



OPEN

Board Meeting Summary Report Multiple Sclerosis Society Board of Trustees

Meeting date: Thursday 1 July 2021, 10.30am
Held by videoconference

Present

Nick Winser	Chair of the Board of Trustees
Sarah Schol	Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees
Stuart Secker	Treasurer
Shewly Choudhury	Trustee
Ady Dike	Trustee
Marion King	Trustee
Emily Reves	Trustee
Anne Shinkwin	Trustee
Ceri Smith	Trustee
Anthony Upshall	Trustee
Polly Williams	Trustee
David Allen	Chair of the England Council (Interim)
Catherine Doran	Chair of the Northern Ireland Council
Mary Douglas	Chair of the Scotland Council (from item 6)
Kath Foot	Chair of the Cymru/Wales Council

Attending

Nick Moberly	Chief Executive
Vicky Annis	Executive Director - Corporate Services
Penny Coombes	Head of Governance & Executive Office
Sarah Rawlings	Executive Director - Research & External Affairs (item 6)
Emma Gray (EG)	Assistant Director - Research (item 6)
Stuart Nixon (SN)	Research Strategy Committee Co-Chair (item 6)
Clare Horwood (CH)	Executive Director - Engagement & Income Generation (item 8)
Phil Anderson (PA)	Head of Policy (item 9)
Morna Simpkins (MS)	Director of Scotland (item 11)
Danielle Walker	Governance Manager (minutes)

1. Opening remarks

Nick Winser (Chair of the Board of Trustees) welcomed the Board and attendees to the meeting. The Board was informed that Susan Crane had stepped down from her Trustee position on 30 June 2021.

2. Chief Executive's Report

2.1. Nick Moberly (Chief Executive) introduced the 2021 Quarter 1 Progress and Performance Report and invited questions from the Board. The report included an executive summary of our performance in quarter 1, a summary of progress against the 2021 business plan and key performance indicators for the delivery of core activities.

2.2. The Board recognised the progress that had been made on developing For You, a personal space on our website where our community can choose what they want to see

and when. It was noted that For You would have a soft launch on 5 July, initially to Group Coordinators. It was also noted that the transition to free membership had proceeded smoothly, with no acceleration in the decline of membership numbers.

3. Business Planning Assumptions

The Board reviewed progress-to-date against our strategy, the external environment, possible areas of investment and change, and sense-checked the financial model that would be used as the starting point for developing our 2022-24 Business Plan and Budget, which would come to the Board in December for approval.

4. Research Update

4.1. The Board received a presentation from Stuart Nixon (Co-Chair of the Research Strategy Committee) on the progress that had been made against our Research Strategy over the past year. The impact of the pandemic on the research environment had been wide-ranging - including cuts to research budgets and cancelled grant rounds; laboratories closed and clinicians redeployed; and recruitment to clinical trials halted. Octopus, our world-leading multi-arm, multi-stage trial for progressive MS was delayed by the pandemic, but had now been launched and had received high-profile media coverage. Recruitment to the trial was expected to start in 2021-22.

4.2. The Board recognised the commitment and resilience of the research community, and the efforts of our Research Team to maintain relationships that ensured existing research was able to continue at pace when laboratories reopened. The Board also recognised the role played by the MS Register in producing data on the impact of the pandemic on people with MS and access to health and social care services.

5. Stop MS Appeal Update

5.1. The Board received an overview of the current position of our Stop MS Appeal, as we launched our film [Team Stop MS: No audition needed](#). The film would support us to build a movement, encouraging people to join Team Stop MS, to donate, fundraise and increase awareness of our cause. A discussion took place about the impact of the pandemic on our Income Generation Strategy, and plans to increase the diversity of the Appeal Board and our Stop MS Champions. The potential role of local groups, and the need to reach out to younger people to support the appeal was noted.

5.2. The Trustees approved a recommendation by the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee to extend the Stop MS Appeal by 12-18 months, in light of the impact of the pandemic on our ability to fundraise during 2020-21.

6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

6.1. The Trustees were asked to approve the new EDI Strategy that reflected input from throughout the MS Society and the wider MS community. The Board commended the level of ambition set by the strategy, and acknowledged the resources that would be required to achieve this ambition, which would be reflected in the 2022-24 Business Plan and Budget. The Board recognised the leading role played by Ady Dike (Trustee) in facilitating purposeful conversations to inform the strategy development. The strategy was approved.

7. National Councils Update

7.1. The Board heard from Council Chairs about matters of concern to the MS community in each of the nations. The Board was shocked to hear about 250-week neurology referral waiting lists in Northern Ireland raised by Catherine Doran (Chair of the Northern Ireland), and Nick Moberly (Chief Executive) agreed to discuss this matter with the Executive Group and report back. Mary Douglas (Chair of the Scotland Council) spoke of the impact of the pandemic on mental health within the MS community and the challenges of keeping in contact with local groups. David Allen (Interim Chair of the England Council) drew attention to the lack of access to MS services and the need for

face-to-face neurology and MS nurse consultations to be resumed. Kath Foot (Chair of the Cymru/Wales Council) stressed the importance of sustainable funding for projects such as Pontio, which was providing access to a range of information and support services for people affected by MS throughout Cymru/Wales.

- 7.2. The Board received a progress report on the review of National Councils to date. Insight had been gathered from Council Chairs and members about how Councils could be more effective at reaching and delivering impact for local communities and supporting delivery of the strategy in each nation; make effective use of the skills and enthusiasm of an engaged group of volunteers; operate more efficiently and with less unnecessary bureaucracy; prioritise and focus Council activity and how they support national and local teams on key areas of work; understand the impact Councils are having for local communities and the MS Society more broadly; and retain and strengthen the sharing of nation-specific information to and from the Board.
- 7.3. The Board received an update on applications received for the existing and pending Council Chair vacancies in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and it was agreed that current Council Chairs should be involved in the handover to new Council Chairs during their induction period from October to December 2021.
- 7.4. The Trustees approved the co-option of Cat Johnson to the Scotland Council for a one-year term.

8. Committee Reports

- 8.1. Stuart Secker (Treasurer, Chair of the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee) gave an overview of the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee meeting on 2 June 2021. The committee had considered the business planning assumptions and Stop MS Appeal update on the Board agenda. They had also considered the Management Accounts to 30 April 2021, and undertaken their quarterly review of the Risk Register. They had approved the new Assurance Map that would be reviewed annually, and considered our approach to assurance in the area of digital, data and tech risk. They had reviewed progress against Internal Audit recommendations and considered a cash flow forecast for 2022. The revised Investment Policy was recommended and approved by the Trustees.
- 8.2. Polly Williams (Trustee, Chair of the People Committee) gave an overview of the People Committee meeting on 2 June 2021. The committee had received the consolidated People Report, which included updates on employee engagement; volunteering; internal communications; and equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI). The committee had considered the revised EDI Strategy ahead of it coming to the Board for approval, and had received updates on activities-based working, smart working, employee engagement levels and the London office move. The committee had also received an overview of the approach to staff pay and benefits.

9. Governance matters

- 9.1. The Trustees approved the revised Scheme of Delegation, which had been updated to align some elements with the recent changes to the governance model.
- 9.2. The Trustees agreed an ex gratia payment relating to a legacy, that had been requested, and delegated authority to Stuart Secker (Treasurer) to sign the required Deed of Variation on their behalf.