

## NHSBT Board

### People and Culture Update

2 December 2021

Status: Official

#### 1. Summary and Purpose of Paper

It seems scarcely possible that I have been at NHSBT for three months and I'm providing this update as a reflection on these initial weeks. My intent is to provide a snapshot of what I have seen that is heartening in the work of the People Directorate; where I observe we need to improve; and to consider what will help us help us deliver an outstanding People function in the future.

To support our discussion, I have summarised what I believe a high performing People function does – and what it doesn't do; considered where the People Directorate at NHSBT sits against this ambition; outlined what we have done to lay the foundations for an improved function which can better serve the organisation; and highlighted what happens next.

#### 2. Action Requested

- Consider and provide feedback on my reflections and our plans.

#### 3. Background

- Reviewing the model and structure for an HR function and implementing changes is notoriously challenging, particularly at a time when there is widespread organisational change and environmentally challenging circumstances (NHSBT's revised TOM and the pandemic respectively). This has called upon all the resilience, commitment, and flexibility possible from each member of the People directorate.
- The People directorate has been aware of and discussing the need for change for a considerable length of time (several years) and has always put the needs of the organisation first. Now is the time to "don the oxygen mask" and mobilise the model and structure for the People Directorate, to acknowledge and recognise the value of colleagues across the directorate and to underwrite NHSBT's ambitious and exciting organisational strategy.
- Implementing the new model and structure is one thing, however true mobilisation will need support and engagement from colleagues across NHSBT to ensure that the structure and the roles designed are truly brought to life for the benefit of all.

#### 4. Detail of report

I believe the People function exists to make life **EASIER** for everyone who works here.

Key Word	Descriptor	NHSBT
Enabling	The "DNA" of those who work in a People function is centred on "How can I help". Most of us join the profession because we're motivated by making a difference with and for people and	Our People team spend a lot of time focusing on this aspect. Examples of our work include supporting the standing up of the

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	enable a culture of “felt fairness”. We seek to support the organisation to deliver on its strategic and operational priorities whilst facilitating the people within it to reach their potential, do their best work and flourish.	<p>Plasma response; working closely with Execs and their teams to develop and implement a series of new op models, from Blood Supply to DX.</p> <p>The introduction of the Chief Diversity role (CDIO) last year, creation of and support for our staff networks, and the Partnership working we do are all critical elements here.</p>
<b>Advising</b>	This covers a multitude of areas and is best captured by the phrase “acts as a sounding board”. Any time there is an initiative that affects people; a challenge that involves people; a situation where the way forward is either not clear or involves new people related practice; or simply a people related question that you don’t know the answer to, the People team can help.	<b>We have a good foundation</b> starting with HR Direct and HR Consult, plus our Organisational Development work, complemented by introducing and embedding our Freedom to Speak Up approach.
<b>Supporting</b>	Often this is framed as development because it includes supporting people and teams to consider their learning needs; developing career pathways which line managers can use with staff to consider what next and what development will make a difference; ensuring there is a suite of development offers available that meet the needs of different professions.	<b>Our strength in L+D</b> needs to be replicated across the other aspects of this element – e.g., career pathways. Our successes include using technology to develop new ways of learning – e.g., the VR approaches at Filton, creating and piloting the Inclusive Leadership programme.
<b>Improving</b>	Effective People teams constantly seek to evolve practice to make life as straightforward as possible for everyone. Developing better recruitment practices; implementing technology solutions to speed up processes or reduce the admin burden; horizon scanning to know what the latest practices are in e.g., Diversity and Inclusion and developing or updating policies and approaches to implement these.	<b>This has been an area of focus in the last 12 months and needs to continue.</b> We have undertaken a full recruitment review which has introduced some improvements with more to come; completed the Discovery phase of the People Technology review to find ways to reduce “pinch points”; and developed a new People Operating Model.
<b>Ensuring</b>	At its heart this involves provision of timely management information to assist the organisation to make good decisions – e.g., on health and safety; reviewing whether our policies and practices are effective and applied consistently across the organisation; and checking that we comply with mandatory requirements – e.g., employment checks.	<b>Whilst we are underway, there is much more to do.</b> So far, we have developed and implemented the D+I dashboard; developed protocols for safe working on sites and at home during the pandemic.
<b>Responding</b>	What brings all this together is responsiveness. Which covers agility of thinking and approach; timeliness of response; and careful listening to	<b>We have much to be proud of here.</b> For example, our Covid19 response, which was recognised in

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	understand what is truly needed.	the October BSI audit; HR Direct receiving a Customer Excellence rating from an external audit for the 5 <sup>th</sup> year running; developing and launching our refreshed code of conduct; reopening of our sites post pandemic
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Any People function is most effective when working in partnership with managers and employees. HR “fails” when it takes on a level of managerial responsibility.

