

Question and Response: FOI 0025 2026 – Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Suicide Prevention / Executive Working Group

You requested the following information.

I would like to request information under FoI in relation to the Executive working group on Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Suicide Prevention.

Can you please provide me with their:

Terms of Reference - including its purpose, objectives, scope, remit, reporting arrangements and accountability and any revisions to the group since established.

Copies of agenda and Minutes of all meetings held to date.

Details of outputs and actions.

Details of recommendations made to ministers or the Executive and whether recommendations were actioned.

Details of Current list of members on working group including names, roles and organisations of current members.

Exact dates of all meetings since established in Jan 2020.

The frequency with which the group is scheduled to meet.

Records of any cancelled or postponed meetings.

Information specifically on how the working group has reviewed, assessed or responded to trends in suicide deaths in NI and the rate increase in recent years.

Can you provide me with information where this group acknowledges shortcomings in funding for delivering the current Mental Health Strategy and what specific action and discussion took place around this.

Has consideration been given to a specific, emergency crisis response in relation to increase in trends?

Can you provide information as to what discussion took place specifically around financial considerations under scrutiny and what mitigations were discussed and put in place for not fully funding the Strategy.

Has a risk assessment been carried out to consider this specific issue, ie shortcomings in funding of strategy and can a copy be provided?

Can you provide information where direction was given and then taken to set up an inquiry under the APG Suicide Prevention group.

Who gave this direction and rationale for this inquiry?

Will this inquiry feed into the working group and what outcomes are they looking for, what is the scope of that inquiry and how will it add to already known knowledge about the sector and current increase in suicide crisis being faced?

RESPONSE

Following consultation with Departmental colleagues, I can offer the following responses.

. A response to each of your requests is provided below:

1. Terms of Reference

Please find Terms of Reference attached. A new Terms of Reference for the working group are to be discussed at the next meeting, which is taking place on 12 March 2026.

2. Copies of agenda and minutes of all meetings held to date

Please find agendas and minutes of all meetings held to date attached. Redactions in the minutes relate to junior members of staff.

3. Details of outputs and actions.

Details of actions and outputs from the meetings are contained within the minutes.

4. Details of recommendations made to Ministers or the Executive and whether recommendations were actioned.

The Executive Working Group acts as a monitoring and reporting group that allows high level overview of the cross-departmental actions supporting suicide prevention, resilience and emotional health and wellbeing. Ministers normally receive updates and presentations at this meeting rather than recommendations. A record of all presentations and updates to Ministers are contained within the attached minutes.

5. Details of Current list of members on working group including names, roles and organisations of current members.

The current Membership list is attached.

6. Exact dates of all meetings since established in Jan 2020.

Meetings took place on 4th March 2020, 29th July 2020, 8 October 2020, 3rd March 2021, 6th October 2021, 3rd April 2025.

7. The frequency which the group is scheduled to meet.

The existing Terms of Reference is for quarterly meetings however in practice this has not been possible due to pressures on Ministerial diaries. A revised Terms of Reference is being discussed at the 12 March meeting and will review future frequency of meetings.

8. Records of any cancelled or postponed meetings.

Meetings were planned and cancelled or postponed on: 6 April 2022, 1 July 2024 and 22 January 2026. However, it should be noted that no formal record is kept of meetings that did not take place and there may be further meetings cancelled or postponed beyond these.

9. Information specifically on how the working group has reviewed, assessed or responded to trends in suicide deaths in NI and the rate increase in recent years.

Former Minister Swann presented on the NISRA suicide figures from 2019 to 2020 at the October 2021 meeting. The Health Minister normally provides an update to members on suicide statistics in Northern Ireland at the beginning of each meeting. The next meeting is expected to review the most recent suicide deaths data released by NISRA.

10. Can you provide me with information where this group acknowledges shortcomings in funding for delivering the current Mental Health Strategy and what specific action and discussion took place around this.

The issue of funding pressures and affordability within the Mental Health Strategy was discussed on a number of occasions by the Executive Working Group. In particular:

24 March 2025 - Mental Health Strategy Orientation Paper – This paper acknowledges significant funding shortcomings for delivering the Mental Health Strategy by highlighting that Northern Ireland’s mental health funding remains substantially below both need and UK comparators.

It notes that no additional funding has been provided to support Strategy implementation, despite the Strategy’s estimated £1.2bn cost over 10 years, and that annual allocations fall far short of what is required. As a result, while 19 actions are progressing, the paper makes clear that delivery is constrained by limited resources and that full implementation is not currently affordable.

3 April 2025 - Executive Working Group Meeting– Professor Siobhan O’Neill, Mental Health Champion, stated that she believed the Mental Health Strategy was a clear plan for transformative change in how mental health services are delivered in Northern Ireland. She relayed her concerns in relation to the progress of the Strategy under current funding levels and that if the required funding was not found then this could render parts of the strategy obsolete and require reviews that have already been done to be repeated.

11. Has consideration been given to a specific, emergency crisis response in relation to increase in trends.

This has not been considered by the Executive Working Group, however following the publication of the recent report by NISRA Profiling Suicide Deaths in Northern Ireland which detailed socioeconomic deaths by suicide, longitudinal trends are likely to be discussed at the next meeting.

12. Can you provide information as to what discussion took place specifically around financial considerations under scrutiny and what mitigations were discussed and put into place for not fully funding the strategy

The Mental Health Strategy Orientation Paper presented at the 3 April meeting notes that the Department has commenced a formal review of the deliverability of the Strategy, to be completed by June 2025, in line with a Public Accounts Committee recommendation. It also sets out that work will continue only on key enabling actions within the existing funding envelope, and that further cross-departmental engagement will be required to address wider determinants and ensure coherent Executive-wide support for mental health outcomes.

It recommends that the Executive Working Group:

- notes that mental health is impacted by a range of social determinants impacted by all Departments of the Executive; and
- agrees that further work should be done to consider how the work of each Department might contribute to the aims and objectives of the Mental Health Strategy

13. Has a risk assessment been carried out to consider this specific issue, ie shortcomings in funding of strategy and can a copy be provided.

The Mental Health Strategy Review of Deliverability 2026 – 29 report was undertaken to allow the Department to refocus and prioritise activity within its constrained budget, while also reiterating that the full Strategy remains essential for driving the transformation of mental health services.

The report can be found here: [The Northern Ireland Mental Health Strategy A Review of the deliverability of the Strategys Actions 2026-2029 - FINAL.pdf](#)

14. Can you provide information where direction was given and then taken to set up an inquiry under the APG Suicide Prevention Group.

The Executive Working Group does not give direction for this Inquiry. The decision is taken by the chair of the APG.

15. Who gave this direction and rationale for this inquiry.

The Executive Working Group does not give direction for this inquiry. The decision is taken by the chair of the APG.

16. Will this inquiry feed into the working group and what outcomes are they looking for, what is the scope of that inquiry and how will it add to already known knowledge about the sector and current increase in suicide crisis being faced.

The Department of Health will make the Executive Working Group aware of the outcomes of the Inquiry once the report is published by the APG. The chair of the APG will be able to provide answers regarding the scope of the inquiry and how it supplements existing research and knowledge.

Appendices (Agendas/Minutes) may be requested from the Information Management Branch (IMB) if required at the following address: FOI@health-ni.gov.uk

Date response issued: 5th March 2026

Reference Number: DOH 2026-0025