

Western Family Support Hubs Strategic Analysis Report 2025/26

**Integrating Family Support Hub and
Outcomes Monitoring Evidence**

*Together we achieve more than any organisation
can achieve alone.*



Executive Summary



This report brings together Family Support Hub monitoring information and Outcomes Monitoring data to provide a deeper understanding of demand, need and future planning implications within the Western Outcomes Group area.

Western recorded the largest increase in Family Support Hub referrals across Northern Ireland during 2025/26. The increase was not driven by financial support referrals, which remained static, but appears increasingly associated with emotional wellbeing, disability, neurodevelopmental need and family support requirements. Population-level indicators demonstrate that Western continues to experience some of the highest levels of child poverty, economic disadvantage and child protection pressure. The emerging evidence suggests that Family Support Hubs are increasingly responding to interconnected and complex needs rather than individual presenting issues.





Understanding Demand

Family referrals increased from 2,081 to **2,526** families, representing a 21% increase and the largest increase regionally. Children referred increased from 1,763 to **2,239** and parents referred increased from 1,667 to **2,144**. This increase occurred despite wider demographic trends showing a projected reduction in the child population and the largest decline in births among all Trust areas. This suggests increasing complexity of need, increasing visibility of need, greater awareness of Family Support Hubs, or a combination of these factors.



Financial Hardship Remains a Defining Context

Financial support remained the largest presenting need within Western Family Support Hubs at 869 referrals in 2024/25 and **897** in 2025/26. Whilst referral numbers remained stable, outcomes monitoring indicators demonstrate that Western continues to experience the highest relative child poverty rate, the highest absolute child poverty rate and levels of free school meal entitlement above regional averages. The key finding is not that poverty is increasing, but that financial hardship remains a persistent backdrop to family life whilst other needs are increasing around it.



Neurodevelopmental Need is Emerging as a Major Driver

Children with disabilities referred through the Hubs increased from 259 to **374**, while children awaiting assessment increased from 164 to **223**. Western is unique in reporting ADHD as more prevalent than Autism among referred children. Outcomes monitoring data demonstrates increasing Disability Living Allowance claims, increasing autism diagnoses over the last few years and increasing Special Educational Needs statements. Together these indicators suggest that Family Support Hubs are increasingly operating within the wider neurodevelopmental support pathway.



Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Referral data demonstrates increasing emotional wellbeing and support needs alongside significant levels of counselling and one-to-one support requirements. Outcomes Monitoring indicators show continuing CAMHS pressures alongside elevated levels of self-harm and alcohol-related admissions. Unmet need information further reinforces demand for counselling, mentoring and targeted emotional wellbeing interventions. These findings suggest continuing pressure in relation to emotional wellbeing support.

Referral Pathways and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Self-referrals increased substantially and remained the largest referral pathway. Whilst this may indicate increasing awareness of Family Support Hubs, it may also reflect families actively seeking support earlier due to financial, developmental, behavioural and emotional pressures. Increased self-referral may therefore be viewed as a positive indicator of accessibility and early intervention.

Disability, Education and Early Identification

The concentration of referrals within the 5-10 year age group aligns closely with increasing SEN prevalence and educational support needs identified in the Outcomes Monitoring Report. The data suggests that schools and educational settings remain important locations for recognising behavioural, developmental and neurodevelopmental need. Hubs may increasingly be responding to children as support needs become visible within education settings.

Family Circumstances and Vulnerability

One-parent families remain the largest household group referred to Western Hubs. However, referrals involving two-parent households also increased significantly during 2025/26. Outcomes Monitoring indicators relating to poverty, welfare dependency and economic vulnerability suggest that pressures are affecting a broad range of family structures rather than a single family type.

Inclusion and Accessibility

Whilst ethnic diversity within Western remains below the levels observed in Belfast and Southern areas, migration trends continue to evolve. Interpreter demand remains comparatively low, however rising racist incidents and increasing diversity reinforce the need to ensure that services remain accessible, responsive and inclusive.

Implications for Future Planning

Future planning should focus on: planning for complexity rather than referral volume alone; strengthening support before diagnosis for children awaiting neurodevelopmental assessment; expanding parenting, resilience and family wellbeing interventions; investing in counselling, mentoring and emotional wellbeing support; using unmet need intelligence to inform commissioning priorities; and recognising Family Support Hubs as a key component of wider neurodevelopmental and early intervention pathways.

Points for Discussion

- What support is needed for families awaiting neurodevelopmental assessment?
- How should unmet need information influence commissioning decisions?
- Are current emotional wellbeing and counselling services sufficient?
- How can Family Support Hubs support children and families before needs escalate to statutory thresholds?
- What additional supports are required to address the consequences of persistent poverty and vulnerability?

CONCLUSION

Western Family Support Hubs are operating in an environment characterised by persistent poverty, increasing neurodevelopmental demand and growing emotional wellbeing pressures. Whilst financial hardship remains a defining feature of family life, referral patterns increasingly suggest that families are presenting with multiple and interconnected needs. Future planning should therefore focus on integrated, preventative and early intervention approaches that build resilience and support families before difficulties escalate.

Data Sources:

[Western Family Support Hub Annual Report Card 25/26](#)

[Outcome monitoring report 24/25](#)



*Together we achieve more than any organisation
can achieve alone.*

