



Belfast Health and  
Social Care Trust

caring supporting improving together

Paper Ref. Num. P153-  
2025 B

*Note:- To be completed  
by HQ meeting organiser*

## Belfast Health & Social Care Trust Meeting Template Sheet

### Purpose of paper

For Approval

If other purpose please specify

Not Applicable

Meeting TB Public

If other meeting please specify

Please enter text here

Presenter

Alastair Campbell

Not Applicable

Date of meeting

7<sup>th</sup> September 2025

### Title of paper (Maximum of 300 characters)

Annual Rural Needs Report 24-25

### Background (Maximum of 1500 characters)

The annual rural needs report shows how the Trust upholds its duties in relation to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 when developing strategies and policies and designing and delivering public services. The Trust recognises that people in rural areas can face particular challenges - the combination of geographical isolation, poor public infrastructure and low population density often impact on the ability of people in rural areas to access services, meaning that service delivery in rural areas often has to be different to that in urban areas. We are committed to ensuring where our services are delivered to people in rural areas that due regard is taken of the potential challenges that can exist. This legislation is potentially more relevant in other Trusts serving more rural populations. Given our geographical profile, Belfast Trust is particularly mindful of our rural needs responsibilities when linked to the delivery of regional services.

Date considered at Exec Team (If Applicable)

28<sup>th</sup> July 2025

### Options for consideration (Maximum of 1500 characters)

Please enter text here

### Recommendations (Maximum of 1500 Characters)

Trust Board are asked to consider the content of the annual rural needs report for onward submission to DAERA



<b>Proposed Onward Consideration</b>	Remove from Agenda
<b>If other</b>	

**Note:-**

***Any papers accompanying this template should not exceed 10 pages in length.***

***Please ensure when submitting papers that***

- (1) Orientation of paper is set so that the content of the paper can be read***
- (2) Embedded documents should be [provided a separate attachments***
- (3) Append any papers to this coversheet starting on the next page***

**Information to be compiled by Public Authorities under Section 3(1)(a) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.**

**Name of Public Authority:**

**Reporting Period:** April 20  to March 20

Belfast Trust is committed to promoting and upholding its duties in relation to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 and will have ‘due regard’ to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services.

The Trust acknowledges that the duty of ‘due regard’ means that it will consciously consider the social and economic needs of persons in rural areas when a policy, strategy, plan, or service design and delivery is under consideration. In addition, the Trust acknowledges the need to compile information on the exercise of this duty. The duty to rural proof means that we have a duty to identify the potential impact that a policy or strategy would have on a rural area, to make a proper assessment of those impacts if they are deemed to be significant and, where appropriate, to make adjustments to the policy or strategy to take account of rural circumstances.

Our [Rural Proofing Toolkit](#), launched in October 2022, was designed to help us address the needs of people in rural areas when designing and delivering our services. In addition, Belfast Trust is aware of and refers to DAERA’s revised guidance: [Guide to the Rural Needs Act NI](#)

We recognise that people in rural areas can face particular challenges - the combination of geographical isolation, poor public infrastructure and low population density often impact on the ability of people in rural areas to access services, meaning that service delivery in rural areas often has to be different to that in urban areas. We are committed to ensuring where our services are delivered to people in rural areas that due regard is taken of the potential challenges that can exist. Given our geographical profile, Belfast Trust is particularly mindful of our rural needs responsibilities when linked to the delivery of regional services.

## 1. Trust Governance and Assurance Framework : Commitment to the ‘due regard’ duty

Robust governance and accountability structures have been established within the Trust to ensure that our responsibilities relating to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 are met. To comply with our statutory duties and to mainstream our commitment to the fulfilment of these duties Belfast Trust has proactively carried out the following activities:

- The Trust’s Involvement Steering Group, which has oversight of our Section 75 Equality work and Rural obligations is part of the Trust Integrated Governance and Assurance Framework. The Framework provides strategic leadership, holds to account, unblocks and assists with problem solving, seeks assurance, provides challenge and escalates risks to appropriate Trust Board Committees.
- It is the Trust’s responsibility to record, co-ordinate and monitor its rural needs assessment activity and for satisfying itself that it is meeting its ‘due consideration’ obligations. These duties are clearly outlined in the regional HSC publication [Guidance for Board Members 2020](#) developed by HSC Trusts and which has been proactively disseminated to the Belfast Trust Executive Team and Trust Board members.
- The Director of Planning, Performance and Informatics (PPI) is responsible for the central co-ordination of the Annual Rural Needs Monitoring Report on behalf of the Trust.
- The Trust’s Planning and Equality Team within PPI provides support to colleagues across the Trust in relation to complying with and understanding the statutory obligations. A Senior Planning and Equality Manager within the team is the rural needs co-ordinator for Belfast Trust. Rural champions have also been trained to facilitate local decision making and ensure compliance with legislative requirements in regard to rural needs assessments.

