

North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust Board Briefing – March 2026 Board

This briefing aims to keep you informed of the discussions at our Trust Board.

To watch the recording and read the papers, please visit the [Board Meeting page](#) on the Combined Healthcare website.

Please note this briefing does not replace the official Board minutes, which will be published in due course and be available on the website.

Service User Story

This month's Service User Story featured Richard's story, which was shown only during Board proceedings at Richard's request.

REACH Recognition Team Award

This month's REACH Recognition Team Award was presented to the Mental Health Law Team. You can watch the recording of the REACH Award [at this link](#).

Chief Executive's Report

Dr Buki Adeyemo, Chief Executive, presented the report, which is available [at this link](#). Buki wanted to draw the Committee's attention to our continuing support for veterans and high performance in the PLACE assessment (Patient Led Assessments of the Care Environment).

There was particular interest from the Board in how the trust is ensuring equality in access and delivery of its services. There was also a welcome from the Board to the investments made through the community mental health transformation programme and for the message of support for any staff affected by the recent events in the Middle East. You can watch the recording of the CEO Report [at this link](#).

Chair's Report

The Chair's report to the Board is available [at this link](#). Janet wanted to thank everyone involved with the successful conclusion of Project Chrysalis, which had been an excellent example of great partnership working between the contractor, Interclass and the Trust. Janet had enjoyed her Board to Ward visits, in particular a visit to the Parent and Baby Unit.

You can watch the recording of the Chair's report [at this link](#).

Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions from members of the public. N.B. Anyone can submit a question for consideration and discussion at the Board via the [Ask The Board facility](#) on the Trust website.



Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (“Martyn’s Law”) - appointment of Designated Senior Individual (DSI) and Implementation plan

Ben Richards, Chief Operating Officer, presented the report. The Board noted this was still work in progress and approved the appointment of Ben Richards, Chief Operating Officer as the Trust's Designated Senior Individual under the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025., complimenting his role as the Trust's designated Accountable Emergency Officer.

There was an extended discussion and assurance was received about the nature of the role and how the associated processes and procedures dovetail with existing policies and practice at the Trust.

They Board also approved the delegation from Trust Board to Quality Committee to endorse board compliance ahead of full implementation and to provide the assurance route for the Trust. The full report is available in the [Trust Board bundle](#).

Board Assurance Framework Quarter 3

Nicola Griffiths, Deputy Director of Governance/Board Secretary, presented the report.

In line with an audit recommendation and following a facilitated Board development session with MIAA in August 2025, a risk appetite tolerance upper and lower levels has been added to the dashboard for each risk linked to the tagged risk

The risk tolerance range has been included which is based on the risk appetite level within each individual risk graph and a proposed risk appetite statement produced which is showing on the risk dashboard.

There was a particular discussion about how the Trust is addressing risks around sickness absence, with a recognition that action is being taken in this regard, notwithstanding the effects of external factors outside the control of the organisation.

The full report is available in the [Trust Board bundle](#).

Board approval of policies

Nicola Griffiths, Deputy Director of Governance/Board Secretary, presented the report. NHS England and NHS Providers recommend Boards retain approval for:

- Governance documents (Standing Orders, SFIs, Scheme of Delegation).
- Policies with legal, financial, or reputational risk.
- Policies required by regulators (CQC, NHS England)

The NHS Code of Governance suggests that Boards must formally approve policies that underpin governance, statutory compliance and organisational integrity.

Following a discussion about the balance between the role of Board Committees and the full Board, the Board approved the proposed list which aligns well with NHS governance expectations and focusses on the highest-risk, statutory areas.

- Health and Safety Policy
- EPRR Policy
- Scheme of Delegation.
- Standing Orders
- Standing Financial Instructions

Improving Quality and Performance Report (IQPR) Month 10

Lisa Dodds, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, presented the Report on behalf of Eric Gardiner, Chief Finance Officer. There are 2 special cause variation (orange variation flag) – signifying concern:

- Sickness Absence
- Appraisal

There are 7 special cause variations (blue variation flags) – signifying improvement:

- Referral to Treatment within 18 weeks
- CAMHS compliance within 18 weeks (RTT)
- Care Plan Compliance
- Risk Assessment Compliance
- Vacancy Rate
- Staff Turnover
- Statutory and Mandatory Training

The full report is available in the [Trust Board bundle](#).

