

Still Waiting Action Plan - Progress Update Report December 2021

Introduction

1. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) published 'Still Waiting – A Rights Based Review of Mental Health Services and Support for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland' on 27 September 2018. The report made 50 recommendations covering a range of aspects of mental health services and support for children and young people, based on evidence provided to NICCY by young people with experience of the services.
2. The Department of Health (DoH) responded to the Still Waiting Report by setting up an Inter-Departmental Project Board to consider the recommendations of the report and take forward an Action Plan for the agreed recommendations. Consequently, the Still Waiting Action Plan (SWAP) was published in draft on the Department's website on 10th October 2019 – World Mental Health Day at the following link: [Interdepartmental Action Plan in response to the "Still Waiting" Report | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#) along with a commitment to publish annual progress updates.
3. This report provides a high-level progress update on the implementation of the Action Plan over the last 12 months. It also provides an opportunity to highlight some examples of notable achievements and positive impacts flowing from implementation of a number of actions set out in the SWAP.

Context

4. During the reporting period, there have been a number of developments that have impacted and influenced implementation of the SWAP. Further details are set out below.

COVID-19

5. It is widely recognised that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have faced significant pressures in recent years as a result of increased demand

for services, and resource constraints. These issues have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of our population, and in particular our children and young people.

6. In response, HSC Trusts and the Health and Social Care Board have put in place measures to increase capacity and improve performance. These include the formal review of CAMHS waiting lists on a weekly basis to identify opportunities for additional assessments; ongoing recruitment campaigns and the redeployment of staff to fill vacancies and long-term absences; identifying opportunities with local providers to support capacity; and offering initial assessments via telephone, zoom or face to face.
7. Given the focus on addressing existing pressures and the emergency pandemic response, progress on implementing some actions within the SWAP has been slowed, resulting in some deadlines having to be extended, while some other actions have been re-prioritised.

Mental Health Strategy

8. On 29 June 2021, Health Minister Robin Swann published the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 along with an associated Funding Plan. The Strategy focuses on the promotion of wellbeing across the lifespan, with an emphasis on recovery and the reduction of stigma, and seeks to ensure consistency, equity of access, and choice for those accessing services and support.
9. The Strategy includes a number of actions focussed on improving and enhancing services that support young peoples' mental health and wellbeing, including:
 - Promoting positive social and emotional development throughout childhood.
 - Providing enhanced and accessible mental health services for those who need specialist support, including children and young people with disabilities, their parents and families.

- Increasing funding for CAMHS to 10% of overall mental health budget; and
 - Creating clear and consistent urgent, emergency and crisis services for children and young people.
10. Implementation of the Strategy is subject to securing significant additional investment, which cannot be funded from within the Department of Health's existing resources. Funding for implementing the Strategy has been included as part of the Executive's Draft Budget 2022-25 consultation, which was launched on 13 December 2021.
 11. Subject to this funding being secured, the strategy serves as a key vehicle in driving forward changes to mental health in Northern Ireland and in taking forward a number of actions within SWAP.

SWAP Refresh

12. During 2021, the Department of Health undertook a review of the SWAP to ensure it reflected developments, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the publication of the 10 year Mental Health Strategy, as well as wider policy initiatives, such as the new Substance Use Strategy.
13. In conducting the review, officials engaged with a range of stakeholders including IDG members, action owners and representatives from the HSCB and NICCY, to seek their views on improvements and future priorities for the SWAP. Focus groups were also held with members of the NICCY and VOYPIC Youth Panel, who responded positively to the Action Plan and provided valuable feedback and recommendations on areas for improvement.
14. The review also involved taking account of feedback from NICCY's two previous monitoring reports on the SWAP, particularly around the need to incorporate additional actions relating the thematic area of 'Children with additional need'.

