

Structured Assessment 2020 – Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

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Summary report

About this report

- 1 This report sets out the findings from the Auditor General's 2020 structured assessment work at the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (the Trust). The work has been undertaken to help discharge the Auditor General's statutory requirement, under section 61 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2014, to be satisfied that NHS bodies have made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of resources.
- 2 This year's Structured Assessment work took place at a time when NHS bodies were responding to the unprecedented and ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. On 13 March 2020, the Minister for Health, Social Services and Sport issued a framework of actions to help prepare the system for the expected surge in COVID-19 cases. The framework included the cessation of non-urgent planned activity and the relaxation of targets and monitoring arrangements across the health and care system. Emergency funding arrangements were also introduced to facilitate the wide range of actions needed to respond urgently to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 Shorter planning cycles were agreed for 2020-21 supported by quarterly guidance setting out key considerations for the planning of the next phase of the pandemic, including delivery of essential services, and a movement towards the gradual reinstatement of routine services.
- 4 Our work was designed in the context of the ongoing response to the pandemic to ensure a suitably pragmatic approach to help the Auditor General discharge his statutory responsibilities whilst minimising the impact on NHS bodies as they continue to respond to the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ The key focus of the work is on the corporate arrangements for ensuring that resources are used efficiently, effectively and economically. Auditors also paid attention to progress made to address previous recommendations² where these related to important aspects of organisational governance and financial management especially in the current circumstances.
- 5 The report groups our findings under three themes:
 - governance arrangements;
 - managing financial resources; and
 - operational planning: to support the continued response to the pandemic balanced against the provision of other essential services.

¹ Our work was co-ordinated with Internal Audit's rapid governance review, which included further testing of key controls noted in this report.

² Previous recommendations can be found in [our 2019 report](#).

Key messages

- 6 Overall, we found that the Trust maintained effective arrangements while responding to the challenges presented by COVID-19. It placed a strong emphasis on transparency and collaborative working in the conduct of its business. The Trust quickly adapted its quality, safety and planning arrangements and continues to identify opportunities to improve and become more resilient.
- 7 The Trust and its Board have worked well to sustain the business programme while responding to COVID-19. The Trust was able to build upon its existing Pandemic Plan in its response, establishing a command structure to make fast and informed decisions. Each of the Board's Committees have met to oversee key aspects of the Trust's response to COVID-19 as well as usual operating arrangements. In addition, the Board recently approved the establishment of a new Committee to strengthen its partnership arrangements with universities and other key partners. Information flows effectively from the Trust's Executive team to the Board, although there is scope to improve recording of information on the COVID-19 decision log. There is a collegiate approach between Executive and Non-Executive Directors and the Trust is committed to reflecting and identifying lessons from the pandemic. The Trust has good arrangements for overseeing the quality and safety of its services, including changes made in response to COVID-19, and it is improving its approach to managing risk.
- 8 The Trust's arrangements for managing financial resources remain effective. It met its financial duties to break even over the three-year rolling period 2017-18 to 2019-20. The Trust continues to forecast breakeven in 2020-21, although achieving financial balance is reliant on achieving ambitious savings targets and receiving additional income for COVID-19 expenditure. The Trust has continuing strong financial controls and provides clear information on financial performance for Board scrutiny and oversight. However, in relation to COVID-19 there is scope to improve sign-off processes for expenditure within the command structure and to strengthen controls for additional payments to staff. There are also recommendations from our 2019 Structured Assessment which remain outstanding due to the Trust pausing work in relation to audit recommendations during the pandemic. Revised dates for progressing previous recommendations are due to be considered at the Audit Committee in September 2020.
- 9 The Trust has quickly developed responsive operational plans that meet Welsh Government requirements. It has identified the resources it needs to deliver the plans, including an increased and flexible workforce. The Trust is assessing the risk to its workforce and making changes to support its staff. It has also undertaken regular and effective internal communication and introduced new ways to support staff wellbeing. Strategic plans have been developed with engagement from internal and external stakeholders, including trade unions and its commissioners. The Trust is developing its approach to organisational recovery including a review of strategic actions and has reinstated arrangements for the delivery and reporting of its strategic performance from July 2020.

- 10 We have not made any new recommendations based on our 2020 work but have noted improvement opportunities throughout this report.

