

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

caring supporting improving together

PEOPLE & CULTURE STRATEGY

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Foreword



The time is right to refresh and strengthen our approach to People and Culture across Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. The culture we create together shapes how it feels to work here and directly influences the care, support and services we provide to patients and service users.

Through staff engagement, including townhall sessions, the Staff Experience Survey and other feedback routes, you have been clear about what matters most: feeling valued, recognised and treated fairly; feeling safe to speak up and confident that feedback will lead to action; having visible and accountable leadership; working together across services, teams, professions and sites, with fewer silos, stronger collaboration and more consistent ways of working; and having development and wellbeing prioritised, alongside the practical support needed to do your job well.

This strategy supports us in the delivery of our Corporate Plan, particularly our priorities in relation to People. It reflects the culture we are working to build: one that is respectful and compassionate, encourages openness, listening and learning, is led with visibility and accountability, fosters inclusion and connection and is focused on delivering a positive staff experience.

Delivering this strategy will require collective leadership and shared accountability at every level. Belfast Trust has a responsibility to create the conditions for a positive culture, but achieving and sustaining the culture we aspire to depends on all of us. Culture is shaped every day through our behaviours, relationships, interactions and decisions. By working together and living our shared values, we can create an environment where people feel respected, supported, included and able to contribute.

I am committed to working with staff as we implement the five commitments in this strategy, track our progress and remain open about where we need to improve, particularly where staff have previously felt unheard or unsupported. Together, we can make Belfast Trust an even better place to work, so that we can provide the best possible care for our patients and service users.

Jennifer Welsh
Chief Executive

The Strategy at a Glance

The Belfast HSC Trust People and Culture Strategy 2026-2031 establishes a roadmap for embedding a positive workplace culture, supporting staff wellbeing and development, strengthening leadership and improving organisational outcomes through measurable and sustained action.

The strategy is grounded in staff feedback and aligned to the Corporate Plan, particularly the People priorities. We will focus on creating the conditions where staff feel valued, supported and able to provide safe, effective and compassionate care.

Our Aspiration

A culture where our values are visible in action, our leaders are trusted and accountable and our people feel heard, respected, recognised, included, treated fairly and supported to contribute, work together and deliver exceptional care.

Our Five Commitments



Belfast Trust:
Our Reach & Impact

Belfast Trust is the largest integrated Health and Social Care Trust in the UK. We provide hospital, community, social care and specialist services for more than 350,000 people in Belfast, as well as regional services for the people across Northern Ireland.

Delivering care on this scale depends on our people. Across every role, service and setting, our staff bring the compassion, skill and expertise needed to serve communities in Belfast and beyond. This strategy sets out how we will support, develop and enable our people to thrive in their roles and provide the best possible care.

Our Scale

350,000
people served locally across Greater Belfast

90%+
Regional Specialist Services for Northern Ireland

4
Acute Hospital Sites

100+
community facilities
Closer to where people live

Our Services

Snapshout of our Annual Activity
Data based on 2025/26 activity

4,380
Babies delivered

302,444
New outpatient appointments

189,260
A&E attendances

50,358
MRI scans

335,961
District Nurse visits

88,064
CT Imaging

2007
Referrals to Hospital at Home

1,249
Children for whom we are corporate parent

1,392
Care Opinion stories shared

Belfast Trust:
Our People

Across every service, ward, clinic, community team, regional specialist pathway and support function Belfast Trust colleagues work tirelessly to provide care. With a focus on safety, improvement and outcomes for patients and service users, our people work across many professions, locations and patterns of work.

Belfast Trust has over 22,000 staff, making it the largest employer in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland and representing around 28% of the total HSC workforce. This includes an increasing number of international colleagues, who bring valuable skills and experience to teams across the Trust.

Our People

Workforce profile as at June 2026.

More than statistics, the figures below reflect the people whose dedication, knowledge and professionalism enable Belfast Trust to deliver for patients, service users and communities every day.

