

DSF

**Executive summary &
Action plan 2022/23**

Executive Director of Social Work:

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Please provide a high level summary overview which must include:

1.1 Executive Director of Social Work Statement of the Governance arrangements in place for safe and effective social work and social care services across the Trust (word limit – 500 words)

During this reporting period the Trust has maintained its responsibilities for exercising, on behalf of the Department, the statutory functions which are directed by virtue of authorisations made under the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 (the 1994 HPSS Order). The Trust has continued to meet its statutory obligation to put and keep in place arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of social work services.

As Executive Director of Social Work I present twice yearly to Trust Board regarding the Annual and Interim Statutory Function reports which includes the 6 monthly Corporate Parenting Report. There are mechanisms in place within the Northern Trust to provide assurance that professional leadership and the control and management of professional and regulatory issues pertaining to the statutory functions are reviewed at regular intervals. The Trust has a Social Care Governance Forum which takes place 8 months of the year specifically focusing on the delivery of statutory functions. Areas of development, improvement and risk relating to statutory functions are progressed there.

Emerging pressures and risks associated with statutory functions are escalated regularly through the Trusts integrated assurance framework via our Safety and Care Quality Steering group and through the Standards, Compliance & Regulation steering group. Key themes, risks, control and mitigations are presented through to the Trust's Assurance Committee and finally to Trust Board. On regular occasions throughout this reporting period, we have presented challenges associated with our statutory functions and appraised Trust Board of the control measures in place to mitigate risk.

Throughout this reporting period I am satisfied that the directed statutory functions are effectively monitored within all programmes of care. I am assured that:

1. Legal and professional responsibilities are assigned and necessary systems and procedures are in place.
2. There is compliance with all regulatory and professional requirements.
3. All staff responsible for the discharge of DSFs have access to relevant training, professional support and supervision.
4. There is proper maintenance and operation of an efficient data collection system.
5. When our statutory functions have been impacted actions are implemented, including the development of improvement plans, to assure the safety, quality and effectiveness of social work services.

6. The Department is informed, at agreed intervals, on the Trust's performance in respect of statutory functions, including early notification of risks, resource pressures, legal challenges, and proposed actions to address these.
7. Timely action is taken to address and/or prevent the escalation of any identified risks that affect our ability to deliver statutory functions.

There are a number of emerging/developing pressures and risks associated with the delivery of our statutory functions. These areas are listed below in section 1.2, actions taken to control / mitigate risk and maintain professional assurances in each of these areas are detailed at section 2.6.

1.2 Statement of the Executive Director of Social Work's assessment of the Trust's performance in effectively and efficiently delivering Directed Statutory Functions during the reporting period
(Word limit – 500 words)

This reporting period has continued to be very challenging with demand continuing to grow whilst experiencing unprecedented staffing challenges. Emerging pressures and risks that continue to affect our statutory functions are outlined below.

Workforce Challenges *(on NHSCT Corporate Risk Register)*

The current workforce arrangements present a significant challenge. This is also in the context of increasing demand for services, as indicated in the data sets. Recruitment of social work staff in particular areas of social services is difficult. Where teams are staffed well there is a disproportionate number of newly qualified staff. The Trust has put in place strategies to recruit and retain staff including introducing new recruitment pathways, different skill mixes, additional administrative support, and mentoring / coaching networks for frontline social workers.

Approved Social Work (ASW)

The ASW service has remained under pressure during the reporting period. Whilst the number of referrals has not increased significantly the number of admissions has increased by around 20%. The ongoing mental health bed crisis coupled with NIAS/PSNI interface issues has resulted in protracted waits on numerous occasions. The ASW leads are continuing to work alongside SPPG and DoH to explore solutions to these issues.

Unmet Domiciliary Care Need

Due to demographic growth, there is a continued challenge in meeting demand in numerous areas of the Trust, blackspots continue. Risk Management frameworks are used to monitor individual need and associated risk.

Care Management Reviews

27% of service users in adult's services have not received an annual care review due to the impact of absence and vacancies and the increase in new referrals in this reporting period. Trust action plans to improve this position are monitored regularly and accountability reporting is in place via the Social Care Governance Steering Group.