Detailed report

Governance arrangements

- 11 Our structured assessment work considered the Trust's ability to maintain sound governance arrangements while having to respond rapidly to the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic. We also reviewed the progress made in addressing our previous recommendations in relation to the Board Assurance Framework and the Performance Management Framework.
- 12 We found that **the Trust has maintained generally effective governance arrangements during its response to COVID-19 including a focus on quality; however, it could make further improvements in terms of recording of decisions and risk management.**

Conducting business effectively

- 13 **The Trust acted quickly to implement its Pandemic Plan and adapted the Plan as needed.**
- 14 In February 2020, the Trust took steps to prepare itself for the pandemic. Using its existing Plan for the Management of a Pandemic Influenza Outbreak (Pandemic Plan), Trust departments identified the extent to which staff could be redeployed across different areas or move to homeworking before the pandemic was declared. The Trust enacted its Pandemic Plan on 4 March 2020 and established a command structure to lead its response. The Trust's command structure consists of cross-departmental cells and teams managed by the Executive Pandemic Team.³
- 15 The ability to use and strengthen an existing Pandemic Plan significantly supported the Trust to prepare for and respond to the pandemic. The Trust has adapted the Pandemic Plan as needed, for example, by expanding its command structure to include a health and safety cell, a trade union cell and a clinical advice cell. However, we note that the Pandemic Plan has not yet been updated to reflect subsequent changes which would be helpful in the event of a second peak.
- 16 The cells and teams of the command structure met very frequently between March and May 2020. The command structure was still in operation at the time of our work although the frequency of meetings has decreased. Members of the Trust's Executive Pandemic Team act as the Chair and Vice-Chair of each cell or team, and they report key points of discussion and action back to the Executive Pandemic Team to ensure a flow of information. 'Pandemic papers' are also produced to evidence discussions held within the command structure. However, the internal audit rapid review of governance reports that there is scope to improve the recording of decisions within papers. Currently, pandemic papers mainly detail

³ The Trust's Executive Pandemic Team refers to meetings of the Trust's Executive Management Team which are specifically focussed on its response to the pandemic.

when key issues such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) have been discussed, rather than provide the detail of key decisions taken and the rationale used. It is also difficult to understand from the pandemic papers how the Trust has considered and is taking steps to comply with the significant new requirements issued in relation to COVID-19.

17 **The Board and committees have sought to conduct business with openness and transparency during 2019-20, including in relation to COVID-19, although the publication of some committee minutes was delayed.**

18 The Board closed its meetings to the public in March 2020 due to social distancing requirements and has since met virtually. The Board convened several additional closed meetings between March and July to discuss urgent matters and ensure effective governance on key decisions. Since May 2020 the Trust has live streamed Board meetings via Zoom and its Facebook page. Virtual meetings have led to a significant increase in the number of observers, which has been welcomed by the Board. The Chair helpfully reminds members of virtual meeting etiquette at the start of each meeting. As part of new virtual meetings, the Board has also invited questions from the public in advance as well as during its meetings.

19 Papers for Board and committee meetings are largely available in advance. Papers are generally high-quality, providing clear summaries of complex information, particularly the Chief Executive reports to Board. The Trust plans to revise covering pages for Board papers in 2020 to include key points from committee discussions to provide the Board with assurance of scrutiny and support decision-making. Board discussions demonstrate a team approach with evidence of constructive challenge and support provided between Board members. Board and committee meeting minutes are generally published once confirmed during the following meeting, which can take several months. However, some committee minutes had yet to be published on the Trust's website at the time of our work.

20 Non-Executive Directors indicated that the arrangements for keeping the Board informed of the Trust's response work well. In addition to specific COVID-19 reports to committees, the Trust utilises informal mechanisms to ensure members are kept updated. The Chair engages in regular briefings with Non-Executive Directors, who are also involved in fortnightly meetings with the Chief Executive. In addition, Non-Executive Directors joined weekly all-staff Zoom sessions (see **paragraph 42**) to listen to staff concerns.

21 The Trust engages in regular and open communication with key partners, including weekly meetings between the Chief Executive and the Chief Ambulance Services Commissioner (the Commissioner). These meetings have enabled honest and constructive discussions to support key decisions on the Trust's service delivery and expenditure in relation to COVID-19. The Trust also engages in regular communication with the Welsh Government and its commissioning Health Boards, for example, in relation to the expansion of its 111 service and in planning transport arrangements for field hospitals.