28%
of the HSC workforce in Northern Ireland

11,884
Bank Workers

370
Volunteers

22,172
TOTAL STAFF

Our Occupational Groups

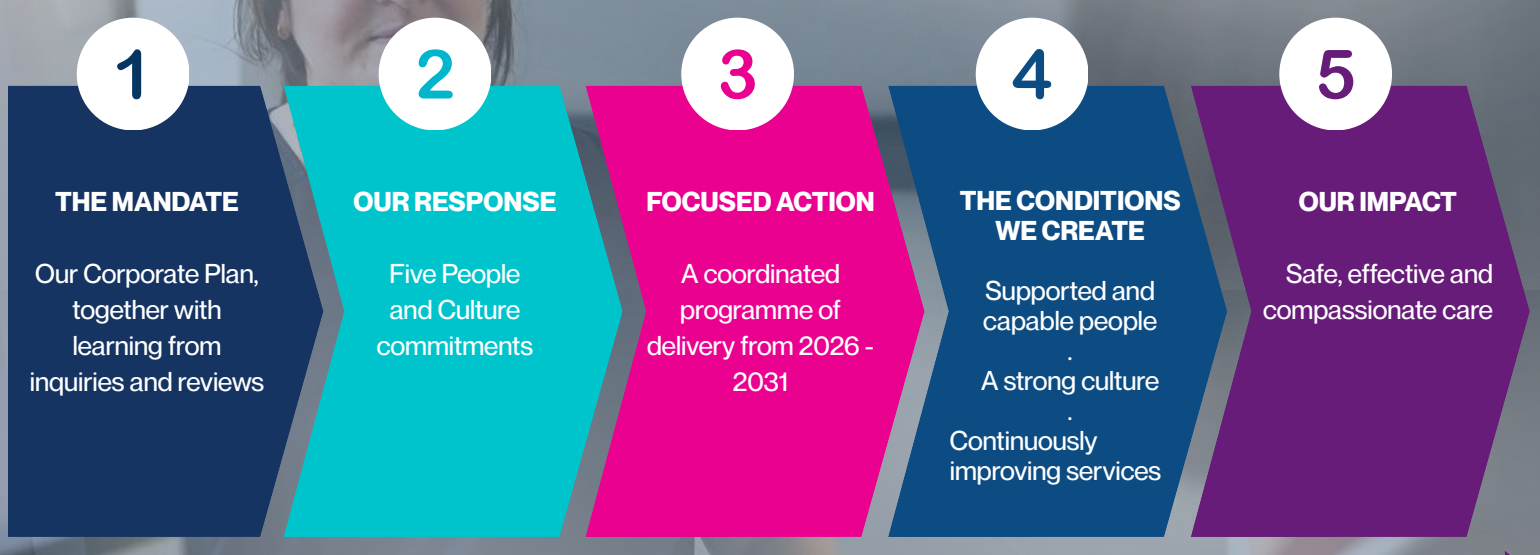


Strategic Context

The Belfast Trust Corporate Plan sets the overall direction for the organisation and describes our priorities for 2026-2031. One of the five priorities is People, which commits us to embedding our HSC values and expected behaviours, prioritising staff health and wellbeing and recognising the contributions and achievements of our people. This People and Culture Strategy sets out how we will deliver those People priorities. The strategy also underpins the wider Corporate Plan, recognising that our people and culture are fundamental to every aspect of service delivery. By strengthening our culture we create the conditions in which our people can improve services, respond effectively to pressures and consistently deliver safe, effective and compassionate care.

Internal and external reviews of care delivered by the Belfast Trust have reinforced the same core message: improving culture requires deliberate, sustained and measurable action. The Report of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry, the Independent Review of the Cardiac Surgery Service, the Hill/McBride report into broader areas for improvement and assurance, the Independent Neurology Inquiry report and the Report of the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-Related deaths, all highlight the importance of openness, listening, leadership, accountability, learning from concerns and creating conditions where staff, patients, families and carers are heard and treated with dignity and compassion.

From Mandate to Impact



What You Told Us

Staff feedback from townhall conversations, the Staff Experience Survey and other engagement and listening channels have shaped this strategy. The 5 Commitments of the strategy reflect the common messages staff shared about what they value, what is working well and what needs to change.

Your aspiration is to build a culture where our values are visible in action, our leaders are trusted and accountable, our people feel heard, respected, recognised, included, treated fairly and supported to contribute, work together and deliver exceptional care.

How our values shape our culture

Our culture is underpinned by the HSC Values that set the standard for how we work with each other and how we deliver care.



