



Annual Report: Delivery of Statutory Functions and Corporate Parenting

For Decision

Requires majority decision prior to implementation or action.

For Discussion

Requires consideration and debate.

For Noting

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 Trust covering the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Trust Board are asked to consider the tabled Report with a recommendation to approve.

2.0 Key Issues

SET has experienced a number of challenges in relation to the delivery of Statutory Functions within this 2025/26 reporting period.

Adult Services

Adult Mental Health

(page 10)

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

Challenges continue to affect the Trust's ability to fully meet its statutory obligations under the Mental Capacity Act 2016 (as enacted). These include insufficient staffing capacity, a significant volume of Deprivation of Liberty (DoLS) referrals within community teams and training to support the effective embedding of legislative requirements into practice.

Approved Social Work (ASW)

The ASW role continues to be significantly impacted by a range of challenges during this reporting period. These include protracted waiting times, difficulties in interface working with partner agencies (PSNI and NIAS), issues relating to RESWS handover processes, alongside the impact of action short of strike action, at both Trust and RESWS level. In addition, there has been an increase in both the complexity and acuity of individuals requiring ASW support, further intensifying service pressures.

Physical Disability Services:

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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.

SET is currently unable to fully meet the assessed needs of individuals using physical disability services including those with complex needs, due to a shortage of appropriate provision. Access to suitable placements remains particularly challenging for those with complex presentations, including alcohol-related brain

injury. Service users continue to experience limited choice across accommodation options, including domiciliary care, supported living, interim care beds and care home placements, which may also impact choice and availability for young people transitioning into Adult Services. These challenges are further compounded by the absence of a Regional Framework for Delegation of Healthcare Tasks.

Adult Learning Disability Services

(page 26)

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.

SET continues to face significant challenges in accessing appropriate inpatient provision for adults with a learning disability, particularly those with co-occurring mental ill health. Limited availability of regional Mental Health Learning Disability (MHLD) beds has resulted in some individuals being admitted to mental health and acute wards. Difficulties in securing specialist learning disability psychiatry input within mental health wards have increased pressure on community multidisciplinary teams, who are managing higher levels of crisis in the community. At present, this includes 1 delayed discharge from Carrick Ward, Holywell, and 2 individuals placed in acute mental health inpatient beds.

There is also a growing number of individuals requiring bespoke placements, particularly those transitioning from children's services, with limited provider capacity contributing to instability and placement breakdown. Workforce pressures continue to impact the timely completion of care management and annual reviews, with compliance improving from 42% to 47% but remaining below expected standards. Increased demand, the introduction of NISAT requirements following Encompass implementation and rising referrals contribute to ongoing delays.

Audit findings have identified non-compliance in adult safeguarding processes, relating to delays and recording issues, largely due to workforce pressures and absence. Additionally, delays in progressing Deprivation of Liberty applications persist, with 58 individuals currently subject to emergency provisions awaiting Trust Panel Authorisation and social work teams continuing to absorb a disproportionate share of assessment responsibilities.

Primary Care and Older People's Services

(page 38)

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

Pressures within the service continue to affect the timely completion of annual care management reviews across community teams and the care home support service; however, action plans are in place to address this. Ongoing staffing challenges have also limited the utilisation of all statutory care home beds across SET. Recruitment efforts are underway, and bed occupancy is expected to improve as workforce capacity increases.

Children's Services

The following issues relate to the Trust's inability to consistently meet its statutory function as outlined 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

SET continues to have a high number of children and families awaiting allocation of a social worker - 340 across Children's Services (Gateway: 107; Safeguarding: 96; Children's Disability: 137).

Statutory Visits by Social Workers (10.3.15)

In this reporting period, 48 children who are looked after did not receive a statutory visit by their allocated social worker within the statutory timescales.

Separated or Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Pressure continues in meeting the needs of separated or unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. SET is accommodating 95 such young people at report end - 26 under the age of 18 and 69 over 18. SET is facing significant pressures in securing suitable and timely accommodation to meet their needs.

Delayed Discharge

1 young person remains in an inpatient facility despite being fit for discharge while SET seeks an appropriate bespoke placement due to the complexity of need.

Regional Secure Care Centre (Lakewood)

The increased complexity of needs among the young people supported has resulted in reduced bed capacity alongside a rise in staff absences during 2025/26.

