

## **Southern Health and Social Care Trust High Level Winter Preparedness Plan 23/24**

### 1.0 Context to Southern Trust Winter Plan

Winter is typically a period when demand for our services is significantly greater than the capacity within our hospitals and the supporting community services. In order to protect our services, we prepare an annual winter plan to outline proposals to address the predicted increase in demand for our services, particularly within our Emergency Departments.

Our Winter Preparedness plan sets out the arrangements that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust will put in place to respond to anticipated additional pressures during the winter months 2023/24. In developing our plan we have taken cognisance of National and Regional Priorities and Trust Locality themes, these include:

- NHS England’s winter planning approach, which focuses on ten high impact priority interventions;
- Three regionally agreed key high impact areas; and
- Four Locality Trust based themes which were identified and co-produced in partnership with Primary Care, Community & Voluntary Care Sector Partners and Service Users at a recent Southern Trust Winter Planning workshop.

### 1.1 National & Regional Priorities & Trust Locality Themes

NHS England 10 High Impact priorities	SPPG 3 Regional Priorities	SHSCT 4 Locality Themes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Same day emergency care</li> <li>2. Frailty</li> <li>3. Inpatient flow and length of stay</li> <li>4. Community bed productivity and flow</li> <li>5. Care transfer hubs</li> <li>6. Intermediate care demand and capacity</li> <li>7. Virtual wards</li> <li>8. Urgent community response</li> <li>9. Single point of access</li> <li>10. Acute respiratory infection hubs</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maximising ambulance capacity</li> <li>2. Reducing time spent by patients in emergency departments awaiting clinical decision and next stage of care</li> <li>3. Timely hospital discharge for patients who are medically fit for discharge.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Admission avoidance</li> <li>2. Unscheduled Care and Ambulatory Care pathways</li> <li>3. Patient Flow</li> <li>4. Discharge from hospital</li> </ol>

Alongside the Winter Plan, the Trust will also continue to implement normal surge plans and business continuity processes to manage any further Covid-19 surge and/or increase in respiratory illness, including:

- Review of Trust surge and business continuity plan;
- Standing up Silver and Bronze control arrangements as required;
- Completion of workforce analysis and development of contingency plans, including staff redeployment, if this becomes necessary. Risk assessments and re-introduction of infection prevention and control measures in line with guidance;
- Within the community setting, prioritise those with greatest assessed health and care needs based on a Red, Amber and Green rating system; and
- Ensure flexible working for staff.

Key challenges remain for the Southern Trust in ensuring resilience and delivering against winter pressures including:

**Workforce** - maintaining safe staffing levels across all areas with increased demand and sick patients alongside high vacancy and absenteeism levels.

**Poor Hospital Infrastructure** - local challenges resulting from aging accommodation. Currently there are no unoccupied areas in the acute hospitals and no capacity for additional medical beds to be created if required. Already there is significant “boarding” of patients on already cramped ward areas and excessive corridor spaces being used in the Emergency Department.

**Delivery of Core Service Capacity** - the ability to balance requirements of core service provision, particularly in relation to ‘red flag’ and ‘urgent’ elective surgical capacity, whilst also managing the demands presented in this period for unscheduled critical care and acute medicine.

**Financial Constraints** - with limited recurrent growth funding and significant existing pressures we will continue to identify any emerging financial pressures during this winter period and as a result of any further surges. The Trust will continue to assess resource requirements and use established channels and processes agreed with the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) of the Department of Health (DOH) to secure additional resources as required.

**‘Outbreaks’ of Covid-19** in both hospitals and care homes - whilst a range of mitigation measures including community vaccination and personal protection measures continue to be implemented, it is anticipated that confined outbreaks with potential nosocomial spread are likely to continue to impact on service delivery, including the need for additional bed closures in acute and community facilities and may be exacerbated by simultaneous transmission of flu during the winter period.

## 2.0 Business Continuity Response to Potential Industrial Action / Impacts of Cost of Living Crisis

The Trust has established an Incident Management Response function to manage the impact of potential industrial action, which could coincide with increased service pressures over the winter period. As part of our Business Continuity Response Plan we have:

- An Industrial Action Working Group / Incident Management Response function and identified control room co-ordination hub locations established. Bronze/Silver Control co-ordinators/staff identified with established rotas in place taking into consideration contingency planning;
- Business Continuity Plans and Action Cards reviewed to include industrial action impact assessment and contingency arrangements; and
- Potential exclusions for essential and priority service areas for approval/agreement are identified upon receipt of Trade Union industrial action notice. Additional training delivered to ensure continuity of service provision e.g. Portering/Switchboard etc. Manager Guidance and Employee Guidance available and circulated following ballot outcome.