15. As a result, a number of improvements have been made to the SWAP, including merging or removing actions to avoid duplication, the inclusion of additional actions to reflect new priorities emerging from the COVID-19 response, and revising the wording of other actions to ensure these were more specific and measurable. In addition, deadlines for completion of some actions have also been extended, while the delivery mechanism for other actions has been updated, with many now being progressed as part of the implementation of the new Mental Health Strategy.

16. Among the notable changes is an additional action to develop a service to provide support and care for young people with co-occurring drug and/or alcohol and mental health problems. The need for this joined up service was highlighted during the consultation process for both the Mental Health and Substance Use Strategies and its establishment will ensure that those with mental health and addiction issues will get the best care and treatment available.

17. A summary of the key changes to the SWAP is noted in the table below

New actions	6
Merged actions	7
Deleted actions	2
Actions unchanged	13
SMARTER actions	22
Split actions	2

SWAP - Main Areas of Progress

18. A total of sixteen actions have been recorded as completed on the updated SWAP, while notable and significant progress has been made against many of the other actions throughout this reporting period. The current position on each of the forty four actions is summarised in the Still Waiting Action Plan and a summary of the main areas of progress is set out below.

Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework (Actions 7.1 - 7.3)

19. The Minister for Education and the Minister for Health jointly launched the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework in February 2021. The Framework comprises a range of initiatives aimed at delivering better mental health outcomes for children and young people, and will be especially important at this time given the impact of the pandemic.
20. Some key programmes have already commenced under the Framework, such as the HSC Trusts' Text-a-Nurse service and the Education Authority's Youth Service REACH (Resilience Education Assisting Change to Happen) programme. Other projects are currently at an advanced stage of planning, including the introduction of new CAMHS Emotional Wellbeing Teams in Schools.
21. The CAMHS Emotional Wellbeing Teams in Schools (EWTS) aims to promote emotional wellbeing of children, and provide intervention at the earliest opportunity, thus potentially reducing the number of young people that may require access to specialist mental health interventions. £1.7m (£1.5m from the Department of Health and £200k from Department of Education) annually has been agreed for the next 3 years to implement this new service. It is anticipated that the new EWTS service will commence delivery at the beginning of the 2022/23 academic year (September 2022).
22. The Framework can be accessed at [Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework \(final version\).PDF \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

CAMHS Data Set (Action 1.5)

23. A key recommendation from NICCY's Still Waiting Report was the implementation of a CAMHS dataset across each Health and Social Care Trust to assist with monitoring implementation of services, including waiting times.

24. Significant progress has been achieved in this area and as a result, a new CAMHS dataset was fully implemented from 1 April 2021. This dataset has been designed primarily as a management information tool to gather regional information on service delivery. As a result, the Health and Social Care Board is in a better position to identify and compare trends and demands within Trust areas, which will assist with timely implementation of mitigating measures to address any emerging issues.
25. Going forward, work will be progressed to integrate the new CAMHS dataset into the new Mental Health Strategy Outcomes Framework, currently under development, and the roll out of the new Encompass system.

Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey (Action 1.7)

26. The Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey, which was completed in 2020, surveyed more than 3,000 young people aged between two and nineteen, as well as over 2,800 parents and care givers. The survey findings can be accessed here [Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey 2020 - HSCB \(hscni.net\)](https://hscni.net/youth-wellbeing-prevalence-survey-2020)
27. During 2021, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) commissioned an in-depth analysis of the survey findings to explore some of the wider, complex and emerging issues relevant to the mental health of children and young people in Northern Ireland. A project board, chaired by the HSCB, was established to oversee this work and to agree protocols for utilising the data.
28. Significant work has been completed in this area throughout the year. As a result, the following six additional reports have been developed using the data mined from the prevalence study:
 1. General mental health disorders in young people.
 2. Mood and anxiety disorders.
 3. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and trauma.
 4. Parental mental health.
 5. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

6. Eating disorders.

29. It is anticipated that the HSCB will publish these reports in February 2022. The findings of each report will help to shape future service delivery of mental health services for our young people.

