Wessex SECURE DATA ENVIRONMENT | Part of the NHS Research Secure Data Environment Network

Wessex SDE Operational Senior Leadership Team

CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Version 1.5

Status: DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW AND SRO APPROVAL

Version history

#	Date	Author	Reviewer	Changes
1.1	1/10/25	Mark Heffernan (Director of Operations) and Rachel Chappell (SETT Manager)	Chris Kipps (SDE SRO) and SDE Board (Not yet reviewed)	N/A
1.2	13/10/25	Mark Heffernan (Director of Operations)	SLT and SRO	Updated with comments from SLT and approved for release to 20 October SDE Board for discussion
1.3	17/11/25	Mark Heffernan (Director of Operations)	SRO and SDE Board	Updated to align with financial limits on SLT decisions based on updated Board ToR and SIAG ToR
1.4	8/12/25	Ralph Scott (Interim Communications & PPIE Lead)	Mark Heffernan (Director of Operations)	Updated to reflect required functionality and align with NHS good practice
1.5	9/12/25	Ralph Scott (Interim Communications & PPIE Lead)	Mark Heffernan (Director of Operations)	Updated to add model agenda for meetings and ensure consistency with Wessex SDE Board TOR.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Operational Senior Leadership Team (SLT) supports the governance of the Wessex Secure Data Environment (SDE) by providing operational leadership, coordination, and advice across the SDE service, ensuring safe, effective and compliant day-to-day delivery in line with approved SDE objectives and national standards.

1.2 The SLT is constituted by the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) as a formal operational decision-making forum for the Wessex SDE. The SRO delegates defined operational decision-making authority through the SLT and uses the SLT as the forum in which operational decisions are taken when present or recorded when taken by the SRO outside meetings. The SLT provides advice and assurance to support the SRO's decisions and the wider Wessex SDE governance framework.

1.3 The SLT also provides oversight of operational performance, risks and issues, study governance, data onboarding, and third-party provider activity across the SDE service. It supports the SRO in discharging operational responsibilities.

1.4 University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust (UHS) serves as the Host Organisation for the SDE and the SLT, ensuring governance and regulatory compliance.

2 Purpose & objectives

2.1 The purpose of the SLT is to provide the formal operational leadership forum for the Wessex SDE, supporting the SRO through coordinated operational management, assurance, and delegated decision-making within defined limits.

2.2 The SLT has the following objectives:

2.2.1 To ensure that Wessex SDE operations and functions comply with applicable legal requirements, UHS governance frameworks, and national SDE standards, and are delivered within an accountable and effective operational framework;

2.2.2 To ensure operational risks, issues and dependencies are identified, understood and escalated appropriately through agreed governance routes.

2.2.3 To ensure operational performance is monitored against agreed SDE objectives and performance measures;

2.2.4 To ensure that third-party provider performance and service levels support safe, reliable and compliant SDE operations;

2.2.5 To ensure that operational delivery is supported by adequate capability, capacity and workforce arrangements across all SDE functions; and,

2.2.6 To provide clear, timely and reliable operational assurance to the SRO and the Wessex SDE Board.

3 Scope & governance

3.1 The SLT is constituted by the SRO as the formal operational leadership and decision-making forum for the Wessex SDE. It operates under authority delegated by the SRO and is responsible for day-to-day operational delivery, compliance and risk management. The SRO chairs the SLT and may, where appropriate, delegate chairing responsibilities to another SLT member.

3.2 Members of the SLT are appointed by the SRO in line with UHS governance processes. Delegated authority for operational functions is allocated by the SRO through the SLT Membership and Functional Scheme of Delegation (see Appendix 1).

3.3 SLT members may take operational decisions within their defined delegated authority and may incur expenditure within budgets approved by the SRO for the functions assigned to them. Decisions outside a member's delegated authority, or outside approved budget limits, must be referred to the SLT for consideration.

3.4 Where an operational decision is referred to the SLT, the SRO will take the decision, ordinarily within the SLT meeting. Where the SRO is not present or determines that a decision is required between meetings, the SRO may take the decision outside the meeting. In all cases, the SLT provides advice and recommendations, but does not hold collective financial or decision-making authority beyond the individual delegations set out in the Functional Scheme of Delegation.

