

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



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Dear *Stephen*

NHSPRB 2027/28 PAY ROUND

I am writing following my recent appointment as Minister of Health to formally commence the 2027/28 pay round for Agenda for Change (AfC) staff in Northern Ireland and provide you with an update on the implementation of the 2026/27 pay award in Northern Ireland.

I wish to begin by thanking the NHS Pay Review Body for its invaluable work on the 2026/27 pay round and the recommendations contained therein. I have accepted the recommendations of the Review Body.

I am committed to continuing the approach taken by my predecessor by implementing the pay award recommendations in full and maintaining pay parity with England for Agenda for Change staff and to do so as promptly as possible.

Work is ongoing to secure an agreed Executive budget and there is ongoing engagement between the NI Executive parties and the NIO/HMT. In recognition that it may still be some time before these discussions reach a conclusion and an Executive budget is agreed my predecessor issued a Ministerial Direction to implement the NHSPRB pay recommendations and to introduce the RLW across HSC and within the Independent Social Care Sector. I am

fully supportive of this. This Direction is currently with the Executive for consideration, and I will continue to press my Executive colleagues to take a prompt decision on the direction. I recently met with the Agenda for Change Trade Unions to discuss the current position regarding the implementation of the pay award and will continue to engage constructively with them.

With regards to the outstanding recommendation from 2025 to 2026 and 2024 to 2025 for a mandate to NHS Staff Council for pay structure reform, I am pleased to be able to update you that following NHS Staff Council's acceptance of the mandate, negotiations commenced in April. The mandate includes the potential to include headline pay uplifts for 2027 to 2028 and 2028 to 2029 as part of these negotiations. We will of course ensure that members of the NHSPRB are kept up to date with the progress of this work, in particular if there are implications for the work of the NHSPRB of any deal agreed with NHS Staff Council.

Ensuring that our staff are fairly rewarded for the vital work they do remains a key priority. In support of this, I want to see pay awards in Northern Ireland implemented as promptly as possible, with the aim of achieving timescales comparable to those in England.

I must also be clear that the draft budget proposals which have been consulted upon by the NI Finance Minister will require very considerable savings required across Health and Social Care to meet the deficit.

The imperative is to seek to agree a three-year budget for my Department which would provide much needed certainty and greater freedom to plan ahead and progress with the necessary changes as to how health and social care will be delivered in the future.

The evidence my department will provide to you will set out the funds available to the Department of Health in Northern Ireland for 2027/28 as well as the recruitment and retention context alongside, earnings data and our plan for building a HSC fit for the future.

My department will seek to work collaboratively with you to meet your timelines and bring forward the provision of evidence. This will help to support the aim of enabling earlier pay announcements.

I would therefore welcome your pay recommendations for health and social care staff in Northern Ireland for 2027/28. The Department will, of course, keep you updated in regard to any progress made in respect of 2026/27 awards.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robbie Butler'.

Robbie Butler MLA
Minister of Health