



Save Our Acute Services (SOAS): Press Release

Monday 7th July 2025

*** Western Trust must reschedule public consultation events on its proposals for emergency surgery at SWAH ***

*** Campaign group seeks direct engagement with Western Trust with livestreamed public meeting as part of consultation ***

The hospital campaign group SOAS has called on the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHST) to reschedule its proposed public consultation meeting in Fermanagh on its proposal to make permanent the removal of emergency general surgery (EGS) from South West Acute Hospital (SWAH). SOAS has also called on the Western Trust to hold more public meetings as part of its consultation.

In a letter to the Western Trust, SOAS have highlighted concerns and sensitivities around the timing of the only two public consultation events – both held before July 17th – in a consultation which is scheduled to continue until October 14th. The Trust will only publish its case for its proposal on July 8th, a week before the first consultation event held in the heart of the Northern Ireland ‘July holiday period’.

Save Our Acute Services also requested a direct meeting with the WHST on the consultation – but made it a condition that the event be livestreamed to allow full disclosure to the community and NHS staff.

SOAS spokesperson Donal O’Cofaigh said, *“It is simply unacceptable that the WHST proposes that its only public consultation event in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area is rushed through in this way. The public must be given sufficient time to digest and consider these proposals from the Western Trust which have not even been published yet. It is totally disrespectful to the public and only reinforces our belief that we are being treated as second class citizens.*

“Deciding to permanently take away emergency general surgery at SWAH is a huge issue for our community and in many ways will determine our future. Worse still, the WHST case for this proposal will only be issued a week before that event and with a weekend and a public holiday in between.

“Even in the consultation that the Trust ran in 2023 after they ‘temporarily’ took away emergency surgery in December 2022, they had seven public meetings, four of which were in Fermanagh. Why are they only having one now when it is a permanent decision that is being consulted on? SOAS has demanded more public consultation meetings spread over the entire fourteen-week consultation.

“As a campaign we are also seeking a direct consultation meeting with the Trust but only if it is livestreamed to allow public access. We consider it important for the purposes of transparency and confidence, especially for our community and SWAH staff, that any engagement we have with the WHST is not held in private but in a publicly accessible forum.”



A copy of the campaign's public letter to WHSCT Chief Executive Neil Guckian was sent to Minister for Health Mike Nesbitt.

ENDS...

For further information or to arrange an interview with the campaign contact Donal O'Cofaigh, SOAS PRO tel. 07375 530941.

Notes for editors:

[1] Letter to Western Trust from SOAS (6th July 2025) attached.



6th July 2025

To: Neil Guckian, Chief Executive, WHSCT
Cc: Mike Nesbitt, Minister for Health

Re: Emergency General Surgery, SWAH – Proposal to Consult on Permanent Change

Mr Guckian,

I am writing on behalf of Save Our Acute Services (SOAS).

We understand that the WHSCT will conduct a number of direct engagements with local stakeholder groups as part of its wider consultation on the proposal for the withdrawal of emergency general surgery (EGS) from South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) to be made permanent.

We would ask for a direct consultation meeting with SOAS as part of the process, subject to our being able to livestream the event publicly. We consider it important for the purposes of transparency and confidence, especially for our community and SWAH staff, that any engagement we have with the WHSCT is not held in private but in a publicly accessible forum. In this regard, we will be publishing this letter.

We also would request that additional public meetings in Fermanagh are organised by the Trust as part of its consultation process. A single meeting – on what is effectively the most important decision for our community's right to access life-saving treatment in an emergency – is simply not acceptable. By comparison we note that 7 public meetings were held by the Trust as part of their consultation on 'temporary' removal of EGS in 2023. In this light, the WHSCT proposal for only one public meeting in Fermanagh appears highly incongruent.

We also highlight our concerns around the timetabling of the consultation events. The Western Trust will only publish the detail of its proposal on Tuesday July 8th and there is a bank holiday in the week before the only public meeting in Fermanagh on 15th July. This is not an adequate period for the public in Fermanagh to fully digest and consider the case being presented ahead of what will be the only consultation event in our area.

We further note that the only two proposed public meetings will be concluded by 17th July but that the consultation itself is due to continue until October 14th. This timetabling appears severely imbalanced and unnecessarily limits opportunities for appropriate public engagement on this vital decision.

We therefore request that you reconsider the number and timing of consultation events with a view to maximising local engagement.

Yours

Helen Hamill (secretary)

SOAS Committee