Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Quality Care - for you, with you

Minutes of a Virtual Trust Board meeting held on Thursday, 28th January 2021 at 9.15 a.m.

PRESENT

Ms E Mullan, Chair
Mr S Devlin, Chief Executive
Ms G Donaghy, Non-Executive Director
Mr M McDonald, Non-Executive Director
Mrs H McCartan, Non-Executive Director
Mr J Wilkinson, Non-Executive Director
Mr P Morgan, Director of Children and Young People's Services/Executive Director of Social Work
Dr M O'Kane, Medical Director
Ms H O'Neill, Director of Finance, Procurement and Estates
Mrs H Trouton, Executive Director of Nursing, Midwifery & Allied Health Professionals.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr B Beattie, Acting Director of Older People and Primary Care
Mrs A Magwood, Director of Performance and Reform
Mrs M McClements, Director of Acute Services
Mr B McNeany, Director of Mental Health and Disability Services
Mrs V Toal, Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Mrs J McKimm, Head of Communications
Mrs R Rogers, Head of Communications
Mr E McAnuff, Boardroom Apprentice
Mrs S Judt, Board Assurance Manager
Mrs S McCormick, Committee Secretary *(Minutes)*

APOLOGIES

None.

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting including Mr Eoin McAnuff, Boardroom Apprentice 2020. She was also pleased to welcome regular public attendees to the meeting.

In light of the current Covid-19 Surge 3, the Chair advised that the meeting would follow a similar format to the meetings held in November and December 2020 and therefore will comprise a one item agenda dealing with Covid-19 pressures and focusing on patients, service users and staff. The Chair referred to a series of short videos which would be played later in the meeting whereby Trust staff share their experiences of working through Covid and she emphasised the importance of reflecting on their messages.

At this point the Chair reminded members regarding some aspects of virtual meeting etiquette.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chair requested members to declare any potential conflicts of interest in relation to any matters on the agenda. None were declared.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 22nd OCTOBER, 12th NOVEMBER AND 10th DECEMBER 2020

The minutes of meetings held on 22nd October, 12th November and 10th December 2020 were agreed as an accurate record and duly signed by the Chair.

Board members approved the minutes of meetings held on 22nd October, 12th November and 10th December 2020.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress updates from the relevant Directors to issues raised at the previous meetings.

Mrs Toal referred to the action against Item 4, Covid-19 update from the meeting held on 10th December 2020 and advised she had shared the Departmental Circular on the Vaccination Framework with Board members prior to the meeting and she would update further on the current position later on the agenda.

5. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

The Chief Executive advised Board members of Mr McNeany's intention to retire as Director of Mental Health and Learning Disability at the end of March 2021. The Trust will now being the recruitment process to appoint a successor.

The Chief Executive provided assurance that the Senior Management Team (SMT) continue to review the Trust's financial position on a regular basis and are confident in achieving a breakeven position at financial year end. Ms O'Neill concurred with the Chief Executive's comments and added that Month 9 figures most recently approved by SMT, highlight expenditure the Trust has incurred as a direct response to Covid-19, which to date is £4.1m. She stated this money is fully funded and will not impact the Trust's breakeven position. Ms O'Neill advised she would respond to any questions members may have once they had considered the report.

6. PATIENT/CLIENT SAFETY AND QUALITY OF CARE

i) COVID-19 update

The Chief Executive provided an update on the current position. He emphasised ongoing challenges remain across the system and referred members to the Surge plan document which sets out how the Trust will manage the current Surge 3. Members noted all three council areas within the Southern locality are experiencing an extremely high volume of Covid positive cases and as of 25 January 2021 all three sit within the range of 400+ per 100,000 population. The Chief Executive emphasised this has translated into considerably more hospital pressure than that experienced by any other Trust across Northern Ireland.

Members were advised that due to sustained community transmission, inpatient demand in Surge 3 peaked at 274 Covid-positive inpatients. This has reduced somewhat, to 184 as a result of the considerable regional support made available to divert pressure from the Southern Area. The Chief Executive went on to reflect on the regional ICU position, stating that although the Trust has seen a small reduction in terms of the number of Covid-positive inpatients, it was important to note that numbers in ICU are not seeing a massive down turn and demand on the regional ICU network is remarkably high.

