

**Kieran McAteer**  
Director of Quality, Safety and Improvement



**BY EMAIL**

Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast BT4 3SQ

Our Ref: HE1/26/44789

Date: 19 February 2026

Dear Colleagues

### **Being Open Framework for Health and Social Care**

I am writing to advise you that the Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt, has today launched the *Being Open Framework for Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland*. A copy of the Framework and an accompanying *Frequently Asked Questions* can be found here [Being Open Framework for Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland | Department of Health](#).

Launch of the Framework follows a public consultation undertaken by the Department in 2025 which has demonstrated overwhelming support for the Framework and its underlying intent and objectives. A copy of the Consultation Analysis Report is also published today by Minister Nesbitt and can be found here [Being Open Framework consultation | Department of Health](#).

### **Purpose of the Being Open Framework**

The Being Open Framework for Health and Social Care Northern Ireland is aimed at supporting a culture of openness, honesty, and transparency across Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations in Northern Ireland.

The aims to provide a standardised, regional approach to help create the conditions where a culture of openness and trust can flourish between those who use health and social care (HSC) services, their families and carers, HSC staff and leaders, and HSC

organisations. The Framework aims to provide a structured yet flexible approach to supporting openness and candour across the HSC system.

By supporting such a culture, patient safety, public confidence and support for staff will be enhanced. The Framework is designed not only to guide organisations and staff when things go wrong, but also to promote transparency and honesty as part of everyday practice and patient care, and to create a supportive and psychologically safe environment for all.

### **Who does the Framework apply to**

The intention of the Framework is to define, support and promote a culture of openness to be achieved across the full range of Health and Social Care delivery organisations in Northern Ireland. In that context, it is intended to be expansive in its reach and scope, and that all individuals and organisations involved directly or indirectly in the provision of Health and Social Care delivery and support services embrace and adopt the requirements of the Framework.

The Framework applies to all staff, independent contractors and organisations providing care and services as part of, or on behalf of, the HSC system in Northern Ireland. All Departmental Arms-Length Bodies and Special Agencies are within scope, as are those organisations that are commissioned, funded or contracted by HSC bodies or by the Department for the purpose of contributing to the provision of HSC services in Northern Ireland.

### **Implementation**

Launch of the Framework today marks the beginning of a familiarisation period for HSC organisations and will allow some time to prepare for implementation which will commence from 1 April 2026. As with any new policy initiative, the Department recognises that the launch is very much a first step. The priority and focus now moves to embedding and sustaining the Framework in practice across the HSC and to achieving its implementation.

The Framework describes that to create an open culture, organisations are required to implement a set of *Enablers*. Consultation feedback noted that some elements of

the Framework - such as references to Corporate Boards - do not directly apply to smaller organisations for example primary care, family practitioner services or community and voluntary sector organisations. In response, the Department has clarified that all HSC bodies must adopt the Framework but can adapt how they implement it, taking account of their size, context and local setting.

The Framework explicitly recognises that “one size never fits all” and as such supports smaller organisations to be flexible and pragmatic in implementing the Enablers in a way that most effectively creates and supports an open culture, taking account of local setting. In practice, smaller or non-Trust settings can tailor processes and structures, so they remain workable and proportionate. Local governance systems will ensure effective implementation of the Framework, with leaders remaining responsible and accountable for embedding openness consistently across their services in line with the Framework. This local ownership and commitment are fundamental to successful implementation.

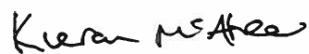
The anticipated benefits of universal adoption of the Framework across the HSC include improved patient safety, better staff support and wellbeing, and enhanced accountability and public trust. It is important that all HSC bodies - large and small - implement the Framework as a key purpose is to create a consistent, system-wide culture of openness, psychological safety and learning across Northern Ireland’s HSC system. It is important that benefits of an enhanced open culture are experienced by everyone who uses services and everyone who works in services across different settings.

### **Next Steps**

The Department has committed to supporting HSC organisations with implementation for example through further promotion of the Framework, building familiarisation and understanding, and consideration of developing sector-specific guidance where needed. The Department will consider further together with sectoral partners, and with colleagues in the Department’s Strategic, Planning and Performance Group (SPPG), how best this support can be achieved and delivered and will communicate again with practitioners in due course.

Should you have any queries or require any further information at this stage please [Ian.Plunkett@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Ian.Plunkett@health-ni.gov.uk) in the first instance.

The Department looks forward to working collaboratively with all partners in the period ahead to achieve implementation of the Framework and to fully realising the intended cultural change and associated benefits and improved outcomes for those that use services and those who deliver them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kieran McAtteer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**KIERAN MCATEER**  
**Director of Quality, Safety and Improvement**