

HIGHLAND NHS BOARD	Assynt House Beechwood Park Inverness IV2 3BW Tel: 01463 717123 Fax: 01463 235189 www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk NHS Highland na Gàidhealtachd
MINUTE of MEETING of the STAFF GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE	6th May 2025 at 10.00 am

Present

Elsbeth Caithness, Employee Director
Bert Donald, Whistleblowing Champion
Kate Dumigan, Staffside Representative
Claire Laurie, Staffside Representative
Dawn MacDonald, Staffside Representative
Gerry O'Brien, Board Vice Chair
Janice Preston, Non-Executive Director
Steve Walsh, Non- Executive (Chair)

In Attendance:

Michielle Abraham, Organisational Development Manager
Gareth Adkins, Director of People and Culture
Evan Beswick, Chief Officer, Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership
Gaye Boyd, Deputy Director of People
Natalie Booth, Board Governance Assistant
Louise Bussell, Nurse Director
Heledd Cooper, Director of Finance
Arlene Johnstone, Head of Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Drug & Alcohol Recovery Services
David Park, Deputy Chief Executive
Katherine Sutton, Chief Officer, Acute
Simon Steer, Director of Adult Social Care
Nathan Ware, Governance and Corporate Records Manager

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that Steve Walsh would be recommended as the new Vice Chair for Staff Governance Committee from May 2025, this was agreed by the committee.

Apologies were received from Philip MacRae, Sarah Compton-Bishop and Pamela Stott, with Arlene Johnstone deputising.

1.2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 ASSURANCE REPORTS & COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATION

2.1 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 1st March 2025

The minutes were **approved** and **agreed** as an accurate record.

2.2 ACTION PLAN

The Director of People and Culture confirmed that both outstanding actions would be closed as they will be discussed item three on the agenda.

2.3 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN 2025-2026

Committee Members noted the workplan.

3. MATTERS ARISING NOT ON THE AGENDA

3.1 Appraisal and PDP Improvement Plan Update

The Director of People and Culture confirmed a new Head of People Planning and Development had been confirmed in post. He noted this piece of work sat within their remit and staffside had provided nominees for participation in the Short Life Working Group to drive progress in this area.

3.2 Health and Safety Reporting Argyll & Bute Update

The Director of People and Culture noted there had been some adjustments in senior management teams but work was underway on health and safety assurance but highlighted some reporting had been delayed. The committee were assured that the work is continuing and the Argyll and Bute Interim Head of Strategic Planning was working closely with him to ensure the appropriate reporting was consistent.

The Director of People and Culture confirmed that whilst this topic had been discussed at Staff Governance Committee, the correct governance route was the Health and Safety Committee.

4. Spotlight Session

4.1 Acute Katherine Sutton, Chief Officer, Acute

The Chief Officer for Acute spoke to the circulated presentation and noted:

- 23% of the workforce over 55
- 10% were over 60 and largely female
- 50% were currently working on a part time basis.
- The Chief Officer highlighted the importance of supporting the workforce but noted significant challenges as absence rates remained high across acute hospitals. She added that the causes consisted of anxiety, stress, depression and other psychiatric illnesses.

Mandatory Training

- Acute held a completion rate of 62.67%.
- Belford Hospital had an 80% compliance rate.
- The National Treatment Centres compliance rate was very good with a comprehensive people plan in place.
- Appraisal Completion rates continued to be low, but renewed focus was underway to improve this.
- The Acute Partnership Forum was now meeting regularly; and communication had been issued so managers understood how they could utilise the forum
- The Management Development Forum had been working with the Acute Medical Director and Associate Nursing Director to identify how multidisciplinary working could be improved.
- Committee Members sought clarity around the sickness levels and whether the failure to conduct appraisals could contribute to this and whether senior managers had not recognised this. The Chief Officer agreed that it may be a contributory factor.

- Committee Members highlighted a lack of communication, particularly around the TARA group, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) alongside concerns raised by members in relation to vacancy levels in Fort William causing burnout. The Chief Officer suggested this point was discussed in further detail out with the meeting
- The Director of People and Culture highlighted the need to embrace the use of technology to assist colleagues and relieve additional pressures.
- Committee Members asked whether the removal of some management posts had resulted in increased pressure for existing colleagues. The Chief Officer confirmed the change in structure had enabled closer collaborative working within the teams but any highlighted pressures were being monitored.

