

| Healthier Communities Select Committee | | |
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| Title | Independent inquiry into bullying and harassment at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust | |
| Contributor | Ben Travis (Chief Executive, Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust) | 5 |
| Class | Part 1 (open) | 16 January 2019 |

1. Introduction

Attached as appendix A is the final report of an independent inquiry into bullying and harassment at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust.

The Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust Chief Executive, Ben Travis, will provide a verbal update and answer questions at the meeting.

Please see relevant press coverage below for further information:

- ['Menacing, threatening and heavy-handed' culture found at trust](#), *Health Service Journal*, 21 December 2018
- ['Menacing, threatening and heavy-handed' culture of bullying embedded in trust](#), *National Health Executive*, 21 December 2018

2. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to consider and note the update.

2. Press articles

['Menacing, threatening and heavy-handed' culture found at trust](#)
Health Service Journal
 21 December 2018

A damning report commissioned by a trust has exposed the extent of bullying and harassment faced by staff and the "menacing, threatening and heavy-handed" culture.

Lewisham and Greenwich Trust in London [commissioned a three-month investigation into the issue in September](#), which was released this afternoon. It found:

- "Overt bullying" particularly "at the most senior levels" within the south London trust;
- A lack of action to address the issue, which "damaged the reputation and credibility of the executive leadership"; and
- The trust should identify "teams" and staff in problem areas as "a priority".

Chief executive Ben Travis, [who joined the trust in April](#), told HSJ he commissioned the investigation from Ashfold Consulting after staff raise concerns about bullying and harassment unprompted at a leadership review in May.

Twenty-nine per cent of staff reported bullying or harassment by another staff member over the past year, compared to a national average of 24 per cent

The report said: “Many examples were given of members of the senior leadership team demonstrating a leadership style that at best was described as ‘menacing, threatening and heavy-handed’. [This was] often excused as, ‘Oh well, that’s how they are’”.

The report said this “learned behaviour” filtered down to lower levels, “particularly the general manager” group.

The trust has suffered significant turnover in senior staff since the start of 2017, with the chief executive, finance director and director of nursing all departing. All had been in post for 10 years or more.

The report said: “The presence of overt bullying, both witnessed and reported, particularly at the most senior levels, coupled not only with a lack of visible action to address it, but a laissez faire attitude which appears to condone it, can be interpreted as a lack of willingness to recognise and tackle bullying behaviour.

“This apparent inaction has damaged the reputation and credibility of the executive leadership, as it existed at that time, both at a collective and, in some cases, individual level.”

Recommendations in the report include that “the past failures of the senior team are publicly acknowledged” and that the “employment relations” team continues to be improved.

A new standards policy will be introduced shortly. The report recommended strategies were devised to “[identify] and appropriately tackle those staff subject of or making repeated complaints”, as well as “identify[ing] those teams where behaviour or performance presents as problematic”.

Mr Travis told *HSJ* his staff were depending on him and his team to make sure the report’s findings were taken seriously and acted on.

The report also said bullying and harassment were likely underreported because of “poorly understood reporting channels” and a “significant level of mistrust in the process”.

The report continued: “Whilst I would not describe the bullying in the trust as institutionalised, it is however widespread in that it is evident across all sites, in all divisions, at all levels and perpetrated by managerial, non-managerial and clinical staff.”

HSJ understands the trust is considering employing professional investigators to improve the complaints process.

The Ashfold team looked at internal documents and spoke to 75 people. Half of interviewees had been bullied or witnessed bullying and not reported it. The author said this was “concerning [considering] the substantial cohort of senior managers who made up the interview process”.

The report added: “Key to addressing [bullying and harassment] is top level leadership. Although there have been a number of recent changes to board level, there remain questions over their commitment to change, a position influenced by the recent past.

“Additionally, senior clinicians and general managers below the executive must recognise their role in an organisational culture that has left many staff feeling unhappy, anxious and unsupported.

“I believe the current situation presents an opportunity for the trust to take a more enterprising, if not radical, approach to effect sustainable and long-term change.”

The trust’s new workforce strategy, written while the investigation was being carried out, said the organisation hoped to reduce the percentage of staff reporting bullying and harassment by half by 2021.

The employment relations team dealt with 628 cases over the two years from October 2016: 95 disciplinary, 35 bullying and harassment, 36 grievance, 18 capability and 444 sickness. In the same period, there were [11 employment tribunals and “a number of settlements”](#), the report said.

It added: “The evidence clearly shows the HR function seemingly, if not actually, being inappropriately persuaded or overly influenced by divisional management in relation to many complaints, investigations or outcomes.”

Investigators also quoted one interviewee who said “some managers are really challenged by the whole process especially if it involves race”.

The report said: “The concern is best replayed in a quote ‘I do not want to be accused of racism so I will play this by the book’.

“Such an approach may not have discrimination at its heart but it certainly deprives [black and minority ethnic] staff of the more informal methods of managing behaviour or performance.” It said this might reflect the “disproportionate level of BME staff entering formal proceedings”.

[‘Menacing, threatening and heavy-handed’ culture of bullying embedded in trust](#)

National Health Executive

21 December 2018

A damning report commissioned by a trust has revealed the extent of “widespread” and “embedded” bullying and a “menacing, threatening and heavy-handed” culture facing its staff.

A three-month inquiry into bullying and harassment at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust (LGT) found widespread bullying in the trust evident “across all sites, in all divisions, at all levels and perpetrated by managerial” and clinical staff.

The employment relations team dealt with 628 cases over the two years from October 2016 with 965 disciplinary, 35 bullying and harassment, 36 grievance, 18 capability, and 444 sickness cases.

“The prevalence of overt bullying, both witnessed and reported, particularly at the most senior levels, coupled not only with a lack of visible action to address it, but a laissez faire attitude which appears to condone it, can be interpreted as a lack of willingness to recognise and tackle bullying behaviour,” the damning report stated.

“This apparent inaction has damaged the reputation and credibility of the executive leadership, as it existed at that time, both at a collective and, in some cases, individual level.”

The inquiry, commissioned by CEO of LGT Ben Travis, involved over 50 mainly one-to-one interviews and concluded that bullying and harassment is “embedded in the culture of the organisation.”

“Many examples were given of members of the senior leadership team demonstrating a leadership style that at best was described as ‘menacing,

threatening and heavy-handed'. [This was] often excused as, 'Oh well, that's how they are,'" the report explained.

The report has recommended that a strategy is devised to identify and appropriately tackle staff who make repeated complaints as a matter of priority and a strategy to identify those teams where behaviour or performance presents a problem.

It added: "Key to addressing bullying and harassment is top level leadership. Although there have been a number of recent changes to board level, there remain questions over their commitment to change, a position influenced by the recent past."

Travis commented: "I want to apologise to anyone in the Trust who has experienced bullying and harassment. This is a watershed moment for the Trust and we need to be clear: bullying and harassment will not be tolerated in any part of the organisation. We recognise that people are working under pressure.

"However, this doesn't excuse bullying, and we need to do more to become an organisation that supports all our staff. The important thing is that we learn so that we can make the changes that are needed to do this."

For further information, please contact John Bardens, Scrutiny Manager, on 02083149976.