

**SOUTH EASTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST**

**Minutes of the People and Culture Committee of the  
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust Board  
held on Thursday 21 August at 2.00pm  
in the Board Room, Trust Headquarters, Ulster Hospital**

**PRESENT:**

Mrs A Quirk, Non-Executive Director (Chair of Committee)

Mrs R Gibbs, Director of Adult Services and Healthcare in Prison  
Dr D Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive / Executive Director of Nursing,  
Midwifery & AHPs and Director of Patient Experience.  
Mrs L Preece, Director of Children Services & Executive Director of Social  
Work  
Mr K Donaghy, Non-Executive Director  
Mr K McMahon, Non-Executive Director  
Mrs S Henderson, Non-Executive Director

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr D Cairnduff, Assistant Director, People & Organisational Development  
Mr M O'Toole, Assistant Director of Employee Relations  
Mrs R Monroe, Equality & HR Assistant, People & Organisational  
Development (Minutes)

**OPENING REMARKS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1.0 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were recorded from, Mrs C Smyth, Director of People & Organisational Development, Mr Martyn, Medical Director, Mrs V Cleland, Director of Primary Care & Older People, Ms W Thompson, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Finance and Estates, Ms M Parks, Director of Surgery, Elective Care, Maternity & Paediatrics, Mr M Neil, Director of Unscheduled Care, Medicine & Cancer, Mrs H Moore, Director of Planning, Performance & Informatics, Mrs E O'Neill, Assistant Director, People & Resourcing and Mrs M McNally, Assistant Director, Risk Management & Governance.

## **2.0 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest made at this juncture or during the meeting.

## **3.0 MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 22 MAY 2025**

The minutes of the People and Culture Committee held on 22 May 2025, having been previously circulated and agreed as correct.

## **4.0 MATTERS ARISING**

The Chair invited Mr Cairnduff to give an update to the committee on the Matters Arising from the People and Culture Committee on 22 May 2025, paper no. SET/PC/26/25.

In relation to Equality Screenings, Mr Cairnduff explained that this is the first step in the process to identify any potential adverse impact on service users and staff in the nine S75 Equality Categories. Most Equality Screenings will identify no S75 impact or even a positive impact. If a potential minor adverse impact is identified at the screening stage, it may be possible to adjust the policy or proposal to avoid the potential impact. If it is not possible to revise the policy or proposal, the Trust may put in place mitigation measures to try to reduce any minor adverse impact. In such circumstances, as part of the monitoring process of the policy or proposal following implementation, the Trust commits to an ongoing screening to monitor for any impact which was not previously identified. If a major adverse impact is identified during this ongoing screening, the Trust will upgrade to a full EQIA and consultation process. This approach is consistent with other Trusts, and our equality screening templates are published in the Quarterly Screening Report on our public facing Trust Website. If an Equality Screening identifies a major adverse impact, the Trust will move directly to an EQIA, with a six month consultation period. The Trust has previously carried out a number of EQIA consultations, including most recently on the 'Future Provision of Urgent and Emergency Care Services in the Ards and North Down Area'. Mr Donaghy commented it would be useful to have a report of what was screened and the decision. Mr Cairnduff committed to provide this at the next meeting.

Mr Cairnduff advised the committee that there is still meetings happening regionally on the Adverse Weather Policy and an update on this will be giving at the next People and Culture Committee meeting in October. Mr Cairnduff also advised an update on the Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Policy will also be provided in October.

## **5.0 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

The Chair updated the committee on renewing the committee's focus on providing assurance by reviewing what we report and how we report it to provide assurance to Trust Board. This will involve seeking assurance from the Directorates. The Chair would welcome input into the format and content of information being brought to this committee. The Chair indicated she welcomes comments and opinions on this.

Mr Donaghy sought clarification around risk management processes and providing assurance to Trust Board. Discussion was had on the reporting of risks and risk management processes. The Chair give assurance to Mr Donaghy around risk management and a further discussion can be had when Mrs Smyth returns from bereavement leave.

Dr Robinson suggested that directorates could bring focused workforce agenda items throughout the year. Discussion ensued on Directorates bringing relevant items and issues to the committee.

## **6.0 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 People Report and Action Plan Update**

The Chair invited Mr Cairnduff to give an overview of the People Report and Action Plan Update to the committee, paper no. SET/PC/27/25. Based on the Chair's update, Mr Cairnduff agreed that these need to be separated and will aim to have this developed for the next meeting. Mr Cairnduff referred to the report and highlighted key areas; Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) survey was sent to 1100 managers and had a 32% response rate; Continued work from the Forums which included the Health and Wellbeing event held in May and also Diversity Celebration Day due to be held on Saturday 13 September; focus on MOVA with information stands/sessions held at various locations across the Trust. Mr Cairnduff indicated he was happy to take questions.

