Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Belfast HSC Trust Annual Operational Plan 2026/27

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Patients and Service Users	People	Population and Partners	Performance	Potential

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Context

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust recently engaged on and developed a five-year corporate plan to outline our strategic direction and the roadmap for the way forward as to where we as an organisation want to be by 2031. This has been greatly informed by regional strategic drivers such as the Programme for Government and the Ministerial priorities, and the Reset Plan. Our new corporate plan has also taken account of the strengths and challenges facing the Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland and more specifically, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust as the largest Trust, providing health and social care to the population of Belfast and delivering more than 90% of the regional specialist services to the population of Northern Ireland.

Beginning the financial year of 2026/27, the Health and Social Care system faced a deficit of approximately £800 million; with an ageing population, demand for our services far outstrips our capacity, needs are more complex, waiting times for HSC services continue to be significant and much longer than we would want. Too much of our care is delivered in hospital or at the point of crisis – there is a need to ensure better cohesion between our services, rather than in silos.

As noted in the Reset Plan, stabilisation and reform are essential to facilitate delivery of a system that is financially sustainable, safe and high quality, fit for the future, more efficient and productive with a strong focus on prevention and community care. In addition to overall systemwide reform, the Trust is required to demonstrate how we will contribute to ensuring we deliver best value within our available resources.

Whilst it has been a challenging period for the Trust, there have been tangible improvements in terms of governance and the development of a revised Board Assurance Framework, of culture and the forthcoming launch of the new People and Culture strategy, of performance and the new Performance Management Framework and in terms of our five-year corporate plan and adoption of the five Ps: Patients and Service Users, People, Population and Partners, Performance and Potential as our key priorities.

This operational one-year plan shows how we will translate our strategic direction into tangible measures and actions for the year ahead. Delivery against these actions and those within the local management plans at Divisional and Directorate level and staff development reviews at individual level will contribute to the delivery of our five key priorities and biannual reporting will facilitate greater performance monitoring and accountability.

This plan reflects that our patients and service users are at the heart of everything we do. We are dedicated to delivering compassionate, person-centred care, informed by feedback and continuous reflection and learning. We are also sincerely appreciative of the dedication, skills, and compassion shown by our staff every day.

Patients and Service Users	People	Population and Partners	Performance	Potential

Our Priorities – the Five P's

The **"5 Ps"** form the focus of our corporate plan, help us review our annual corporate objectives and measure our progress. They will be carried into local management plans and individual personal development plans, so that every member of our teams understand how they contribute to the overall ambition and aims of the Trust.

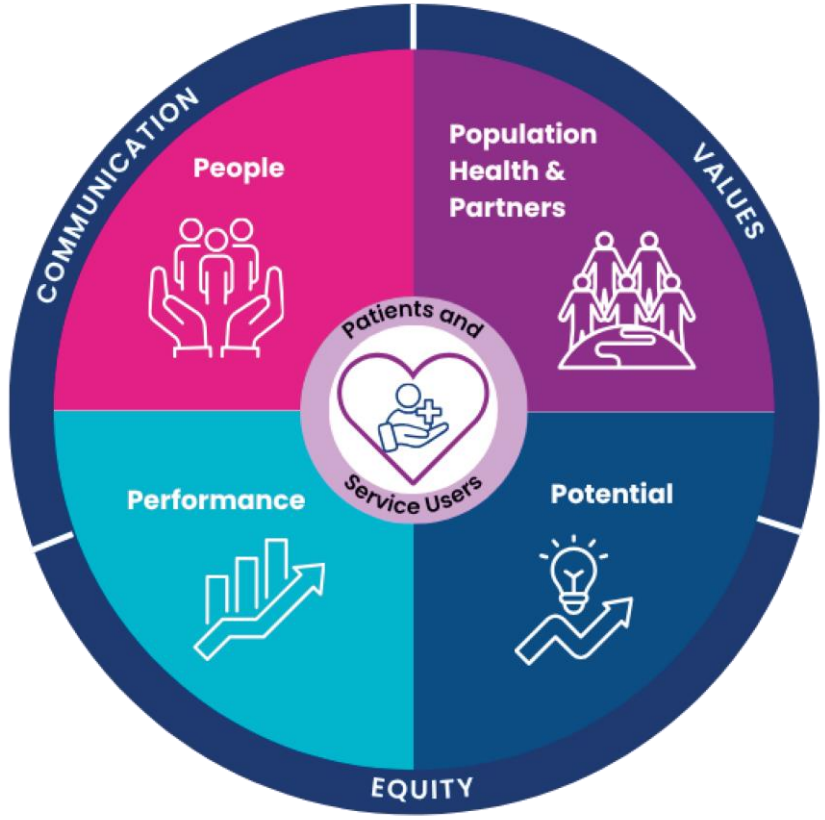
PATIENT AND SERVICE USER At the centre of all that we do. We aim to be widely recognised for delivering safe, person-centred, high-quality, and compassionate care leading to excellent experience and best outcomes.

