



Association for Real Change (NI)

Response to the Health and Social Care Trust  
2017/18 FINANCIAL PLANNING SAVINGS PLAN

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Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI) is an umbrella body, representing 41 organisations from the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors. The voluntary and independent sector alone supports over 10,000 people, including those with a learning disability, autism, acquired brain injury, older people and mental health. ARC NI recognises the financial pressures currently facing the health & social care sector in Northern Ireland and welcomes the opportunity to respond to this public consultation.

### **Potentially Devastating Impact on the Learning Disability Sector**

In December 2016 ARC NI met with the Health & Social Care Board to discuss the critical funding pressures facing voluntary sector learning disability providers which were:

- the need to redress the lack of uplifts/contract freezes since 2008/09 placing voluntary sector providers under significant financial pressure
- the negative financial impact on costs to organisations of the year on year expected increase in NLW rates, which is anticipated to rise to an hourly rate of over £9 by April 2020. Although the sector very much welcomes the increase of salary for their valued workforce, this increase is not being commissioned and organisations are currently funding the gap
- the significant implications for costs relating to night time support when staff are sleeping, following Government directive in England and the potential exposure to HMRC.

**Nine months on, nothing has changed. There is a real risk that the learning disability sector could collapse. The implications for other areas of the Health and Social Care system and for some of the most vulnerable people in our society, if this were to happen, are – in our view – unthinkable.**

### **Key Questions about the Savings Plan**

ARC NI members are struggling to understand the rationale for these proposals, particularly in view of the multi-million-pound package secured by the DUP in return for its “confidence and supply” arrangement with the Conservative Government. In addition, James Brokenshire recently announced that he had identified some £60m which was earmarked for the NI budget.

There is a belief among our members that this savings exercise is being used to put pressure on politicians to assume their responsibilities for government. Freezing access to residential and nursing placements, or to domiciliary care and supported living, is not a serious strategy to address the actual issue and might be argued in some instances, that it contravenes the statutory responsibility and duty of care to these vulnerable people. It has all the appearances of a cynical attempt to attract media headlines by affecting those who need support the most, and thus embarrass elected representatives for their failure to discharge their duties.

On the sidelines in these political games are families and carers who are already at breaking point and cannot be expected to take any more. Vulnerable people are being failed at every turn.

**For the above reasons, ARC NI calls on each and every HSCT to notify James Brokenshire formally of their refusal to make these savings.**