- 22 **The Trust was largely able to continue its usual Board and committee business during the pandemic.**
- 23 At a meeting in March 2020, the Board considered its governance arrangements against Welsh Government COVID-19 guidance. The Board decided to utilise existing governance arrangements, specifically Chair's actions, to enable timely decision-making when responding to the pandemic. Chair's actions require the agreement of the Chair and two additional Non-Executive Director signatories and are reported to the wider Board at subsequent meetings. Given the Trust's Standing Orders already make provision for Chair's actions, the Trust did not alter its Standing Orders, Standing Financial Instructions or Schemes of Delegation for this purpose.⁴
- 24 The Board decided to continue to operate each of its sub-committees. Meetings have been held virtually, although unlike Board meetings, they are not open to the public to observe. In July 2020, the Board agreed to establish a new Academic Partnership Committee, which will begin to meet quarterly later in 2020. The Committee aims to develop and strengthen partnership working between the Trust, higher and further education providers and other key partners, such as Public Health Wales.
- 25 Performance reporting was the only area of routine business that the Trust partially deferred during April and May 2020. The Board did not review progress against the 2019-20 Integrated Medium-Term Plan (IMTP) as quarter four IMTP reporting was stood down by the Welsh Government. The last IMTP report provided to the Board in November 2019 stated that progress against three-quarters of the Trust's objectives were rated green. In its annual governance statement for 2019-20 the Trust indicated that it made good progress up to the end of March, but we have not assessed this progress as part of our review. The Trust has resumed usual performance reporting arrangements since June 2020. However, in our 2019 Structured Assessment report we recommended that the Trust review its performance management framework, which is yet to be completed.
- 26 **The Trust continues to demonstrate a commitment to learning and continuous improvement.**
- 27 The Trust currently has a full complement of board members following the appointment of three Non-Executive Directors and four Directors in the last 12 months.⁵ The Welsh Government's induction programme for new Non-Executive Directors was suspended in 2020 because of COVID-19. The Trust is looking to do a gap analysis to identify any training needs for new board members. This should

⁴ The Trust has more recently agreed to temporarily alter its Standing Orders in line with Welsh Government guidance to delay its Annual General Meeting for 2020-21.

⁵ Recently appointed Directors include the Executive Director of Finance, the Executive Director of Quality and Nursing, Director of Digital, and Director of Planning and Performance.

be conducted as soon as possible to identify and address any potential training needs.

- 28 The Board is committed to continuous improvement. While the Trust's board development programme was suspended during the first phase of the pandemic, a new programme is due to begin in September 2020.
- 29 During the March 2020 Board meeting, members received verbal assurance of business continuity arrangements in the event Board members were unable to discharge their duties due to factors relating to COVID-19 such as illness. For example, Assistant Directors becoming responsible if a Director was unable to work. However, these arrangements are not currently detailed either in the Trust's Pandemic Plan nor the Board minutes for the March meeting. Formalising such arrangements would be helpful in the event of a future peak to ensure clarity.
- 30 Members of the Trust's command structure have taken part in a very thorough debrief and lessons learnt exercise. This exercise, supported by the Trust's resilience team, enabled members to reflect on the Trust's response to the pandemic. The exercise was extensive, identifying recommendations, areas for improvement and arrangements to be continued going forward across the Trust. A report summarising the findings of the exercise was reported to the Trust's Executive Pandemic Team in July and they are being considered as part of its recovery plans (see **paragraph 66**).

Managing risk

- 31 **The Trust continues to review and manage its risks, including in relation to COVID-19, and is improving its risk reporting arrangements.**
- 32 In responding to the pandemic, the Trust decided against developing a separate COVID-19 specific risk register, and instead is using existing mechanisms. Executive officers told us that that discussions on risk are continuously held within the Trust's command structure, although these are not driven by regular reviews of the corporate risk register. For example, specific operational risks such as PPE supplies were discussed, recorded and escalated on a very regular basis through a black, red, amber, green (BRAG) risk reporting system.
- 33 The Trust's Assistant Director Leadership Team is usually responsible for reviewing risks for inclusion on the corporate risk register. During the pandemic, this group was stood down with the Executive Pandemic Team becoming responsible for this task. Corporate risks have been reviewed appropriately with risks removed following effective mitigation and new risks from underpinning registers identified. Changes were reported to and scrutinised by the Quality, Experience and Safety (QuEst) Committee and Board in May 2020 but have not been considered since that time. However, the Trust states that during the pandemic the Board moved to dynamic risk reporting and reviewed risks as at that exact point in time.

