

To: Council of Governors
From: Jamu Patel, Committee Chair
Author: Norbert Lieckfeldt, Corporate Governance Manager
Date: 8 July 2021
Subject: Communications and Engagement Committee Report

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To update the Council on the work of the Communications and Engagement Committee.

2. Background

2.1 The Communications and Engagement Committee has been established to carry out specific duties on behalf of the Council, including reviewing the Trust's Membership Strategy and communications with members and among Governors.

2.2 The core membership of the Committee is as follows:

- Dawn Allen, Bedford Public Governor
- Joseph Croft*, Staff Governor
- Caroline Diehl, Hackney Public Governor
- Mark Dunne*, Staff Governor
- Carol Ann Leatherby*, Newham Public Governor
- Beverley Morris, Hackney Public Governor (Apologies)
- Jamu Patel, Luton Public Governor (Committee Chair)
- Felicity Stocker, Bedford Public Governor
- Ernell Diana Watson*, Newham Public Governor
- Keith Williams, Luton Public Governor

Those marked with * were not present at the meeting on 21 June 2021. Attendance is only registered for core members of the Committee.

2.3 The Communication and Engagement Committee meetings are open to all Governors. Those Governors who are not core members but wish to attend should notify the Membership Office in advance.

2.4 The Committee met on 21 June 2021. In addition to the core members, also attending were:

Roshan Ansari (Public Governor, Tower Hamlets)
Suzana Stefanic (Public Governor Central Beds)
Janet Flaherty (Head of Communications and PR)
Tajmina Khanam (Apprentice, Governors and Members Office, Minutes)
Norbert Lieckfeldt (Corporate Governance Manager)

Cathy Lilley (Associate Director of Corporate Governance) sent apologies.

3.0 21 June 2021 Meeting: Key Decisions and Discussions

3.1 Media Activities Update

- Janet Flaherty provided Governors an update of the media activities in the Trust:
 - The core focus of media activity over the past months has been the work around the vaccination centre in Stratford, celebrating achievements, responding to numerous media requests and providing information for staff and communities to enable them to make an informed choice about taking up the offer of vaccination.
 - The Trust is the lead employer for the NE London vaccination effort and the team have supported recruitment esp. of volunteers
 - A special focus was on the Mass Vaccination event held at the London Stadium in the Olympic Park.
 - Going forward, the team are supporting the publicity around the Big Conversation to refresh the Trust Strategy, and
 - Are preparing for Veterans' Awareness Day.

3.2 Governors Survey

- The Committee discussed plans for returning to face to face meetings, in view of the results from the Governors Survey (attached as Appendix 1).
- They agreed to start provisionally planning for a face to face Council meeting in November, subject to satisfactory development of current infection trends which were causing some concerns; the Committee also stressed Governors who feel unsafe attending meetings need to be accommodated so they can take part fully in any meeting.
- The Committee agreed that in future there will be a blended approach to holding meetings with some lending themselves to virtual technology while other should revert to face to face meetings as soon as is safe and practicable (eg Stakeholder and Members Lunch Meetings).

3.2 Review, Council of Governors Election Literature

- The Committee reviewed the nominations information leaflet and the reminder email to members and staff to stand for elections as Staff or Public Governor of ELFT.
- The Committee requested added emphasis in the leaflet on the benefits for Governors of carrying out their role in terms of added knowledge, skills and personal development.
- The Committee requested that special efforts should be made to attract nominations from younger candidates and noted the underrepresentation of current staff governors from Luton and Bedfordshire.

3.3 Membership Strategy Review

- Norbert Lieckfeldt updated the Committee on current plans for the review of the Membership Strategy in order for it to dovetail more closely with the refreshed Trust Strategy.

- Governors interested in joining a Task and Finish Group over the summer should contact Norbert for further details.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Council of Governors is asked to
- **RECEIVE** and
 - **NOTE** the report.

