


COVER SHEET

Meeting and Date of meeting	Trust Board 3 April 2025	
Title of paper	Executive Director of Social Work Report	
Accountable Director	Name	Colm McCafferty
	Position	Director of CYP Services and Executive Director of Social Work
Report Author	Name	Colm McCafferty
	Email	<i>colm.mccafferty@southerntrust.hscni.net</i>
This paper sits within the Trust Board role of:	Accountability	
This paper is presented for:	Assurance	
Links to Trust Corporate Objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unscheduled Care Transformation and Reform
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Improved Access to Services
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Focus on developing services provided in the Community
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ensure Safe Services while delivering financial recovery
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strengthen Financial and Governance Systems
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital Readiness
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sustainability of Our Estate
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Embedding Our Co-production Approach
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Delivery of Year 3 of Our People Framework

	<p><i>The report author will complete this report cover sheet fully. The Accountable Director must satisfy themselves that the cover sheet is accurate and fully reflects the report. The expectation is that the Accountable Director has read and agreed the content (cover sheet and report).</i></p>
	<p><i>Its purpose is to provide the Trust Board/Committee with a clear summary of the report/paper being presented, how it impacts on the people we serve and the key matters for attention and the ask of the Trust Board/Committee</i></p>

1. Reason for Presentation of Paper / Report

This report is a scheduled update to Trust Board on the Executive Director for Social Work's areas of responsibility. It is presented for assurance and information purposes.

2. Detailed summary of paper contents:

The paper provides an overview of issues relating to the delivery of statutory functions across all Directorates.

This reporting cycle has a dual focus on:

- Overview of the social work workforce and associated challenges
- Overview of the Trust Adult Protection service.

3. Areas of improvement/achievement:

Regarding statutory functions and social work services in the Trust

- The Social Work profession, working across Directorates within the Southern Trust, continues to deliver high compliance in respect of the discharge of Statutory Functions (SF). However, performance continues to be impacted upon by Social Work staffing challenges across both children's and adult services.
- The vacancy rate for permanent social work staff Band 5 -7, as of December 2024 (Data Return 7, SPPG) was 35, from a workforce complement of 782, equating to approximately 4.5% of frontline practitioners Trustwide. This is an improvement on the vacancy rate of 9% recorded for the same period last year. However, this is on top of sickness absence and maternity leave, which can equate to vacancy rates in excess of 35% in some front line teams, which cannot recruit qualified social work staff.
- Regional social work recruitment commenced in October 2024 to fill vacancies. A total of 11 vacancies were filled from this recruitment, however only 3 people were recruited from outside of the Southern Trust, other appointments reflected internal movement. There are currently 43 final year students on placement within the Southern Trust. A showcasing event is planned during the Spring to encourage them to avail of career opportunities within the Trust.
- Directorates are in the process of providing update reports to SPPG in relation to the Statutory Functions action plans agreed with SPPG in June 2024. Directorates are preparing for provision of data and information for the next Statutory Functions reporting period at end March 2025.
- The CYPS SW Improvement Forum is in the process of establishing a Service User Reference Group to ensure the needs of children, young people, parents and carers are represented and reflected in how services are delivered across Children and Young People's Social Services.
- Adult Community Services are undertaking service improvement initiatives with support from the Quality Improvement Team, with a focus on compliance with annual reviews and improving performance. Since October 2024 there has been a 7.5% increase in compliance with annual reviews, with both Nursing and Residential reviews now achieving over 80% compliance for the first time since before 2018.
- The overview of Adult Safeguarding provides assurance in relation to the Trust's arrangements for discharge of statutory duties in accordance with the joint DHSS&PS/NIO paper "Adult Safeguarding in Northern Ireland Regional and Local Partnership Arrangements" (March 2010).

