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15th May 2019
(by e-mail)

Dear Party Leader,

Letter to N.I. Political Leaders regarding Pay in Health and Social Care (NHS)

We the collective Trade Unions representing members employed across Health and Social Care (NHS) are writing to you as a party political leader on the matter of pay for our HSC workforce.

We do so in the knowledge of your involvement in discussions to try to achieve restoration of a devolved power-sharing Assembly here in Northern Ireland.

Trade Unions and the wider community understand the importance of good governance and support for our people and expect the delivery of same from Political leaders. We are concerned about the significant and worsening workforce challenges that exist within the health and social care workforce in Northern Ireland and the growing pay gap with HSC staff here paid less than colleagues in other countries for the same work. Central to good governance is pay justice for working people, most especially those delivering health and social care. As Trade Unions we continuously play our part in representing on and securing pay terms and conditions for our members. However the current political context presents barriers to progress which we now need politicians to recognise and assist in finding a resolution.

The Trade Unions have re-engaged in discussions with Department of Health officials and employers where we seek to close the pay deficits which now exist. We have engaged in these discussions in good faith following the imposition of a one year pay uplift for 2018/19, which was not agreed by Trade Unions. We entered discussions in 2018 within the context of the Agenda for Change framework that was established and agreed for staff employed within the NHS across all four countries, with the exception of doctors, dentists, and some senior managers. The refresh of that framework and pay uplift negotiated and agreed to be implemented over a three year period was on the basis that funding would be released by the Treasury. Northern Ireland was intended to be a beneficiary of that commitment to Health workers as much as in the other jurisdictions, and subsequently money would be made available via the Barnett consequential to achieve this refresh.

Subsequently two problems have emerged. Firstly the Department is advising that monies are only released on a year by year basis, via supply arrangements.

Secondly, any funding would not include social care (which is delivered by Local Government in the rest of the UK).

We now find ourselves in a situation whereby the NHS with the exception of the HSC (NI) have been able to secure a three year pay framework, (2018-2021). Given the integrated nature of health and social care in Northern Ireland, social care staff here are subject to Agenda for Change terms and conditions of employment. This is not the case within the NHS in the other countries. Therefore in any circumstance there would have existed a shortfall in funding that will be required to address the social care workforce. Given the absence of devolved government, Executive and Minister, departmental officials have cited an inability to resolve these matters.

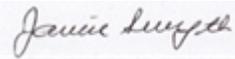
Health and social care workers across all of the Trade Unions have indicated that they will not accept the continuation of these pay gaps. We are calling on you as party leaders, to include in your discussion on a future programme for government, resources to end the existing and growing pay deficits. This is essential if we are to maintain a stable health and social care workforce in order to provide safe and effective care for our people.

We will do our bit at our negotiating table. Will you do the same at yours?

Yours sincerely,



Anne Speed
Lead Joint Secretary



Janice Smyth
Joint Secretary



Trade Union Chairperson