## 3.0 Supporting our Staff

We will provide support to staff across a range of service areas including human resources, occupational health, psychology, infection prevention and control and health improvement. The Trust will take the following measures to support our staff to maintain service delivery during this period.

**Staff Health and Wellbeing Support** - We will continue to provide a range of staff health and wellbeing resources through our 'U Matter' staff wellbeing hub, including on-line nutrition and exercise programmes, stress management sessions, advice and support on a range of issues such as managing anxiety, building resilience and coping mechanisms, sleep well resources and mental health support for adults and young people.

The Trust's 'U Matter' staff wellbeing hub continues to provide staff with resources and information to support them to manage their emotional health and wellbeing, including a weekly newsletter which is circulated widely.

The Trust will also undertake Flu and Covid vaccination programmes for staff and take forward actions to maximise uptake, including early planning, peer vaccinators and targeting areas with low uptake.

In line with normal winter planning arrangements, staff leave over holiday periods will be carefully managed to ensure appropriate staffing levels are in place to maintain appropriate staffing levels and the safe delivery of service.

## 4.0 4.0 Communication Plan

Responding to seasonal pressures is a complex and dynamic process and our communications will be tailored to meet need throughout the winter period. The corporate communications team have prepared a Winter Pressures Communications Plan for 2023/24.

### External Communications

We will run targeted Emergency Department messaging campaigns and promote the 'Phone First' system and early discharge messaging on our social media channels.

- x As Emergency Department pressures increase we will, in exceptional circumstances, advise of busy status of the Emergency Department(s) and signpost the public where possible to access alternatives.
- x We will liaise with the media when necessary to highlight ongoing difficulties/pressures.
- x We will issue briefing materials to public representatives and will include Winter Messaging in our virtual briefings as appropriate.
- x We will link with the Health and Social Care region and support regional messaging when the system is under pressure. We will issue messaging aligned with regional priorities.

### Internal Communications

- We will promote our key messages to help alleviate winter pressures throughout the Trust.
- We will keep staff informed about the current pressures and work with them to communicate challenges externally.
- We will run internal promotional campaigns targeting staff to avail of the vaccination programmes.

## What can the public do to help over winter?

If you become ill or injured and need medical help or advice, choose well by using the right NHS service for your needs.

**Play your part help our Health and Care Service**  
Please choose the service most appropriate for your symptoms

- Selfcare** - to treat an ache, pain, upset stomach, cough or cold, get plenty of rest, take simple pain killers if needed and use over-the-counter medicines.
- Your local pharmacist** - they are there to give confidential, expert advice and can treat a number of minor ailments such as aches and pains, skin conditions, allergies, eye conditions or upset stomach and emergency contraception.
- Your GP** - they will give expert medical advice and diagnosis, referring you for further care or consultation as needed.
- Primary Eyecare Assessment & Referral Service** - treats sudden eye conditions such as red eyes, sudden reduction in vision, eye pain or a foreign body in the eye.  
Go to: <https://online.hscni.net/our-work/ophthalmic-services/eyes/>
- Mental Healthcare** - if you experiencing mental health difficulties there are a range of services available to help you.  
Go to: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/mental-health-support>
- Emergency Dental Treatment** - if patients have an urgent dental need then they can follow the advice on the HSC website.  
<https://online.hscni.net/our-work/dental-services/out-of-hours-emergency-dental-treatment/>
- Minor Injuries Unit** - treats injuries that are not life threatening such as broken bones, sprains, bites and burns.
- Urgent Care Centres** - treats injuries that are not life threatening such as broken bones, sprains, minor scalp wounds and suturing of minor wounds.
- Emergency Department** - provides the highest level of emergency care for patients, especially those with acute illnesses or trauma, such as heart attacks, stroke, serious accidents or head injuries.  
Call 999 when there is a risk to life or serious injury.