Appendix 1 – Governor Survey, Returning to Face to Face Meetings

The Governors and Members Office ran an MS Forms online survey with Governors to elicit their views on

- How Governors regard a possible return to face to face meetings from September 2021, and
- Going forward, which meetings they would prefer to continue to be delivered virtually, by video conference

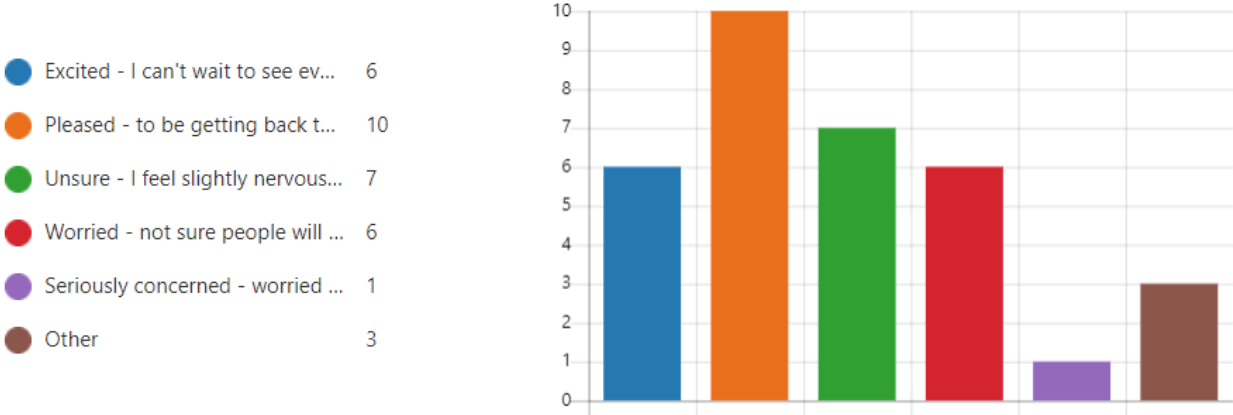
Results

27 Governors (66%) responded to the survey.

In terms of **returning to face to face meetings** from the September 2021 Council meeting, we asked

If Council meetings were held at a venue again from September 2021, how would you feel about returning to face to face meetings (NB: it may not be possible to find a venue where current social distancing guidelines will be met)

Responses were surprisingly mixed. Governors could tick more than one box and told us:



While there were 16 broadly positive and optimistic expressions who tended to chose either the first or second option, ten respondents voiced some level of concern, in some cases choosing all three options (“unsure”, “worried”, “seriously concerned”).

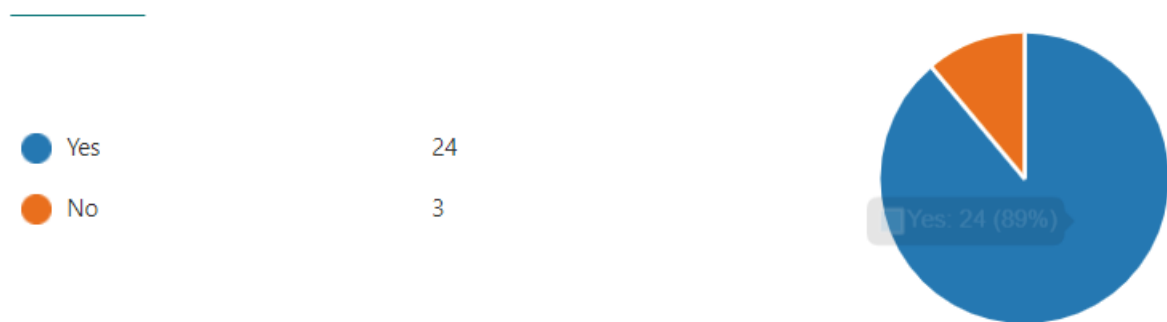
Comments (see Appendix 1) focused on safety for themselves and others and the necessity not to exclude governors who may be concerned perhaps because they may have underlying health conditions or have not yet been fully vaccinated or requiring a booster shot; the convenience of attending virtually without having to travel (and the risks associated with travelling); the opportunities of contributing to meetings for example through the chat facility and discussion in breakout rooms; and concerns about practicalities such as ensuring that catering for Council meetings is delivered in a safe manner.

Some Governors in later comments (Appendix 2) argued for hybrid meetings with some joining face to face and others virtually (the required technology will have to be explored further).

