

NHSI Aspirant Chair Case Study

Summer 2019

The NHSI Aspirant Chair scheme is flexible and largely candidate led; allowing the 'aspirant' and Chair to develop opportunities and appropriate experience relevant to the role. This is supplemented by a quarterly networking and development event run by NHS Improvement and NHS England, showcasing best practice and providing supplementary training and support.

Case Study – Cathy Elliott, 2018/19 Aspirant Chair Cohort

From the 2018/19 cohort, Cathy Elliott was appointed to the role of Chair of Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust in May 2019, commencing the role in September 2019.

When joining the scheme, Cathy had served as a Non Executive Director with Tameside & Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust in Greater Manchester for two years, building on a past career in voluntary sector senior leadership and national charity Board roles. Her current portfolio of work includes the continuation of a Ministerial appointment as an independent Chair for a national funding programme with the Department for Transport as well as her new NHS Chair role and national charity consultancy roles.

“I was delighted to be invited to join the NHSI Aspirant Chair programme. The variety of support and information provided was very welcomed, including an engaged mentor, tailored articles, regular seminars with expert speakers and direct support when applying for a role. Learning from the lived experience of current and past NHS Chairs balanced with the results of quality research gave helpful insights into the reality and expectations of being a Chair.”

Cathy Elliott, Incoming Chair of Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust Summer 2019

Preparing for the Chair Recruitment Process

Before applying for the role of Chair with Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust, Cathy first sent her CV to the recruitment agent to test her suitability for the role. The agent confirmed her being a potential candidate of interest and gave some initial background information on what the Trust was looking for.

Cathy read the Trust's strategy summary, visited their website and read the summary of the Trust's recent CQC inspection to inform her application as well as addressing in her covering letter and CV all the elements in the candidate pack. This might all sound obvious things to do, but tailoring her application demonstrated an understanding of the Trust and an interest in working for them.

Going through the Chair Recruitment Process

Long-List Stage: Cathy was invited to a Long List interview with the recruitment agent to discuss her CV, career highlights and motivations in applying for the role. The interview of around an hour provided an opportunity to find out about the Trust's ideal candidate and to discuss any gaps in her application which would need to be addressed if Short-Listed to the next stage. In advance of the interview Cathy arranged a call with her Aspirant Chair mentor to discuss her experiences during the early stages of the Chair recruitment process which proved helpful.

Whilst waiting to hear whether Cathy had been selected for a Short-List interview, the recruitment agent invited Cathy to arrange calls with the Trust's current Chair and Chief Executive. Cathy took up these opportunities, preparing points for discussion and questions to inform her knowledge of the Trust, including its opportunities and challenges. Within days of the phone calls Cathy was invited to

a selection day which included a Short List panel interview. There was also an offer to visit a service before the selection day which Cathy took up and combined it with a face to face meeting with the current Chair.

“If you’re offered an opportunity for any added extras throughout the selection process, such as a phone call, meeting or service visit, then I advise taking it up or even asking for them. It provides helpful information about the organisation to inform you and demonstrates your interest in them and enthusiasm to work for them.” Cathy Elliott

In advance of the selection day Cathy gained support from her Aspirant Chair mentor via a phone call and also gained advice from NHSI on the common pitfalls to note during Chair interviews. She also undertook additional reading and began thinking through her first 100 days in the role, if appointed, which was helpful when answering some interview questions.

The Selection the Day

Cathy had about a week to prepare for the selection day which started at 8.45am and finished at 3.30pm. The day included the following:

- A pre-prepared 10 - 15 minute presentation given by Cathy to a group of 10 staff and governors;
- A panel interview with six service users and carers of service users of 35 - 40 minutes;
- A formal panel interview of 45 minutes - 1 hour with the Chief Executive, Lead Governor, Senior Independent Director, Staff & Public Governors and a Chair of an external NHS Provider;
- Facilitation of a 40 minute discussion between external stakeholders, such as the CCG and Council, on a topic given when walking into the room;
- A Fit & Proper Persons Test discussion with HR of 15 minutes.

In between each element of the selection day all candidates were encouraged to wait in the same room with a recruitment agent so that HR staff could find them for the next element. However, there were opportunities to find a quiet space to prepare for the next element.

The Offer: Cathy was informally offered the role within 24 hours which then prompted a series of calls and interviews, including the request for early references to satisfy the Trust and recruitment agent to take the appointment recommendation to the Trust’s Council of Governors for approval.

“I was honoured to be offered the Chair role with Bradford District Care. Be prepared to be busy and little overwhelmed when you’re initially offered the role. There is much to take in and to do whilst it all being very exciting! Thanks to NHSI and my mentor for their support in reaching this point.” Cathy Elliott

Preparing to Start the Chair Role

Fit and Proper Persons Test: Once offered the role, the next stage of the process was going through the Fit & Proper Persons test with HR which is a familiar process as a Non Executive Director.

Pre-Preparation: With two months before starting the role, Cathy has arranged three half day visits to the Trust to meet key staff and visit services, especially those of focus for the CQC. She has already planned for key Trust meetings in her diary, looking three to six months ahead, and her interview preparation around her first 100 days has been a good reference. She has arranged to attend the Trust’s staff induction when she starts in post and agreed an official handover period of two weeks with the current Chair. She also has

the support of senior staff to arrange to meet staff across the Trust and key external stakeholders during the autumn.

Via the recruitment process, Cathy gained an offer of support in her new role from the Chair of an external NHS Provider who sat on the formal interview panel, and she has again taken up this offer.

“I’ve tried to prepare in advance as much as possible as I know my first few weeks and months will be a very busy time, and I want to meet as many staff, governors and partners as I can when I start. Making contact early on with key people I’ll be working with has been helpful to get to know them and their working styles; I somewhat know now what lies ahead which varies on a scale from a potential CQC visit in my first month to judging a staff Bake Off competition! I can’t wait to get started!” Cathy Elliott

As Cathy prepares for her new role she has been featured in the HM Government’s Diversity in Public Appointments report of June 2019 which highlights the importance of such schemes as the NHSI Aspirant Chair one.

July 2019

NHSI Aspirant Chair Programme