Crisis Services (Action 4.10)

30. The SWAP includes an action to ‘Create a regional crisis service for children and young people’. To assist in progressing this work, a new Regional Crisis Service policy was developed and released on 24 August 2021. Based on recommendations from a review of current provision, this new service will seek to provide a regional approach to mental health crisis, where people get care and treatment when they need it, where they need it.
31. The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency are leading on the implementation of the new crisis service, with Health and Social Care Trusts responsible for the implementation and delivery of regionally consistent mental health crisis services. An implementation plan for the new service was published by the Department in December 2021. <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-annexa-hscb-mh-crisis-service-implement-plan.PDF>

Beechcroft Inpatient Unit (Action 4.5)

32. The demand for inpatient services at Beechcroft has remained high over the past 12 months. This has largely been due to an increase in young people presenting with higher levels of acuity in relation to eating disorders. During 2021/22, the Department provided an additional £500k to the Health and Social Care Board to assist with alleviating the pressures arising from this demand. The funding is being used to increase specialist staff across all Trusts so that support is available to young people at the earliest opportunity.
33. In addition, a key priority within the SWAP was to further enhance intensive care within Beechcroft. From 1 February 2021, the Psychiatric Intensive Care (PICU)

provision within the unit, increased capacity from two to four beds. These beds will be used to provide essential psychiatric care for children and young people presenting with an acute mental health illness. Work is also currently underway to consider further enhancements to intensive care support for children and young people in Beechcroft Unit.

34. The Belfast Trust has recently commenced a pilot offering an intensive day treatment programme for children with mild to moderate presentations of eating disorder or eating difficulties. This pilot provides an intensive programme as an alternative to inpatient treatment, via provision of a step-up service from standard outpatient treatment. In addition, the new service also offers step-down from inpatient services, potentially reducing the length of stay in hospital. It is hoped that the introduction of this new provision will assist with alleviating bed pressures within Beechcroft. A post project evaluation will be completed following the pilot to analyse effectiveness.

Reviews

35. A number of reviews of key services were commissioned as part of the implementation of the Mental Health Action Plan, launched by the Health Minister in May 2020. A number of these reviews were completed during the reporting period. From a young person's perspective, most relevant reviews included:
 - Restraint and Seclusion;
 - Transitions from CAMHS to Adult Mental Health services;
 - Crisis Services;
 - Eating Disorder Services;
 - Personality Disorder Services;
 - Psychiatric Low Secure Services; and
 - Mental Health Rehabilitation Services.
36. Action 5.1 of SWAP is to develop proposals for transitions between CAMHS and Adult mental health services. The out workings of each of these reviews is helping to inform future policy direction and service developments in children and young peoples' mental health services, as well as implementation of associated actions set out in the SWAP.

37. Further details on each review are contained in **Annex A**.

Conclusion

38. Despite the challenging context, significant and notable progress has been made against key actions contained within the SWAP. Simultaneously, work has also been completed to review the SWAP to ensure the plan is robust and actions are appropriately prioritised to make the maximum impact on the most important areas of our children and young people's mental health services.
39. Over the next twelve months, the IDG would anticipate making further progress on a number of priority actions, including full implementation of the Managed Care Network and the Emotional Wellbeing Teams in schools. In addition, we will scope options for sharing the data captured by the CAMHS dataset in the public domain, recognising the need for full transparency.
40. We will also utilise the findings from the Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey sub reports to help shape and inform future service delivery. Given the increase in demand for mental health services over the course of the pandemic, and recognising that the data captured pre-dates the pandemic, we will also consider the frequency and need for commissioning of further prevalence surveys to take account of changing demands and priorities.
41. Implementation of the SWAP will continue to be informed and influenced by engagement with children and young people. This work will build on the earlier engagement with the NICCY and VOPIC youth panels and will focus on monitoring implementation of the action plan, ensuring the actions are appropriately prioritised. To assist with this work, we will progress with the development of a children and young people's version of the SWAP.
42. In parallel, we will also engage with young people and colleagues within NICCY to begin the process of designing an outcomes framework for the SWAP. This work will involve developing key performance indicators and agreeing outcomes that will support an evaluation of the impact of the SWAP, which is due to be carried out in 2023.

