

NHSBT Public Board Meeting

03 February 2026

Chief Executive's Report

Status: Official

There was work across the organisation to prepare for the winter pressures and I am pleased that, as a result of this forward planning, we have come out of the Christmas and New Year period in a strong position. Our overall blood stocks have remained stable. We have also seen improvement in the cornea donation rates, meaning that we anticipate meeting the NHS England waiting list targets for corneal transplants. However, we remain vigilant and continue to closely monitor progress and take action where appropriate, so that we can maintain the positive trajectory.

Since the last Board I have also had the privilege of reviewing the nominations for the NHSBT Together Awards. We received over 1000 nominations, demonstrating the incredible work and achievements by our team members. I wish all those shortlisted the best for the ceremony at the end of February

1. Service Delivery

Blood supply

Red cell stock update: At the beginning of January 2026, overall red cell stocks were above target levels at 8.8 days of stock (DoS). NHSBT targets each blood group to be above 5.5 DoS. At the beginning of January, three blood groups were below target:

- O-negative was at 5.0 DoS.
- B-negative was at 3.5 DoS.
- AB-negative was at 4.7 DoS.

Red cell stock comparison: red cell stock levels at the start of 2026 compare favourably with previous years. Fig 1 shows stock levels at a comparable date for the start of five calendar years. In 2026:

- Overall stock is c.3 DoS higher than previous years.
- O-negative stock levels are around twice as high as previous years.
- B-negative stock levels are similar to previous years.

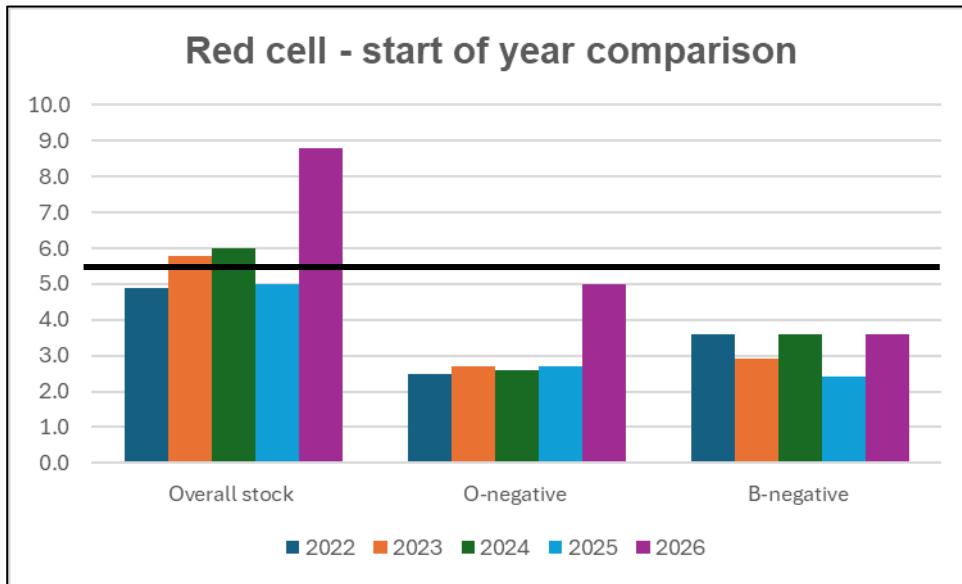


Fig 1: Comparison of start of year stock levels for key blood groups

Red cell stock trends: Fig 2 shows the stock level trend over the past 12-months. During the summer of 2025, an incident response group was established to increase blood stocks, taking steps to improve collection performance.

- Overall stock grew to above target levels over the summer; this was first time that stock has grown during the summer period. Since then, overall stock has been above target levels.
- O-negative stock grew over the summer, which enabled NHSBT to stand-down the amber alert that had been in place for 12 months. O-negative stocks trended downwards during autumn but recovered to target levels in the build-up to Christmas.
- B-negative stock levels have been variable over the 12-month period.
- O-negative and B-negative are in pre-amber status. Stocks of both groups are heavily influenced by Ro substitutions.

