

**Chief Executive Update**

**Trust Board**

**Thursday 28 May 2026**

## Trust Key Metrics

| What People Say                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                       |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>77 Compliments Received<br/>(Q4 2025/26)</div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <div></div>                                                           | <div>499 Complaints Received<br/>(Q4 2025/26)</div>                                                  | <div></div>                                                                                                                                                                        |
| A decrease of 54* since previous quarter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                       | An increase of 354* since previous quarter                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| *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. |                                                                       |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| What We Spend (At Month 12)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                       |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <div>Cumulative Spend £1,213 million (net of non cash expenditure)</div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                       | <div>Savings Achieved £43 million</div>                                                              | <div>Breakeven position (177k surplus)</div>                                                                                                                                       |
| Our People (At 31 <sup>st</sup> January 2026 unless stated)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                       |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <div>13,294</div> <div>Excludes Bank Staff, Staff on Career Break &amp; Seconded out of Trust</div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <div>Permanent Staff Turnover April 2025 – March 2026<br/>7.09%</div> | <div>Number of Vacancies Activity being recruited to at 31<sup>st</sup> January 2026<br/>1,118</div> | <div>7.08% Sickness Level</div> <div>April 2025 – March 2026</div>                                                                                                                 |
| <div>31<sup>st</sup> January 2026 Position 13,245</div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                       |                                                                                                      | <div>31<sup>th</sup> January 2026 Position 7.04%</div>                                                                                                                             |
| Our Internal Controls (At 16 <sup>th</sup> March 2026)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                       |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <div>Opening position 126 recommendations due for implementation in 2026/27</div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                       | <div>Of these 40 are significant audit recommendations</div>                                         | <div>Three of the significant recommendations are priority one, all carried forward from prior years.</div> <div>IA Forum resumed on 18 May 2026 to monitor progress monthly</div> |

## **1.0 Cervical cancer screening**

**1.1** Sir Frank Atherton's *Summary Report on Issues Related to the Northern Ireland Cervical Screening Programme* has been received by the Health Minister.

**1.2** The report was published (14 May) by Department of Health alongside a statement.

**1.3** Minister Nesbitt said "I asked Sir Frank to consider whether a statutory public inquiry might provide additional significant insight and assessment to the findings already made in relation to questions of responsibility and to the future safety of this important population screening programme. Sir Frank concluded that while there have been significant failings, a statutory public inquiry is highly unlikely to provide any further clarity. I accept these findings and advice from Sir Frank."

**1.4** Professor Sir Frank Atherton said: "I hope this summary report helps to explain the historic failures in the Cervical Screening Programme delivered by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust and provides reassurance that the changes which have been made will ensure delivery of a safe, effective service for women in Northern Ireland in the future."

**1.5** SHSCT apologised again to the women and families affected for past shortcomings in Trust cervical screening services and for the anxiety and distress this has caused.

## **2.0 Urology Services Inquiry**

**2.1** A statement from Christine Smith CBE KC, Chair of the Urology Services Inquiry was released in April, providing an update on the Inquiry's work.

**2.2** The statement said that a draft report was completed and warning letters sent to those who are currently the subject of criticism in that draft of the report. They were offered the chance to respond before the deadline at the end of April.

**2.3** Once the warning letter process is complete, The USI Chair said she will provide a further update, and at that time, expects to be able to indicate a date when the report will be delivered to the Minister of Health.

## **3.0 Medical Practitioners Tribunal**

**3.1** Former Southern Trust urologist Aidan O'Brien is facing a Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) case scheduled to run from April 26 - July 15. Mr O'Brien's virtual hearing is also due to sit again between January 11 and 22 next year.

**3.2** The tribunal will inquire into the allegation that, on 9 October 2019, Mr O'Brien failed to provide good clinical care to a patient.

**3.3** It is further alleged that between November 2014 and January 2017, Mr O'Brien failed to dictate clinic letters in approximately 668 cases following patient attendance

at outpatient clinics and between June 2015 and January 2017, failed to triage routine and/or urgent GP referrals on approximately 783 occasions.

