

Report title: Staff Support at North West Anglia NHS FT

To: Cambridgeshire County Councils Adults & Health Committee

Meeting Date: 17 March 2022

From: Caroline Walker, Chief Executive, North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: N/A

Outcome: To update the committee members on the Trust's workforce pressures and the support programmes being offered to manage staff stress.

Recommendation: The Adults and Health Committee are asked to:

- a) note the pressures on the Trust's workforce during the pandemic.
- b) note the measures taken by the Trust to support staff and a positive staff experience.

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1. Background

- 1.1 North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust operates across three main hospital sites in Peterborough, Stamford and Huntingdon, and three smaller sites in Doddington, Wisbech and Ely. With over 7,000 substantive staff and a further 800 bank workers delivering services via over 300 roles, the Trust is committed promoting and supporting health and wellbeing. Since start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the health and wellbeing offer has expanded to meet the emerging needs of staff and to also reflect the national priorities of the NHS People Plan and NHS People Promise. The emphasis on enhanced health and wellbeing support is one of the key pillars, and includes for example, the requirements to appoint a Non-Executive Director Champion for Health and Wellbeing, which the Trust put in place in 2020.
- 1.2 This report summarises the challenges facing the Trust and staff over the last two years, and how this has impacted on staff health and wellbeing, and specifically on mental health.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on almost all Trust staff and bank workers in one way or another. For some it has meant working from home for some or all of the time. Those who were Clinically Extremely Vulnerable have had to shield and it has not always been possible to find them meaningful work to do from home. Most Trust staff and bank workers have been on site to care for all categories of patients throughout the last 2 years, including those treated for Covid. Patients have been cared for professionally and with compassion despite any personal pressures.
- 2.2 Many staff have also been redeployed to priority areas or to where staffing gaps required additional support. Training and support was provided to help them settle into a new team or area, sometimes with very different types of patients. Some staff were anxious about working in areas they were unfamiliar with, e.g. in Intensive Care or with CPAP patients. Personal risk assessments were completed and kept under review for all staff, regardless of whether they worked directly with patients or not. This was part of the requirements under the Health and Safety at Work Act and was in line with the frequently changing national guidance for the NHS, set against a back drop of around 1,500 front line workers across the country who sadly lost their lives to Covid.
- 2.3 Staff have also had to balance the impact of covid on their home or private lives, including home schooling. Additional support of up to 10 working days was provided to parents to help them care for sick children or arrange child care.
- 2.4 Workplace pressures have come from a number of sources as outlined above. The most significant day to day challenge has been staffing levels and a rise in people coming to the Trust for urgent care and treatment.
- 2.5 Sickness levels in the Trust have ranged between 4.07% and 4.68% between February 2021 and February 2022. Daily tracking of absence levels (sickness plus shielding, isolation and childcare) has shown much higher levels of more than 8% or even higher at times. Sickness for mental health related issues, e.g. stress, anxiety and depression have also

risen over the last two years. Additional support has been provided via mental health first aiders, occupational health, counselling, quiet spaces (wobble rooms), psychologist support and access to a wide range of local and national NHS resources. A staff mental health pathway has been successfully supporting staff from across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough into clinical CPFT services, with extra funding by the CCG to support this and will continue for another two years. As part of the supervision and appraisals processes staff are entitled to have regular wellbeing conversations with their line managers. Stress risk assessments are completed by staff and managers where someone is demonstrating they are not coping and a range of supportive action are agreed and put in place. Occupational Health advice can also be sought. Referrals from managers to the in-house occupational service have been increasing as more support has been needed for staff.

- 2.6 The impact on staffing levels is not just about absence. Vacancy levels of around 5% in 2020/21 and 9% in 2021/2022 (higher because of additional funded establishment from April 2021) has also been a challenge. Recruitment has continued at pace to help bring new staff into the Trust. Pipelines of trainees and students have also remained strong overall. Overseas recruitment has continued and 52 nurses are due to join the Trust in February and March 2022, with 17 midwives joining later in the year. Doctors and other staff groups are also sourced overseas or respond directly to job adverts on-line. The Trust currently employs over 1,000 staff with non UK nationalities.
- 2.7 The Trust's 'flexible' workforce supply comes from in-house 'bank' workers and external agency workers. The impact of supply and demand across the sector has meant that it has been harder to fill rota gaps through and bank and agency workers at times in the last two years. This places more pressure on staff as rota gaps cannot always be filled. To keep patients safe, staff are moved around on a shift by shift basis. The agency cost for the Trust is between 4.5% and 6% of payroll costs per year.
- 2.8 The Trust has committed to expanding the equality, diversity and inclusion awareness across the Trust to ensure that all staff feel they have a voice and are able to progress effectively in their careers. With over 100 languages spoken at the Trust, inclusion is very important to our staff and to the care they provide to our patients. Several staff networks are in place and are appreciated by staff who attend, e.g. BAME, disabled, women, LGBTQI+ Each of the Executive Team are 'Ally's' for one of the networks to help raise the profile on the issues faced by some staff and to role model across the Trust. Reverse mentoring and others programmes are in place. These all help to build a more positive staff experience and culture.
- 2.9 The Trust monitors and manages working hours and the impact on staff in a number of ways. For example, for nursing staff on the wards the rostering systems places controls on the maximum number of hours someone can work in any week. The Trust also requires staff to take a 25% of their annual leave every three months to ensure they get break from work. For junior doctors their nationally agreed contract provides for a Guardian of Safe working to monitor working hours and any issues relating to breaches so that the Trust can take action and provide support as necessary.
- 2.10 The Trust employs a dedicated Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Guardian who encourages staff to speak out about things they are concerned about, including how they feel they are being treated at work. All issues are considered and/or investigated and actions taken. There are regular updates to the Trust Board. This is another way we try to support staff

and improve their experience of working for the Trust.

- 2.11 The Trust continues to use the annual NHS Staff Survey and quarterly surveys to gain feedback and to help prioritise targeted actions to address the issuers identified. The Good to Outstanding Programme delivers this through 5 work streams: Health and Wellbeing, Leadership, People and Culture, Quality and communication. The 2021 survey results are due to be published on 30thMarch 2022 and for the first time questions have been aligned to the NHS People Promise.



3. Source documents guidance

3.1 Source documents

NHS People Plan

NHS People Promise

NWAngliaFT Public Board reports

3.2 Location

NHS England website:

www.england.nhs.uk

North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust website

<https://www.nwangliaft.nhs.uk/about-us/trust-board/board-papers-meetings/>