Leaders and managers have a critical role in setting expectations, modelling behaviours and responding when standards fall short. Creating a positive culture is a shared responsibility and every member of staff contributes through how they demonstrate our values in their day-to-day work.

What this means in practice

HOW WE BEHAVE

The responsibility of everyone

Showing respect, civility, inclusion, fairness and positive behaviours in how we speak, work together, make decisions, learn and respond when things go wrong.

HOW WE LEAD

The role of leaders and managers

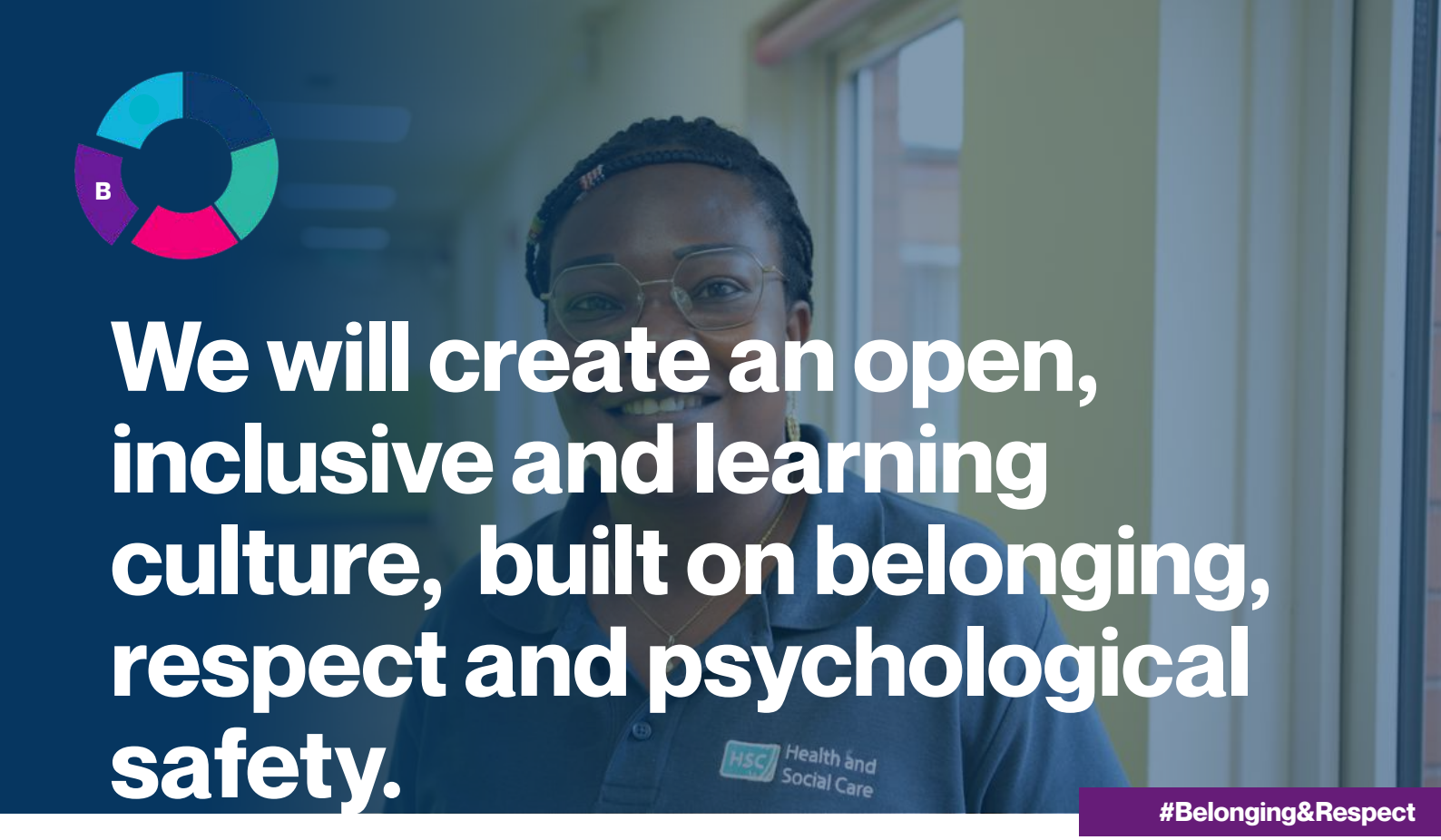
Being visible, approachable, accountable and consistent—setting clear standards, modelling expected behaviours and enabling people to perform at their best.

