

TUESDAY 22 MAY 2018

South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group confirms intention for Trusts to become one organisation in future

The Boards of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust have confirmed their shared intention to fully progress plans to become one organisation in the future.

Earlier this year the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group* shared its intention to explore the possibility of becoming one Trust and outlined the next steps for the strategic alliance which has now been in place since 2016.

Since January 2018, Trust leaders have been working closely with NHS regulators to understand the detailed process involved to become one organisation. Work has also taken place to prepare a draft 'strategic case', which has now been submitted for approval to NHS Improvement - the organisation responsible for overseeing NHS Foundation Trusts.

Both Trusts must now await formal feedback from NHS Improvement which is expected over the summer and is the vital first step in the process before the Trusts can embark on any wider discussion with staff and stakeholders.

Pending approval of the draft strategic case by NHS Improvement, Trust leaders are planning for a period of widespread engagement with staff, patients, Trust governors and the public, which is likely to start over the summer. This will ensure that all feedback from key stakeholders is fully considered as work progresses to develop a full business case for the joining of the two Trusts.

The Boards of both Trusts, which currently remain as separate statutory bodies, have recently held separate meetings to discuss the draft strategic case. After considering various options for closer working, both Boards concluded that a merger would offer the best possible opportunity to secure the long-term sustainability of

local NHS services. They remain unanimous in their view that a formal joining of the two organisations is the natural next step for the strategic alliance with the potential to yield many further benefits for staff, patients and the local health economy.

Chief Executive of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, Ken Bremner, said:

“I fully welcome the decisions taken by both Trust Boards which marks a key milestone for our strategic alliance and sends a very important signal to our staff, patients and the public that we are fully committed to working together in the long-term and building stronger hospital services in both South Tyneside and Sunderland for the future.

“Through our strategic alliance we have already been able to deliver many quality improvements in patient care, improve the resilience of our services, attract more key staff to our organisations and bring significant investment into both Trusts to embrace the use of digital technology. None of this would have been possible without working together.

“We know, however, there is much more we could do to improve quality even further and to make it much easier for our teams to work more effectively together across South Tyneside and Sunderland without unnecessary organisational boundaries and different systems and processes.

“Although we must now await formal feedback from NHS Improvement, we felt it important to update all stakeholders on the decisions made by both Trust Boards and ensure we have complete transparency as this work moves forward.

“We recognise that there will be many questions, particularly from our staff, patients, Trust governors and members of the public, about what the joining of the organisations might mean and it is important that everyone has an opportunity to share their views and understand what further benefits this could bring for both patients and staff.

“We are committed to openly engaging more fully as soon as we can and now look forward to receiving feedback from NHS Improvement in the months ahead.”

Subject to approval from NHS Improvement on the draft strategic case, both Trusts will begin work over the summer to develop a full business case with submission expected by the end of 2018 for consideration.

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Notes to editors

***About South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group**

- South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust have been working closely together since March 2016. They signed a formal partnership agreement in April 2016 to form the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group and which committed both organisations to transforming the way local services are delivered for the benefit of patient care.
- A single executive management team has been in place at both NHS Foundation Trusts since November 2016, led by Chief Executive Officer Ken Bremner who was appointed as CEO across both Trusts in September 2016.

The strategic alliance between the two Trusts has already brought many benefits for both patients and staff with shared learning and expertise helping to drive many quality improvements. Some of the latest examples of this include:

- Work across both Trusts to embed a positive patient safety and reporting culture has been shortlisted for a national Patient Safety Award 2018 in the ‘*Changing Culture*’ category. The ‘Excellence Reporting’ scheme, which is now in place at both Trusts, encourages staff to report and share examples of excellence they see in the course of their work. The scheme complements existing systems in place for reporting patient safety incidents and ensures learning is shared and embedded across both Trusts for the benefit of patients.
- Strategic planning on a bigger scale with the first joint recruitment exercise to the Philippines taking place in February 2018 with over 100 job offers made and the expectation that around 50 nurses will join both Trusts in the year ahead. Multiple nursing and midwifery recruitment open days are also being jointly planned across the Healthcare Group for 2018.

- Significant improvements in patient care at South Tyneside District Hospital with the latest Care Quality Commission (CQC) report acknowledging good progress in medical care, urgent and emergency care services and visible Trust leadership which encourages pride and positivity.
- Closer working between the two Trusts' research and innovation teams with the aim of securing further expansion of clinical trials and investment in research to improve patient care. Sharing expertise is undoubtedly strengthening the position South Tyneside and Sunderland as leaders in research across North East and North Cumbria. A recent visit from National Institute for Health Research praised the commitment and enthusiasm for research across both organisations.
- Closer working across clinical and operational teams resulting in greater flexibility to manage pressures and service vulnerabilities across the local healthcare system in order to deliver safe patient care.
- Over 3,500 staff sharing their views with Trust leaders as part of the national NHS Staff Survey in 2017, representing a seven percent increase for City Hospitals Sunderland and a five percent increase for South Tyneside. This represents a significant increase in the staff engagement score at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust.
- Both Trusts now officially recognised as forces-friendly employers with South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust joining City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, in signing the Government's Armed Forces Covenant. The move signals a shared commitment to supporting the armed forces community.