

South East Social Partnership Forum (SPF)

Terms of reference

The South East Regional Social Partnership Forum (SE RSPF) is a partnership between NHS organisations in the South East and regional trade union representatives. It mirrors and supports the national arrangements for partnership working on the workforce implications of policy. In its way of working, it acknowledges the partnership working that takes place at a system and organisational level. The RSPF will use the subsidiarity model below to recognise its regional role and impact:

Activities will be carried out nationally where:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is necessary to meet statutory responsibilities. • It is more efficient and effective because of economies of scale and there are clear benefits from a national role in standardisation or implementation. • National teams have specific core skills/knowledge that ICSs and local organisations can draw on.
Activities will be carried out regionally where:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for coordination and improvement support to deliver national priorities. • There is a need to help foster capacity in local health systems. • Decisions need to be made across a regional labour market.
Activities will be led or coordinated by ICS where:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong local partnerships are required, including partnerships with local government, social care providers and education providers.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning is needed over a medium-term period, for example, up to five years. • There are benefits of scale from joined up solutions to shared challenges and opportunities.
Activities will be led by local employers where:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They relate directly to the employment, development, wellbeing and retention of the people that work in that local organisation.

Aims

The forum will in particular:

- Embed the role of trade unions in underpinning effective employee engagement.
- Understand the workforce implications of strategic developments and coordinate responses where appropriate.
- Ensure regional oversight and scrutiny of local partnership working in the ICS footprints within the South East and facilitate meaningful discussions.
- Support local partnership working in the ICS footprints within the South East region.
- Share and promote best practice between organisations and ICSs.
- Support the work of the national social partnership mechanisms and staff council.
- Ensure meaningful consultation and engagement is taking place and promote openness, honesty and transparency in communications.

Working arrangements

Principles for effective joint working

This agreement is underpinned by shared values and common purpose. Partners are committed to:

- The values, rights and responsibilities in the NHS Constitution.
- Supporting an NHS which provides high quality and integrated services for patients and service users.
- Continuous improvement and access to high quality services.
- The People Promise that forms part of the NHS People Plan.
- Supporting and promoting equality and inclusion.

To deliver successful partnership working it is important to develop good formal and informal working relations that build trust and share responsibility, while respecting difference. To facilitate this, all parties commit to adopt the following principles:

- We will keep the patient or those who use the service at the centre of everything we do.
- We won't always agree but commit to keep talking.
- Early sharing of information in a meaningful way.
- Openness, honesty and transparency in communications.
- A positive and constructive approach based on shared goals and aspirations.
- No surprises and respect for positions.
- Be clear about whether we are discussing issues for information, a specific policy direction for implementation, issues which require resolution or items to demonstrate lessons learned.
- Early discussion of emerging issues and maintaining dialogue on policy and priorities.
- Attend (or send a deputy to) at least 50 per cent of meetings.

Benefits

Effective partnership working has the potential to produce some important benefits for all parties. These include:

- Delivering improved services to patients/users.
- Improving quality of decisions through sharing knowledge and experience in proactively leading and managing the workforce implications of health policy and innovation.
- Enabling more effective implementation of policy.
- Reducing duplicated effort by establishing principles and frameworks within which partners can take forward their engagement with staff in partnership locally.
- Providing a transparent and streamlined structure for trade union, employer and staff engagement.

Membership

Membership of the forum will comprise:

- Representation from staff organisations listed in the National SPF Partnership Agreement. The staff organisations will elect two co-chairs.

- Representation from the HRD forum (at least one director of HR per ICS) from NHS trusts/providers in the South East. Employers will elect two co-chairs, one of which could be a CEO.
- Nominated individuals with understanding of strategic workforce from across the region.
- Representation from ICSs across the South East.
- Representation from the NHS England and Improvement Regional HR and OD team.
- Representation for specific discussions from the regional director of The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.
- Representation from NHS England.
- Representation from NHS Employers.

Meeting logistics

Frequency of meetings

The forum will meet bi-monthly via Microsoft Teams and arrange in-person events according to forum need and as far as is practicable. If needed, both sides can agree to additional meetings for urgent business or situations such as industrial actions or pandemic.

Roles and responsibilities

All parties agree to recognise and respect each other's roles and functions which are distinct but complementary.

Chairs of the forum have responsibility for:

- Establishing a strategic agenda for the meeting.
- Maintaining effective links with the National Social Partnership Forum.
- Establishing task and finish groups for identified projects or themes.
- Considering other stakeholders' legitimate views.

In addition, there are several generic roles and responsibilities. Members will be expected to:

- Support employee relations through the development of principles and the use of best practice.
- Contribute to the development of enabling frameworks.

- Share expertise to support the engagement of staff.
- Identify and share best practice and exemplars on employment issues.
- Follow and communicate the principles and processes which are agreed by partners in the SE SPF for dealing with specific aspects of regional policy.
- Agree processes for engagement in response to national policy.

Facilitation

The chair of the meeting will alternate between the employer and staff side each month. The secretariat for the forum will be provided by the National Engagement Service (South team) at NHS Employers. Every effort will be made to provide information in good time for discussion or consultation.

Working arrangements

The forum will discuss a wide range of strategic issues in relation to the following themes:

- Planning and delivery of care
- Productivity, efficiency and effectiveness
- Quality
- Developing just and learning cultures
- Equality and inclusion
- Workforce recruitment and retention/attracting people to our NHS
- Change management principles
- Education and training

Review

There will be an annual review of these terms of reference and arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The next review will be in January 2026.

A separate priorities appendix will be agreed at the beginning of each financial year that aligns to the national priorities.