- 34 In our 2019 Structured Assessment report, we found that the quality of the corporate risk register could be improved, for example, by including information on mitigating actions, which remains an issue. For example, the pandemic has increased the risk score in relation to the Trust achieving breakeven at the year-end, but there are no mitigating actions detailed for this risk. However, in June 2020 the Board agreed changes to the reporting of the corporate risk register. From September 2020, the Audit Committee will move away from a retrospective reporting of risks and instead be able to access the live Datix risk registers, which include a wealth of information, including on mitigating actions.
- 35 In our 2019 Structured Assessment report, we also recommended that the Trust made greater and more consistent use of its Board Assurance Framework. The Board Assurance Framework has not been considered by the Board since March 2020. This is expected given that demands from COVID-19 resulted in the suspension of most of the Trust's strategic actions including those within the Trust's Integrated Medium-Term Plan (IMTP). However, the People and Culture Committee considered a Committee Assurance Framework at its July 2020 meeting, which highlighted key strategic risks and issues for the committee's consideration. Committee Assurance Frameworks have the potential to significantly support members to focus on the strategic risks within their remit. The Trust has stated that it is committed to ensuring the Board Assurance Framework remains a key tool for the Board and will resume reporting from September 2020, in addition to rolling out further Committee Assurance Frameworks during 2020-21.

Systems of assurance

- 36 **The Trust has effective systems for assuring the quality and safety of its services and staff wellbeing.**
- 37 The Trust upheld a strong focus on quality and safety during the pandemic. There was a representative from the Quality and Nursing department on each cell within the command structure. This helped ensure a quality focus on key decisions with quality implications carefully considered.
- 38 In line with the Pandemic Plan, the Trust prioritised six core services aimed at delivering and supporting its 111 and 999 services. It also decided to continue the recruitment of additional front-line staff in line with recommendations from the 2019 demand and capacity review.⁶ The Board were informed of key quality and safety considerations in relation to changes to services. For example, the quick increase in 111 staff and use of the military necessitated rapidly agreed arrangements and condensed training programmes. Also, in line with other UK ambulance services, the Trust introduced a specific pandemic protocol for 999 call handling, titled

⁶ In 2018, the Trust and the Chief Ambulance Services Commissioner jointly commissioned a demand and capacity review. The review looked at how the ambulance service and its workforce will need to change to meet the demands of the population with a five-year forward look.

CARD36.⁷ The Board were sighted and satisfied about the quality and safety arrangements related to these and other key developments.

- 39 The QuEST Committee has considered the Trust's quality governance both in relation to COVID-19 and normal business. In May 2020, QuEST obtained assurance in relation to infection, prevention and control, which received investment to support the Trust's resilience by providing additional support and training. The Committee also received information on adverse incidents in relation to COVID-19; and details of the health and safety cell and clinical advice group within the command structure. The Trust continued its mortality reviews and Putting Things Right processes during the pandemic. The Trust is currently revising some key practices and guidelines in line with the introduction of the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act. This will be incorporated as part of the Trust's updated Quality Strategy which will be presented to QuEST in December 2020.
- 40 The Trust is proactive in monitoring and managing workforce wellbeing and health and safety. The People and Culture Committee continues to monitor workforce metrics, including metrics related to COVID-19, such as staff redeployment, training and wellbeing and any remedial action that is needed. The Trust has recently concluded a risk assessment of its estate to consider compliance with COVID-19 requirements with the Trust's estates team currently working through the actions to put signage and other social distance measures in place. In addition, at the time of writing, the Trust had begun to implement the all-Wales COVID-19 workforce risk assessment tool to ensure it identifies and supports staff vulnerable to COVID-19, particularly staff from BAME groups.
- 41 The Trust quickly recognised the availability of PPE as a key risk given the supply chain challenges at the start of the pandemic. This was one of the core business areas prioritised in line with its Pandemic Plan. The Trust has engaged with staff to communicate changes and requirements throughout the pandemic through posters, interactive virtual sessions and demonstrational videos. In order to ensure effective protection for its staff in various situations and public spaces, the Trust decided to use the national PPE guidance as a minimum and, using a pragmatic approach, use higher levels of PPE where appropriate.
- 42 The Executive Team has been committed to consistent and responsive communications with staff during the pandemic, including daily email briefings and 'WAST live' all-staff Zoom meetings. WAST live meetings ensured two-way communication between the Executive Team and staff about key developments and concerns. These meetings were initially weekly but have become less frequent as the impact of pandemic has receded. The Trust also carried out a staff survey to understand their experience, which will help inform its plans for any future peaks,

