

1 October 2025

Our Ref: FOI 1326

Dear

**Freedom of Information Act 2000
Information in Relation to**

I am writing to confirm that the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (the Trust) has now completed its search for information relating to the above, which you requested on 4 August 2025. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to your request. Thank you for your understanding and forbearance.

A response to the questions you have raised has been provided by the Children's Services Directorate and is attached in Appendix A.

If you are unhappy as to how this request has been handled, you have the right to seek a review within the Trust in the first instance. You should write to the Information Governance Department, Lough House, Ards Community Hospital (informationgovernance@setrust.hscni.net) within two months of the date of this response and your complaint will be considered and a response provided, within 20 working days of receipt.

If, after receiving a response, you remain unhappy, you can refer your complaint to the Information Commissioner at The Information Commissioner's Office –Northern Ireland, 3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place, Belfast, BT7 2JB. It is important to note that if you refer any matter to the Information Commissioner, you will need to show evidence of having gone through the Trust's internal review procedure to try to resolve the matter with the Trust in the first instance.

If you have any queries about this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

**Olivia Robinson
Information Governance Officer**

Policies and Internal Procedures

Q1. All current internal policies, procedural guidance, and staff training materials related to the handling of:

a. Child protection cases

b. Cases involving parental acrimony, including disputes over custody/contact and allegations of alienation or abuse

A1a. Child protection in Northern Ireland is governed by comprehensive policies and procedures aimed at safeguarding children and young people from abuse and neglect, co-ordinated by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI).

The SBNI Procedures Manual has replaced the previous 2005 Child Protection Policies and Procedures and can be accessed at <https://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/>

Internally, all social workers in children and family teams complete Safeguarding Children Levels 1 and 2. There is additional training available to support the development of knowledge and skills in this area, such as neglect awareness, domestic abuse, developing a trauma sensitive approach to practice and understanding attachment and developmental trauma.

A1b. There is no specific training in relation to parental acrimony in the Trust, however, the training detailed above will cover the impact this has upon children and parents.

Statistical Data

Q2. Case statistics from January 2019 to the present (or most recent available), including:

a. Number of child protection cases and those involving parental acrimony

b. Breakdown by outcome category (e.g. referred to court, child removed, early help, closed, etc.)

c. Average and median time taken to process cases

A2a. Child protection cases are categorised under sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse and Neglect. Parental acrimony is not a stand-alone category, therefore, the information requested is not held on a central information system. To obtain this information would require a manual review of records.

This would exceed the 'Appropriate Limit' as defined by the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Trust therefore exempts the release of this information under Section 12(1).*

*12.-(1) Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit.

A2b. The Trust does not have an information system to support the collation of a breakdown by outcome category, therefore, the information requested is not held on a central information system. To obtain this information would require a manual review of records.

This would exceed the 'Appropriate Limit' as defined by the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Trust therefore exempts the release of this information under Section 12(1).*

*12.-(1) Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this statement/letter acts as a Refusal Notice in respect of questions 2a & 2b.

A2c The Trust does not process cases. Children's Services undertake assessments at Gateway and where the assessment indicates that the family require further support, a more in-depth assessment will then be undertaken. This will be carried out under a family support, child protection, or children in care pathway, all with varying timeframes.

Oversight and Performance

Q3. a. Internal performance metrics (KPIs) relevant to these types of cases

b. Results of any internal or external audits, reviews, or evaluations of services at James Street Social Services from January 2019 onward

A3a. Each social worker is provided with case supervision on a 4 weekly basis. During this time, cases are discussed in detail between the social worker and their manager to determine key actions to be taken forward in order to progress cases and achieve the best outcome for children and their families.

Social workers also have the opportunity to discuss cases that are more complex with Principal Practitioners for guidance. These Practitioners will have an expertise in areas such as child protection or court work.

A3b. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is the regulatory body that have responsibility for auditing the provision of Services and therefore, no internal audits are held.

External evaluations of the service are completed by the RQIA. Any reports can be accessed on the RQIA website, however, these are anonymised.

Complaints and Investigations

Q4. a. Number of formal complaints received about James Street Social Services from January 2019 onwards

b. Any summaries or anonymised findings from investigations or responses to those complaints from January 2019 onwards

A4&b. Please see Table 1 below for a breakdown of the total number of formal complaints received about James Street Social Services and the outcome of those complaints from 1 January 2019 to 31 July 2025.

| Year | Total Number | Brought To Attention Of Staff | No Further Action | Withdrawn | To staff/Trust meeting | Change in Service Provision | Procedural Review | Change/ New staff | No outcome as complaint still open |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 01.01.19 to 31.03.19 | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| 01.04.19 to 31.03.20 | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| 01.04.20 to 31.03.21 | 6 | <5 | 5 | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| 01.04.21 to 31.03.22 | 15 | <5 | 7 | Nil | <5 | <5 | <5 | Nil | Nil |
| 01.04.22 to 31.03.23 | 15 | Nil | 15 | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| 01.04.23 to 31.03.24 | 24 | <5 | 17 | <5 | Nil | Nil | Nil | <5 | Nil |
| 01.04.24 to 31.03.25 | 27 | 6 | 16 | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | 5 |
| 01.04.25 to 31.07.25 | <5 | Nil | <5 | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | <5 |

Please note where numbers in individual cells are given as <5 within Table 1 below, in line with Trust policy, the data is aggregated to reduce any risk of identification of individual patients.