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Reports into teenage deaths highlight 'systemic failures'

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REPORTS INTO the deaths of two teenagers in State care have highlighted “tragic systemic failures” and missed opportunities by social services to provide them with proper support or protection.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) yesterday published two summarised and heavily-edited reports into its handling of the cases of David Foley (17) and Tracey Fay (18) who died of drug overdoses while in care.

They show a litany of failures by social work and child protection services, including “inexcusable” delays in providing essential services, chaotic case management and systemic failures.

Officials acknowledged that no managers or social workers have been held accountable for failures in the system. But they did not rule out taking disciplinary action.

The executive’s reports omit key details contained in more extensive case reviews of the teenagers’ care, which show the extent of failings by health authorities.

Phil Garland, the executive’s assistant national director of children and families, said its decision to publish a summarised and edited version of this report was on foot of legal advice.

“I appreciate that there may be disappointment with the level of information we can make available . . . but it is essential that in this instance the HSE acts in full compliance with fair procedures,” he said.

The teenagers are not named and, instead, are referred to as “young person A” and “young person B”.

The summarised reports were criticised by Fine Gael’s spokesman on children, Alan Shatter, who said the executive was trying to hide the “grotesque failures of a dysfunctional, mismanaged and unco-ordinated childcare and protection service”.

For example, details in a case review of Tracey Fay show that she ended up in more than 30 different forms of accommodation including BBs and a bench in an accident and emergency unit. These details, among other serious failures, are not contained in the report.

In addition, a key failure in the case of David Foley – which involved a dispute between two community care areas over who was responsible for the boy – is not contained in the report.

In a statement, the executive expressed its “deep regret” that these young people did not receive the quality of care it aimed to provide for all young people in care.

It also acknowledged that opportunities were missed in the care of both young people.

In the case of David Foley, the report shows he was treated in a chaotic manner with 32 agencies involved with him in some form.

Similarly, some 40 social workers were involved with Tracey Fay while she was in the care system.