

PRESS RELEASE – 12 DECEMBER 2018

Thieves strike at South Tyneside District Hospital threatening safety

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust is warning that thieves are costing thousands of pounds and potentially endangering patient safety following a spate of thefts and criminal damage at South Tyneside District Hospital.

The latest incident involved the theft of fixed copper piping from underneath an administration building. The thieves gained entry by cutting a padlock and forcing their way into a basement area before stripping long lengths of pipework, causing extensive flood damage to parts of the building. The cost of the damage was estimated at £4,000.

Other recent incidents have included the removal of an electrical cable that was cut from a stand-by generator and the theft of items from the construction site of the hospital's new boilerhouse.

Steve Jamieson, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's Director of Estates and Facilities, said: "We feel very saddened and disappointed that thieves would want to target hospital premises. The cost of repairing the damage and replacing equipment is money that could be better spent on patient care.

"A number of the recent incidents have targeted critical functions such as electrical installations, water and heating pipes and medical gas systems and this poses a threat to safety. Not only is there is a real risk that anyone tampering with live equipment could themselves be seriously hurt, but if certain systems are disabled then this could impact on patient safety.

"We would urge those committing these offences to consider the consequences of their actions, especially when harming parts of the infrastructure that maintain the safe running of the hospital."

The Trust places strong emphasis on safety and security and, in addition to having sophisticated CCTV systems, recently invested in body-worn cameras for security staff. Evaluation of the use of body-worn cameras has shown they can act as a deterrent and provide valuable evidence in confrontational incidents to support criminal prosecutions.

Inspector Phil Baker, of Northumbria Police, said: “We are aware of a number of reports of theft from South Tyneside District Hospital and enquiries are ongoing to locate those responsible.

“I find it difficult to comprehend that thieves would target a hospital where some of the most vulnerable people in our communities are treated. I would ask anybody with information, or who sees anybody acting suspiciously in the area of the hospital, to come forward and assist officers.”

Anyone with information is asked to contact police on 101 quoting reference 995 091218.

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Issued by **Kay Jordan**

For press enquiries on this release, contact **0191 404 1128** or email kay.jordan@stft.nhs.uk