

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Department of Health

### WRITTEN STATEMENT TO THE ASSEMBLY BY HEALTH MINISTER ROBBIE BUTLER MLA – REGIONAL REVIEW OF NEUROLOGY: CONSULTATION ANALYSIS REPORT AND NEXT STEPS

*Published at 11.30am on Thursday 8 October 2026*

**Mr Butler (The Minister of Health):** I wish to inform Members that today I am announcing the next steps regarding my Department's Regional Review of Neurology. Those steps are informed by the analysis of responses to a public consultation which is also being published today.

Neurological conditions affect thousands of people across Northern Ireland and can have a profound impact on individuals, families and communities. My Department's Neurology Review report identified significant shortcomings in current services including workforce capacity, variation in access to services and poor care coordination.

The Review report sets out a long-term vision for neurology services and identifies four priorities for change which are supported by thirty recommendations to drive improvements in services;

- **Priority One: A Person-Centred Service:** Recommendations under this priority are intended to support people with neurological conditions, recognising them as equals in the care and using tools such as patient portals to empower people through the provision of targeted information.
- **Priority Two: Developing Additional Workforce Capacity:** This priority has the largest number of recommendations to address the gap between demand and current capacity. In addition to workforce growth, there are also recommendations to develop a broader skill mix within the service.
- **Priority Three: Addressing Gaps in Current Services:** This priority focuses on expanding inpatient capacity, improving access to specialist neurology expertise, establishing specialist clinics across all Trusts, and implementing standardised care pathways to ensure more equitable and effective services.
- **Priority Four: Using Current Resources More Effectively:** This priority focuses on maximising current neurology resources within Neurology through a focus in more responsive services, new ways of working and improved use of data to better understand and target the range of needs within the neurology community.

The Review report notes that full implementation of the recommendations would require over £65m of additional funding in the first five years of implementation. In light of ongoing budgetary pressures facing Health and Social Care, the report notes that the scale and pace of implementation will have to be adjusted in line with available funding. But that does not mean that we should stand still. Current resources must be used to deliver highest impact, and initial funding will ease immediate capacity pressures in neurology services.

#### Public Consultation

My Department undertook a public consultation on the Review report from 07 May 2025 – 06 August 2025. The consultation sought views on the vision, priorities, recommendations and next steps presented in the report.

My Department received 56 written responses to the consultation. This included a response from the Northern Ireland Neurological Charities Alliance which reflected the views of over 270 people with lived experience.

I would like to put on record my thanks to all those who participated in the consultation process including people living with neurological conditions, their families and carers, clinicians, professional organisations, representative bodies, voluntary and community sector organisations and wider members of the public.

Responses to the public consultation indicated a high level of support for the vision, priorities and proposed recommendations set out in the Review report. Over 85% of responses agreed or strongly agreed with the four priorities set out in the Review report. It is important to acknowledge that, while supportive of next steps as set out in the Review report, responses also indicated concern about how the absence of identified funding would impact the scope to move forward.

In considering the way forward I have also considered the views of the Northern Ireland Neurological Charities Alliance, which has consistently advocated for implementation of the Review through its #FightForNeuro campaign. I recently stood alongside representatives of the Alliance at the launch of its report, *Left Behind: The Price of Inaction on Neurology Reform*, which highlights both the human and economic consequences of continued delay in reforming neurology services. The report reinforces the urgent need to move forward with implementation, stressing that the costs of inaction are borne not only by patients and carers, but by the wider health service and society as a whole.

### **Implementing the Neurology Review**

In this context I am satisfied that the Review report makes a compelling case for change. I am therefore endorsing the overall strategic direction set out in the Review report.

To support implementation, I have instructed my officials to proceed with establishing a dedicated Neurology Delivery Team to provide strategic leadership, programme management and delivery oversight for implementation of the Review.

The Delivery Team will develop an implementation plan as an initial priority with clear milestones, deliverables and performance measures. Progress against these milestones will be monitored through formal governance arrangements and reported regularly to my Department. This will ensure that implementation is subject to robust oversight and that patients, clinicians and stakeholders can see tangible progress as the Review's recommendations are taken forward.

The Neurology Delivery Team will build on the work already undertaken through my Department's Regional Neurology Alliance (RNA). The RNA was established last year to provide regional oversight and coordination in response to the immediate pressures facing neurology services and will be subsumed within the Delivery Team when established.

### **Investing in Neurology Capacity**

Members will be all too aware of the current financial pressures facing my Department and the wider Health and Social Care system. Despite these pressures, I was pleased to announce an additional £2.3 million of recurrent funding each year to increase neurology capacity and begin to reduce waiting lists. This funding is from my Department's Elective Care Fund.

Pending the establishment of the Delivery Team, the RNA will be tasked with identifying how the additional funding could best be used to create capacity and begin to address waiting lists. This will include consideration of relevant recommendations from the Review report.

In addition to the use of this funding, there will also be a focus on those recommendations that can be progressed through service redesign, better coordination and more effective use of existing resources at little or no additional cost.

For too long, many people living with neurological conditions have faced unacceptable waits for assessment and treatment, difficulties accessing specialist support and significant variation in the services available to them. The consultation responses, the work of the Regional Neurology Review and the powerful advocacy of patients, carers and voluntary sector organisations all point to the same conclusion: the case for reform is clear and the case for delay is unacceptable.

While I am unable to commit the level of funding required to fully deliver against the Review's recommendations, I am determined that progress begins now. Through the £2.3m investment secured, the work of the Neurology Delivery Team and continued partnership with patients, carers, clinicians and stakeholders, we will take the first important steps towards delivering more responsive, equitable and sustainable neurology services for the people of Northern Ireland.

I will continue to keep Members informed as implementation progresses.