

17<sup>th</sup> October 2023

The Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
1 Horse Guards Road London  
SW1A 2HQ  
Erskine House  
20-32 Chichester St Belfast  
BT1 4GF

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing collectively as Chief Executives of Northern Ireland's six Health and Social Care Trusts to emphasise in the strongest possible terms the need for concrete action on pay awards for our staff.

We very much welcome the dialogue you and your officials have had with HSC trade unions. However, despite these discussions, a pay offer for our staff has not yet been tabled for 2023/24.

As Chief Executives, we care deeply about our workforce. We know just how much they gave during the pandemic. We are also very conscious of the toll being taken on them by the continuing severe pressures on services.

It is unsustainable and unfair that they should be left with a de facto pay freeze during a cost of living crisis.

This sends out entirely the wrong signal on how health and social care staff are valued by society. It should also be stressed that staff retention is becoming an increasingly acute problem for services across HSC.

You will be aware that the 2019 health pay dispute was only resolved with the re-establishment of pay parity with England. It is hugely frustrating to see history repeating itself within four years.

The Department of Health has explained that it is not currently feasible for it to match English pay offers for this year. Under the current budgetary settlement, this would only be possible with large scale cuts on an unprecedented scale. No one wants that option and the Department has undoubtedly been left in an impossible position.

Please be assured that we are very mindful of the many pressures on public funding both in Northern Ireland and across the UK. It is nevertheless clear that a political intervention on additional funding is required before the pay issue can be resolved.

As things stand, further industrial action is planned. This will inevitably impact heavily on an already fragile health and care system, in what is invariably the most challenging time of year. We have very deep concerns about impacts on patients and other service users.

We are acutely aware that there is a heavy responsibility on us as Chief Executives to drive forward efficiency and transformation measures and make the best possible use of available resources. Reducing our unacceptably long waiting lists will require not just investment but a sustained focus on productivity. Whilst we are committed to making that happen, progress becomes immeasurably more difficult with a demoralised and depleted workforce and a sustained period of industrial action.

Consequently, we are appealing directly to you to do all in your power to find a solution to the 2023/24 pay issue. This cannot be a subsidiary issue to the work being done to restore the NI Assembly, as important as that may be.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Bloomfield'.

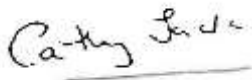
Michael Bloomfield  
Chief Executive  
NIAS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roisin Coulter'.

Roisin Coulter  
Chief Executive  
SEHSCT

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Neil Guckian'.

Neil Guckian  
Chief Executive  
WHST

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathy Jack'.

Cathy Jack  
Chief Executive  
BHSCT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria O'Kane'.

Maria O'Kane  
Chief Executive  
SHSCT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Welsh'.

Jennifer Welsh  
Chief Executive  
NHSCT

**\* Please note: This letter will be published on HSC Trust websites and shared with our staff**