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Chief Executives of HSC Bodies[1]

For information:

Directors of Finance and
Directors of Human Resources

Uplift to National Living Wage (NLW) Rate for AfC Band 1 and Band 2

Dear Colleagues

On 29 October 2025, the UK Government announced that the National Living Wage (NLW) would increase to £12.71 p/h for workers aged 21 and over from 1st April 2026. This means that the current rates for Band 1 and Band 2 will fail to meet the minimum legal requirement come 1st April 2026.

Compliance with the National Minimum Wage and the National Living Wage is a legal requirement monitored by HMRC. It is not a defence to rely on an outstanding pay award which may be backdated to make the employer compliant. A similar situation previously arose in 2017 when late implementation of a pay award meant that HSC employers locally were in breach of the legal requirements.

In order to meet the minimum legal requirements for 1st April 2026, the Minister has agreed that a temporary consolidated increase to Band 1 and Band 2 salaries is implemented to top up the rate to £12.71 (annualised to £24,852), effective from 1st April 2026.

1 HSC Trusts, the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Business Services Organisation (BSO), the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service Agency (NIBTS), the Children's Court Guardian Agency for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Practice & Education Council for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting (NIPEC), the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), the Patient & Client Council (PCC), the Northern Ireland Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA).

This measure is being introduced to ensure that employers can meet the statutory National Living Wage requirement for 2026/27. This uplift will form part of the 3.3% pay award for 2026/27 which has been agreed by Minister. Once the 2026/27 pay award is implemented, this interim uplift will be incorporated within the overall 3.3% award.

The Minister has also recently restated his absolute commitment to advancing progress toward HSC paying the Real Living Wage. The Department has been working closely and proactively with Trade Unions to agree a clear and achievable pathway to implementation of this commitment with the shared intention of agreeing a pathway and timescale for implementation by the end of March 2026. The final implementation date will only be confirmed once an agreed pathway to implementation and the Department's budget for 2026/27 have been agreed.

Further, uplifts to pay points would be in addition to the temporary consolidated increase to meet minimum legal requirements set out in this letter; and, for those staff on the impacted pay points, will be in addition to the overall 2026/27 3.3% award to ensure they are paid the Real Living Wage as a minimum rate of pay. Any uplifts as a result of the implementation of the Real Living Wage, will be backdated to 1st April 2026.

Yours sincerely



Katherine Ferguson