

**Minutes of the Council of Governors' meeting
held at 14:00 on Thursday 25 September 2025,
Orwell Room, Kesgrave Community and Conference Centre.**

Present:

Mark Millar	Interim Chair
Helen Rose	Public Governor, Lead Governor
John Alborough	Public Governor, Rest of Suffolk
Caroline Bowden	Public Governor, Colchester
Peter Coleman	Public Governor, Rest of Suffolk
Isaac Ferneyhough	Staff Governor
Paul Gaffney	Public Governor, Ipswich
Sam Glover	Stakeholder Governor, Healthwatch Essex
Rebecca Hopfensperger	Appointed Governor, Suffolk County Council
Verity Jolly	Public Governor, Ipswich
Pride Mukungurutse	Staff Governor
Sara Naylor	Appointed Governor, Colchester City Council
Martin Nixon	Public Governor, Rest of Essex
Light Onyekachi	Staff Governor
Gillian Orves	Public Governor, Rest of Suffolk
Jane Simpson	Appointed Governor, Integrated Care System – Anglia Care Trust
Allison Weston	Staff Governor

In attendance:

George Chalkias	Director of Governance
David Eagles	Non-Executive Director
Ann Filby	Trust Secretary
Paul Little	Strategic Director for Service Development
Richard Spencer	Deputy Chair and Senior Independent Director
Lucy Bryanton	EA to Chief Executive – minutes

Apologies for absence:

Roger Blake	Staff Governor
David Guest	Public Governor, Colchester
Jane Hadlow	Public Governor, Colchester
Tim Newton	Public Governor, Rest of Suffolk
Laura da Rita	Committee and Membership Secretary

Para no		Action
Section 1 – Chair's Business		
20/25	<p>1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Mark Millar welcomed the Council and confirmed that it was the last meeting for Richard Spencer, Helen Rose's, John Alborough and Peter Coleman. He thanked the Governors who were ending their term of office for their contributions over the years.</p>	
21/25	<p>2. Chief Executive's Briefing on Trust activities</p> <p>Paul Little provided an overview of the newly launched National Oversight Framework, which assesses Trusts across six domains, access to services, effectiveness and experience of care, patient safety, people and workforce, finance and productivity and improving health and health inequality. The framework is still evolving and is updated quarterly. Trusts are segmented into four categories, with a fifth reserved for those in special measures.</p> <p>ESNEFT was initially rated Segment 2 during the pilot phase but has since moved to Segment 3 due to changes in metrics. Nationally, ESNEFT ranks mid-table (86 out of 134 Trusts). Trusts in financial deficit or off-plan cannot be rated in Segment 1 or 2.</p>	

Regionally, only three providers are in Segment 1 or 2, typically those without Emergency Departments.

Key challenges for ESNEFT include patient waiting times and hospital-acquired infections.

Sara Naylor asked for details of the specific actions being taken to address waiting times and infections. Paul responded that Catherine Morgan is in discussions with Sodexo, and timelines will be shared when available. He also noted that Surgical division changes are expected to reduce waiting times. This remains a key focus for the Executive Leadership Team.

Mark emphasised that the Board is focused on delivering the agreed plans for the benefit of our patients.

It was noted that emergency care remains a significant challenge, particularly at Colchester, where bed capacity is an issue. Ipswich has seen investment, but capacity is yet to be fully realised. Productivity metrics are currently impacting the Trust's rating and Epic implementation was noted as disruptive but essential for long-term improvement.

Isaac Ferneyhough expressed concern over the NOF rating and requested a clear plan for improvement. He did feel that there was now a measure against which the Trust can be assessed. Mark Millar clarified that governors were briefed at the informal meeting prior to publication. This was discussed at the Board, and a detailed report was reviewed at the Performance and Finance Committee and can be presented to the full Council if needed.

Sara Naylor requested more detailed assurance measures for governors. Mark confirmed that existing processes are in place and that relevant Board Committees are reviewing domain-specific metrics, observed by governors.

Sam Glover stressed the importance of narrative alongside metrics.

Richard Spencer supported ongoing Committee scrutiny and welcomed the NOF as a tool for accountability. Caroline Bowden advised that she had observed the recent Performance and Finance Committee meeting and felt reassured by the seriousness and depth of the investigation.

Mark Millar noted that alongside the NOF, the Trust will undertake a CQC Well-led self-assessment in the autumn and there are continued internal performance reviews.

Paul Little talked about the Neighbourhood Scheme, aimed at shifting care from acute settings to the community. ESNEFT has been selected to pilot this initiative, supported by the Integrated Care Board, Primary Care Network (PCN) Directors, and local councils. It builds on work in North East Essex (NEE) and aims to reduce demand on acute services through better integration with primary care.

