

Office of the Chief Executive
West Park Hospital
Edward Pease Way
Darlington
Co Durham
DL2 2TS

Simon Connolly
Assistant Coroner for County Durham and Darlington

1 April 2026

Dear Mr Connolly,

The purpose of this letter is to respond to the Report to Prevent Future Deaths (PFD), served on the Trust on the 8 February 2026, regarding the Trust's Mental Health Act Section 17 Leave Policy in line with the findings of the hearing in February 2026 into the death of Hilary Chapman on 11 March 2025.

On receipt of the PFD, the Trust's Chief Nurse and Medical Director commissioned a working group consisting of; the Trust's Care Group Director of Nursing, Deputy Care Group Director of Nursing, Associate Medical Director, Associate Director of Nursing for Urgent Care and the Deputy Head of Mental Health Legislation, to review the current Section 17 Leave Policy in relation to the specific concerns that were raised. A full review of the Section 17 Leave Policy is planned for early June 2026 which will involve all stakeholders, including those with lived experience of receiving services and of caring for those who receive services.

The working group met a number of times and have agreed that the following immediate policy changes were required:

- i) For clinicians to have clear direction regarding the expected processes for prescribing and arranging Section 17 leave
- ii) For consideration of contingencies to be incorporated into Section 17 leave planning
- iii) Wherever possible and practicable, to increase family involvement in leave planning.
- iv) Uniformity throughout the Trust for risk assessing when planning Section 17 leave and the recording of this within the patient electronic care record.

In order to address these identified changes, as of April 3rd 2026 we have amended the Section 17 policy to direct staff to PIPA (Purposeful In - Patient Admission) procedures and standard processes. This directs adult acute admission ward staff to the relevant documentation required to ensure the above. This includes the,

- a) Leave risk discussion form.
- b) Standard operating procedures for the completion of the leave plan in the electronic care record.

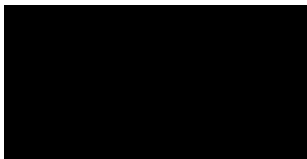
The following immediate, stipulations within the Section 17 leave policy have also been made:

- i) That family, friends or carers involved in someone's care are to be kept up to date with significant changes to the persons leave arrangements.
- ii) That family, friends or carers involved in someone's care receive a copy of the leave plan, in line with the wishes of the person going on leave. The section 17 leave form is not the leave plan and does not need to be shared with the family, friends of carers.
- iii) For any agreed contingencies, should Section 17 leave not go according to the agreed plan to be shared with all ward staff to inform them about agreed next steps.

We would like to assure H.M.C. that the improvements he noted at inquest and in the Prevention of Future deaths report regarding how we discuss, prescribe, and share plans about leave have been maintained with recent audit results showing that positive progress has been sustained. We continue to have monthly oversight of our compliance with the expected safety planning for section 17 leave via our Quality Assurance schedule.

We hope that the above demonstrates the changes that we have made to improve our policy to ensure robust safety planning for Section 17 leave and that we will continue to monitor this closely to ensure that any changes are understood and embedded.

Yours Sincerely




Chief Executive