

# Pre-appointment hearing – Chair of the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

July 2022

## 1. Introduction

### Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

- 1.** The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST) was established in 1998, with NHS Direct Wales (NHSDW) becoming part of the organisation in April 2007. WAST provides a service to some three million people across Wales, an area of almost 8,000 square miles, spread across a diverse urban, coastal and rural landscape.
- 2.** WAST attends more than 250,000 emergency calls a year and transports more than 1.3 million non-emergency patients to more than 200 treatment centres throughout Wales and England. It employs more than 3,600 people, of whom approximately 70 per cent are within the emergency medical services (which includes the Clinical Contact Centres), and around 640 staff in the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service. The patient-facing services are supported by approximately 500 staff in corporate and support functions, and by the extended volunteer workforce, which includes more than 600 Community First Responders and 200 Volunteer Car Drivers.
- 3.** WAST operates from 90 ambulance stations, three regional offices and five vehicle workshops. During the pandemic, it also enhanced its Clinical Contact Centre provision within a current model of five main centres for the handling of 999 and 111/NHSDW calls across Wales. It has its own National Training College to ensure staff maintain high levels of performance and receive regular professional development. It is also the host for the 111 service, which is an amalgamation of NHS Direct Wales and the front end call handling and clinical triage elements of the GP out-of-hours services, and which now operates across all of Wales.



## 2. The pre-appointment hearing process

### The process

4. Welsh Ministers and the Welsh Parliament agreed to introduce pre-appointment scrutiny by Senedd committees of certain public appointments which are of significant public interest or which will have a significant impact on the public. The aim is to further improve the scrutiny and transparency of the public appointment making process. Pre-appointment scrutiny generally takes the form of a public pre-appointment hearing with the preferred candidate. For appointments to these agreed roles, it is for the relevant committee to decide whether or not it wishes to carry out a pre-appointment hearing.

### Pre-appointment hearing

5. On 29 June 2022, the Committee held a pre-appointment hearing with Colin Dennis, the Welsh Government's preferred candidate for the position of chair of WAST. The meeting transcript is available on the [Committee's website](#).

6. To inform the hearing, the Welsh Government provided us with a briefing on the process ("[the Welsh Government briefing](#)"), [Colin Dennis' CV](#) and [supporting statement](#) and a copy of the [information pack for applicants](#). The Committee also asked the preferred candidate to complete a [questionnaire](#) in advance of the hearing.

## 3. The recruitment process

7. On 28 March 2022, the Welsh Government Public Appointments Unit advertised for a chair for WAST.

8. The role was advertised on the Welsh Government and Cabinet Office public appointments vacancies website. A search agency was also appointed to identify potential suitable candidates to apply for the role.

9. Following a four week advertisement period, the advert closed on 25 April 2022. Six applications were received. Diversity data relating to the applicants can be found in the [Welsh Government briefing](#).

## Role and person specification

**10.** The Welsh Government set out the role of the chair in the [information pack for applicants](#). This included notification that, at the Committee's discretion, appointment to the role of chair could be subject to a pre-appointment hearing.

**11.** The chair will be accountable to the Minister for Health and Social Services for the performance of the Board and its effective governance, upholding the values of the NHS, and promoting the confidence of the public and partners throughout Wales.

**12.** In addition, the chair will:

- Develop a Strategic Vision for WAST and its services, identifying and realising the inherent potential and skills within the organisation to develop an innovative and world leading service;
- Provide strong, effective and visible leadership across the breadth of WAST's responsibilities, internally throughout WAST and externally through their connections with a wide range of stakeholders and partners at a national level, the community, local authority and NHS organisations;
- Ensure the Board collectively articulates and realises WAST's strategic aims through appropriate delivery plans and governance arrangements;
- Be responsible for maintaining the highest quality of public health standards and practices, and improving quality and safety of healthcare;
- Be accountable for the performance of the Board at community, local authority and national levels through the agreement of a three year integrated medium term plan (IMTP) and an annual delivery plan and the annual evaluation of achievements against the plan in public by the Minister for Health and Social Services;
- Hold the Chief Executive to account across the breadth of their responsibilities;
- Work effectively with partners, in particular with health boards, NHS trusts, special health authorities, local authorities, the third sector and social care partners, to ensure the planning and delivery of safe, effective services;
- Provide the assurance and governance for the proper stewardship of public money and other resources for which the Board is accountable;

- Provide the assurance for ensuring that the Board is governed effectively within the framework and standards set for the NHS in Wales;
- Undertake an external ambassador role, delivering in the public spotlight and instilling public confidence.

## 4. The Welsh Government's preferred candidate

### Background

**13.** Colin Dennis, the Welsh Government's preferred candidate, is Group Chair of the Citizen Housing Group - one of the UK's largest social housing providers providing specialist housing and support services, including refuges and hostels, to the elderly, individuals with learning difficulties, individuals who have drug or alcohol addictions, young people, the homeless and recently released offenders, alongside traditional social housing across the West Midlands, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.

**14.** His CV states that he is:

*"An experienced Non-Executive Chair and board member in the Health, Social Care and Social Housing sectors, with a former executive career in MD and CEO roles in highly regulated, customer focused, complex, multi-stakeholder environments. Combining practical non-executive experience from the board of an acute hospital trust, and Group Chair experience in a County-wide adult social care and reablement service provider, leading strategic planning, service integration, governance improvement and operational transformation (including digitalisation, modernisation and OD)."*

**15.** A full copy of his CV and supporting statement is available on our website.

### Our view

**16.** In line with the guidance on pre-appointment hearings agreed between the Welsh Government and the Senedd, our role is to set out our views on the suitability of the Welsh Government's preferred candidate.

**17.** During the pre-appointment hearing, we had a wide-ranging discussion with the preferred candidate, Colin Dennis. This covered his experience of working in other organisations, including roles in the NHS, social care and the private sector.

**18.** We discussed the need for a shift in the public mindset, including helping people to understand that services such as 111 provide an alternative to dialling 999 and that not every ambulance callout will necessarily result in a hospital admission. We also discussed the importance of good governance, and of encouraging a culture in which issues of concern can be raised freely without fear of reprisal. Mr Dennis acknowledged that WAST had begun its transformation from primarily a transport service to one which provides care at the initial point of contact thereby avoiding admission to hospital. He told us that there was further work to be done, and spoke about the need for cultural change, led from the top of the organisation and bringing all staff on board. He demonstrated an enthusiasm and willingness to engage openly with staff and the public in this process.

**Conclusion 1.** Based on his performance and responses to questioning at the pre-appointment hearing, we believe the Welsh Government’s preferred candidate, Colin Dennis, is suitable for appointment to the post of chair of the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust.

**19.** Should Colin Dennis be appointed, we wish him well for the future and look forward to constructively scrutinising him in his role as chair of WAST during the course of this Senedd.