

Minutes of the 172nd Public Trust Board Meeting
on 30 April 2025 at 9am in the
Boardroom, NCS, RVH

Present

Mr Ciaran Mulgrew	Chairman
Mr John Conaghan	Non-Executive Director
Miss Patricia Gordon	Non-Executive Director
Mr Joe McVey	Non-Executive Director
Professor Catherine Ross	Non-Executive Director
Mr David Small	Non-Executive Director (<i>via MS Teams</i>)
Mrs Maureen Edwards	Interim Chief Executive
Mrs Fiona Cotter	Interim Director of Finance
Mr Chris Hagan	Medical Director
Mrs Olga O'Neill	Interim Director of Nursing and User Experience
Miss Tracy Reid	Interim Executive Director Social Work

In Attendance:

Dr Brian Armstrong	Director Unscheduled and Older People's Services
Ms Paula Cahalan	Director Child Health and NISTAR, Maternity, Dental, Gynaecology and Sexual Health
Mr Alastair Campbell	Director Performance, Planning and Informatics
Mrs Tara Clinton	Director ACCTSS and Surgery
Mr Colin McMullan	Interim Director Adult Community and Older People Services
Mrs Marion Mulholland	Director, Trauma and Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation Medicine, Imaging, Medical Physics and Outpatients
Mr David Porter	Director of Strategic Development
Dr Peter Sloan	Interim Director Mental Health, Intellectual Disability and Psychological Services
Mrs Gillian Somerville	Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Ms Kerrylee Weatherall	Interim Director Children's Community Services
Mr Peter Watson	Head of Office
Mrs Bronagh Dalzell	Head of Corporate Communications

Apologies:

Mrs Ellen Finlay	Non-Executive Director
Professor Carmel Hughes	Non-Executive Director
Ms Moira Kearney	Interim Director of Cancer and Specialist Services

Dr Adam Walker, Locum Consultant in Emergency Medicine, attended the meeting as an observer.

Mrs Clare Shannon, Divisional Nurse, also attended the meeting as an observer.

1. Trust Board workplan

The workplan in the pack was noted.

2. Conflicts of Interest.

The Chairman asked for any conflicts of interest to be declared. None were declared.

3. Apologies

It was noted that Mrs Finlay, Professor Hughes and Ms Kearney had sent apologies for the meeting.

4. Chairman's Business P123-2025

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Dr Adam Walker, Locum Consultant in Emergency Medicine, and Mrs Clare Shannon, Divisional Nurse, who joined the meeting as observers.

The Chairman noted that he had added to the Board pack, some details of visits he had undertaken.

The Chairman also thanked Board members for facilitating the May Trust Board meeting a day early, noting that it was just over 3 weeks since the previous meeting. The Chairman thanked Executive Team for the preparation of the various papers provided to the Board.

Referencing the briefings which had been provided at previous meetings in relation to taking forward the recruitment of a substantive Chief Executive, the Chairman updated the Board that the recruitment process had now commenced with the substantive CEO position advertised on both HSCNI recruitment and Saxton

Bampfylde websites. The Chairman also noted that there was an item on the Loop as he wished to be as transparent as possible about the process.

The Chairman thanked Miss Gordon for her help in defining what we want in our substantive Chief Executive, and Mrs Somerville for her assistance with the process. The Chairman noted that there had also been wide consultation including with Executive Team, trade unions and the Department of Health. The Chairman also took the opportunity to thank Mrs Edwards for filling the Interim Chief Executive role so well.

The Chairman referred Board members to the correspondence from and to Mr Stanford Smith, emailed to the Board on 24 March 2025, 31 March 2025 and 4 April 2025. The Chairman advised that further correspondence has been received from Mr Smith on 23 April and that that correspondence and the response will be shared with the Board.

The Chairman noted that some of the scheduled meeting items had had to be deferred - such as the Being Belfast Presentation, but they remain on the agenda because they are permanent items in our Annual Work Plan and we wish to follow that as far as possible.

The Chairman provided a brief update on the meeting which he and others had attended with Mr Mike Farrar on 28 April 2025 regarding finance, with it being stressed that in a context where health now accounted for 53% of public spending it was not envisaged there would be any in-year additional funding.

Mrs Cotter noted that while there was a recognition of the savings that had been achieved, and a recognition that all the savings required could not be easily realised, there was a need to demonstrate that all possible steps were being taken to address in-year pressures, while also seeking to develop medium term plans.

Mrs Cotter noted the focus which there would be on a number of themes including workforce savings, elective care, demand management, social care, clinical services consistency in standards and revenue raising. Mrs Cotter noted that Mr Farrar wished the region to work together to have a definitive plan for the financial year 2025/2026 by the end of quarter one. Mrs Edwards noted that the Minister might be required to provide progress updates even earlier than the end of quarter one.

The Chairman confirmed that his expectation was that Executive Team would advise the Board on the steps which would need to be taken to deliver breakeven, with the Board then holding the Executive Team to account for delivery.

The Board discussed the impact which administrative validation could have on waiting lists. Mr Campbell outlined the approaches taken to waiting list validation in the context of outpatient and inpatient/daycase waiting lists. There was also reference to the potential to out-source some clinical validation.

Mr McMullan noted his disappointment that discussions in relation to a review of charging arrangements for domiciliary care had been delayed until 2027.

The Board queried if there would be a need to consider high impact savings proposals in-year given the understanding regarding the financial position. Mrs Edwards noted that while there had not been specific discussion at the workshop regarding high impact savings proposals, she envisaged that they might need to be considered later in the year in the context of the mandatory requirement to breakeven. The Chairman confirmed that any such proposals would be discussed at the Trust Board.

