



# **NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY MEETING NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH**

**14 MAY 2025**

## **JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

1. The twenty-sixth North South Ministerial Council Health and Food Safety Sectoral meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices, Armagh on 14 May 2025. The meeting was attended by Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD, Minister for Health, Norma Foley TD, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Mike Nesbitt MLA, Minister of Health and Aisling Reilly MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office. Minister Carroll MacNeill chaired the meeting.

### **HEALTH**

#### **REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME**

2. The Council welcomed the progress made to date in implementing the Council's current work programme in the Health sector.

3. Ministers noted that both Departments of Health have engaged on additional areas which have potential for further development and collaboration between the health authorities in both jurisdictions, that work to ensure the work programme reflects the priorities of each Administration will continue and that a refreshed work programme will be presented at the next Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting.

## **HEALTH CO-OPERATION UPDATES**

4. The Council noted:
  - (i) the ongoing collaboration on issues connected with alcohol and drug use, such as the sharing of learnings through the North/ South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group;
  - (ii) that work on suicide prevention initiatives in both jurisdictions is ongoing, including the exploration of potential opportunities for further joint working to prevent suicide;
  - (iii) the update on the *All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network*;
  - (iv) the update on cross-border emergency planning and emergency response, and that both Health Departments will work collaboratively to seek ways to further cooperate in emergency planning and emergency response;
  - (v) the ongoing work between the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and the National Ambulance Service;
  - (vi) that an *All-island Medication Safety Conference* took place in November 2024, with a further one planned for 2026;
  - (vii) the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Medicines Optimisation Innovation Centre and the Health Innovation Hub Ireland; and
  - (viii) that funding of just over €85 million has been awarded to ten projects under the PEACEPLUS Programme to target health inequalities among communities in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

## **CANCER CARE CO-OPERATION**

5. The Council noted the valuable services provided to children and their families by the Cancer Fund for Children and welcomed the progression of the Daisy Lodge Therapeutic Centre at Cong, Co. Mayo.
6. Ministers welcomed the awarding of five research grants under the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium, which will enhance collaboration and innovation amongst cancer researchers and experts across the three jurisdictions.

7. The Council noted the continuing efforts and engagement to improve cancer research and clinical trials at an 'Island of Ireland' scale and the benefits for patients from the ongoing cooperation and expansion of Radiotherapy Services at Altnagelvin Hospital.
8. Ministers welcomed further cooperation on services provided through the North-West Cancer Centre, the collaboration by both jurisdictions in working together to develop projects to improve cancer services for patients across both jurisdictions and efforts to work together to develop a concept as a collaborative project.

## **ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY WITHIN THE HEALTH SECTOR**

9. The Council noted:
  - (i) the existing work of the health sector in supporting biodiversity throughout its estates;
  - (ii) the opportunity for the health sector to promote the physical and mental health co-benefits of actions to support biodiversity and address climate change; and
  - (iii) and the intention of both Departments of Health to develop guidance and awareness-raising materials to support the promotion of biodiversity by both Departments, and to report on this at the next NSMC Sectoral meeting.

## **PRESENTATION BY THE INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

10. Ministers received a presentation from the Institute of Public Health (IPH) on the policy interface between Ireland and Northern Ireland with case studies from tobacco control, breastfeeding and data infrastructure.
11. The Council noted that the IPH is working through evidence, policy, and partnership, to improve health equity and reduce health inequalities in Ireland and Northern Ireland and noted opportunities for future co-operation between the two jurisdictions.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

12. The Council approved the Child Protection work programme for 2025-2028 that is focussed on knowledge exchange on child welfare / protection developments, early identification and sharing of information on emerging complex child welfare / protection issues and the consideration of their impact on cross-border working; and ongoing cross-border cooperation in relation to child welfare and protection.

13. Ministers noted that the Knowledge Exchange Forum, which brings together Child Protection Practitioners from both jurisdictions continues to meet to share information in the critical area of social work practice within child protection services.
14. Ministers also noted that there has been significant awareness-raising work in both jurisdictions on the need for dual registration of social workers in relation to children's cases with a cross-border dimension.

## **FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD/SAFEFOOD**

### **SAFEFOOD PROGRESS REPORT**

15. The Council noted the Progress Report containing Safefood's high-level achievements since the last Health and Food Safety Sectoral meeting, including:
  - (i) the new 'Food Environment' campaign (2024-2028) to protect children's health, which was launched in June 2024 in partnership with the Departments of Health in both jurisdictions, the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Food Standards Agency;
  - (ii) the ongoing 'Safefood for Business' training resources that Safefood is providing for businesses across the island of Ireland, which produce or sell food, with about 80% of those being small food businesses;
  - (iii) the new extended 2025-2028 'Community Food Initiatives' Programme that has been developed to positively influence healthy eating habits, especially of low-income families, through promoting greater access to and availability of healthy and safe food, using a community development approach;
  - (iv) the food safety, nutrition and healthy eating promotion work done by Safefood through its various Food Safety and Nutrition Programmes and Networks and;
  - (v) the research carried out by Safefood on a range of topics, including consumers' use of smart devices, food poverty, and food safety advice for vulnerable patients and residents in healthcare settings.

### **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MATTERS**

16. The Council approved:
  - (i) Safefood's Business Plans for 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023 and the associated budget/grant provision for each;

- (ii) Safefood's Revised Business Plan 2024 and noted the revised Budget/Grant provision; and
  - (iii) Safefood's Business Plan 2025 and recommended the associated Budget/Grant provision.
17. Ministers noted Safefood's Corporate Plans for 2020-2022 and 2023-2025 and that the Safefood Annual Report and Accounts for 2023 having been certified by the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions have been laid before the NI Assembly and both houses of the Oireachtas.

### **SAFEFOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

18. The Council approved the appointment of eleven members to the Safefood Advisory Committee.

### **SAFEFOOD PRESENTATION**

19. The Council noted the Safefood Presentation on the new Community Food Initiative Programme 2025-2028, the aim of which is to positively influence the eating habits of people in low-income communities.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

20. The Council agreed that the next NSMC Health and Food Safety meeting will be held in Autumn 2025.

### **JOINT SECRETARIAT**

**14 MAY 2025**

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