Placement Provision in Fostering

A total of 177 young people cared for by SET are currently in unregulated placements, kinship placements that have not been approved within the required timescales (10.3.3). This is due to workforce pressures and the ongoing increase in demand for kinship placements. Ongoing pressure to secure appropriate fostering placements has resulted in continued reliance on independent providers, with 129 children currently supported in such placements (10.3.3). SPPG are monitoring this issue through the Support and Intervention Framework (Level 1).

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)

The provision of short breaks has shown a slight improvement during this reporting period providing 335 overnight stays for 36 young people.

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

Workforce

SET continues to experience challenges in recruiting qualified social workers, primarily due to ongoing regional workforce supply. These staffing pressures have, at times, impacted SET's capacity to consistently meet its statutory obligations. In response, SET is actively engaging with DoH at a regional level to develop and implement strategic recruitment initiatives.

To strengthen this approach, SET has appointed a Senior Social Worker with dedicated responsibility for recruitment and retention. This postholder will lead on

key initiatives, including the development of a rolling recruitment programme, the introduction of accelerated pathways to attract final-year social work students into the workforce, and the delivery of targeted, bespoke recruitment campaigns aimed at addressing specific workforce 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 and resolutions need to be developed and implemented to ensure long-data integrity.

Mental Capacity Act

Challenges continue to affect SET's ability to fully meet its statutory obligations under the Mental Capacity Act 2016 (as enacted). These include insufficient staffing capacity, a significant volume of Deprivation of Liberty (DoLS) referrals within community teams and training to support the effective embedding of legislative requirements into practice.

Approved Social Work (ASW)

The ASW role continues to be significantly impacted by a range of challenges. These include protracted waiting times, difficulties in interface working with partner agencies (PSNI and NIAS), issues relating to RESWS handover processes, alongside the impact of action short of strike action, at both SET and RESWS level. In addition, there has been an increase in both the complexity and acuity of individuals requiring ASW support, further intensifying service pressures.

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 SPPG with key mitigating actions summarised below:

Adult Mental Health

SET has recruited 3 full time ASWs and continues to take steps to increase the numbers of ASWs by working at local & regional level to address these challenges. SET are robustly monitoring MCA Corporate compliance. Recruitment of MCA Consultant and project management approach to triage and manage unauthorised DOLS has shown significant improvements.

Physical Disability Services

The service has action plans in place to progress issues identified in this report and works with partner Trusts to progress regional issues with 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 CRR. SET is progressing plans at both a local and regional level to address this identified need and are progressing business cases with SPPG.

A transitions worker has been recruited to provide additional resource to meet the needs of those with a learning disability transitioning from Children's Services. SET has engaged in a pre-market engagement event to expand the availability of placements offered through the independent sector. Monitoring, escalation and action plans are in place with the other issues of concern highlighted in the Report.

Primary Care and Older Peoples Services

The service has devised action plans to increase completion of annual care management reviews including the development of new senior practitioners roles to improve governance and accountability. 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 SET ensuring an appropriate level of risk management.

SPPG are monitoring this issue through SIF specific to Unallocated Cases involving Children with Disability.

Statutory Visits by Social Workers (10.3.15)

All young people received a visit from another social work and assurance systems are in place to monitor these cases.

Separated or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

SET continues to explore all available options to increase accommodation capacity and remains actively engaged in both regional and local initiatives.

Delayed Discharge

Enhanced governance and reporting are in place with SPPG monitoring through SIF (Level 3).

Regional Secure Care Centre (Lakewood)

SET has engaged with SPPG, RQIA and regionally to address these challenges, developing a comprehensive action plan focused on culture, recruitment, estates, training and longer-term strategic priorities for secure care. The safety and quality of care remain under ongoing scrutiny by SPPG under SIF (Level 3).

Placement Provision in Fostering

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

SET continues to work locally and regionally to increase the usage of foster carers with SPPG monitoring this issue through SIF (Level 1).

Children and Young People with a Disability

SET has also opened an additional facility for children with disabilities and this will increase the short break provision. SPPG are monitoring this issue through SIF (Level 2).

Statutory Functions Action Plans & Support and Intervention Framework (SIF)

Social work leads maintain regular engagement with SPPG to ensure a shared understanding of progress and expectations. They are actively addressing all areas of concern identified within the Action Plans and SIF supported by clear actions, ongoing monitoring, and a commitment to achieving sustained improvements in service delivery and compliance.

Lead Director: Marie-Louise Sloan, Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work

Date 8th May 2026