

Doctors urge end to private sector 'waste'

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MONEY SHOULD not be squandered on expensive private providers in the current financial climate, doctors leaders have warned.

They have called instead for better workforce planning and investment in the NHS.

BMA Northern Ireland has developed a briefing paper in light of the difficult financial situation faced by the health service.

It was delivered last week to Northern Ireland health, social services and public safety minister Michael McGimpsey, Stormont's health, social services and public safety committee and the country's Department of Finance and Personnel.

The BMA is also due to have a first official meeting with health, social services and public safety committee

chair Jim Wells. Doctors leaders plan to discuss the financial crisis with him.

The briefing paper calls for the future sustainability of Northern Ireland's health service to be made a priority.

BMA Northern Ireland council chair Paul Darragh said: 'We are facing unprecedented financial constraints, and tough questions need to be asked about what the priorities should be for our public services.

'Frontline health services need to be supported and protected, and we urge politicians to work together to ensure that Northern Ireland's health service is the best that it can be.'

Dr Darragh said only a professionally led, patient-

centred service could deliver a world-class health service within the current constraints.

He continued: 'Better workforce planning and investment in the health service, instead of squandering money on expensive private providers, would provide better care for patients.

'Doctors are realistic about what the health service can provide, but we urge caution as to how trusts will achieve efficiency savings.'

The briefing note also stresses:

- It is erroneous to resort to simplistic measures, such as freezing recruitment or cutting clinical staff
- Services such as mental health or older people's services should not be seen as 'soft targets'
- The private sector should have no role in the commissioning of public services.