

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Health

SOUTHERN TRUST IT OUTAGE

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Mr Nesbitt (The Minister of Health): I wish to provide Members with an update on both the impact and recovery process of the IT outage in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) which commenced on 17th September.

I can confirm the issue was isolated to the SHSCT but it impacted across their sites and a major incident was called by the Trust. There is no suggestion that this was a cyber related matter. In line with statutory/legislative requirements the SHSCT have reported this matter to both the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the Competent Authority (Network Information Systems Regulator) and will comply with any requests. This is not due to a loss of data, but required when there is non-availability of data or systems for the period of time.

Business Continuity plans were promptly enacted by SHSCT, which unfortunately necessitated the postponement of elective activity and the diversion of ambulances to other Trusts' Emergency Departments. Thankfully a lessor impact has been seen in community services which are fully operational today.

While a digitally enabled organisation might expect that on occasion issues may arise, the impact on Health and Social Care services can, as was evidenced in this case, be considerable. I sincerely regret that it was necessary to postpone planned appointments and to have patients conveyed by ambulance to other HSC facilities as a consequence.

Early indications on the impact to patients are that approximately 1,600 appointments associated with Acute, Elective, Mental Health and Children's and Young People's services were postponed over 17th - 18th of September. No appointments have been postponed on Friday 19th and there were no postponements of any appointments for adult community services during this period.

I can assure Members that the SHSCT is working at pace to rebook all postponed appointments as quickly as possible, in line with clinical priorities and my Department is supporting with additional support and resource where it is required. I appreciate the understanding and patience shown while this is worked through.

Contrary to some commentary in social media I also wish to provide clarification that this was not related to our new digital systems, but was instead related to the data centres which our systems rely upon.

When the issue was first identified the Southern Trust assessed the situation and declared a major incident. This process not only dictates the Business Continuity measures which are taken within the Trust, but through the Major Incident Escalation protocol overseen by the Department, the regional response. In this incident given the lack of access to patient facing systems many ambulances were diverted to other hospitals and the response from our HSC system has been remarkable. My thanks go to all of those exceptional HSC staff who worked tirelessly to keep patients safe. The support provided by all parts of the HSC was in line with our 'One System' ethos.

While a longer timeframe for resolution was initially expected, the response from all involved ensured the data centres were restored by 5pm on day 1 (17 September). Therefore access was provided to the first priority systems (relating to labs, EDs, ICU and night medicines) and this enabled both Daisy Hill Hospital and Craigavon Area Hospital to recommence receipt of ambulance arrivals from 21:00 and 22:30 respectively. With the exceptional support of staff from across the HSC, my Department

and providers the major incident was formally stood down the morning of 18 September 2025, i.e. within 24 hours of commencement. However, recovery efforts will continue for some time.

As with any Major Incident the HSC has a process to understand the cause, understand the impact and identify any learning or rectifications to prevent a recurrence. In this space I can confirm the following approach is underway:

- . Root Cause Analysis of the reasons for the outage. This process has commenced with a Working Group set up and the Network support provider considering the technical assessment. This is being supported by independent members of two Trusts, the Business Services Organisation (BSO) and the Department's Digital Health and Care (NI) team (DHCNI); and

- . In tandem, the Trust is setting up an Incident Review Group and my Department's DHCNI team are identifying some options for an independent chair of this group. The scope will be to look wider than the root cause of the technical issue and consider the steps taken by the Trust in advance of the outage and subsequently. This will include the Trust's approach to decision making and the effectiveness of business continuity arrangements. This group is also tasked with identifying learning from the incident for the Trust as well as the rest of the region. The Department's Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) will be involved and ensure consideration is given to the wider system response to the incident.

My Department will continue to oversee the recovery and learning processes associated with this Major Incident and I again reiterate my apologies to all impacted patients, service users and staff.