



Title of Paper:
Annual Report: Discharge of Delegated Statutory Functions and Corporate Parenting 2024/25

<u>For Decision</u>	<u>For Discussion</u>	<u>For Noting</u>
Requires majority decision prior to implementation or action.	Requires consideration and debate.	Contains information Members should be made aware.

1.0 Background

This is a performance management and assurance report on the delivery of statutory functions and corporate parenting (CC3/02), within the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) covering the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

2.0 Key Issues

The Trust has experienced a number of challenges in relation to the delivery of statutory functions within this reporting period.

Physical Disability Services (page 21)
The issues outlined below highlight the Trust's inability to meet its statutory functions as outlined in HPSS (NI) Order 1972 Article 15.1, Disabled Persons Act (NI) 1989, Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (NI) Act 1978 Section 2.

Physical disability services are reporting an inability to meet the assessed needs of some service users due to lack of appropriate services, including supported living and care home placements. The report also highlights a lack of clinical care pathways for service users with complex health needs and the need for assessment and treatment of individuals with alcohol related brain injuries.

The service has not been fully compliant in completing annual reviews within this reporting period.

Adult Learning Disability Services (page 27)
The concerns outlined below highlight the Trust's inability to meet its statutory function as outlined in the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986; the Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order (1972), Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's (NI) Act (1978) and Disabled Persons (NI) Act (1989).

Three individuals remain as inpatients within Muckamore Abbey Hospital. Transition for 2 of these service users is planned for June 2025 with further planning required for the third individual due to presentation requiring forensic services.

The Trust continues to face significant challenges in accessing Inpatient assessment and treatment for adults with a learning disability who have mental health (MHLD) issues resulting in individuals being admitted to mental health wards.

The Trust reports an increase in the number of adults requiring bespoke placements due to complex needs. This is exacerbated by difficulties within the independent sector in the recruitment and retention of staff.

To align with regional services, individuals with a learning disability will now transition from Children's Services at the age of 18. A number of these young people require bespoke placements to meet their identified needs.

Pressures within the service continue to impact on the completion of annual reviews, and financial reviews for service users within residential, nursing and supported living placements. The completion of carer's assessment has also been impacted.

Adult Learning Disability services report a Failure to complete Deprivation of Liberty applications under the Mental Capacity Act in a timely manner. This impacts on approximately 100 services users with Emergency Protection requiring a full application to be processed.

Adult Mental Health

(page 12)

The issues identified highlight the Trust's inability to meet its full range of statutory functions as outlined in the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

Mental Capacity Act:

Limited staffing resource continues to impact on the Trust's ability to meet its full legislative responsibilities in relation to the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016 and this will be exacerbated in light of the incoming additional requirements.

Approved Social Work (ASW):

The ASW role continues to be impacted by a number of challenges in this reporting period. These include protracted waits, difficulties with interface working (PSNI and NIAS), RESWs handover, action short of strike action, increased complexity and acuity of people requiring ASW support.

Primary Care and Older Peoples Services

(page 40)

The concerns below relate to the statutory functions outlined in the HPSS (NI) Order 1972.

Pressures within the service continue to impact on the completion of annual care management reviews within the community teams and care home support service. Action plans are in place to resolve the issue.

The service also reports that due to ongoing staffing challenges not all statutory care home beds across the Trust can be utilised. Recruitment is ongoing and as workforce capacity improves, bed occupancy will increase.

Children's Services

The following issues relate to the Trust's inability to consistently meet its statutory function as outlines in Article 17 (a) assessment of services and Article 18 (a) provision of services as outlined in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Unallocated cases / Waiting lists

The Trust continues to have a high number of children and families awaiting allocation of a social worker, a total of 652 across children's services (Gateway: 53; Safeguarding: 177; Children's Disability: 422).

Separated or unaccompanied asylum seeking children:

The Trust is accommodating 80 S/UASC at report end, an increase of 24 in this reporting period. There are significant pressures on the Trust to secure appropriate and timely accommodation to meet the needs of these young people.

Bespoke Placements:

Complexity of assessed need and service commissioning gaps has resulted in the Trust supporting 7 bespoke placements (3 of which are outside of NI). A further 2 children have currently been assessed as needing high cost / bespoke residential care provision.

Regional Secure Care Centre (Lakewood):

The Senior Management Team worked in partnership with SPPG to finalise a service specification for Lakewood. This sets out the remit for secure provision in Northern Ireland and became operational in December 2024.

Placement provision in fostering:

170 young people cared for by the Trust are in 'unregulated placements', a kinship placement, which has not been approved within the requisite timescales. This is attributed to workforce pressures and the continued increase in demand for kinship placements.

During the reporting period, capacity issues within the Trust led to 36 children who are looked after being accommodated in an inappropriate placement given their assessed needs. The pressure to secure appropriate fostering placements has led to continued reliance on independent providers; 127 children being supported in 88 independent placements.

