

MINUTES OF THE WELSH AMBULANCE SERVICES NHS TRUST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

Meeting held on **27 September 2023 at 09:30**

Held via Zoom and Facebook

1. Chair's Welcome

The Chair, Colin Dennis welcomed all to the Meeting and gave an outline of the agenda. He reminded attendees that it was an open meeting, and any questions from the public were welcomed.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

The Chair added that the 2022/23 Annual report and Accounts were available as part of the presentation pack.

2. Chief Executive's year in review

The Chief Executive, Jason Killens opened by thanking on behalf of the Executive Management Team all staff for their sterling work over the past year.

During the past year the Trust had faced several challenges which had impacted on performance, and this was illustrated in more detail by way of a PowerPoint presentation:

2023 was a year of solid progress towards the Trust's ambition of delivering excellence despite all the external disruption and challenge.

The Trust reached immediately life threatening patients more quickly than ever before.

The national roll out of the 111 service was consolidated with a range of developments and improvements.

Through changes to the clinical model and investment in people we saw some improvements to patient outcomes.

As a result of substantial and sustained pressure across Emergency Care in Wales, the Trust saw the worst disruption to the service ever seen. These delays have seen too many patients waiting longer than we would like.

There was a period of industrial action which was the first time this had happened for over 30 years.

3. Performance

In terms of highlights from the performance outputs of last year Lee Brooks, the Executive Director of Operations provided a presentation which included detail on the following areas:

- a) The total number of non-emergency patient journeys undertaken in 2022/23 was 543,840, which while being a further increase on the 497,570 seen in 2021/22, is still significantly below the 670,353 recorded for 2019/20.
- b) NHS111 Wales Service; For many of the Trust's patients, the first point of contact with the Trust is the 111 service, which is now live across every part of Wales. Call answering performance and the call abandonment rate did not achieve their targets.
- c) Response to 999 calls, 65% of the calls were answered within 3 seconds. Those patients waiting longer for their calls to be answered has reduced.
- d) The Trust's target, as agreed with Welsh Government, was to respond to 65% of immediately life threatening 999 calls (Red calls) within eight minutes. Unfortunately, the Trust was not able to meet this target with the most challenging month of 2022 being December. One of the factors affecting response times has been the significant increase in the volume of red calls.
- e) Another significant factor affecting response times has been the significant increase in the number of hours crews wait to handover patients to

Emergency Departments. The average number of hours lost per month was an average of 25,000 hours.

The Executive Director of Quality and Nursing, Liam Williams continued the presentation from the patient safety and concerns perspective.

- a) 76,007 patients waited over an hour outside Emergency Departments.
- b) There were 128,267 patients where the Trust was unable to send an ambulance, or the patient cancelled the ambulance.
- c) There were 207 severe cases, including death, arising from extended response times in the community.
- d) There were 450 Coroner requests received during 2022/23.
- e) The Trust received six Regulation 28 (Prevention of Future Deaths) reports during 2022/23. Five related to timeliness of ambulance response, one related to delay in transfer of patient from hospital to hospital for vascular surgery.
- f) In relation to the most serious incidents, the Trust reported 66 patient National Reportable Incidents (NRIs) in 2022/23 compared with 65 in 2021/22. Most, but not all of these NRIs relate to the Trust's 999 service

Andy Swinburn, the Director of Paramedicine continued the presentation from a clinical perspective:

- a) The clinical indicator, Return of Spontaneous Circulation (ROSC) percentage was lower than expected in the first half of the year – with the second half achieving the highest rates recorded. In terms of the suspected stroke patients who were documented as receiving the appropriate care bundle this achieved a rate of 77.51%.
- b) The Trust set an ambition of achieving a 15% consult and close rate for 999 calls which it almost continues to achieve.

Angela Lewis, Director of People and Culture, continued the presentation which looked at the trust's achievements in respect of its people:

- a) The Trust has recruited 133 Full Time Equivalents for its EMS.
- b) Sickness absence has been a focus across the Trust, steady progress was being made to meet the target of 6% and for last year it was 8.33%.
- c) The number of EMS ambulance production hours has increased.
- d) The completion of Performance Appraisals and Development Reviews met the WG target of 85%

4. Finance

Chris Turley, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources gave a presentation and highlighted the following:

