

WELCOME TO OUR

# People Strategy

2025-2028



Safe **Kind** Effective

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## A message from Vicki Wilson, Chief People Officer and Wendy Williams, Non-Executive Director and Chair of People Committee



At the Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, our people are the driving force behind every success, every innovation, and every compassionate act of care. This People Strategy for 2025–2028 reflects our unwavering commitment to creating an environment where every individual feels supported, valued, and inspired to thrive.

This strategy is not just a document—it is a shared promise. It is built on what our people have told us matters most: wellbeing, inclusion, growth, and a culture of kindness and civility. We know that to deliver outstanding care, we must first take care of our own, ensuring our staff are healthy, empowered, and have the tools and support they need to be their best.

Over the next three years, we will focus on four key themes: looking after our people, creating a sense of belonging, developing our people to be their best, and building the future workforce. These themes are rooted in the NHS People Promise and shaped by feedback from across our Trust. They are also anchored in a strong belief that culture is everyone's responsibility—from the boardroom to the ward.

Our vision is to be not only a provider of outstanding care but also an exceptional place to work. Together, we will continue to build a workplace where people feel proud, safe, and supported to be and do their best.

Let's make Team Countess a place where everyone belongs, and where every colleague knows they matter.



**Vicki Wilson**  
*Chief People Officer*



**Wendy Williams, Non-Executive Director  
and Chair of People Committee**



## Introduction

At the Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust our people are at the heart of everything we do. We understand that our organisational strength and potential is our people and that it is through our people that we are able to create an inclusive, supportive, and high-performing workplace that enables our staff to provide outstanding care to our patients.

Our People Strategy sets out our commitment over the next three years to looking after each and every one of our almost 6,000 members of staff, volunteers and governors. The strategy is built on four key themes that align with the NHS People Plan, ensuring we create an environment where our workforce feels valued, empowered, and prepared for the future.

Influenced by your feedback, we know what we need to do to and how we are going to do it. We want to work together with staff, Staff Side colleagues and Staff Networks to make this Trust a great place to work. We hope the approach described in this document gives you the confidence that this Trust is a place where you want to come to work, care for patients, and can be proud to be part of Team Countess.



## About Us and Our People

The Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust includes the Countess of Chester Hospital – a 550-bed hospital which provides the full range of acute and specialist services, Ellesmere Port Hospital – a rehabilitation, intermediate and outpatient facility, and Tarporley War Memorial Hospital which is located 12 miles outside and provides community-based services to serve the local rural population.

The Trust provides acute emergency and elective services, primary care direct access services and obstetric services to a population of approximately 343,000 residents in Chester and West Cheshire which includes rural areas, Ellesmere Port and Neston as well as the Deeside area of Flintshire which has a population of just over 50,000.

The Trust employs almost 5,000 staff, has almost 1,000 temporary staff registered on its internal staff bank and over 100 volunteers.



## Our Vision

Our Trust vision is to achieve outstanding patient care for our patients and families.

The Trust's strategy, Transforming Care Together, sets out a commitment to improve patient care and ill health prevention through strong leadership, a positive culture and robust collaborations with partners across the NHS and social care.

Our vision for our people strategy is ***to make our Trust a great place to work.***

To achieve this, we need everyone taking responsibility for the culture, inclusivity and the success of the organisation as a whole. In order to move towards this goal, in 2024 we launched the Trust's civility statement which was voted for and chosen by our colleagues. Our chosen statement is:



*'We will always treat everyone with respect and kindness, be polite and professional, listen to them and help each other whenever we can'*

Following the launch of the civility statement, the Culture & Civility handbook was created with the aim to support colleagues to understand what civility is, its impact and the part that every team member plays in making the Trust a civil organisation.

You can read the civility handbook online on the intranet: [here](#).

## Our Values

The Trust's vision is supported by our ways of working and a program of continual learning and improvement. Our values underpin everything we do:

- **Safe:** at the heart of everything we do
- **Kind:** always caring and compassionate
- **Effective:** services that are responsive to our patients' needs.