4. Areas of concern/risk/challenge:

- Social work workforce challenges across all Directorates continue to impact on the Trust's ability to consistently deliver Statutory Functions. All Directorates are focused on managing the challenges and mitigate the impact, with a focus on Quality Improvement initiatives, risk management, and recruitment and retention of staff.
- Within Children's Services, at 31 January 2025, there were 40 unallocated Children in Care, out of a total 690 Child in Care population. Robust governance arrangements have been established to manage the associated risk, including escalation processes and a plan to allocate these cases as a matter of urgency. The children noted are in long term stable placements. These cases are also monitored via regular checks undertaken by a Social Work Assistant. A duty system remains in place and a Social Work intervention is provided in response to any emerging concern. There is ongoing regional work to finalise a Band 5 support worker post which will enhance existing capacity, including support with Statutory visits to Looked after Children.
- There are 2,426 unallocated cases and 1,618 outstanding annual reviews in the integrated care teams in Adult Community Services. A number of Quality Improvement projects are underway, which are delivering positive results, including a 10% reduction in the number of unallocated cases and 10% improvement in completion of annual reviews.
- Based on existing adult protection trends as evidenced in referral rates, demographic and societal challenges, and in the context of legislative and procedural requirements arising from the Adult Protection Bill, there will continue to be increasing growth in adult protection activity, which will require investment in order to strengthen and expand existing resources into the future.

5. Impact on Statutory Duties: Provide details on the impact of the following and how.

<i>Financial Impact</i>	<i>Safety and Quality Impact</i>
Yes, there are Financial Impacts	Yes, there are Quality, Safety or Experience Impacts

6. Risk Assessment (Risk level and state if a risk assessment be completed)

Social Work Staffing shortages across all Directorates is on the Corporate Risk Register. Risk Level:

7. Other Business Intelligence/data (If appropriate)

8. Impact: Provide details on the impact of the following and how. If this is N/A you should explain why this is an appropriate response.

Corporate Risk Register	Social Work Staffing shortages across all Directorates is on the Corporate Risk Register.
Board Assurance Framework	Yes. Statutory Functions and associated challenges as previously reported.
Equality and Human Rights	Ready access to support services.

Executive Director of Social Work Report for Trust Board 3 April 2025

Corporate Social Work overview

SOCIAL WORK & SOCIAL CARE GOVERNANCE/ Statutory Functions (SF)

The Trust continues to deliver on and adhere to statutory functions with a high level of compliance. However, this continues to be impacted upon by staffing shortages across the system and increasing demands associated with population growth for both children and older people. This inevitably results in increased demand for all social work and social care services.

The regional social care system is undergoing change at a number of levels. This includes legislative change, eg the pending introduction of the Adoption and Children Act (2022) and Adult Safeguarding legislation. While a definitive timeframe has not been agreed for the introduction of these elements of legislation, there is extensive planning work underway in terms of preparation.

There are further developments planned in relation to the upscaling of Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Teams. While all these developments are welcomed, there is concern across the system in relation to the capacity to progress these at a time of significant challenge in respect of social work workforce availability.

This paper will provide a detailed update to Trust Board in respect of:

1. Overview of the social work workforce and associated challenges
2. Overview of the Trust Adult Protection service.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL WORK WORKFORCE IN SOUTHERN TRUST

As previously reported, there continues to be challenges across Directorates to consistently deliver on all Statutory Functions and other core service delivery requirements due to the longstanding and sustained workforce deficits and associated pressures, including increased demand as reflected in all referral metrics. Every effort continues to be made within the Directorates to manage these challenges and mitigate the impact, with a focus on recruitment and retention of staff.

Strategic context

The Social Work Workforce Review NI 2022, identified that, “demographic changes, a steady rise in the number of families in need of social work intervention, an ageing population, pressures on mental health services for adults and children, and a rise in domestic abuse and poverty have all resulted in increased demand for social work services”. These trends and associated risks are clearly identified in the review of Children’s Services undertaken by Professor Ray Jones, June 2023. The Department of Health (DOH) has established a Regional Reform Programme Board to take forward a number of recommendations from this review which have been accepted. This work is being progressed by 9 specific workstreams covering a variety of priorities including Foster Care, Residential children’s services, Children with Disability, workforce and associated matters.

Transformation initiatives in Health & Social Care, new legislation, innovations in service delivery and developments in the Justice and Education sectors have added to the demand on the social work profession and specifically the current recruitment and retention challenges experienced by the Southern Trust’s social work service. An analysis of the range of service developments at a regional level in 2023, concluded that in the statutory sector alone there are at least 490 additional social work roles across Trusts in comparison to the situation prior to 2017. There has not been a corresponding rise in university training places for social workers.