- a) The draft accounts had been formally submitted to Audit Wales on 5 May 2023 with all statutory financial duties being met.
- b) A retained surplus for the year of £0.062m had been achieved; effectively a break-even position with total income of £296.092m and Net expenditure of £296.030m.
- c) The breakdown of income from patient care activities was £283.2m consisting of: Emergency Ambulance Services Committee, £230m, Local Health Boards, £17m, Welsh Government, £34m and income from other Trusts, £2m. The total increase from the previous year was £21.6m.
- d) In terms of expenditure, pay costs were £204m and Non-pay and other costs came to £92m. The main differences for the previous year were an increase of £14.6m in pay and a net increase of £5.4m in Non-pay expenditure.
- e) With respect to the Balance Sheet, the Net Book Value as of 31 March 2023 was £99m. Debtors had increased by £1.4m, with borrowings increasing by £10m.
- f) Capital Investment funds of £28.795m was expended thereby utilising 100% of the Trust's Capital Expenditure Limit (CEL).

- g) The Trust achieved Public Sector Payments Policy (PSPP) of 97.4% within 30 days against the 95% target.
- h) Personal Injury Benefit Scheme (PIBS), the income of £2.5m reflected as other income instead of Welsh Government (WG) income.
- i) Employee Costs – 6.3% pension support from WG was reflected in Employer Pension Contribution line instead of Salaries and wages line in the note. The figures were £8.4m and £7.8m for 2022/23 and 2021/22 respectively.
- j) The Audit opinion resulted in an unqualified audit opinion and the accounts showed a true and fair view of the situation of the Trust as of 31 March 2023 and of its surplus for the year then ended.

5. Volunteers

Lee Brooks provided the meeting with a presentation which focused on the volunteering aspect within the Trust:

- a) The number of additional Community First Responders (CFR) who have joined in 2022/23 was 220 and by the end of 2023 it was hoped the total number of CFR in the Trust would be in the region of 700.
- b) A new mobile application for CFR's has been deployed.
- c) The green Trust uniform has now been issued to CFR's and also clinical observation equipment has been issued.
- d) There was also a change to the clinical practice which included the ability for CFR to administer analgesia (pentrox).
- e) A pilot of the electronic patient care record has been deployed and can be used by CFRs.
- f) A CFR was first on scene at over 2,700 life threatening incidents last year, 71% of the time within 8 minutes.

- g) In terms of the Volunteer Car Service there has been a significant contribution with nearly 9 % of all non-emergency patients taken to appointments. The plan for this year was to double the numbers of drivers to 200.
- h) The Trust was looking to further its relationship with St John ambulance Cymru.
- i) Work was underway to develop a new Community Welfare Responder role.

A note of thanks was recorded for the volunteering group within the Trust for their unwavering support.

6. Forward Look

The Executive Director of Strategy and Planning Rachel Marsh explained it was important to look at the lessons learned from last year to build on the planning for next year and the longer-term strategy. In terms of highlights the following points were raised:

- a) An Integrated Medium Term Plan for the next three years had been developed and helped the Trust to move towards its longer term strategy and ambitions.
- b) Areas of focus for the coming 3 year period included: Improving the 111 service, ensuring there were the correct numbers of call handlers and clinicians in place, improve dental and end of life services and to develop a new software to meet needs over the phone.
- c) There were several initiatives in development which will focus on ensuring the right advice or care is given in the right place every time.
- d) The Trust was also transforming its Urgent and Emergency Medical services by "inverting the Triangle", - this model set out to only convey patients to ED where their care needs cannot be safely met at home or in the Community.

- e) In terms of the Ambulance Care Service (Non- Emergency Transport), a range of priorities were in the plan which including the review of the number of vehicles and personnel.
- f) There was a specific section in the IMTP which illustrated plans and set out specific priorities for our people to include, flexible working and shift over runs.
- g) In order to support all of the plans going forward the Trust was looking to improve its digital services, improve the overall estate, implement innovative fleet solutions and to continue to meet with stakeholders.

Chris Turley then gave an update on the initial 2023/24 Financial plan which included a significant increase in the savings and cost containment efficiencies that would need to be delivered against the backdrop of the increasing challenging financial outlook across the UK. A year-end financial balance was forecast which was being delivered month on month.

Furthermore, Chris Turley commented that a Financial Sustainability Programme has been established to, amongst other things, promote and embed a culture of commercial and efficiency awareness throughout the Trust.

