



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

27 JUNE 2024

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-fifth North South Ministerial Council Health and Food Safety meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh on 27 June 2024. The meeting was attended by Mike Nesbitt MLA, Minister of Health, Stephen Donnelly TD, Minister for Health and Aisling Reilly MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office. Minister Nesbitt chaired the meeting.

HEALTH

REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME

2. The Council welcomed the ongoing engagement between the Departments of Health in both jurisdictions in the context of the NSMC Health and Food Safety Work Programme and noted that a review of the Work Programme is ongoing.
3. Ministers noted that a revised Work Programme will be developed by Sponsor Departments in the coming months and will be presented at the next NSMC Sectoral meeting.

HEALTH COOPERATION UPDATES

4. The Council welcomed the continued cooperation of both Departments in the Health Sector since the last meeting, including:
 - (i) progress following the successful implementation of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2021;
 - (ii) the continued progress on the development and implementation of strategies to prevent the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse in both jurisdictions; the continued engagement on opportunities to cooperate on common elements of substance abuse strategies across both jurisdictions; and the potential for further collaboration on issues connected with alcohol and drug use, such as the sharing of learnings through the North/South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group;
 - (iii) the update on obesity prevention, including partnership through **safefood**;
 - (iv) suicide prevention initiatives in both jurisdictions including the joint working on the Self Harm Registry and the potential for further joint working on suicide prevention;
 - (v) the updates on the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) Network;
 - (vi) the update on cross-border emergency planning and emergency response and that both Health Departments will work collaboratively to seek ways to further cooperate on emergency planning and emergency response;
 - (vii) the Pharmacy update, particularly the information regarding the upcoming All-island Medication Safety Conference; and
 - (viii) the update on the joint funding applications under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

CANCER CARE COOPERATION

5. Ministers received a presentation on cancer care and cooperation delivered by officials.
6. The Council welcomed the significant developments by both jurisdictions in improving cancer services for people on the island of Ireland, including:
 - (i) the continued cooperation and expansion of Radiotherapy Services at Altnagelvin Hospital and further cooperation on services provided through the North-West Cancer Centre;
 - (ii) the ongoing work of the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute (NCI) Cancer Consortium and its role in securing Health Research Board (HRB) funding to support the priority thematic areas of the Consortium, with the overall aim of

- advancing cancer research and innovation across the island, in partnership with the NCI;
- (iii) the award in June 2023 of Government of Ireland funding to Cancer Fund for Children, including through the Shared Island Fund, to develop a second therapeutic residential centre that will be accessible to children and their families across the island of Ireland;
 - (iv) the ongoing and concerted effort and engagement in improving cancer research and clinical trials at all-island scale; and
 - (v) both Administrations working together to develop projects to improve cancer services for patients across both jurisdictions and efforts to identify funding streams to facilitate this work, including exploration of further opportunities to avail of Shared Island funding.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY WITHIN THE HEALTH SECTOR

- 7. The Council noted the scale of the climate and biodiversity crisis and the opportunities for the health sector to support biodiversity throughout its estates.
- 8. Ministers noted the role of the health sector in promoting the physical and mental health co-benefits of actions to support biodiversity and address climate change; the intention of both Departments of Health to engage in discussions on climate change and loss of biodiversity; work to develop shared areas of interest to protect biodiversity and address climate change on the island; and report on this at the next NSMC Sectoral meeting.

FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD/SAFEFOOD

SAFEFOOD PROGRESS REPORT

- 9. Ministers welcomed the achievements of **safe food** since the last meeting and the valuable contribution it makes through its various activities including:
 - (i) the progress report from **safe food** on the high-level achievements and updates in relation to its public health role to promote food safety and healthy eating advice to the public and those involved in providing food on the island of Ireland;
 - (ii) that the Body has developed and delivered various public health campaigns across all media; developed various all-island networks and programmes to promote food safety and healthy eating; promoted new working partnerships and all-island collaboration; and developed and distributed various resources in educational settings; and
 - (iii) that the Body has carried out research, including in relation to meat thermometers, hand washing, food hypersensitivity, use of antimicrobials in animals, convenience foods, costs of a healthy food basket, food offered to children in social activity centres,

whole systems approach to childhood obesity, plant-based dairy alternatives, children's diets, food supplements, portion control tools, fiscal and pricing food policies, building sustainability into national healthy eating guidelines.

SAFEFOOD CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MATTERS

10. The Council approved **safefood's** 2024 Business Plan and recommended budget/grant provision and noted the position regarding **safefood's** Business Plans and budgets for 2017 and 2018, and the 2017-2019 Corporate Plan.
11. Ministers noted that the Business Plans for 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023 and the Corporate Plans for 2020-2022 and 2023-2025 will be presented for consideration at a future meeting following approval by the Department of Health (NI) and Department of Finance (NI).
12. The Council noted that the **safefood** Annual Report and Accounts for 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 have been laid before the NI Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

SAFEFOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

13. Ministers welcomed that **safefood** has commenced a process to identify suitable candidates for appointment to the **safefood** Advisory Committee and the NSMC will be invited to consider nominees at a future meeting.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY WITHIN SAFEFOOD

14. The Council welcomed **safefood's** progress and leadership on climate action to date and noted future planned sustainable work and plans for further alignment of many operational public health programmes and activities, towards the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals relevant to **safefood's** remit.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

15. The Council agreed that the next NSMC Health and Food Safety meeting will be held in autumn 2024.

Joint Secretariat
27 June 2024

Website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org