

# **INTERIM REPORT ON FIRE INCIDENT ON 11<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2009**

## **1. Introduction**

On the afternoon of Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February the alarm, was raised and the Fire Brigade attended a fire within the Northwick Park site of the Trust.

The fire was discovered in on of three main electrical substations at the hospital, located in the basement of the ward block, which housed two voltage reduction units installed approximately 2 years ago to reduce electricity consumption.

Whilst this was essentially a small and contained fire it caused smoke to infiltrate the ward block, requiring the horizontal evacuation of 170 patients from the H Block wards to the two wards on the same level that were in E and G blocks and were unaffected. H block houses Paediatrics, Frederick Salmon, Edison (currently the Theatre Admissions Unit), the Regional Rehabilitation Unit, Parexel, Haldane and Jenner Wards. Additionally St Mark's Hospital services were severely disrupted by the loss of power including outpatients, endoscopy, histopathology and the Education Centre.

The areas affected are shown in red on Appendix 1.

The evacuation was handled well by staff and no staff, patients or visitors were hurt during the incident.

## **2. Operational issues**

As an immediate consequence of the fire, the A&E department and Maternity units were closed. The Maternity Unit re-opened the following day. A&E remained closed to ambulances through much of Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> Feb but was open to walk in patients. It reopened to ambulances at 13.00 that day.

Seven temporary generators have been brought in to provide power to the affected areas within the Trust (see Appendix 2). However these are not designed to deal with power demands in the same way as a mains power supply, and this has meant a phased approach being taken to becoming fully operational.

At the time of writing this paper the Trust is running services with 27 fewer beds in H block than usual, and this will continue for a minimum of six weeks until Substation 3 is rebuilt. The Trust has been working closely with PCT colleagues to address these issues.

Plans to enable full operational capacity have been worked up with all clinical leads and with particular regard to patient safety and ensuring that only limited re-occupation of H Block takes place, that this is for low dependency patients only, for whom electrical requirements are low and who would be relatively easy to move in the event of a problem with the interim electrical supply. The operational plans of note include:

- Jack's place is closed and all acute paediatric services have moved to CMH or will be provided within Chaucer ward whilst the Trust is running on temporary generators;
- In terms of routine operations much of this is still happening at NPSM but we have requested support from others including the Clementine Churchill hospital;

- Nineteen ortho-geriatric and neuro-rehab patients are to move to Willesden Centre for Health;
- Acute patients from Frederick Salmon and Jenner Wards are being cared for on other acute wards temporarily;
- trustPlus is being used for those higher dependency patients from St Marks where possible;
- CMH services are not affected, although A&E and acute services are feeling the pressure of the reduction in capacity at the NPH site.

A personal letter from the Chief Executive was distributed to all patients affected by the fire.

The Occupational Health department offered drop in sessions and support for staff to attend if they felt particularly affected by the events of the fire.

The Communications team has sent out regular briefings to staff in addition to a daily press release to keep staff, patients and the public abreast of developments.

### **3. Fire investigation**

Following the fire, a Fire Brigade investigation team and a fire enforcement officer visited the Trust to undertake a full review of the events and circumstances leading to the fire. The Trust will receive a written report in due course. Because the Trust has a number of similar voltage reduction units in its other two main substations, a 24/7 fire-watch was put in place

Investigations are also taking place by the manufacturer, the NHS Litigation Authority's loss adjuster, and the Trust, and the Department of Health informed in order that any necessary action could be taken in other Trusts as a result of these investigations.

### **4. Governance issues**

The enforcement officer undertook a full spot check audit of Trust procedures, policies, risk assessments and training. A further meeting is to be held with the senior fire brigade enforcement team on 6<sup>th</sup> March and the Trust are also expecting a full report on their findings, including the possibility of an improvement notice.

All key agencies including Department of Health, NHS London, the Healthcare Commission and the Health and Safety executive have been informed of the incident and are being kept updated as required. The Trust has declared this as a serious untoward incident and an investigation panel will report in due course.

Key staff are meeting with the NHSLA loss adjuster in respect to insurance cover and careful note is being kept of all allowable costs incurred as a result of the fire.