PEOPLE: Being kind, professional and respectful. We aim to create an inclusive and people centered experience at work to help our workforce flourish

POPULATION HEALTH & PARTNERS: Being collaborative and inclusive. We aim to improve the lives of our community, working together with all our partners.

PERFORMANCE: Being effective and efficient .We aim to consistently deliver efficient, effective and equitable patient care.

POTENTIAL: Being curious and embracing innovation. We aim to encourage and support our staff to bring bold ideas with continuous creativity.



Patients and Service Users	People	Population and Partners	Performance	Potential

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
caring supporting improving together

Our Plan on a Page

Each of our Strategic priorities will have clarified Aims, Actions and Measurement.

These will be closely monitored to review our performance against where we expect to be and refreshed accordingly.

	AIM	ACTIONS	MEASURES
	Being safe, caring, and open	Patients & service users are at the core of all we do. Improving pathways, communication & learning from feedback. Creation of alternative ED pathways.	• Reduced waiting times • Positive feedback & compliments • Improved patient experience • Improved safety measures
	Being kind, professional and respectful	Prioritisation & promotion of staff health & wellbeing. Continued promotion of HSC values & behaviours. Recognition & celebration of staff achievements.	• Improved capacity & attendance • Increased civility, respect & safety culture • Increased staff engagement
	Being collaborative and inclusive professional and respectful	Implementation of the Neighbourhood care model & expand delivery of community services. Engaging communities through education & focusing on prevention strategies.	• Reduced admissions and ED attendances • Healthier population indicators • Positive service user and carer feedback
	Being effective and efficient	Develop benchmarking against regional & national standards. Providing training for leaders on performance & improvement. Sharing data & learning across teams.	• Regular performance reports & positive trends • Feedback from staff & service users • Improved benchmarking
	Being curious and embracing innovation	Strengthen partnerships with strategic collaborators to make the most of resources. Drive digital transformation & innovation, using data to improve care.	• Improved patient & service user outcomes • Strong partnership with universities, GPs, and Voluntary & Community sector • Visible impact of innovation • Compliance with statutory requirements including financial breakeven

Reflecting- some of our achievements during 2025/2026

Palliative Care Hub:

Belfast Trust, Marie Curie and the NI Hospice have collaborated to create a service, with a single point of contact, and to coordinate ongoing support for every referral received. This is transforming how community palliative care services are delivered across Belfast. **1179 referrals** in our first year.

Hospital at Home:

Our specialist staff in the Hospital at Home team deliver an invaluable service to support elderly patients in avoiding unnecessary admission to hospital. They provide acute medical care which helps patients be as safe and independent as possible within the comfort of their own home. **2007 referrals** received last year.

Diagnostics:

A significant development was the introduction of a new diagnostic technology that reduces the time needed to diagnose brain tumours from several weeks to just a few hours—a breakthrough developed in partnership with Queen's University and a local charity significantly speeding up access to treatment and improving patient outcomes. The service also delivered **50,358 MRIs and 88,064 CT imaging** in 2025/2026 year.

Outpatient modernisation and Patient Initiated Follow Up (PIFU):

Our dynamic outpatient reform programme recognises that not all patients need a routine follow-up but do need rapid access when and if their condition changes. PIFU supports a more personalised, efficient and sustainable outpatient model, focussing on care where and when it adds most value. **302,444 appointments** given for first attendances at an outpatient clinic. **41 PIFU pathways** and **8,524 patients** receiving care with this approach.

