

Trust Board Briefing Paper	
Reference Number:	TB158/13/H
Date of Meeting:	Thursday 27 th June 2024
Presenting Director:	Maura Dargan, Executive Director of Social Work
Subject:	Directed Statutory Functions report 23-24
Purpose: Approval/Noting	Retrospective approval/noting
Background:	The executive summary within the annual report requires the Trust to provide a statement via the Executive Director of Social Work on the: 1. Arrangements in place for safe and effective social work and social care services across the Trust 2. A statement on the assessment of the Trust's performance in effectively and efficiently delivering Directed Statutory Functions during the reporting period 3. A Summary of areas where the Trust has not adequately discharged their Directed Statutory Functions The trust has provided the following summary within the annual report.
1. Arrangements for safe and effective social work and social care services The Trust maintains 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, which it provides to individuals and the environment in which it provides them. Reports are presented twice yearly to Trust Board regarding the Trusts Annual and Interim Statutory Function compliance this includes the 6 monthly Corporate Parenting Report. There are mechanisms in place within the Northern Trust to assure 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 at this forum.	



In addition to the above and in compliance with the Trusts arrangements for monitoring Directed Statutory Functions the Executive Director of Social Work provides overview reports and presentations to Governance Committee's and Trust Board on any new or emerging risks that impact detrimentally on the delivery of statutory functions. Divisional and Corporate risk registers are also utilised to capture specific issues pertaining to the delivery of statutory functions. (As noted throughout this report). This process is utilised in order to identify the regional and local challenges, the mitigations and monitoring in place to address these challenges and to notify Trust Board on how these challenges have been appropriately escalated to the SPPG.

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.

2. Assessment of the Trust's performance in effectively and efficiently delivering Directed Statutory Functions.

This reporting period has continued to be a very challenging one where demand has increased at the same time as an unprecedented staffing shortfall. Emerging pressures and risks that continue to affect our statutory functions are outlined below.

Themes crossing all programmes of care

There are 2 core themes impacting all areas of Social Work.

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 on the availability of placements has resulted in an increase in the number of children in inappropriate placements. On occasions the Trust is unable to meet the demands for specialist bed based placements within our Adult Services programmes, this result in bespoke placements being designed within a community setting, trackers are in place within Children's and Adults services to monitor these arrangements closely.



Workforce Challenges (on NHSCT Corporate Risk Register)

Social services have experienced significant workforce pressures during this DSF reporting period which have impacted on the capacity of the Trust to discharge statutory duties. The current workforce arrangements present a significant challenge. This is also in the context of increasing demand for services. 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 Northern 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.

Statutory Function Challenges within Adult Services

Approved Social Work (ASW)

Despite there being no increase in Approved Social Work (ASW) assessments compared to last year the service remains under considerable pressure due to lack of inpatient beds, delays in ambulance and PSNI attending and the emergence of issues relating to RESWS; including difficulties with handovers to and between the daytime service and the Regional Emergency Social Work Service (RESW). The Northern Trust ASW service has remained under pressure during the reporting period. Whilst the number of local referrals has not increased significantly, the number of admissions has increased by around 20%. The ASW lead in the Northern Trust is continuing to work alongside SPPG and DoH to explore at solutions to these issues.

Unmet Need for Domiciliary Care

The report indicates that the Trusts continues to have a significant level of unmet need for Domiciliary Care. This level of unmet need spans all programmes of care with older people being the largest group affected making up 80%. Maximising capacity in domiciliary care is a core focus for the Trust Community Care Division and reform work continues to take place within one of the new Department of Health (DoH) Social Care Reform Collaborative work streams.

Adult Safeguarding

The quarterly data submitted to SPPG provides detail that adult safeguarding services has seen a significant increase of referrals during this reporting period.



The greatest number of referrals received relates to people with mental ill health, with older people being the second largest grouping followed by people with learning disabilities. The Northern Trust does not currently face any challenges with their delivery of statutory functions with respect to adult safeguarding. The Trust has a governance structure and reform board in place to monitor adult safeguarding arrangements and deliver improvements.

Carers Assessments

Carers play an important role in the provision of care and support they provide to a family member or someone close to them. The Northern Trust remains committed to the promotion and uptake of carers assessments, using a standardisation of approach of the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT) and Carer's Conversation Wheel, across all Programmes of Care. The need for improved recording and reporting of carers assessments is recorded within section 2.6.