The Department of Health recommended that Arup act as advisors to assist and quality assure the incident response, recovery and remedial works, and we continue to work closely with them as well as our own appointed specialists.

### **5. Repair and reinstatement**

Wards were either affected by fumes or smoke damage from the fire rising through the ward block, the worst of which was on levels 2, 7, 8 and 9. A full deep clean of the wards is ongoing as the Trust moves towards becoming as fully operational as it can for the time being.

The Trust has worked closely with the manufacturers in respect of the other units on the site and as a result is removing two more from use as part of its recovery strategy.

The reinstatement of mains power supply to H Block will take six-eight weeks in terms of design, procurement, installation and commissioning.

A wider review will also look at improvement to the electrical services at NPSM including the resilience of the system overall and the provision of emergency generator support to the hospital.

## **6. Risk Register**

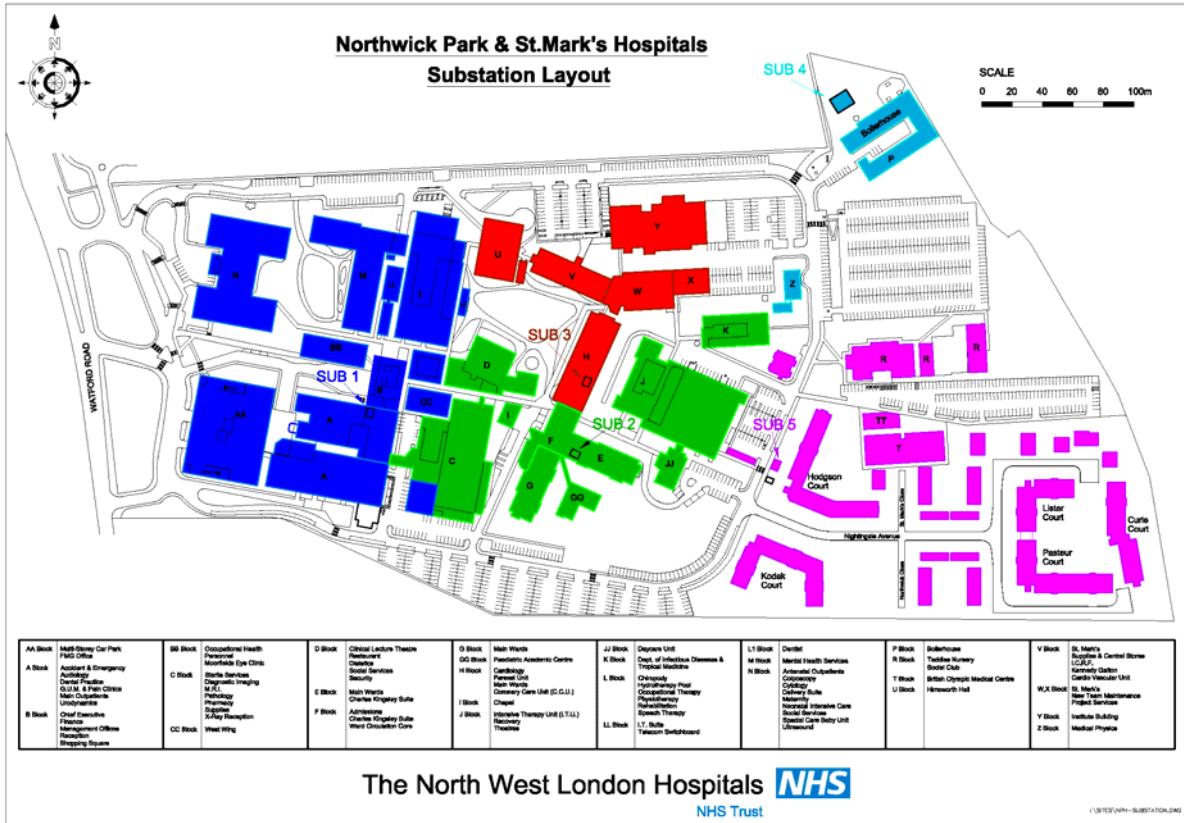
The following have added the following risks to the risk register whilst this incident remains "live":

- risk of loss of power to areas supported by emergency generator power;
- risk of fire in remaining voltage reduction units;
- increased risk to loss of income due to reduced operational capacity;
- risk that staff do not follow Trust Policies and Procedures as necessary; and
- risk of uninsured losses related to the fire.