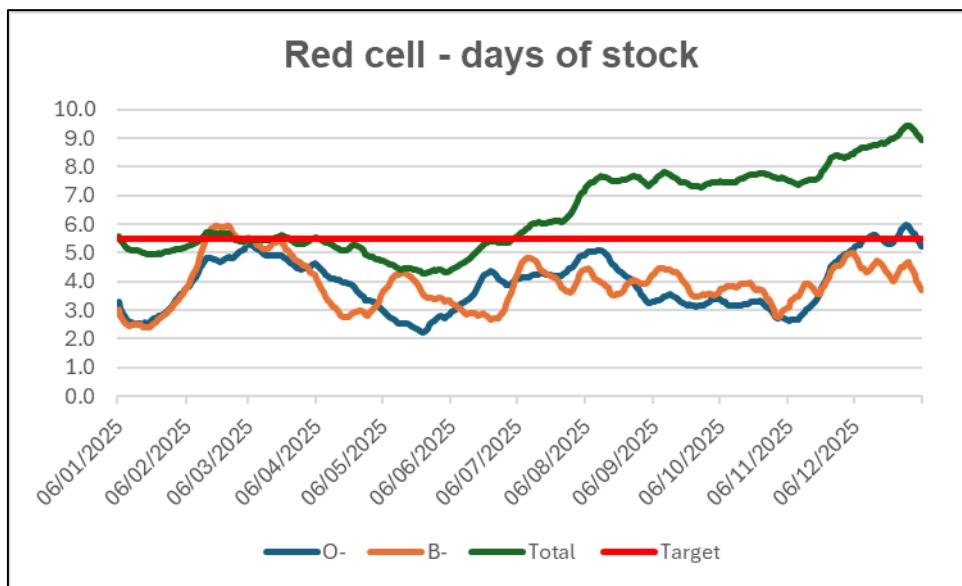


Fig 2: Red cell stock level trend for key blood groups

Platelet stock update: At the beginning of January 2026, overall platelet stocks were at good levels at 2.9 days of stock (DoS). A-negative is seen as the universal group and was at 2.5 DoS. NHSBT targets a minimum of 1 DoS for platelet groups.

Platelet stock levels across the Christmas and New Year period were stable. This was facilitated by an increased number of sessions over the Christmas period, increased donor-related activity, and decreased hospital demand. We also enacted a pre-amber status for A-negative and AB-negative platelets in mid-December with these platelet types issued on a named-patient basis, to support appropriate issues. Feedback from hospital customers is that they valued the timing of this intervention to prevent shortages experienced in previous years.

Fig 3 shows a comparison of average days of stock in December at both an overall level and for A-negative. During December 2025, stock levels at the total level and for A-negative was maintained at higher levels than each of the previous years.

