

## Embedding the NHS Staff Survey at a team level: Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust



Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust provides integrated mental health services, specialist learning disability services, addictions services, brain injury services and community health services to a population of almost 700,000 people across the county of Dorset. Most of its services are provided in the community, in local centres, or in people’s homes through locally based health and social care teams. The trust strives to provide patients with dignity, involve carers and to respond to individual needs.

Over the last seven years, the trust has undergone drastic change. Indeed, in 2015 the CQC rated the trust as “requires improvement”. Just four years later, Dorset was awarded an “outstanding” rating after it had made “significant improvements to the quality of services for patients”. The trust’s use of NHS Staff Survey insights and results has made a positive contribution to Dorset’s improvement journey. This is evidenced by the improved survey response rate, which between 2016 and 2020 grew by almost thirteen percentage points. The growth in participation is a testament to a changing culture at the trust, in which survey results are communicated and staff are shown what changes have been made based on their feedback.

The ambition of the trust was to fully embed the insights obtained through the survey across the organisation. This meant going beyond the directorate level and encouraging each team – no matter how small - to not only participate in the survey, but to use the feedback to identify and prioritise local improvements. Indicative of the effectiveness of this approach are the survey results themselves. Indeed, since 2016 Dorset has consistently scored above the benchmark average in the following survey questions:

- “I am able to make suggestions to improve the work of my team / department”.
- “I am involved in deciding on changes introduced that affect my work area / team / department”.
- “The team I work in has a shared set of objectives”.

A similar trend is evident in the 2020 survey, in which Dorset scored above the benchmark average in nine out of the ten survey themes. Outlined below are some of the ways in which the trust has used the survey to drive change at a team level.



### Using team level data:

The trust started by identifying the level of detail and granularity needed to best hear staff voices. Initially, survey data was only available at the directorate level. However, the trust worked closely with its survey

contractor to deliver five levels of data. This has provided staff feedback which is highly relevant to even small teams.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, teams are now equipped to discuss survey results which are meaningful in their context, and to agree with their leaders upon three local priorities for improvement each year.

In addition to the structure of the data, the trust also reviewed the way it uses survey reporting. Most notably, team leaders are provided with reports containing two years’ worth of data. The reports not only detail the feedback and themes emerging from their team’s survey results, but they also remind leaders of the three priorities which were established in the previous year. This has helped to instil a culture of accountability, in which teams are given ownership of the improvements and play a key part in embedding the change.

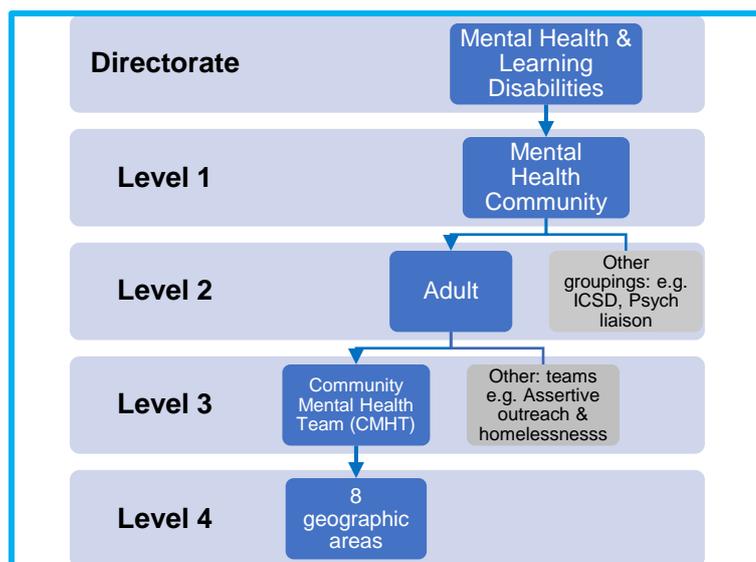


Figure 1: Example of the five reporting levels in action.

<sup>1</sup> To protect the anonymity of respondents, survey results are not reported from any group where there are ten or fewer responses.



## Demonstrating the importance of the survey:

All year round, teams are involved in discussing the survey results and planning for improvements. It was not always like this, however. At the beginning of Dorset's journey, there was limited interest shown in the survey. Staff not only questioned whether it was truly confidential, but also doubted whether their views were really being heard. As with all trust-wide improvements implemented over the long-term, staff did not always see the connection between the survey feedback they had provided up to two years ago and the changes their feedback had helped to bring about.

Trust service managers understood that insights obtained through the survey would be an essential tool in improving morale, and so Dorset initiated a range of measures to embed the survey within its teams. While some of these measures - such as providing staff with allocated time to complete the survey - helped to boost participation, the trust also strove to change the way in which the survey was perceived. This involved:

**Creating animation videos and posters** to summarise the survey results, and to highlight improvements made based on staff feedback.

**Using existing staff meetings as an opportunity to openly discuss concerns.** All staff are invited to the meetings, whether clinical or administrative.