- To ensure the effective mainstreaming and monitoring of the “due regard” duty the Trust’s equality screening template now has a new section relating to rural impact assessments. This provides an aide memoir to staff when undertaking an equality screening when drafting a policy, redesigning/modernising a service or planning to introduce a new service or way of working.

**Figure 1: Rural Needs Assessment Aide Memoire within the Equality Screening Template**

**Section 11: Statutory Rural Impact Assessment Duties**

The Trust is legally obliged to take **due regard of the impact** of any policy, proposal or decision on the social and economic needs of people who live in a rural community. This is particularly so when the policy/proposal/decision [impacts](#) service users/carers/patients across NI (eg regional service/policy).

Please **tick the box** to indicate that you have paid ‘**due regard**’ to the social and economic needs of the rural community when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans *and* when designing and delivering [public](#) services and that **a rural impact assessment is not required**.

OR


Please complete a [Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template](#) rural impact assessment if there is impact on the social and economic needs of people who live in a rural community.

Please go to [the Rural Impact Assessments Toolkit for HSC NI](#) to find out how to undertake a rural impact assessment.

Contact [Estella.Dorrian@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:Estella.Dorrian@belfasttrust.hscni.net) for further advice.

- Belfast Trust have designed a mandatory ‘Policy Drafting’ template to ensure consistency across the Trust in terms of the key elements of a policy. The template includes a section relating to the legislative rural duties. This reminds staff of the need to have ‘due regard’ of the social and economic needs of persons in rural areas when drafting a policy/proposal/plan or strategy. By doing so, an explicit aide memoir is again provided to staff to ensure that they consciously consider the social /economic needs of persons in rural areas when drafting a policy/proposal or strategy.

**Figure 2: Policy Drafting template with explicit reference to rural needs duties in Section 12**

		Reference No: <input type="text"/>	
<b>Title:</b>	Please ensure the title reflects the content of the policy and does not commence with words such as Policy, Procedure, Guideline, Management of etc. Title must be kept to a limit of 15 words.		
<b>Policy Author(s)</b>	List name and titles of lead and additional Policy Author(s) or group responsible for drafting policy Include telephone number and email address		
<b>Responsible Director:</b>	Insert name of Director, (Director of) Directorate		
<b>Policy Type:</b> (tick as appropriate)	*Directorate-specific <input type="checkbox"/>	Clinical Trustwide <input type="checkbox"/>	Non-clinical Trustwide <input type="checkbox"/>
If policy type is confirmed as 'Directorate-specific' please list the name and date of the local Committee/Group that policy was approved			
<b>Approval process:</b>	Specialist Committee Name (if applicable) Standards and Guidelines Committee <i>(Directorate-specific and Clinical Trustwide policies only)</i> Trust Policy Committee <i>(Non-clinical Trustwide policies only)</i> Executive Team Meeting	<b>Approval date:</b>	Insert date each Committee approved/ noted
<b>Operational Date:</b>	To be completed by S&G Department	<b>Review Date:</b>	To be completed by S&G Department
<b>Version No.</b>	<b>Supersedes</b>	V( ) - Operational dates (Insert reference of policy this new/ updated policy supersedes)	
<b>Key Words:</b>	Insert key words that staff may use to find the policy		
<b>Links to other policies</b>	Insert name of policy and link (if applicable)		
<b>Version control for drafts:</b> (box to be removed prior to issue). Identifies where changes have been made to a document and ensure Policy Authors are using the most recent version. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first draft must be versioned as 0.1 with subsequent versions 0.2, 0.3 etc. When formally approved it will be issued as 1.</li> </ul>			

## 12.0 STATUTORY RURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT DUTIES

The Trust has a legal responsibility to have 'due regard' to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, and when designing and delivering public services. For more information go to [Rural Needs Duties](#)

To satisfy this 'due regard duty' Trust staff must consider the impact of any policy, proposal or decision on the social and economic needs of people who live in a rural community. For Belfast Trust, this is particularly so when the policy/proposal/decision impacts regional services.

