

# Report to the Meeting of the

**BOD 46/2021**

(Agenda item 05)

# Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

# Board of Directors

**28th July 2021**

**Trust Chair’s report**

**For: Information/Discussion**

Apparently, a couple of the candidates to succeed Sir Simon Stevens as Chief Executive of NHS England have been in touch with Claire Murdoch, the mental health lead, to inform themselves and quiz her about the state of mental health provision. That is encouraging, except there are reputedly four candidates. Either the others are already well enough informed or (ring the alarm bells) they are missing the large and sustained emphasis that the outgoing regime has placed on mental health. Whether that continues under the new Secretary of State, Sajid Javid, is to be discovered but we can be reasonably assured that the person chairing the appointments panel for the new Chief Executive, Lord David Prior, knows about mental health need. He surely came away from his recent visit to the Warneford Hospital convinced that attempting to treat seriously ill patients in buildings dating from the mid 19th century is a scandal.

Parity of treatment for mental health in funding (still a goal rather than a reality, despite welcome progress in the Mental Health Investment Standard) needs to be matched by parity of attention. The eminent psychiatrist Sir Simon Wessely reported two years ago, recommending changes in mental health law – not drastic but important revisions to regulation, securing the rights of patients and tidying up the boundary with mental capacity rules. These changes require parliamentary time and there is a danger they will be shoved to the back of the queue. As a large trust providing mental health services, we should speak up and tell ministers, civil servants and the media these are no longer the Cinderella of the NHS.

Transition at the top of the NHS is echoed by changes on our Board. It is great to welcome new recruits (see the Chief Executive’s report) but it is also gratifying that members of our senior team such as Debbie Richards, Executive Managing Director for Mental Health & Learning Disability & Autism, can move on and up, offering their leadership and experience elsewhere in the NHS. For the Trust to become an incubator of talent would be a fine accompaniment to our general drive to improve our services.

Changes in Board membership and our efforts to develop how we work are part and parcel of that wider improvement effort, framed by the Care Quality Commission’s impending assessment of whether we are ‘well led’. We are open to learning from what other trusts do as well as from rigorous self-examination, in parallel with the Quality Improvement initiative unfolding across the Trust.

On recent visits I have been impressed by the enthusiasm of staff, despite COVID and despite the unremitting pressure of demand for services – but also a little dismayed at how fragmented our teams and units can be. Staff know that the Trust pays their wages but are not necessarily conscious of belonging to a wider entity, in which they might learn from colleagues and share good practice. Shortly, the Inspire programme of events gets going, intended to give staff a stronger sense of belonging to an organisation that cares about them, their work and their patients. It is especially important in our far-flung services – children and young people across Bath, Swindon and Wiltshire – and in our community services. My biggest wish for the autumn is to be able again to get out and visit and hopefully reinforce a sense of connectedness across specialisms and places.

Talking of places, I am looking forward shortly to welcome to the Trust the new leaders of Oxfordshire County Council in the hope that the structures and committees being proposed for the Integrated Care System in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West will promote and encourage more alignment between the Board and local authorities. Our Executives are actively involved with council officers, but councillors and NHS boards do not have much to do with one another. The creation of the ICS is encouraging more contact between us and, for example, the board of Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Let us reach out beyond health to talk more often and in more depth to those responsible for housing, social care, schooling and, especially in the city of Oxford, environmental sustainability and mitigating climate change.

**Recommendation**

The Board is asked to note the report.

**Author and Title: David Walker, Trust Chair**

1. *A risk assessment has been undertaken around the legal issues that this report presents and there are no issues that need to be referred to the Trust Solicitors*
2. ***Strategic Objectives/Priorities*** *– this report relates to or provides assurance and evidence against the following Strategic Objectives:*

*1) Quality - Deliver the best possible clinical care and health outcomes*

*2) People - Be a great place to work*

*3) Sustainability – Make best use of our resources and protect the environment*

*4) Research and Education – Become a leader in healthcare research and education*