

## **Lead Governor Report 2017-18**

Good Afternoon, it is a real pleasure to see so many people here My name is James Crawley and I am one of the Trust's Elected Public Governors for Kent and am in my second term as Lead Governor. This afternoon it is my privilege to speak to you on behalf of all the members of the Council of Governors.

The Council of Governors' primary role is to be critical friend to Trust. We appoint the Chair and Non-Executive Directors and hold them to account for the performance of the board and play a very active role in helping the Trust with strategic planning and initiatives to assist the Trust in delivering to the highest standards of care to people accessing our services, and the staff who provide those services.

Last year during this very speech I said "we do not under-estimate the challenges ahead, but with the leadership now in place, we have every opportunity to meet the demands placed upon the Trust, and to excel." I am pleased to tell you that we have seen very significant progress in nearly all areas of the Trust where staff and external agencies had identified issues.

Having seen and been involved in the numerous changes on the Executive Team at Board level, Governors are increasingly heartened at the calibre and ethos of the Executive Directors now in post. At year end the Executive Team was almost substantively complete and, with the appointment of a substantive Medical Director following year end and a substantive Chair appointed and due to start later this month, we are close to achieving stability on the Board. Governors led the recruitment process for the new Chair and we are keen to welcome David Astley. I'd also like to take this chance to thank Graham Colbert and Tim Howe for their work as interim Chair and Deputy over the past few months.

There have been some very welcome additional Non-Executive Director (or NED) appointments bringing much-needed organisational development, IT and clinical skills and experience to the Board, which should be very helpful with the work still ahead. The NEDs as a body seem to be working more effectively and the revamped Board Committee structure highlights areas of risk to the Board more clearly and in a timely fashion. Governors have observed many of these committee meetings.

Council meetings are becoming more effective in discussion with the NEDs, and Governors are finding that our questions to Trust managers between meetings are receiving much fuller and more frank responses: this bodes well for the general direction of travel.

During 2017-18, we were very pleased with the CQC's appraisal of the 111 service as good, and were proud of 999 staff who also achieved a CQC 'good' for caring for our patients. The numerous areas of serious deficit identified by the CQC were very much in the systems and processes put in place by the then leadership of the Trust.

As we have heard from Daren, the recent follow-up inspection seems likely to recognise many of the improvements made while acknowledging there will always be more to do, though we of course haven't received the final report yet. It's great to hear that the inspectors felt welcomed and were treated openly and honestly.

Governors seek robust structures to protect patients and empower staff to deliver the best possible service. It is on these areas that the Council puts its focus at our meetings and in our other interactions with the Trust.

The Trust remains challenged in a number of areas, not least operational performance, and while this is an issue nationally, Governors will not stop seeking improvements for our locality. The introduction of the Ambulance Response Programme appears to have helped us get to the sickest people more quickly, but Governors have been and will continue to be vocal in insisting on the importance of understanding the experience of our patients who wait the longest for our services, including those who sometimes experience long waits for their 999 call to be answered. The Trust has been finding it hard to recruit into some roles however the new HR Director appears to be getting to grips with this challenge quickly, and we are now almost at complement in many areas, including critically, our emergency operations centre.

Governors have been involved, particularly the Staff Governors, in work to improve the culture of the organisation and remove the everyday blockages that staff experience that prevent SECamb from being a more decent place to work.

One area where the Trust is still failing to provide leadership and is subsequently losing productivity is with our fantastic volunteers. Whilst volunteer Governors, and Chaplains are pretty well supported, our hundreds of volunteer Community First Responders are not well managed or supported, a situation identified and highlighted by the Governors on numerous occasions over the years. This waste of dedicated resource, who often have the ability to assist those patients waiting the longest for our services, is wholly unacceptable and must be rectified as a priority by the Executive. Volunteers must never be a replacement for paid staff, but as an enhancement to make the role of the paid staff a little easier and crucially, provide an important first response to patients until ambulance crews get to the scene. In cash strapped times the Trust must look to alternative methods of building extra capacity into the system. The number of CFRS has dwindled from over 600 to less than 300 in a just a few years and Governors look to the new HR Director to address these issues urgently (in conjunction with the Operations Director where appropriate) and have asked NEDs to focus on getting assurance that this work is moving apace.

We have been pleased to note there are signs of investment in this area, whilst it is still early days, and that there is also the nationally recognised Investing in Volunteers programme, on which SECamb is the National Ambulance Lead Trust, which will shine a light formally on areas for improvement. We will continue to scrutinise developments in this area as we feel investment in volunteers will have a significant impact on our patients' outcome

It is pleasing to see investment in cultural improvement work across the Trust and the acknowledgement that this cannot be imposed on the organisation but must be owned by and embodied by all staff. We are seeing green shoots of improvement.

Financial challenges cannot be ignored and there has been some significant investment not undertaken this year, for example much-needed improvements to

premises, while other investments, in our new HQ and Emergency Operations Centre and in a new and improved Computer Aided Despatch system for 999 have brought massive benefits. The Governors are pleased to see that the Trust now has a fleet replacement strategy in place and is beginning to replace older vehicles with more modern, efficient and fit for purpose units. This is important as our staff need access to the best possible equipment to be able to provide the continuing excellent levels of patient care safely.

We all know the NHS is strapped for cash and it's vital we make the right choices when we spend tax payers' money. We also need to work together better across the health and social care system to remove the disincentives to work together when it can improve things for our patients and finances. Some Governors are very much involved in the emerging Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships and are keeping a weather eye on their progress to ensure they are both effective and accountable to the public. We are pleased to hear about innovations including leading on a health system-wide project to improve hospital handover times, and the embedding of midwives in our EOCs to provide support. Governors are also investing time in building links with other foundation trusts in our areas of operations in the hope of assisting the system wide transformation of care.

There seems to be increasing recognition that Governors raise important issues that should be listened to and acted upon. The type of SECAMB where the Governors are listened to and respected will be the type of SECAMB where patients and staff receive the same basic courtesy and ultimately a good service and experience. This is the SECAMB we all strive for and that the South-East deserves, and the Council will continue to support and challenge as the team also strive for this, under Daren's leadership.

There have been a number of changes in the Council and I thank those who have left during the year and welcome those who have joined.

We have a large number of Council seats up for election in the new year and I'd like to encourage our members to consider standing for election – please talk to any Governor here about the role or contact the Trust for more information. All members will receive more info through the membership newsletter in due course too. It is a demanding role (2-3 days per month sometimes) but very rewarding.

Finally, I would like to thank all my fellow Governors for their hard work over the year, and recognise the efforts of Daren and his team, the rest of the Board, SECAMB's 999,111 and non-operational staff and all our volunteers. I sincerely hope their efforts continue to bear fruit, and I know we in the Council will continue to do our best to represent the interests of the public and external stakeholders.

James Crawley

Lead Governor