



Title of Paper:

Directed Statutory Functions: Interim Corporate Parenting Reporting

For Approval	For Discussion	For Noting
Requires Board majority decision prior to implementation or action.	Requires Board consideration and debate.	Contains information Board Members should be made aware of.

1.0 Background

The Interim Corporate Parenting Report provides an overarching assurance framework for the discharge of Delegated Directed Statutory Social Care functions in relation to Corporate Parenting covering the period 1 April to 30 September 2023.

2.0 Key Issues

During this reporting period, SET has experienced a number of pressures in relation to the discharge of Directed Statutory Functions summarised below:

Unallocated Cases:

431 cases were unallocated in Children’s Services - including a rise in Safeguarding cases (108), Gateway (35) and Children’s Disability Services (288).

Residential Provision:

57 children in SET residential care - up 5 from the last reporting period with increased requests for admission to residential care continuing during this period.

Separated or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children:

SET is accommodating 39 Separated or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children - an increase of 9 in this reporting period.

Bespoke Placements:

SET supports 3 bespoke placements and 4 placements outside of NI due to the complexity in assessed need and commissioning gaps in services.

Fostering Placement Provision:

133 young people are in placements not approved within the requisite timescales with increasing demand attributed to workforce pressures and requests for kinship placements. Capacity issues led to 49 Looked After children being accommodated in an inappropriate placement given their assessed needs. Less foster carers and approved places (decrease of 20) has led to an increase (32) in the number of young people experiencing placement moves during this period. 72% of these young people have moved once and 24% have moved between two and four times.

Statutory Visits for Children who are Looked After:

SET ensured 3893 statutory visits to Children who are Looked After took place with 68 such visits outside of the statutory timescales. SET continues to monitor and review any statutory visits not completed within timescale.

Children and Young People with a Disability:

The numbers of children in need with a disability continues to increase with 1161 young people known to services with the majority diagnosed with a learning disability (694) and those with Autism/ADHD/Asperger's (302). Demand remains high so in spite of continued improvement in staff vacancy rates, there remains 288 Unallocated Cases - an increase of 184 from the last reporting period.

A high number of children known to Disability Services are in the 16+ age range and there continues to be challenges regarding service provision for young people transitioning to Adult Services.

Residential short break support available to children with disabilities has decreased with 260 overnight stays provided for 37 children. Lindsay House has accommodated 3 children who have experienced family breakdown removing the provision of overnight short breaks for families in SET and BHSC. The inability to recruit permanently has affected service provision.

SET has received finance to increase its short breaks provision within the Greenhill facility which has also received independent registration by RQIA.

Leaving Care and After Care:

296 young people receive support from the Leaving and After Care services with 31 young people residing in unregulated placements – up 22 from the previous report. The majority of these young people live in rented accommodation with support.

3.0 Resources Implications (Organisational, Financial, Human Resources)

Workforce: SET continued to face difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified social workers. This is a regional issue and SET has engaged with regional colleagues and DoH to develop recruitment pathways including a rolling recruitment programme to address this challenge.

Financial: Bespoke Placements are proving high cost and together with pressure to secure appropriate fostering placements which has led to continued overreliance on independent providers (111) are contributing to considerable fiscal pressures.

4.0 Impact on Safety, Quality and Experience (SQE)

The inability to recruit permanently to various roles will continue to impact service provision.

5.0 Key Risks and Proposals to Mitigate

Unallocated Cases:

Enhanced governance arrangements are in place ensuring an appropriate level of Risk Management.

Residential Provision:

Risks associated with Child Sexual Exploitation and paramilitary activity for Children in Residential Care are included in the Directorate Risk Register.

Separated or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children:

SET's inclusion in the National Transfer Scheme is expected to result in increased pressure to meet assessed need and provide appropriate and timely accommodation for these children. SET continues to engage with regional colleagues to meet the needs of these children.

Fostering Placement Provision:

Enhanced assurance arrangements are in place to ensure rigorous oversight of all unregulated placements and reporting arrangements to SPPG. During the reporting period, capacity issues led to 49 Looked After children being accommodated in an inappropriate placement given their assessed needs.

Regional Secure Care Centre (Lakewood):

SET remains unable to meet demand for secure beds within Lakewood due to staffing issues and the complexity of young people requiring this service. This is recorded on the Corporate Risk Register. Senior Management continue to work with SPPG to develop the remit for future secure provision.

Statutory Visits for Children who are Looked After:

43 children who are Looked After did not have a named social worker - an increase of 25 from the last reporting period. Assurance systems are in place to monitor these cases and updates provided on a monthly basis to the Assistant Director.

Early Years:

SET had 48 overdue inspections in this reporting period with sickness levels within the staff teams contributing to the rise in this figure. There is regular monitoring of overdue inspections and the service have a plan in place to resolve this increase in overdue inspections before the next reporting period.

DSF Action Plans:

The Social Work Leads maintain regular contact with SPPG and are progressing in all areas of concern identified within the DSF Action Plans

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