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 22 January at 2.00pm in the Syndicate Room 1, Trust Headquarters, Ulster Hospital

PRESENT:

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

Mr J Patton, Chairman
Mrs C Smyth, Director of People & Organisational Development
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 V Cleland, Director of Primary Care & Older People
Mr K Donaghy, Non-Executive Director
Mr K McMahon, Non-Executive Director
Mrs S Henderson, Non-Executive Director

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs M McNally, Assistant Director, Risk Management & Governance
Mr S Powell, Assistant Director, Digital Services
Mrs ML Sloan, Assistant Director, Lakewood, Residential, Leaving Care Services, Cared for Children
Mr D Cairnduff, Assistant Director, People & Organisational Development
Mrs E O'Neill, Assistant Director, People & Resourcing
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 H Moore, Director of Planning, Performance & Informatics, Dr D Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive / Executive Director of Nursing, Midwifery & AHPs and Director of Patient Experience, Mrs R Gibbs, Director of Adult Services and Healthcare in Prison, Professor S Kirk, Medical Director, Mrs L Preece, Director of Director of Children Services & Executive Director of Social Work

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 19 November 2025

The minutes of the People and Culture Committee held on 19 November 2025, having been previously circulated and approval has been given from the committee.

4.0 MATTERS ARISING

The Chair commenced the meeting by looking at the Matters Arising from the last meeting, paper number SET/PC/02/26. Matters Arising from November's meeting, agenda item, 6.1 People Report, Action Plan has been developed and is tabled today, amendment to MOVA slide has been completed. Agenda item, 6.5 Raising Concerns, this is being tabled in today's meeting. Agenda item, 9.2 Future People & Culture Committee meeting dates for 2026, this has been completed and circulated.

Matters Arising from May's meeting, agenda item, 7.3 Policy Updates in relation to the Adverse Weather policy, Mrs O'Neill explained to the committee, the policy is still in draft, but it has been piloted and hopeful of sign off in March.

Matters Arising from August's meeting, agenda item, 5.0 Chair's Business regarding Risk Management, the Chair, Mrs Smyth, Mrs McNally and Mr Donaghy had a meeting to discuss which committees are best placed to discuss risk and assurance in relation to HR and people matters. The Chair indicated we are very conscious also that documents are appearing at multiple committees and where the document actually sits. Its still a conversation in progress, but Mr Donaghy is happy to close it off at this stage.

5.0 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

5.1 People Report

The Chair invited Mrs O'Neill to give an update to the committee on the People Report, paper number SET/PC/03/26. Mrs O'Neill explained that the People Report looks at the key areas. Breakdown of the workforce, is broadly similar to this time last year, the Trust is now using less agency and moving more staff onto bank contracts and substantive posts. Staff retention is again broadly similar to this time last year, with high retention of staff across most areas, there is some areas we are keeping an eye on.

Mrs O'Neill indicated there has been a big focus on compliance across Core Mandatory Training, a few which have dropped in percentage is Health and Safety and also Appraisals, Mrs O'Neill knows that Mr Cairnduff is to give an update on Appraisals. Mrs McNally explains that the training figures were brought to the Health and Safety Committee and is being monitored highly by each directorate. Mr Donaghy states that he has looked back and the picture isn't improving, it's getting worse, especially Manual Handling and Appraisal, has any thought been giving around the reason, as to why? Mr Cairnduff explains that the reason regarding the drop in percentage for Manual Handling, is the time out of work and number of days to complete the training. There are also capacity issues with the Manual Handling Team. Also, there is a DNA rate which we are trying to address. Mr Cairnduff stated there is a big focus on Appraisals, this has been brought to the People and Culture Steering Group, Mr Donaghy around the barriers, we are aware of areas that Appraisals are happening and other areas which need more work. Through the Steering Group, we have put forward a plan, to include amendments to the system to help. Mr Donaghy asked about the trend being down over the year, possible more resources required. Mr Cairnduff explained about the Appraisal reason and to have a conversation focusing on the areas identified.

Mrs Smyth explains that Support Services have a high level of Appraisals. Also, there has been higher numbers with Complaints Training, this was through Comms and we have kept momentum on it. Mrs Smyth is asking other Directors about their areas. Mr McMahon states that the Medical Directorates are very poor, is this due to it being part of their re-validation, so not being reported as Appraisal.

There was discussion as to the reduced compliance in the Medical Specialities directorate and Mrs McNally agreed to review this. Mr Donaghy commented that is looking at the trends, compliance is going down rather than going up. Mrs Cleland can give some reassurance for her directorate, not down as stand along but from a Governance and Report aspect, the priorities is always hands on clinical care, being creative and maximising every opportunity, make it as simple as possible for clinical staff. To be reassured, staff are well supported through formal and informal meetings. Mrs Smyth explained that there was a focus on certain mandatory training when Encompass was being launched and there will probably be another focus when Equip is launched.