HSC Health and Social Care

**Your support is vital at this critical time.**

**‘Choosing well’ ensures you receive the right care at the right time and that emergency medical care is available to those people who need it the most.**

Take some time to find out more about the variety of healthcare services that are available to you and what they can offer.

Visit [How to use your health services | indirect](#) to find out more.

Attached overleaf is the summary Winter Preparedness Plan on a Page, the Trust has also developed a detailed action plan for implementation.

# Southern Health and Social Care Trust Locality Winter Plan – Plan on a Page 2023-2024

## Maximise ambulance capacity

### Regional High Impact areas

- Explore the potential for Clinical Mental Health expertise input into the ambulance control room.
- Provide alternative 'Front Door' service options to the Emergency Departments (ED).
- Support the GPs to deliver the NI Local Enhanced Services for GP Proactive Care for Nursing and Residential Homes.
- Endeavour to protect Ambulance Handover Areas in our acute hospitals to support NIAS (HALO).
- Provide a range of Acute Respiratory same day assessments.
- Support the management of the frail elderly to avoid hospital admissions.

### Key Priorities

- Direct GP and Care Home Placement referrals to Emergency Department via the Acute Care at Home Team between the hours of 9.00a.m. until 5.00p.m.
- Prioritise and enhance Frailty, Respiratory and Cardiology same day assessment and develop ambulatory pathways with direct access for GPs.
- Establish a community Respiratory Virtual Ward.
- Provide Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) direct access to Phone First

## Reduce time spent in ED

### Regional High Impact areas

- Redirect patients to the appropriate service.
  - Provide prompt support to the Emergency Department by specialty including mental health liaison/crisis response services.
- ### Key Priorities
- Establish a new front door triage before access to the Emergency Department.
  - Integration of Phone First/Urgent Care Centre (UCC) and GP Out of Hours to provide 24/7 urgent care.
  - Open a new Urgent Care Centre on the Daisy Hill Hospital site and provide direct GP referral to the Urgent Care Centres.
  - Develop and enhance a range of alternative care pathways to admission.
  - Provide earlier specialty assessment and review of Decisions to Admit.
  - Flex paediatric support to the Emergency Department.
  - Consistent use of frailty identification at Hospital presentation.
  - Maximise flow out of the Emergency Department via three additional beds per ward.
  - Provide NIAS with on-going Mental Health Home Treatment/Crisis Response phone triage.
  - Continue to provide 24/7 mental health liaison services to the Emergency Department

## Timely hospital discharge

### Regional High Impact areas

- Improve the management of simple and complex discharges.
- Increase and maximise domiciliary care, increase bed capacity in care homes and increase and maximise core community beds.

### Key Priorities

- Establish a Single Discharge Team.
- Promote patient choice and manage the escalation process when the patients first option is not available.
- Pilot a Single Handed Care Approach within domiciliary care.
- Maximise use of statutory residential care homes.
- Increase the volume of beds held within the independent sector.
- Increase domiciliary care provision through recruitment.
- Establish Early Review Team for domiciliary care.
- Focus to increase patient discharges at the weekend.
- Continue to promote and enhance Trust discharge initiatives.
- Ensure the patient discharge lounges on both hospital sites are effectively utilised to support timely discharge and improve hospital flow.
- Enhance pharmacy early discharge planning on the wards.
- Patients deemed medically fit for discharge subject to diagnostics will receive priority testing and assessment.
- Continue to provide British Red Cross Hospital to Home

## Protecting elective care

Focus on Service Delivery Plan target activity and associated recovery plans via our Elective Services Improvement Project

Ensure elective theatre capacity is maximised.

## KEY ENABLERS

### Protecting and promoting staff health

Trust wellbeing programme 'U Matter'.  
Planning staff leave/staff breaks.  
Flu and vaccination programmes for staff.  
Occupational Health targeted sickness absence work.

### Leadership

Trust Surge and Business Continuity Plans  
Manage and ensure appropriate staffing levels for the safe delivery of service.

### Preparation for Industrial Action

Industrial Action Working Group / Incident Management Response function and identified control room co-ordination hub in place.  
Business Continuity Plans and Action Cards reviewed to include industrial action impact assessment and contingency  
Engagement with Unions on exclusion arrangements.

### Monitoring and reporting

Enhanced command and control arrangements supporting appropriate implementation of escalation process and continuity plans  
Implementation of agreed protocols - Escalate nurse staffing protocols, non-designated beds protocol