



National Ambulance Sector

UNSOCIAL HOURS - AMBULANCE SECTOR BRIEFING MARCH 2007

1. **Background** – Prior to Agenda for Change (AfC) there was no national agreement for unsocial hours payments to ambulance staff.

During the 'testing' stage of AfC, two ambulance trusts – East Anglia and North East trialed a prototype scheme. The reports were that it had worked well as a 'prospective scheme', i.e. predicting future unsocial hours working and adding a % to basic pay.

However, the reports from other 'early implementing' trusts were that the scheme had not worked well. In particular, that it did not incentivise shifts when working patterns were unpredictable and that it created too many 'winners and losers' when compared to the former 'Whitley Councils' unsocial hours provisions.

The NHS Staff Council (which includes UNISON) decided not to include the prototype scheme in the final AfC agreement and instead agreed interim arrangements to apply until a new harmonised scheme of unsocial hours payments could be concluded.

The interim scheme (Section 2 of the NHS Terms and Conditions Handbook) provided for staff previously on Whitley unsocial hours % payments, to continue to receive them. However, as ambulance had no previous payments, it was agreed that the prototype scheme would apply (Annex E of the Handbook).

2. **New draft proposals** – In December 2004, the Staff Council set up a joint working group to review the current unsocial hours schemes and draw up proposals for a new harmonised system of payments. The unions said that extra money would need to be made available for this and a figure of £75 million was agreed by the Department of Health to cover England (separate monies have been allocated for the other countries in the UK).

The draft proposals have now been published. They were discussed with management and staff side representatives from the two ambulance 'early implementer' trusts who have influenced the draft proposals.

The current stage is one of 'testing' the draft proposals. The Staff Council recognises that the change that is proposed from the AfC prototype is a significant one. It is concerned that any new scheme must meet the needs of the ambulance service and its staff.

The Staff Council did run these draft proposals through a number of trust's shift patterns with differing results. Some showed little difference in earnings whereas others showed some losses.

The draft proposals have now been published. They provide for a more simplified scheme of unsocial hours payments that would if accepted, replace existing ambulance staff unsocial hours pay.

They provide for staged movement from current arrangements to the new scheme to apply in full from 1st April 2010.

Band	Mon-Fri 8pm-6am Saturday 12am-12am	Sunday & Public Holidays 12am-12am
1	50%	100%
2	44%	88%
3	37%	74%
4-9	30%	60%

All unsocial hours pay would be pensionable and payable for periods of annual leave and sickness.

By staging the changes over two and a half years, it is believed that very few staff would require pay protection.

However, if pay protection were required on total earnings, this could continue until March 2011.

3. **Testing** – The Staff Council has asked all ambulance trusts and services in the UK to test these draft proposals against shift patterns in their organisations. This should be done for staff working on the AfC prototype scheme as well as for staff on former 'Whitley' schemes.

The criteria that testing should take place against are:

1. Operational impact
2. Earnings of staff
3. Incentives to ensure 24 hour cover
4. Equality issues
5. Appropriate to all
6. Administrative issues
7. Transitional arrangements

Replies should reach the Staff Council by the 20th April 2007.

4. **Next steps** – The Staff Council will evaluate the responses and then commence a further round of joint discussions to produce a final proposal. It is the intention that these discussions will address issues identified in the 'testing'.

Any final proposals will then be subject to a ballot of all members.