

2nd November 2025

To: Mr. Neil Guckian, Chief Executive, Western Health and Social Care Trust
Cc: Dr. Tom Frawley, Chairperson, Western Health and Social Care Trust

Re: Proposed Meeting with SOAS - an open letter

Dear Neil,

Save Our Acute Services (SOAS) acknowledges receipt of your letter of 17th October 2025 concerning the Western Health and Social Care Trust's proposal to meet with our committee to discuss our "list of enquiries" outlined in our correspondence of 28th July. We appreciate the Trust's offer to engage and we are willing to meet under the terms and understandings set out below.

Scope of Meeting

In keeping with the list of enquiries in our 28th July letter, the proposed meeting should be confined specifically to the issues raised under the five sections of that letter:

1. Development of a Vision Plan for SWAH
2. Progress on RQIA Recommendations
3. Recruitment of Surgical Consultants and Workforce Planning
4. Engagement with Non-Executive Directors
5. Ministerial Correspondence and Transparency

To ensure discussion remains focused and productive, this agenda will be the foundation for the meeting. In the interests of making the meeting as valuable and constructive as possible, we would ask that the Western Trust provide draft written responses to the questions set out in our letter of 28th July in advance of the meeting. This will enable both parties to use the meeting time effectively and facilitate meaningful dialogue on the key issues.

Meeting Format and Transparency

For clarification, there has been no communication or collaboration between SOAS and the Western Trust since our unanswered letter of enquiry sent on 28th July, despite recent public statements which may inadvertently suggest otherwise.

SOAS acknowledges that the Western Trust has, in various recent public statements and in correspondence to others, indicated its willingness and intention to meet directly with the SOAS Executive. Given this open approach, and considering the level of public interest in the ongoing Vision Plan process, SOAS believes that extending transparency to the meeting itself would be appropriate and constructive.

Accordingly, we propose that the meeting be live-streamed and recorded for public access, so that all interested stakeholders can observe and have confidence in the openness of the engagement. We trust that the Trust will support this proposal, reflecting the shared commitment of both parties to transparency and genuine public involvement.

Attendance

Given the significance of the SOAS Roadmap—which your Chair indicated in your June Trust Board Minutes would be “considered by the Board in developing the way forward for the South West Acute Hospital including future decisions on the provision of emergency general surgery at the hospital” — we believe it would be beneficial for Dr. Tom Frawley, as Chair of the Western Trust, to attend alongside members of your Senior Team. His participation will help ensure continuity and accountability at Board level regarding the development of the Vision Plan for SWAH.

Chairing and Venue

In the interests of fairness and accessibility, we do agree that an independent venue might be more appropriate. Considering the strategic implications for SWAH, we are also requesting that the meeting be independently chaired.

We will get back to you shortly with details of both venue and independent chair.

Purpose and Context

As we outlined in our letter of 28th July, SOAS remains wholly supportive of a Minister-recommended Vision Plan for SWAH that is developed quickly, transparently, and with genuine engagement. We believe that this work should advance independently of the Trust’s wider Pathfinder process. Our position remains that SWAH must retain its full acute hospital status, including the restoration of emergency surgery, and that the hospital should be formally recognised and protected as a ‘rural area hospital’ – as defined by SOAS in our Roadmap – within the Department of Health’s strategic framework.

Closing Remarks

Finally, we wish to reiterate the same conclusion expressed in our July 28th correspondence. The development of a Vision Plan for SWAH – as defined by the Minister – that fully involves the relevant stakeholders is something that our community genuinely stands behind. We regard this as a real opportunity to quickly develop a credible, locally grounded plan that fully acknowledges the needs of smaller hospitals like SWAH which serve rural populations.

We welcome your written confirmation that the terms above will be acceptable as a basis for proceeding, and that the Trust will agree to the arrangements we have proposed regarding transparency, venue, moderation, and attendance.

Yours

Helen Hamill (secretary)

SOAS Committee



17 October 2025

Chair
Dr Tom Frawley CBE

Chief Executive
Mr Neil Guckian

By Email : soas.swah@gmail.com
Mrs Helen Hamill
Secretary, SOAS Committee

Dear Helen

I refer to your letter dated 28 July 2025 and I would like to provide you with an update following a meeting of the Western Health and Social Care Trust Board on 7 October 2025. I am sorry for the delay in responding to you but it has only been possible to provide an updated position in respect of the public consultation following approval by Trust Board at its meeting and to inform you on the decision taken on the next steps moving forward.

In the Western Trust statement, we have been very clear in our intention to have significant and meaningful engagement with many stakeholders and I would welcome SOAS to be included as part of this engagement process.

I would therefore like to offer an initial opportunity for the SOAS Executive to meet with members of my Senior Team and me to discuss your list of enquiries. To allow enough notice and time to hold this meeting in the South West Acute Hospital, or another venue if you feel that is more appropriate, I would suggest the following date and time to meet:

- **Friday, 21 November 2025, 2.30 pm, in the Boardroom, South West Acute Hospital**

I should be grateful if you would confirm that this date/time is suitable to you to meet and I will ask for the necessary arrangements to be made. If however this does not suit, if you could advise my office and we will offer another appropriate date and time.