3.5 The SLT is the formal forum in which the SRO takes operational investment decisions for the Wessex SDE within the delegated authority threshold of £75,000 or less. Decisions above this threshold fall within the remit of the Strategic Investment Committee (SIC), which is the formal forum where the SRO takes major investment decisions.

3.6 The SLT may provide operational input into SIC business where requested by the SRO but does not scrutinise or approve investment proposals above the SLT's delegated authority threshold.

3.7 Any operational or investment decision taken by the SRO in an SLT meeting is a decision of the SRO. Such decisions will be documented by the Secretariat and reported to the SDE Board, ordinarily for noting or, where the SRO considers it appropriate, for assurance before implementation, in which case decisions are formally recorded at the next SLT meeting.

3.8 Where the SRO takes an operational or investment decision outside an SLT meeting, the decision will be documented by the Secretariat and formally noted at the next SLT meeting.

3.9 The SLT provides operational assurance to the SRO and the SDE Board and receives escalation from operational teams. It may escalate issues, risks or resource concerns to the SDE Board through the SRO where additional oversight or assurance is required.

3.10 The SLT and all members must operate in full compliance with UHS Standing Financial Instructions, Standing Orders, the Scheme of Delegation, procurement and contracting rules, and all associated financial control and audit requirements. Nothing in these Terms of Reference permits any individual or committee to commit UHS to expenditure, contracts or liabilities beyond delegated authority.

3.11 The SDE does not operate its own Legal, HR, Procurement or other corporate functions. The SLT must ensure that any decision with legal, workforce, contractual or procurement implications follows UHS corporate governance processes and is routed to the appropriate UHS teams for advice and approval.

4 Responsibilities

4.1 The responsibilities of the SLT are to:

4.1.1 Provide operational leadership of the Wessex SDE and take decisions within delegated financial authority;

4.1.2 Act as the formal decision-making forum in which the SRO receives advice and takes operational investment decisions for the Wessex SDE on proposals of £75,000 or less;

4.1.3 Develop and manage annual operational plans and budgets, ensuring expenditure remains within approved limits and advising the SRO on decisions outside delegated authority or budgetary parameters;

4.1.4 Ensure operational compliance with applicable legal requirements, UHS governance frameworks and national SDE standards;

4.1.5 Ensure that operational policies, procedures and internal controls are in place, up to date and effective in supporting safe and compliant service delivery;

4.1.6 Maintain the Wessex SDE Operational Risk Register and ensure that operational risks and issues are identified, recorded, assessed and escalated in accordance with the SDE Risks and Issues Policy and the UHS Risk Management Policy;

4.1.7 Ensure that research study and data-onboarding activity follows the approved governance pathway and is delivered, monitored, and closed down in accordance with UHS information-governance, legal, security, and applicable research governance requirements;

4.1.8 Support the operation of the Wessex Data Access Committee by providing feasibility assessments, data onboarding inputs, and necessary operational reports, but does not review or influence DAC recommendations.

4.1.9 Oversee overall operational delivery against agreed SDE objectives and performance measures, monitoring progress, exceptions, risks and required mitigations;

4.1.10 Ensure that each SLT functional lead provides regular reporting to the SLT on performance, delivery status, risks and expenditure against approved plans and budgets for their delegated operational functions;

4.1.11 Monitor third-party provider performance and ensure contractual obligations, milestones and deliverables remain aligned with SDE operational objectives and perfornance measures, with assurance proportionate to service criticality; and,

4.1.12 Provide clear and timely operational assurance to the SRO and the Wessex SDE Board, ensuring that operational reporting and performance information is available, accurate and supports effective decision-making.

5 Transparency

5.1 In line with the public sector transparency expectations, the SLT will contribute to the SDE's commitment to publish key governance documents (e.g. Terms of Reference, organograms, and summary papers) once approved by the SRO. Any publication will be managed through the Communications and PPIE Lead, ensuring that information is accurate, accessible, and consistent with confidentiality and commercial sensitivity policies.

6 Membership

6.1 Core membership is determined by the SRO and reflects the operational leadership roles required to run the Wessex SDE in conjunction with UHS corporate functions. The full list of roles and individuals is set out in the SLT Membership and Functional Scheme of Delegation (Appendix 1).

6.2 Additional individuals may attend by invitation of the SRO (as Chair) or Delegated Chair to provide specialist advice. These attendees are not core members and do not count toward quorum.