Finance position month 10

Lisa Dodds, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, presented the report which contained details of:

- The year-to-date surplus of £942k against a planned deficit of £144k, giving a favourable variance of £1,086k.
- The underlying financial position (ULP) of £955k deficit.
- Agency expenditure of £1,373k against a plan of £1,291k, resulting in an adverse variance of £82k. The Trust is forecasting an adverse variance against planned agency spend of £22k.
- Bank expenditure of £5,368k against a plan of £4,751k, giving an adverse variance of £617k. The Trust is forecasting an adverse variance against planned bank spend of £652k.
- The Trust is forecasting full achievement of the Trust £7.4m CIP target, with a total of £7.1m fully achieved / transacted, and £0.3m opportunities identified.
- The Trust has spent £3,397k on capital, which is £781k behind plan.
- The cash position of the Trust on 31st January with a balance of £31.4m.

Finance and Resource Committee Assurance Report

Russell Andrews, Committee Chair, presented the reports from the meetings of the Committee held on 5 February 2026 and 5 March 2026.

The Committee received a comprehensive update on the Orbis digital programme, noting the delay to the go-live date, the engagement of senior clinicians, and emerging contractual and reputational risks associated with Dedalus. Members held detailed discussions and raised significant challenge, emphasising the need for a dual-track approach that balances immediate delivery of the programme with development of a longer-term digital strategy. Level of assurance 3 was agreed.

Updates were received relating to: IQPR, Finance Position, ICS Finance, Financial Planning, Budget Setting, Cost Improvement Programme, Estates and Capital and Business Opportunities.

Quality Committee Assurance Report

Prof. Pauline Walsh, Committee Chair, presented the reports from the meetings of the Quality Committee held on 5 February 2026 and 5 March 2026.

System demand remains a challenge, particularly with system flow and ambulance waits. There was a positive meeting with the CQC in February. We are actively planning informal engagement visits to Trust services with the CQC team to commence from April 2026.

The Trust received a deep dive presentation from the Darwin Centre, which generated positive discussion and highlighted a number of areas of improvement and focus

Audit Committee Assurance Framework

Prem Gabbi, Committee Chair, presented the report from the meeting on 28th January 2026. Internal audit was on track to complete programme of work for this year. There was a good system of controls with only 3 medium and 3 low level recommendations, many of which have been already actioned.

People, Culture and Development Committee Assurance Report

Martin Evans, Committee Chair, presented the report from the meeting of the Committee held on 2 March 2026. The Committee welcomed and heard from a Ward Manager who is also a Health & Wellbeing Ambassador. The story focused on how the Ward Manager has embedded health and wellbeing within the team and she talked through a number of the initiatives that the team now has in place. She was able to quantify the positive impact of this work through reduced levels of sickness absence, reduced turnover, staff willing to come in and work on days off thereby reducing bank and agency usage etc.

Whilst considering the renewal of the Freedom To Speak Up policy the Committee had an in-depth discussion regarding the current effectiveness and value of Equality Impact Assessments. The committee observed that EIAs consistently state “no impact”, which raises concern about whether the assessments are being meaningfully applied. Despite workforce data and FTSU reports showing that certain staff groups—including disabled staff, minority ethnic colleagues and LGBTQ+ staff—are less likely to access FTSU, this is not reflected within the EIA. It was agreed that further work is required to ensure that the EIA considers the assessment of the wider impact of the implementation of the policy and not just the wording of the policy and to consider how dynamic the assessment needs to be. The FTSU policy was not approved, and it was agreed to use this policy to develop the quality of the EIA.

The Committee approved the 2024/25 Pay Gaps Reports (Gender, Ethnicity and Disability). The committee agreed that on the whole the reports were positive but that there was a need for a clear plan to be put in place to reduce the gaps that had been identified.

Charitable Funds Committee Assurance Framework

Martin Evans presented the report from the meeting on 2 March 2026. A paper was presented summarising the resource utilised in support of charity development over the 12 months from 1 December 2024 to 30 November 2025. A more comprehensive report will be presented to Charitable Funds Committee in June 2026 aligned with the end of the two year development and testing phase for the charity. This will consider a range of options for the Trust Charity including recommendations for the future.

The Trust has recently been informed that £50,000 had been secured from NHS Charities Together.

Consent items

The following items were presented as consent items and can be read in the [Board papers bundle](#)

- Board Members’ Declarations of Interest Register
- Medium Term Planning Final Submission 2026/27
- Trust Board Attendance Report

Any Other Business

The Board meeting closed at 12.35pm. Date and time of next meeting in public is 10.00am, 14 May 2026. To access papers and meeting link, please visit <https://www.combined.nhs.uk/about-us/our-board/board-meetings/>