South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Paper No: SET/178/26
Trust Board Meeting: 30 September 2026
Public Agenda Item 4.16

Title of Paper: **Update on Temporary Change in Opening Hours of Lagan Valley Urgent Care Centre (UCC)**			
~~**For Decision**~~	**For Assurance**	~~**For Information**~~	~~**For Discussion**~~

1.0	**Background:**
	Prior to October 2021, Lagan Valley Hospital had been operating an emergency medicine service with opening hours of 8am – 8pm, Monday to Friday. Whilst it has access to consultant-led emergency care, there are limited specialties in Lagan Valley Hospital, which can result in delays in care for patients who require transfer elsewhere. This includes those requiring admission for: surgery, intensive care, paediatrics, obstetrics, gynaecology and orthopaedic services. In inpatient areas, there are a broad range of acute general medical specialties available: including respiratory, cardiology, gastroenterology, and care of the elderly medicine. There is also a dedicated Psychiatry of Old Age service with direct admissions to these wards. From **15 June 2026**, a temporary change to the operational model of the Lagan Valley Hospital Urgent Care Centre (UCC) was implemented as a result of significant medical workforce pressures. This decision followed a substantial deterioration in the service's medical staffing position. The UCC has experienced longstanding difficulties in recruiting and retaining appropriately trained medical staff, which were further exacerbated by the departure of a key long-term locum clinician and persistent challenges in the overall medical workforce. Collectively, these factors resulted in an unsustainable medical rota and created a significant risk to maintaining safe clinical cover across unscheduled care services. In order to maintain patient safety and ensure available medical resources could be deployed safely and effectively, a temporary change in the operational hours of the Lagan Valley Hospital UCC was implemented from 15 June 2026, changing from: • **Monday to Friday, 08:00-18:00** to: • **Monday to Friday, 08:00-16:00** This temporary service adjustment was introduced to align service provision with available medical staffing capacity while maintaining safe and sustainable clinical services.

2.0	**Key Issues:**
	Medical Cover The need to maintain current operating hours remains unchanged. The Trust continues to seek workforce solutions, including the use of temporary staff, though to date this has not delivered the level of cover required. The Trust is planning on recruiting again in the coming months, and will reassess the position in relation to service opening hours following completion of this process. The current position ensures a safe service, with the working hours supporting the ability of the consultant workforce to have oversight of every patient attending LVH UCC each day. **Activity** The Trust stated it would anticipate that there would be minimal change in the overall activity in Lagan Valley Hospital UCC, and that remains the case. The UCC leadership team continually review the activity and performance of the unit. The UCC has seen 88 patients per day since the change, which is in line with the anticipated volume of 85-90 patients per day. The operational teams continue to work closely together to ensure that the LVH inpatient medical service is protected and the beds in Lagan Valley Hospital are well utilised. I can confirm that this remains the case, and that the impatient beds in Lagan Valley Hospital are a key part of the hospital network approach within the Trust.
3.0	**Link to Strategic Objectives:**
	Our People ☐ Population Health & Health Inequalities ☐ Delivering Care Closer to Home ☐ Hospital Care ☒ Safety, Quality and Experience of Care ☒
4.0	**Resource Implications (inc Organisational, Financial, Human Resources):**
	1. Organisational
	The Trust is aware of the potential for patients in the Lagan Valley area to have concerns in relation to this temporary change. The Trust remains committed to Lagan Valley Hospital and the services it provides to both local and regional patients. There is strong assurance for Trust Board and the local community that UCC is seeing a high volume of patients each day, and that the bed stock in Lagan Valley Hospital remains in use.

	2. Financial
	There may be a slight reduction in cost due to a locum leaving, though there has been great uptake of vacant shifts as the model is viewed as an improved working environment for medical staff.
	3. Human Resources
	All staff impacted have had opportunity to discuss ongoing employment with relevant managers. In October we will complete another round of engagement but current feedback suggests that the Lagan Valley Hospital UCC team are content with the change and the temporary model is working well. All staff have had opportunity for meetings to discuss and individual needs and these have been supported.
	4. Environmental Factors Yes ☐ No ☒
5.0	**Impact on Safety, Quality and Experience (SQE):**
	1. Safety
	This change remains required in order to maintain the service in Lagan Valley Hospital Urgent Care, and without this in the short term would create patient safety risks due to lack of doctors with the relevant clinical expertise.
	2. Quality
	The patients in Lagan Valley Hospital UCC receive an excellent service, and with reduced reliance on ad hoc locums, the Trust will increase the percentage of work undertaken by Trust employed staff. This will ensure quality of service are maintained, with approximately 88 patients per day being seen.
	3. Experience
	Service activity in being maintained close to that of activity prior to change. This will ensure patients who currently receive their care in LVH continue to receive it in the same way they have been in the vast majority of cases. The Trust continues to monitor relevant experience data in relation to Lagan Valley Hospital UCC.
6.0	**Key Risks and Proposals to Mitigate:**
	1. Key Risks
	The current position remains unchanged since June Trust Board and reflects ongoing regional challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced medical staff, which are impacting services across Northern Ireland. The Trust has engaged with its recruitment partner to identify suitable candidates from across the UK, able and willing to work in Lagan Valley Hospital, however no suitable candidates have been identified to date. Opportunities for other staff to cover shifts have also been explored but have not yielded the necessary medical staffing required.

	We will continue to actively progress: • Recruitment to substantive posts • Temporary staffing solutions e.g. locums • Explore opportunities with other staff to cover shifts, for example, use of Emergency Nurse Practitioners (recruitment ongoing) This will allow the Trust to maintain its focus on improving workforce stability. The temporary change will ensure the Trust can rely on existing medical staff to support the Urgent Care Centre.
	2. Proposals to Mitigate
	Engagement plan and clear communications with all relevant stakeholders, including relevant strategic partners. Continue to employ Emergency Medical doctors to work across South Eastern Trust Urgent and Emergency Care services to reduce service vulnerability. The Trust continues to provide direct access to Primary Care colleagues and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service into Lagan Valley Hospital.
7.0	**Risk Register:**
	It is listed on BAF? Yes ☐ No ☒ Is it listed on CRR? Yes ☐ No ☒

Lead Director:	**Marc Neil, Director of Unscheduled Care, Medicine & Cancer**
Date:	**24 September 2026**

Reasons for Paper Presentation

Decision	*Used when an item requires a formal agreement or endorsement by the meeting / committee members. Examples are approving minutes, budgets, proposals or policies.*
Assurance	*Used when an item can be measured against a certain criteria / standard. Examples are a project is on course with delivery or financial targets are being met.*
Information	*Used when an item is presented for the purpose of updating or informing the attendees without requiring a decision or action, such as reports, updates, or announcements.*
Discussion	*Used when an item is listed primarily for open discussion, brainstorming or gathering input from the members without requiring an immediate decision.*