meeting requests from Trussell and Blood Cancer UK.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond advising that, due to legislative business, it was unable to facilitate a meeting at this time but would welcome written briefings from these organisations.

xli. The Committee considered correspondence from Caoimhin's ROHHAD Journey regarding a request to meet with Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond advising that, due to legislative business, it was unable to facilitate a meeting at this time.

xlii. The Committee considered correspondence from Caleb's Cause regarding survey results and a full report.

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

xliii. The Committee noted correspondence from Emerald Urgent Care regarding its engagement offer and framework for the Committee for Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond advising that the document had been shared with all Committee Members.

xliv. The Committee noted the October 2026 e-newsletter from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

xlv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal College of Nursing regarding the Safe and Effective Staffing Bill.

xlvi. The Committee considered correspondence from Extern regarding the Enhanced Needle and Syringe Exchange Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health as supplementary correspondence.

xlvii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Muckamore Abbey Inquiry and Trust correspondence.

xlviii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in relation to Antrim Emergency Department.

xlix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding mental health services across Northern Ireland.

l. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding funding for Adult ADHD Support and Community Peer Groups.

li. The Committee considered a meeting request from an individual regarding family justice and child welfare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond advising that, due to legislative business, it was unable to facilitate a meeting at this time.

lii. The Committee noted a number of items of correspondence from an individual regarding a procedural concerns.

liii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding communication support, referrals and waiting times for children with SEND.

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

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13. Oral briefing from the Department – Adult Protection Bill

The following officials and Trust representatives joined the meeting at 4.16 pm:

- Kerry Loveland-Morrison, Head of the Adult Safeguarding Unit;
- Mark McGuicken, Director of Disability and Older People; and
- Deborah Hanlon, Head of Adult Safeguarding, Southern Trust

Alan Chambers MLA left the meeting at 4.17 pm.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Adult Protection Bill.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

14. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The Committee moved to closed session at 4.45 pm.

15. Adult Protection Bill – Committee Deliberations.

The Committee discussed outstanding issues relating to the Adult Protection Bill.

Órlaithí Flynn MLA left the meeting at 5.00 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the Bill in the coming weeks.

16. 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.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for evidence on the Health and Social Care (Staffing) Bill on the date of the Bill's introduction, for a two week period.

17. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 12 November at 2.00 pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.12 pm.

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Phillip McGuigan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health
12 November 2026