Please tick the box to indicate that you have paid 'due regard' to the social and economic needs of the rural community when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services and that a rural impact assessment is not required.

*OR*

Please complete a [Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template](#) if there is an impact on the social and economic needs of people who live in a rural community.

Please go to the: [Rural Impact Assessments Toolkit for HSC NI](#) to find out how to undertake a rural impact assessment.

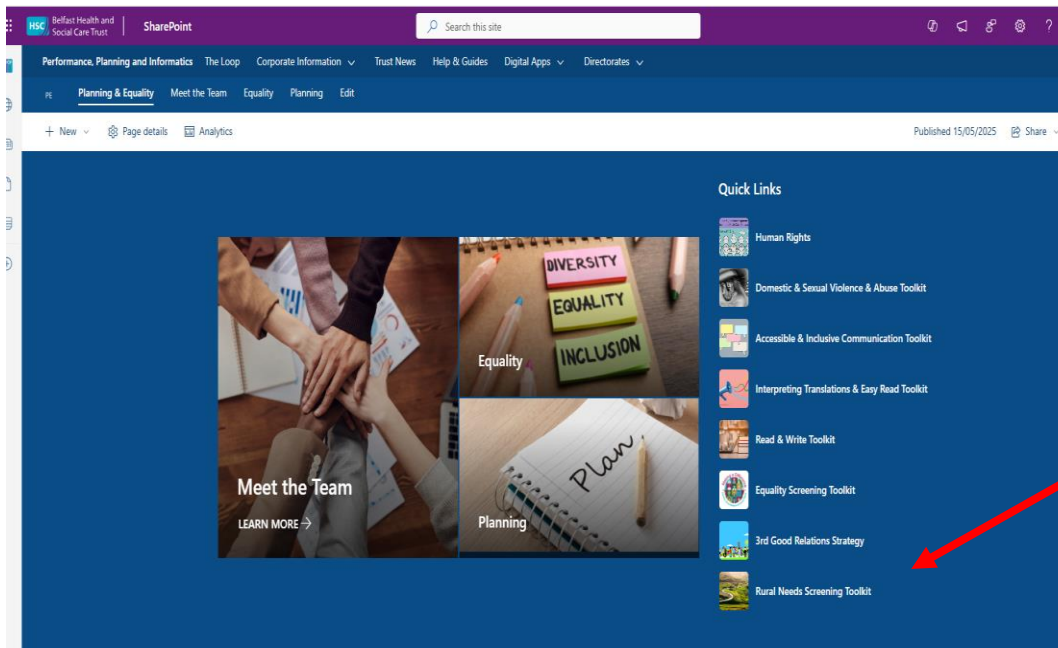
Contact [Estella.Dorrian@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:Estella.Dorrian@belfasttrust.hscni.net) for further advice

Wording within this section must not be removed.

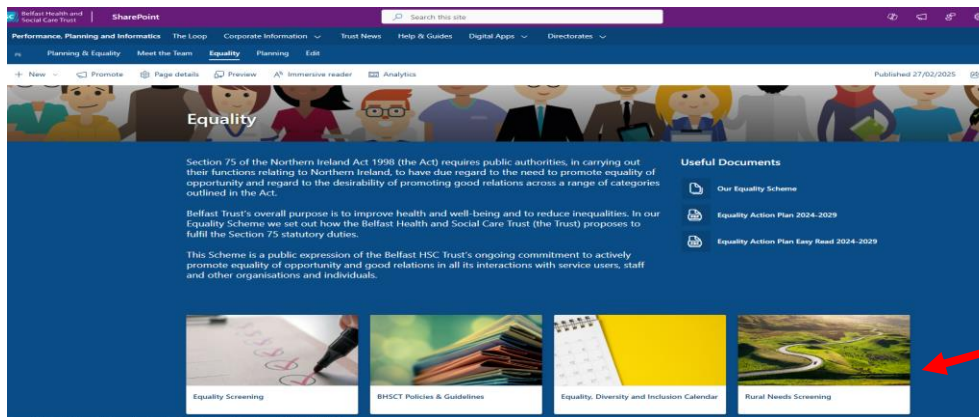
## 2. Staff Awareness

Information about the statutory 'due regard' duty in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas is provided to staff through a variety of channels and mechanisms as follows:

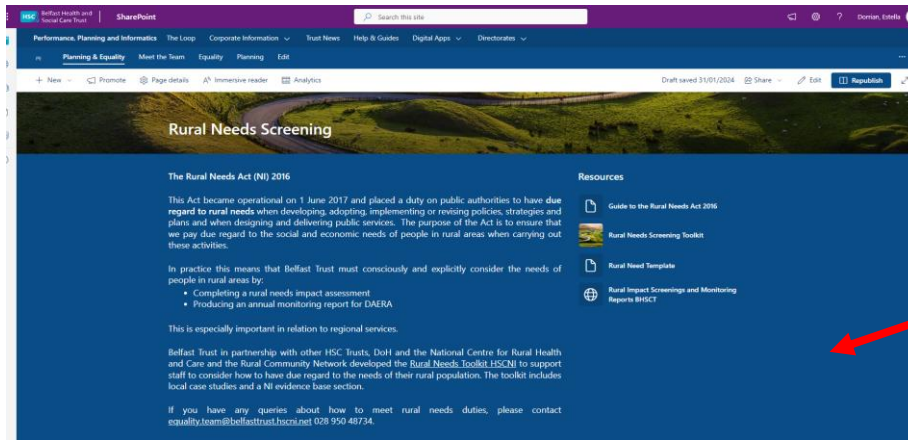
- The Planning & Equality Trust Staff Intranet site (The Loop) has a quick link to the HSC Rural Needs Toolkit. (Fig 3). In addition, dedicated online resources related to Rural Needs is contained within the Planning & Equality staff site (Fig 4 & 5).



**Figure 3:** Information about Rural Needs within the Planning & Equality Team's Section: Staff Intranet: The LOOP

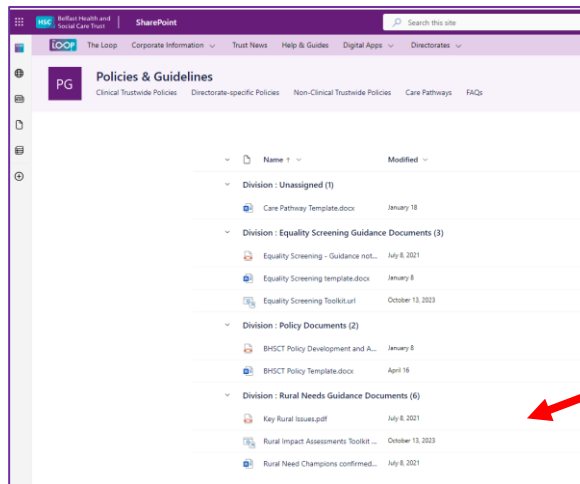


**Figure 4/5:** Information about Rural Needs within the Planning & Equality Team's pages: Staff Intranet: The LOOP



**Figure 4/5:** Information about Rural Needs within the Planning & Equality Team’s pages: Staff Intranet: The LOOP

The Trust staff intranet site ‘The Loop’ has a section dedicated to ‘Writing a Policy’. This is available to all staff. Resources are available within a distinct Rural Needs section to raise awareness of the need to undertake a rural impact assessment when writing a policy.

