

BRIEFING NOTE

For Elected Representatives

Belfast Trust Responds to the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry Report

In response to the publication of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry Report, Chief Executive of Belfast Trust, Jennifer Welsh, said:

I would like to begin by speaking directly to those patients who lived at Muckamore Abbey Hospital and who experienced abuse, neglect, and at times, cruelty. I am truly, deeply sorry for everything that you have suffered, and for the lasting impact that such appalling behaviour will have left on you.

You did nothing wrong.

You did not deserve to be treated in this way.

You deserved safety, dignity, and compassion.

In your interactions with many staff in Muckamore Abbey Hospital, safety, dignity and compassion were in short supply. I simply cannot imagine what this was like for you.

On behalf of this Trust, and the senior team gathered here today, I, as Chief Executive, take full responsibility for the wrongs committed against you and I offer you my unreserved apology.

I hope that in time the scars left by this experience – whether they are physical, mental, or emotional, will heal, and that you will go on to live the full and equal lives that you so richly deserve, in the safe, supportive, and loving environment that you have every right to know. You are owed nothing less.

The CCTV footage which captured the behaviours of many staff while, at times, deeply shocking and distressing, has given a voice to those who had no voice. Some of this footage is harrowing, but it speaks to a truth that cannot be denied.

And therefore, while appalling to comprehend, I know I speak for the whole Trust when I say that no stone will be left unturned while we work to ensure that the conditions in Muckamore Abbey which enabled abuse to perpetuate, can never again exist in any other health care setting.

And so, to those families and carers whose child or sibling experienced abuse, neglect, or cruelty, and to those who fear that this has happened to their loved one, I offer you a full and heartfelt apology for the profound impact this has had on you, on your loved one, and on your wider family.

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I am truly sorry for the distress, anger, and anxiety that this Trust has caused you, and continues to cause some of you.

The mark of a civilised society is how we treat the most vulnerable members of that society. I am sorry to say that your loved ones were treated by many staff in the most uncivilised way, by people who were there to care, who not only should have known better, but more importantly, should have behaved better.

I am all too aware that those staff who abused or neglected your loved ones, or who walked past and who were either not curious enough to act, or were unwilling to act, were held in positions of trust.

They were known to you. They were more than professional caregivers. For many of you, they were trusted allies; friends; and loyal advocates. Dare I even suggest it, for some of you they were an extended family for you and your loved one.

Your loved one was in our care, and you rightly expected that they would be safe and looked after with expertise, compassion, and professionalism. Muckamore Abbey Hospital was their home, and you believed that they were safe. You and your loved ones have been unequivocally let down and for that, on behalf of Belfast Trust, I sincerely and whole-heartedly apologise.

I am speaking to families and carers today, not just as a Chief Executive, but as a parent myself. To have everything that you have ever believed to be true about your loved one's care and experiences in their place of safety, to have that undermined, will have caused a lasting and distressing impact on you.

This will be especially difficult for those whose child or sibling was impacted, and who has since died in the intervening years.

I know that many of you are angry, and some of you have even told us that you feel broken, and I understand that all of you have lost trust in us. I accept that we have damaged relationships with many of you that will last a lifetime, and beyond.

Lifelong care is the very essence of caring for someone with a learning disability, and I accept that we, as an organisation, must try to rebuild and somehow reset those vitally important relationships.

I know that we are at the beginning of a journey. Please let me assure you that under my leadership, and that of our Chair, and working collaboratively with our Board, this is something that we are determined to rebuild.

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To read today how this Inquiry has brought to the surface some new truths about Muckamore Abbey Hospital and how it has re-opened many known problems, must be profoundly difficult for families and carers.

I know that many parents and siblings are perhaps living with regrets, with guilt, and with the anxiety of the 'not knowing'. I would like to take full responsibility for this on behalf of Belfast Trust, and I reiterate my apology to all patients and their families affected by abuse at Muckamore Abbey Hospital, at whatever point in time that occurred.

We know that Muckamore as an institution has existed for more than 70 years and clearly issues of concern have been present for many years.

Today, Belfast Trust is facing up to all those failings on behalf of a health and social care system which recognises that people with learning disabilities who lived in hospital institutions have been failed for decades.

Previous reviews - long before this Inquiry - have concluded that there was a lack of curiosity at the highest level about Muckamore and the people who lived there. Experts and specialists in the delivery of care for adults with learning disabilities have consistently confirmed over the years that no one with a learning disability should call a hospital their home.

But it took the persistence of a parent, Mr Brown, to relentlessly challenge the system and to push hard for his son which uncovered so many failings at Muckamore and which has led us to where we are today. I must recognise and applaud Mr Brown's perseverance, dedication, and unrelenting challenge on behalf of his son.

I know he is not alone in this, and many families have been very vocal in their pursuit of justice for their loved ones. And many, too, have preferred to push hard for similar outcomes in a different way.

I acknowledge all of you today.

I also want to acknowledge today the staff who worked in Muckamore over the years and who wanted nothing but the best for their patients. It is a matter of deep regret that their dedication, compassion, and professionalism has been tarnished by the indefensible actions of others.

Many of those staff dedicated entire careers to caring for patients in Muckamore and will not recognise the Muckamore that has been described today in this Report. It is deeply sad that their professionalism and kindness has been eclipsed and I apologise to them for the long shadow this will cast over their reputations.

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I would also like to recognise those staff in more recent years – both past and present members of staff – who have done their best to support families through the internal investigations, resettlements, and over the life of the Inquiry. I know that many families today think highly of them.

Today's Inquiry Report makes for very difficult reading. The failings are widespread and go to the core of operational, strategic, and policy failings. The Report also notes concerns about the Trust's approach to the Inquiry itself, which we take very seriously and will reflect upon. The Report goes on to describe serious deficiencies in Belfast Trust's management of the Hospital, as well as long-term health and social care failings.

Some of the failings include poor leadership, ineffective governance, and inadequate escalation of concerns. There was no ambition for the patients, poor communication with families, and a lethargy around care and support for the health and wellbeing of both patients and staff.

We did not always involve patients and families in decisions about care, we were often slow to address concerns that were raised, and our silence and lack of articulation around the progression of investigations caused suffering.

All of these failings and many more, contributed to an environment which enabled the serious maltreatment of vulnerable people to go unnoticed for so long. This is a matter of profound regret and for that I am deeply sorry.

Today, Muckamore Abbey is no longer a functioning hospital.

No one in Northern Ireland will ever again call a hospital their forever home, and that is a tremendously positive and powerful development.

Belfast Trust has had first sight of the Report for just a few hours. We will now take the time to read it thoroughly, to digest, and reflect.

We will work with Minister Nesbitt, Department of Health colleagues, our commissioners, and other Health and Social Care Trusts to establish what the next steps will be. To do this properly, will take time.

But my first priority and that of Trust Board and the senior team gathered here today, is to rebuild those vitally important relationships with our patients, their families, and carers.

In so doing, we have the opportunity to ensure that never again can the conditions that existed in Muckamore Abbey Hospital perpetuate anywhere else in health and social care.

Thank you.

The Muckamore Inquiry Report can be viewed here: [Muckamore Inquiry Report June 2026](#)

The Easy Read of the Executive Summary can be viewed here: [Easy Read Version of Executive Summary](#).