Adult Safeguarding Reform

The Trust has conducted a review of the professional oversight arrangements for DAPO's. Work has commenced to develop an options appraisal paper to illustrate how the management structure for adult protection services can be strengthened.

LAC Population

On the 31st March 2023 there were 774 LAC, an increase of 108 children since 30.03.20. (Pre-covid)

Inappropriate Placements in Adults and Children's Services *(on NHSCT Corporate Risk Register)*

The continued and growing pressure on the looked after children system and in particular the unavailability of placements has resulted in an increase in the number of children in inappropriate, unregulated placements. On occasions the Trust is unable to meet the demands for specialist bed based placements within Adult Services, which results in bespoke placements being designed within a community setting. Trackers are in place to monitor these arrangements closely.

Statutory LAC Reviews

In the reporting period, there were 60 LAC reviews held outside of timescales as a direct result of the significant staffing shortfall across the LAC teams. A number of reviews also continue to be impacted by delays in expert reports being provided in court proceedings to support care planning. The Trust continues to monitor the review position weekly and takes a targeted approach by moving staff around teams to address review cycles.

Fostering Reviews

A targeted approach to outstanding reviews remains in place. Risk pressure meetings with the Head of Service continue to take place.

Unallocated Cases in Children's Services *(on NHSCT Corporate Risk Register)*

The Trust has established a range of processes to monitor unallocated cases as outlined in section 2.6. Unallocated activity remains an area of risk for the LAC, Gateway and Family Support and Intervention Teams. As at 31.03.23 there were 59 FSIT cases and 98 Gateway cases waiting longer than 20 days and 156 looked after children with no allocated social worker. This unallocated activity is a direct consequence of staff vacancies. The Trust continues to monitor and control the level of unallocated activity. Within LAC services, each child continues to be seen regularly by another member of staff (full details at section 10.3.14B).

Domestic Homicide Reviews

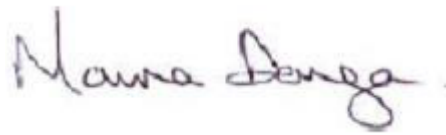
In this reporting period the Trust has provided 5 independent learning reports to the Department of Justice, these reports identify areas of good practice and make recommendations on how support to victims and perpetrators can be improved, these recommendations have not directly impacted on our statutory functions. Further detail can be found within programme summaries.

Children with a Disability *(on NHSCT Corporate Risk Register)*

The primary pressure relates to a shortfall in Short Break provision for Children with challenging behaviour. An independent sector 3 bedded resource was closed to

admissions for 16 months following an RQIA inspection. Permanent placements remain unavailable and currently there is a system pressure for 3 children who require accommodation.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Maura Dargan', written in a cursive style.

Maura Dargan
Executive Director of Social Work & Divisional Director of Children and Young People.
Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Date: 12th May 2023

Discharge of Directed Statutory Functions

Summary of areas where the Trust has not adequately discharged their Directed Statutory Functions for this Programme of Care. Please outline remedial action taken to address this situation and any proposed future action.

2.6	Summary of areas where the Trust has not adequately discharged their Directed Statutory Functions for this Programme of Care	Please outline remedial action taken to address this situation and any proposed future action.
	Mental Health Issues	
	<u>Carer's Assessments</u> The adult mental health service continues to promote carers assessments, across acute, crisis and community settings. Whilst numbers continue to gradually improve year on year, the service remains below target. There are variable factors impacting on uptake of carer's assessments, a percentage of work undertaken by CMHT is considered brief intervention, and the remit for carers assessment is not applicable. Within the remit of care managed and secondary care acute/recovery patients this is offered.	Following the commencement of the Think Family Social Work Practitioner, the adult mental health service is promoting the use of the A5 card and piloting the Think Family Social Work Assessment. A formal carer's assessment will be considered within this intervention. The Trust will report at a later date if this measure supports carer assessment activity within this service area.
	Learning Disability Issues	
	<u>Care Management</u> As part of the NHSCT review of care management guidelines, LD services conducted internal audit of care management files. There is a noted back log of care management reviews outstanding across LD teams.	Accountability arrangements are in place to monitor the CM review position within the LD service. There is a targeted action plan in place across each of 4 teams to address the outstanding reviews.