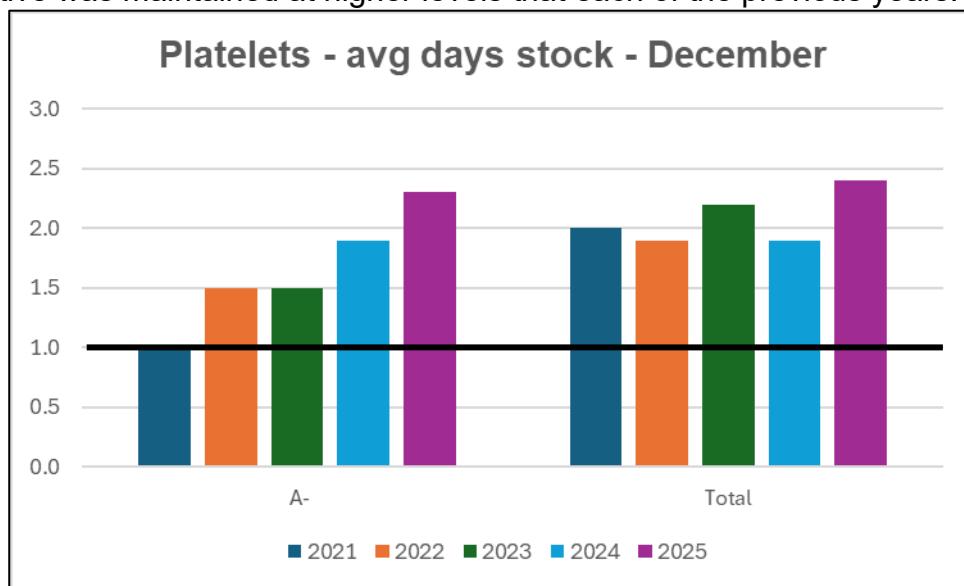


Fig 3: Platelets: December average days of stock

Platelet stock trends: Fig 4 shows the platelet stock level trend over the past 12-months:

- Overall platelet stock levels remained above 2 days across the 12-month period.
- A-negative stock levels were more variable. However, they remained above 1.5 days.

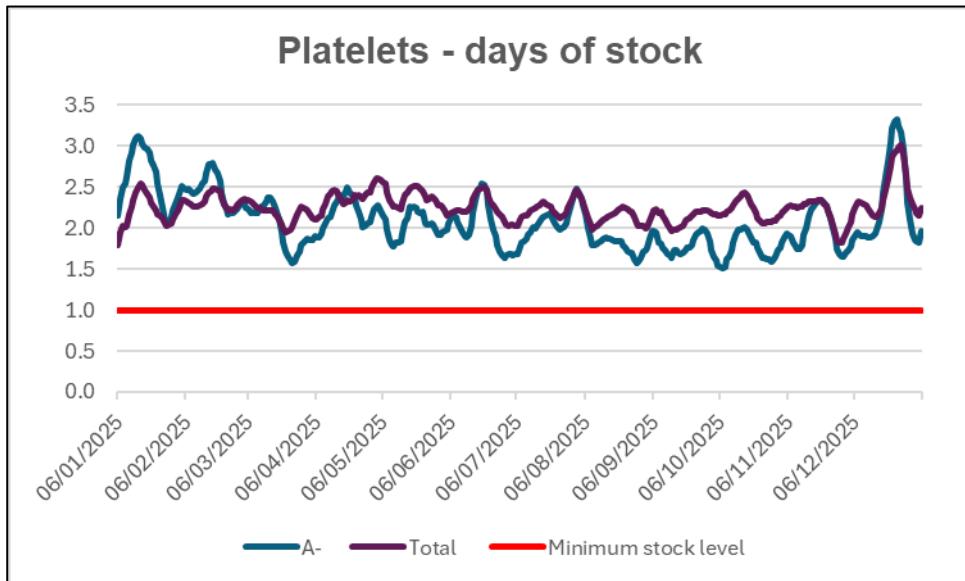


Fig 4: Platelets stock level trend

Plasma

Plasma is recovered from all whole blood donations, and any not used for clinical purposes is sent for fractionation. We also collect plasma directly from donors in our 3 source plasma clinics. Over 250,000 litres of plasma have been collected in 25/26 from both Source and Recovered. From August 2024, NHSBT has delivered a total of 686,000 litres of plasma to be fractionated into plasma derived medicines (Immunoglobulin and Albumin). From April 2025 to March 2026, we will ship 450,000 litres (353,000 to date).

Increasing the self-sufficiency of the UK in plasma derived medicines is a key goal as demand continues to rise globally. In the short term, NHSBT is developing new locations for increased source plasma collection.

Ensuring that collection of plasma is safe, efficient and productive is a key focus and has been delivered in 25/26 through the continued delivery of our transformation agenda. Recent highlights include:

- Further refinements to the manufacturing and logistics of plasma in NHSBT sites, allowing faster pallet packing and shipping.
- First submission of annual update to Quality Technical Agreement to fractionator

Organ Donation and Transplantation

The Organ Donation Joint Working Group report was published on the 21 January, setting priorities for action to address three challenges: aligning societal action with public support for organ donation, reversing the decline in consent rates, and expanding the pool of potential donors. Jointly Chaired by the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS Blood and Transplant, it brought together national and international experts in the field of organ donation, including donor families and service providers. The Group's remit was to identify actions to maximise the number of lives saved through the gift of deceased organ donation, building on the positive developments (such as the change in legislation) and learning from less successful approaches. The final report provides 10 actions, with supporting activity, to deliver improvements in deceased organ donation rates in the UK.

