

Trust Board meeting – 16 November 2023

Interim Chair's opening remarks

Welcome to today's board meeting in public. I am Helen Hirst and I have been appointed as the interim chair following the resignation of Max McLean until a substantive chair is appointed.

I want to start with a few comments about what has happened since the last board meeting, what we have been advised to do next by NHS England and what my plans are for the next two to three months.

As has now become public knowledge, the Trust commissioned an independent review into concerns raised by the previous Chairman and the Chief Executive. I have not seen this review but I do have a copy of the action plan and we will be discussing this later. It is coming to our closed board meeting today for the Board to endorse the plan. The plan covers matters of policy and procedure, specific areas of concern re patient safety, staff welfare and staff illness, Board member appraisals and specific communication and relationship issues between the former chair and chief executive. Given the chair is no longer here it seems appropriate to make some of the specific points referred to in the plan into more generic action points. Once these amendments have been made the plan will be presented to our open board in January along with a response to the letter from Richard Barker which is in your pack of papers.

The former chair has written to individuals within the trust making two specific points where he believes communications sent out by the Trust were incorrect. The first relates to a communication that said that the Chief Executive had not fallen short of the expected standards for the role. I have discussed this point with the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chair. They informed me that the review did find that both the former chair and the chief executive actions, in some specific areas, fell short of the standard expected. The review did not find that either fell short of the overarching the standards or principles for public life expected of those occupying the role of Chair and CEO - the Nolan principles. The communication could have been clearer in this regard.

The second point challenged by the former chair is whether he resigned voluntarily or was asked to resign. It is my understanding from discussions with those involved that he was asked to resign.

Moving onto the letter from Richard Barker, Regional Director for NHSE. The letter sets out five specific actions that are all in train. The letter also asks the board to confirm that it accepts the findings of the review and will learn the lessons. This takes me onto my next steps as interim chair.

Yesterday I discussed the timeframe for commissioning an external well led review with the NHSE Regional Office. This will start in January. In the meantime I have restarted the board development work that was started in February 2023 and Andrew Hughes is here today observing our board. He will feedback to us at our next board development session in December where we will agree a programme of board development for the coming year. I have also asked Andrew to undertake a similar piece of development with the council of governors. And I am meeting the governors in early December to scope this.

This has been a difficult time for the trust and for individuals involved specifically Max and Mel, and I hope we are able to now move forward with clear plans for improvement and truly learn the lessons so we respond much more quickly in the future if things go wrong. I cannot erase what's happened but I do want to draw a line under it.