Sara Naylor raised concerns about the implementation gap and asked about modelling and impact measurement. Paul Little explained that the business plan is in development. Early case studies show promising results, with Birmingham reporting a 50% reduction in admissions for certain cohorts. Despite this, bed shortages at Colchester remain a concern.

Paul Gaffney asked about alignment with existing programmes. Paul Little confirmed that the new scheme will bolster existing initiatives.

Mark reiterated the importance of keeping people out of hospital safely and building on current infrastructure and teams thanking Paul for the update.

22/25	<p>3. Declarations of Interest No additional interests were declared. However, Ann Filby gave a reminder that annual declaration of interests forms are due and had been requested and Governors were asked to ensure this was completed. It will form part of the revised induction process to include new Governors.</p>	
23/25	<p>4. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2025 The minutes were approved as an accurate record.</p>	
24/25	<p>5. Matters Arising from the minutes and action log The action log was updated as appropriate.</p>	
25/25	<p>6. Report from the Trust Chair Mark Millar provided governors a brief update and thanked them for their ongoing support and contribution to the Trust.</p> <p>Helen Rose questioned a recent visit by some Executive Directors to Epic's headquarters in the United States, and the declarations of interest made. The Director of Governance explained that the visit was organised by Epic, the Trust's contracted EPR provider, as part of their global engagement programme to support learning and collaboration across the Epic community. Further detail would be provided.</p>	AF
Assurance and Accountability		
26/25	<p>7. Board Proceedings Report George Chalkias provided an update on several key matters. He began by reflecting on the recent visit of the Princess of Wales to Colchester, noting its significance for the Trust. He outlined the Trust's strategic planning and the enhanced approach being taken to improve service delivery and to meet the requirements of the recently published 10-year health plan. Reference was made to the Joint Productivity Board which had been established following the publication of recommendations in the SNEE Sustainability Review. George also addressed the implications of changes to the MARS (Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme) and immigration policies, highlighting their potential impact on workforce planning. A report had also been provided on ESNEFT's role as an anchor organisation, emphasising the growing role in supporting community health and wellbeing.</p> <p>The Council noted the proceedings and decisions of the Board.</p>	
27/25	<p>8. Verbal Reports from Board Committees</p>	
	a) Performance and Finance Committee – Paul Gaffney noted that, although the meeting was lengthy, it was constructive and productive.	
	b) Quality and Patient Safety Committee – no comments were received	
	c) People and Organisational Development Committee – no comments were received	
	d) Audit and Risk Committee - Helen Rose read out an email from a governor who had observed the committee meeting. The observer commended the quality of questions raised, particularly by Richard Spencer, and noted that issues around cyber security was addressed effectively. The committee was described as critical and well-run.	
	<p>e) Charitable Funds Committee – Jane Simpson reported that the meeting was well chaired, heartfelt, and informative. Questions were proportionate, and the overall tone was positive.</p> <p>Helen Rose encouraged Governors to share any activity or involvement and hopes this will continue after her departure.</p>	

