



Branch Newsletter

Sept 2009
Special Issue 31

Trust Board response's to your questions

To the UNISON branch membership East of England Branch C/O Kevin Risley.
Dated 4th September 2009

Dear Colleagues.

Re: Letter dated 21st July 2009

I write to you in response to your letter dated 21st July, in which you raised a number of questions. Please find below my response to each of the questions posed. You can no doubt recall that we had a very constructive meeting on the 24th August at which we agreed a way forward around the joint improvement of communication and engagement between both UNISON and this Trust. I gave a commitment from the Trust Board to spend some considerable time in developing improved working relationships between both parties which recognises the huge challenges which face this organisation and others in the next few months and beyond.

Q. Do any of our senior managers read our Newsletter, and if they do, do they have any answers to the issues we raise.

A. I cannot say on behalf of the senior managers if they read your newsletter, however as I am of the understanding that a high proportion of the Trust's management and senior management are members of UNISON or UNISON' MIP. I expect it is very likely that they may read your newsletter. On a personal note I do read your Newsletter. With regard to the feedback on issues, I assume that in those areas of the Trust where local level partnership working is more embedded, this occurs without our even being aware. In addition, we have the Trusts formal consultative mechanisms, the Locality partnership Forums, and the Staff partnership Forum where issues can and are discussed on a locality and Trust wide basis.

We are keen to strengthen the partnership /working relationship with UNISON as we move forward to address a number of significantly challenging and difficult issues for this organisation

Q. Why is our Chief Executive spending so much time in London advising on the potential flue epidemic when our Trust is struggling with targets and going down the pan? . Surely all his attention should be focused here ? Weren't we told a little while ago in Focus East that Oskan Edwardson was seconded to carry out this very role. ?

A. The Chief Executive has attended a few national flue pandemic meetings in London which have been required of him. These meetings are also held virtually in view of the travelling distance involved for some CEO's / Directors.

All Ambulance Chief Executives have a National role to fulfil and they are expected to balance the priorities between this and their regional duties. Hayden in his national role has the responsibility for the planning arrangements around winter pressures and Swine Flue. All board members have national responsibilities that provide the trust with early information, that support us to provide a better quality of service.

Since the planning for the flue pandemic started, the national Directors of Operations meetings and Chief Executive's meetings have been minimised to reduce the number of external meetings that Chief Executives are required to attend.

The planning and implications of the flu epidemic for Ambulance services is immense and overall a huge challenge facing the NHS. We need to be very well prepared to cope with the demands that will be placed upon us both Nationally and regionally. At the heart of this requirement and the work being put into preparing for the pandemic, is our commitment as a trust to ensure that the public of the East of England have access to our emergency service and quality patient care, where and when they need it.

Q. Why have our directors posts been advertised in the 12th July Issue of the Sunday Times ? Aren't the ones we have at the moment any good or are we going to have some more ? Doesn't this restructure process place current post holders at risk, in which case aren't the Trust breaching their own Change Management, Redundancy & Re-Deployment policy ? How much is it going to cost the Trust to carry out this exercise. ?

A. There is no doubt that the work involved in preparing and moving to Foundation Trust Status and ensuring the optimum future of the Trust necessitated a restructuring of the board and senior management level structure in the trust, and the requirements of those posts need to be reflected in those new roles. Whilst for confidentiality, I am limited as to what I can disclose, we are consulting with the staffside on the current re-structure. In regard to this at least one meeting has been held with the staffside, and a further meeting is scheduled for 17th August 09. I can give my assurance that the Trust's Change Management, Redundancy and Re-deployment policy is being applied. The costs of the recruitment process connected with the restructuring are commercially sensitive due to the nature of the procurement. However we can provide assurances that these have been budgeted for and have been authorised by due process. Many Ambulance trusts are undertaking similar changes.

Q. Is it true that the Trust is spending hundreds of thousands, if not millions, on management re-organisation ! Surely that cannot be the case when we need more road staff and vehicles on the A & E side of our work ?

