23 February 2012

Dear Sir/Madam

Consultation on the Model of Shared Service for Implementation in Health and Social Care within Northern Ireland

The Northern Health & Social Care Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the above consultation document.

The Trust would concur with the need stated within the Consultation document for significant investment in its support functions in order to modernise systems that are now over 30 years old. Such investment will in turn lead to increasing efficiency in the Health and Social Care (HSC) sector. In addition the Trust accepts that there are additional benefits to be gained by adopting a shared services model of delivery.

Regardless of the decision taken in relation to the model, the Trust would advise that all staff are well skilled, highly competent and capable of adapting to the range of changes that this project presents. Additionally, the Trust welcomes the possible location of shared services accommodation in Ballymena.

The Trust’s support of the BSTP project is based on an expectation that the business systems which emerge will, in addition to being reliable, resilient and delivering staffing and transactional saving, improve its management information systems to the level of detail and responsiveness necessary to fully support the wide scale service transformation envisaged by the Minister.

The Trust would wish to acknowledge the considerable achievements in securing the procurement of HR, Payroll and Travel & Subsistence IT Systems and Finance and Procurement & Logistics IT Systems for HSC organisations. This achievement is testimony to the commitment and hard work of all those involved. Work continues to implement the new systems and senior staff within Human Resources and Finance dedicate significant time to ensure their successful implementation. It is anticipated that the new systems will be ready to be implemented towards the end of the current year with full implementation being achieved by August 2013.

However a number of risks have been identified associated with the implementation of the new business systems including the time limits for the phases of work required to design, build and roll out the systems.
While it is acknowledged that the current planning assumption is that implementation of Phase 1 shared services will begin on a phased basis as soon as practicably possible in the latter half of 2012, the consultation on the model and location of shared services has had the effect of distracting key staff needed for the implementation of this process. This additional and significant risk could be mitigated or avoided by postponing the move to a shared service model until the systems implementation is complete.

The timing and location of SSC will emerge as a result of this consultation. It will be essential that a regional HR strategy is put in place to deal with the genuine concerns of staff who will be affected by this major change. It is essential that we maintain the commitment of staff throughout the whole of this change programme.

The current focus on early implementation of shared services could lead to key operational staff becoming disaffected at a time when their knowledge and skill is essential to secure effective systems implementation.

It will be essential that the BSO has in place a clear workforce strategy to provide the appropriate levels of expertise required to provide what are complex services.

Trade Unions have clearly indicated that until there is a separation between the new business systems and shared services their co-operation is being withheld. There is therefore a risk that this lack of co-operation could spill over into the implementation of the new systems thus jeopardising their full implementation.

The initial screening undertaken to support the consultation document will in the view of the Trust require a full Equality Impact Assessment as there are significant issues of detriment to defined Section 75 groups that will require to be addressed through a full consultation process.

The Trust notes that the document refers to the equality paper as an ‘initial EQIA’ and that additional, more detailed work will be undertaken in due course. The Director of HR and the Director of Finance have not been consulted in relation to the development of the ‘initial EQIA’. It would be helpful to see a clear timescale for the more detailed work to be undertaken.

The Trust looks forward to the implementation of the new systems and a considered plan for the transition to a shared services model.

Yours sincerely

Jim Stewart, CBE
Chairman