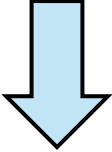


Chief Executive Update

Trust Board

Thursday 26 March 2026

Trust Key Metrics

What People Say		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> 51 Compliments Received (Q4 2025/26) </div>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> 412 Complaints Received (Q4 2025/26) </div>
<i>A decrease of 80* since previous quarter</i>		<i>An increase of 267* since previous quarter</i>
<p><i>*A short-term increase in complaints and reduction in compliments is noted while the new NIPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure beds in from January 2026, as staff adjust to new standards, processes, and early-resolution requirements. During this transition phase, teams are becoming more consistent in identifying, recording and escalating issues in line with the new regional model, which can temporarily influence reported volumes as practice aligns to the updated procedure.</i></p>		
What We Spend (At Month 11)		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> Cumulative Spend £ 1,042.9m </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> Savings Achieved £37.48m </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> Projected break-even position at year end </div>
Our People (At 31 st January 2026 unless stated)		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> 13,245 </div> <p><i>Excludes Bank Staff, Staff on Career Break & Seconded out of Trust</i></p>	<p>Permanent Staff Turnover February 2025 – January 2026 7.23%</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> 7.04% Sickness Level </div> <p>April 2025 – January 2026</p>
<p><i>30th November 2025 Position 13,254</i></p>	<p>Number of Vacancies Activity being recruited to at 30th September 2025 938</p>	<p><i>30th November 2025 Position 6.78%</i></p>
Our Internal Controls (At 16 th March 2026)		
<p>Opening position – 126 recommendations for 2025/26</p>	<p>47 recommendations remain outstanding at 13 March for implementation in 2025/26</p>	<p>At least 38 of the 47 recommendations will not be achieved in 25/26, with implementation dates pushed into 26/27, including 3 of the 3 priority one issues.</p> <p>Of the remaining 9 of the 47 recommendations due, work is ongoing with IA regarding assessment of these and whether they will complete for 31 March 2026.</p>

1.0 Health Committee

1.1 Representatives from The Southern Trust attended the NI Assembly Health Committee on 12 February to give an overview briefing of The Southern Health and Social Care Trust, as part of a series of such briefings by all HSC NI Trusts over recent months.

1.2 Steve Sperry, Chief Executive; Eileen Mullan, Chair and Elaine Wilson, Director of Planning, Performance and Informatics attended and provided written and oral evidence to the Committee as well as responding to questions from Committee members.

2.0 Director of Operations

2.1 Debbie Burns recently took up post as The Director of Operations - Adult Community & Acute Services within The Southern Trust.

2.2 The Director of Operations is a new role in the Trust and will be a pivotal member of the Senior Leadership Team, accountable for the operational leadership of adult acute and community services spanning all acute and non-acute hospitals, and adult community sites and services (excluding mental health services, paediatrics and obstetrics and gynaecology). The Director has specific oversight of the three operational Directorates: Adult Community Services, Surgery and Clinical Services, Medicine and Unscheduled Care Services.

2.3 Debbie is a former Southern Trust Director of Acute Services and has many years' experience in all fields of Acute and Community Services provision. She has worked in both England and NI at Director level within both statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

3.0 Cervical cancer screening

3.1 Professor Sir Frank Atherton is conducting an expert review of all the published reports.

3.2 The Health Minister confirmed in the NI Assembly recently, that he "instructed officials to liaise with the Southern Trust to see whether there was any information not in the reports that Sir Frank Atherton would find usefuland that the Southern Trust has not uncovered any information that it thinks is particularly germane..."

3.3 The Minister also asked Sir Frank whether he would be willing to have a direct meeting with Ladies with Letters, which he did. He confirmed that this has added to the timeline.

3.4 The Minister confirmed that "as part of the terms of reference, Sir Frank will advise me as to whether he believes that a statutory public inquiry is appropriate. I would not like to think that it will be the summer before I get the report and that it will not take me very long at all to come to the final conclusion."

4.0 Muckamore Abbey Hospital public inquiry

4.1 The outcome of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital public inquiry has been delayed until June 2026. The inquiry finished on 10 March last year.

4.2 In an update on his report, Inquiry chair Tom Kark KC said the delay was partly due to those who have been criticised in the report receiving a warning letter and being given a reasonable opportunity to respond. According to the chair, the delay is also due to the use of restricted material and working alongside the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service amid the ongoing criminal proceedings.