	This was due to level of vacancies across teams, sick leave, and maternity leave and staff prioritising MCA applications/extensions. A number of interim review conversations between carers and or service users has taken place throughout the reporting period, resulting in changes to packages of care.	Team leaders continue to meet monthly with CSM and review progress. If L3 SW students are successfully recruited into vacancies the LD service hopes to see an improved review position by September 2023.
	Older People Issues	
	<u>Domiciliary Care</u> Unmet need for Domiciliary Care across NHSCT at 3 April 2023 was 1710, 1204 from within the Community Care Division (Older People and Physical Disability services). There is a noted increase in the number of service users receiving Domiciliary Care Packages in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22 <u>Reviews</u> The Trust has made progress in meeting requirements for Care Managed cases (85% compliance from 70.5% in November 2022). There are continued challenges for total review compliance (including non-care managed cases), 67.9% at 31st March 2023 from 66.4% at 31st March 2022.	The Trust has increased the provision of Rapid Response packages (used primarily for hospital discharges). In addition, community teams have prioritised completion of early reviews to ensure resources can be recycled in a timely manner. This has been successful in ensuring Rapid Response hours are available for hospital discharges. In 2023/24, the Trust is working with regional partners in a range of workstreams to maximise capacity of domiciliary care. The Division has taken a targeted approach using bank staff to complete Care Managed reviews, which has proved successful. Pending capacity from Bank SWs, this approach will be transferred to non-care managed cases. The Trust is working to ensure recruitment to vacant SW posts through regional programme via Health Sector Talent.

	Physical and Sensory Disability Issues	
	<u>Reviews</u> The Trust has made progress in meeting requirements for Care Managed cases (85% compliance from 70.5% in November 2022). There are continued challenges for total review compliance (including non-care managed cases), 67.9% at 31st March 2023 from 66.4% at 31st March 2022.	The Division have taken a targeted approach using bank staff to complete Care Managed reviews, which has proved successful. Pending capacity from Bank SWs, this approach will be transferred to non-care managed cases. The Trust is working to ensure recruitment to vacant SW posts through regional programme via Health Sector Talent.
	<u>Looked After Children Issues</u>	
	<u>Unallocated Activity</u> <i>(On Corporate Risk Register)</i> As at 31.03.23 there were 156 looked after children with no allocated social worker, this unallocated activity is a direct consequence of staff vacancies	<u>Unallocated Activity</u> The Trust has applied the following mitigation measures which ensures those Looked After young people who do not have an allocated social worker are still seen by another skill mixed staff member or social work manager. 1. The Principal Practitioner has been identified to provide support for permanence plans which creates some additional capacity for social work staff. 2. Four teams have implemented a variation in virtual & direct statutory visits for settled cases. 3. Regular communication with parents takes place and is monitored via the Team Leader.

