

Media Release



Performance of Restricted Procedures by Health Trusts

Northern Ireland's Comptroller and Auditor General has today (Wednesday 08 October 2025) published a report which considers the Department of Health's *Effective Use of Resources* (EUR) policy. This policy restricts the performance of 29 healthcare procedures, to ensure they are only carried out in very specific circumstances, if at all. In doing this, the policy aims to guide the allocation of the health service's limited resources to areas of greatest clinical benefit.

Dorinnia Carville's report identifies around 12,000 restricted procedures carried out by health trusts in 2023-24. It concludes that there is no assurance that these were performed in accordance with the EUR policy.

The total cost of restricted procedures is estimated at just under £22 million for the year. However, the report notes that data recording across Trusts was inadequate. Therefore, the true cost of the performance of procedures restricted by the EUR policy is likely to be even higher.

Today's report highlights that, across Northern Ireland's five regional trusts, an average of over 40 restricted procedures were being performed daily during 2023-24. While some of the thousands of procedures performed may have been permissible within the terms of the EUR policy, the report finds that arrangements have not been put in place by Trusts to verify this. No such assurances were provided by Trusts during 2023-24, and none was sought by the Department. Therefore, the report concludes that the Department's EUR policy is not resulting in good value for money being achieved.

Commenting on the report's findings, Dorinnia Carville said:

"At a time when our health service is facing increased demands and significant financial pressures, measures introduced to ensure the effective use of resources are vital. However, these can only be successful if they are properly implemented and monitored. In this context, the lack of oversight and evidence of compliance with the Department's restricted procedures policy is very disappointing."

"There is a responsibility at all levels of the health service to ensure good value for money, and to be able to provide assurance that public funds are being spent properly. This report sets out a series of

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recommendations, to be implemented at pace, for ensuring greater awareness of and adherence to the Department's policy in respect of restricted procedures."

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Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). She and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. The C&AG certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. She has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. Her reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. The report will be available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Wednesday 08 October 2025.