**CLARIFICATION ON SAFE STAFFING**

The Framework Agreement (<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/AfC-draft-framework-agreement.pdf>) makes a number of commitments in respect of safe staffing. I thought it would be helpful to provide some further clarity on some of these.

**Social Work and Social Care**

The Framework Agreement states that as a matter of urgency, there shall be detailed and sustained engagement with the Department of Health, and the affiliated trade unions representing social workers on the range of issues that have led to the current vacancy pressures, etc, with a view to addressing safe staffing concerns. This engagement shall include discussion about wider social care roles and associated funding implications.

The Department and HSC employers are keen to start this engagement as soon as possible. As a first step, the Department confirms, as part of the overall Framework Agreement, that the ongoing Social Work Workforce Review will be published as soon as it is completed (currently scheduled for September 2020), and, as with other staff groups, accompanied by a fully-costed implementation plan for the recommendations that are accepted, together with the establishment of a dedicated workstream to oversee implementation of agreed recommendations.

In addition, relevant HSC employers will hold priority consultations with trade unions to agree appropriate local, Trust-based responses to local Trust workforce pressures, within the scope of existing terms and conditions, taking account of service needs.

**Workforce Strategy**

In the Framework Agreement, the Department commits to an urgent schedule of discussions to develop a costed action plan for the implementation of the health and social care Workforce Strategy 2026, which includes all health and social care professional roles. This will need to focus on

* Urgent filling of all permanent posts on a permanent basis (there should be no more unnecessary temporary contracts).
* Development of career progression pathways for staff.
* The availability of paid in-service training for staff.
* An end to delays in recruitment and the need to expedite the recruitment process.
* A continuation of the focus on agency spending and remedial steps to end unnecessary expenditure.
* Full design of the optimum workforce model by 2023.

As a next step, and as part of the work currently being done in the Safe Staffing Framework Delivery Group, the Department confirms the immediate establishment of two workstreams:

* Admin and Clerical
* Support Services

I propose that the Terms of Reference should be agreed between the Department, HSC employers and trade unions by 31 March 2020, with final reports to be agreed by 30 September 2020. These workstreams will form part of the urgent priorities being identified by the Safe Staffing Framework Delivery Group.

As agreed in the Framework Agreement, the workstreams will tackle recruitment issues including delays in recruiting to posts, training, career progression and associated issues. An important part of this work will be to identify “early wins” that can be progressed immediately. We will also accelerate progress on the Work-Life Balance action in the Workforce Strategy.

In accordance with the Framework Agreement, the Department and HSC employers have agreed to discuss, as a matter of urgency with trade unions, the urgent filling of all permanent posts on a permanent basis, with a view to ensuring that there should be no unnecessary temporary contracts. We will wish to bring forward actions by 30 September 2020, but an early action will be to hold targeted recruitment initiatives.

**Initiatives to increase supply of staff**

HSC employers will continue to work on initiatives to increase the supply of staff into social work and social care, including, for example, the Open University and employment-based routes for social care.