The agreement of boundaries between the People team and managers/employees in terms of responsibility is an essential requirement for the People function to do its best for and on behalf of the organisation.

### Reflections on NHSBT

My observation is that the last two years have exacted a toll across the organisation. The combination of dealing with the pandemic, the rising number of demands for HR related support/intervention and implementing a range of change initiatives alongside operating model changes have placed significant demands on everyone.

When I first joined the Health sector, NHSBT’s HR function was regarded as a leading light in the profession. What I observe is that it has stood still over time. This has effectively resulted in NHSBT going backwards as others have progressed, overtaking us in terms of ways of working and operational delivery.

As I travel around the organisation the frustrations that I hear about our People services centre around inconsistency of advice, the length of time taken to get things done, and unwieldy processes. It’s clear that recruitment is felt to be challenging, and concerns exist about the apparent lack of transparency and fairness for a whole range of people related decisions.

Part of the issue I see is that we have lost our way in terms of who is accountable for what when it comes to people. Therefore, the People team are deemed to be responsible for every decision. Instead, we need to ensure we have far greater clarity about the role of the line manager, the role of the People team, and the role of individual members of staff.

Within the People team there is frustration too. They feel keenly the apparent loss of confidence in their work and professionalism. The situation has been exacerbated by three changes to the CPO leadership during this period, which has made an unsettling situation more difficult.

To win back the trust of the organisation the team have taken on a significant amount of work over and above the day job. We had an awayday on 29<sup>th</sup> October and discovered we have 120 initiatives in flight. This is simply too many for us to deliver to the quality that we want, and the organisation deserves. Therefore, we are reprioritising and rephasing work.

In summary, within the People Directorate I see capable people, passionate about NHSBT, working with positive intent and over stretched as they attempt to do everything they believe is being asked of them, and do it now.

The good news is the new People Operating model that was developed earlier in the year and

which we are in the throes of implementing, is designed to remedy these challenges.

## 5. Our plan

We have several initiatives underway which we need to complete to provide the most solid foundation from which to build. This starts with implementing the new People directorate operating model and concludes with delivering the people and culture priorities we have included in the NHSBT strategic plan.

Our strategic plan areas of focus are:

- ▶ Introducing strategic workforce planning to ensure we have the right capability, capacity, and flexibility to deliver our strategy
- ▶ Undertaking robust succession planning for critical roles (e.g., senior leadership and subject matter experts)
- ▶ Revamping recruitment and reward to attract and retain great people and increasing diversity at all levels within the organisation
- ▶ Helping our people to reach their full potential by providing learning and development, flexible career pathways and regular career conversations
- ▶ Building a refreshed set of behaviours into our performance and recruitment framework and supporting leaders and managers to role model these
- ▶ Taking swift and appropriate action to resolve conflict and tackle inappropriate behaviour
- ▶ Working in partnership with staff side, diversity networks and heads of centre to make NHSBT an even better place to work

The Op Model will provide us with strengthened strategic partnering; new thinking/capabilities in strategic workforce planning and horizon scanning; a fresh approach to recruitment and career development; a springboard to evolve our OD work and introduce new ways of learning for our leaders; our HR Ops work will be taken to the next level, especially our thinking on Reward and policy development; we will extend our diversity/inclusion and wellbeing initiatives; and we will introduce a new approach to resolving issues, based on identifying these early and acting promptly.

I perceive we have “porous” boundaries, and it would help everyone if we were to re-establish what is for the People team to support line managers with and what is for us do on behalf of the organisation. This is as much of a priority as implementing the Op Model.

To achieve the necessary shifts, we will both develop our existing people more effectively and bring in new folk. At the AD level we have reimagined 8 of the 9 roles and are recruiting to these at pace. I anticipate having all 9 in post by end March.

In parallel to recruiting we are working through the implications for all the teams that report into the ADs and will start to move people and portfolios to match the new structure.

As a result of our changes the Board can expect to see a more comprehensive set of metrics – starting with a proposal on monitoring organisational effectiveness in March; better outcomes across a range of people related areas; and an increase in employee engagement.

**Deb McKenzie, Chief People Officer**

**December 2021**