

**2<sup>nd</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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