The challenges in relation to Southern Trust social work workforce difficulties, as currently experienced, are a consequence of long standing (past 6 years) supply challenges. In addition, presenting referrals to the services are of increased complexity, and there are rising numbers of unallocated cases across Children and Young People’s Service (CYPS), Adult Community Services (ACS), Adult Mental Health and Learning Disability Services. These challenges inevitably have an impact on service delivery and are compounded by increasing numbers of children on the child protection register, increasing numbers of Looked after Children, and significantly increased activity in adult services reflected in referral trends. In addition, there are more attractive salaries available across the border in Southern Ireland and some qualified social workers are choosing to pursue careers there.

Social Work Supply

Review of current workforce data for social work services across all Health and Social Care Trusts evidences a continued shortage in supply of social workers regionally. Many teams are continuously working at staffing levels significantly below that which is funded or necessary to be able to meet service demands. For example, in Southern Trust at end Jan 2025, the Gateway service was operating a 38% shortage in its funded Band 5 – Band 7 SW compliment due to vacancies, maternity leave and sickness absences. There is no prospect of recruiting social work staff until final year students become available in late summer.

The growth in the number of social work posts available has not been matched by a growth in supply. Due to the expansion in posts available, ie Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Teams, expansion in other disciplines, there is a high churn of staff, with front line children’s social work services being the most impacted upon. In addition, data from Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) in relation to registrations,

and the DOH in respect of graduates, demonstrates that, for a number of reasons, not all new graduate social workers enter the HSC workforce. In June 2024 there were 220 Social Work graduates who joined the statutory sector, the lowest number of newly qualified social workers joining the workforce since 2019.

Since 2021 there has been a 30% reduction in applications to the Undergraduate Route, and a 50% reduction in applications to the Relevant Graduate Route. Applications for 2024/2025 indicate a slow down in the rate of reduction. The current number of social work training places is 326. This includes a non recurrent increase of 40 places in 2024/25.

In recent years, both the Southern Trust and the DOH have invested in the Open University (OU) as a progression route for social care staff to gain a social work qualification. To date, eleven people have qualified within the OU route and filled vacancies within the Trust. An additional nine social care workers are in progress, due to qualify in 2025 and 2026. In November 2024 18 social care workers in Southern Trust were shortlisted for selection by the OU, and eight places will be offered to the Trust, with courses commencing in September 2025.

OU graduates are recognised as a valuable asset to the service they work in as they come with a breadth of experience, from pre and post qualification work. Within the Trust there are OU graduates in posts within sensory disability, learning disability, integrated care teams, acute, forensic learning disability, family intervention, adult protection and sensory services. A recent Southern Trust OU graduate was recognised as the regional highest-performing social work undergraduate and postgraduate student. Increasing the OU route requires funding to assist with training support, development and student supervision. A business case has been submitted to DOH, however has not been responded to.

Regional recruitment

The regional recruitment process provides a streamlined approach to SW recruitment. It is recognised that there is a need to analyse data in relation to permanent vacancies regionally. The DOH is currently working on the development of a 10 year SW Workforce Plan, which will review population demographics, in relation to SW workforce demographics and planned legislative and policy developments. The plan will seek to address the workforce challenges in relation to attraction, recruitment and retention.

Responding to vacancies

Band 5-7 Absences & Vacancies (including Team Leaders) December 2024				
Service Area	Permanent Vacancies	Temporary Absences	Total Vacancies/ Absences	% of Workforce
Children in Care Service	5	1	6	16%
Children's Gateway	5	7	12	35%
Children with Disability	0	5	5	12%
Children's Residential Care	3	4	7	13%

Family Intervention	9	6	15	21%
Physical & Sensory Disability	1	1	2	5%
Mental Health	2	4	6	6%
Integrated Care Teams	7	2	9	13%

The absences referenced above relate to staff sickness and high levels of maternity leave. Within the current climate it is not possible to recruit to fill temporary absences.

Throughout 2024/25 the CYPS Directorate Social Work and Social Care Improvement Forum has focused on consideration of options to improve service response and capacity to meet statutory requirements. Following engagement with staff, this work has moved to focus in the first instance on the following proposals:

- Development of an Early Intervention Service within Family Support and Safeguarding – including consideration of a Band 5 role within safeguarding cases.
- Development of pilot of a Band 5 role in Children in Care Services.

The following Task and Finish Groups are also underway:

- SW Workforce Steering Group and Workforce Wellbeing and Retention Group.
- Establishment of a Service User Reference Group.
- Communication group.