## Our People Promise

Our **People Promise** sets out 7 things our staff should be able to say about working for us. Only by making Our People Promise a reality will we become the best place to work – where we are part of one team that brings out the very best in each other.

- We are compassionate and inclusive
- We are recognised and rewarded
- We each have a voice that counts
- We are safe and healthy
- We are always learning
- We work flexibly
- We are a team

For some colleagues, some parts of the Promise will already match their current experience. For others, it may still feel out of reach. We must all pledge to work together to make these ambitions a reality for all of us.

The people best placed to say when progress has been made are those who work in our Trust. We will continue to engage with our workforce to understand how we we're meeting these promises in the Trust. We ask quarterly through our People Pulse and again in the annual NHS Staff Survey which was redesigned to align with Our People Promise and we commit to listening and take action based on what we hear.



# Creating the Countess Culture

Creating and sustaining the right culture is central to everything we do at the Countess. Culture is the foundation of our success – shaping how we care for one another, how we perform, and how we deliver outstanding care to our patients and communities. It reflects both how people feel and how we behave. A positive culture is one that balances compassion with candour – ensuring kindness and respect are matched with clarity, consistency, and follow-through. Our aim is to foster a psychologically safe environment where people can speak up, learn from mistakes, and take responsibility with confidence and support.

To achieve our vision of being an outstanding place to work, we must build a culture where kindness, respect, and accountability sit side by side, and where every member of Team Countess feels safe, heard, and empowered to make a difference.

Over recent years, we have taken significant steps to strengthen leadership visibility, improve staff engagement, and promote civility and respect through initiatives such as our Civility Statement, Culture & Civility Handbook, and the High Performing Teams (TED) programme. These have helped to rebuild confidence and improve engagement. However, we acknowledge that deep-rooted cultural challenges remain. Inconsistent behaviours, variable accountability, and limited psychological safety in some teams continue to affect how people experience work.

Our data and staff feedback show that we are a culture in transition. To sustain progress, we must move beyond surface-level interventions. We will take a structured and evidence-based approach to developing the Countess Culture. Guided by the King's Fund Culture Framework and the NHS Culture and Leadership Programme (CLP), we will focus on strengthening six key characteristics of a healthy culture: vision and values, goals and performance, support and compassion, learning and innovation, effective teamwork, and collective leadership. This approach will be practical and embedded within our existing systems and processes, including leadership development, appraisals, team engagement, and staff experience processes, ensuring every leader models the values and behaviours we expect.

We will build capability across our organisation to hold constructive, compassionate conversations that promote both learning and accountability. Visible leadership, proactive listening, and partnership working with Staff Side and staff networks will remain at the heart of this work.



# 1. Looking After Our People

**Our Commitment:** *We will ensure that we create the conditions that enable our people to feel supported and well including a focus on health and wellbeing and attendance and support people to work in a way that enables them to balance their work and home life. We will act proactively to protect our people from violence and aggression and ensure that where incidents occur, our focus is on supporting people are ensuring organisational learning.*

We understand the importance of staff feeling healthy and well both physically and mentally and having the flexibility to balance their work and home life commitments. We recognise the need to more effectively manage workloads to help reduce burnout and fatigue amongst our workforce and will ensure that our managers are well equipped for this. We know there is more to do to address staff experience of violence and aggression, and we will prioritise work to ensure we take a robust and consistent approach to improve this. Where there are challenges, we will take a compassionate approach, in particular exercising discretion where patients may be cognitively impaired. We will increase opportunities for flexible working across our workforce and take advantage of digital solutions, for example e-rostering, to support in this area.

## Key Actions

- Violence and aggression: take proactive steps to ensure robust approach to managing staff experience of violence and aggression including creation of violence and aggression group with a focus on supporting staff and ensuring organisational learning.
- Management support: Delivery of Management Essentials programme to ensure that managers are equipped to effectively manage staff and workloads to help reduce burnout and fatigue, ensuring adequate rest and recovery time and a compassionate leadership approach.
- Health and wellbeing support: Expand access to occupational health and wellbeing, including psychological support and proactive health checks for staff.
- Flexible and agile working: Enhance flexible working options, including remote and hybrid working where possible, to support work-life balance.