In relation to staffing, the Chief Executive advised that Covid related absence remains high across all Directorates with the biggest impact felt across Acute services and Old People and Primary Care Directorates. Members were mindful of the associated pressures on the Trust's ability to manage Covid-19 due to high demand and staff absence.

In relation to the Covid-19 Vaccination programme members noted to date the Trust has administered 20,000 first vaccinations along with a further 3,600 people having received their second dose. Mrs Toal stated that work in terms of vaccinating the Priority group 1 encompassing residents in Care Homes and Mental Health and Disability Supported Living client groups has nearly concluded. All Care Homes have received their first dose and the programme has nearly completed the 2nd dose in the vast majority of others. She alluded to some challenges in a number of facilities that have been in outbreak but these are being worked through.

Mrs Toal went on to report that the roll out of vaccinations for all Health Care staff is progressing well, with just over 16,000 having received their first dose through the South Lake Centre. The Trust is also involved in a partnership programme with GP practices and members heard a detailed update on how vaccinations are progressing. Mrs Toal emphasised slots were still available for members of staff/Care Home staff.

The Chief Executive reported on continuing challenges in terms of staff burn out and unscheduled care flow. He reiterated the Southern locality has a community prevalence that is far greater than other Trusts and this is having a real impact, along with the continued redeployment of staff which has led to the downturn of services. He went on to refer to a number of issues currently facing the Trust including, changes to Hospital Visiting and in particular End of Life, the current intensity in terms of mental health demand both inpatient and community based along with growing demand on Children and Young Peoples Services and also within Disability Day Care Services. Members were reassured the Trust is doing everything set out in the Surge 3 Plan; however there are still immense challenges.

At his juncture, the Chair recorded thanks for the great effort to date undertaken by teams in delivering the Vaccination Programme and members were given opportunity to raise questions. Mr McDonald asked if the high volume of Covid positive cases within the council areas local to the Southern Trust is due to community behaviour or a concentration of a particular variant and does the Trust need to do something more in terms of a targeted approach or set up mobile vaccination.

The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of communities adhering to all the Covid-19 guidance; however, he acknowledged there are some specific challenges. Dr O'Kane referred to local data

suggesting 60% of cases are new variant which increases transmissibility. She also outlined a range of other factors which are contributing to the high numbers; however pointed out it was important to note the vaccine is impacting positively on the virulence of the disease. In relation to targeting particular groups, Dr O'Kane pointed out Trust staff have been positive in their response to taking up the vaccine and the remaining community is served by general practice and GPs are moving forward positively with the vaccination programme. Mrs Toal referred to the significant regulations with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine used by the Trust and the associated challenges with movement to other vaccination centres; however she was pleased to advise that a recent pop up vaccine clinic at Daisy Hill Hospital had been very successful.

Ms Donaghy asked if Government restrictions are released on 7 March 2021 and numbers have not reduced sufficiently was there potential for a fourth surge and if an already stretched system could cope. The Chief Executive stated that past evidence shows when lock down is released this translates into an upsurge in demand and it was imperative that numbers drop dramatically to avoid another surge. Ms Donaghy asked if it would be beneficial to fast track younger age groups for vaccination to assist in kerbing community transmission amongst the younger age group. Mrs Toal advised the Trust is following the vaccination rollout in accordance with the Department of Health approach and (Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) guidance which set the priorities and she explained the rationale in terms of the prevention of Covid-19 mortality.

In relation to Children and Young Peoples Services, Mrs Leeson asked what challenges are facing staff in terms of supporting vulnerable children with some special schools being closed. Mr Morgan commended both community and voluntary sector staff along with the family support hubs who have assisted in putting together a number of bespoke support packages, enabling children and families to access community based respite. Members noted the Trust has been working with the Department of Health/Department of Education on developing guidance around how the most vulnerable children will be supported both from an education perspective and the expectations around the Trusts. Mr Morgan welcomed the announcement regarding the re-opening of special schools and assured members the Trust is working to support these children in a number of ways.