Unallocated Cases in Older People and Physical / Sensory Disability Services.

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Due to increased demand the Trust's Community Care Division has experienced a new challenge around unallocated cases. Presently these unallocated cases are managed through the duty SW system. The Trust continues to engage in regional discussions surrounding the definition of unallocated cases in Adult Services; in addition to this, the Trust continues to develop an improvement plan and a governance assurance system to effectively monitor unallocated case activity. This issue has been added to Divisional Risk Register

Annual Care Reviews

Non-compliance by the Trust in ensuring that service users receive timely annual reviews is recorded within section 2.6; this area continues to be an issue, particularly across older people and learning disability services. The cause is largely related due to increased workloads, increased referral levels along with the prioritisation of adult safeguarding, hospital discharge and Mental Capacity Act work.

Interface with Service Delivery Process (SDP).

A number of DSF challenges are also included in the Trust's Service Delivery Plan (SDP). These services relate to:

- Adult Day Care



- Adult Short Breaks
- Domiciliary Care Hours
- Mental Health Services (Adult Mental Health, Psychological Therapies, Dementia)
- Mental Health Acute Bed Pressures.

Statutory Function Challenges within Children and Young People's Services

Unallocated Cases

Our reporting procedures for unallocated cases indicate an improved position in our Gateway services, a continued challenging position in our Family Support Teams and an unprecedented position in our Looked After Children's Services. An improvement plan is in place for all unallocated case activity within the Northern Trust. The Trust's actions around unallocated cases in the LAC service are recorded within section 2.6. The Trust continues to report our Gateway and Family Support unallocated case activity via the agreed SDP reporting procedures.

Increase in Looked After Children

Since 2021 statutory functions reports for the Northern Trust highlight a very significant increase in our looked after children population. Within the Northern Trust in March 2024 there was 807, an increase of 43 young people since the submission of our ICP data in October 2023, our LAC service has now experienced an increase of 118 children since 30.03.20. Inevitably the increase in looked after children has resulted in increased demand for suitable placements, and challenges in completing statutory reviews / visits.

The increase in kinship placements is positive and in line with legislation, policy and research findings. The Northern Trust continues to support children to remain with family or friends. This trend has changed the face of foster care as kinship carers often need different and/or more intensive support. The arrival of increased numbers of separated and unaccompanied asylum children into the looked after system has added challenges for the corporate parenting system within the Northern Trust.

Children with Disability, Short Breaks

The Trust continues to record pressures in this area, and notes that services have



had to be repurposed to provide residential accommodation for children with a disability who become looked after. Our report acknowledges improvements in our short break performance with the 22/23 action surrounding Children with a Disability being closed by SPPG in October 23. In this reporting period the Trust has placed significant focus on the transfer of operational ownership of a residential short breaks facility in one area of the trust whilst also profiling and expanding other types of short breaks.

Interface with Children's Strategic Reform Board

The Children's Strategic Reform Board under the leadership of DoH has been set up to tackle many of the key issues (noted above) for children services by working creatively and collaboratively with Trusts and other stakeholders to assess the issues, underlying causes, and develop robust and creative plans to tackle them. Associated work streams under the Reform Board will be focussing on a number of areas that are also included in the Northern Trust DSF action plan these include unallocated cases and placement pressures.

3. Summary of areas where the Trust has not adequately discharged their Directed Statutory Functions

Following end year accountability (18th June 2024) with SPPG Deputy Directors the 2023/24 DSF Action Plan for Northern Trust was closed. 4 out of 22 actions were completed and the remaining 18 actions which were still either red or amber have been carried across to the 2024/25 DSF Action Plan. Commissioning leads within SPPG having reviewed the DSF reports and following discussion with Trust leads agreed that one new action would be included in the 24/25 Action Plan (unallocated cases in Older Peoples Service).

The 19 actions outline in the 2024/2025 DSF Action Plan forms the basis of ongoing quarterly accountability meetings between SPPG and Northern Trust SW Assistant Directors. As noted above these actions are cross cutting with a focus on placement pressures, unallocated cases / unmet need, care management reviews and workforce.

The 2024/2025 Northern Trust DSF Action Plan is attached.