4.2 **Employability** **Megan Glass, Employability Lead**

The Employability Lead spoke to the circulated presentation and confirmed there was a focus on delivery and planning over the next 3 years. She confirmed the strategy had been pulled together by working closely with partners and considered the wider health inequalities challenges.

It was noted, NHS Highland should consider how it engages with younger generations and their career aspirations. Currently only 3.5% of NHS Highlands workforce is under 25, 0.4% were under 18. She added that a secondary school engagement plan had been developed in partnership with Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council.

There had been a number of work experience opportunity enquiries which was an area of work moving forward. 15 different workshops took place across Highland and a total of 80 pupils attended, she confirmed this would now take place annually in Inverness, Wick and Fort William.

Discussions had taken place with UHI to increase the number of apprenticeships across NHS Highland and some awareness sessions were conducted during National Apprentice Week with Skills Development Scotland.

5. **Items for Review and Assurance**

5.1 **People and Culture Portfolio Board Update** Report by Gaye Boyd, Deputy Director of People

The Director of People and Culture spoke to the circulated report and highlighted:

- Assurance levels were good indicating positive progress against expected milestones for each workstream.
- Workforce transformation and planning has been discussed at committee for some time but no decision had been made in terms of deliverables. It was highlighted the Portfolio Board would be refreshing the 3-year workforce plan.

The Committee **noted** the report and agreed to take **moderate** assurance.

5.2 **Integrated Performance and Quality Report** Report by Gareth Adkins, Director of People and Culture

The Director of People and Culture spoke to the circulated paper:

- Statutory/Mandatory training completion numbers had increased.
- Appraisal completion figures had increased but it was noted improvements were still required.
- Committee members sought clarity on whether there had been any particular reasoning around recent voluntary departures and had an exit interview been completed. The Director of People and Culture confirmed there were a variety of

reasons including retirement and fixed term contracts but highlighted a more robust exit interview process was required to provide additional insight.

The Director of People and Culture also indicated that a review around the quantity of training NHS Highland asks of its management teams was required as it had increased and could become unmanageable.

The Committee **noted** the report and agreed to take **moderate** assurance.

5.3

Education, Learning and Organisational Development (ELOD) Annual Report

Report by Gaye Boyd, Deputy Director of People

The Organisational Development (OD) Manager explained the Learning and Development team merged with the Organisational Development team to form ELOD, with the focus of aligning goals with the organisation's aim to embed a culture that encourages interpersonal working and compassion. She provided an overview of the recent activity conducted by the ELOD team and explained that further detail was contained in the circulated report. The Director of People and Culture advised the report aimed to provide assurance across educational activities and identify areas for improvement.

Committee Members inquired about aligning OD with future priorities and the demand for coaching and mentoring within NHS Highland. The OD Manager advised they were progressing proactively with OD themes and addressing the high demand for coaching. Members emphasised the importance of measuring outcomes and evaluating success, and the need to balance proactive and reactive efforts given limited resources.

The Committee noted the report and agreed to take substantial assurance.
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5.4

Medical Education Annual Report

Report by Helen Freeman, Director of Medical Education

The Medical Director highlighted that the report provided an overview of last year's activities, regulatory compliance, and stakeholder involvement, noting that inspections and reviews ensured quality and addressed any concerns raised. It was noted there was a national aim to increase medical student numbers to fill workforce gaps, with current challenges including accommodation for trainees. Despite these challenges, the medical education team performed well, providing high-quality education and meeting standards.

Members highlighted concerns about staff workload and burnout, access to staff accommodation, and the need for other onsite facilities. He also sought clarity on the term "ACT" referenced in the report. The Medical Director suggested consulting the Director of Medical Education for issues related to hospital facilities. He noted the "additional cost of treating" (ACT) fund was central funding for medical education, highlighting the need for a balanced approach between service commitment and education. It was noted that plans were being reviewed to increase accommodation capacity in Highland, with alternative funding methods being sought.

The Director of People and Culture noted that traditional staffing models might no longer be sustainable or attractive due to changes in medical jobs. Exploring different roles and staffing mixes was necessary to support junior doctors and the medical workforce, while addressing challenges and adapting to modern expectations.

Members queried the reason for the low number of doctors proceeding to specialty training after their foundation year. The Medical Director emphasised that national and international data on workforce changes should guide the creation of future jobs and services, with medical education serving as an early warning system to shape policy and adapt working conditions.