THE CONDITIONS WE CREATE

The responsibility of the organisation

Understand and respond to workload pressures, providing practical support through systems, processes and working environments, so that people feel equipped to do their jobs well

TOGETHER, THESE SHAPE OUR CULTURE AND STAFF EXPERIENCE



We will create an open, inclusive and learning culture, built on belonging, respect and psychological safety.

#Belonging&Respect

Our Aim

We will create a culture where people are treated with respect, feel included and treated fairly, behaviours are consistent and staff feel safe to speak up and contribute.

Why This Matters

Staff want a culture built on respect, civility, kindness, trust, inclusion and psychological safety. Where people from all backgrounds, roles, professions, sites and working patterns feel they belong, are treated fairly and can speak up with confidence. They want consistent standards and to have confidence that concerns will be heard, acted on and used to support learning and development.

We will focus on

01. Promoting respect, civility and kindness in everyday interactions, so positive behaviours are visible in how people work together.

02. Strengthening inclusion, diversity and belonging, so people from all backgrounds, roles, professions, sites and working patterns feel respected, heard, fairly treated and able to contribute.

03. Creating clear behavioural expectations and providing practical support to help staff uphold our values, challenge and respond safely to inappropriate behaviours.

04. Strengthening an open, just and learning culture, where people feel safe to speak up, concerns and incidents are approached constructively, and learning is used to improve how we work

Measures of success

- Improvement in staff experience of respect, civility, inclusion and belonging
- Improvement in staff confidence to speak up and confidence concerns will be acted upon
- Improvement in staff experience relating to bullying, harassment and unwanted sexual behaviours in the workplace
- Improvement in organisational learning from concerns, incidents and feedback



We will support and develop effective, visible, and accountable leaders.

#EffectiveLeadership

Our Aim

We will develop leaders and managers who are visible, supported and accountable for the culture and experience they create

Why This Matters

Staff have told us they want leaders and managers who are present, approachable and accountable, who model positive behaviours, listen well, communicate openly and support teams through challenge and change. When staff trust their leaders and see that concerns and feedback lead to action, they are more likely to speak up, contribute and feel psychologically safe. These expectations must be matched by practical support, development, coaching and feedback, so that leaders and managers have the skills and confidence to lead well and take responsibility for the culture and staff experience they create.

What we will focus on

01. Providing leadership and management development at all levels to build the skills and confidence needed to lead effectively.

02. Strengthening inclusive leadership practice, so leaders and managers are equipped to create psychologically safe environments where staff can contribute and thrive.

03. Strengthening visible and approachable leadership, including senior leader engagement and more local opportunities for staff to connect with leaders.

04. Building accountability for culture and behaviours, ensuring leaders and managers understand their role in creating positive staff experiences.

Measures of success

Improvement in staff survey measures relating to leadership visibility, manager support, inclusion, trust, fairness and confidence in senior leaders

Improvement in leadership capability and confidence through participation in leadership and management development, coaching, mentoring and leadership feedback opportunities

Improvement in leaders and managers acting on staff feedback, culture-related risks and agreed improvement actions



We will listen, involve and respond.

#Involve&Respond

Our Aim

We will make it easier for staff to share their views, influence decisions and see how their feedback is shaping action and improvement, while strengthening co-production with patients, service users and carers where changes affect care, experience or service design.

Why This Matters

Staff want clearer communication, meaningful opportunities to contribute and clarity on what is changing as a result of their feedback. An open culture means listening to and learning with patients, service users and carers, so their insight and lived experience helps shape improvements. Staff value opportunities to hear about developments acrtoss the Trust through townhalls, updates from senior leaders, The Loop and other forums.

What we will focus on

01. Strengthen staff voice and engagement at Trust, directorate, service and team level, using townhalls, surveys, listening events and local engagement routes.

02. Working with trade unions and staff networks to listen, understand staff experiences and drive meaningful change.

03. Improve feedback loops, so staff can see how their feedback is influencing action, decisions and improvement.

04. Communicate decisions clearly and transparently, including the reasons for decisions, what is changing and what this means for staff.