#### **4.0 Home Care Services**

**4.1** BBC recently reported on the 'Modernising Home Care: A new way of working' SHSCT document including commentary from Pauline Shepherd chief executive of the Independent Health and Care Providers, following a recent FOI response on home care costs and activity from the Trust.

**4.2** SHSCT said it was currently identifying "new and better ways of working" as it aimed to free up time to care for other service users who need support.

**4.3** Connected Health said recently that it is likely it will pull out of domiciliary care in some rural areas of Northern Ireland because it can no longer afford to provide it.

**4.4** DOH said the entire health and social care system was facing significant challenges given the lack of an agreed budget.

#### **5.0 Release to rescue**

**5.1** The 'release to rescue' protocol was implemented on April 27 and sets a clear standard that no patient arriving by ambulance will wait longer than a maximum of 2 hours outside an ED. This is the first step in a longer-term ambition to move towards a 45 minute handover.

**5.2** This is a whole system change which depends on HSC staff working hard across acute, community and support services to keep our patients moving safely through the system.

**5.3** Initial results indicate in the weeks since the introduction of release to rescue, there have been very few breaches of the 2hr target.

#### **6.0 Budget**

**6.1** Permanent Secretary Mike Farrar said that having another one-year budget would make it "almost impossible" to deliver necessary savings as well as jeopardising the vision to transform Northern Ireland's health care system.

**6.2** DoH said it's facing a fresh projected deficit of between £800m-£1bn for the new financial year.

**6.3** Mr Farrar said: "To balance our expenditure, we need to spend more money in community along with general practice balance, mental health and social care those are the areas we need to shift the balance of our expenditure towards."

**6.4** Mr Farrar said a proposed £26bn for health until 2030 suggested by Finance Minister John O'Dowd would not be enough without reform.

## **7.0 Reset**

**7.1** Permanent Secretary Mike Farrar answered questions from the Health Committee recently about how the 'Reset Plan' will work in the coming years.

**7.2** He explained the new system will create 17 new integrated neighbourhood teams (INTs), and will include GPs, pharmacists, local councils as well as the community and voluntary sector.

**7.3** Mr Farrar said this would allow more coordination of existing resources as well as moving around 2% of hospital budgets a year towards communities.

**7.4** Expecting this would initially be around £40-50m, he predicted the figure will rise to an annual amount of between £50-100m in the next three years.

## **8.0 This is our health**

**8.1** Health Minister Nesbitt recently launched "This is our health" - a key part of the Minister's overall strategic approach to prevention in the Reset Plan reflecting the important shift of 'People to Partners.' The programme will identify what people need most from the health service and the part they can play in making those services work better.

**8.2** 'This is our health' will be rolled out across Northern Ireland, including The Southern Trust Area, until the end of June 2026 and will include in-person engagement in a range of public spaces and within community and voluntary groups. People will also be able to contribute through digital and social media channels, as well as completing a short questionnaire online. More details can be found at <https://thisisourhealth.org.uk/>.

## **9.0 Muckamore Abbey Hospital investigation**

**9.1** Belfast HSC Trust recently sent letters of apology to parents and guardians of patients involved in the Muckamore Abbey Hospital (MAH) investigation.

**9.2** The Trust wrote to those families where CCTV footage at MAH between March and September 2017 showed concerns about ill-treatment of their loved ones.

**9.3** The letter acknowledges the profound impact that the abusive behaviours of staff had on their loved ones and invites families to meet with staff for an update on the trust's internal disciplinary processes.

## **10.0 Industrial action ballot**

**10.1** Hospital doctors in N.Ireland are being balloted on industrial action. The BMA ballot for industrial action opened on 11 May for four weeks closing on 8 June 2026.

**10.2** The ballot announcement follows the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body recommending a 3.5% pay uplift for 2026/27 that doctors leaders have already rejected as unacceptable.