## Measures of Success

- Reduction in violence and aggression towards staff
- Improved response to violence and aggression including evidence of staff support and sharing of organisational learning.
- Reduction in sickness absence rates and reduction in stress related absences
- Improved staff well-being scores in surveys
- Increased uptake of well-being initiatives
- Increased uptake of flexible working opportunities
- All managers having completed Management Essentials programme



## 2. Creating a Shared Sense of Belonging

**Our Commitment:** *We will foster an inclusive and diverse workplace where every individual feels respected and valued, our people are treated fairly, and any inequalities are addressed. We will support our people to feel safe and empowered to speak up and to feel proud and fully engaged in the work they do. We cannot be complacent and we will be proactive in addressing incivility, disrespect and bullying behaviours.*

We want our people to feel proud to be part of Team Countess, to feel that they are supported and valued for their individual and collective contributions. We know that there are currently unacceptable levels of violence and aggression towards our staff and will work hard to address this through our violence and aggression group. We are determined to see a reduction in behaviour related incidents and cases of bullying and will adopt a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of harassment, abuse and discrimination. We will continue to strengthen our approach to EDI, ensuring representation at all levels and addressing disparities in recruitment, pay, progression experience. We will do more to promote awareness campaigns and cultural events that highlight and celebrate the diversity of our workforce and foster a culture of inclusion and belonging. We recognise the contribution of our Trade Union colleagues and we will work together to strengthen our Staff Side and enhance our partnership working activities.

### Key Actions

- Continue to develop reward and recognition strategies with increased engagement from all areas of the organisation.
- Strengthen our EDI strategies, ensuring representation at all levels and addressing disparities in recruitment, pay, progression and experience.
- Increase awareness campaigns and cultural events that highlight and celebrate the diversity of our workforce
- Support development of Staff Side and partnership working arrangements.
- Expand and empower staff networks, ensuring diverse voices are heard and influence decision-making.
- Continue to promote opportunities for speaking up, understand and address potential barriers to speaking up and share learning when action is taken.

### Measures of Success

- Increased engagement with reward and recognition programmes
- Improved staff engagement and experience scores
- Higher representation of diverse groups in more senior roles
- Reduction in reported cases of bullying and discrimination, or behaviour related incidents, particularly in relation to minority staff groups.
- Increase in staff feedback and speaking up, including FTSU.
- Increased engagement in Staff Networks
- Increased Staff Side representatives and Staff Side engagement

### 3. Developing Our People to Be Their Best

**Our Commitment:** *We will support the continuous learning, development, and career progression of our workforce to enable them to reach their full potential.*

We recognise that developing our people's capability today, is creating the capacity to deliver care tomorrow. We will ensure all colleagues are able to participate in meaningful appraisals which support individual development and ensure every person has a clear development plan. We recognise the importance of high performing teams and will continue to support use of the Team Engagement & Development (TED) tool across all teams in the Trust. We are committed to being a learning organisation and will enhance our approach to learning when things don't go as expected and celebrating and learning from successes.

#### Key Actions

- Continued focus on appraisal process and rollout of quality of appraisal feedback as part of process
- Continued rollout of TED tool across all teams
- Build upon existing approach to learning when things don't go as expected and celebrating and learning from successes and promote awareness across all areas of the organisation.

#### Measures of Success

- Increased appraisal compliance and improved feedback on quality of appraisals
- Increased mandatory training scores
- Expand use of TED across all teams and increase in TED scores.
- Increased instances of organisational learning and greater sharing of lessons learned.
- Improved staff experience scores in staff survey areas relating to 'we are always learning' and 'we are a team'.

