



Midlands Social Partnership Forum (SPF)

Terms of reference

The Midlands Social Partnership Forum is a partnership between NHS organisations and trade union representatives in the region. It mirrors and supports the national arrangements for partnership working on the workforce implications of policy.

The role of this forum is to work in partnership and involve employer and staff organisations in considering future changes and identifying the workforce implications of these. It enables frank debate and exchanges regarding the development of the NHS workforce across the Midlands.

The partnership recognises respective roles and responsibilities, establishes shared values and common purpose and sets some key principles for effective joint working. It provides a basis for a continually improving partnership which will lead to long-term solutions that work for both staff and patients or service users.

The forum will not pursue matters that affect single organisations, unless they have wider impact across the region affecting other employers, but may, with agreement, provide a forum for negotiated agreement across organisations.

Aims

The forum will in particular:

- Embed the role of trade unions in underpinning effective employee engagement.
- Contribute trade union and employer perspectives, at a formative stage, on the possible workforce implications of the development and implementation of policy.
- Understand the workforce implications of strategic developments and changes to service commissioning, and respond where appropriate.
- Embed and promote partnership working and effective communication, with a focus on sharing best practice and facilitating meaningful discussions.

- Prioritise areas that will have greatest impact on staff practice, behaviour and culture in the workplace, in discussion with employers and staff side colleagues.
- Support the work of the National Social Partnership Forum mechanisms and the NHS Staff Council.
- Where possible and of benefit, agree region-wide good practice or consultation under the auspices of the group and these terms of reference.

Working arrangements

Principles for effective joint working

To deliver successful partnership working it is important to develop solid, 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 in their dealings with each other:

- We may not always agree, but we commit to keep talking and actively listening.
- Openness, honesty and transparency in communications.
- A positive and constructive approach based on shared goals and aspirations.
- Be respectful to positions and one another.
- Work together in partnership to build healthy and inclusive working environments for NHS people in the Midlands, to support them to do good work and provide excellent, high-quality care.
- Ensure each member is clear about who gives their mandate for joint working.
- Be clear about which agenda we are leading: national, regional or local health community.
- 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.
- Recognise the primary responsibility for managing relationships in employment is between employer and employees.

Membership

Membership of the forum will comprise of trade union representatives, employers, commissioners and Arms' Length Bodies (ALBs), more specifically to include the following:

Management representatives

Management representatives will include:

- Chief people officers from NHS trusts/providers in the Midlands or a nominated senior workforce representative
- Local leaders from NHS England and NHS Employers
- ICB chief people officer or a nominated senior workforce representative
- Other appropriate employer representatives.

Trade union representatives

Trade union representatives will include regional officers from:

- UNISON
- The Royal College of Nursing (RCN)
- The Royal College of Midwives (RCM)
- Unite the Union
- GMB
- The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP)
- The Society of Radiographers (SoR)
- The College of Podiatrists (CoP)
- Managers in Partnership (MiP)
- The British Medical Association (BMA)
- Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (HCSA)
- British Dental Association
- Other appropriate trade union representatives.

Other associated health and care partners to be invited/included at the discretion of the joint chairs.

Meeting logistics

Frequency of meetings

The forum will meet quarterly, which can be increased as required in light of the agenda under discussion.

Chairing arrangements

The meetings will be co-chaired, alternatively (where practical), by a nominated/elected staff side lead and nominated employer individual with understanding of strategic workforce implications of policy change from Midlands NHS service providers (for example, director of HR).

Facilitation

The secretariat for the forum will be provided by the National Engagement Service (Midlands and East team) at NHS Employers. Every effort will be made to provide information in good time for discussion or consultation.

Communication

- Joint public communications will be agreed from time to time. At the close of each meeting the group should be clear on the agreed key communication points for wider dissemination. Those in attendance to communicate agreed key messages to colleagues in their organisation.
- All partners undertake to respect confidentiality where required or requested and otherwise to conduct their dialogue openly.

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 May 2026.