Discussion was had as to the assurance relating to Mandatory Training and the need to understand the context behind the figures and related decisions. It remains an item on Directorate SMT agendas and reports are provided on a regular basis however there are often competing priorities.

Mr McMahon has asked about Vacancy Control, the orange in the table is the vacancies we are recruiting, the impact, the Staff in Post is linear. Ms Thompson explains that it's a very complicated situation, no front-line posts are being held in vacancy control.

Mrs O'Neill indicated the stats around MOVA, nobody wants to see any of these stats, its on the radar to reduce and protect our staff. Mr O'Neill also explained about the ER Summary, its very steady, Disciplinaries did go up, but that is a focus for the attendance team, its being managed and looked at. Mr O'Toole explained that he will discuss during the Absence update, but there have been more claims with an increase on cased going to Tribunals. Trade Unions are supporting staff through Tribunals. The Chair has asked if the themes of the cases can be shared. Most seem to fall under Disability and Reasonable Adjustment. Mr Donaghy asked about settlement figures, Mr O'Toole to bring to next meeting as these are provided to the department. Discussion was had around absence.

The Chair thanked Mrs O'Neill.

<u>5.2 Action Plan Update</u>

The Chair invited Mr Cairnduff to give an update to the committee on the Action Plan Update, paper number SET/PC/04/26. Mr Cairnduff explains the Action Plan Update is available to view, but he just wants to highlight a few key areas. The MOVA group continues to meet and work on actions, looking at the use of body worn cameras for two areas; Emergency Department and Lakewood. Currently looking at the feedback from Northern Trust, ED to commence in the next 6/7 weeks. Lakewood will be a bit longer, surrounding governance. Mr Cairnduff stated that the Neurodiversity Toolkit was launched last week. Mrs O'Neill explained that it has received great feedback regarding the Toolkit.

Mrs Henderson asked about placements, which was asked at the last committee meeting in November. Mr Cairnduff explained about the different college terms and it may take awhile for it to feed through. Updates will be provided.

The Chair thanked Mr Cairnduff.

<u>5.3 Absence Action Plan & Progress Report</u>

The Chair invited Mr O'Toole to give an update to the committee on the Absence Action Plan and Progress Report, paper number SET/PC/05/26. Mr O'Toole indicates that Absence is high but consistent. There are key focuses has been on the high level of short-term absence and, in particular those individuals who have five or more episodes a year – it is disappointing that the absence in November is sitting at 8.44% despite all the on-going work. Please note working days lost has reduced by 3102 from the previous month, and a total savings of £137.6K on previous month. Mr O'Toole stated there is a new regional policy being launched in April. There is no further training scheduled, just awareness sessions. Mr O'Toole explains there is some changes within the Absence Team, two members have got promotions, but the tram continues to progress and the focus in on the regional policy and new system implementation.

Mrs Henderson asked, in reference to Lakewood, 40% absence. Mrs Sloan explained that Absence within Lakewood has reduced but has increased vacancies. This is being managed through the number of children in the service. Mrs Henderson asked is their staff who wants to come back but more work is required? Mrs Sloan explains we are looking at the model and how to move forward based on how staff feel. Is the model sustainable, engagement has commenced with SPPG, offering opportunities to staff who are off as a pilot. Mrs Henderson has asked, has feedback been received? Mrs Sloan responded, yes this has been worked on from September and positive feedback so far.

Mr McMahan has asked about the target. Mrs Smyth has indicated we are probably frustrated this year based on all the good work being done. 7.66% is probably a realistic target, with focus being on areas with particular trends. Discussion was had around absence. Mr Donaghy has asked £137.6k doesn't reflect actual cost, it's a notional figure. South Eastern Trust has the best policies and implementation of them has been excellent, Mr Donaghy, expressed concern about the regional approach, could be slower pace. Discussion was had around absence, especially looking at short-term and long-term absence.

The Chair thanked Mr O'Toole.

5.4 Policy Updates

The Chair invited Mrs O'Neill to give a verbal update to the committee on any Policy Updates. Mrs Smyth explained that the Special Leave Policy is to be signed off, currently still sitting with one union (British Medical Association) for sign off, hoping they will come back in February. Mrs Smyth indicated this policy will inform staff of the various events which may impact them during their working life.

Mrs Henderson asked are the policies held in a central place, which we can access. Mrs Smyth responded by saying yes, all policies are on i-Connect. There is more of a push towards regional policies.

The Chair thanked Mrs Smyth.

