3. Council of Governors update

3.1.   The Council met for the first time in our new conference room in Robert Dolan House on 13 March 2025.

3.2.   I thanked governors for the many kind messages of condolence on the death of Jason Cook, lead governor at North East London NHS FT (NELFT) and expressed how much this meant to the NELFT Council and the whole team at NELFT.

3.3.   The Council this time focused on the final strategic priority item in their current series, 'communication'. Introduced by Community Engagement Manager, Tina Bixby, and her annual report and, mindful of the Council's duty to bring the views of the members and the wider public to the Trust, we asked the question "What can we all do to help our members, and the wider public communicate with and be heard by the Trust?". The feedback from the Council from this discussion will flow into the annual report on progress on the Membership Engagement Plan which will be presented to June's People Participation Committee.

3.4.   Governors then received an operational update on the Trust's Crisis Services, particularly the impact of changing to the NHS 111 Option 2 service in our London boroughs (our Bedfordshire & Luton services were national pioneers, having introduced the new crisis line number in June 2020). The discussions helped us to focus on service user benefit in future operational updates.

3.5.   Governors approved their next five strategic priority themes building on their discussions from January 2025. The themed feedback from that meeting had been cross-referenced with the Trust strategy, our Marmot Trust ambitions, recent governor discussions on barriers to equity of access to services, and insights from the recent "Caring Together – What Matters to You" conversations arranged for members and governors. Additionally, consideration was given to the future direction of the NHS 10 Year Plan, and Trust initiatives such as our recently launched Poverty Toolkit. The themes agreed were:
●   Shifting from acute to community care
●   Staff wellbeing
●   AI and Digital Innovation – how will they improve patient experience?
●   Prevention and support for independence in older adults
●   Estates and community.

3.6.   Governors received a written report from the Significant Business & Strategy Committee detailing its recent submission to the NHS 10 Year Forward Plan consultation, as well as a verbal update by Committee Chair, John Bennett, on an important session held just two days previously that focused on the changes to the Trust's primary care strategy. John highlighted that, while the decision had not been an easy one for the Board, feedback underscored confidence and provided assurance that the Board is making tough but necessary choices. It was noted that the services are being left in a better position than when the Trust initially took them over, and there was alignment between the Board and Governors on prioritising the interests of both patients and staff in the services throughout the process.

3.7.   As Chair of the Nominations & Conduct Committee I shared progress in the recruitment of three new Non-Executive Directors (NEDs). In response to Governor queries, I was able to offer assurance that the appointments would only be made if we are confident the person is the right fit for the role and for the Trust. I also confirmed there is sufficient time to re-open the recruitment process if necessary and the current skill mix on the Board allows the Trust to manage in the interim. Additionally, we are placing a strong emphasis on maintaining if not improving the diversity of the Board, ensuring robust succession planning, and continuously learning from each new recruitment process.

3.8.   In her report from the Communications & Engagement Committee, newly re-elected committee chair, Felicity Stocker, drew special attention to the upcoming Mental Health Summits in NEL, planned for 28 March and 7 April 2025. I emphasised the importance of these service-user led events which play a crucial role in shaping our mental health plans for the coming years.