## 4. Building the Future Workforce

**Our Commitment:** *We will develop a sustainable, skilled, and adaptable workforce that meets the future needs of our patients and communities.*

We will use a data and evidence-based approach to predict workforce needs, address gaps in critical roles and utilise digital technologies to support productivity and efficiency of our workforce, including expanding our use of e-rostering and e-job planning. Our plans will include a focus on new roles, widening participation and development of career pathways.

### Key Actions

- Development of annual workforce plan to support annual operational planning
- Development of longer-term strategic workforce plan, aligned to the Trust's future Clinical Strategy.
- Increased use of apprenticeships for clinical and entry level roles and increase in advanced practice and new roles. Improved links between widening participation activities and future workforce needs.

### Measures of Success

- Annual workforce plan which is financial sustainable and aligned to actual workforce utilisation.
- Long term strategic workforce plan which is aligned to the Trust's future Clinical Strategy.
- Growth in apprenticeships and training placements, advanced practice and other new roles.
- Reduction in vacancy and turnover rates
- Improvement in recruitment and retention figures
- Reduction in premium rate temporary staffing solutions

# Developing People Services

We recognise that there is opportunity to enhance People Services and how we support the organisation. We have set a number of objectives for year one of our strategy (2025/26) to support us in doing this.

Area	Objective
<b>Resourcing</b>	Roll out of electronic rostering and e-job planning.
<b>Transactional HR</b>	Improve accessibility of transactional HR information and improve use of digital solutions to improve transactional processes.
<b>Business HR</b>	Implementation of HR Business Partner model to support divisional and corporate teams.
<b>Staff Experience</b>	Integrated approach to improving staff experience, aligned to the People Promise.
<b>Workforce Reporting</b>	Improved workforce reporting.



## Our People Priorities

Strand	Workstream	What will good look like?
<b>Creating the Countess Culture</b>	Culture & Leadership	An outstanding place to work with a culture where every colleague feels safe, valued and accountable – proud to work for Team Countess, confident to speak up, consistently living our values and delivery outstanding care.
<b>1. Looking after our people</b>	Health & wellbeing	Our people are safe, competent, healthy and well in their mental and physical wellbeing. Comprehensive health and wellbeing offer available including physical, mental and financial wellbeing to all staff
	Violence & aggression	The Trust consistently takes a robust approach to violence and aggression against staff, taking active steps to minimize risk and ensuring learning from incidents and support to staff.
	Flexible working	People are able to work flexibly in a way that balance home and work commitments. Flexible working by default and increase in number of people working flexibly.
	Management & Leadership Development	Managers have the essential skills and knowledge to support staff and demonstrate a compassionate leadership approach. All managers undertake Management Essentials programme and access relevant leadership development.
<b>2. Creating a sense of belonging</b>	Staff Experience	People are proud to work here, feel supported, recognised, equally valued and feel that they belong (improved staff experience measures, increased engagement with reward and recognition programmes).
	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)	A strong stance against bullying, harassment, and discrimination, with clear reporting mechanisms and accountability. Representation at all levels and addressing disparities in recruitment, pay, progression and experience. Reduction in cases of bullying and harassment or behaviour related incidents.

Strand	Workstream	What will good look like?
	Engagement and empowerment	<p>Expand and empower staff networks, ensuring diverse voices are heard and influence decision-making.</p> <p>Increased Staff Side representatives and Staff Side engagement.</p> <p>People feel able to speak up and understand the positive contribution speaking up makes (increase in staff feedback and FTSU).</p>
<b>3. Developing our people to be their best</b>	Performance management	All colleagues participating in meaningful appraisals (increase in appraisal completion & effectiveness ratings). Development for all colleagues to build on their potential.
	Team Development	High performing individuals and teams (improved TED scores).
	Organisational learning	Regular and proactive learning when things don't go as expected and celebrating and learning from successes.
<b>4. Building the future workforce</b>	Workforce planning	<p>Our services are appropriately staffed and financially sustainable (workforce plan).</p> <p>Our workforce plans look to the future, are agile and support the Transforming Care Together and the Trust's Clinical Strategy.</p>
	Building career pathways	<p>Increased use of apprenticeships for clinical and entry level roles and increase in advanced practice and new roles.</p> <p>Improved links between widening participation activities and future workforce needs.</p>

## How will we deliver this?

The development of this strategy has been led by the people function; however, it is co-owned and co-delivered together with our leaders, managers, staff and staff side colleagues.

