

NDHT and RD&E a stage closer to formally joining together

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust (NDHT) and the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust (RD&E) have received the go-ahead from NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) to continue working on plans to formally join together.

In November 2020, both Boards approved a 'Strategic Case' which sets out how the Trusts propose to become a single integrated organisation and submitted it to NHSEI for review. This formal document signalled the organisations' intent to join together and set out the benefits this would provide for patients, staff and local communities.

The approval to proceed from NHSE/I means the organisations can now proceed to develop an Integration Business Case which will describe in more detail how the two organisations become a single integrated organisation working across Northern and Eastern Devon for the benefit of both communities.

Suzanne Tracey, chief executive of both NDHT and the RD&E said:

"This is a really exciting and important milestone to have reached that now paves the way for moving to the next more-detailed assessment on how we now bring the two organisations together.

"From the outset, the partnership between NDHT and the RD&E has been focused on benefitting patients and staff across Northern and Eastern Devon. Both trusts face many of the same challenges – ensuring we have enough staff, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, managing our waiting lists and transforming services. We have already made progress on many of these areas by working together through enhanced collaboration. However, there is growing evidence that we can be even more successful and resilient if we come together as a single organisation to meet these challenges."

NDHT has a track record of innovation and adaptability, partly due to its size, but also borne from a culture of necessity as the global healthcare skills shortages affect smaller hospitals more significantly. At the RD&E, there is a track record of excellence in research, teaching and links to the university and it has established a positive reputation for many of its clinical services.

Suzanne added: "Both trusts have something to offer the other, and it is clear that our strengthened partnership can make a real difference to our communities and staff across Northern and Eastern Devon.

“We will ensure the integration process builds on the best of both organisations, respects differences and engenders mutual respect, and engages with and listens to the voices of staff and the communities we serve as we develop our future direction as a single organisation.”

The go-ahead from the NHS regulators marks the start of a programme of work to plan how the organisations integrate, with an aim to become a single organisation from April 2022. This will align to other strategic areas of work, including the estates investment for NDDH through the Government’s Health Infrastructure Plan, aspirations to create a common digital electronic patient record across NDHT and RD&E, and work underway to develop a shared clinical strategy across the SEND network (Southern, Eastern and Northern Devon).

The Trusts have committed to providing regular updates and will set out the opportunities for interested stakeholders to be involved in this process.

ENDS

Background

NDHT and RD&E have a long-standing partnership. The RD&E has supported the delivery of acute services in Northern Devon for a number of years through clinical networking arrangements to ensure patients in Northern Devon have local access to specialist care.

In June 2018, this arrangement was strengthened as part of a Collaborative Agreement which supported NDHT to address some of the challenges faced in providing acute services from the most remote hospital in mainland England.

In December 2019, the Boards of Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust and the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust agreed that the two organisations would explore joining together on a more formal basis.