7. Questions from the public

The Director of Partnerships and Engagement, Estelle Hitchon presented questions that had been put forward to the Trust:

Deborah Cruz asked how the non-emergency patient transport service (NEPTS) in Wales can become more accessible and user-friendly for refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, and other communities, ensuring that they receive the necessary support for their health and well-being without language or cultural barriers. She asked if there were any plans to improve the NEPTS booking system for refugees and individuals from minority ethnic communities in Wales.

Lee Brooks commented that the first step was to determine whether the individual qualifies for the non-emergency patient transport service. This assessment is crucial to ensure that the service is provided to those who genuinely need it, such as individuals with significant mobility issues, complex

health conditions, or other specific needs that prevent them from using regular transportation. The eligibility criteria typically consider the individual's medical condition, physical mobility, and ability to travel independently or with minimal assistance. This might involve verifying medical records, consulting with healthcare providers, or assessing the individual's current health status. Once eligibility is confirmed, the next step is to assess the type and level of support required during transport. This assessment ensures that the service provided is tailored to the specific needs of the individual, making the journey as safe and comfortable as possible. He added that a language line is already in place to support call handlers during the needs assessment process. This service is an important resource in ensuring that language barriers don't prevent individuals from accessing the non-emergency patient transport service.

A further point was raised by Deborah who was concerned about ensuring that refugees, particularly those with limited English proficiency, can clearly understand when their non-emergency ambulance transport is cancelled. Miscommunication in these situations can lead to significant frustration and missed appointments, which can be especially challenging for refugees who may already face barriers in accessing healthcare.

Lee Brooks added that the Trust was looking to improving communication, and offering proactive alternatives, enhancing capacity management, from which the experience for ineligible patients can be significantly improved. This approach will help to manage expectations and also ensure that those who cannot be accommodated by NEPTS are still supported in accessing the healthcare they need. He added that the Trust was open to exploring text messaging as a more interactive solution for improving communication with service users.

What percentage of users of the 111 press 2 service were mental health related and is there a significant rise here in Wales.

Lee Brooks commented that due to the current state of healthcare record systems in Wales, there is limited visibility of diagnosis data across different care settings. This means that comprehensive data on specific issues, such as the percentage of 111 press 2 service users with mental health concerns, may not be fully accurate or accessible. When callers press 2 through the 111 system, they are connected to Health Board services. This means that the follow-up and outcome data are managed by these health boards rather than centrally through the 111 service.

However, Lee Brooks has observed that the 999 activity trends provide a useful context for understanding mental health-related calls. In 2022, there was a reduction in mental health-related calls to 999 compared to the previous years (2021 and 2020). This reduction is based on the chief complaint identified at the time the 999 call was made. The chief complaint is the primary issue identified by the caller, which helps in classifying the nature of the emergency.

Lee Brooks' updated the meeting about the ongoing enhancement of the clinical support desk with mental health practitioners. By increasing mental health practitioners to the clinical support desk it was seen as a positive step that has been well-received by both staff and service users.

An update was sought on recruitment of roads staff. Angela Lewis explained that Last year saw a record number of recruitment activities, likely due to increased demand or specific strategic initiatives. This financial year, the volume of recruitment has decreased. This shift was influenced by current financial constraints and the need to operate within a set budget. For roles such as paramedic conversions, there is a plan to backfill positions to ensure that service levels are maintained.

Was there a model in place for a recognisable mental health vehicle for Cardiff. Lee Brooks explained that as of now there was no specific mental health vehicle in Cardiff. There was significant potential in having a clinical staff member work alongside a mental health practitioner. This integrated approach can enhance the quality of care by addressing both physical and mental health needs simultaneously. Rachel Marsh added that a mental health response model was being tested in the Aneurin Bevan area. This pilot will assess the effectiveness of integrating clinical staff with mental health practitioners in providing community-based mental health support.

What is the new volunteer management system called you are planning to use. Lee Brooks advised it was called: Assemble.

The Chair Colin Dennis reminded everyone that, just as you joined this meeting via Zoom webinar, you can also attend all our Trust board meetings in the same way. Our next Trust board meeting is scheduled for tomorrow at 9:30 AM. You are welcome to join us via the webinar to observe the board in action.

He extended his thanks to Alex Payne and the governance team, as well as everyone working behind the scenes. Organising these events involves considerable effort, and their hard work today in managing questions and supporting the technology has been invaluable. A big thank you also goes to all my Executive colleagues who have contributed to today's discussions. Your participation and insights are greatly appreciated.

Meeting closed at 10:35