The staffing deficits within Adult Community Services (ACS) have a direct impact on the services' ability to fulfil their statutory functions. Despite significant improvement in the vacancy rate, there remains a backlog of work as a result of the staffing deficits over a sustained period. The Directorate has recently appointed an additional 4 senior practitioners, 3 in Integrated Care Teams and 1 commencing in Non-Acute hospitals. This is a positive development for social work and these senior practitioners are leading on key elements of quality improvement work to improve safety and delivery of care for service users. This will also address some of the back log challenges including high numbers of unallocated cases.

As part of the newly formed Community Mental Health service there has been a review of the professional roles for each service area. Additional Mental Health Social Work posts are proving difficult to fill. Four new Band 6 Social workers have accepted posts, with a further 7 permanent band 6 vacant posts. A bespoke recruitment exercise is currently underway.

Challenges remain in the Learning Disability Service in relation to ongoing vacancy issues, including long term sick leave, maternity leave and career breaks. This is a particular issue in one locality. Work is ongoing to support those currently on sick leave back to work and a bespoke recruitment exercise is underway. Bank staff have been identified to support this team with priority statutory functions. Adult safeguarding investigations are being supported by other teams.

Staffing levels within hospital social work continue to be challenging. Whilst there is some impact at ward level, the impact is felt most within the senior pool of staff, who continue to be challenged in fulfilling operational duties alongside allocated safeguarding investigations. Whilst Acute Services have recently appointed a senior

Safeguarding and Child Protection Lead, the limited staffing resource results in investigations taking longer to complete, and additional pressures on staff's capacity to meet statutory functions requirements.

Focusing on recruitment and retention

In response to the Social Work recruitment challenges within Southern Trust, two improvement groups have been established: a cross-Directorate group and a Children and Young People's service specific group. Both groups are led by the Head of Services for the Social Services Workforce Training and Development team and supported by the Quality Improvement team. The aim of this work is to strengthen recruitment and increase retention of the social work workforce and is informed by current research on social work retention, including feedback from staff. This work supports a coordinated and concerted approach to address key drivers consistent with Our People Framework including:

- Identity and vision
- Culture
- Learning and development
- Work life balance and staff well-being
- Promotion of social work recruitment and retention.

The focus of this work for this reporting period is as follows.

Identity and Vision. The aim is to ensure strong professional identity, pride and satisfaction among social workers. Work towards achievement of this has focused on recognising excellent practice, encouraging cohesion as a workforce and sharing information across Directorates on developments within social work. A quarterly newsletter 'Social Work Spotlight- Shining the Light on Social Work and Social Care' has been developed as a means of supporting a cohesive staff identity and effective communication across the Directorates. Since March 2024 there have been 3691 on-line visits to the four publications issued, an average of 922 views per newsletter, with positive qualitative comments received on its usefulness and relevance.

It is acknowledged that an important aspect of developing a strong professional identity, is to recognise and celebrate best practice. As a means of recognising excellent social work practice, a total of 37 nominations were submitted to the regional social work awards, scheduled for March 2025. Further recognition of best practice was achieved through a series of face to face events within the Trust. To date, six events have been held, with 451 staff members in attendance, with a focus on the Open University students, showcasing the work of social care staff, and showcasing social work across Directorates.

Organisational culture priorities have focused on strengthening social work leadership through staff engagement with the Social Work Leadership Framework, (DOH, 2022). Awareness of the framework was promoted through dissemination of a regional survey, and by holding information sessions for student social workers, staff in their Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) and social work managers. In addition, the Leadership Framework has been incorporated into specific Social Work Leadership Training. The 'Supporting Social Workers in Practice Forum' has also had a focus on strengthening the confidence and capability of line managers in their leadership responsibilities.

The Trauma Informed Leadership group, led by the Assistant Director for SW Governance, Workforce Training and Development, has supported the Trust's engagement in a baseline assessment in relation to becoming a trauma informed organisation. An action plan has been drafted to progress priority areas as identified from the baseline survey. The ultimate aim of this work is to build an organisation which is sensitive and responsive to the trauma experienced by our service users and support for staff in the provision of care in challenging circumstances.