NHSBT has been successful in their bid to host the International Society for Organ Donation Professionals (ISODP) Congress in 2027 in London. This is the leading worldwide organ and tissue donation congress, and this will be the first time that it will be held in the UK. This decision provides global recognition that NHSBT is a world leading organ and tissue donation service.

Work to urgently increase levels of ocular donation continues. Donations increased in October, leading to above-target issues of corneas November. Due to this growth in activity, we were able to increase the issuing cap to 140 corneas a week in December and early January. Prior to this, the cap was set at 70 corneas a week. Patients are already benefiting and it is projected that all patients waiting more than 52 weeks will have been transplanted by the end of March. Our updated “iOrbit” project is now recruiting extra capacity to ensure that these gains in cornea donation are made sustainable.

The Opt-Out Legislation for the Isle of Man went live on 1 January 2026. This is the last area of the UK to adopt this legislation, meaning that all residents will be considered to be organ donors unless they have opted out of the legislation.

Cell Apheresis & Gene Therapies (CAGT)

In December 2025 the NHS Cord Blood Bank reached the milestone of issuing its 1000th unit to a stem cell transplant patient. The donation went to a patient whose adult donor had fallen through, demonstrating the lifesaving value of cord blood as a reliable safety net for patients, while showcasing NHSBT’s role in delivering equitable, resilient transplant services when other options are unavailable.

The Therapeutic Apheresis Service (TAS) has started a new automated red cell exchange service for Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, the second service to go live for the new East of England TAS unit. These services bring red cell exchange treatments closer to home for many sickle cell patients that previously could not access treatment or had to travel long distances.

Unfortunately, the biotech company who CAGT are partnering with to manufacture their CAR-T product for a UK clinical trial, has taken the decision to close down the cell therapy part of their business. The decision is not in any way related to our partnership and affects all of the company’s cell therapy program, which is currently active across Europe and US. This is very disappointing for the Barnsley Advanced Therapies Unit team, and our ATMP work in general, but the team should be congratulated on successfully transferring in and validating the manufacturing process.

Digital

The latest Organ Donor Register release went live in November, introducing an enhanced automated search feature for specialist nurses or requesters to simplify the organ and tissue donation process. Initial feedback suggests that the changes have added significant value to users. It also introduced a fully automated trace and de-duplication service, which more regularly traces: CHI/NHS numbers; address changes; death notifications.

The NHS Organ Donor Register (ODR) Service within the NHS App surpassed 4 million unique users in November with people who have used the service to check, record or update their organ donation decision. 82% have an existing decision to donate (opt-in) and 18% a decision not to donate (opt-out) and around 10% are first ever registrations.

The work to integrate the ODR Service into the NHS England Register with the 'My GP Service' got approval to proceed from the NHSE Caldicott Guardian. Aligned to this, the ODR registration target for 26/27 has been increased to 1 million, from the current year target of 750,000-825,000.

Quality & Governance

External inspection

Since the last report in November 2025, NHSBT has hosted 6 inspectors over 10 inspection days. We were inspected by The Human Tissue Authority (HTA) at the Southampton centre and the British Standards Institution (BSI) at Filton, Colindale, Tooting, Oxford, Newcastle, Lancaster and Brimingham Vincent Drive, as part of an annual Business Continuity management system audit. These investigations only led to 3 minor issues to be addressed

In this period, the organisation

Process improvements:

We continue to make iterative changes to the incident management process and are seeing positive outcomes as a result. Going digital first for incident reporting has continued to deliver efficiencies across Blood Donation. There have also been significant improvements in the appropriate management of 'low-risk' 'high-occurring' incidents across the organisation. The pilot is entering phase 2 in Blood Donation and has release more time to support donor safety, experience and addressing quality key performance indicators (KPI). For the first time since setting these KPIs, we achieved our objective of having zero (0) major incidents overdue for closure.

