

FOI 3806

18th June 2026

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – INFORMATION REQUEST

Question: Please provide the percentage breakdown of private law children cases during 2025 in which a Court Children's Officer (CCO) recommended each of the following contact arrangements in your Trust:

- Residence/contact primarily with the mother, with some contact with the father
- Residence/contact primarily with the father, with some contact with the mother
- Shared care/shared contact between both parents
- Other arrangements

If possible, please also provide the total number of cases considered in producing these figures

Response: The Southern Trust cannot provide the percentage breakdown requested for private law children cases during 2025 in the format outlined.

This information is not recorded centrally and therefore retrieving it would involve a manual search of individual patient records.

As such we cannot provide this information as the cost of locating and retrieving the information exceeds the "appropriate limit" as stated in the Freedom of Information (Fees and Appropriate Limit) Regulations 2004. In order to obtain this information from a number of individual patient records would exceed the £450 limit and is therefore cost prohibitive.

Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Public Authorities are not obliged to comply with an information request where to do so would exceed the cost limit.

In addition, it would not be appropriate to search through individual patient records for the purposes for responding to a FOI request, there would be no patient expectation that medical records would be used in this way.

Furthermore, under Section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act, we can advise that it would require an extensive manual review of individual court files, reports and case records across the relevant courts for the 2025 period. This would be necessary to

identify whether a final recommendation was made, who made the recommendation, the nature of the recommendation, and whether it fits into one of the categories requested. Given the volume of courts attended, the number of reports completed, and the fact that this information is not held in a readily reportable format, the Trust is unable to provide the requested breakdown within the timeframe available.

As a result, the Southern Trust is unable to confirm either the percentage breakdown requested or a reliable total number of cases considered for the purpose of producing those figures.

Furthermore, the data sought is not routinely collated or recorded in a format that would allow for extraction of the specific categories requested as detailed below.

To compile this information would require a detailed manual review of individual case files and reports.

- Residence/contact primarily with the mother, with some contact with the father
- Residence/contact primarily with the father, with some contact with the mother
- Shared care/shared contact between both parents
- Other arrangements

Given the volume of work undertaken by Court Children's Officers across multiple courts, the number of cases progressing to the stage where recommendations are made, and the involvement of both CCOs and Social Workers in preparing reports, such an exercise would be exceptionally resource intensive. In particular:

CCOs attend a significant number of courts across Northern Ireland, generating a high volume of cases.

Many cases require more than one report before reaching a stage where a final recommendation on residence/contact is made.

Recommendations may also change as further information becomes available, following contact observations, safeguarding checks, parental engagement, or further direction from the court.

In some instances, cases are referred to Social Work teams within the Trust to complete the report and provide recommendations rather than the CCO. This further limit the ability to provide a reliable Trust wide percentage breakdown based solely on CCO recommendations.

Any recommendations are included in written reports rather than stored in a format that can be easily grouped or measured.

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