NHS
Somerset
NHS Foundation Trust

Report from the Lead Governor for 2025-2026

During 2025/26, the Council of Governors continued to develop its role in line with ongoing collaboration across acute hospitals, mental health, and community services, ensuring that patients throughout Somerset have their needs heard. The Council was also reformed and reduced in size to respond more effectively to the changes anticipated through the NHS 10-Year Health Plan. The newly structured Council will now refocus on its two key statutory areas.

1. Ensuring effective and unambiguous feedback and engagement with the general public, and presenting their concerns and comments to the Trust Executive.
2. Continuing to ensure that the Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) hold the Board to account by engaging in Board and committee meetings as required.

Governors also participate in the following key activities, which help ensure that the Trust Executive remains focused on the Trust's core objectives.

1. Governors attend the Board meetings on a rotational basis, which reassures Governors that the NEDs regularly challenge the executives.
2. Governors are invited to join leadership walkarounds across acute, community, and mental health wards. These are undertaken by an Executive, a NED, and a Governor, who speak with staff and patients and observe both issues requiring attention and examples of good practice. The walkarounds also allow Governors to see NEDs at work and to gain assurance that Executives are being held to account.
3. The Lead and Deputy Lead Governors hold monthly meetings with the Chair and the Deputy Chair. This provides an effective conduit for information to pass between Governors and executives, ensuring that Governors are kept informed of developments within the Trust.
4. A Governor representative attends the Finance and Audit Committee and the Governance and People Strategy Committee. It is hoped that, over the next year, two Governors will be able to attend these committees as observers on a rotational basis.
5. A Governor representative also sits on the Mental Health Legislation Committee.

Given SFT's extensive geographical footprint and the distances involved in attending face-to-face meetings, formal Council of Governors meetings and development half-days have been consolidated into full-day quarterly events. This has made meetings more time- and cost-effective, while helping Governors build their knowledge and understanding of developments within the Trust. Governors remain impressed by staff dedication to providing excellent healthcare to the people of Somerset. Looking ahead, we plan to hold monthly development sessions and working groups between quarterly Council meetings to support wider Governor participation and stronger engagement with the restructured Council.

The relationship that Governors have with their constituents is increasingly important. Governors are now holding Governor surgeries throughout the Trust, including at Musgrove Park Hospital, Yeovil District Hospital, South Petherton, Shepton Mallet, Minehead and other sites.

These surgeries allow constituents to ask questions and gain a better understanding of the Governor role. They also help encourage Trust membership, giving people more knowledge of the Trust and how it seeks to meet the needs of the people of Somerset. Our plan is to re-energise this work during the coming year to gain greater input from patients and their families across Somerset.

During the year, Governors attended a number of leadership walkarounds to meet colleagues and patients across the Trust, hear concerns and issues, and understand areas of best practice. In this year's series of walkarounds, communication was the most frequently raised concern among colleagues, some of whom felt they did not understand where the Trust was going or their place within it. Feedback from patients was generally positive; however, concerns were raised about ward cleanliness and discharge.

The Council of Governors closely monitored the CQC's concerns about maternity, paediatric, and neonatal services, as well as the temporary closure of Yeovil maternity/Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) services. As a Council, we are profoundly grateful to the entire Trust maternity team for their commitment to patient care throughout this difficult period. We continue to monitor the situation now that the Yeovil maternity unit has reopened. The Council continues to monitor and support patient safety learning, and we welcome the Trust's objective to embed PSIRF learning into all improvement plans going forward.

Our Staff Governors are a vital part of the Council, and we are very grateful for the time they give us despite their extremely busy work schedules. Their input is invaluable, as they provide Governors with a unique perspective on their working lives and the challenges they face in an increasingly demanding health environment. We remain concerned, however, that not all Staff Governors are given sufficient time by their respective line managers to support the Council's work, and this will be a focus in the coming year.

The executive team has ensured that Governors have benefited from the open and inclusive culture at Somerset Foundation Trust throughout this year. We look forward to working together during what will be another challenging year as we implement the expected changes arising from the NHS 10-Year Health Plan. I would like to thank my Deputy Lead Governor for her wise and helpful support during the short time we have led the newly structured Council, and I look forward to the year ahead. I would also like to thank Kate Butler and Jack Torr for their leadership at the beginning of the 2025/26 period and for their tremendous help with the transition to the new leadership team.

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Finally, I would like to thank all Governors who, throughout the year, have attended meetings and made such a valuable contribution, ensuring that the statutory duties of Governors have been met. The entire Council would also like to thank all our support staff, who have worked tirelessly over the past year; without them, we would not be able to perform our duties.

Stuart Goble
Lead Governor

Appendix 1: Update on Membership Strategy
Appendix 2: Changes in Governors
Appendix 3: Council of Governors' Proceedings

APPENDIX 1

Update on Membership Strategy

The trust recognise the importance of having a strong and engaged membership. With approximately 26,000 members (public and staff combined), the Trust has access to local communities and staff perspectives, helping to inform and improve services.

The Membership Strategy for 2023-26 came into effect on 1 April 2023. The focus of the Strategy has been to improve meaningful engagement with members, with key activities including the Annual Members' Meeting and oversight of membership engagement through the Governor-led working groups.

The Membership Strategy for 2023-26 remains in place and continues to guide the Trust's approach to member engagement. A review and refresh of the Strategy had been planned for 2026. However, given the potential changes to NHS legislation and the future role of Foundation Trust membership currently being considered nationally through the proposed Health Act Bill, it has been agreed to defer the review until 2027. This will ensure that any revised strategy, or alternative approach to membership engagement, reflects the national policy position and legislative framework once confirmed.

