



**Police Service**  
of Northern Ireland

# COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

10 February 2022

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**Briefing Paper**

**Custody Healthcare Provision**

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## **PURPOSE**

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Committee for Justice with a short overview of the nurse-led custody healthcare model operating in police custody facilities at Musgrave Police Station.

## **INTRODUCTION**

2. In early 2017, the Police Service commenced work with senior stakeholders within Health and Social Care, including the Chief Medical and the Chief Nursing Officer forums, to promote awareness of, and responsiveness to, the healthcare needs of people detained in police custody.
3. A plan for the collaborative delivery of custody healthcare was subsequently endorsed by Department of Health and Department of Justice officials.
4. A Regional Task and Finish Group was established in December 2017, to develop a regional specification for the delivery of a 'transformed custody healthcare service'. This group included representatives from Health and Social Care Trusts, the Public Health Agency and the Police Service.
5. This innovative collaboration between health and justice has resulted in a 'pathfinder' nurse-led custody healthcare model staffed by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in Musgrave Police Station custody facilities. This service began on 1 October 2018, with a regional rollout plan following evaluation.
6. At present, nurse-led services in custody facilities at Musgrave and Antrim Police Stations, provide healthcare for over 50% of all people detained by police.
7. The wider implementation, expansion and ultimately full realisation of the benefits of a regional model has been slower than anticipated. There are a number of reasons for this including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and

a legislative/legal issue raised by Health partners. An outreach nurse-led service has, however, been extended to Antrim custody suite with effect from 3 January 2022 and conversations continue to resolve the legal issue.

8. In the Police Service's other six custody suites, custody healthcare continues to be provided by 34 independently contracted Forensic Medical Officers.
9. An additional five Forensic Medical Officers provide service as sexual assault examiners in The Rowan, Sexual Assault Referral Centre.

## **COSTS AND RESOURCING**

10. The total annual cost of the nurse-led custody healthcare model in 2021/22 is £1,213,951. This includes provision for Musgrave throughout the year and for Antrim facilities from January 2022 onwards. The Police Service of Northern Ireland has contributed 80% of this cost i.e. £971,161, with the remaining 20% (£242,790) being contributed by the Department of Health.
11. Resource requirement for the delivery of the project are determined by the healthcare provider (Belfast Health and Social Care Trust)

## **REDUCTION IN REFERRAL TO HOSPITAL FACILITIES**

12. The introduction of experienced acute care nurses into Musgrave custody facilities has reduced the number of detainees referred to hospital from Musgrave custody suite.
13. Custody nurse practitioners are able to treat minor ailments and provide immediate emergency health care intervention in cases of serious illness.
14. Baseline data over a twelve month period, 1 December 2017 – 30 November 2018, confirmed that 800 people detained in police custody required transfer to hospital. By comparison, from 1 December 2018 – November 2019, under the new model, 451 people detained in Musgrave Custody Suite were transferred to hospital, representing a reduction of almost 44%. This also reduced the

abstraction of police officers from frontline duties by 4.5k hours, clearly demonstrating the efficiencies that this programme of work delivers.

## **OTHER CROSS-CUTTING BENEFITS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH OUTCOMES**

15. From September 2019, all mental health assessments have taken place within Musgrave Custody Suite, thereby reducing demand on hospital resources. Prior to August 2019, any person requiring a mental health assessment in police custody required transfer to the Unscheduled Care Team in the Mater Hospital.
16. Vulnerable offenders with mental health issues are referred into pathways in their home Health and Social Care Trusts. This pathway can be instigated only by qualified community psychiatric nurses, who provide care in Musgrave Custody within the nurse-led model.
17. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's custody nurse practitioners refer opioid users into substitution prescribing pathways in their home Health and Social Care Trusts. This improves not only individual health and wellbeing but helps address the wider public health issues associated with intravenous drug misuse, including drug litter.
18. The custody healthcare team is engaged in Public Health Agency outbreak meetings and has also embarked on a needle replacement scheme.

19. Police custody has been identified as providing an opportunity to carry out health assessment and offer blood borne virus testing to those identified as high risk. From 29 March 2021, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust custody healthcare team in Musgrave Custody Suite commenced a pilot to screen for blood borne viruses. Through this process a number of detainees have received a positive diagnosis for Hepatitis C and have been referred for treatment.

