

FOI 3196

16th July 2025

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – INFORMATION REQUEST

We are gathering information about drug and alcohol testing that children’s social care services in the United Kingdom carry out where there are signs and/or concerns that a parent’s drug or alcohol use may be affecting their parenting. We are interested in drug and alcohol testing that is not directed by the family court or part of family court proceedings.

Please could you answer the following questions

What is the name of the local authority?

Response:

Southern Health & Social Care Trust.

Question 1: Does your organisation commission or carry out drug testing or breathalyse parents where there are concerns about substance use?

Response:

Yes

Question 2: Does the organisation have policy and criteria for testing parents?

Response:

No

Question 3: At what point in children’s social care proceedings are tests carried out-

- **In the context of early help to families? Yes**
- **When Child in Need procedures are in place? No**
- **When Child Protection procedures are in place? Yes**
- **Post proceedings with the child at home? No**

Question 4: Who carries testing out? Randox

- **Dedicated substance use social worker?** No
- **All social workers?** No
- **Family support/early help service?** No
- **Substance use treatment service (on behalf of children's social care)?** Yes
- **Other?**

Please add more information if needed. - Community Addiction Services carry out their own testing and parents can consent or not consent to this information being shared with Social Services. The Community Addition Service does not carry out testing on behalf of Social Services.

Question 5: What substances are tested for -

- **Alcohol?** - Yes
- **Crack cocaine/cocaine?** -Yes
- **Illicit and prescribed opiates?** - Yes
- **Cannabis?** - Yes
- **Amphetamines?** - Yes
- **Benzodiazepines?** - Yes
- **Ketamine?** - Yes
- **Methamphetamines?** - Yes

Question 6: What kind of tests are carried out -

- **Breathalyser?** No
- **Oral fluid tests?** No
- **Urine tests?** Yes
- **Hair strand tests?** Yes
- **SCRAM alcohol bracelet?** No
- **Alcohol blood test?** No
- **Other?** - Nail sample.

Question 7: Where are tests conducted -

- **Social services offices?** - Yes
- **In parents' homes?** - No
- **Substance use treatment services?** - Yes

Question 8: Are samples analysed -

Immediately by social worker/substance use practitioner etc? - No

Sent away for analysis? - Yes

How is information about the test results conveyed to parents? E.g. protocols for discussion about the test results and any consequences with parents?

Response:

Outcome of testing is shared verbally by Social Services directly to the parent.

Urine drug tests provide instant positive or negative results, therefore both the social worker and parent are present at this time. Depending on the results the social worker will discuss the next steps with management to ensure the well-being and safety of the child involved, and offer parents support if required.

The results from a hair follicle test can take up to 7 days to come back to allow sufficient time to analyse. The results are sent directly to the social worker who requested the test in the first instance. Once received the social worker will discuss with management, and share with the parent. The wellbeing and safety of the child is paramount in the decision making, and in the agreed next steps.

Email: Foi.Team@Southerntrust.hscni.net