⁷ This triage protocol is designed specifically for pandemic management and assesses all patients with breathing problems, chest pain, or flu-like illness (sick person) under the same protocol.

as well as being considered as part of its wellbeing strategy, which is due to be published later in 2020.

- 43 The Trust has effective arrangements to track progress in relation to audit and review findings. The Audit Committee reviews the internal and external audit recommendation tracker log at each meeting. The format of the tracker log enables committee members to view information on progress in relation to each recommendation. The tracker log was temporarily paused in March 2020. In June 2020 Audit Committee members requested that recommendations and completion dates be reviewed for its September 2020 meeting to ensure recommendations remain relevant and that timescales for completion are realistic.
- 44 The Trust has recently begun to refer relevant extracts of the audit tracker to each Committee to support oversight and scrutiny for recommendations relating to their remit. Papers were first provided to the Finance and Performance and People and Culture Committees in July 2020 but noted little progress against actions due to the suspension of the audit tracker at that time. The Trust's clinical audit programme was also suspended in March 2020 and is currently beginning to resume, pending decisions as to which audits within the programme will continue following the pandemic.

Managing financial resources

- 45 Our work considered the Trust's financial performance, changes to financial controls during the pandemic and arrangements for monitoring and reporting financial performance. We also reviewed the progress made in addressing our previous recommendations in relation to strategic capital planning and the reporting of single tender waivers.
- 46 We found that **the Trust has effective financial controls and reporting arrangements, although expenditure in relation to COVID-19 poses a risk to financial balance during 2020-21.**

Achieving key financial objectives

- 47 **The Trust met its statutory financial duties for 2019-20, although performance for individual savings schemes remains variable and performance for 2020-21 is dependent on additional income for COVID-19 related expenditure.**
- 48 The Trust has consistently achieved financial balance delivering small surpluses each year, including a surplus of £45,000 for 2019-20. The Trust met financial duties to break even over a rolling three-year period (2017-18 and 2019-20) and to have an approved IMTP for the period 2019-20 to 2021-22. The Trust remained within its capital expenditure limit and utilised the opportunity from the Welsh Government to broker elements of unplanned and unspent capital monies for 2019-20.

- 49 The Trust delivered planned savings totalling £2.163 million in 2019-20, which was £53,000 over its savings target. However, as has been the case for several years, performance against individual schemes varied, with some schemes significantly under or over-achieving their planned savings. For example, vacancy management significantly over-achieved by £654,000 which compensated for underachievement in other areas including workforce, efficiencies and transformation (of £380,000). The Trust also utilised several local schemes, some of which attracted additional income rather than reduced costs.
- 50 In our 2019 Structured Assessment report, we recommended that the Trust move away from annualised capital planning to enable it to utilise its capital allocations effectively. This year the Trust again had unallocated discretionary capital by January. This was exacerbated by slippage caused by the pandemic which totalled £1.339 million. This was addressed by the Board and internal groups within delegated limits in March 2020.
- 51 For 2020-21, the Trust's capital spending in relation to COVID-19 was initially resourced from its Discretionary Capital allocation. This was on the assumption that the Trust would be reimbursed and then be able to resume its planned capital programme later in the financial year. However, the Trust received communication from the Welsh Government in relation to the All Wales Capital Programme that it would not receive all the capital money it was expecting. In response, the Trust has reviewed and re-prioritised its capital programme with several previously approved schemes on hold, including its vehicle replacement programme. The Trust will keep its capital programme under review to enable it to progress plans if additional capital money becomes available.
- 52 The Trust's resource envelope for the 2020-21 financial year is £211.3 million. The Trust's programme of work for 2020-21 is underpinned by the financial plan set out in its IMTP 2020-23. There are some key financial assumptions within the Trust's three-year financial plan relating to increased funding from the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee (EASC) and the Welsh Government. In common with many other NHS bodies, the Trust is also anticipating that it will receive additional income from the Welsh Government to cover all COVID-19 related spending, therefore the Trust has not included these costs within its revenue budget. The Trust has set itself an ambitious savings target for 2020-21 of £4.3 million, which is twice the target for 2019-20. The Trust must carefully manage its savings, particularly given the variability in savings performance for specific schemes discussed above and the risk of not receiving full reimbursement for COVID-19 expenditure.
- 53 At month three, the Trust's reported performance was a small year-to-date under-spend against budget of £10,000. The Trust recorded an additional spend totalling £5.127 million due to COVID-19, for which the Trust is seeking reimbursement. The Trust had achieved savings totalling £1.193 million, which represents 85% of its month three target. The Trust is also seeking additional income for non-delivery of some savings for 2020-21 due to COVID-19 to the value of £175,000 as of June

