

## **Royal College of Psychiatrists NI (RCPsych NI) Response to: DoF Consultation on Draft Budget 2025-2026**

### **1.0 Introduction about RCPsych NI:**

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) is the statutory body responsible for the supervision of the training and accreditation of Psychiatrists in the UK and for providing guidelines and advice regarding the treatment, care, and prevention of mental and behavioural disorders. Among its principal aims are to improve the outcomes for those with mental illness and to improve the mental health of individuals, families and communities.

The College has approximately 450 Members in Northern Ireland (including Doctors in training) who provide the backbone of the local Psychiatric service, offering acute and community treatment, as well as specialist care and consultation across a large range of settings.

This response is submitted on behalf of the Devolved Council of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland.

### **2.0 Substantive Response/Comments:**

We welcome the opportunity to comment on this overarching Draft Budget Consultation for 2025/2026.

We support the aspiration for multi-year budgets and share the hope that this is the last single year budget.

**Context of Mental Health Funding:** We need to outline the context of mental health funding in Northern Ireland against the overall health spend and overall public funding in comparison to other countries of the United Kingdom.

The serious crisis in Northern Ireland Mental Health Services can only be addressed in an overarching Budget Consultation such as this.

In terms of the **overall public spend** by the UK government to each of the four nations in 2023/2024, Northern Ireland received the highest per capita allocation according to the [Research Briefing](#) entitled "*Public Spending by Country and*

*Region*", which was published by the House of Commons Library in December 2024. In comparing per capita spend for Northern Ireland (£15,371) with that for England (£12,625), it is significantly higher in Northern Ireland. In fact, Northern Ireland received 19% more than the average for all of the United Kingdom.

With regard to **spend on health**, the figures in the Nuffield Trust Review [Report](#) commissioned by The NI Fiscal Council and authored by Appleby et al. entitled: "*Future funding and current productivity in Northern Ireland's health and social care system*" demonstrated that the trend per capita spend has been 7% higher in Northern Ireland than England and 4% lower than Scotland. Historically there has been an increase of 63% per capita spend on health in Northern Ireland over the past 20 years, the highest in the UK. However as described below this has not been reflected in the spend on mental health services.

Despite the aforementioned higher overall per capita government spend in Northern Ireland and despite the aforementioned highest per capita increase in health spend - the Mental Health [Strategy](#) 2021–2031 states at page 15 that **Mental Health spend** in Northern Ireland is 27% less than England and 20% less than Ireland. This is also despite the fact that the Mental Health [Strategy](#) 2021–2031 earlier states at page 12 that "Northern Ireland has the highest prevalence of mental health problems in the UK, with a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England." Corrective fiscal action must be taken immediately, given these figures.

This longstanding neglect of Mental Health Services has led to the crisis that we are now in. We have extending waiting lists, restriction of services and high vacancy rates in mental health posts. In Psychiatry there is a 25% vacancy rate for substantive consultant posts and 29% vacancy rate for substantive SAS Doctors in Psychiatry. Northern Ireland, unlike the other countries of the UK, has not had any expansion in Resident Doctor posts for Psychiatry in the past 18 years. There has been no implementation of the DoH Medical Workforce [Plan](#) for Psychiatric Specialties 2022 to 2031

In addition, the Mental Health [Strategy](#) 2021–2031 was completed with a funding Plan in 2021. Each year there is planning for the implementation of this Mental Health Strategy. However, the funding that is available annually falls radically short of what is needed. The total cost for the implementation of the Strategy over ten years is £1.206.8m in 2021 estimates. The budget needed for the first three years was £9.59m, £24.38m and £42.08m respectively – with £61.72m needed for 2025-2026, being the year being consulted upon herein. These sums are nowhere near being met by Department of Health funds. The result is that the main areas that are looked at for implementation are largely those that are budget neutral and this is obviously not addressing the serious deficiencies in Mental Health Services year after year.

Mental Health cuts across all Departments and the lack of adequate services has a negative impact on all sections of society. There is no opportunity that the Department of Health will obtain anything close to the funding needed to meet the current deficiencies in the Mental Health Services, correct the historical

downhill trend or fund the implementation of the 10-year Mental Health Strategy.

The only way this is going to be achieved is through a cross Departmental Executive financial and policy commitment to Mental Health Services, given its prominence as a cross Departmental need in Northern Ireland Society and given the costs which would be saved across Departments were this to be done.

### **3.0 Response to Specific Questions:**

1. Do you agree with the prioritisation of funding within the 2025-26 draft Budget document?

**No**

2. What services should be prioritised in the 2025-26 Budget?

**We urge, for the reasons stated above, that Mental Health Services need to be funded as a priority through Executive action.**

3. Are there services that no longer need to be delivered or can be reduced in 2025-26?

**No Comment**

4. Do service charges need to be considered for some services?

**No Comment**

5. Please respond to the following statement: Public sector pay should be prioritised.

**Yes - public sector pay should be prioritised.**

6. Have you any other views?

**Please see above.**

**Dated: 6th March 2025**



**Dr Julie Anderson Chair RCPsych NI & Vice President RCPsych  
- on behalf of RCPsych NI**

**Contact Details: [thomas.mckeever@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:thomas.mckeever@rcpsych.ac.uk)**