## **11.0 NISRA population projections**

**11.1** New projections from the NI Statistics and Research Agency (Nisra) show that Northern Ireland's population is ageing rapidly with the number of people aged 65 and above projected to overtake the number of children by 2027.

**11.2** In 2024 - there were approx. 385,000 children (0-15) in Northern Ireland and about 164,000 people aged 75 and over. By 2034 there is projected to be 319,000 children and 207,000 aged 75 plus.

**11.3** An older general population also means a shrinking pool of younger, working-age people to train and recruit as nurses, doctors and care workers.

## **12.0 ED waiting times**

**12.1** DOH recently published quarterly statistics on the time spent in Northern Ireland emergency care departments (ED) January - March 2026.

**12.2** There were 201,992 attendances at EDs during the quarter - 3.8% (7,467) more than the same quarter in 2025 (194,525).

**12.3** During the quarter, over two fifths (40.2%) of patients spent less than 4 hours at an ED, less than in the same quarter in 2025 (43.6%)

\*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.

**12.4** A new report by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) stated that, in 2025, some 1,032 excess deaths were associated with waits of 12 or more hours in EDs while awaiting admission.

**12.5** The report found that, while the overall death figure for 2025 is slightly lower than in 2024 (1,122) and 2023 (1,063), the estimated mortality figure has more than doubled over five years. In 2020, the estimated mortality figure was 461. In 2016, there were 60 excess deaths attributed to long waits.

**12.6** The report also that in 2025, one in 12 (8.3%) patients waited 24 hours or longer, while a RCEM survey conducted in December 2025 found that one ED recorded a wait time of over 124 hours.

## **13.0 Cancer waiting times**

**13.1** DOH Cancer waiting times for the quarter ending December 2025 reported 3,902 patients were seen by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral across all five HSC Trusts, 44.6% (1,203) more than in the previous quarter (2,699).

**13.2** 5.5% (213) of those patients were seen within 14 days of their urgent referral for breast cancer, compared with 6.8% (183) in the previous quarter.

**13.3** 2,965 patients started their first definitive treatment following a decision to treat, 4.4% (124) more than in the previous quarter (2,841).90.1% (2,672) of those patients started treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat, compared with 88.0% (2,499) in the previous quarter.

#### **14.0 Regional mother and baby unit**

**14.1** A permanent regional mother and baby unit providing specialist inpatient mental health care, is to go ahead in the grounds of the Belfast City Hospital with a design team to be appointed immediately.

**14.2** The health minister said it represents a "significant step forward" and the aim is for it to open "no later than 2028/29".

#### **15.0 Dental services**

**15.1** Minister Nesbitt announced an investment of £8 million in general dental services and said the funding would help improve access for patients while the planned long-term reform of dental services is underway.

**15.2** The funding will support a number of areas including an additional 6 Dental Foundation Training places to support early career dentists, the continuation of the Enhanced Child Examination Scheme to encourage new registrations for children aged 0-10 years, and the establishment of an Emergency Dental Clinic in the Western Trust area.

#### **16.0 Tobacco and Vapes Act**

**16.1** The Tobacco and Vapes Act has now passed into law. The Act, which extends to Northern Ireland, will see a smoke-free generation by making it illegal to sell tobacco to anyone born on or after 1st January 2009, taking effect from next year.

**16.2** From 29th October 2026, it will also be illegal to sell non-nicotine vapes and other nicotine products to under 18s. The legislation will provide new powers to reduce the harm from second-hand smoke and improved regulation of retailers of vapes and nicotine products.

#### **17.0 Hospital Parking Charges**

**17.1** The Hospital Parking Charges Bill has now passed into law. The legislation defers the abolition of hospital parking charges as provided for in the Hospital Parking Charges Act 2022.

**17.2** The Bill enables the Department, by regulations, to set a new date for the 2022 Act to come into operation and for hospital parking charges to be abolished. The date specified must be no later than 12 May 2029, and potentially sooner if the financial circumstances allow. Any such regulations would require approval by the Assembly before coming into force.