	<u>Placement Fragility</u> <i>(On Corporate Risk Register)</i> The Trust continues to experience an increased demand for foster and residential childcare placements, this is a direct consequence of the increasing LAC population and a number of placement breakdowns. On numerous occasions throughout the reporting period the Trust has created bespoke placement arrangements. SPPG are notified at agreed intervals.	4. There is a designated duty system for unallocated YP queries. 5. SWSM's have implemented a RAG rating system for unallocated YP to ensure the correct prioritisation of staff time. 6. Risk Pressures meetings (for teams with high numbers of unallocated YP) are chaired fortnightly by the Head of Service and reports on progress / mitigation is provided to LAC Assurance Forum. 7. Where appropriate the service has approved staff overtime, payment in lieu of annual leave and time off in lieu; 8. In two teams the Team Leader is carrying caseload and working cases in Court. 9. Social Work Service Managers are working priority cases and assisting with oversight of Team workload. 10. There is regular highlight reporting into the Trust's Social Care Governance Steering Group and the Divisions SW Assurance Forum. <u>Placement Fragility</u> The Trust has applied the following mitigation measures to manage the impact of placement breakdown and limited placement availability. 1. Individual risks in respect of individual young people are mitigated/monitored through Social Work visits. The risks are further reviewed, and where possible addressed, through formal review mechanisms such as Child in Need reviews, Looked after Children reviews, Child Protection Conferences and specific Risk Strategy meetings as appropriate. 2. Detailed analysis is regularly undertaken by the Division on the nature
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		and scale of shortfall in care placements. 3. A Fostering oversight meeting is chaired regularly by the Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting. 4. The Intensive Support Team undertake evening and weekend support for children on the edge of care. 5. Recruitment of three temporary Support Workers to work alongside young people and foster carers where placements are at risk of breaking down. 6. Malin's Wood Children's Home opened April 2023. 7. 6 apartments secured for care experienced young people and unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. . 8. Escalation Panel meets weekly to keep cases under review, securing placements where possible. 9. Regular notification to Regional Emergency Social Work Service of high risk cases. 10. Unregulated arrangements notified to SPPG. 11. Increase from 6 to 7 beds in 4 Children's Homes approved by RQIA. 12. Business case submitted to SPPG for The Ferns 13. Guidance on management of bespoke placements has been implemented; 14. Regular reporting via dashboard tracker to the Executive Director of
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		SW and into the Trust's Integrated Assurance Framework.
	<u>Children in Need Issues</u>	
	<u>Unallocated Activity</u> <i>(On Corporate Risk Register)</i> As at 31.03.23 there were 59 FSIT and 92 Gateway cases waiting longer than 20 days. *Child protection response times are not impacted.	<u>Unallocated Activity</u> The Trust has implemented the following measures to mitigate risks associated with the unallocated activity. 1. Unallocated Escalation Trackers are in place for each team 2. Weekly escalation meetings are held by team managers to review unallocated case work 3. Direct contact is made with families by the Team Leader or Senior Social Worker 4. Allocation is prioritised based on the risk rating detailed within the escalation tracker 5. Staff overtime is explored regularly 6. Where appropriate staff from other teams support those areas that have the longest waits. 7. Families and Children are regularly contacted and supported by another skill mix member of staff within the team, and where appropriate referrals are made to other sectors / agencies who can provide interim support. 8. There is regular reporting via dashboard tracker to the Executive Director of SW and into the Trust's Integrated Assurance Framework
	<u>Workforce Issues</u>	
	<u>Recruitment and Retention of Frontline Social Workers</u> <i>(On Corporate Risk Register)</i> Data and evaluations from regional social work recruitment indicates that the current regional approach	The Trust continues to see good results from the recently piloted L3 fast tracked recruitment, this allows L3 students to select a critical post in their final month of placement and move straight into this post without interview / application. These students immediately join a mentoring scheme which

	is effective in reaching the small pool of social workers available in Northern Ireland. The current recruitment process is not the reason why there is a problem with hard to fill (HTF) posts. It is felt that the present workforce challenges within Social Work are a result of a wider supply issue. In addition to this some posts remain unattractive to candidates on the regional waiting list, qualitative data pulled from engagement with candidates indicate that LAC, Gateway and FSIT posts remain HTF because of the complexities, risk and size of caseloads within teams.	provides the necessary support to help them transition into the workforce. The Trust secured a total of 32 posts using this method in June 2022. The OSS has secured a Health Sector Talen contract to strengthen this process and the Trust expects to see positive results. The mentoring scheme has been evaluated and is now a mandatory requirement for all L3 students following this recruitment pathway. In addition to the above the Trust has delivered on ceasing all off contracted SW agency staff by 01.04.23 and remains on track for ceasing all contracted SW agency staff by 01.07.23 The Trust continues to support the development of a new regional recruitment model after the existing regional waiting list ceases in May 2023 Given the existing process challenges and current workforce pressures; the Trust is committed to considering new methods for running a regional SW recruitment campaign. There is a willingness to look at different and creative methods for recruiting social workers in the future. The Trust is considering how to effectively implement a new approach to widen the reach of social work recruitment in Northern Ireland. i.e. Ireland, Mainland U.K. and International recruitment.
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Our Vision

**We provide compassionate care
with our community, in our community.**

If you would like to give feedback on
any of our services please contact:

Email: user.feedback@northerntrust.hscni.net

Telephone: 028 9442 4655



Northern Health and Social Care Trust



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