Measures of success

Improvement in Staff Experience Survey measures relating to staff voice, and involvement,

Increased participation in engagement and listening events and improved staff understanding of decisions, change and organisational direction.

Improved feedback loops and confidence that staff feedback is listened to and acted upon.

Demonstrable involvement of staff, patients, service users and carers in improvement and decision-making.



We will nurture our people to grow, contribute and feel valued

#Nurture&Grow

Our Aim

We will help people to develop, contribute and feel valued through fair access to opportunities and meaningful recognition.

Why This Matters

Staff want fair access to learning, development and career opportunities, with the support and protected time needed to grow. Enabling people to develop their skills, contribute their ideas and progress in their careers strengthens confidence, motivation and retention, while building the capability the Trust needs to meet changing service demands. Meaningful recognition of good work, positive behaviours and everyday contribution helps people feel valued and reinforces the culture we want to create.

What we will focus on

01. Promoting fair access to learning, development and career progression for all staff.

02. Supporting protected time for learning and reflection, particularly for frontline teams.

03. Supporting career progression, helping staff develop skills and build a career within the Trust.

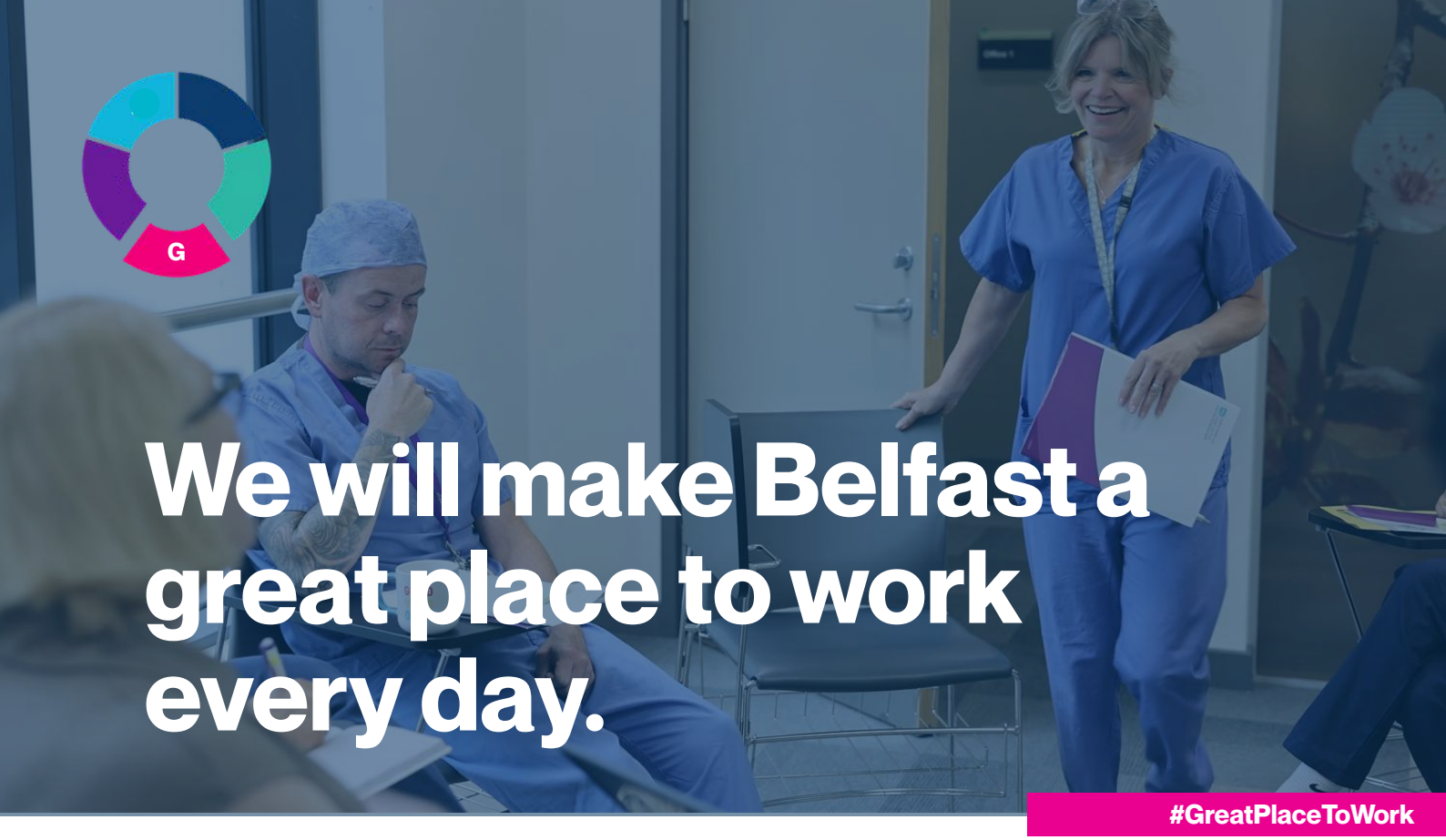
04. Making recognition more visible and meaningful, celebrating good work, positive behaviours and everyday contribution.

