



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Briefing for Meeting
26 January 2023

General Update on Issues

Rapid Diagnosis Centre – STH

The Department of Health has recently confirmed the two Rapid Diagnosis Centres, the first of their kind in Northern Ireland, will be set up at the South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon and Whiteabbey Hospital. It is hoped the specialist cancer clinics will help reduce the time for cancer diagnosis and improve patient outcomes.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-64048845>

The Trust has a project team established and has worked to develop diagnostic pathways for people with 'vague' symptoms with the first patient journey through this pathway taking place in late December 2022 as a test case.

Some minor enabling works have taken place to support the development to date. Further investment in diagnostic imaging capacity is anticipated.

NHS Pressures

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine recently said that the NHS is facing the worst winter for A&E waits on record. Senior doctors described the NHS as on a knife edge, with some A&Es in a "complete state of crisis". Hospitals are experiencing soaring demand, which experts believe is in part driven by winter illnesses like flu and Covid. A number of hospitals have declared critical incidents suggesting they cannot function as usual due to extraordinary pressure.

The Southern Trust continues to experience pressures associated with unscheduled care reflected by overcrowding in our Emergency Departments as patients requiring admission wait for a bed on hospital wards, reduced flow on hospital wards as patients, deemed medically fit for discharge, remain in hospital and increased demand for community care packages.

Hospital time limits

Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care Trusts have agreed new target time limits for discharging patients and for ambulance handovers to ease pressure on emergency departments.

Patients medically fit for discharge will leave hospital within 48 hours if they have a suitable place to go to. This could be an "alternative interim placement" while they wait for a space in their first choice of care home or for a Package of Care to support them in their own home.

For ambulances, a three-hour limit to handover patients to EDs will apply to free up staff for life-threatening calls. Pressures across the Health and Social Care system have resulted in handover times lengthening over the past number of years. It is not unusual for NIAS staff to wait in excess of 3 hours and, on occasion, significantly longer to hand patients over to ED staff.

NIAS have released figures covering the period 20 December – 2 January and the intention remains that over the coming weeks the number of handover times greater than 3 hours, will reduce further.

Date 20 Dec – 2 Jan	Total no of ambulance arrivals	No of handover times > 3 hrs	% handover times > 3 hrs (arrivals/no >3 hrs)
Region	4385	709	16%
North	926	242	26%
South	852	167	20%
Belfast	1165	89	8%
West	878	22	3%
South East	564	189	34%

Future of Emergency General Surgery

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust is bringing forward a consultation on proposals for the provision of Emergency General Surgery Services for the area. The proposal will be reviewed at Trust Board on 26 January and a period of public consultation will follow.

From February 2022, as a contingency measure, in response to difficulties in recruiting and retaining consultant general surgeons, the Trust consolidated emergency general surgery to Craigavon Area Hospital to maintain the safety of the service for all patients. Recruitment of general surgical consultant posts has been an ongoing challenge across Northern Ireland and work has been progressing to develop more sustainable emergency and elective surgical services for the whole population.

Future of Dementia Inpatient Services

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust consultation on proposed arrangements for the provision of dementia inpatient beds closed on 23 December 2022. This was further to a contingency measures, in response to difficulties in recruiting and retaining consultant psychiatrists who specialise in the management of older people, which saw services for all inpatients consolidated to the Craigavon Area Hospital site.

The proposal identified that these beds should be permanently co-located with mental health and learning disability service beds on the Craigavon Hospital Site. The outcome of the consultation will be presented to a future Trust Board meeting.

Covid-19 & Flu

Northern Ireland has seen a significant recent increase in coronavirus infections in the community in December. The Department of Health said that both Covid-19 and flu are among the factors contributing to the ongoing pressures on health and social

care. NI hospitals have seen a large increase in the number of patients with confirmed Covid-19 with data indicating that around 1 in 16 people in Northern Ireland had the virus in the lead up to Christmas.

The Department of Health is reminding people to get vaccinated. Cases of flu are also at the highest levels since before the COVID-19 pandemic, and this is expected to persist for a number of weeks. Free flu and COVID-19 vaccinations are still available for all eligible groups and are the best protection against the viruses.

