

Chair
Dr Tom Frawley, CBE

Chief Executive
Mr Neil Guckian, OBE

18 November 2025

Mr Barry McElduff
Chair
Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Townhall
2 Townhall Street
ENNISKILLEN
BT74 7BA

Dear Barry

I am writing to update you on recent correspondence between the Trust and the Fermanagh pressure group Save Our Acute Services (SOAS).

As you know, on 7 October 2025 the Trust Board agreed to close the Public Consultation and to begin new visioning work — a forward-looking, collaborative programme centred on the people and communities of Fermanagh and West Tyrone. This work will involve a sustained period of meaningful engagement, listening, and co-design, with a particular focus on the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH).

In recent weeks I have received a high volume of enquiries from a wide range of stakeholders, including SOAS and the Council. In my most recent correspondence to the SOAS Executive (attached, dated 17 October 2025), I offered the opportunity to commence a period of meaningful engagement and to discuss the concerns and questions they have raised publicly and in writing.

SOAS responded on 2 November and again on 4 November 2025, agreeing in principle to meet and requesting that the meeting be held in an independent venue with an independent chair. Although this is an unprecedented request, I agreed that the meeting could proceed on this basis.

In the proposal of 4 November, SOAS asked that the meeting be held in the Fermanagh and Omagh Council Chambers in Enniskillen and chaired independently by you, as Chair of the Council.

We value our constructive relationship with the Council across a range of committees, including the Health and Social Care Sub-Committee, and we recognise your important



role as Chair, as well as your contribution to the SWAH Strategic Development Group and the Area Integrated Partnership Board. I believe it will also be very important to continue with this relationship moving forward with the Trust and Council, as collaborative partners, and we value your contribution in all our meetings, engagements and work which has taken place over a considerable period of time.

However, in considering SOAS's proposal for the role of an Independent Chair for this specific engagement, we do believe it is essential to ensure openness, transparency, and impartiality and vital to hear and understand all factual context and information.

In this initial engagement meeting between the Trust Executive and SOAS Executive, we have a duty on behalf of our staff and the organisation in delivering commissioned Health and Social Care Services in Fermanagh and West Tyrone (including SWAH), to ensure we are providing feedback on the SOAS Roadmap Document. This is the first engagement opportunity that we have had with SOAS to do so, and we have not been engaged or had a discussion on the Roadmap document to date, despite having been asked for our position on numerous occasions by Public Representatives. We look forward to doing so but believe it is respectful and courteous to talk through with SOAS in the first instance if possible.

As stated, this meeting will therefore require an open, balanced discussion of that document. While the Trust values your contribution in all health matters and discussions over a long period of time, as Chair of the Council you have publicly supported SOAS and endorsed the SOAS Roadmap. In light of this, we cannot see how you could be viewed as impartial, and for that reason you may not be in a position to chair a meeting that requires an open, balanced and factual discussion on all aspects of the Roadmap document. This was also discussed directly with you by a Trust official at the time the request was received from SOAS.

We are grateful to the Council for the offer to host the engagement meeting, and we hope it can proceed as planned on Friday 21 November 2025 at 2.30pm. To ensure a balanced discussion, the Trust has proposed an alternative independent chair: **Martin Quinn**, Personal and Public Involvement and Engagement Lead for the PHA, who would provide an impartial, experienced and appropriate facilitation for this meeting.

As set out in the agenda, the Trust welcomes the opportunity to discuss the SOAS Roadmap with the SOAS Executive, including its 20 recommendations. For the meeting to be constructive, we will also need to outline the independent data demonstrating improved outcomes for patients using the Emergency General Surgery (EGS) pathways since December 2022, and to brief SOAS on the Trust's planned work going forward.

SOAS have also requested that this meeting be livestreamed as a public meeting. This is an unprecedented request for an engagement meeting and we do not consider this an appropriate format for an initial engagement meeting with the group. I am open to giving further consideration to this request for any future meetings, provided that both parties



have had an opportunity to establish a constructive dialogue and agree a suitable format to do so. Any such arrangement for having a live-streamed engagement discussion would need to support balance, openness and transparency for both parties, and ensure that the Trust is also able to present the factual independent data, improved patient outcomes, and our detailed position in relation to the SOAS Roadmap.

We therefore welcome an initial engagement meeting with SOAS on Friday 21 November and believe it to be very important as we hope to build the opportunity to work respectfully and constructively for the benefit of South West Acute Hospital moving forward, which can be beneficial for everyone. A live streamed meeting is something that may detract from that initial engagement, so perhaps we could look at a different approach if this is something which does not work for the SOAS Committee. May we suggest that after the initial engagement meeting on Friday 21 November, we could look at both SOAS and the Western Trust attending a Fermanagh and Omagh Council meeting. This could be designed to allow both parties to present important information in the context of Emergency General Surgery and also any broader plans for Health and Social Care in the Fermanagh and Omagh area, which could help everyone understand the current position and future provision.

The Trust Board's decision of 7 October 2025 requested that we begin creating a new, collaborative vision for health and care in Fermanagh and West Tyrone, centred on sustained engagement, listening, and co-design. I want to reiterate our strong and sincere commitment to the long-term sustainability and development of SWAH as a vital part of the regional Health and Social Care hospital network. This commitment is fully supported by the Department of Health and the Minister.

This new programme will build on learning from the earlier Pathfinder project, which involved 62 community engagement sessions and contributions from over 2,200 people. Although completed before the pandemic, it provided valuable insights into local needs - particularly community, mental health, and primary care services - which will continue to inform our long-term planning.

While this work progresses, the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at SWAH will remain in place. Minister Swann's 2022 Review of General Surgery introduced new standards to ensure safe, high-quality care. The current pathways meet those standards. Independent data show improved outcomes for Western Trust patients treated at Altnagelvin since December 2022 - including lower mortality, fewer complications, and reduced readmissions. These improvements demonstrate that the temporary arrangements are safe and effective, and we will continue to monitor them closely in line with clinical standards. The Trust has a duty to highlight these outcomes publicly in the weeks ahead, as patient safety remains our priority.

SWAH continues to operate as a key acute hospital within Northern Ireland's network, providing a 24/7 Type 1 Emergency Department, maternity services, full resuscitation and intensive care, and a wide range of medical specialties including respiratory, gastroenterology, and cardiology. These core services will continue.



**Western Health
and Social Care Trust**

The Department of Health and the Minister have reaffirmed SWAH's critical role in serving both the local population and patients across Northern Ireland.

In the interests of openness and transparency, I wanted to ensure you had all this information in your capacity as Chair of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. I will continue to keep you updated as engagement with SOAS progresses.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Neil Guckian'.

**NEIL GUCKIAN OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**