Blended Model

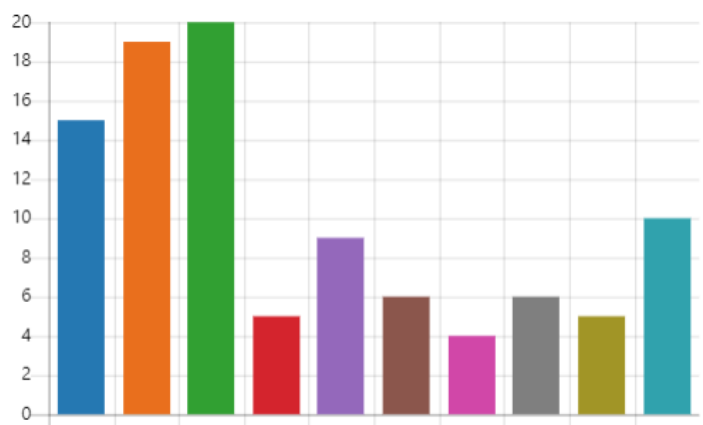
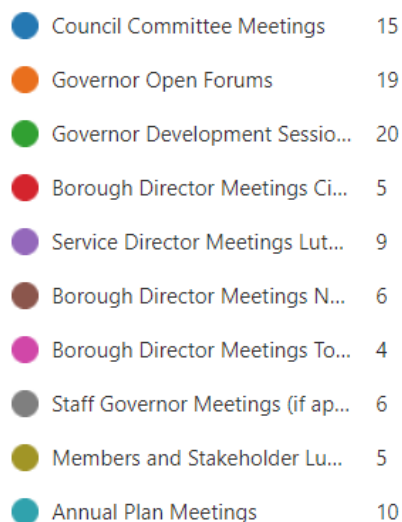
We also asked governors whether they would consider a blended model of running Council meetings, with two meetings each year in Winter (early January and early March) to be held virtually. This would save Governors from travelling sometimes long distances in the dark and the cold; enable governors to maintain a level of engagement and proficiency in virtual meetings; and help the Trust to reduce its carbon footprint and achieve any financial targets in terms of staff time and expenditure (for example, the cost of each Council meeting held near King’s Cross in terms of room hire and catering is c £3,500).

Out of 26 votes, 23 voted in favour, 3 were opposed:



Finally, we asked Governors which meetings they would prefer to continue running virtually. We asked

***Which meetings would you think are suitable/preferable to continue to be held virtually in future?
[select all that apply]***



Governor Development Session and Governor Open Forums unsurprisingly top the bill; especially Development Sessions have been convenient to organise, sometimes on an ad hoc, as needed basis

without the problems of organising a venue, or travelling (and with easy access to those delivering the session, often ELFT Board members). Similarly, the Open Forums have been popular online and more easily accessible for governors and especially for NEDs not having to travel to Alie Street to attend.

Committees clearly lend themselves to online meetings, especially for Governors from Luton and Bedfordshire for whom travel time is a significant burden, especially in Winter. While the number of votes for virtual Service/Borough Director Meetings is lower, these reflect the lower number of Governors in each locality and still seem to be a strong positive vote for the convenience of virtual meetings. We will check this with the Governors involved in each meeting going forward.

Traditionally, our Annual General Meeting/Annual Members Meeting have been significant 'showcase'-style events for the Trust; however, last year's online event has also seen very positive feedback and it is therefore unsurprising that nearly 40% of respondents opted for this format.

Summary

Governors have long expressed a desire to return to face to face meeting. The most recent such Council meeting was held in January 2020, 15 months ago. In the meantime, ten new Governors have joined the Council who have never had a face to face meeting with either other Governors, members of the Board or staff from the Governors and Members Office.

An informal survey of NHS Foundation Trusts indicated that most had no current plans to return to real-life meetings but it also became clear that there has not been any attempt to garner the views of the Governors.

- It has been surprising to note the caution voiced by Governors in terms of returning to face to face Council meetings from September. This reflects concerns about their own safety but also for fellow Governors and a real concern that Council members should not feel excluded from Council business merely because they feel worried about attending such meetings. [NL: Compare with Trust's Return to the Workplace guidelines]
- There was a real appreciation of the value of virtual conferencing for specific meetings, with benefits including greater ability to participate and inclusivity, reduced burden and risk of travelling distances on public transport; ability to quickly schedule meetings as and when required (esp for Governor Development sessions).
- Travel during winter time was regarded as a significantly worse experience than travelling on Council business in the lighter months.

Recommendations

- Hold all Council meetings including September 2021 virtually to give more time for the vaccine to have an impact and concerns to reduce
- Start planning for the November Council meeting (including celebration of outgoing Governors) to be held face to face near Kings Cross
- Explore hybrid meeting technology with those Governors comfortable to attend traveling to the meeting, while others can join virtually (for Council and other future meetings eg Committee meetings)
- Continue L&B Service Director Meetings virtually as Luton and Bedfordshire Governors some time ago expressed a preference to do so; explore with Governors in other localities if they prefer virtual or face to face BDMs.

- Continue to offer virtual Governor Development Sessions, Governor Open Forums and Committees
- AGM/AMM 2021 is already scheduled as a virtual meeting.
- Explore possibility of an informal face to face Governor Social Event in October 2021 for those wishing to attend.