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## Hospital beds and 480 jobs axed

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The bed cuts by Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Trust are in addition to 43 which have already been axed.

The trust said it was reducing the amount of time patients spent in hospital, so fewer beds were needed.

Health campaigners said they believed the "scandalous" cuts would hit secretaries, nurses and cleaners.

The trust runs Epsom General Hospital in Surrey and St Helier in Carshalton.

It is not currently in debt but needs to make the savings to balance its books in future.

In September it announced cost-cutting measures including asking office staff to empty their own bins and cancelling water cooler contracts.

Chief executive Lorraine Clifton said it appreciated it was an "unsettling time for staff".

No individuals had yet been identified for job losses but every area, from senior management to clinical, non-clinical and corporate areas had been reviewed by consultants KPMG over the past five weeks.

As far as possible, the reduction in jobs would be achieved by not filling vacant posts and reducing the use of temporary staff.

"While our financial situation has been a key driver for the recovery plan, there is also an opportunity to improve services for patients," said Ms Clifton.

"By looking at all our systems and how we can work differently, we will make sure patients have good access to services...and don't spend longer in hospital than necessary."

'Small fortune'

Pressure group Health Emergency said no part of the care team would be left unscathed by the job cuts.

"This is a scandalous attempt to make hard-working front-line hospital staff pay the price for mismanagement and political interference at the highest level," said spokesman Geoff Martin.

"These cuts have been drawn up by KPMG, who have charged the NHS trust a small fortune to identify a hit-list of staff and services for the axe."

Public services union Unison said staff were furious.

"Their futures have been put on the line in order to bail out a financial crisis that is not of their making," said branch secretary Kevin O'Brien.

He said a demonstration would be held on 25 November to show the anger of staff and the public about the "assault on their local hospital services".

Last month, thousands of people marched through Epsom in protest at the ending of emergency and trauma surgery at their local hospital.

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