

Chief Executive's Report to the Trust Board

March 2026

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report updates the board on strategic activity undertaken since the last meeting and draws the Board's attention to any other issues of significance or interest.

2.0 NATIONAL CONTEXT AND UPDATES

CQC report finds long waits for mental health care are leading people to become more ill

The CQCs Monitoring the Mental Health Act 2024/2025 report has outlined how increasing demand for services and higher thresholds for admission are leading to long waits for mental health care, with people becoming more ill as they wait for support.

Other key areas of concern identified in the report include:

- Out-of-area placements are on the rise, meaning people are being placed far from home for care – despite a national commitment to end this practice by March 2021.
- People living in deprived areas are 3.6 times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act when compared with people living in the least deprived areas.
- In 3 out of 4 services visited for the report, staff hadn't heard of the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF) - a framework required of all NHS mental health services to tackle racism. This is despite continuing concerns around racial inequality in mental health care, including black people being detained at 4 times the rate of white people.

[The full report is available via the CQC website.](#)

How does Combined Healthcare compare?

A recent self-assessment was carried out in some of Combined's core services; the assessment suggests a reasonable amount of awareness regarding PCREF related issues, training is indicated as a key priority. There is a PCREF involvement audit being progressed to assist inpatient teams in their understanding of CQC requirements in relation to PCREF. The Trust's Quality Assurance and Improvement Manager is overseeing this work with some preparation support being prepared for ward managers and their teams.

Adult acute inpatient occupied bed days (OBDs) have increased by 2.6% year on year, indicating continued pressure on inpatient capacity. More significantly, the use of inappropriate out-of-area (OOA) placements has risen sharply, increasing from 632 OBDs in 2024/25 to 7,180 OBDs in 2025/26*, a 1,036% increase. When local and OOA occupied bed days are considered together, this represents an overall year-on-year increase of 37.9%. This level of growth reflects constrained local capacity and a material operational risk for the Trust and financial risk for the system.

*As 2025/26 is not yet a complete financial year, activity from April 2025 to December 2025 has been extrapolated to provide a full year forecast position.

Mental health detentions – whilst the numbers are too small to confidently draw any conclusions, it appears that the ethnicity breakdown of people detained under the Mental Health Act broadly aligns with the Stoke-on-Trent population ethnicity breakdown.



Deprivation – contrary to the national picture, Combined’s data shows that the more deprived the area, the more people are seen, and that those from a more deprived area were seen quicker than those from a lesser deprived area in our services in Q3.

3.0 OUR TRUST

3.1



Combined Healthcare reaccredited as Veteran Aware

We are pleased to receive reaccreditation as a Veteran Aware NHS provider, by the Veteran Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) National Steering Group, reaffirming our long-standing commitment to providing high-quality, compassionate care for members of the Armed Forces community. Accreditation through the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) is a mark of quality, signalling that organisations actively uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant and are committed to continual improvement. To maintain Veteran Aware status, organisations must continue to meet core standards, including identifying and supporting patients with an Armed Forces background, appointing Armed Forces Champions, and working closely with military charities and local support networks. Re-accreditation reflects continuous quality improvement and is required to be undertaken every three years.

Combined Healthcare awarded Triangle of Care accreditation

A Trust-wide commitment to supporting carers has been formally recognised with a Triangle of Care Star 2 Award from Carers Trust, covering community services. The trust was awarded Star 1 in 2023, relating to inpatient and crisis teams.

Triangle of Care is a quality improvement scheme for health and social care providers that promotes safety, recovery and wellbeing by including and supporting unpaid carers. Originally developed by carers, the scheme is run by Carers Trust and recognises healthcare providers that have committed to continuous improvement according to six key ‘carers included’ standards.

Working in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council, as well as North Staffs Carers and the Staffordshire Together for Carers over the last two years, the Trust has built on the existing support available for carers. This has included working on improvements to the support available, as well as evaluating communication with carers and looking at how to involve them further with the care and recovery of the patients that they support. It has also enabled the Trust to deliver strong, inclusive and compassionate mental health services with support from carers and service users.





3.2

Mental Health Nurses Day 2026: reflections from the Trust's newly qualified nurses

To mark Mental Health Nurses Day last month, we have been celebrating the voices and experiences of our newly qualified nurses (NQNs) and the journeys they have taken as they begin their careers in mental health nursing.

The transition from student to registered mental health nurse can be both rewarding and challenging. Our NQNs have shared honest reflections about their early experiences, the doubts they faced, and the confidence they have gained with time, support, and experience. You can find their reflections via the [news section of the Trust website](#).

Kenny Laing, Director of Nursing and Quality, also shared a message for Mental Health Nurses Day: "As a proud mental health nurse, I would like to acknowledge all our mental health nurses today. We play a unique role in caring for people in distress who are often at their most vulnerable. We have pioneered many of the innovations in mental health services and I am proud of the innovation which mental health nurses lead here at Combined Healthcare. Thank you all and happy Mental Health Nurses Day!"



3.3

Combined Healthcare allocates final round of grant money as part of NHS-wide community mental health transformation programme

Over the last three years, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust has committed to working with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire in new and collaborative ways through the community mental health transformation programme. This is a place-based community mental health model which looks at how community services should modernise to offer whole-person, whole-population health approaches, aligned with guidance from NHS England and the NHS Long Term Plan. One of the most impactful examples of this community mental health transformation is the grant programme, which has demonstrated what's possible when supporting individuals with mental illness happens directly within their communities and close to home.

Across multiple grant rounds, facilitated by The Community Foundation for Staffordshire, the Trust has awarded over £500,000 in funding to VCSE organisations. Through five rounds of the grant programme, various recipients across the VCSE sector have supported approximately 1250 young people and adults to date.



The fifth and final grant round launched in May 2025 with an aim to provide accessible mental health and wellbeing support in local communities, delivered in a safe, youth friendly environment, with a primary focus on early intervention and prevention of mental health difficulties. Out of 29 total applications, 15 projects have now been awarded funding covering a diverse range of organisations and activities across North Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, ranging from creative arts, boxing, and specialist bereavement support.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Once again, it has been a busy month at Combined, full of further examples of the initiatives and activities that continue to contribute to us being outstanding in all we do and how we do it.

Dr Buki Adeyemo
Chief Executive Officer