Learning and Development – There is ongoing provision of in-service training to staff to support professional development and a skilled and competent workforce. Professional development is also delivered through more formal university-based modules, mainly through the Professional in Practice framework (PiP). This ensures adherence to professional registration requirements and enables staff to develop specialisms. A total of 127 social workers are enrolled on these courses. A total of 33 social workers achieved requirements within the PiP consolidation award in this reporting period, enabling them to meet post AYE registration requirements.

Newly qualified staff within their assessed year in employment received enhanced supports following a refreshed and strengthened induction. During the reporting period 39 social workers successfully completed their assessed year in employment (AYE) and 46 remain active within this year.

Work life balance and wellbeing. This work has focused primarily on the Children and Young People's Directorate and has actively encouraged staff to consider flexible working, specifically a 'nine day fortnight'. A six-month evaluation survey is underway to in respect of staff who have availed of this, and to identify any emerging challenges associated with the use of flexible working practices.

Also, within the Children and Young People's Service Improvement Forum, plans are progressing to introduce additional skills mix to teams, with the potential to ensure that families receive a targeted and timely service, thereby reducing the demand on social work staff and with the objective of reducing unallocated cases and high caseloads.

Promotion of social work and recruitment – In response to regionally recognised undersupply of social workers, a range of activity has been progressed to promote social work as a career of choice. A regional model of recruitment is in place to optimise efficiency and an improved experience for applicants. Social work has been promoted at career events at higher educational institutes (colleges and universities), schools and council events.

There are currently 43 final year students on placement within the Southern Trust and a showcasing event is planned to encourage them to identify career opportunities within the Trust. In addition, social work is promoted as a career of choice through attendance at school and Further Education College careers events. Applications to the SW degree programme have increased significantly in recent years from students under 21 years (2021- 27% applicants were <21yrs, compared to 51% in 2024).

Planned developments – This includes the development of a measurement plan to track improvement and measuring employee retention, as well as turnover. A 6-month evaluation of the flexible working initiative will be completed. In addition, scoping is underway to identify support needs for line managers. The Trust will collaborate in a Department of Health funded partnership with Queens University Belfast to implement

a range of projects, derived from research, with the aim of improving social work retention. It is intended that this work will develop a knowledge bank of effective retention approaches. Within this work, the Southern Trust's retention initiative will create clear career pathways which offer opportunities for specialism and mobility across service areas, given its connection to identity development and retention.

To measure staff experience, findings from the recent Trust Pulse survey will be examined to gain a picture for social work as a profession, including comparisons across Directorates.

Summary

This overview of the social work workforce demonstrates the significant challenges in relation to workforce availability and associated vacancy rates, which limits capacity to proactively deliver targeted and consistent preventative services.

The report also outlines the concerted efforts and developments underway in response to workforce deficits, the need to support staff and to adapt to the changing environment, including demographics, working patterns and the current financial climate which Health and Social Care operates in. Despite the challenges, the Southern Trust's social work and social care service continues to perform effectively in the majority of specialisms, and provide a high standard of innovative care to service users.

However, there is a need for a fit for purpose workforce planning strategy and engagement continues with the Department of Health in this regard.

Overview of Adult Safeguarding and Adult Protection in Southern Trust

Context

The purpose of this section of the report is to provide assurances on how the Southern Trust is fulfilling its responsibilities under statutory functions and compliance with the Regional Adult Safeguarding Policy, 2015. A key objective of the '*Prevention and Protection in Partnership, Regional Adult Safeguarding Policy*', (2015) and Adult Safeguarding Operational Procedures, 2016 is to reduce the incidence of harm from abuse, exploitation or neglect of adults who are at risk. The policy emphasises everyone's fundamental right to be safe. Some adults are more at risk of exposure to harm because either they are unable to protect themselves or their situation may provide opportunities for others to neglect, exploit or abuse them. The definition of adults at risk refers to the impact of personal characteristics or life circumstances on an adult's ability to keep themselves safe.