Mr McMahon asked if 'green' was optimistic and queried if actions were challenging: Action 4 - only 47% of staff have had an appraisal in the last 12 months; Action 17 - meaningful succession planning for Band 7s but without appraisals. Mr McMahon and Mrs Henderson asked what the target for appraisal is. Mr Cairnduff stated the aim is for an 80% response rate. Discussion ensued regarding realistic appraisal compliance and linkages to revalidation and liP feedback. Mr Cairnduff will review the Rag status of action plan based on feedback.

Mr Donaghy stated that it would be useful to have connected reports on the same agenda and would give a clearer view of linkages and trends.

In response to a query about coaching, Mr Cairnduff confirmed the Trust was piloting the Royal Free London team approach, currently with 3 teams. Good feedback has been received to date. Mr Donaghy asked about the Trust's coaching strategy. In response, Mr Cairnduff confirmed training for individual coaches is ongoing and the team coaching model is being rolled out. Individual coaching is still offered however the current focus is the prioritising of implementation of the LNA results in the short term.

The Chair thanked Mr Cairnduff for the update.

## **6.2 Absence Action Plan & Progress Report**

The Chair invited Mr O'Toole to give an update on the Absence Action Plan and Progress Report paper no. SET/PC/28/25. Mr O'Toole indicated that the report reflect April 25 to June 25 monthly figures and highlights current actions and future plans. The Absence team is working alongside Occupational Health and managers to address the Trust absence. A key focus for the team has been on the high level of short term absence and in particular those individuals who have four or more episodes a year. There is currently over 300 staff under review. Mrs Gibbs highlighted progress made with long term absence.

Mr O'Toole confirmed ongoing support for managers, with continuous communication, videos for managers and roadshows across all four sites. A new e-learning package for managers and staff on absence management has been developed and to date 650 managers have undertaken formal training. This will increase with the use of the e-learn package. A new Regional Management of Sickness Policy is due to be signed off in October 2025. Focused collaborative work ongoing with Nursing and Midwifery team and the Medical Directors Office.

Mr McMahon asked for more detail on the attendance e-learning package that was being developed. Martin O'Toole provided information on content and how it will be disseminated to managers.

Mrs Henderson asked about the replacement for HRPTS. Mr O'Toole explained that Equip is due to Go Live in the autumn 2026, currently in build stage. Mr McMahon queried if this was a potential cost pressure to the Trust. Mr Cairnduff responded more of a significant pressure on staff and resource implication. Discussion was had around the new Equip system.

The Chair thanked Mr O'Toole.

## **6.3 Raising Concerns**

The Chair invited Mr O'Toole to give a verbal update to the committee on Raising Concerns. Mr O'Toole confirmed between April and June there has

been four cases, with a further two cases between July and August. These are at formal investigation stage. Mr O'Toole confirmed any concerns raised are screened in line with the Whistleblowing process and once the requirement for a formal investigation is confirmed, the relevant Director agrees and identifies an investigation team. Annual report provided to Department of Health. Discussion took place in relation to Raising Concerns and Whistleblowing.

The Chair thanked Mr O'Toole for the update.

#### **6.4 Phase 1 IIP Reports**

The Chair invited Mr Cairnduff to give an overview of the Phase 1 IIP Reports paper no. SET/PC/29/25. Mr Cairnduff indicated these are not accreditation reports, just an update. This summary update indicated areas of good practice and identified areas of focus. Directorates have been asked to share reports with staff and to demonstrate that feedback is being acted on. Reports will continue to be brought to the committee, as well as being published on iConnect.

The Chair indicated that it is good to consider the data on a regular basis, both the positive feedback and also the areas needing improvement. Mrs Henderson commented on the Finance IIP report and the idea that a multi-year budget would help this service. Dr Robinson shared that the IIP process is welcomed and helpful. Mrs Preece said staff are very bought into the IIP process.

The Chair thanked Mr Cairnduff.

### **7.0 ITEMS FOR NOTING**

#### **7.1 Policy Updates**

The Chair asked Mr O'Toole to give an update on Policy Updates paper no. SET/PC/30/25 in Mrs O'Neill's absence. The Annual Leave Policy has been comprehensively reviewed to ensure consistency, transparency, and fairness with regards calculations and management of leave entitlements across all staff groups. The updated version reflects best practice and supports health and wellbeing by encouraging proactive leave planning and usage. The policy provide clarity on entitlements for both Agenda for Change and Medical & Dental staff.