2020. At the time of writing, additional income from the Welsh Government for all COVID-19 related expenditure by NHS bodies has not been confirmed.

- 54 As the Trust returns to normal operating arrangements, it is basing its financial assumptions for longer-term recovery planning on the existing financial plan within its IMTP. However, as it reflects on its response to the pandemic, the Trust is identifying areas of business that require investment to prepare for possible future waves of COVID-19. There is a finance representative on most of the Trust's COVID-19 command cells and teams to provide advice and support as response and recovery plans are developed and reviewed.

Financial controls

- 55 **The Trust's financial controls have not changed significantly and although it is capturing and tracking COVID-19 related expenditure there is scope to formalise sign-off processes.**
- 56 The Trust has developed a COVID-19 spending log to capture its expenditure with net expenditure totalling £5.127 million at month three of 2020-21. The COVID-19 spending log captures a range of expenditure including staffing, infrastructure, equipment, vehicle and PPE costs. It also details any unintended savings from fuel and reduced need for taxis by the Non-Emergency Patient Transport service.
- 57 Information on COVID-19 spending has been regularly presented to the Trust's Executive Finance Group, Executive Management Team, Finance and Performance Committee and Board. Any expenditure related to COVID-19 is scrutinised by departmental and finance managers. The finance team are currently undertaking further due diligence tests on spend allocated to the COVID-19 expenditure codes alongside challenge from the Welsh Government. However, the internal audit rapid governance review reports scope to improve the management of the COVID-19 spending log, highlighting that it has not been reported or signed off by the Executive Pandemic Team with ad hoc reports in place instead.
- 58 The Trust has conducted business in response to COVID-19 within its existing financial control arrangements. As previously stated, where decisions needed to be taken quickly and between Board meetings, the Board decided to utilise Chair's actions for all spending commitments above the Chief Executive Officer's delegated limit. Chair's actions were used five times between March and July 2020 with details documented and ratified by the Board at subsequent meetings. The Trust's Standing Financial Instructions are already clear on the procedure where tender arrangements may need to be waived and therefore have not been changed. While the Trust has made some minor changes to its authorised signatories list these have been routine and not as a result of COVID-19. However, the internal audit rapid governance review identified scope to improve the Trust's controls in relation to making additional payments to senior managers. These additional payments were introduced in response to COVID-19. However, the review found evidence that some individuals have received both a percentage increase as well as itemised overtime hours.

- 59 While there was large-scale redeployment of Trust staff, including from the finance team, some finance staff were ringfenced to ensure the organisation could meet its accounts deadline. The Trust's procurement process has been largely unchanged during its response to the pandemic and the finance team indicates that procurement support provided by the NWSSP during the pandemic has been very good. The Audit Committee reviewed single tender actions and waivers, one of which was related to COVID-19 at its meeting in June 2020. The Audit Committee was satisfied that the actions taken were appropriate and justified. However, we made a recommendation in our structured assessment 2019 that the Trust seek to provide greater information in single tender action reports. An internal audit review of single tender waivers in 2019-20 made further detailed recommendations. The Trust plans to make changes to arrangements in due course.
- 60 The Trust's financial reporting is aligned to the revised Welsh Government monitoring requirements. The Board and committees continue to receive regular high-level reports on the financial position against plan to enable oversight of COVID-19 and non COVID-19 expenditure.