Summary of Service Reviews

Link to MH action plan	Review Title	Key Points
6.5	Review of Restraint and Seclusion	<p>The project objective was to review the current use of restrictive interventions, restraint and seclusion in health and social care settings and any local governance arrangements and to produce a regional policy document governing the use of seclusion, restraint and restrictive interventions and a supporting regional operational procedure for the use of seclusion.</p> <p>A 'Use of Restraint, Seclusion and Restrictive Interventions Policy' and 'Regional Guidance Document on the Use of Seclusion' were subsequently developed and subject to public consultation which closed on 3 October.</p> <p>A total of 26 consultation responses were received. 92% of respondents indicated that they agreed with the draft Regional Policy.</p> <p>The consultation did identify some areas where further work is required. The Department is currently working to secure resource to progress this work, update the Policy and Guidance Document and to develop an associated training package for staff.</p>
7.1	Improve transitions	<p>A working group was established to: conduct a time-bound review of existing arrangements for transitions; consider a number of defined options for a future model and approach; make recommendations as to a future model; and outline key steps required to implement any preferred option.</p> <p>The working group submitted its final report to the Department in April 2021.</p>
8.2	Review Crisis Service	<p>An externally-led working group was established to review and make recommendations for mental health crisis service provision in Northern Ireland. The intention was to reduce the number of people attending Emergency Departments in a mental health crisis and to provide an improved mental health crisis response.</p> <p>The review team provided its report which makes 15 recommendations for the further development of mental health crisis services in Northern Ireland. It led to the development of a new Policy Paper entitled 'A Regional Mental Health Crisis Service for NI Policy Paper for Implementation' which was published in August 2021.</p> <p>The HSCB and PHA are leading on the implementation of the new Mental Health Crisis Service and have developed an Implementation Plan for the actions in the policy. This Plan was published on the DoH website on 22 December 2021.</p>

9.2	Eating Disorder Services	<p>Options for improving eating disorder service provision across Northern Ireland have been examined by HSCB through the Regional Eating Disorders Network Group (REDNG).</p> <p>The REDNG paper identified that the provision of specialist eating disorder services in Northern Ireland should centre on optimising community based services and, in addition, consider optimising the ability of local mental health/acute medical wards and paediatric in-patient facilities to treat eating disorders.</p> <p>The paper has been accepted as the future model for eating disorder services in Northern Ireland. A more detailed consideration of costs and best value of service provision has been commissioned and is being progressed through a business case process.</p>
9.2	Personality Disorder Services	<p>An external review was commissioned by the Department and the final report was received in April 2021.</p> <p>The review has been accepted as the future model for personality disorder services in Northern Ireland. The previous personality disorder strategy from 2010 has been formally closed, and the new policy direction forms an action in the new Mental Health Strategy. A more detailed consideration of costs and best value of service provision has been commissioned and is being progressed through a business case process.</p>
9.3	Psychiatric Low Secure Services	<p>Proposals for psychiatric low secure provisions in Northern Ireland was submitted to the Department in February 2021.</p> <p>The proposal has been accepted as the future model for psychiatric low secure services in Northern Ireland. The position is the published Mental Health Strategy 2021– 31. Options and associated costs are currently subject to more detailed consideration through a formal business case process.</p>
9.3	Mental Health Rehabilitation Services	<p>A review of the future commissioning needs of regional rehabilitation services was carried out and a high-level briefing paper was developed. The paper proposes a phased approach to the development of a ‘fit for purpose’ infrastructure to include a mix of hospital and community provision.</p> <p>The proposals has been accepted as the future model for mental health rehabilitation services in Northern Ireland. The position is reflected in the published Mental Health Strategy 2021–31. Options and associated costs are currently subject to more detailed consideration through a formal business case process.</p>