

23 March 2026

Trust-Wide Discharge Safety and oversight 2025

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I request the following information for the calendar year 2025. Please provide data for the Belfast HSC Trust as a whole, with a breakdown by individual hospital site (RVH, City, Mater, Musgrave, and RBHSC) where available:

Section A: Discharge Definition & Physical Presence

- 1. Point of Discharge: What is the Trust's formal definition of the "Point of Discharge"? Is a patient legally discharged upon the signing of the summary, or only once they have physically vacated the ward?**

HSC Data Standards document 'Delayed Transfers of Care Definitions' indicates that "A patient is regarded as discharged when they have left the hospital site." Please refer to email hscdatastandards@hscni.net for further information.

- 2. On-Site Discharge: Does Trust policy permit "administrative discharge" (marking a bed as vacant on systems) while a patient is still physically present on the ward or hospital grounds?**

Discharge is undertaken in line with Belfast Trust policy (attached). Information is recorded on the electronic patient record system, Epic.

Please refer to: 36337 - Discharge and transfer of care policy for general acute hospital sites and intermediate care settings_attachment 1.pdf

- 3. Timeframes: What is the maximum permitted time-lag between a clinician signing a discharge order and the patient physically leaving the facility?**

Under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Belfast Trust can confirm that it does not hold the information you have requested.

Monitoring and Regulation

- Internal Monitoring: How does the Trust internally monitor and audit compliance with discharge safety protocols (e.g., via Datix, ward-based audits, or Key Performance Indicators)? Please provide the titles of any 2025 internal audit reports regarding discharge errors.**

Information relevant to discharge safety protocols may be captured on the Trust electronic information management system, which is called Datix, via incident and complaints reporting, where the incident or complaint concerns matters relevant to patient discharge.

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In relation to **incident** reporting:

If an event occurs that meets the Adverse Incident definition (as outlined below) this is recorded on Datix and managed in line with the Adverse Incident Policy.

Adverse Incident definition: *“Any event or circumstances that could have or did lead to harm, loss or damage to people, property, environment or*

In relation to **complaints** reporting:

Any service user of the Trust or their representative may make a complaint about any aspect of treatment and care that they have received. Such complaints are logged, investigated and answered by the service about which the complaint has been made. The Trust Complaints Procedure operates in line with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Model Complaints Handling Procedure. A copy of this document can be downloaded from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman website at <https://www.nipso.org.uk/>

All complaints received by the Trust are recorded on Datix. This system ensures appropriate records exist of each complaint received.

Datix entries created to record complaints include categories of complaint under a regionally prescribed set of subjects. These subjects currently include “Delayed/Planned Discharge. It may be, therefore, from time to time, that a complaint will be received, investigated and answered by the Trust on this subject.

In relation to **internal audit reports**:

There were no internal audit reports regarding discharge errors in 2025.

In 2024/25 there was an Internal Audit, which included the discharge process, called ‘Patient Flow Processes (Mental Health Patient Services Continuity of Care in the Community)’.

- **External Regulation: Which external bodies (e.g., RQIA, Department of Health) regulate the Trust’s discharge and referral accuracy?**

No information recorded.

In line with our duty to advise and assist under Section 16 of the FOI Act, we can advise that matters relating to regional policy, standards, and oversight of discharge and referral processes are led by the Department of Health (DoH).

You may therefore wish to direct this part of your request to the Department of Health at: foi@health-ni.gov.uk

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- **Accountability: Have any internal or external financial penalties or "fines" been issued in 2025 specifically regarding unsafe discharges or misdirected referrals? If so, please state the total amount.**

Under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Belfast Trust can confirm that it does not hold the information you have requested.