Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
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FOI/38310

21 October 2026

Emergency Department Services at the Royal Victoria Hospital and Pressures Facing the NHS in Northern Ireland

1. **What is being done to reduce the exceptionally long waiting times at the Royal Victoria Hospital A&E?**

   Please see Belfast Trust's Winter Surge Plan 2026/2027 – attached as separate document.

2. **What measures are in place to ensure patients waiting many hours are regularly reassessed and monitored?**

   Under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Belfast Trust can confirm that it does not hold the information requested in a recorded format. There is no overarching document that would answer this question. However, to try to assist you, we can advise as follows:

   Patients waiting for extended periods are reassessed by nursing staff according to clinical need. Where operationally applicable, nurses are allocated to waiting-room and ambulance offload areas. Observations and pain are monitored, deterioration is escalated promptly, and time-critical medicines and immediate care needs are addressed.

   Following a decision to admit, the relevant specialty oversees continued review, monitoring and treatment.

3. **What is being done to address staffing levels, particularly overnight when we were told there are fewer doctors available?**

   Under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Belfast Trust can confirm that it does not hold the information requested in a recorded format. There is no overarching document that would answer this.

   However, to try to assist you, we can advise as follows – this explanation is drawn from multiple sources:

   The Trust aims to build a sustainable substantive workforce, reduce reliance on temporary staffing and maintain senior clinical decision-maker cover. Staffing and rota gaps are reviewed against demand across evenings, nights and weekends.

Recruitment to medical and advanced clinical practitioner roles has strengthened substantive cover and reduced agency reliance.

Training, supervision, wellbeing and engagement on employment arrangements support retention, while vacancies, rota fill, absence and clinical cover are monitored through assurance and escalation processes.

4. What steps are being taken to prevent blood results and other important patient information from being lost?

Under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Belfast Trust can confirm that it does not hold the information requested in a recorded format. There is no overarching document that would answer this.

However, to try to assist you, we can advise that Encompass records track diagnostic requests and results within the patient's electronic record, allowing authorised staff to access information across the care pathway. Electronic ordering, ED tracking and structured handovers help identify outstanding investigations.

Clinical teams monitor samples and results, document outstanding actions at handover and respond to urgent laboratory alerts.

Missed or delayed results may be reported through the clinical incident process so that learning informs improvement and training.

5. What additional resources are being provided to hospitals to deal with the current pressures on emergency departments?

Under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Belfast Trust can confirm that it does not hold the information requested in a recorded format.

Belfast Trust's published Winter Surge Plan 2026 / 2027 (attached as separate document) states that no additional funding has been provided specifically for winter pressures and that delivery will be within existing resources.

The Trust is maximising capacity through Same Day Emergency Care, Urgent and Ambulatory care, GP Out of Hours, Hospital at Home, virtual wards, community alternatives, improved diagnostics and earlier discharge planning.

The Full Capacity Protocol may be used during severe pressure.

6. What is being done to ensure that patients and their families receive clear and timely communication while waiting?

Under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Belfast Trust can confirm that it does not hold the information requested in a recorded format. There is no overarching document that would answer this. However, to try to assist you, we can advise as follows:

Administrative and nursing staff provide patients and relatives or carers with verbal updates on waits and delays, where appropriate. Patients are advised that times may change because those with the greatest clinical need are prioritised. Staff provide further updates alongside clinical reassessment.

After Encompass was introduced, the patient-facing ED dashboard became unavailable. NI Direct publishes indicative median waiting times, and the Trust is working with partners to restore patient-facing information on ED status and delays.

7. What long-term plans are in place to improve emergency department capacity and reduce these prolonged waits?

The Corporate Plan 2026 to 2031 provides the long-term framework for urgent and emergency care. Corporate-Plan-2026_31.pdf