Our high-level People Priorities, as reflected in this strategy, are included within this document. A 3-year People Strategy action plan has been developed to support us in delivering the ambitions we have set out. The People function will work closely with clinical divisions and corporate services so that we deliver on our promises to you and progress against this plan will be reported and monitored through the People Committee.

The People Strategy action plan also has a specific focus on improving performance across workforce key performance indicators - getting the basics right for our people. These indicators are split between regulatory targets as described by the NHS Oversight Framework and internally set Trust targets.

## Conclusion

This People Strategy sets out our commitment to making our Trust a great place to work. We will create a positive, inclusive, and high-performing workplace where our staff feel supported, valued, and empowered to deliver outstanding care. Working together, we will bring out the best in each other and create a culture where we can all be proud to be a part of Team Countess.







# 3-year plan

2025-2028

Safe **Kind** Effective



## People Strategy – 3-year plan

Strand	Workstream	What will good look like?	Year 1	Year 2/3	KPIs*
<b>Creating the Countess Culture</b>	Culture & Leadership	An outstanding place to work with a culture where every colleague feels safe, valued and accountable – proud to work for Team Countess, confident to speak up, consistently living our values and delivery outstanding care.	Delivery of CLP focusing on strengthening six key characteristics of a healthy culture.	Implementation of Leadership Strategy and interventions identified through CLP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved staff survey scores in relation to FTSU, engagement, leadership behaviours, feeling valued.</li> <li>Reduction in ER cases</li> </ul>
<b>Looking after our people</b>	Health & wellbeing	Our people are safe, competent, healthy and well in their mental and physical wellbeing. Comprehensive health and wellbeing offer available including physical, mental and financial wellbeing to all staff.	Expand access to occupational health and well-being, including psychological support.	Facilitate proactive health checks for staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in sickness absence rate and in stress related absences</li> <li>Increased uptake of well-being initiatives</li> <li>Reduction in V&amp;A incidents against staff.</li> <li>Increased number of standardised debriefs &amp; reporting learning.</li> <li>Improved staff well-being scores in surveys</li> </ul>
	Violence & aggression	The Trust consistently takes a robust approach to violence and aggression against staff, taking active steps to minimize risk and ensuring learning from incidents and support to staff.	Launch of V&A group, proactive management of risk, standardised debriefing, support to staff and approach to learning.	Expansion of training and support for staff to manage V&A and embedding of learning approach.	
	Flexible working	People are able to work flexibly in a way that balance home and work commitments. Flexible working by default and increase in number of people working flexibly.	Launch flexible working campaign.	Expand types of flexible working making use of digital systems to support teams (eg team rostering)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased uptake of flexible working opportunities</li> </ul>
	Management & Leadership Development	Managers have the essential skills and knowledge to support staff and demonstrate a compassionate leadership approach. All managers undertake Management Essentials programme and access relevant leadership development.	Develop and launch Manager Essentials programme.	Expand roll out to include aspiring managers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All managers having completed Management Essentials programme</li> </ul>