Over the past 12 months, we have seen a significant reduction in the average age and numbers of major incidents awaiting closure — from 16 incidents this time last year to 5 and the average days overdue down from over 60 days to 13 days. This improvement is largely due to focused efforts by the Quality Assurance team and stronger engagement from directorates. Further iterative changes are on track for delivery in Q4 25/26.

Donor Experience

The whole-blood donor base grew by 3,000 in December to 779,640—the year's highest, with gains in Ro (+400), B negative (+160), and O negative (+500). Platelet donors fell 1% to 14,140; A-negative fell slightly less, by 0.8%. Stocks stayed above target throughout the holidays, with December's days-of-stock the highest since 2020. Current registration figures for the NHS Stem Cell Donor Registry stand at 20,427 YTD against a 25/26 target of 25,000.

The Donor Base Resilience programme continues to expand, driving increased typing and recruitment nationwide. In November and December, the programme also delivered short-term initiatives aimed at improving fill rates at Brixton Donor Centre.

Infection prevention and control (IPC)

Safety mitigations remain in place in response to the discovery of legionella within the water systems at Filton, Colindale and Southampton. All actions continue to be taken under the direction of the Water Safety Authorising Engineer, with remedial works and enhanced testing regimes ongoing.

Risk Management

Governance, risk, and assurance mapping across the directorate's portfolios, now in its second year of formation, has reached a strong level of maturity. Clear and effective governance arrangements are in place between relevant regulatory and

governance committees and the Clinical Governance Committee (CGC). Principal Risk 1 was subject to a detailed, annual deep dive at the Risk Management Committee and was formally presented to the CGC, providing assurance that risks to donor and patient safety are being managed effectively.

2. Innovation

Colleagues from across NHSBT came together on 21st and 22nd January for the Clinical and R&D conference. The theme was 'Insight to Impact: Enhancing Outcomes for Patients and Donors' with the event programme covering the breadth of NHSBT work, including sessions on Ethical Responsibility and Inclusivity in Healthcare and Research, Donor and Patient Stories, Innovation and Horizon Scanning, and much more. As always it was a very successful conference expertly organised by the Research Governance Office.

The STRIDES (STRategies to Improve Donor ExperienceS) study has been published in *The Lancet Haematology*. This landmark trial conducted within NHSBT which included 1.4 million donors, assessed whether 4 different types of intervention (isotonic drink, additional information to prepare the donor, prolonged time before getting up after donation, applied muscle tension) could decrease the number of donors experiencing an adverse event (fainting). Prior to this research all of these interventions were thought to decrease the risk of fainting. This trial showed that none of these interventions made any difference to the number of fainting episodes donors experience. This is important, as it means that NHSBT does not need to introduce any of these interventions, and some of these interventions, such as isotonic drinks, would have been expensive to implement. [Preventive interventions for vasovagal reactions in whole blood donors: a cluster-randomised, stepped-wedge, crossover trial of 73 sites involving 1·4 million donors in England - The Lancet Haematology](#)

We are supporting various regulatory engagement activities as part of our strategic objective to influence standards, guidance and regulations with external agencies. The focus of these actions has centred on artificial intelligence and the use/application of software, as a medical device, Artificial Intelligence as a Medical Device and Software as a Medical Device (AlaMD and SaMD). It is expected that benefits will be realised with Donor and Session Platform (DASP), Genomic programme and other clinical research activities.

In December, the Donor Planning and Performance team continued to roll out our priority booking request system. Over the month, we booked 1,400 appointments (up from 1,200 in November) for O-negative, B- negative and Ro donors who otherwise would have been unable to find a suitable opportunity to donate. This represents 4-5% of all O negative appointments booked in December.

We are piloting direct communications informed by audience insight, including winter messages, birthday communications, and product-switching campaigns to improve engagement and retention while supporting operational flexibility.