**Linking the NHS Staff Survey with the National Quarterly Pulse Survey.** This has provided a sense of continuous dialogue between staff and the trust, and is achieved through an astute use of phrases and slogans. For example: *"we don't feel the same all the time, that's why it's important to share how it feels to work for Dorset HealthCare regularly"*.

**Sending weekly emails to service and team leads** during the fieldwork period. The emails provide a regular update on the number of staff who have shared how it feels to work for the trust.

**Encouraging and/or allocating time at away days and planning days** to discuss and build on survey feedback, providing teams with the opportunity to get involved in local improvements. Staff working within teams can be best placed to identify those improvements which would be most effective.

Collectively, these actions have helped staff to see how their participation in the survey can lead to real change.

Building on local empowerment, the survey results prompted one team to bring in local business and performance expertise. This enabled the team to put in place actions that helped to reduce the unpaid overtime which staff within the team were working. This not only boosted morale and freed up time for face-to-face patient contact, but it also provided staff with a further demonstration that their voices could lead to real change.

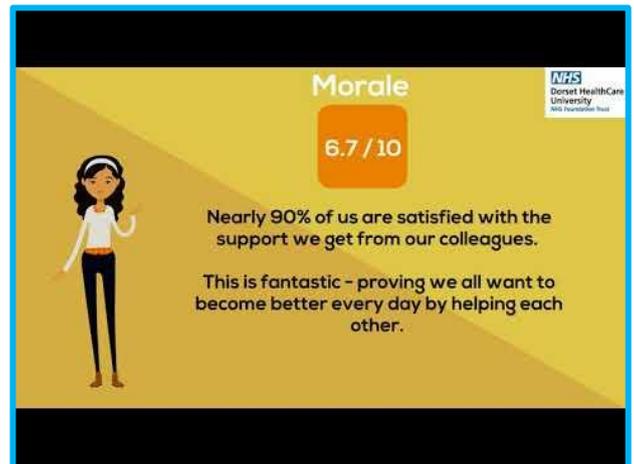


Figure 2: A 2019 animation video which summarises Dorset's survey results, and the improvements made based on staff feedback. **Click to play.**



## Involving managers and leaders:

The work undertaken at a team level was supported by the trust's Senior Leadership Team, who understood the important role which the survey could play in strengthening employee voice. Service Managers, for instance, decided to lead by example. They not only completed the survey themselves and informed the team, but also reassured staff of the survey's confidentiality and reiterated its importance to driving improvement. These messages are echoed by Team Leaders, who during the fieldwork period continue to share their own experiences with the survey and explain to their teams why it is important.

**Your Voice Counts**

### 2021 NHS annual staff survey

**"It is so important for everyone to complete the annual survey as this gives staff an opportunity to say how it feels working for DHC.**

**It gives valuable feedback that allow managers and directors to make changes to the culture and environment of the Trust to make working for DHC a positive, nurturing experience and to help improve staff support and wellbeing"**

Caryl Hill, Lead District Nurse for North Dorset  
77.6% of the North Dorset District Nursing team shared how it feels to work for DHC in the 2020 survey

Senior managers, too, are also involved in championing the survey. Indeed, they use team meetings and away days as opportunities to discuss the survey directly with teams. This has helped to foster open conversations at the trust, a workplace in which staff feedback is both valued and actively encouraged throughout the year.

Some teams have supplemented this with their own local initiatives. 'Suggested improvements' boxes, for instance, have been used to provide an additional communication channel between teams and leadership. These serve as a visible reminder to staff that their voices are being heard.

Figure 3: A team leader explaining the importance of the survey.

For more information on this case study please contact Gaby Morris, Staff Engagement & Experience Manager: [gaby.morris@nhs.net](mailto:gaby.morris@nhs.net)

# People Promise





## Further communications and engagement resources:

Shared below are a range of resources produced by Dorset HealthCare to help promote the NHS Staff Survey. While it can be easy to stick with what works well, there are many different ways in which you can experiment to capture people's attention. Consider whether the examples below could be applied at your organisation.

### Fieldwork engagement videos:



Figure 4: Damien Kendrick, Service Manager for Podiatry and Diabetes, encourages staff to participate in the 2021 survey. **Click to play.**



Figure 5: Stephen Churchill, Staff Governor, encourages staff to participate in the 2021 survey. **Click to play.**

### Progression chart:



Used during the fieldwork period to provide a regular update on the number of staff who have participated in the survey.

*Click on the icon to open*

### Promotional slides:



Local leaders explain why participation in the survey is important and encourage their teams to participate.

*Click on the icon to open*

### Microsoft Teams background:



Used during presentations, calls, meetings etc. to encourage staff to complete the survey.

*Click on the icon to open*

### Examples of local initiatives:



A list of local initiatives which have been used across Dorset to follow up the Staff Survey results.

*Click on the icon to open*