5.0 Being Open Framework

5.1 The Health Minister recently announced a new framework aimed at promoting open communication between patients, families and staff.

5.2 Minister said the Being Open Framework comes after several public inquiries over recent decades highlighted systemic failings within health and social care, particularly around openness, transparency and accountability. He said a public consultation heard “overwhelming support” for the framework. Implementation is set to start in April.

5.3 Mr Nesbitt also said most consultation responses backed the introduction of a statutory duty of candour. He said his department is “progressing two important strands of work in this area” and seeking to “align Northern Ireland with the other UK nations in relation to both an organisational and an individual duty of candour”.

6.0 Waiting Times statistics

6.1 The Department of Health (DoH) published the quarterly Northern Ireland Outpatient, Inpatient and Day Case, and Diagnostic Waiting Times Statistics, relating to the position on 31 December 2025.

6.2 In the last quarter, the number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at hospitals in Northern Ireland has decreased by over 15,000 patients, while the number of patients waiting for inpatient or day case admission to hospitals fell by 7,316, an encouraging downward trend for the second quarter in a row. In addition, the figures highlight 6,673 fewer patients waiting for a diagnostic test, compared to the previous quarter.

*Figures sourced from encompass are considered to be 'official statistics in development', which are a subset of Official Statistics in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics. While caution must be exercised when using these figures and they are not directly comparable with legacy (pre-encompass) data, they are a meaningful representation of what they measure and are of sufficient quality for publication and use.

7.0 Emergency Care Waiting Time statistics

7.1 DoH published statistics on the time spent in emergency care departments (ED) throughout Northern Ireland during the months of October, November, and December 2025.

7.2 There were 204,357 attendances at EDs during the quarter ending 31 December 2025 (October, November and December), 1.0% (2,073) more than same quarter in '24 (202,284).

7.3 Over two fifths (41.3%) of patients spent less than 4 hours at an ED, more than in the same quarter in 2024 (40.9%). Between December 2024 and December 2025, the number waiting over 12 hours decreased from 12,325 to 11,325 in December 2025, accounting for 17.0% of all attendances in December 2025.

8.0 HSC Workforce statistics

8.1 DoH released details of NI Health and Social Care (HSC) vacancies actively being recruited and HSC staff in post as at 31 December 2025.

8.2 The HSC workforce stood at 67,866 whole-time equivalent (WTE) - an increase of 1.9% (1,277 WTE) from 31 December 2024, and a 9.0% increase (5,617 WTE) since 31 December 2020. 33.2% of the HSCNI workforce was in the Nursing & Midwifery occupational family (22,506 WTE).

8.3 All regional HSC Trusts reported an increase in WTE staff since 31 December 2020, with the Southern HSC Trust reporting the most notable increase (990 WTE, 10.3%). The Belfast

HSC Trust had the largest workforce with 19,280 WTE at 31 December 2025, 1.6% (310 WTE) higher than at 31 December 2020.

8.4 There were 6,078 HSC vacancies actively being recruited in Northern Ireland - an active vacancy rate of 7.0%. The annual percentage change in vacancies was greatest in the Northern HSC Trust with an increase of 18.5%, followed by Western (14.5%), Belfast (10.4%) and Southern (7.0%). The South Eastern HSC Trust reported a decrease of 8.3%.

9.0 Pay Settlement

9.1 The NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB) has made a core recommendation for a 3.3% consolidated uplift effective from 1 April 2026 for all Agenda for Change pay points.

9.2 Recommendations from the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body that will cover Medical and Dental staff (including those working in primary care) are not expected until early April 2026.

9.3 England and Wales confirmed that they will proceed with the NHSPRB recommendation of 3.3%.

9.4 The Health Minister said: "I can confirm that I remain fully committed to ensuring that pay will be the first priority for the Department and it is my desire to proceed with a headline pay award of 3.3% for AfC staff in 2026/27 and to progress towards HSC becoming a Real Living Wage (RLW) employer. I also intend to honour my commitment to funding for independent sector adult social care staff who provide direct care through commissioned services, in order to deliver the RLW for these staff."

9.5 He added: "Whilst it remains my firm ambition that pay increases will be received by all staff as early as possible in the incoming financial year, I am fully aware that I can only deliver against those commitments when clear about my budgetary position. However, even in the absence of agreement, I have asked my officials to progress the necessary preparatory work at pace."