Improving ED capacity and flow:

Through the Release to Respond initiative, improved coordination between the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and our Emergency Department teams has reduced ambulance handover delays, improving ED capacity and enabling ambulance crews to return to emergency calls more quickly. By March 2026, **over 95%** of ambulances were offloaded within two hours, with continued improvements expected

Reflecting- some of our achievements during 2025/2026

Rapid Emergency & Acute Care Therapy Team (REACTT):

From October 2025, a newly formed multidisciplinary team was established to deliver acute geriatric assessments for older adults aged > 64 in the Royal Victoria Hospital ED. **61% of patients seen were in attendance due to a fall or having frailty.** The team were able to **discharge 57% of ambulance referrals**.

Therapy support animals:

Patients, Service Users and Carers have all reaped benefits from our therapy dogs- Riley, Skye and Bramble, as well as Mary, the Therapy Pony. Over the last year, there have been animal visits to a wide range of services, helping the delivery of ongoing, compassionate care in Community Children's Mental Health Services, Regional Acquired Brain Injury Unit, the Children's Hospital and residents at Killynure House who live with dementia.

Electronic Triage in Nephrology and Haematology:.

Consultants can identify which patients can continue to be cared for appropriately in the community by their own GP and can provide some specialist advice and guidance. A significant benefit is being able to get earlier treatment and therefore this can prevent deterioration and development of secondary health issues. **48-70% of referrals are appropriately discharged** without needing a patient to attend a hospital-based appointment.

Special Educational Needs (SEN):

BHSCT received **1,036 requests for SEN Statement Advice** reports from the Education Authority (EA), this supports EA to understand and meet each child's physical health and wellbeing needs, and to work towards making children as independent as possible in an educational setting. BHSCT were **94% compliant** in meeting the statutory duty to return all advice reports to the EA within 42 days/6 weeks

Elective Overnight Stay Centre (EOSC):

Building on the centre's proven success at the Mater Hospital in delivering high-quality care to more than **9,000** patients since its opening in November 2022.The centre consistently achieves the expected day-case throughput standards. Patient experience surveys have also reported exceptionally positive feedback, highlighting EOSC as a successful example of innovation, collaboration and service transformation within Belfast Trust.

Looking ahead- what will we work towards during 2026 and 2027

Patients and Service Users

Listening and learning

As a listening and learning organisation, we will act on the recommendations from reviews and inquiries, embedding learning into everyday practice, and sharing lessons learned to improve the safety and quality of our services.

Care of Elderly:

We will consolidate the acute Care of Elderly wards from the Mater, MPH, and RVH to provide a single centre of excellence on the BCH campus, facilitating a new pathway for direct admission from our Hospital at Home team, local GPs, NIAS etc. The aim is to ensure an optimal use of resources and that the frail older person can receive the right care, at the right time, in the right place and importantly, avoid unnecessary Emergency Department attendance.

New model for Intellectual Disability

We will align our priorities in delivering care to people with an Intellectual disability to the forthcoming new regional model Learning Disability services. The overall aims of which are to improve health and wellbeing, standardise care, while enhancing personalisation by tailoring care, enabling choice, and empowering independence. There will be a shift to community-based care delivery to reduce reliance on acute inpatient care.

Changing Places:

We will reconfigure space in the Royal's main foyer to deliver our first Changing Places facility, which is an enhanced accessible toilet space designed for people who cannot use standard accessible toilet. It gives enough space, equipment and privacy for disabled people, their families and carers to manage personal care with dignity.

Looking ahead- Patients and Service Users

… what will we work towards during 2026 and 2027

NISTAR:

We will expand capacity within NISTAR and work in partnership with health and social care providers and specialist paediatric networks to implement safe and effective repatriation pathways. We will ensure children receive specialist care when required and can return to local services closer to home as soon as clinically appropriate.

Mental Health:

We will continue to work with key stakeholders on development of the proposed Regional Place of Safety at Mater Hospital, which will provide a safe, therapeutic alternative to Emergency Department attendance for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. Alongside this, we will continue to deliver services at PATH (Psychiatric Assessment Treatment Hub) services, recognising the vital role it plays by providing an alternative place of safety to support patients, who are mentally unwell and awaiting admission. This work supports regional priorities to strengthen crisis care pathways and improve patient experience.