Members questioned the removal of FY1s from trauma and orthopaedics and the ability of senior clinical supervisors to deliver quality education. The Medical Director explained that GPs and consultants were responsible for teaching and emphasised the importance of ring-

fencing time for medical education. It was noted that the decision to remove FY1s was necessary due to repeated poor feedback, with ongoing improvements to reintroduce them with better support. Additionally, the Director of People and Culture highlighted collaboration on medical leadership development, aiming to integrate it into overall learning and development offerings, addressing the need for leadership skills beyond technical expertise.

The Committee **noted** the report and agreed to take **substantial** assurance.

5.5 Annual Delivery Plan

Report by Gareth Adkins, Director of People and Culture

The Director of People and Culture highlighted that feedback on the Annual Delivery Plan was still under review by the Scottish Government. The plan aimed to focus on workforce elements, ensuring clear deliverables within the People and Culture portfolio, which aligned with strategic work. The circulated report provided a comprehensive overview of workforce priorities across different services and areas, reflecting corporate workforce development and specific deliverables for various organisational areas.

The Committee **noted** the report and agreed to take **substantial** assurance.

5.6 Strategic Risk Review

Report by Gareth Adkins, Director of People and Culture

The Director of People and Culture advised there were no updates on the actions from June, but completed actions had been integrated into risk controls. It was highlighted that progress on Level 2 corporate risks was pending with further work being required.

Members queried protected learning time for statutory training and its national implementation. The Director of People and Culture advised that the national working group aimed to define protected learning time as part of the non-pay aspects of the Agenda for Change. He advised the working group also focused on creating a consistent approach to statutory and mandatory training across the organisation, understanding the time required and how to incorporate it.

Members highlighted risk of poor culture querying the controls in place to address this and enquired about the effectiveness of the leadership and management development, and corporate induction programmes. The Director of People and Culture advised of the need to identify gaps in the strategic approach to ensure controls are effective. He noted the leadership and management development provided updates through the portfolio board and people were actively participating in the Corporate Induction programme.

The Committee **noted** the report and agreed to take **moderate** assurance.

5.7 Staff Governance Monitoring 23/24

Report by Gareth Adkins, Director of People and Culture

The Director of People and Culture advised that the paper had followed the correct governance routes in response to a Scottish Government request. The government had paused staff governance submissions but had requested an assurance statement, with clarity provided in national discussions. The submission had focused on continuous improvement, highlighting areas of success and needed improvement based on government feedback.

Ongoing discussions with staff side colleagues regarding issues raised at the 2024 Annual Review had yet to reach an agreement. Communication had been provided to the Scottish Government outlining negotiation steps. Further discussions had been held with relevant unions and staff side to ensure a clear working process and address disagreements. There would be a review of whether a staff governance monitoring group with staff side

representation could be created to proactively resolve disagreements and ensure good governance.

Members emphasised the importance of reaching agreement with staff side colleagues and ensuring smooth approval processes. The Director of People and Culture suggested that majority decisions might be necessary when consensus was not possible and highlighted the need for clear, transparent processes.

The Committee:

- **Agreed** to take **moderate** assurance
- **Noted** the request from Scottish Government to provide an update on the assurance request in September 2024 against the staff governance standard
- **Noted** the response to Scottish Government including:
 - Unable to reach a consensus agreement with staff side to date
 - Further discussions are required with relevant unions to identify additional actions or areas of focus that could be included and this can then be discussed with the wider staff side group
 - Draft letter to be submitted to Scottish Government

6. Items for information and noting

6.1 Area Partnership Forum update of meeting held on 4 April 2025

The Committee **noted** the Area Partnership Forum update of meeting held on 4 April 2025.

6.2 Health and Safety Committee Minutes of meeting held on 1 April 2025

The Committee **noted** the Health and Safety Committee Minutes of meeting held on 1 April 2025.

7. Any other Competent Business

7.1 Review / summary of meeting for Chair to highlight to Board.

The Chair noted that it was his first time chairing the Committee. He highlighted the quality of the two spotlight sessions and the Education reports, which were very informative and high quality. He also mentioned the staff governance monitoring and the commitment to avoid future disagreements.

8. Date & Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 1st July 2025 at 10 am via Microsoft Teams.

9. Future Meeting Schedule

The Committee Noted the remaining meeting schedule for 2025 as follows:

2 September 2025
4 November 2025
13 January 2026
3 March 2026

Close of Meeting 12.35 pm