3. Donor and Patient Experience and Engagement Activity

Haemoglobin (Hb) Testing

After a September dip following the rollout of secondary venous Hb testing, satisfaction rose to 83.5% in December. Satisfaction with waiting times improved to 70.4%, and Net Promoter Score (NPS) reached 88.6.

Marketing and Communications

We marked World Sight Day with targeted cornea donation campaigns, including new video content, social media activity, a stakeholder toolkit, and PR outreach. Collaboration with reality TV personality Sam Vanderpump amplified the message through national media, podcasts, and social platforms, contributing to a 15% year-on-year increase in opt-in registrations in November. Last year (April-December), almost 550,000 people registered an opt-in decision on the ODR (99% of target YTD), which brings the total opt-in donor base to 23.1m.

Our “Love is in the Blood” series with Channel 4 targeted 18–35-year-olds, featured blind-date donations, and achieved 5 million views, helping normalize donation and ease time concerns.

The winter paid media campaign, launched in October, focused on boosting bookings and attracting new donors in regions with large Black populations and available collection capacity, including London, West Midlands, Manchester, Leeds, and Nottingham. Channels included video-on-demand, radio, digital audio, social media, online display, in-game audio, outdoor media, and a Citymapper pilot in London. We also secured significant pro-bono advertising: a London bus campaign worth £55k and hospital radio spots reaching nearly 50,000 listeners.

In December we launched our first social media led campaign for organ donation designed and delivered by our in-house team. At the heart of the campaign is a pink and white paper plane, designed by Joe Russell - an organ recipient and origami artist who needed a life-saving double lung transplant. We took a video-led approach, bringing audiences on a six-part journey - from the perspectives of a South Asian heritage donor family to three organ recipients spanning from 11 to 69 years old. Overall, the joint video content had 89.5k views. We also briefed media and secured regional TV packages in London, the North-west, South-east, South-west and West Midlands.

Over the festive period we planned several impactful stories with media to help boost blood stocks. These included the story of Lucie Maguire who needed emergency blood at the roadside and in hospital after being hit by a tractor. This resulted in coverage on ITV Calendar and across Yorkshire media as well as nationally on Good Morning Britain who presented their morning news bulletins live from Tooting DC. On the day we saw 1,200 new blood donor registrations as well as an increase in appointment bookings. And our piece with BBC Breakfast on the Pint For Mike campaign just prior to Christmas enabled us to push critical messaging including last minute appointments and the urgent ongoing need for more Bneg, Oneg and Ro donors. This led to 1,400 new blood donor registrations on the day and 30,000 visits to the website. To support blood stocks, we also shared toolkits with seasonal messaging with 124 public sector and commercial partners.

Our Super Donors story on 29 December identified that only 10 donors in the country have donated whole blood, platelets, plasma as well as stem cells via the NHS Stem Cell Registry. The story achieved widespread national and regional coverage including - BBC Breakfast, BBC5Live, BBC London, ITV London and other key regional press including filming at Birmingham, Tooting and Shepherds Bush DCs. Coinciding with the story, we saw over 2,000 new blood donor registrations. More coverage is planned including This Morning in late January.

Patient and Donor engagement

Work has commenced on establishing an organisation-wide policy for donor and patient engagement. This work will be led by the NHSBT Chief Nursing Officer, which will be informed by a steering group with patient and clinical co-chairs to lead engagement with stakeholders and the development of recommendations to inform the policy. There is already significant activity across the organisation to liaise with donors and patients in our service design. This work will improve consistency of approach and outline best practice for ensuring the patient and donor voice informs how our services are designed and delivered, with governance in place to monitor adherence.

Patient Safety

The Patient Safety Incidence Response Framework (PSIRF) continues to mature, with three open patient safety incident investigation (PSII) responses nearing closure. An internal multidisciplinary Safety Improvement and Insights Group has been set up to triangulate data and drive organisational learning. This meeting replaces the now decommissioned board and project PSIRF meetings.