6.3 Members are responsible for reviewing papers relevant to their role, declaring any conflicts of interest in line with UHS policy, and attending meetings consistently to support effective decision-making.

6.4 All members must complete a Declaration of Interest and Confidentiality Agreement.

7 Administration of meetings

7.1 Secretariat support to the SLT will be provided by UHS R&D. The Secretariat will:

7.1.1 Provide administrative and governance support to the SLT, including scheduling meetings, preparing agendas for agreement with the SRO (as Chair) or Delegated Chair, coordinating paper collation, and ensuring papers are circulated in advance;

7.1.2 Produce and maintain accurate minutes, the Operational Actions and Decisions Log, and Wessex SDE Operational Risk Register;

7.1.3 The Secretariat will coordinate all papers required to support the SRO's operational decision-making and assurance, including papers needed for decisions taken outside SLT meetings and those required for onward reporting to the Wessex SDE Board;

7.1.4 Manage written-procedure papers and record SRO decisions taken outside of SLT meetings; and,

7.1.5 Ensure all SLT documentation, including forward plans and assurance materials for inclusion in SDE Board reports, is stored and retained in accordance with UHS information-governance and records-management requirements.

7.2 The SLT will meet weekly or more frequently if required.

7.3 A standard agenda may include:

- **Welcome and apologies** – Note attendance and confirm the meeting is quorate.
- **Minutes and Operational Actions and Decisions Log** *(previous minutes; updated Operational Action and Decisions Log)* – Approve the minutes and formally note any operational decisions taken by the SRO outside the meeting.
- **Risk Register and Issues Log** *(Operational Risk Register extract; Issues Log)* – Review, by exception, material risks and issues requiring SLT discussion, escalation or mitigation.
- **Operational status update** *(verbal or written updates as required)* – Receive updates on service performance, OKRs, compliance indicators, and operational dependencies, as well as targeted updates from SLT members on major activities.
- **Blockers and dependencies requiring SLT attention** *(papers from functional leads)* – Identify and resolve operational blockers, cross-team dependencies or delivery risks requiring coordinated SLT action.
- **Operational decisions for SRO consideration** *(papers requiring SRO decision within delegated thresholds)* – Consider matters requiring SRO decision within the SLT forum, informed by SLT advice and recommendations.
- **Any other business** – Address any additional matters relevant to SLT governance.

7.4 Meetings are quorate when the SRO (as Chair) or Delegated Chair is present together with more than 50 per cent of core SLT members identified in the Functional Scheme of Delegation.

7.5 Substitutes may count towards quorum where formally authorised by the SRO (as Chair) or Delegated Chair in advance of the meeting. Observers and invited attendees do not count towards quorum.

7.6 Voting members must be present for the full duration of any agenda item in which they participate.

7.7 The SLT will seek consensus in forming its advice to the SRO. Where consensus cannot be reached, the SRO (as Chair) or Delegated Chair may call a vote to establish the balance of views within the SLT. A simple majority of voting members will determine the SLT's formal advice to the SRO. The SRO is non-voting.

7.8 A vote does not constitute a decision of the SLT. It informs the advice provided to the SRO, who remains the sole decision-maker and may take decisions within or outside the meeting in accordance with Section 3.

7.9 Any member with a potential or perceived conflict of interest in relation to an investment proposal must declare it in advance of discussion. The SRO (as Chair) or Delegated Chair will determine whether the member should withdraw from that item. Declarations and actions will be recorded in the meeting minutes.

7.10 The SLT will produce or update the following outputs after each meeting, coordinated by the Secretariat:

7.10.1 **Minutes:** A full and accurate record of discussions, rationales, recommendations, and any operational or investment decisions taken by the SRO. The approved minutes will constitute the formal public-record output of the SLT in line with transparency requirements;

7.10.2 **Operational Actions and Decisions Log:** A single log capturing SLT decisions, actions, recommendations, and status updates. It supports effective governance and assurance; and,

7.10.3 **Wessex SDE Operational Risk Register:** A record of risks and issues affecting the safe, effective and compliant delivery of the SDE service in line with SDE and UHS governance policies.

7.11 Following each meeting, the Secretariat will submit the approved minutes, including SRO decisions, to the SDE Board through the SRO.

7.12 All documentation will be retained in accordance with UHS data governance and information management policies. Records will be stored within approved SDE repositories (e.g. NHS Futures) to ensure transparency, traceability, and compliance with information governance requirements.