We are consistently being told that the trust cannot afford to resolve matters such as the annual leave and Meal Breaks, but seem willing to throw unlimited amounts of cash at the organisation without a second thought.

A. With regards to the re-structure, this has been answered in the response above. With regard to A & E, during the course of the last 18 months or more, the trust has made huge investments in increasing our numbers of staff, whilst simultaneously developing the skills of our current staff. Since April 2008, we have recruited more than 359 new staff into A & E, providing paramedic training for 182 members of staff and the receipt of 50 new ambulances and 25 RRV's. At the current time we also have a number of Senior Manager vacancies, for which we are utilising the money to further support A & E services. In this context I trust you will appreciate that the trust does not have unlimited amounts of money and has to ensure that we are utilising the budget we have to the best effect.

Q. Is it correct that the trust has spent up to 1.5 million on upgrading the Beds & Herts Control Room, and it has been a total cock up ? What is going to happen to the Beds & Herts Control Room now ?

A. The trust has spent £1.1 million on this facility for the Bedford Control room. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly, the internal fabric of the building has been completely re-furbished so that the standard internally will match both the Chelmsford and Norwich Localities. New tables, chairs and PC hardware has also been purchased as the existing equipment is outdated and in poor condition. In addition, the existing conditions for staff in the Bedford Control room are very poor, cramped and uncomfortable for our staff. The new facility will address both of these issues. This facility is now up and running as of August 25th and I can confirm that the 'go live night' went without a hitch. The delay arose out of the Chief Executive asking for more work to be carried out around the wide area network (WAN), as he was not completely confident that enough testing of this had been done, prior to our making any decision on 'go live' with new Cad system. However this is not a CAD system issue, its purely around resilience within the WAN to share data across other control centres.

Q. How much money is the Trust spending this year on Voluntary & Private Ambulance suppliers because of our failure to be able to reach our targets ? This practice is helping them to grow and improving their chances of winning contracts from us when they come up for grabs. (Or is that the real reason for giving them the work) ?

A. The Trust employs Private and Voluntary Ambulance provisions to support A & E services in times when we have high cover issues or where the service is anticipating periods of high demand.

We would rather not have to engage private and voluntary provisions in this work but until we get to a consistent staffing level and have improved rosters in place, this practice will have to continue. The additional income from our Commissioners for over activity offset some of these costs.

There is no evidence that private contractors are winning contracts from us on the basis of the A & E cover they provide. For example, in Bedford the Private PTS provider had not undertaken work on behalf of the trust prior to the Service being tendered and lost.

Q. Why am I not able to book the Annual leave I want over the Christmas period ? I thought that the policy states there will be 75% leave limit for allocation this year ? Surely an agreement has been reached by now- 7 months into the year. Isn't it enough time for something this important ? I don't see how there can be a problem over Christmas as we get a full allocation during the summer and we have just been told that it has been busier than any other time, it doesn't make sense to me.

A. There is a huge amount of concern over the current Annual Leave policy. Our experience last year was that the 50% leave limit for last year caused some significant issues for the Trust and in particular during the Christmas and winter period. It is therefore apparent from the evidence to hand that a 75% leave limit will have dire consequences for our staff and patients, and with the current level of abstractions will not work. During the course of the year and increasingly more intensively, there have been a number of protracted meetings around this in order to reach mutual agreement on safe leave levels for Christmas 2009, and we are doing what we can to resolve the matter as soon as practical.

Q. How can the Trust seriously justify instructing not-yet qualified Student Ambulance paramedics to crew up with Clinicians over the week-end period 17th-19th July 2009 in order to cover the shortfall in resource levels and provide a safe level of cover ?

What was the reason for this unsafe level of cover ? How is it that the East of England Ambulance trust appears unable to provide and maintain a safe level of cover, if we supposedly have so many new staff in the system ?.

A. We acknowledge your concerns and are in discussion with UNISON regarding this. However I think it may help to comment on the challenges of achieving optimum cover in general terms.