In respect of your specific list of enquiries detailed in your letter, I would refer you to the Trust's statement below and I look forward to talking these through with you, where possible, answering any other enquiries which SOAS would like to raise at the meeting.

Best regards.

Yours sincerely

NEIL GUCKIAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 7 October 2025

Update: Trust Board closes the current public consultation to move forward on visioning work for 'Future Health Services in Fermanagh and West Tyrone'.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust (Western Trust) Board has met to discuss the recent pause to the Public Consultation on the permanent change to Emergency General Surgery in the Western Trust.

Trust Board has taken the decision to close this current Public Consultation and will now move forward on visioning work for 'Future Health and Care Services in Fermanagh and West Tyrone'.

In July 2025, the Health Minister asked the Trust to end the current consultation and begin the process of producing a vision plan, emphasising how the South West Acute Hospital will meet the health needs of its current and future population.

Following the Trust Board decision, Chief Executive Neil Guckian commented, "Since pausing the Public Consultation, we have reflected on what we have heard and it is important that I acknowledge the tremendous depth of feeling and concerns raised by people who have written to us and spoken to us directly.

"As Chief Executive, I accept that there were flaws in our planned process. The previous process from the public's perspective felt rushed and we should have spent more time engaging with the local community before the launch of the consultation process. The timing of the public events was wrong, and we underestimated the number of people who would want to attend our public meeting in Fermanagh.

"We have apologised for these shortfalls and the fact that they caused a lot of unnecessary anxiety and uncertainty. We will learn from this moving forward as we develop our plans for the period ahead.

"We are steadfast in our commitment to the long-term sustainability and development of SWAH as a vital and successful hospital within the HSC regional network of hospitals. We will now work with all relevant stakeholders to develop a clear vision for health and social care provision in Fermanagh and West Tyrone, including South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) as an integral part of how we serve this community.

"This detailed analysis will focus on 'Future Health Services in Fermanagh and West Tyrone' which will be informed by population needs and will build on the Fermanagh and West Tyrone Pathfinder engagement previously undertaken. Pathfinder was seen as an excellent example of positive and meaningful engagement with our local population. The feedback was very useful and highlighted a very clear focus by the majority of service users on community services. Moving forward with this vision planning it will be crucial to plan for a strong community aspect to services to support SWAH. *(see note (a) below)*

"Careful consideration will also be given to key strands of policy and research *(see note (b) below)* which will help shape the strategic and policy framework going forward.

"In recent weeks, the Trust has received and collated many views and opinions from a wide range of stakeholders including SOAS. This will all help to inform and influence work to develop the vision, ensuring that the approach is shaped by the needs and experience of patients, clients, carers and communities. We will work closely with our

staff, trade unions, community leaders, elected representatives and the public and there will also be discussion on areas for potential future collaboration with the Health Service Executive, Republic of Ireland (HSE)."

SWAH remains an Acute Hospital with a type 1 Emergency Department

The Department of Health and the Minister have re-iterated that SWAH will have a critical role to play going forward and will continue to provide services to patients not just across Fermanagh and parts of Tyrone but across Northern Ireland. SWAH remains an important Acute Hospital within the NI hospital network and its acute services provision has not changed. SWAH provides a 24/7 Type 1 Emergency Department, maternity services (Obs and Gynae), full resuscitation facilities and ICU, in addition to being a part of the major trauma network.

Chief Executive Neil Guckian confirmed that while work to complete the vision is carried out, the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery (EGS) at SWAH, in place since December 2022, will continue to remain in place.

"To date the independent analysis shows that after the temporary change, patients in the Western Trust who have had emergency general surgery have improved outcomes with decreased mortality, a lower surgical complication rate and a lower rate of re-admission after discharge. We want to reassure the public that the clinical pathways in place are in line with all required clinical standards and they continue to be monitored carefully," he said.

The Western Trust is currently developing a comprehensive communications programme to help better inform staff and the public and this will be implemented alongside the stakeholder engagement programme in the months ahead. Full details of this will be provided on the Trust website at www.westerntrust.hscni.net

Notes:

- a. The Trust's Pathfinder project involved an extensive process of engagement with staff, local and regional stakeholders and 62 engagement sessions at community venues with contributions from more than 2,200 people.
 - i. [Click here](#) for the link to view the Report for Health and Social Care Needs in Fermanagh and West Tyrone, published following the Pathfinder engagement.
- b. Key strands of policy and research include:
 - i. The outcomes report following the Department of Health's consultation on the future hospital network "*Creating a Network for Better Outcomes*";
 - ii. The Ministerial priorities in the Department of Health 3 year plan "*Stabilise, Reform, Deliver*" (December 2024)
 - iii. The DoH "*Reset Plan*" (July 2025) which set out the priorities for Health and Social Care.
 - iv. The Fermanagh and Omagh District Council commissioned advocacy paper, developed by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD), on building a sustainable model of rural health care provision across the South West region of Northern Ireland (including its cross-border functional area).