Complaints

The NHSBT commissioned Complaints review is complete and a report detailing the current process and early recommendations went to ET in early December 2025. This is being progressed, as requested by ET, to a formal proposal for a decision by ET in Q4.

Safeguarding

The Safeguarding Assurance and Accountability Framework (SAAF) process is being completed for the Safeguarding Committee for Q4. The SAAF provides a consistent national framework to strengthen safeguarding leadership, accountability, and assurance across the NHS, ensuring protection of the most vulnerable remains a core organisational priority.

Safeguarding training figures are very nearly at target level. A thorough training needs analysis of all levels has been completed with some changes to levels/roles now being implemented. This has been supported by the Subject Matter Expert Strategic Lead and the Safeguarding Committee.

Infected Blood Inquiry

The first Infected Blood Commemorative Event was held on November 19th at Church House, London, gathering infected and affected members of the community. It started the conversation on Infected Blood Memorialisation, following the recommendations made by Sir Brian in the Inquiry's 2024 report. Recommendation 2 is "*Recognising and remembering what happened to people*". Sir Brian suggested that there be at least 3 gatherings of the community and this was the first one.

The Infected Blood Compensation Scheme Authority and the Cabinet Office also held sessions on compensation in the afternoon. Representatives from NHSBT attended to ensure alignment when considering our commemoration approach.

NHSBT is reviewing the future IBI governance arrangements to support implementation of IBI recommendations outlined in the DHSC Transfusion Transformation strategy, which will be published in early 2026.

4. People

Inclusion

As part of our ongoing commitment to inclusion, we launched an EDI top up module for all staff as a reminder on inclusive practice and to raise awareness of adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

Senior Leader Conference

We delivered a face-to-face event for our Senior Leadership Community in November with a theme of Shaping the future of NHSBT – leading today and for tomorrow with a keynote from Sam Jones opening the day as we moved into three focused sessions on Driving High Performance, Leading Change & Transformation & Transforming our Culture.

Flu Vaccination

Our seasonal Flu Vaccination Campaign has been highly successful, beating the previous total of 34.4% and exceeding the stretch target of 40% for frontline staff. The overall reconciliation for frontline staff (excluding those on long-term sick leave and maternity leave) stands at 40.8%, with 41.7% for all staff. This was delivered through organising additional clinics at various centres and a series of short sessions aimed at helping managers understand the importance of flu vaccination, and encouraging conversations with colleagues, significantly boosted uptake and reporting.

Forward Together Programme

Work is progressing to continue to deliver the Forward Together Programme, with highlights including commencing the test phase for the new HR platform and the launch of new learning and development on 'Inclusion Essentials'.

The programme held a deep dive with staff networks, trade union representatives and inclusive culture leads at the EDI Council in December with a follow-up session planned for January. Change volunteers from across the organisation are being engaged to provide valuable input to the design, development and testing of deliverables being produced by projects across the programme.

5. Finance

November closed with a £1.04m deficit, and we forecast a year-end overspend of £1.7m. This position has been reviewed and approved by the Executive Team under Amber Alert status. While challenging, this reflects planned investment in donor engagement and resilience initiatives.

Our full year outlook remains positive following the Quarter three forecasting cycle, and we still remain confident in delivering 2025-26 within our agreed funding envelope.

The second National Commissioning Group meeting will take place in mid-February to agree pricing proposals and review the service offering for Blood and Specialist Services for the year ahead.

Across NHSBT, divisions have developed detailed budgets for next year, aligned with their business plans and strategies, and within their funding assumptions and pricing proposals. The final proposed budget, together with the business plan and transformation portfolio will be presented to the Board at the March 2026 meeting.

This is my last report as Interim Chief Executive Officer, with Frances O'Callaghan starting as the permanent CEO in February.

I am grateful to colleagues across NHSBT and our many external colleagues for their help, support and advice during my tenure. NHSBT is part of the essential backbone for the wider NHS and it has been a privilege to have led an organisation with so many talented and committed people, all dedicated to saving and improving lives.

Author: Caroline Walker

Date: January 2026