Patient Initiated Follow Up (PIFU):

We will expand the use of PIFU, enabling appropriate patients to initiate follow-up appointments based on their needs, improving access and making best use of clinical capacity.

Looking ahead- People… what will we work towards during 2026 and 2027

People and culture:

We will launch our new People & Culture Strategy which outlines our commitment to support our staff. We will show that our people are valued and that we will sustain an environment that promotes safety, collaboration, effectiveness, accountability, and innovation.

Body Worn Cameras (BWCs):

We will pilot BWCs in our Emergency Departments to help prevent, reduce and manage the incidents of violence and aggression against staff and to create a calmer, safer care environment for our patients, visitors, carers and staff. There has been a marked rise in acts of violence and aggression against our staff over the last number of years. This is not unique to Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland or Belfast Trust; however, this behaviour presents a real and credible threat to the physical and psychological wellbeing of our other patients, service users, carers and staff.

Safeguarding and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG):

We will continue to safeguard those at risk of abuse, exploitation, and neglect, with a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of abuse. Recognising that violence against women and girls remains a significant issue in NI, the Trust undertook an organisational pledge to support the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, which is one of the 9 priorities in the Programme for Government. We will continue to provide practical and emotional support to staff affected by domestic or sexual abuse through trained support staff and we will implement a Sexual Safety Charter to ensure Belfast Trust is a safe and respectful workplace for all.

New staff:

We will deliver a structured induction programme for all new staff, with additional support available for internationally recruited colleagues to aid their transition, integration, and development within the organisation.

Looking ahead- Population and Partners..what we will work towards in 2026 and 2027

Department of Health Reset Plan:

We will continue to support the delivery of the Department of Health Reset Plan by continuing to shift care closer to home through prevention, early intervention and community-based services. Work collaboratively with system partners to improve access to care, reduce pressures on acute services and waiting lists, and enable people to live independently for longer within their local communities.

This is Our Health:

We will support people and communities to take greater control of their own health and wellbeing through prevention, early intervention, self-management and informed use of health and social care services to align with DOH's 'This is Our Health' initiative, .

Neighbourhood Health and Well-being model:

We will support implementation of the Neighbourhood Health and Well-being Model by delivering proactive, preventative care closer to home, reducing health inequalities, and promoting the Sensible Care approach through integrated, person-centred services and shared decision-making.

Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs):

We will work in partnership to develop an Integrated Neighbourhood Team (INT), bringing together primary care, health and social care services, and community and voluntary sector partners to provide coordinated care based on local population needs. The INT will support earlier intervention, prevention, and the shift of care from hospital to community settings. We will continue to work collaboratively with SPPG, PHA, Primary Care and other HSC Trusts to develop and strengthen Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and support the delivery of neighbourhood-based care across Northern Ireland.

Big Discussion – alignment of 7 projects

We will continue to collaborate and support the 7 projects from the Big Discussion HSC-wide programme to reduce pressures and support long-term sustainability. The Trust will implement the learning from the improvements, having led on seven priority areas, including hip fracture care, enhanced care in care homes, end-of-life care, frailty pathways, advance care planning, and frailty identification for people aged 65+.

Looking ahead- Performance.. What will we work towards in 2026/27

Release to Rescue:

This is a new policy aimed at reducing ambulance waiting times at emergency departments. It mandates that ambulance crews handover patients to hospital staff within a maximum of two hours of arrival, allowing the crew to leave and become available for the next emergency. This will build on the foundational work the Trust has already undertaken to improve flow through its Emergency Departments, the service will continue to collaborate with NIAS as patient safety will remain paramount and to ensure this promotes a better experience for patients, carers and staff of both organisations.

Building Our Hospital Network:

Continue working as part of the wider HSC system to support the reform of key regional services, including

- **Neurology:** Development of Specialist Neurology Clinics, and condition-specific pathways, consideration of tele-neurology.
- **Stroke:** Continuing engagement with Regional Stroke Network on initiatives within the Stroke Action plan 22-27 e.g. expand mechanical thrombectomy services towards a 24/7 model, removing remaining variations in access to clot-busting thrombolysis, ensuring a 7-day service that offers specialist assessment within 24 hours of symptoms of a TIA (Transient Ischaemic Attack or mini-stroke).
- **Obesity:** The Trust will engage with the Regional Obesity Network in supporting a shift in focus from individual responsibility to systemic change, aligning Northern Ireland's obesity management with the rest of the UK.
- **Paediatrics:** Continue working with the Regional Paediatric Hospital Network to deliver safe, sustainable, high-quality paediatric services through standardised pathways, enhanced specialist access, workforce resilience, and care closer to home where appropriate

