



Trust Board Briefing Paper	
Reference Number:	TB155/16/L
Date of Meeting:	25 th January 2024
Presenting Director:	Maura Dargan, Executive Director of Social Work
Subject:	Interim Corporate Parenting Report (1/4/23-30/09/23)
Purpose: Approval/Noting	Retrospective Approval
Background:	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's Social Care Governance forum which takes place 8 months of the year, specifically focuses on the delivery of statutory functions, areas of development, improvement and risk relating to statutory functions. In compliance with the Trust's Directed Statutory Functions (DSF) process the Data 10 narrative and subsequent children's DSF spreadsheets for the reporting period 1st April 2023 to 30th September are presented to Trust Board for oversight and approval.
The key themes that arise from the Interim Corporate Parenting Report will be considered further at a Trust Board workshop in December 2023. Themes There are 2 core themes that affect our directed statutory functions. 1. Inappropriate Placements (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.	

2. Workforce Challenges (on NHSCT Corporate Risk Register)

Children's 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. However, vacant posts continue to grow throughout the year with improvement noted only in July / August when NQSW join the workforce following completion of their degree.

Current key pressures on Statutory Functions in Children's Services

Unallocated Cases

The Interim Corporate Parenting report indicates reductions in unallocated cases at LAC, Gateway and Family Support Teams. As at 30th September 2023 there were 0 Gateway cases waiting longer than 20 days for allocations / initial assessment. As at 30th September 2023 the Family Support Service reported 21 cases waiting longer than 20 days for allocations, a reduction of 14 cases since our end year DSF report was submitted on 30.03.23. There continues to be an unprecedented position in our Looked After Children's Services with 115 unallocated cases. A reduction of 61 cases since end year DSF data was submitted on 30.03.23.

An improvement plan is in place for all unallocated case activity within the Northern Trust. Unallocated cases in family support teams has now been agreed as a Service Delivery target. Our recent reductions in unallocated are a direct result of a new supply of Band 5 AYE Social Workers joining our workforce in July / August 2023. There is no additional supply of Band 5 AYE Social Workers until June 2024, therefore vacant posts within LAC, Gateway and Family Support Teams may remain unfilled, this will have a direct impact on maintaining the reductions noted within this reporting period.

Increase in Looked After Children

The Interim corporate Parenting Report highlights continued growth in our looked after population. At the 30th September 2023, there were 807 looked after children. In March 2023, there was 774, an increase of 33 young people since the submission of our end year data in March 2023. Our LAC service has now experienced an increase of 141 children since 30.03.20. The biggest increase in children becoming looked after is in the two Trusts that have wards with the highest deprivation levels (Northern Trust and Belfast Trust). Inevitably the increase in looked after children has resulted in increased demand for suitable placements.

Our Interim Corporate Parenting report highlights an increase in kinship



placements as 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 want different and/or more intensive support. The arrival of separated and unaccompanied asylum children into the looked after system has added challenges for the corporate parenting system within the Northern Trust.

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 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 CYP Northern Trust DSF action plan these include unallocated cases and placement pressures.

N.B The data set for 10.3.5 reflects a reduced amount of short break activity. Discussions have taken place with SPPG around changing the data criteria for this template as not all Children with a disability follow a LAC pathway when accessing short breaks.