Operational planning

- 61 Our work considered the Trust's progress in developing and delivering quarterly operational plans to support the ongoing response to COVID-19 and to provide other essential services and functions in line with Welsh Government planning guidance. At the time of our work, the focus was on essential services with the aim of restoring normal and routine activities when it is safe and practicable to do so.
- 62 We found that **the Trust has developed responsive operational plans which consider the resources required and are routinely monitored and reported, alongside continued development of other key strategic plans.**

Developing the plan

- 63 **The Trust has developed responsive operational plans that reflect Welsh Government guidance, while continuing to progress other key strategic plans.**
- 64 The Trust's quarter one and quarter two operational plans met the requirements of the NHS Wales COVID-19 Operating Framework. The Plans were co-ordinated at pace by the Executive Pandemic Team and approved by the Board prior to submission before their respective deadlines.
- 65 The operational plans detail how the Trust maintained levels of support for essential services provided by Health Boards throughout the pandemic. Through the operational plans, the Trust is required to respond to additional essential services as well as prepare for major changes including the implementation of the South Wales Major Trauma Network and the opening of the Grange University Hospital.

- 66 The operational plans detail the Trust's approach to recovery planning. Recovery planning has been led by the Trust's business continuity and recovery cell and co-ordinated by the Executive Pandemic Team. Recovery plans build in a review of deliverables from the Trust's 2020-23 IMTP to ascertain which actions remain relevant following the first phase of the pandemic. The Trust is also incorporating the identified learning points from its pandemic debriefing exercise at both a local operational and strategic level, as well as feedback from colleagues and the public.
- 67 The operational plans include a description of how the Trust will balance its recovery and remain flexible to potential future waves of the pandemic, including the stepping up of response structures and actions when required. The Trust identifies significant challenges if additional waves of the pandemic collide with other factors such as winter pressures or a major incident.
- 68 To enable it to respond quickly, the Trust has introduced two to three-week planning cycles informed by modelling potential demand from future waves of COVID-19. The Trust is using external consultants and its own Optima Predict software to model demand. Information is reviewed and refined by a newly established forecasting and modelling group, which includes representatives from key partners. This group tracks the COVID-19 infection rate and corresponding demand on Trust services.
- 69 The Trust's operational plans were considered by both the Commissioner and the Welsh Government. The Commissioner provided challenge to the Trust to be more proactive in identifying and responding to changing circumstances across NHS bodies. The Welsh Government also provided challenge to the Trust to provide further clarity on the risks within its quarter one operational plan, including how it will support the continued provision of essential services and performance monitoring. The Trust has addressed these comments within its quarter two operational plan, which provides greater detail of how the Trust is moving from its initial response phase to supporting broader services while maintaining flexibility.
- 70 The Trust submitted its IMTP to the Welsh Government in January 2020 after it was approved by the Board. The Welsh Government has not formally approved the IMTP as the approval process was suspended when the pandemic struck. As part of enacting its Pandemic Plan, the Trust suspended the majority of its IMTP priorities, continuing work on priorities that were deemed essential, such as recruitment and training in its Emergency Medical Service. Over recent weeks the Trust has been recommencing a small number of IMTP activities alongside its review of each priority and underpinning actions.
- 71 Alongside its operational plans and the IMTP, the Trust is continuing to progress several other underpinning plans and strategies. At its Board meeting in July 2020, the Board approved the Trust's clinical strategy entitled **Delivering Clinical Excellence Strategy 2020-25**. This strategy will be underpinned by the Trust's Quality Strategy due to be approved by the Board later this year. In addition, the Trust is finalising its Wellbeing and Digital Strategies for Board approval in late 2020.

- 72 The Trust is also engaging in discussions in recognition of the recent Black Lives Matter movement, reflecting and challenging itself on how it can make positive changes. The Trust issued an impactful message to all staff on the organisation's stance and, as part of its equality plan **Treating People Fairly 2020-24**, has committed to improving the diversity of its workforce.
- 73 The Trust's planning process is supported by effective partnership working both internally and externally. Officers we met as part of our work spoke highly of the input from trade unions through command structure discussions, which have led to improved arrangements during the pandemic in relation to PPE access, training compliance and social distancing. The Trust intends to continue this strengthened engagement within its business as usual. Externally, the Trust has sought regular input from members of the EASC on key planning issues including the Demand and Capacity Programme Board and Field Hospital Transportation. While the Trust established a Service Level Agreement with the Fire and Rescue Services in response to COVID-19, the Welsh Government has provided challenge to the Trust to develop sustainable long-term arrangements for joint working. The Trust has also been challenged to consider how it can strengthen partnership working with Local Authorities and social care going forward.
- 74 The operational plans state an intention to engage with the public although the Plan acknowledges that communication with staff and stakeholders is a vital component of the response so far. At the end of May 2020, the Trust sought the views of the public on their experience of the service during the pandemic through a commissioned survey. The results have been fed into various internal Trust groups as well as with key partners including the Chief Ambulance Services Commissioner. While the Trust has maintained links at a local level with Community Health Councils (CHCs), the Trust is seeking to establish a more formal mechanism with the national CHC Board in developing future operational plans.