Building our Capacity:

- **Social care workforce:** The success of our recent recruitment and retention initiatives will enable our Family and Childcare services to develop their capacity and support timely allocation of cases.
- **Trauma and Orthopaedics:** Activity within Trauma and Orthopaedics continues to increase. A business case has been submitted seeking additional funding to improve capacity, by expanding surgical lists and an increase in beds
- **EOSC:** Continued optimisation of EOSC will support more timely access to treatment, improve operational efficiency, and enable greater use of specialist hospital capacity for complex procedures across the Trust

Looking ahead- Potential.. What we will work towards in 2026/27

Virtual wards:

We will commence a pilot of virtual wards, which provide hospital level care for patients in their own homes, using remote monitoring technology to manage conditions like respiratory issues or frailty. These wards help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and allow for earlier discharge, with clinicians tracking data on heart rate, oxygen levels, and blood pressure to ensure safe care in a person's home

Financial Breakeven:

We will develop a financial plan that aligns available revenue and capital funding with the Trust's strategic and operational objectives and ensures value for money. This is in line with our statutory duty to breakeven. We are committed to working collaboratively with colleagues across health and social care to improve productivity and enhance efficiency to ensure we are making best use of available resources. Significant opportunities exist to reduce expenditure, particularly through the elimination of premium pay costs, whilst also increasing productivity and efficiency through service and system transformation, as demonstrated by NHS peers. The Trust will play an active role in a wider HSC financial recovery programme over the next three to five years as part of the HSC Reset Plan.

encompass- optimisation and promotion of MyCare:

We will continue to work with our regional colleagues, to make the encompass system (the single digital record for everyone in NI, who accesses health and social care) more accessible, efficient, and to develop new pathways of communication and reporting. We will further promote use of My Care, an electronic portal, available through an app, which gives service users greater control of their own healthcare by providing personalised and secure online access to specific parts of their medical records. My Care provides access to information like medications, appointments and some test results. It is free to use, and it is optional.

Looking ahead- Potential…

What we will work towards in 2026/27

Digital tools to support workforce planning:

We will continue to embed and optimise digital applications such as SAFECARE and CARELINE LIVE to strengthen workforce planning, improve operational efficiency, and support high-quality care delivery.

Service reconfiguration:

We will continue to scope opportunities to redesign and align services to deliver more efficient, resilient and sustainable models of care, including service reconfiguration and greater integration across related specialties.

Corporate digital transformation:

We will continue to implement the eQuIP programme, replacing existing finance, procurement, payroll and HR systems with a single modern platform to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and support effective workforce and financial management.

Transforming strategy into reality

We have developed rigorous processes to regularly monitor the delivery of our corporate plan and our annual operational plan. This will ensure we are on track and positioning ourselves to make improvements with real benefits in people's lives and long-term sustainability of results.

Alongside this we will undertake:

Local management plans: Detailed action plans for each Directorate and Division are developed in accordance with this overarching corporate plan, with each objective having clear milestones and timelines for completion.

Staff Development reviews: The Trust has a workforce of more than 20,000 staff, all of whom contribute to the delivery of safe, effective and compassionate care. Each member of staff develops a Staff Development Review to help to achieve directorate and corporate objectives and help them acknowledge the significant contribution that they make.

Performance Monitoring: Regular quarterly performance reviews to monitor progress, adjust strategies, and ensure alignment with organisational goals.

Governance and Assurance: The Trust will have processes in place to provide oversight and accountability for service delivery, with decisions being guided by evidence and data, to drive forward improvement and support innovation.

Reflection and Learning: Support of continuous reflection and learning needs embedded at every level of the organisation. An open and systematic approach will improve care, keep patients safe, support staff, and this can remain effective despite a changing healthcare environment.

Stakeholder Engagement: Regular communication with patients, staff, and external partners to keep them informed and engaged in the corporate plan's initiatives. The Belfast Plan and a regular feedback summary will be shared online and directly with our partner organisations, and through the Trust's engagement groups and forums.