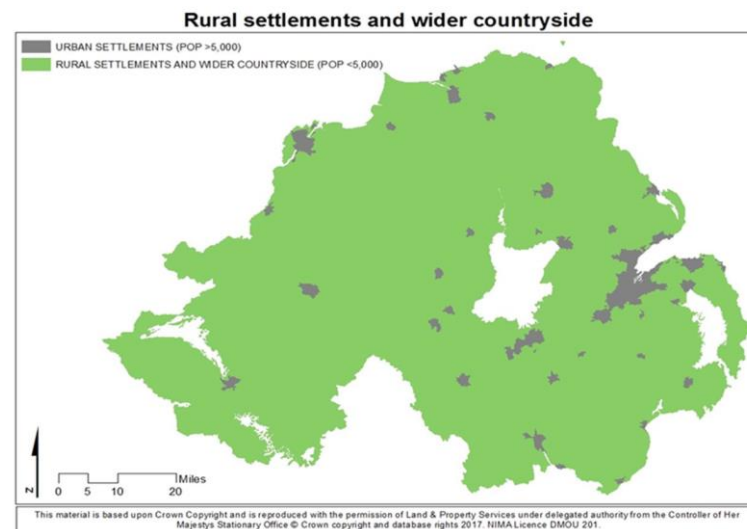


**Figure 6:** Rural Needs within the ‘Writing A Policy’ Section of the staff intranet The LOOP

### 3. 'Rural' Definition

Belfast Trust uses a working definition of 'Rural' in terms of Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service to mean those settlements with populations of less than 5,000 together with the open countryside as per DAERA guidance for public authorities.

More than a third (36%) of Northern Ireland's (NI) population lives in a rural area but given the urban population that Belfast Trust serves in terms of District General Hospital services, there will be very few instances when a rural impact assessment is appropriate or proportionate. As such, only the delivery of regional specialist services by Belfast Trust are likely to require a rural assessment.



## 4. Rural Needs Assessments

Belfast Trust is committed to promoting and upholding its duties in relation to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 and to having due regard to rural needs in the development of our policy and public service delivery decisions.

Policy/Project leads across the Trust are responsible for completing rural needs impact assessments using a regionally agreed template (Appendix A) alongside the S75 equality screening template *when appropriate* during policy development/review including during the development of business cases, strategies and reform projects. In the interests of openness and transparency, Belfast Trust provides detail of those policies which were considered as having a bearing on rural needs and therefore are subject to a full rural needs assessment together with our monitoring reports on our website at: [Rural Impact Assessments](#)

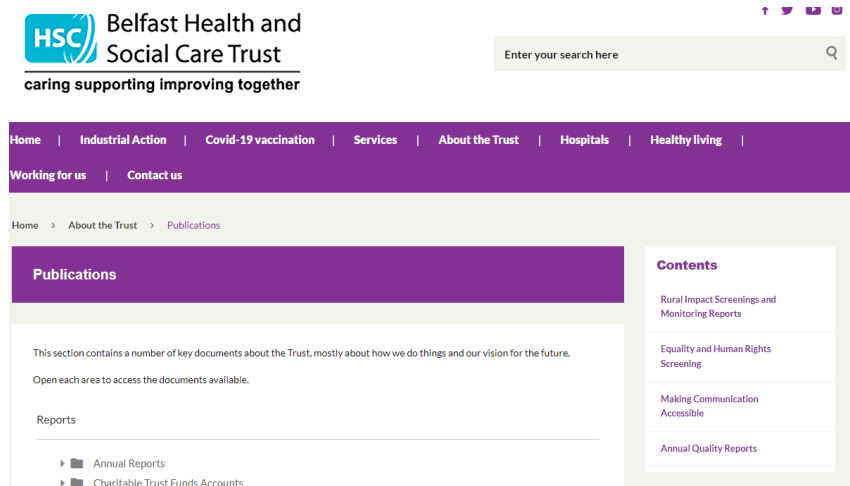


Figure 7: Belfast Trust Website: Rural Needs Pages

The Trust is mindful that the level of 'due regard' expected will depend on the circumstances and, in particular, on the relevance of rural needs to the decision or function in question. The greater the relevance and potential impact for people in rural needs, the greater the due regard required by the duty.

Belfast Trust is the largest integrated health and social care provider in the UK delivering a service to over 360,000 people each year across Belfast and Castlereagh and the region.

When considering the impact of a policy, strategy or plan on the rural community, a fundamental consideration is ‘what constitutes a rural community?’. As noted previously Belfast Trust similar to all other HSC Trusts use the default definition of “rural” as developed by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group i.e. that *“rural is classified by those settlements with populations of less than 5,000 together with the open countryside”*.

Whilst it is acknowledged that approximately 670,000 people live in rural areas in Northern Ireland (36% of the population <sup>1</sup>) for Belfast Trust the geographical area for which it provides a service to in terms of local services is largely urban. Indeed, from NISRA’s Agricultural Census for 2022 the number of farms in Belfast is noted as 92 and some of these may only be temporary addresses or correspondence addresses. However, there are small pockets of rural areas - the rural population of Belfast (2016 mid-year population estimates, NISRA) is approximately 1,484, including the small settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.