APPENDIX 2

CHANGES IN GOVERNORS

The Council of Governors is required to report on any changes which have taken place since the last annual meeting and below an overview of the changes over the period 30 September 2025 to 16 September 2026.

Appointed Governors

The organisations eligible to nominate Appointed Governors are set out in the Constitution. Between 30 September 2025 to 16 September 2026 there have been the following changes to the governors:

- For the Somerset Council, one appointed Governor stepped down due to personal reasons:
  - Val Keitch
- For the Somerset Council, one new appointed governor joined the Council on the 23 October 2025:
  - Sarah Wakefield
- For the Somerset Integrated Care Board, one appointed Governor stepped down due to changes in the Cluster Board / ICB Board terms of reference:
  - Caroline Gamlin
- For the Somerset Integrated Care Board, one new appointed Governor joined the Council on the 12 August 2026:
  - Grahame Paine
- For the Universities, one appointed Governor came to the end of his term and chose to step down:
  - Jos Latour
- For the Universities, one new appointed Governor joined the Council on the 11 June 2026:
  - Chrissie Thirlwell

Public and Staff Governors

Governor changes outside of elections and Governor elections April 2026

At its meeting on 17 December 2025, the Council of Governors approved proposals to reduce the size of the Council as part of transitional arrangements in response to anticipated national changes to Foundation Trust governance. The proposal was

approved by a majority vote, with 15 of the 29 Governors present supporting the recommendation.

The revised arrangements were implemented through the 2026 Governor elections. Where constituencies retained vacancies within the revised Council structure, Governors reaching the end of their term of office were eligible to stand for re-election. In constituencies where the number of Governor positions had been reduced, vacancies arising at the end of a Governor's term were not refilled.

During the year, a number of Governors completed their terms of office, some sought and secured re-election, and a small number stood down before the end of their term. Details are set out below.

Governors whose terms of office concluded:

- Virgina Membrey
- Alison James
- Eddie Nicolas
- Ian Hawkins
- Sarah Duncan
- Peter Shorland
- Phil Hodgson-Purves
- Adekunle Akinola
- Halley Kimber-Keirle
- Heather Sparks
- Jonathan Moore
- Sun Sander-Jackson
- Robert Williams
- Lydia Karamura

In April, the trust held an election to fill:

- 1 x full term for Mendip Governor
- 1 x half term for Mendip Governor
- 1 x Dorset
- 4 x full terms for Staff Governors

The following new governors were elected:

- Alison Cooke (Public Governor for Mendip)
- Joan Burgen (Public Governor Dorset)
- Mary Ugah (New Staff Governor)
- Kate Greenwood (New Staff Governor)

Governors re-elected for a further term of office:

- Julie Reeve (Re-elected Staff Governor)
- Joe Silsby (Re-elected Staff Governor)

Other Changes to Council membership during the year:

- Jeanette Keech, public governor for Somerset West and Taunton, sadly passed away during their term of office. The Council places on record its appreciation for their contribution and service to the Trust.

- Jude Glide, public governor for Dorset, stepped down on 18 February 2026, during their term of office. The vacancy was not filled at the elections and remains vacant.

The Council of Governor held a vote to appoint a new Lead and Deputy Lead Governor.

- Stuart Goble was successfully appointed as Lead Governor
- Jessica Cross was successfully appointed as Deputy Lead Governor

APPENDIX 3

COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS' PROCEEDINGS COVERING THE PERIOD

1 SEPTEMBER 2025 TO 31 AUGUST 2026

SOMERSET NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

The Council of Governors met six times between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026.

The Council of Governors met on 19 September 2025, 17 December 2025, 23 February 2026, 18 March 2026, 13 May 2026, and 25 June 2026.

The standard agenda items for the scheduled meetings are:

- Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising.
- Public Register of Council of Governors' Interests.
- Chairman Update; including Council of Governors meeting attendance and statutory duties of Governors 2024/25.
- Performance report from the Board of Directors.
- Chief Executive Report
- Feedback from working groups – Strategy and Planning Group; the People Group; the Quality and Patient Experience Group; Membership, Involvement and Communications Group; and the Nominations and Remuneration Committee.
- Feedback from Governors, including Staff Governors.

The remaining items discussed at the Council of Governors meetings are set out below:

September 2025

- Ratified the appointment of the Lead Governor and Deputy Lead Governor.
- Received and considered the Trust's 2024/25 Annual Report, Annual Accounts and Quality Account, together with the External Auditor's reports and opinion.
- Received updates on Governor activities and priorities for the forthcoming year.

December 2025

- Approved the Future Governance Arrangements Transition Proposal and associated amendments to the Trust Constitution.
- Received an update on Governor elections and future governance arrangements.
- Received presentations from the Learning Disability, Autism and ADHD services.

February 2026 (Extraordinary Confidential Meeting)

- Approved the process and arrangements for the recruitment of Non-Executive Directors.

March 2026

- Received an update on the redesign and future delivery of community services.
- Considered the Trust's priorities for 2026/27, including workforce matters and NHS Staff Survey results.
- Received an update on Governor elections and recognised Governors completing their terms of office.

May 2026 (Extraordinary Confidential Meeting)

- Approved revised Terms of Reference for the Nominations and Remuneration Committee.
- Approved the appointment of the Deputy Chair and considered matters relating to Chair remuneration.
- Approved the appointment of Non-Executive Directors.

June 2026

- Approved the appointment of the Lead Governor and Deputy Lead Governor and welcomed newly elected Governors to the Council.
- Received an update on the Trust's Corporate Strategy and future priorities.
- Considered Governor engagement arrangements and the future structure of Governor working groups.