Strand	Workstream	What will good look like?	Year 1	Year 2/3	KPIs*
<b>Creating a sense of belonging</b>	Staff Experience	People are proud to work here, feel supported, recognised, equally valued and feel that they belong (improved staff experience measures, increased engagement with reward and recognition programmes).	Develop reward and recognition offer with increased engagement. Create calendar of events and increase number of campaigns supported.	Increase Trust wide engagement with R&R initiatives. Further increase number and diversity of campaigns supported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased engagement with R&amp;R programmes</li> <li>• Improved staff engagement and experience scores</li> </ul>
	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)	A strong stance against bullying, harassment, and discrimination, with clear reporting mechanisms and accountability. Representation at all levels and addressing disparities in recruitment, pay, progression and experience. Reduction in cases of bullying and harassment or behaviour related incidents.	Embedding Civility & Respect campaign with focus on speaking out to challenge incivility or bullying behaviours. Positive action to address underrepresentation.	Promote positive role modelling and demonstrate impact across organisation to support embedding of culture change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in cases of bullying, discrimination, or behaviour related incidents, particularly in relation to minority staff groups.</li> <li>• Higher representation of diverse groups in more senior roles</li> </ul>
	Engagement and empowerment	Expand and empower staff networks, ensuring diverse voices are heard and influence decision-making.	Support the expansion and engagement of networks.	Enhance the role of staff networks and partnership working arrangements in influencing organisational decision making and driving cultural change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased Staff Side representatives and Staff Side engagement</li> </ul>
		Increased Staff Side representatives and Staff Side engagement.	Support development of Staff Side and partnership working.	Improve sharing of organisational learning from speaking up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased engagement in Staff Networks</li> </ul>
		People feel able to speak up and understand the positive contribution speaking up makes (increase in staff feedback and FTSU).	Continue to promote opportunities for speaking up, understand and address potential barriers to speaking up.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in staff feedback and speaking up, including FTSU.</li> </ul>
<b>Developing our people to be their best</b>	Performance management	All colleagues participating in meaningful appraisals (increase in appraisal completion & effectiveness ratings). Development for all colleagues to build on their potential.	Continued focus on appraisal process compliance and rollout of quality of appraisal feedback.	Further enhance appraisal process based on learning from quality of appraisal feedback analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased appraisal compliance and improved feedback on quality of appraisals</li> </ul>

Strand	Workstream	What will good look like?	Year 1	Year 2/3	KPIs*
	Team Development	High performing individuals and teams (improved TED scores).	Prioritised rollout of High Performing Teams / TED tool.	Expand rollout of High Performing Teams / TED tool across organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased mandatory training scores</li> <li>Expand use of TED across all teams and increase in TED scores.</li> <li>Increased instances of organisational learning.</li> <li>Improved staff survey scores in 'we are always learning' and 'we are a team'.</li> </ul>
	Organisational learning	Regular and proactive learning when things don't go as expected and celebrating and learning from successes.	Build upon existing approach to learning when things don't go as expected	Celebrating and learning from successes and promote awareness across all areas of the organisation.	
<b>Building the future workforce</b>	Workforce planning	Our services are appropriately staffed and financially sustainable (workforce plan). Our workforce plans look to the future, are agile and support the Transforming Care Together and the Trust's Clinical Strategy.	<p>Implementation of medical e-roster. Rollout of e-roster for clinical areas (shifts)</p> <p>Development of e-job plans for medics.</p> <p>Annual workforce plan.</p>	<p>Increase e-rostering level of attainment.</p> <p>Use of job plans in other clinical areas, eg specialist nursing. Development strategic workforce plan, aligned to Clinical Strategy. Increase in advanced practice and new roles and development of clear career pathways for nursing.</p> <p>Development of additional apprenticeship programmes in E&amp;F, admin and digital.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levels of attainment for nursing &amp; medical workforce</li> <li>% clinical staff with job plans</li> <li>Annual workforce plan on track.</li> <li>Long term strategic workforce plan which is aligned to the Trust's future Clinical Strategy.</li> <li>Growth in apprenticeships and training placements.</li> <li>Increase in advanced practice and new roles.</li> <li>Improvement in vacancy and turnover rates for high turnover roles.</li> <li>Reduction in premium rate temporary staffing</li> </ul>
	Building career pathways	Increased use of apprenticeships for clinical and entry level roles and increase in advanced practice and new roles. Improved links between widening participation activities and future workforce needs.	Increase use of apprenticeships for clinical and entry level roles including development of HCSW apprenticeship programme.		

\*Specific KPI targets will be identified within the People Strategy dashboard to support monitoring (under development).