

## **Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers response to Northern Health and Social Care Trust 2017/18 Financial Planning Savings Plan Consultation Document**

### **Introduction**

The Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW) is part of the British Association of Social Workers which is the largest professional body for social workers across the UK. The Association has 22,000 members employed in frontline, management, academic and research positions in all care settings.

NIASW is opposed to the planned cuts to the Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust budget of £13m, as part of the proposed Northern Ireland HSC budget savings of £70m.

### **Agency and locum staff**

NIASW recognises the need for the HSC Trusts to more effectively manage agency workforces and notes the Northern HSC Trust intends to save £2.42m by ending its reliance on the use of non-contract Agency Nursing staffing and reducing its use of Locum staff.

Employing staff on agency contracts does not represent value for money. The Bengoa report *Systems not Structures* highlights that in 2014/15 almost £76.5 million was spent on employing locum and agency staff across the HSC workforce, a 78% increase on the £43 million spent in 2010/11.

Social work spend on HSC agency staff amounted to £2.9 million in 2014/15, this increased to £4.6 million in 2015/16.

While NIASW recognises the need to address spend on agency staff to ensure the long-term sustainability of the HSC workforce, it is deeply concerned at the impact the proposed measures will have in terms of reducing access to beds in Rehabilitation services, reducing the number of beds available in acute hospital services and limiting routine elective work. NIASW is also concerned that the reduction in access to Rehabilitation services, a result of reducing agency / locum spend and reducing the number of rehabilitation beds commissioned from the independent sector, will lead to an increase in bed blocking in acute services and will add pressure to demand for community rehabilitation services.

This highlights the importance of developing a long-term solution to address the current reliance on agency and locum staff while ensuring patient / service user care is not negatively affected. NIASW encourages each HSC Trust to work closely with the Department of Health to ensure the Department's forthcoming Workforce Strategy adequately addresses the staffing needs of the HSC.

## **Containment of growth in community care home placements and domiciliary care packages**

NIASW is particularly concerned at the Northern HSC Trust's proposal to contain growth in nursing and residential home placements and packages of domiciliary care.

The Bengoa report recognises our aging population will require significant additional social care resources to adequately provide for people in need of care and support. For example, by 2020 there will be a 15% increase in the number of care packages required compared to 2016.

Bengoa also highlights the need to increase investment in early intervention and prevention to reduce the cost of admission to acute hospital services. When short term savings are required to social service budgets it is often early intervention and prevention work which is cut back. However, making cuts to these areas of work only serves to increase the scope of social problems, resulting in greater costs in the longer term.

The Trust's consultation paper appears to recognise the impact of cutting access to domiciliary care stating the restriction of care packages will result in increased bed blocking, which will impact delivery of acute services.

The above impacts will also result from the Trust's proposal to contain access to nursing and residential home placements for new patients and service users for the remainder of the year.

Individuals who cannot access placements will be required to remain in the community and as consequence their care needs may not be adequately met. This in turn may result in degeneration of medical conditions, necessitating the provision of expensive hospital care in future.

In light of the impacts, NIASW considers it careless to reduce access to domiciliary care and nursing and residential home placements in order to deliver financial savings of £1.475m.

## **HSC Transformation**

The former Health Minister's 10-year vision for HSC transformation proposed the introduction of a multidisciplinary primary care team (MDT) model embedded around General Practice. These teams will include GPs, Pharmacists, District Nurses, Health Visitors, Allied Health Professionals and Social Workers.

NIASW recognises social work has a key role to play in primary care provision and is committed to working closely with the Department of Health to inform the development of any new primary care model.

It is essential the new model does not strip resources from existing social work teams and additional investment will be required to train and employ staff in any newly created roles. It is unclear, however, how the transformation agenda can be advanced while HSC Trust budgets are being cut.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of this response please contact Andy McClenaghan, NIASW Campaigns Officer on 028 9064 8873 or [a.mcclenaghan@basw.co.uk](mailto:a.mcclenaghan@basw.co.uk).