South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Paper No: SET/96/26
Trust Board Meeting: 24 June 2026
Public Agenda Item 8.6

Title of Paper: **Summary Report on Issues Related to Northern Ireland Cervical Screening Programme (NICSP) - Professor Sir Frank Atherton**			
For Decision	**For Assurance**	**For Information**	**For Discussion**

1.0	**Background:**
	Concerns were first identified in 2021 regarding the performance of cervical cytology screening within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust including potential issues extending over a number of years. In response, a series of investigations were commissioned, including a Royal College of Pathologists review, a Cervical Cytology Review lookback exercise, epidemiological analysis, external expert opinions, a Quality Assurance review and a Serious Adverse Incident thematic review. The Atherton report synthesises these findings to assess the extent of failings, the likelihood of patient harm, and the adequacy of current and future programme arrangements.
2.0	**Key Issues:**
	This paper provides a summary and analysis of the independent expert report by Professor Sir Frank Atherton on the Northern Ireland Cervical Screening Programme published 16 May 2026. It highlights key findings, areas of concern, and implications for governance with a focus on assurance, patient safety and system learning. The Report identifies significant systemic weaknesses in governance, quality assurance and data management with a particular emphasis on the failure to act on known risks over a prolonged period. It also sets out learning for Trust Boards regarding oversight, accountability, and the effectiveness of assurance processes.
3.0	**Link to Strategic Objectives:**
	Our People ☐ Population Health & Health Inequalities ☐ Delivering Care Closer to Home ☐ Hospital Care ☐ Safety, Quality and Experience of Care ☒
4.0	**Resource Implications (inc Organisational, Financial, Human Resources):**
	1. Organisational
	Members are asked to note the findings of the Atherton Report and the associated governance implications

	2. Financial
	No impact identified at this stage.
	3. Human Resources
	No impact identified at this stage.
	4. Environmental Factors? Yes ☐ No ☒
5.0	**Impact on Safety, Quality and Experience (SQE):**
	1. Safety
	EMT will be considering the relevance and applicability of the identified system failures and learning to the South Eastern Trust.
	2. Quality
	EMT will be seeking assurance that appropriate governance, data and quality assurance arrangements are in place across high-risk clinical pathways, including: o Formal approval and oversight of service variation o Clear and standardised performance metrics o Effective tracking and escalation of assurance actions
	3. Experience
	EMT will support any further review or assurance work required to confirm that similar risks are not present within Trust services
6.0	**Key Risks and Proposals to Mitigate:**
	1. Key Risks
	2. Proposals to Mitigate
7.0	**Risk Register:**
	It is listed on BAF? Yes ☐ No ☒ Is it listed on CRR? Yes ☐ No ☒

Lead Director:	**Professor Stephen Kirk, Medical Director**
Date:	**18 June 2026**

Reasons for Paper Presentation

Approval	*Used when an item requires a formal agreement or endorsement by the meeting / committee members. Examples are approving minutes, budgets, proposals or policies.*
Assurance	*Used when an item can be measured against a certain criteria / standard. Examples are a project is on course with delivery or financial targets are being met.*
Information	*Used when an item is presented for the purpose of updating or informing the attendees without requiring a decision or action, such as reports, updates, or announcements.*
Discussion	*Used when an item is listed primarily for open discussion, brainstorming or gathering input from the members without requiring an immediate decision.*