

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Health

UPDATE FROM THE MINISTERIAL SUMMIT, 16 MARCH 2022

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Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): The purpose of this statement is to provide an update from a Ministerial Summit that I held in March 2022.

I have been committed to continuous engagement with stakeholders throughout my time as Health Minister, and I recognise the value of hearing about experience and ideas first hand. In December 2021, I took the opportunity to meet collectively with leaders and stakeholders from across the Health and Social Care (HSC) to discuss the challenges being faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. We looked at initiatives to help support the service that were planned, or already underway, and through a focused and constructive discussion examined how further resilience could potentially be built into the HSC system over what was expected to be a very challenging winter period ahead.

These discussions were a precursor to a more detailed summit involving a wider group of stakeholders and leaders from the HSC, which was subsequently held on 16 March 2022. The key focus of the March summit was on the development of medium to longer term actions to rebuild our HSC service and to rebuild it better. Only by working together can we achieve this aim.

The summit involved HSC Arm's Length Bodies' Chairs, Trust Medical Directors, Trade Unions, Professional Bodies, Royal Colleges, the Patient Client Council and service users. I was also joined by Trust Chief Executives and officials from the Department. The event was facilitated by the HSC Leadership Centre who have produced a report summarising the depth and breadth of the discussion and I am publishing that report today.

During the Summit, we discussed opportunities for rebuilding the HSC, the challenges we face in realising these opportunities, and how can mitigate against these challenges. There were a number of common themes emerging, including: building and supporting the HSC workforce; tackling health inequalities; embracing new ways of working; and tackling our lengthy waiting lists.

In the short time since the Summit was held, I have announced a number of initiatives aligned with the themes discussed:

On 16 March 2022, I launched a consultation on the Review of Urgent and Emergency Care. I want to hear views on how we might improve our urgent and emergency care services, including the service user experience. I want to ensure greater accessibility to services by making it easier to access the most appropriate service as quickly as possible.

Included in the consultation report are plans to protect access to emergency care and providing alternative services/pathways for urgent but not life threatening conditions.

On 22 March 2022, I launched a 10 year cancer strategy that aims to deliver top class outcomes for people in Northern Ireland diagnosed with cancer. The central vision of the new strategy is to ensure that every individual in Northern Ireland, wherever they live, has equitable and timely access to the most effective, evidence-based referral, diagnosis, treatment, support and person centred cancer care.

I have also announced the locations for two prototype Rapid Diagnosis Centres which will serve patients from across Northern Ireland. These will be established at the Whiteabbey Hospital site in

Newtownabbey and at the South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon. Work has now begun on making the plans a reality, with a view to welcoming their first patients later this year.

Sustained investment in education and training is essential to the rebuilding of our HSC system. On 11 May 2022, I announced a £2.1m education and training investment package to boost the HSC workforce. The package, which includes 1,335 nursing and midwifery university places for 2022/23, also outlines investment for additional medical specialty and Allied Health Profession (AHP) training posts.

Work also continues on the implementation of the actions in the Elective Care Framework. The Framework, which was published in June 2021, sets out a five-year plan to systematically tackle the backlog of patients waiting for elective treatment in Northern Ireland. There are a number of initiatives that are already underway including mega clinics to maximise patient throughput; outpatient assessments delivered by GP Federations in primary care settings; recurrent use of the independent sector; development of in-house HSC capacity and continued investment in staffing; and development of the day procedure centre model at Lagan Valley Hospital and Omagh Hospital.

I have also recently approved further recurrent investment in building capacity across elective care to tackle our unacceptably long waiting lists. This will mean sustainable new services to help those who are currently waiting too long.

Whilst there has been excellent progress delivered over the last number of months, with various initiatives in place to rebuild and transform the service, there is no doubt that without an agreed budget for Health, financial uncertainty will continue to pose a significant risk to sustained progress and improvement. However, we will continue to plan on the basis that the funding will be forthcoming and, where possible, the recovery of the service should not be delayed as a result of this uncertainty.