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Private & Confidential

Jeane Freeman MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport
St Andrews House
Edinburgh
EH1 3HD

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

We urgently write to you following your announcement to all NHS Agenda for Change (AFC) staff on 24 February 2021 of a pay imposition and a delay in any meaningful negotiations for NHS pay in Scotland 2021/22.

Our members deserve an immediate substantive pay rise and we therefore cannot pretend we are anything other than deeply disappointed and our members are angry that the Scottish Government has chosen to make this unilateral announcement, effectively side-stepping the overdue need for pay negotiations to begin.

Our members are angry hearing, both in Parliament and press briefings from Scottish Government Ministers that we are in formal negotiations on NHS pay, now only to be told negotiations will not commence until summer. We believe these discussions should have commenced months ago and there is no reason for a significant delay.

To add insult to injury the handling of the announcement in briefing the press and writing directly to our members without our prior knowledge shows a significant breakdown in the trust and respect between the Scottish Government and the Health Trade Unions. We were told about the decision and the announcement as the press were being sent the press release. Other members of STAC also got the information at the same time as their members. It would have been reasonable to have expected to have at least been briefed prior to the announcement in the same way the employer's representatives were advised. We believed that over several years we have always fostered positive relationships built on mutual trust and respect and the way this announcement was made strongly challenges our previously held assumptions.

When we met with you as the Secretariat although we accepted there may be some difficulties at no point did, we agree we could not commence negotiations and try to reach an agreed settlement. It is now clear the Scottish Government are aware of their proposed budget which is currently making its way through the Scottish Parliament. This should allow for us to enter negotiations immediately to at least try to reach a settlement for our hard-pressed members.

'Payment on account' was discussed with STAC Staff side informally and we responded strongly by letter on 1 February 2021 to reinforce we did not support this approach and requested negotiations to begin immediately. Our members are deeply disappointed that what has been imposed as 'payment on account' as described in your letter will be consumed within any final agreement and is not in addition.

The correspondence between yourself and the Health Trade Unions regarding the Scottish Governments proposal of entering pay negotiations commenced in June 2020. There has subsequently been correspondence on several occasions without formal negotiations beginning and now we have an imposition of 'payment on account'. The Staff side have serious concerns around the time it takes to receive responses to our correspondence and would ask that we receive timely responses going forward.

Your previous correspondence over several months has reiterated your willingness to enter negotiations as the Scottish Government is not participating in the Pay Review Body process. We do not accept your arguments of your letter of 24 February that the pandemic has had such an impact on the ability to progress and conclude meaningful pay negotiations.

Our members are angered by this decision and are considering how they should respond collectively and the various options open to pursue a fair pay settlement .

We write to request urgent reconsideration and change to the Scottish Governments decision to delay the beginning of negotiations until this summer. This requires immediate action and to begin meaningful pay negotiations immediately and as a matter of urgency for our hard-pressed members.

We would also request you meet with STAC Staff side to discuss this situation.

We look forward to your response by return.

Yours sincerely



Colin Poolman
Staff side Chair of STAC



Willie Duffy
Staff side Secretary