The following issue relates to the Trust's inability to regularly perform its required statutory function in the provision of services to children with a disability outlined in Schedule 2, paragraph 7 of the Children (NI) Order 1995.

Children and Young People with a Disability: (10.3.5)

Residential short break support available to children with disabilities has decreased over this reporting period, with 211 overnight stays provided for 22 children.

Data:

As a result of action short of strike and the resultant non-completion of statistical returns, the Trust is unable to provide information in relation to the following data lines: 10.3.15 a; 10.3.15 b; 10.3.16; 10.3.17; 10.3.26 a; 10.3.29 and Data Return 5 (5.1 – 5.4).

3.0 Resources Implications (inc Organisational, Financial, Human Resources)

Workforce:

Challenges are ongoing in recruiting qualified social workers, largely due to regional workforce supply constraints. These staffing pressures have, at times, affected the Trust's ability to consistently meet its statutory obligations. In response, the Trust is actively engaging with the Department of Health at a regional level to develop and implement strategic recruitment initiatives. These include a rolling recruitment programme for (B6) social workers, accelerated pathways to attract final year social work graduates (B5 AYE's) into the workforce, and targeted, bespoke recruitment campaigns designed to address specific gaps.

Encompass:

There are outstanding issues in relation to regulatory reporting and data validation within the Encompass system that continue to affect the accuracy and reliability of current data. As a result, services have had to operate a dual system of data collection throughout the reporting period. Whilst this interim approach has enabled continued reporting, it is not sustainable longer term. These issues are being addressed at a regional level as they are common to all Trusts that have completed the Encompass Go Live phase; resolutions need to be developed and implemented to ensure data integrity.

Supervision:

The new Regional Social Work (NI) Supervision Policy 2024 has been implemented across all programmes of care. Subsequent audits have identified gaps in full compliance, specifically in relation to the frequency of supervision being recorded for social workers.

4.0 Impact on Safety, Quality and Experience (SQE)

The inability to recruit permanently to various roles and ongoing industrial action will continue to impact service provision.

5.0 Key Risks and Proposals to Mitigate

All issues contained in this report have been raised with the SPPG. Key risks are summarised below:

Physical Disability Services

The service has action plans in place to progress issues identified to SPPG.

Adult Learning Disability Services

Accessing Inpatient assessment and treatment for adults with a learning disability who have mental health (MHL) issues have been placed on the Trust corporate risk register. The Trust is progressing plans at both a local and regional level to address this identified need.

A transitions worker is being recruited to provide additional resource to meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability transitioning from Children's Services.

Monitoring and action plans are in place to progress the other issues of concern highlighted within the Statutory Functions report.

Adult Mental Health

The Trust are progressing a business case to increase staffing resource to meet legislative responsibilities under the Mental Capacity Act.

The Trust continues to take steps to increase the numbers of Approved Social Worker's and work at local and regional level to address these challenges to meet its' statutory duty.

Primary Care and Older Peoples Services

The service has devised action plans to increase completion of annual care management reviews.

Recruitment is ongoing to improve bed occupancy within statutory care homes.

Children's Services

Unallocated cases / Waiting lists

This is reported in line with monthly requirements to SPPG. Enhanced governance arrangements are in place for all unallocated cases across the Trust ensuring an appropriate level of risk management. SPPG are monitoring this issue through the Support and Intervention Framework (level 2) specific to unallocated Children with Disability.

Separated or unaccompanied asylum seeking children:

additional beds have been sourced to meet the accommodation needs of this population

Bespoke Placements:

High cost placements continue to place significant financial pressures on the Trust and have been included in growth funding bids made to SPPG.

Regional Secure Care Centre (Lakewood):

Lakewood's inability to operate at full bed capacity is currently reviewed on the Corporate Risk Register in addition to weekly escalation meetings with SPPG.

Placement provision in fostering:

Enhanced assurance arrangements are in place with rigorous oversight of all unregulated placements.

The usage of independent providers places considerable fiscal pressures on the Trust. SPPG are monitoring the Trust's use of independent fostering providers through the Support and Intervention Framework (level 2).

Children and Young People with a Disability:

Additional funding from the DoH has progressed plans to open an additional facility in the next reporting period to increase short break provision. SPPG are monitoring progress in relation to short breaks through the Support and Intervention Framework (level 1).

The Children's Disability Service is also registered on the Corporate Risk Register due to its inability to meet the trajectory of young people requiring services and short breaks.

SF Action Plans:

The social work leads maintain regular communication with the SPPG, ensuring that there is a shared understanding of progress and expectations. They are actively working through all areas of concern identified in the Statutory Functions Action Plans, with actions in place, ongoing monitoring and a commitment to delivering sustained improvements.

Lead Director: Lyn Preece, Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work

Date: 21 May 2025