8 Review

8.1 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually or as required by the SRO to ensure they remain aligned with the SDE's operating model and governance requirements.

8.2 These Terms of Reference, including all appendices, may be amended at any time with the approval of the SRO. The Secretariat may submit factual updates, including changes to membership, for SRO approval between annual reviews. All approved amendments will be reported to the SDE Board for noting and assurance.

Appendix 1: Senior Leadership Team Membership and Functional Scheme of Delegation

1 Purpose

1.1 This appendix sets out the core membership of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the authority delegated by the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) to individual SLT functional leads. Membership is defined by organisational role, and named post-holders may be updated administratively. The Functional Scheme of Delegation establishes the operational functions, responsibilities and decision limits assigned to SLT members to support the safe, effective and compliant operation of the Wessex SDE.

2 Principles of Delegation

2.1 The SRO retains overall accountability for the Wessex SDE. Delegation of authority to SLT members does not remove or diminish this accountability.

2.2 Delegated authority applies only within the specific functional responsibilities and financial limits set out in this SoD and must be exercised in accordance with UHS Standing Financial Instructions, Standing Orders, the Scheme of Delegation and all relevant governance policies.

2.3 SLT members may take operational decisions within their defined delegated limits. Decisions exceeding those limits, or carrying significant operational, financial, legal or governance implications, must be escalated to the SRO in line with the SLT Terms of Reference.

2.4 Decisions above £75,000 fall outside the scope of this SoD and must be referred to the Strategic Investment Committee (SIC) for consideration by the SRO.

3 Decision-Making and Escalation

3.1 Decisions made under this Functrional Scheme of Delegation must comply with the SLT Terms of Reference.

3.2 Operational decisions within individual delegations may be taken directly by the relevant SLT functional lead.

3.3 Decisions outside an individual's delegated authority, or outside approved functional budgets, must be referred to the SLT. The SRO will take the decision, ordinarily within the SLT meeting or, if required, outside the meeting.

4 Review and Reporting

4.1 This Scheme of Delegation will be reviewed annually by the SRO and updated as required. The SRO may approve interim amendments at any time.

4.2 All updates will be reported to the Wessex SDE Board for noting and assurance..

5 Delegated Functions and Authorities

5.1 This Scheme summarises the operational functions of the Wessex SDE and the authority delegated by the SRO to individual SLT members for their delivery. The table below sets out each function, the responsible SLT role and the scope of the authority delegated to that role. Detailed role descriptions, including the full scope of activities and responsibilities for each function, are maintained under Section 6 (Functional Role Descriptions).

5.2 All delegated functions operate under the overall accountability of the SRO. Amendments to this Scheme require SRO approval and will be shared with the Wessex SDE Board for assurance.

5.3 The following functions and delegated authorities are approved by the SRO:

Responsible Functional Lead	Delegated Function
Operations & Partnerships Lead – Mark Heffernan	Business Development & Income Generation
	Strategic Investments, Initiatives, New Product Development & Management
	Corporate Functions: Commercial (via Commercial Advisory Group)
CIRU Service Lead – Ashley Heinson	Infrastructure Management – Cloud & Collaboration Platform
	Data Security & Compliance
Risk & IG Lead – Mikayala King	Wessex SDE Information Governance
	Risk, Security, Compliance, Certifications, Accreditations
	Research Organisation & User Validation, Data Ingress & Egress governance – with delivery of these led by the CIRU Service Lead under instruction from the Delivery Lead.
Delivery & Centre of Excellence Lead – Rachel Chappell	SDE Centre of Excellence: Data Onboarding, Catalogue & Inventory
	SDE Centre of Excellence: Data Strategy, Technology & Engineering / Platforms & Tools
	SDE Centre of Excellence: Product Engineering & Development / Disease Repositories
	Client Study Delivery / Technical Delivery / Study Management
	Research Study Engagement and Pre-Sales
	Client Experience Management
Finance & Funder Management Lead – Hayley Angel (interim)	Corporate Functions: Finance
	Finance Risks and Issues
	SDE Citizen Engagement & Communications

Communications & PPIE Lead – Ralph Scott (Interim)	[Digital Critical Friends Secretariat]
Clinical Lead – Matt Stammers	[SDE Registries and Driver Projects] Engagement with UHS and Wessex Clinicians

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6 Functional Role Descriptions

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