In carrying out its statutory rural duties the Trust will remain mindful of those smaller pockets of rural areas within the Trust area and notably the need to consider rural impact in delivery of our regional services. In identifying the social and economic needs of people in rural areas the Trust will consider the NISRA data on the three relevant rural settlements and when considering the delivery of regional services alongside the information presented in the DAERA Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland. This provides further details of the social and economic needs generally for those who live in rural areas across Northern Ireland primarily in terms of transport, connectivity, broadband and access to services. Our HSC [Rural Proofing Toolkit](#) also supports us to address the needs of people in rural areas when designing and delivering our services.

In preparing this monitoring return Belfast Trust staff considered policies in respect of the social and economic needs of persons in rural areas and for all there were **three** rural needs assessments were carried out in the reporting period.

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<sup>1</sup> Census 2021

In the interests of openness and transparency, the Trust has provided the following hyperlinks to our S75 equality screenings of Trust policies for the period under review:

- [Equality and Human Rights Screening - Apr to Jun 24](#)
- [Equality and Human Rights Screening - July to Sept 24](#)
- [Equality and Human Rights Screening- Oct to Dec 24](#)
- [Equality and Human Rights Screening - Jan to Mar 25](#)

94 equality screenings were undertaken in the reporting period April 24 to March 25. The majority of these were clinical and technical screenings (approx. 80%) which means they had no relevance to equality. Examples of policies screened include: [Wound Management Principles of Caring for Patients with an open wound.](#)

The Trust is assured that where a policy was drafted or screened the duty to give ‘due regard’ to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas this was undertaken given the governance and assurance framework described in section 1 above. The following table includes information on policies where a Rural Needs Impact Assessments have been completed

<b>Description of the activity undertaken by the public authority which is subject to section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016</b>	Policy Area	<b>Describe how the public authority has had due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising the policy, strategy or plan or when designing or delivering the public service</b>
BHSCT implementation of encompass system for electronic health care records.	Health	<p><b>Impact is deemed positive.</b></p> <p>Implementation of encompass is expected to reduce unnecessary appointments for assessment, review and reduce repeated interventions, reducing need for travel and associated costs.</p> <p>Encompass’ ability to collect and report on data, may make it easier to analyse health inequality data, and be useable for service development, re-design or improvements. Health inequalities between urban and rural populations will be better evidenced.</p> <p>The ‘My Care App will be available to all BHSCT service users regardless of where they live. This means that patients and service users and carers who use regional services delivered by BHSCT can access their medical records and are more informed.</p>

		<p>The My Care app will allow people to access information like medications, appointments and some test results. It is free to use, and it is optional. The Department of the Economy is leading on the delivery of Project Gigabit in Northern Ireland. This is part of the UK Governments £5 billion programme to enable hard- to reach communities to access lightning-fast gigabit capable broadband. Policy and implementation takes this into consideration.</p>
<p>Emotional Wellbeing Teams in School (EWTS) service delivered by BHSCT to children and young people in schools within both Belfast Health &amp; Social Care Trust. (BHSCT) &amp; South Eastern Health &amp; Social Care Trust (SEHSCT).</p>	Health	<p><b>Impact is deemed positive.</b>  The programme is part of the implementation of the DoE &amp; DoH’s 2021 Framework: Children and Young People’s Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education. To implement the Framework the BHSCT programme will integrate support from the voluntary &amp; community sector in local educational settings to enable effective, local early interventions. The goal is that children and young person’s problems can be prevented and where they do happen the right care/support is provided at the right time in the right place – locally</p>
<p>Implementation of the Closure of Muckamore Abbey Hospital</p>	Health	<p><b>Impact is deemed positive.</b>  An integral aspect of the implementation of the DoH decision to close Muckamore Abbey Hospital is the resettlement of existing residents to their own local area. This means that the provision of care and support to Service Users and Patients will be based around their own home Trust locality which will ensure there is greater community integration and closer links to family, carers and other established local community supports.  Each Trust’s multidisciplinary team will be able to coordinate care and take ownership of the services provided to each of service users living within their Trust area. It is anticipated that services locally owned and operated will be better able to proactively deliver and react to the changing needs of this cohort of service users across Northern Ireland. In addition, the provision of local support provides additional benefits to the families of the current cohort of patients/service users in MAH as families / carers no longer will have to travel across NI to Hospital to visit and support their loved ones.</p>