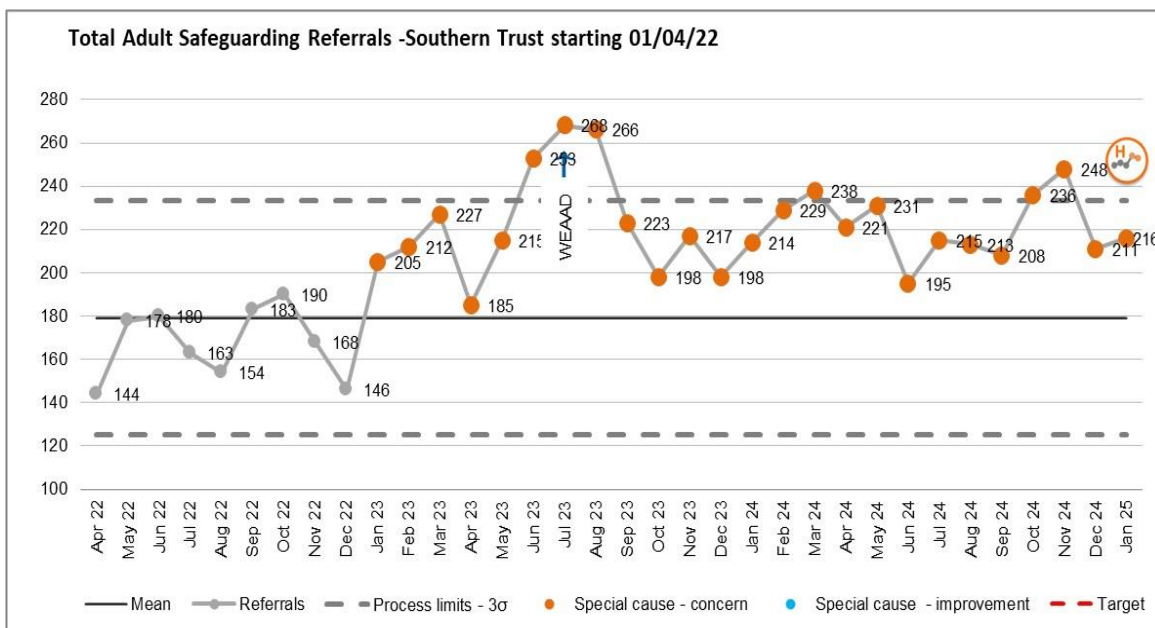
Work continues in relation to the new Adult Protection Bill and associated statutory guidance. The legislation, when enacted, will place statutory responsibilities on Trusts, PSNI and on other agencies to undertake new duties and powers. The legislation includes offences relating to neglect and ill treatment of adults. The Southern Trust Head of Adult Safeguarding represents regional operational leads at the Department of Health Transformation Board where work is progressing regarding the development of the Bill.

Overview

Safeguarding and Protection of adults at risk of harm from abuse, exploitation or neglect continues to be a priority across operational Directorates. The Trust Adult Protection Operational Group, chaired by the Director of Adult Mental Health and Learning Disability services, has operational oversight of the delivery of the service, assurance on compliance with standards and good practice and workforce and training. As part of the shared learning mechanism for adult protection each Directorate Social Work Lead and respective Assistant Director will share practice learning and relevant recommendations relating to adult protection cases from their Division. Learning is subsequently cascaded throughout each Division.

Adult Safeguarding Activity

Recognising and responding to adult safeguarding within Southern Trust shows an average of 266 referrals per month compared to 223 referrals per month for the same 10 month period last year. Recognising safeguarding issues at an early stage enables alternative preventative safeguarding responses to be progressed. Early intervention to mitigate against known safeguarding risks can reduce the need for a protection investigation at a later stage. Effective recording is important to enable trends of low level safeguarding issues to be monitored and considered in terms of escalating behaviours and patterns. This is of particular relevance to situations involving domestic abuse.



