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Your Ref:

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Dear Colleagues

REBUILDING HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

Following on from my commitment to update you all after the meetings of the Management Board, please find below my update from the meeting held on Wednesday 13 October 2021.

The Board received further detail from the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) on the draft Trust winter / surge plans for the period October to December 2021. The winter ahead is likely to be one of the most challenging ever faced by our health care system. Bed capacity in particular will be under extreme burden, given ongoing elective care work and the continued presence of COVID-19. Despite these challenges, maximising regional elective care resource during this period remains a key priority for my Department and that of the wider HSC system, in order to ensure that the needs of as many people as possible are met as quickly as possible.

Whilst Trusts have in place mitigation plans, the period ahead will be very testing in view the anticipated winter and COVID-19 pressures. We must therefore all play our part in efforts to control the virus.

Staffing pressures remain very challenging across HSC services within all sectors of the health care setting. These challenges have been compounded by the pandemic and have placed unprecedented demands on our dedicated HSC staff. I fully recognise the effort and commitment from staff throughout the last 18 months.

In this context, the Board received an overview on a paper exploring potential options to ease staffing pressures. The paper considered available options at both a local Trust and regional level, potential impacts and proposed next steps. My Department will now undertake further work to assess regional options considered before providing an update to the Board.

I trust that you find this update helpful and I look forward to our continuing discussion on the vitally important work of rebuilding HSC services in the weeks and months ahead.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Swann', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health