Discussion took place in relation to the need to progress conversations regarding demand management, with Professor Ross sharing her experience from work within laboratory services in Scotland.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting P124-2025

The Chairman referred to the draft minutes of the Trust Board of 6 March 2025. The Board agreed that they were a true and accurate record of the meeting.

The Chairman enquired if there were any matters arising from the minutes that were not already picked up on the Action Log. The Board confirmed that there were no such items.

6. Action Log P125-2025 A&B

The Chairman indicated he was grateful to Mr Watson, Mrs Finlay and Professor Ross for their work on a revised format for the action log.

The Chairman checked if members were content that the Green items be removed from the log. Members agreed.

The Chairman asked if there were any queries on the outstanding actions. There were none.

7. Chief Executive's Business P126-2025

The Chairman thanked Mrs Edwards for the paper which she had provided, and in particular the highlighting of various achievements.

Mrs Edwards added that a number of colleagues had attended a further Big Discussion workshop on 29 April, and a written update would be provided to the Board in due course.

Mr McMullan also updated the Board on the launch of the Palliative Care Hub on 28 April. It was agreed that Mr McMullan should bring a presentation back to Trust Board in circa six months in relation to the work of the Palliative Care Hub.

ACTION: Mr Watson / Mr McMullan

The Board sought and received further clarity from Ms Weatherall in relation to the impact of industrial action within Children's Community Services, and in particular the increasing risk of unallocated cases in child protection and how this was being managed. It was agreed that Ms Weatherall would provide a detailed report at the next meeting of Trust Board.

ACTION: Mr Watson / Ms Weatherall

8. Trust Service Delivery Plan Report – end March 2025 P127-2025

Mr Campbell referred to his tabled report. He noted in particular the number of patients waiting, with circa 41k patients waiting for inpatient or daycase procedures, and 155k patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment.

Mr Campbell also noted the numbers of patients waiting in excess of 4 years, with 14386 waiting for inpatient or daycase procedures, and 7531 waiting for first outpatient appointments.

Mr Campbell noted that long waiting patients were particularly concentrated in a small number of specialties such as Orthopaedics and Ophthalmology. Discussions were taking place at a regional level to agree how best to target any available funding.

Mr Campbell noted that waiting lists are a symptom of the demand/capacity imbalance, and they would continue to grow unless and until that imbalance was corrected.

Mr Campbell also updated the Board in relation to recording of activity, recent discussions regarding the setting of realistic targets for activity, and the positive work between clinical and ICT colleagues in the development of potential AI opportunities.

The Board also discussed the approach to Strategic Outcome Measures, and received assurances regarding ongoing work to ensure oversight of theatre productivity.

9. Finance Report – P114-2025 A-C

Mrs Cotter referred to the tabled financial report.

Mrs Cotter noted that the reported surplus for 2024/2025 was now circa £95k. Auditing of the accounts has now commenced with it being expected that the Audit Committee will consider the final accounts and annual report on 19 June, and the full Board considering these for approval on 20 June.

Mrs Cotter confirmed that the opening deficit for 2025/2026 was £168m. The Delivering Value Board would ensure continued oversight of the budgetary position and the steps being taken to seek to reduce this deficit.

Mrs Cotter confirmed that Belfast HSC Trust Charitable Funds were now registered with the Charities' Commission for Northern Ireland with Belfast being the first HSC Trust to achieve this..

The Board discussed the need to consider revenue raising opportunities, noting for example the approach in other parts of the UK to prescriptions and domiciliary care. Discussion also took place in relation to the potential for income generation through research and clinical trials, with it being noted that improving population health outcomes was the ultimate objective of such work.

10. Update on Capital Schemes

Mr Porter advised the Board that in relation to the new Maternity Hospital, multidisciplinary risk review meetings were being progressed, with decisions as to the next steps to be taken shortly. Mrs Edwards thanked Mr Porter, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Cahalan and Mr Hagan for their work on this.

11. Updates from Committees/Standing Reports – P130-2025

Mr McVey, as Chair of the Assurance Committee, referred to the update from that Committee.

Mr McVey noted the ongoing work to improve the efficient and effective working of the Committee.

The Chairman noted that there was a question posed to the Board as to whether the full Board would wish to receive not only updates from Board committees, but also the minutes of those committee meetings. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Board would wish to receive the minutes of such committee meetings, alongside the updates.

12. Papers for Direction

The Chairman noted that there were no items under this agenda heading.

13. Papers for Approval

The Chairman noted that no papers had been provided for Board Approval today, with one paper (the Annual ALB Self-Assessment) deferred to the next meeting, and the Board having already considered the Board Assurance Framework Risk Document at its meeting earlier in April.

The Chairman noted that a paper had been prepared in relation to Sticky Note management but further to discussions had not been tabled. That paper will be re-worked and brought back to the next meeting of the Trust Board.

ACTION: Mr Watson

14. Papers for Oversight and Assurance

The Chairman noted that there were no items under this agenda heading.

15. Being Belfast – Presentation from Cancer Services

The Chairman noted that this item had been deferred due to staff absence.

16. Any Other Business

Miss Reid referred to the “Move a mile a day in May” initiative and invited Board members to join with social work colleagues in this.

Miss Gordon noted she had recently visited the Emergency Department, where despite the pressures they were experiencing, staff continued to be committed to improving the care provided to patients.

There was no other business and the meeting in public session concluded at 1025.