The delivery of A&E services is highly complex, and it is not easy to attribute reduced cover to any one thing. For instance, at any one time, we can experience reduced cover due to things that arguably can't always be foreseen, such as short term sickness absence and special leave. Cover levels are also affected by things we can foresee to a certain extent such as levels of annual leave, extractions for training, secondments, levels of maternity and paternity leave, long term sickness absence cases etc. All these factors can be occurring differently on a Team, area, and or locality within the trust at any point in time. In addition , although we have made real improvements in moving to one Trust -wide approach to deployment, there is still work to do.

For instance, there still remain elements of the historic service delivery operating models of the former Trusts with their associated shift patterns, approaches to relief and working practices such as Meal Break arrangements, which all have an impact on cover. In going back to the above question and looking at the impact of annual leave levels during the Christmas period, you may therefore be able to appreciate the complexity of managing this whole system, which is made up of inter-related and dependent parts. In respect to the annual leave discussions we are therefore keen to take a two-fold approach to this, by looking to optimally manage those elements of the system which we can reasonably foresee or predict (for example, not undertaking training during that period) to enable us to achieve a position whereby we can we can balance the needs of our staff whilst ensuring that we can provide a level of service, which can be maintained even when faced with unforeseen contingencies.

Q. Where are all the new staff that we have been told have arrived or are on there way, because we certainly haven't noticed them out on the road ?.

A. There have been 359 staff recruited into A&E and on the road having completed their initial training since April 2008.

.... End....

Yours Sincerely

Maria Ball Chair

Hayden Newton Chief Executive

See over-

UNISON Officers Branch Officer Listing 2009

Please note where a Branch Officer has taken on other roles these are also listed below

Chairperson	Ross Stanton	07733225887	ross.stanton@eastamb.nhs.uk zolaisgod@hotmail.co.uk
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Herts County Lead Rep Young Members Officer and Membership Officer	Stuart Reeves	07772479434	sreeves@eeas-unison.com sreeves@btinternet.com
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Pensions Retired Members Officer	Ian Mc Kenna	07870544241	ian.mckenna@eastamb.nhs.uk iantracey@mckenna2003.fsnet.co.uk
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Womens Officer Job Shared with	Carole Taylor NSC Lesley Hilton BHE	07745549287 07989786661	carole.taylor@eastamb.nhs.uk lesley.hilton@sky.com
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Essex County H & S lead	Peter Kelly		peter.kelly@essexamb.nhs.uk Peter.kelly@talktalk.net
Beds County H & S lead	Vacant		
Suffolk County H & S lead	Vacant		

Note- Please inform Communications if your details change in any way at all.



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In response to your Questions

Acting on members behalf, the previous questions were forwarded by letter to the board on your behalf at 21st July 09. They were then reproduced in the August edition of this Newsletter. It was hoped that the replies could have been incorporated within the normal Issue 30 of the September Newsletter, but overlapped that deadline.

As stated within the submission the answers have been given equal prominence in this special edition of the Newsletter and as always, can also be found on the UNISON Branch website at - eeas-unison.com

This edition is devoted entirely to the answers in response to your questions to the East of England Trust Board and is signed by Chair Maria Ball and Chief Executive Hayden Newton.

Should any members feel they wish to follow up or comment on any of the content of this article, and /or wish the branch to further respond on their behalf, please contact any of their representatives as listed on this page.

As always to avoid misunderstanding, responses are better forwarded in written format, and in this case if forwarded to their respective Divisional Officers can then be centralised to the Branch Secretary for further action.

Many Thanks

E.M Communications

News in brief

Public Sector Cuts. Despite the potential for the government to undergo a national Election next year, it is expected that all parties will make savage cuts to public services, which will in turn affect our members and the public they serve.

Privatisation The privatisation agenda for public services is expected to be one of the biggest impacts on our members, and the public they serve.

National Pay Update.

The Secretary for Health Alan Johnson has made a clear statement that the current 3 year Pay deal would not be re-opened.

Representatives Elections

Departments should note as we near the end of the year, the elections for Station / Departmental representatives forms will be sent out for members to consider their nominations for the forthcoming year 2010.

Diaries Free diaries will be issued as usual to members.