Mrs McCartan asked about the intensity of the Mental Health demand both in-patient and community based and what are the current specific challenges and the implications post Covid-19 in terms of a reassessment of future priorities. In responding, Mr McNeany advised of a significant increase in those presenting acutely unwell for the first time as in-patient admissions as well as through the Home Treatment Crisis Response Team and alluded to the associated challenges in terms of current workforce pressures. He went on to point out there had also been a rise in the level of acuity within the community and spoke about the mechanisms in place during Surge 3 to assist those who use the mental health support and recovery teams. There was also an increased level of concern for those caring for a family member with a disability given the impact Covid has had on Short Breaks and Day Services, particularly given that a number of MH&D staff had to be redeployed into OPPC to meet the challenges of Covid on their services.

In terms of the implications post Covid, Mr McNeany stated he believes there will be a number of challenges for the Service over the next 6-9 months. There is a strong correlation between the issues of multiple deprivation associated with the economic impact of Covid and poor mental health, as well as the psychological impact of Covid on our staff. These issues have been raised regionally and the Public Health Agency (PHA) have increased investment in Mental Health preventative measures e.g. virtual Stress Control classes. Mr McNeany stated that learning from how we have delivered services during Covid will help the MHD Directorate in re-evaluating how the Organisation moves to meet the needs of our Service Users differently in the future, taking into account the anticipated increase in need in our community.

Mr Wilkinson asked if redeployed staff to the community vaccination programme is causing any additional pressure in terms of restarting services. Mrs Toal advised the majority of staff have been made available from the School Nursing Programme as well as support from Occupational Therapy (OT) and the Corporate Nursing and Allied Health Professionals (AHP) teams. Additional staff from the Workforce appeal will be trained up to respond to the increasing number of vaccinations. Mr Wilkson pointed out the delay in getting into schools will cause a back log of vaccinations and pressure on the School Nursing Programme when services restart. Mr Morgan acknowledged this and advised discussion is ongoing with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and PHA. He welcomed the completion of the Flu Vaccination Programme in schools before

closure and stated some targeted work is taking place in terms of a number of vulnerable groups facilitated through the school health visiting team.

Mr McAnuff asked if there was an upward trend on staff off specifically due to poor mental health. He also asked if there has been a higher uptake of staff accessing Psychological supports and what new or innovative mechanisms have been put in place to help staff through Covid and into the future. Mrs Toal advised mental health stress/anxiety related absence is up significantly from a staff perspective. She reminded members of the Psychological Support Service the Trust has in place and updated members on a number of mechanisms including; in-reach support primarily into hospital settings. She emphasised the focus on next steps is exploring what regional support will be required into the future.

Ms Donaghy asked if the new 'Phone First' process is effectively capturing the urgent versus Emergency cases and if Covid centres are still in operation and taking pressure off ED. Mrs McClements and Mr Beattie advised the new system is working well albeit still in its infancy and staff continue to work with the public where required to assist this new cultural change in service delivery.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair asked public representatives if they wished to raise any points. Mr John O'Dowd, MLA Sinn Fein asked firstly, why those aged between 75-80 outstanding their GP appointment cannot go to the Vaccination Centre facilitated by the Trust and secondly, has there been a significant percentage of hospital admissions from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community. In responding, Mrs Toal and Dr O'Kane acknowledged public frustration, however explained the significant safety regulations involved, in that the Trust is offering Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine whilst Primary Care offers the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine. Mrs McClements stated she was aware Health Care Workers across the region from within the BAME Community are at a higher risk from the virus.

Mr Adam Morton (Armagh I), asked Mr Devlin, in light of the three local government areas having the highest community transmission rate, what message would he send to the people of the Southern locality. In responding, Mr Devlin implored people to follow all government guidance on social distancing and Infection control, emphasising the need to drive down Covid positive in-patient numbers.

Staff Stories

At this point in the meeting the Chair advised it was important for Trust Board to hear first-hand from staff how they have been affected since the pandemic began. Members listened and reflected on a number of videos which provided a flavour of staff experiences. The Chair thanked staff for their participation in the videos.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair asked the Executive Directors of Medicine, Social Work, Nursing and Finance if there were any other issues relating to their professional roles they wished to bring to the Board's attention. There were none noted.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive emphasised the need to reflect and learn from the experiences shared by staff today, to help refocus and rebuild the Organisation.

The Chair recorded thanks to everyone for their attendance and participation in the virtual meeting and to all those who had facilitated the meeting in any way. She advised the next meeting would take place on Thursday, 25th February at 9.45 a.m.

The meeting concluded at 1.10 p.m.

SIGNED: _____ **DATED:** _____