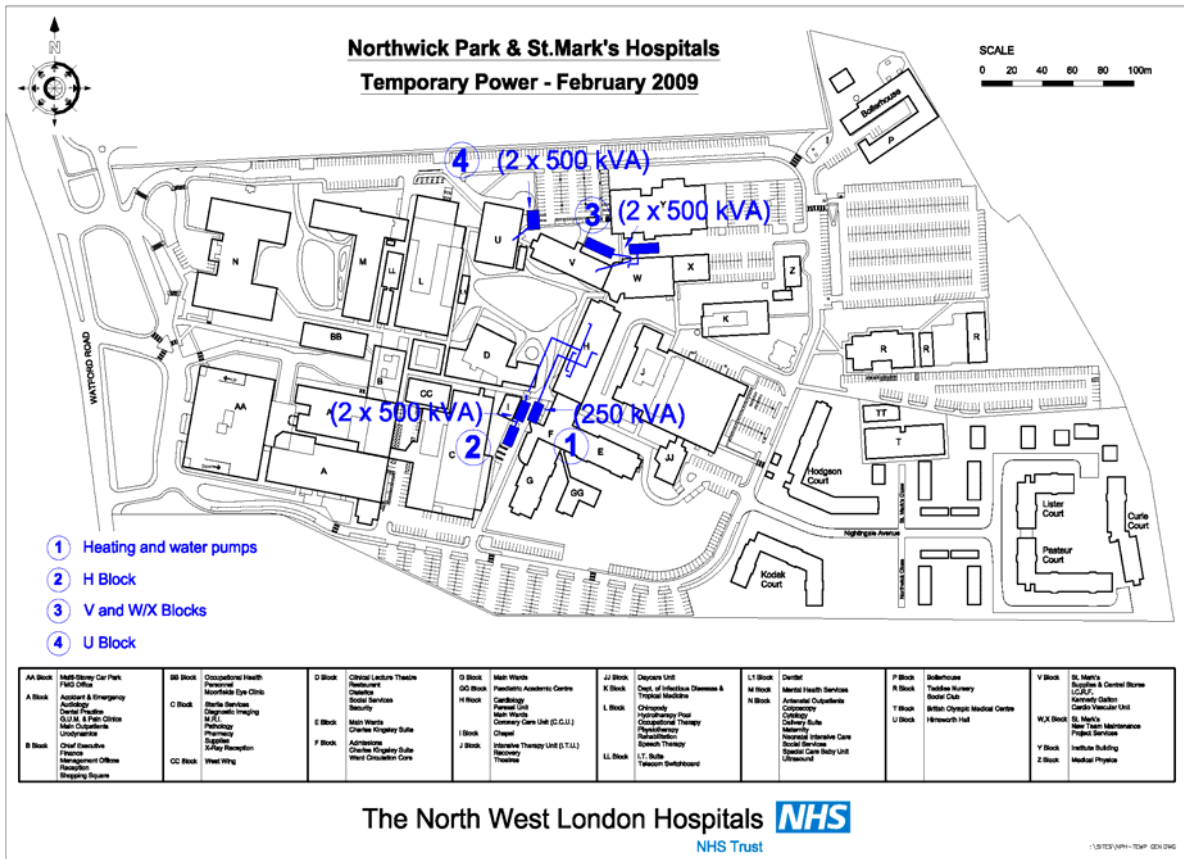
There is an increase risk to the Trusts ability to meet the A&E target as a result of the fire and associated pressures.

**Philip Sutcliffe**  
**Director of Corporate Services**

2 March 2009



Appendix A – Areas affected by the Fire (shown in red)



Appendix B – Location of temporary generators