28/25	<p>9. Report from Lead Governor</p> <p>Helen Rose had nothing further to add to the written report, except to highlight the importance of the final paragraph and confirmed it had been a privilege to work alongside each of our Essex and Suffolk Governors, our team of Staff Governors and those Governors appointed by organisations across the ESNEFT patch.</p>	
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Governance		
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29/25	<p>10. Council of Governors’ effectiveness review and Terms of Reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointments and Performance Committee • Standards Committee • Membership and Engagement Working Group <p>Ann Filby opened the item by expressing her appreciation for the work of the Governors and emphasising its importance and for the number of Governors who took the time to respond to this annual survey. She summarised the findings of the effectiveness review, noting that most governors strongly agreed with the statements presented, and areas of improvement were highlighted. While positive feedback was received, particularly regarding Helen Rose’s contributions, some concerns were raised by individual governors, prompting a discussion on potential solutions. The main areas of focus relate to holding to account and how the Council delivers that and the future timing of Council meetings.</p> <p>Isaac Ferneyhough raised a point about how each Trust must determine its own approach to discharging responsibilities, and to agree what good looks like. Ann advised that a review had been undertaken into Governor observers at Board committee meetings from January to June and of the committees reviewed, eight had two or more governors present, five had one, and seven had none. It was acknowledged that while this system can provide assurance relating to how the Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) chair the committees and provide constructive challenge, it relies on consistent attendance and thorough reporting. Alternatives such as committee chairs providing feedback were considered, though concerns were raised about overburdening Non-Executive Directors who were appointed to provide four days per month. Ann welcomed Governors’ thoughts on how to proceed prior to membership being confirmed for the new Council</p> <p>Sara Naylor suggested that hearing directly from committee chairs could add valuable insight, while Mark clarified that assurance is primarily provided to the Board.</p> <p>A broader conversation followed about governor engagement, with some expressing difficulty in observing NEDs effectively. John noted that observation alone can feel disengaging, whereas Richard Spencer recommended post-meeting conversations with NEDs to build relationships and to enhance understanding. Mark supported this approach and encouraged Governors to attend assurance committees. Ann explained that governors are sent the meeting papers and are matched to meetings based on their interests. David Eagles added that chairs welcome feedback and engagement. Allison Weston agreed that setting aside time for this purpose would be beneficial. There is no substitute for Governors observing the discussion.</p> <p>Mark Millar concluded by recommending that Governors continue their observation of assurance committees and adopt Richard’s suggestion of post-meeting discussions with NEDs rather than providing feedback at the end of the meeting. He also encouraged NEDs to share updates on their work. George Chalkias raised concerns about information governance (IG) issues when excluding governors from certain meetings, which Mark clarified would only occur in exceptional cases.</p> <p>In relation to providing more information regarding NEDs, Ann Filby confirmed that this element would be enhanced in the induction scheduled in November.</p> <p>The timing of Council meetings was also discussed, with general support for later afternoon virtual meetings to accommodate working governors. Allison Weston</p>	
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	<p>queried the availability of information in advance, and diversity in governor recruitment was acknowledged as an ongoing effort, with an invitation for further suggestions.</p> <p>Comments regarding lead roles will be incorporated into the induction process.</p> <p>The Council is approved the outcome of its annual effectiveness review, agreed to continue to observe Board committees ensuring that those allocated made every effort to attend, agreed that one meeting in 2026/27 would be held later afternoon and approved the revised Terms of Reference.</p>	AF
30/25	<p>11. Council of Governors Elections</p> <p>Ann Filby provided an overview of the Council of Governors election process, confirming that pre-nomination engagement had been positive and resulted in a good number of candidates, with more diversity than had been demonstrated previously. She provided the results received on 24 September, which would be published on the Trust's website. It was noted that while the staff governor return rate was lower, this is not directly comparable to other categories.</p> <p>Mark Millar thanked Governors for standing in the elections and reflected on those existing Governors who had not been successfully re-elected and thanked them for their commitment to the role.</p>	
31/25	<p>12. Interim Lead and Deputy Lead Governor</p> <p>A requirement for an interim Lead and Deputy Lead Governor was noted, prior to the new Council electing to the roles. David Guest proposed as Interim Lead Governor, supported by Caroline Bowden as Interim Deputy Lead Governor, both of whom would be supported by Verity Jolly.</p> <p>The Council approved the appointment of David Guest as the Interim Lead and Caroline Bowden as Interim Deputy Lead Governor from 1 November 2025 until 31 January 2026.</p>	
32/25	<p>13. Annual General Meeting/Annual Members' Meeting agenda</p> <p>Ann Filby confirmed that the Annual Report had been laid before Parliament and that preparations were underway to present the report at the AGM/AMM scheduled for 12 November at Kesgrave Community Centre. Discussions on the clinical presentation included the inclusion of ESEOC and children's services, with a suggestion to feature another service area and the draft agenda was presented.</p> <p>The Council confirmed the agenda.</p>	
Appointments and Performance		
33/25	<p>14. Appointments and Performance Committee report</p> <p>Ann Filby presented the report outlining the discussions undertaken at this statutory committee. Reporting is included within the mandatory requirements in the Annual Report.</p> <p>The Council noted the decisions made at the Committee.</p>	
Membership and engagement		
34/25	<p>15. Membership and Engagement Working Group Update</p> <p>Martin Nixon provided an update on recent engagement activities, highlighting the success of the health talk on diabetes and emphasising the importance of continuing such initiatives. He also reported positively on the Tendring Show.</p> <p>Ann Filby noted the need to reschedule a planned meeting and thanked Martin for his contributions as Chair of the working group, acknowledging the progress made and the availability of stands and promotional materials for Governors to use in their engagement.</p>	

35/25	16. Governor Activities Update Caroline Bowden shared her experience of attending several advisory group meetings, noting that they offered a fresh perspective and were highly valuable. She encouraged other Governors to participate, highlighting the benefit of engaging with different formats and materials, such as posters, which broaden understanding and insight.	
Briefing		
36/25	There were no items for consideration.	
Public Questions		
37/25	17. Questions from members of the public present There were no members of the public present at the meeting.	
38/25	18. Any Other Business The Council formally acknowledged Helen Rose's contributions, with a presentation made in recognition of her service. Mark Millar expressed his thanks on behalf of the Council as Helen prepares to step down from her role as Lead Governor.	
39/25	19. Date of next meeting Annual General Meeting/Annual Members' Meeting, 2:30 pm – 5:00 pm, Wednesday 12 November 2025, Kesgrave Community Centre. The next meeting of the Council of Governors will take place on Wednesday 10 December 2025, 2pm, Kingsland Church Community Centre, Colchester.	

Approved: 10 December 2025 **TBC**

Chair Mark Millar

Disclaimer: The minutes do not necessarily reflect the order of business as it was considered.