The revised Secondment Policy strengthens governance around internal and external secondments while maintaining developmental opportunities for staff.

It also addresses workforce planning challenges linked to extended or indefinite secondments.

Mr O'Toole mentioned some key changes within this policy; the time-bound approach, standard secondment duration of 3 months to 3 years. Substantive posts held open for up to 2 years, may be permanently filled if the secondment exceeds two years. Return to post, it not guaranteed if the original role has been filled.

Discussion was had around Secondment. The Chair thanked Mr O'Toole.

### **7.2 NME Assurance Report**

The Chair asked Dr Robinson to give an update to the committee on the NME Assurance Report paper no. SET/PC/31/25. Dr Robinson explained there is over 4500 staff in Nursing and Midwifery within the Trust and this quarterly report provides feedback from teams and is designed as a magazine. The Chair noted it was very comprehensive, very user friendly.

Mr Donaghy queried the Think Yellow Project and why there has been an increase in falls. Dr Robinson stated that the falls team have been looking at this and it is natural as staff try to mobilise patients. Mrs Henderson asked about the number of outstanding falls reviews, sitting at 31. Dr Robinson, says he is aware of it and will raise again with the teams. Discussion was had around falls

The Chair thanked Dr Robinson.

### **7.3 People & Culture related Internal Audit Reports**

Mr Cairnduff updated on behalf of Mrs O'Neill and confirmed there were no new updates to bring to the committee. Progress and updated will be provided at the next People and Culture Committee meeting in October. The Chair thanked Mr Cairnduff.

### **7.4 ECNI Investigation**

The Chair asked Mr Cairnduff to give an update to the committee on the ECNI Investigation, paper no. SET/PC/32/25. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) has investigated a complaint alleging that the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme. In September 2023, the Complainant alleged that the Trust failed to comply with its Equality Scheme in relation to not equality screening its decision to change the language used in a patient information leaflet issued by the Radiology Department. The terminology has since been amended, this decision and wording has been equality screened in November 2023 and also April 2024.

The interim report has been received for comments not for circulation. The ECNI will present the final report to its Statutory Duty Investigations Committee for consideration at its scheduled meeting in September 2025. The ECNI requires the Trust to report on the action taken to meet the recommendations stated in paper no. SET/PC/32/25 within six months of the publication of the Investigation Report.

The Trust has fully co-operated with the ECNI during this process, including email correspondence, telephone/teams calls, and face to face meetings.

Mr Donaghy stated his support for the Trust and how they had responded to the complaint.

The Chair thanked Mr Cairnduff.

### **7.5 Gender Identity and Expression Policy**

The Chair asked Mr Cairnduff to give an update to the committee on the Gender Identity and Expression Policy paper no. SET/PC/33/25. Mr Cairnduff explained that following the Supreme Court ruling on 16 April 2025, which clarified that the legal definition of 'woman' (in terms of the Equality Act 2010) is based on biological sex, there has been much media scrutiny of this high profile issue. The ruling also mentioned protection of the rights of trans women and trans men.

SET Gender Identity and Expression Policy was implemented in 2021. This policy had been developed regionally and adopted by all HSC Trusts. In 2024, as part of the planned timescale, a regional review of the policy began. In light of the Supreme Court ruling, the Department of Health instructed that the review process be paused. In July 2025, it was confirmed that the pause should be lifted and the HSCNI should work to complete the regional review of the policy.

The ECNI has a consultation exercise running and will close on 19 September 2025, with the aim to publish final guidance for employers, service providers and public authorities on what they need to do to fulfil their legal obligations.

The Chair thanked Mr Cairnduff.

### **7.6 Social Work Assurance Newsletter**

The Chair asked Mrs Preece to give an update to the committee on the Social Work Assurance Newsletter paper no. SET/PC/34/25. Mrs Preece explained that this newsletter is produced twice a year highlighting ongoing work within Social Work. It demonstrates good work and provides ongoing governance assurance. The Social Work Executive Forum meets quarterly. The Chair thanked Mrs Preece and along with Mrs Henderson complimented the

document and production of same. Mrs Preece will take the comments back to the team.

#### **8.0 ITEMS FOR ESCALATION**

During the committee meeting there was no items raised for escalation.

#### **9.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr Cairnduff mentioned to the committee, the Diversity Celebration Fun Day and attached flyer.

#### **10.0 DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair confirmed the date and venue of the next meeting would be **Wednesday 19 November at 9.30am** in the Board Room, Trust Headquarters, Ulster Hospital, Dundonald.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.