



By Email

Our reference: AP7234 and AP7235

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29 November 2024

CQC Reference Number: AP7234 and AP7235

Dear Neill

**Re: CQC inspection of East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust**

Following your feedback meeting with Robert Shannon (Operations Manager) and Luam Kidane (Operations Manager) on 29 November 2024. I thought it would be helpful to give you written feedback as highlighted at the inspection and given to you and your colleagues, Simon Chase (Chief Paramedic (Allied Health Professional) & Director of Quality) and Liz Cunnel (Chief of Staff) at the feedback meeting.

This letter does not replace the draft report and evidence log we will send to you, but simply confirms what we fed-back on 29 November 2024 and provides you with a basis to start considering what action is needed.

We would encourage you to discuss the findings of our inspection at the public session of your next board meeting. If your next board meeting takes place prior to receiving a final or draft inspection report, this correspondence should be used to inform discussions with the board. When scheduling a discussion of this letter, or the draft report, please inform your CQC Regional Communications Manager, who is copied into this letter.

**An overview of our feedback**

The feedback given to you in relation to Emergency and Urgent Care was:

- All staff we spoke with were open, honest and welcoming of the inspection team.

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- Staff were passionate about doing their best for patients.
- Some improvements in culture noted by staff, with positive feedback about the focus on leadership (at Chelmer Valley Station)
- External speak up guardian processes in place was welcomed by staff

**Areas for Improvement:**

- Concerns around medicines management – storage of Controlled Drugs(CDs) in ambulance vehicles (Cambridge and Peterborough Site); one key fits all CD cupboards, if lost staff get another key, staff left this cupboard unlocked with/without CD packs inside, yellow drugs packs not always signed out. This was similar to what was found at the last inspection.
- Fleet – vehicles off the road for long periods for relatively minor issues. This meant that staff were ready to start their shift but no vehicles available (Chelmer Valley Station).
- Environment – dirty cleaning area and equipment in some stations (e.g. Holdings Lane Ambulance Station, Addenbrookes Ambulance Station).
- Culture – disconnect between ambulance staff, LOMs and LAM/higher; increased responsibility for staff oversight of ambulance staff by LOMs but difficulty doing this due to pushback from ambulance staff (refusing to do things and reporting LOMs for bullying when requested more than once), LOMs don't feel they have support from SLT/HR and grievances taking a year to resolve for very minor issues and very minor issues being reported, staff refusing to complete activities they feel are not part of their role, inappropriate gesture witnessed by LOM to junior staff member. Staff survey – staff reluctant to complete this, partly due to overload of surveys, partly due to lack of action from previous surveys, poor feedback. Reporting poor culture – staff don't see the point of reporting and nothing is done.
- Staffing – staff reported some turnover of the same staff designation at the same time (x6 paramedics left Peterborough station in last 2 weeks, 30+ ECAs started at Cambridge in January 2024).
- Appraisals – have been completed and good compliance rates. However, this were all completed in October 2024 and no plans to stagger these across the year. This has impacted staff time in completing business as usual tasks.
- Training – Mandatory training compliance patchy, this will be further explored through the data request.

**The feedback given to you in relation to the Ambulance Operation Centers was:**

- All staff we spoke with were open, honest and welcoming of the inspection team.

- Staff were passionate about doing their best for patients.
- Staff at each location were completing the required processes to risk assess patients and keep patients safe. All staff followed the correct AMPDS process at the call handling stage.
- Cleaner environment generally. Chelmsford – significant improvement in the physical environment.
- Updated critical processes at the Chelmsford EOC.
- Manager at Norwich has an awareness of the issues of culture etc and has been able to show some improvements.
- Bedford staff spoke of a positive contribution from the new HR personnel. In addition, they welcomed the new Freedom to speak up guardian process.
- At the Bedford site staff were positive of the monthly staff award scheme
- The service were not meeting their call waiting pick up time across the three sites on the days we visited.
- Patient call backs were not being audited. Staff told us there was no way of auditing what is being completed unless they go into each individual call. They do this if there has been serious incident or patient complaint.
- We did not see that any welfare calls were being completed especially by the call handlers. There was an indication of the dispatchers doing this but we did not see this in practice.
- Inconsistency in following policy across the three sites. For example, issues around uniform and staff not being bare below the elbow even though trust policy requires it. Staff do not believe they should be bare below the elbow in the office environment. Across the three sites there were mixed messages and therefore in practice was also mixed. This also applied to phone usage and eating at the desk.
- There were particular concerns around the leadership of the service. At Bedford and Chelmsford we could not see a culture of transparency and open communication between leaders and staff. The three sites were all working in a different way and messages shared from the leadership team were different and varying.
- Staff were unaware of the vision and strategy of the service.
- Some managers are aware of the poor culture but there were no action plans in place to improve this. Particularly at the Bedford office staff morale was low but leaders told us no additional support has been put in place to support staff
- Staff we spoke with talked about a bullying culture, banter that goes too far and is sexually inappropriate. We asked the Head of Operations about this

and he was aware of the concerns and the last staff Survey in November 2023 had significantly negative results in this area. We were told a safety and behavior training has been released for staff to complete however staff we spoke with were not aware of this training.

- We were told information about appropriate behaviors in the workplace were reinforced within the ESOPs however the Head of Operations could not be assured that these were being read and signed by staff. We were told managers would brief their staff members. Managers we spoke with told us different processes for reviewing updates in policies.
- Staff wellbeing - the Head of Operations told us there was a task and finish group about how wellbeing can be improved. Bedford – staff told us there was little or no support. However, managers told us there was a wellbeing team and wellbeing lead in the trust. There was a welfare wagon that would attend the sites if managers requested this. Norwich – Staff we spoke with did not feel they could discuss in their appraisals if they wanted to develop in certain areas. Managers told us there is a dedicated learning and development team but they have not attended the EOC site. Chelmsford – some staff told us it has been very challenging to develop.

Following the onsite visits, we are planning to have conversations and focus group with staff. We will contact you to support us in organising these.

A draft inspection report will be sent to you once we have completed our due processes and you will have the opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the report. I am also copying this letter to Louise Ashley at NHS England and NHS Improvement.

Could I take this opportunity to thank you once again for the arrangements that you made to help organise the inspection, and for the cooperation that we experienced from you and your staff.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact me through our National Customer Service Centre using the details below:

Telephone: 03000 616161

Write to: CQC  
Citygate  
Gallowgate  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4PA

If you do get in touch, please make sure you quote or have the reference number (above) to hand. It may cause delay if you are not able to give it to us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Roberts', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Hazel Roberts

**Deputy Director of Operations – London and East of England**

**c.c.** Mrunal Sisodia (Trust Chair)

Louise Ashley (NHS England)

Jennifer Fung (CQC regional communications manager)