

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

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Health, Social Services and Public

PAEDIATRIC CONGENITAL CARDIAC SERVICES

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Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Members will recall that in an oral statement to the Assembly on 9th December 2013 I announced that in conjunction with Dr James Reilly TD, then Minister for Health in the Republic of Ireland, I had appointed a team of international clinicians to provide an assessment of a potential model for Cardiac Surgery and Interventional Cardiology for Congenital Heart Disease to meet the needs of Northern Ireland and also the Republic of Ireland. The International Working Group (IWG) was subsequently appointed, chaired by Dr John Mayer from Boston Children's Hospital and also consisting of Dr Adrian Moran from the Maine Medical Centre, USA, and Dr John Sinclair from Yorkhill Children's Hospital, Glasgow. Nursing expertise and advice was provided to the IWG by Dr Patricia Hickey, also from Boston Children's Hospital.

The purpose of this statement is to provide an update to the Assembly on the assessment and to outline the next steps in taking this work forward. The IWG has presented its report to my Department and to the Department for Health in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). Both Departments are currently considering the report and I would expect to be able to announce the IWG's full recommendations together with the Minister for Health in the ROI and Dr Mayer within the next month.

I am however aware that the families who use this service and the clinical staff who deliver it are anxious to learn the IWG's recommendation as to whether this service should continue to be delivered in the Belfast Trust. I want to end that uncertainty and therefore inform the Assembly that the IWG has recommended that children's heart surgery and interventional cardiology should cease to be delivered in the Belfast Trust. The IWG has reached this conclusion because of an insufficient volume of patients.

This recommendation is made within the context of the terms of reference set for the IWG to give consideration to an overall model for delivering both children's and adult congenital heart services on the island. This model would allow Belfast and Dublin clinicians to sustain and build upon the respective strengths of both cardiac teams. As the IWG's report needs to be carefully considered by both Departments I am not yet in a position to publicly release the report or to indicate what my decision is likely to be on its recommendations. However, I considered it important that I should announce as soon as possible the IWG's recommendation on the key issue of concern to Northern Ireland in respect of the future of children's cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology at the Belfast Trust.