Elective care

Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care Trusts have confirmed they have postponed some non-urgent operations due to ongoing hospital pressures.

The Southern Health Trust postponed a small volume of elective orthopaedic and breast surgery operations over the Christmas and New Year period to manage demand.

Trauma demand has increased and there is potentially going to be further postponements in the weeks ahead as we increase the number of trauma surgery sessions to meet demand. The Trust is reviewing the situation daily and is working hard to ensure all postponed patients are offered a new date.

Waiting Times continue to increase for elective services. A summary of the numbers waiting is included below

[Hospital waiting times statistics | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Cancer waiting times

The latest quarterly figures from the Department of Health show that targets are still being missed. In the quarter ending in September last year, 2,373 (88.2 per cent) of patients started treatment within the target of 31 days. Margaret Carr from Cancer Research UK said she was “deeply concerned” that the last six months were the “worst on record” for Northern Ireland.

The Southern Trusts performance remains low reflecting a demand for services post pandemic but more fundamentally a reduction in theatre capacity associated with workforce challenges, particularly in respect of trained theatre nurses. The Trust continues to openly recruit to increase this workforce.

The Trust is working hard to increase its activity to pre-pandemic levels and is being monitored closely in respect of this performance by the SPPG.

Urology Services Inquiry

The Statutory Public Inquiry into Urology Services in the Southern Trust commenced open public hearings on November 8th, 2022. There were opening statements from Core Participants in the Inquiry – the Trust; Department of Health and Mr O'Brien.

- Evidence was heard from: Mr Peter May, Permanent Secretary, Dept of Health. Mr Ryan Wilson, Director of Secondary Care, Dept of Health. Mr Mark Haynes, Consultant Urological Surgeon, SHSCT. Dr Dermot Hughes and Mr Hugh Gilbert, Independent Chair & Consultant Urologist of the Serious Adverse Incident Review 2020. Dr Maria O'Kane, Chief Executive SHSCT. Mr Shane Devlin, former Chief Executive SHSCT.
- The hearings completed on 8 December and will resume on 24 January 2023 with two further patient representatives giving evidence in private.
- From 26 January, the USI will hear from 16 witnesses with hearings taking place on a 2 week on/2 week off basis until the end of March. Witnesses will include a mix of current and former staff as well as two external witnesses.

Full details of the hearings are on the USI website, www.urologyservicesinquiry.org.uk, including witness schedule and transcripts of all the public hearings. There is also a link to the live stream, available while the hearings are in session.

New Integrated Care System (ICS) Model

Work is progressing regionally in respect of the development of new legislation and arrangements to support the design and delivery of a new ICS model

An essential part of these arrangements will be the formation of Areas Integrated Partnership Boards. The Southern Trust area has been identified as the test area for the formation of new arrangements, with other Trust areas to follow incrementally.

Industrial Action

Royal College of Nursing members in Northern Ireland have ruled out further strike action in January of 2023.

- Nurses in NI had staged two days of strike action on December 15 and 20.
- Unite the union has confirmed that its members working across the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland will be participating in an industrial campaign involving all health trade unions after they voted overwhelmingly for strike action on 26 January, February 16, 17 and 23, 24.
- UNISON and NIPSA intends to call to take part in further industrial action in the form of action short of strike from 16 until 29 January 2023.
- NIPSA Members are participating in Specific Continuous Industrial (ASOS) to highlight the issue of Travel Reimbursement on: 20 January, 20 February and 20 March 2023- consisting of a 24 hour withdrawal of personal vehicles for work related use.

Financial Planning

The Strategic Planning and Performance Group SPPG wrote to Chief Executives of HSC Trusts to advise that the budget settlement for the next financial year is likely to provide the HSC significantly less funding in real terms than was required in this financial year.

The Trusts are required to develop plans to spend less next year than current spending.

The first draft of the SHSCT plan to manage these reductions in funding will be required to be returned to SPPG by 23rd January 2023.