

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to the Committee for Justice

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Dear *Kathy*

BENCHMARKING ACTIVITIES IN RELATION TO THE PROVISION OF CHILDREN'S SECURE CARE ACCOMODATION

Thank you for contacting my Department, on behalf of the Committee for Justice, to enquire about any benchmarking activities the Department has undertaken in the provision of secure care accommodation in Northern Ireland against other jurisdictions and whether they make use of community and voluntary providers.

I can advise that the majority of secure children's homes in other jurisdictions within the UK are governed through the statutory sector. Currently England has a total of 13 secure care facilities of which 12 are statutory provided. Wales has 1 secure care facility which again is statutory provided. Scotland are the exception, relying on four charitable organisations to provide secure accommodation for children and young people.

In the Republic of Ireland 3 special care units are statutory provided by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. In Northern Ireland, since the historical recommendation from the November 2000 Health Committee report, advocating for the restriction on the voluntary sector from providing secure care accommodation for children to be lifted, there have been several reviews and ongoing progress made in relation to secure care accommodation.

As part of the Regional Care and Justice Campus programme resulting from the 2018 Review of Regional Facilities for Children and Young People, visits were carried out by Departmental, Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and Trust representatives to several secure care facilities in England at the end of 2023. Learning from those visits informed the work of the Programme, which ultimately led to

improvements in the provision of secure services in both Lakewood and the Juvenile Justice Centre at Woodlands.

The Campus Programme also led to the introduction of the multi-agency admissions panel, providing oversight for admission to Lakewood Secure Care Centre under strict criteria and undertaking regular reviews of placements in Lakewood.

There has also been the formation of a Regional Forum - 'Secure Care NI' - to examine the secure care provision and is attended by representatives from SPPG and the five health care trusts.

To strengthen collaborative working with Tusla a visit by representatives from my Department to a special care facility in Dublin is scheduled to take place in the coming weeks. Discussions have also been taking place with Tusla regarding the establishment of a formal All Ireland Secure Forum.

Children and young people in Northern Ireland who require secure care have very high, complex needs. Restriction of liberty of such a child is a serious step, and it is vital that robust governance and oversight is in place to care for these vulnerable children and young people. As I set out in my previous correspondence, my Department currently considers this need best being met through the statutory sector, and it is not considered necessary or appropriate to expand the ability of Trusts to restrict liberty of a child. This view is in line with one of the key recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services in Northern Ireland (2023), avoiding the privatisation of children's care.

My Department will continue to work with the South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (as provider) to ensure that Lakewood Secure Care facility continues to be fit for purpose and offers adequate provision to those children in need of secure care.

I trust the Committee finds this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Nesbitt MLA
Minister of Health



**Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee for Justice**

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Department of Health
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27 January 2026

**Department of Health Response on the provision of Secure Care
Accommodation**

Dear [REDACTED]

At its meeting on 15 January 2026 the Committee for Justice considered the response from the Department of Health of 22 December 2025 on the provision of secure care accommodation.

The Committee agreed to ask if and how the Department has benchmarked the provision of secure care accommodation against other jurisdictions in the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and if those jurisdictions make use of other providers, such as the community and voluntary sectors, in providing this service.

I would be grateful for a response by 10 February 2026.

Yours sincerely

Kathy O'Hanlon

**Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to the Committee for Justice**