Resources to deliver the plan

- 75 **The Trust has developed mechanisms for ensuring a flexible workforce that can respond to possible future peaks of the pandemic, alongside taking steps to support the wellbeing of its workforce.**
- 76 In response to the pandemic, the Trust has undertaken significant planning and preparation to enable it to increase its operational capacity across core services where and when needed. The Trust planned a tiered approach to the supply of additional capacity that included a range of internal and external options, such as the redeployment of non-core service staff into 111 call handling, support from the current cohort of student paramedics from Swansea University and deployment of other staff partners, such as Fire and Rescue Service Personnel and Military Personnel. To support this, the Trust made rapid progress in developing an online educational delivery service to support these arrangements. As a result, the Trust

has secured a range of options which mean that it is able to flex capacity up and down in response to demand.

- 77 Staff health and wellbeing is a strong feature of the Trust's operational plans. The Trust's Occupational Health and Wellbeing team offer a comprehensive service, frequently signposting staff to its portal, running weekly drop-in sessions, workshops and aligning to national campaigns including Mental Health Awareness week and Men's Health Week. The Trust has seen an increase in calls to the Wellbeing team in relation to anxiety and has increased availability to interactive anxiety workshops as a result. The Trust is increasing internal communications to encourage staff to make use of drop-in sessions and the counselling service if needed. The Trust recognises the upheaval to staff as a result of homeworking, shielding and self-isolation and has adopted a compassionate leadership approach to support staff to return to more normal working arrangements. The Trust is also actively monitoring absence levels, with COVID-19 absence reported to the Welsh Government daily.
- 78 The Trust has continued progress in developing a Digital Strategy which is due to be presented to Board in October 2020. The Strategy will capture the progress already made in response to COVID-19 against its digital and health informatics agendas. For example, the Trust rebranded its NHS Direct Wales website to a 111 website with an online COVID-19 symptom checker that has been widely used since its establishment. The Trust has further ambitious goals for progressing its digital agenda in line with the long-term strategic framework published in 2019, including the development of an electronic Patient Clinical Record solution.

Monitoring delivery of the plan

- 79 **The Trust has effective arrangements for the oversight and scrutiny of delivery of key plans.**
- 80 The quarter one operational plan outlines the process for overseeing the progress of delivery. Oversight is provided by the Executive Pandemic Team. Specific actions and issues are delegated by the Executive Pandemic Team in line with the pandemic command structure where appropriate with progress reported backed up through pandemic papers and verbal updates. There are an additional 10 geographically-based 'Operational Cells' to ensure local delivery of tactical options.
- 81 The Trust's Strategic Transformation Board, which is primarily responsible for overseeing progress against its IMTP was stood down in March 2020 in recognition of the suspension of most IMTP priorities. To support delivery of its operational plans, the Trust reinstated the Strategic Transformation Board in June 2020 which meets monthly. This forum agrees the Trust's priority work programme and monitors delivery of operational plans and IMTP priorities. The Strategic Transformation Board also ensures that the Commissioner and the EASC are sighted on priorities, and that priorities align to commissioning intentions.
- 82 As described, the Board approved the Trust's quarterly operational plans. The Board expects to be regularly informed of progress against the operational,

recovery and IMTP priorities. The Board continues to provide scrutiny of performance and progress at Board Meetings. At its July 2020 meeting, the Board received an update paper on the Trust's progress against its quarter two operational plan. The paper provided a Red, Amber or Green (RAG) rating against each deliverable, along with a narrative to describe progress. The report showed generally good progress against key IMTP deliverables as well as broader quarter two operational plan deliverables, which was welcomed by board members.



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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.