

## SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP FORUM STRATEGIC GROUP

### TERMS OF REFERENCE – updated May 2025

<b>WORKING ARRANGEMENTS</b>	<p>Under the joint agenda setting arrangements, items for discussion may be placed on the Strategic Group agenda by any of the four partners (NHS Trade Unions, NHS Employers, DHSC, NHS England) on condition that the final agenda is agreed by all partners via the SPF Co-chairs and SPF Secretariat.</p> <p>The Strategic Group will, at the earliest opportunity, discuss and consider in confidence the impact on, and potential actions for, the workforce of key strategic issues and challenges for the health and care system.</p> <p>It will operate under the auspices of the wider national SPF <a href="#">Partnership Agreement</a>, supported by the existing SPF Secretariat. It is accountable to the SPF Wider Group.</p> <p>The Strategic Group can commission existing or new subgroups to take forward agreed priority work programmes or projects.</p> <p>Partners’ shared values and principles for effective joint working are set out in the <a href="#">Partnership Agreement</a> based on the mutual commitment and shared endeavour to meet the workforce challenges facing the NHS. They should also observe the behaviours and carry out their responsibilities as set out in the <a href="#">SPF Members’ Handbook</a>.</p> <p>The SPF co-chairs are responsible for ensuring that individual members uphold the forum’s spirit of co-production and its partnership principles.</p>
<b>PROJECT TEAM</b>	<p><b>JOINT CHAIRS/PARTNERS:</b></p> <p>Danny Mortimer, NHS Employers (Co-chair)          Helga Pile, Acting NHS Staff Side (Co-chair)          Thomas Simons, NHS England (NHSE)          Gavin Larnier/Louisa Elias-Evans, Dept of Health &amp; Social Care (DHSC)          Rebecca Smith (NHS Employers)</p> <p><u><i>Additional representatives:</i></u>  <i>NHS employers x3 - from wider SPF attendees</i>  <i>NHS staff side x5:</i></p>

	<p><i>Joanne Kaye (RCM), Brian Morton (RCN), Lena Levy/ Rob Kidney (BMA), Claire Sullivan (CSP), Jon Restell (MiP), Nick Entwistle (Unison and staff side SPF Secretariat rep)</i></p> <p><i>DHSC x1 – Andrew Morris</i></p> <p><i>NHSEI x1 – Angie Walsh</i></p> <p>NB – Navina Evans (NHSE) to have open invitation.</p>
<b>DATES</b>	<b>2025 dates:</b> 16 July, 15 October (face-to face.)
<b>AIMS</b>	<p>With reference to the context of the Health and Care Act 2022, the NHS People Promise, and the NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan, the SPF Strategic Group will aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to improved patient outcomes through partnership working and staff engagement on the most significant strategic challenges and changes faced by the healthcare system.</li> <li>• Bring strategic partners together to discuss, debate and engage in the earliest stages of the development of policy and strategy in the NHS, where there are workforce implications.</li> <li>• Endeavour to find collective, partnership solutions, wherever possible, for the healthcare system, whilst recognising and valuing each partner’s perspectives.</li> <li>• Support and promote good employment practices and the benefits of good people management.</li> <li>• Enable and support the national SPF and regional SPFs to deliver on these aims.</li> </ul>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To operate within the principles outlined in the existing SPF Partnership Agreement – e.g. mutual respect, co-operation, and “no surprises” culture.</li> <li>• To consider the development and impact of NHS policies and strategic delivery on the NHS workforce and NHS employers and other providers of NHS-funded services and their staff, where appropriate.</li> <li>• To engage the workforce effectively in tackling future challenges.</li> </ul>
<b>DELIVERABLES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cochairs to agree a plan in terms of the areas to prioritise and focus on, which will be reviewed quarterly.</li> <li>• Support the development and delivery of national healthcare priorities, policy and strategy by contributing key workforce perspectives.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the benefits of partnership working through the delivery of outcomes that are transparent, open and dispel myths and misconceptions.</li> <li>• Commission work from existing SPF subgroups or establish issue-specific working groups.</li> <li>• Provide update reports for the SPF Wider Group meetings.</li> </ul>
<b>BUSINESS BENEFITS</b>	<p><i>As described in the work of Prof Michael West, and referenced in the NHS People Plan, there is a growing body of evidence that effective staff engagement through partnership working results in improved patient outcomes and overall NHS performance.</i></p> <p>In this context, the Strategic Group will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a more transparent and streamlined structure for Trade Union and employer engagement on healthcare policy changes and early, open and frank discussion on potential outcomes and solutions.</li> <li>• Support delivery of high-quality services to patients/users.</li> <li>• Improve mutual understanding and respect.</li> <li>• Provide an opportunity for partners to contribute their experience and ideas to the development and implementation of the workforce implications of policy on healthcare.</li> <li>• Lead to more effective policy making.</li> <li>• Contribute to improved staff experience, high standards in employment practice, and improved levels of staff engagement and experience.</li> </ul>
<b>POTENTIAL RISKS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership working could be understood differently by the partners leading to the Strategic Group being deemed untenable.</li> <li>• The remit of the group might not adequately take account of the role of DHSC as the department accountable to Parliament or NHS England as having operational oversight for the NHS.</li> <li>• SPF members not on the Strategic Group may feel disempowered and disengage with the Wider SPF.</li> <li>• Duplication/cross-over - partners may wish to consider what synergies exist between the SPF Strategic Group and other strategic “system” meetings and consider if any links/networks could be better exploited.</li> <li>• Establishing the right approach to communications and keeping wider SPF members in the loop may create additional pressures on partners.</li> </ul>

<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updates will be provided from Strategic Group to the Wider Group through a standing item on Wider Group meeting agendas.</li> <li>• Key communications and minutes from Strategic Group will not be published more widely, as discussions may be incomplete and confidential.</li> <li>• Attendees to communicate back to their networks, mindful of sensitivities and confidentiality issues.</li> <li>• For each item at Strategic Group meeting, the group will agree what communications and actions should follow – including what should be networked out and what should remain confidential.</li> <li>• Supporting papers will be provided where necessary to support discussions but <b><i>are not for wider circulation</i></b></li> <li>• Minutes will be action-orientated and concise. They will be circulated only to attendees and secretariat members and <b><i>are not for onward or wider circulation</i></b>.</li> </ul>
<b>TIMING and LOGISTICS</b>	<p>Frequency of meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Group will meet four times a year, chaired jointly by the SPF staff side and employer co-chairs.</li> <li>• Agendas and supporting papers will be agreed with co-chairs at least one week before the meeting.</li> <li>• Terms of Reference will be reviewed periodically.</li> <li>• Working arrangements will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains an effective forum.</li> <li>• Secretariat will be provided by the DHSC SPF team in conjunction with existing employer and staff side secretariat support and nominees from NHS England.</li> </ul>