5.5 Raising Concerns

The Chair invited Mr O'Toole to give an update to the committee on Raising Concerns, paper number SET/PC/06/26. Mr O'Toole indicated that the paper is brought to each meeting of this committee, providing a small snippet of Raising Concerns within the Trust. Mr O'Toole indicated that from May 2025 to Jan 2026 you will see that we have received and dealt with 10 Whistleblowing concerns, pointing out that in the initial triaging that takes place as part of our process only 3 cases were considered to be Whistleblowing. When we triage the complaint, we are primarily checking if the matters raised meet the criteria set in the policy -- are these concerns raised in the public interest where the interest of others or of the organisation are at risk. E.g. patient safety; health and safety; criminal offence; environmental damage.

Mr O'Toole explained that he has provided detail in the excel spreadsheet, attached with this paper. There is still a number ongoing, every four weeks there is an email sent to see if there is an update. The team try to stick to within the 12week window. Mr O'Toole indicated that both Internal and External audits have been completed.

Mr McMahon stated this is really helpful as this was discussed at the last meeting. Is there learning from other policies? Mr O'Toole explained that the feedback comes back but not logged on the table. Useful discussion was had around Whistleblowing and Raising Concerns.

Mr O'Toole to add another column to the excel spreadsheet for learning and where they are recorded. This will be brought to the next meeting.

The Chair thanked Mr O'Toole.

6.0 ITEMS FOR NOTING

6.1 Gender Identity and Expression Policy

The Chair invited Mr Cairnduff to give an update on the Gender Identity and Expression Policy, paper number SET/PC/07/26. Mr Cairnduff explained to the committee that discussions have been had previously around this issue, so its just to note that we have added this to the Corporate Risk Register following advise from DLS. This started with the Supreme Court ruling in Scotland, and whilst that ruling is not legally binding in NI, the expectation is that the law here will follow, this may put us in conflict with EU Legislation which is required to follow as part of the Windsor framework. Currently awaiting guidance from Equality Commission.

The Chair asked, is this coming to Trust Board, even for noting. Mr Patton says it's a contentious issue for the public and maybe just bring it to Trust Board for Noting. Mrs McNally will add to the agenda for February's Trust Board. Mr Donaghy asked is there a view from this committee. A Discussion was had around the policy. Mr Cairnduff stated we just need to be aware of the impact and it may be changed again. Mrs Henderson asked what is the reality of what is happening in a hospital setting? Mr Cairnduff explained that we don't have any significant issues currently, any that have come through to the Equality Team, have been dealt with locally, but it may become a bigger issue.

The Chair thanked Mr Cairnduff.

6.2 People & Culture related Internal Audit Reports

No updates were provided at this Committee meeting.

6.3 Social Work Assurance Newsletter

The Chair invited Mrs Sloan to give an overview to the Committee of the Social Work Assurance Newsletter, paper number SET/PC/08/26. Mrs Sloan indicated that this newsletter provides reassurance across the three areas of Social Work within the Trust. Mrs Sloan stated it is produced bi-annually and is brought today for noting, as its useful and informative.

Mrs McNally asked, is this the right place for this newsletter? Mr Patton responded by saying hold it in this committee for now, only needs to come to Trust Board for noting. Discussion was had on where the best place to hold this assurance report would be.

The Chair thanked Mrs Sloan.

6.4 NME Assurance Report

The Chair indicated that Dr Robinson was an apology for today. Mrs McNally is also going to look at where the best committee to hold this assurance report is.

The Chair thanked Mrs McNally.

7.0 ITEMS FOR ESCALATION

During the committee meeting there was no items raised for escalation

8.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8.1 Being Human Framework

The Chair invited Mrs Smyth to give a verbal update on the Being Human Framework. Mrs Smyth explained to the committee that the framework has been launched by RGIA, but we have put together our own working group. Mrs Smyth indicated that she is aware we are waiting on the being open framework, with a focus on culture. There is lots of different groups looking at lots of different frameworks. The group is looking at different elements of the framework. Mrs Smyth indicated that Mr Cairnduff has provided a paper, which Prof Martin and I have looked at. The regional steering group will have an action plan for this. Mrs Smyth has stated that this will become a standing agenda item for this committee.

The Chair thanked Mrs Smyth.

Mr Donaghy has asked about escalations to Trust Board, is there a need to alert them to Mandatory Training or await the outcome of the action plan. Mrs McNally is looking into the different areas and will bring an update to the next meeting on Mandatory Training.

The Chair thanked Mrs McNally.

9.0 DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair confirmed the date and venue of the next meeting would be **Thursday 23 April 2026** at **2pm** in the Board Room / Syndicate Room 1, Trust Headquarters, Ulster Hospital, Dundonald.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.