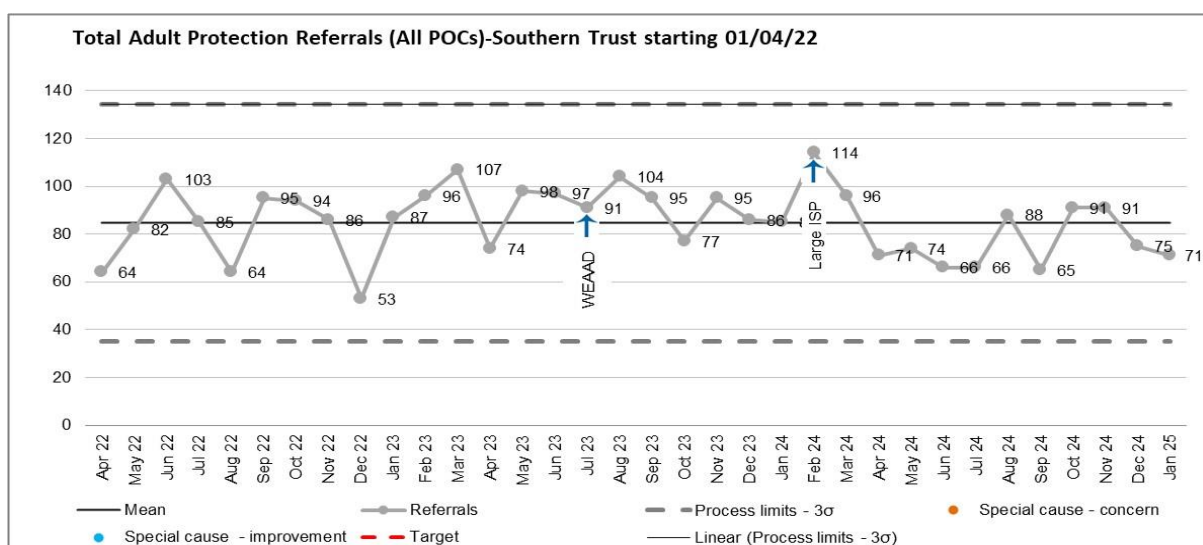
Adult Protection Referrals

There has been a 16% decline in adult protection referrals to the Adult Protection Gateway Team (APGT) from April 2024 to January 2025, compared to the same period the previous year. This may be due to increased recognition and early

intervention where adults are identified as at risk of harm, and alternative safeguarding responses are more appropriate.

The chart below shows the number of adult protection referrals where an initial assessment was undertaken by APGT. Initial assessment provides further opportunity to ensure the most appropriate, proportionate response is provided. A high number of protection referrals are actioned via safety plans and support at this stage, therefore mitigating the need for a full protection investigation response.

Where initial assessment indicates a protection response is required, this is allocated to a Designated Adult Protection Officer (DAPO) in the Community or Hospital Social Work teams. The initial assessment will set out an initial investigation plan to be progressed by the DAPO responsible. This may be as a Trust led investigation or as a Joint Protocol investigation with PSNI. As of 24 February 2025, there were 275 open adult protection cases across Southern Trust.



Areas of achievement

The Southern Trust has responsibility for the coordination and chairing of the Southern Local Adult Safeguarding Partnership. (LASP) The partnership is made up of 18 partner organisations across the statutory, independent and community and voluntary sectors and works collectively to achieve a locally agreed interagency annual workplan. The LASP produces an annual report which showcases the work the partnership has achieved in year.

Within the last year, a key development for adult safeguarding has been the establishment of the LASP Newsletter and the Southern Trust Adult Safeguarding Newsletter. Both highlight the work that is currently ongoing within the partnership and the Trust, demonstrating how safeguarding spans across all areas and disciplines. “Working Together to Keep Me Safe” Project is now rolling out across are largest Independent Sector providers in Southern LASP area.

Challenges and risks

Workforce

The majority of the workforce undertaking investigations are registered social workers. At present there are 75 social workers trained as Designated Adult Protection Officers and 167 social work and nursing Investigating Officers trained in the Southern Trust. There are 10 trained and active Achieving Best Evidence social workers. This is an adequate supply based on the demand for this role. The Trust Adult Safeguarding Specialist (TASS) retains an active oversight of the numbers of staff fulfilling protection roles and responsibilities.

Workload capacity

Staff undertaking the adult protection functions are primarily located within core community teams and hospital social work teams. Staff report increasing pressures to undertake robust and timely investigations due to competing demands and workload priorities associated with their operational roles and responsibilities.

Investigations should be progressed as quickly as possible to ensure protection plans are proportionate and service users, families and those subject to allegations receive timely outcomes.