Measures of success

Improvement in staff experience relating to learning, development, career progression and equitable access to opportunities.

Improved staff experience of access to protected time for learning, particularly for frontline staff.

Evidence that recognition is visible, meaningful and more consistently experienced across teams, sites and services.



We will make Belfast a great place to work every day.

#GreatPlaceToWork

Our Aim

We will improve everyday staff experience by responding to workload, staffing pressures, practical barriers and support needs that affect how people feel and function at work.

Why This Matters

Staff have described how workload and staffing pressures, systems and processes and practical working conditions affect their wellbeing, morale and ability to deliver safe, effective care. When people have the capacity, support, tools and working environment they need, they can focus their time and expertise where they make the greatest difference. Addressing everyday barriers will reduce unnecessary frustration, help people feel supported and enable teams to provide high-quality, sustainable care.

What we will focus on

01. Reducing workload pressures and supporting staff wellbeing through better staffing experiences and healthy work-life balance.

02. Strengthen health, wellbeing and emotional support, including support during high-pressure periods and challenging environments.

03. Embed the Regional Health and Wellbeing Framework, including appointing Health and Wellbeing Champions in every service directorate.

04. Reduce absence rates through proactive wellbeing support and consistent attendance management, helping staff stay well and connected to work.

Measures of success

Improvement in the overall Trust staff engagement score to 3.9 or higher and sustain this.

Improvement in Staff Experience Survey measures relating to wellbeing, workload, work-life boundaries and organisational support.

Improvement in workforce indicators relating to absence, turnover, vacancies and agency reliance where within the Trust's influence.

Evidence of practical improvements to working environments, facilities, systems and processes informed by staff feedback and staff experience insights

Delivery, Governance and Accountability

This strategy will be delivered through clear ownership, regular review and honest reporting on progress. A supporting delivery plan will be developed during Year 1 to establish baseline measures, delivery priorities, reporting arrangements and measures of success for each of the five commitments. The focus will be on impact and what is changing for staff, teams and services, not simply on activity completed. We will continue to work in partnership with trade union colleagues as this strategy is implemented, so staff views, concerns and practical experience help shape delivery, improvement and assurance.

Governance and accountability

Delivery of the strategy will align with the Trust's Integrated Governance and Assurance Framework. The People and Culture Committee will provide Board-level oversight, review progress against the five commitments, consider risks and assurance gaps and ensure alignment with the Corporate Plan and Board Assurance Framework.

Directorates and services will monitor delivery locally, act on staff feedback and identify risks, barriers or support needs. Assurance reporting will focus on evidence of progress, impact and any action or escalation required. This will help us understand what is changing, where barriers remain and what support is needed. Where relevant, assurance should also consider how patients, service users and carers have been involved in shaping improvements that affect care, safety and experience.

Delivery plan and review

Phase	Focus
Year 1: Launch, Mobilise and Establish Foundations	Launch the strategy, establish governance and accountability arrangements, confirm delivery plans and baseline measures and commence priority actions that will support culture, leadership, staff experience and organisational improvement.
Years 2–3: Embed, Grow and Accelerate Improvement	Implement actions across teams, strengthen local ownership and accountability, share learning and scale successful approaches to improvement.
Years 4–5: Sustain Impact, Learn and Evolve	Evaluate impact, sustain and build on improvements, address remaining gaps and refresh priorities based on staff feedback, workforce data, service pressures and organisational learning.