10.0 New Medical and Dental Agency Framework

10.1 The Health Minister recently welcomed the launch of a new Agency Framework for Medical and Dental locum staff.

10.2 Similar to the approach for the registered Nursing, Midwifery and Support Workers Framework, a "price cap" has been introduced for the first time into the Medical and Dental framework. This should enable Trusts to secure better value and reduce locum spend. It is anticipated that it will also support stabilisation of the medical workforce through some doctors taking up substantive posts with Trusts.

10.3 The Minister said: "Tackling the high levels of use and the associated costs of Agency staffing is a complex and challenging piece of work. I am encouraged by the fact that Trusts have worked collaboratively across HSC to address this problem and welcome the progress made to date in reducing our agency spend on Nursing and other staff groups and completely eliminating our use of agency staffing in Social Work."

11.0 COPNI report

11.1 The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) released a report in February which warns that the health and social care system is failing older people across Northern Ireland and say they feel increasingly shut out from the HSC system.

11.2 The report also highlights that the number of people reaching retirement age will exceed those entering the workforce by 2040, placing unprecedented pressure on funding and staffing.

11.3 Northern Ireland is on course to become the oldest region in the UK by 2050, intensifying demand for care and the report concludes that Northern Ireland now faces a clear choice: planned reform or collapse.

12.0 Western Trust new Chief Executive

12.1 The Western Trust has announced the appointment of Karen Hargan as its new Chief Executive.

12.2 Currently the Trust's Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development, Mrs Hargan will take up the role on 1 May 2026, following the retirement of the current Chief Executive, Neil Guckian, at the end of April after almost five years in the role.

13.0 Encompass

13.1 The Health Minister provided an update in February on the encompass programme in the past nine months, when all five geographic Trusts went live.

13.2 The Minister said "one of the main benefits is the availability of high-quality data. encompass has been able to show just how much HSC provides to the public on a day-to-day basis. For example, it has shown that on one day in January, HSC delivered over 43,000 acute hospital and community appointments, plus 70,000 Domiciliary Care calls, and 500 operations and invasive procedures. These figures are part of a total of nearly 120,000 encounters with the public through HSC Trusts, Homecare (formerly known as Domiciliary Care) calls and District Nursing visits.

14.0 Core Grant funding 2026/27

14.1 More than 70 Community and Voluntary sector organisations across Northern Ireland are anticipated to receive Core Grant funding in 2026/2027, subject to final checks, the Health Minister has announced.

14.2 A total of 26 organisations were awarded funding in 2025/2026. The increase in 26/27 was made possible by a restructuring of the scheme to ensure that the £1.8m available could be spread further to support a greater number of eligible organisations.

14.3 Under the 2026/2027 scheme, eligible organisations were invited to apply to one of four policy funds, each totalling £450,000.

15.0 NI Cancer Nursing Clinical Career Pathway launched

15.1 DoH has launched a Cancer Nursing Clinical Career Pathway for Northern Ireland. The Pathway was commissioned by the Chief Nursing Officer and produced by the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council (NIPEC).

15.2 The Pathway, which was launched on World Cancer Day, provides a well-defined, structured career progression route from Senior Nursing Assistant roles through to Advanced and Consultant-level practice.

16.0 Cass Assessment report

16.1 The Health Minister has published a report, which assessed Northern Ireland's Gender Identity Service's compliance against the 2024 Cass Review.

16.2 The Minister commissioned Dr Hilary Cass in September 2025 to assess whether changes to services for children and young people with gender incongruence and gender dysphoria in Northern Ireland are compliant with her recommendations in the review of services in England.

16.3 The report concluded that the Department's position now presents a crucial opportunity to develop a Regional Lifespan Gender Service and to build the foundations for a collaborative relationship with the English under-18's services.

16.4 Department officials will now consider the recommendations and work alongside counterparts in England and Health and Social Care (HSC) service providers in Northern Ireland to implement them.

17.0 ADHD Needs Assessment report

17.1 DoH has published the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Needs Assessment final report.

17.2 The needs assessment, which covers both adults and children, aims to determine the level of demand for a commissioned service, as well as recommendations for what such a service might look like, including potential implementation and staffing costs. It also specifically includes consideration of the prison population, recognising the significantly higher prevalence rates of ADHD compared to the general population.

17.3 The report's recommendations will help inform options for a potential commissioned ADHD service across Northern Ireland, subject to future budget availability. The recommendations are now being considered by the Department with a view to identifying next steps.