Mental Health and Disability DAPO Rotation

This model is now in its 3rd year and has demonstrated an effective equitable distribution of adult protection work across the Directorate. It has provided relevant staff with opportunity to experience different types of protection cases and has successfully reduced the burden of workload on those staff who also hold team leader responsibilities. A key factor to success is the appointment of a permanent DAPO post who coordinates the rotation and holds complex, time intensive cases.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention of staff undertaking adult protection roles continues to be a challenge. The impact of staff movement within and out of the organisation results in a workforce heavily reliant on newly trained DAPO staff and a lack of experienced staff undertaking highly complex, high risk adult protection work. At present there is a high turnover of staff within the Adult Protection Gateway team impacting on the ability to progress and lead service development and quality improvement initiatives. The Adult Protection Gateway Team successfully facilitated a student social work placement in the service. This individual was subsequently appointed to a social work post in the team, where they have commenced their Assessed Year in Employment.

It is important that staff across all Directorates are supported to develop in confidence and competence in adult protection work as the service prepares for the new adult protection legislation and associated statutory responsibilities. Directorates will consider innovative ways to stimulate and encourage staff to develop their skills and experience thereby growing an internal interest in adult protection in the context of a regional social work shortage.

The DAPO and IO practice support fora continue to provide direct practice support for those involved in adult protection. The Trust Adult Safeguarding Specialist undertakes fortnightly practice support audits to gather themes for shared learning at upcoming fora. The fora provide safe learning space for staff to explore concepts, tools and share

knowledge across Directorates. Feedback from staff is positive and sessions are always well attended.

Supervision

All staff undertaking adult protection work should have an aligned social work supervisor. This is coordinated by the respective Directorate social work leads. Strengthening supervision for adult protection work remains an area of focus to ensure supervision meets the needs of the staff member and the organisation. The professional functions of supervision are the mechanism for obtaining assurances on compliance with processes, interfaces, user and carer involvement and feedback and importantly the individual case progress and outcomes of protection work. It is also critical in terms of support for the staff involved. Practice highlights the impact of vicarious trauma for staff involved in adult protection when allegations of harm by abuse, exploitation or neglect are made.

Interface with Adult Protection Investigations and Human Resources / Disciplinary Process

Guidance for staff in coordinating adult protection investigations where Trust staff were identified was developed in 2017 and aimed to reduce duplication, ensure best use of resources, ensure effective communication and best outcomes for the service user and staff involved. There is a need to review this guidance in light of the new Regional Disciplinary Policy. A draft has been prepared for consideration and discussion with Human Resources and the Head of Adult Safeguarding.

Assurance and Compliance Arrangements

Quarterly governance reports are compiled by the Head of Adult Safeguarding for the Directorates Risk and Governance Groups to reflect trends in adult safeguarding and adult protection activity and to highlight areas for attention and exploration. KPIs also include engagement in training and development for staff through attendance at practice support fora. The corporate Adult Safeguarding report will be included in the Trust Adult Safeguarding Champion - Annual Position Report 2024/2025.

Summary

The overview of Adult Safeguarding provides assurance in relation to the Trust's arrangements for discharge of statutory duties in accordance with the joint DHSS&PS/NIO paper "Adult Safeguarding in Northern Ireland Regional and Local Partnership Arrangements" (March 2010). Based on existing trends as evidenced in referral rates, demographic and societal challenges, and in the context of legislative and procedural requirements arising from the impending Adult Protection Bill, there will be a need to strengthen and expand existing resources into the future.

Conclusion

This report has provided a high level overview of the Trust's Statutory Functions and focussed specifically on challenges associated with staff recruitment and retention. As part of this reporting cycle, the report provided detailed information in respect of the Adult Safeguarding service, recent and pending developments in this area of practice. The report outlines to prevalence of Adult Safeguarding episodes, processes aimed at prevention and how the service assesses and responds to Safeguarding

concerns identified. It is essential that Adult Safeguarding awareness continues to be promoted across all agencies and communities with the objective of affording support and care to some of the more vulnerable individuals in society.

It is important to emphasise the necessity of ensuring adequate workforce supply if social work services are to continue to respond to the numerous challenges faced by families, children, adults in need of support and protection in the context of changing communities and escalating difficulties associated with Poverty, social isolation, Domestic Abuse, mental health and discrimination.

Currently, there are significant workforce supply deficits which are impacting on the service's ability to meet these challenges on a consistent and preventative basis.

However, despite the difficulties and as a consequence of our committed and skilled staff and managers, the social work service in the Southern Trust continues to evolve and develop in providing high quality services across the lifespan and our community.

Colm McCafferty

Director, CYPS | SHSCT

Edenderry House, 18 Gilford Road, Portadown, Bt63 5ed