

Delivering the NHS People Plan at Virgin Care



Commissioned by:



About Virgin Care

Since 2006, Virgin Care has been a transformational change partner with the NHS and with local authorities, working together to make health and care services more efficient, to improve the experience for service users and communities and to improve outcomes – helping to level up Britain.

Part of the Virgin Group, we believe in investing in people and changing lives for the better through health and care services. We do it through working together to transform services, to design digitally enabled ways of working, and to work with commissioners and communities to solve problems.

100% of our services are rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by the healthcare watchdog the CQC, 9 out of 10 service users would recommend our services and we're consistently rated positively by our colleagues in our annual engagement survey both as an employer and as a care provider.

"Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to."

– Richard Branson



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The NHS People Plan and us

The current NHS People Plan was launched in mid-2020, and it sets out the system's approach to resolving historic issues and forging a path for the future: aiming to make the NHS the best place to work, to improve leadership cultures and to deliver a workforce equipped for 21st century care. The People Plan has been set by NHS England and NHS Improvement, but is to be delivered by organisations like ours – responsible for thousands of NHS staff.

The plan aims to:

- Respond to new challenges and opportunities
- Look after our people
- Create belonging in the NHS
- Introduce new ways of working and delivering care
- Growing the workforce for the future
- Support our NHS people for the long term



"Positive, compassionate and improvement focused leadership creating a culture that delivers heartfelt service."

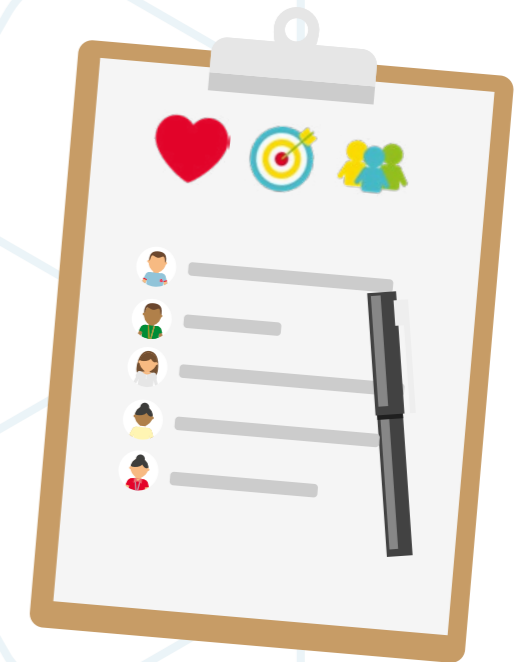
– Samantha Kane,
Chief People Officer

The NHS people plan, "We are the NHS – People Plan 2020/21 – action for us all" is available to download from NHS England.

Our people strategy

At Virgin Care, our people strategy sets out how we'll deliver on the things we believe in, the objectives set by our commissioners and align with the NHS People Plan.

We want to create an environment for our people to bring their best selves to work so that everyone feels the difference. And we believe we'll do it through three channels: by focusing on creating a workforce fit for the future, by focusing on wellbeing and creating a business where our colleagues feel the difference too.



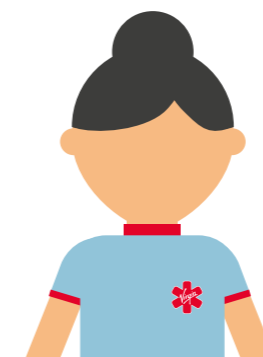
What it feels like...

VALUES-DRIVEN CULTURE As a colleague I feel...

- Encouraged to think about changing things for the better
- Motivated to care for others
- Empowered to do what needs to be done

VALUES-DRIVEN SERVICE As a service user I feel...

- Nothing is too much trouble
- Genuinely valued and cared for
- It's a seamless service



Highlights

85% say positive action taken on health and wellbeing



In-house, high quality learning and development



Quality Mark



2% of our workforce are apprentices



74% Report they are engaged with working at Virgin Care



76% of colleagues say they feel cared for in our staff survey



Delivering the plan

1. Looking after our people

In a business focused on helping people to get well and stay well, a focus on colleague wellbeing is essential and at Virgin Care we invest significantly in our colleagues' health and wellbeing.

The NHS People Plan rightly says that looking after our people is the first step in delivering safe, high quality care and the impact of the pandemic cannot be underestimated. The NHS, and health and care services generally, emerge into 2021 with colleagues feeling tired and in need of rest.

Evidence tells us those in caring roles often don't seek support until they are very unwell, so as well as providing support we must encourage people to access it – as soon as it might be needed through a combination of good leadership and creating a compassionate culture.



Our people strategy mission is to create the environment where colleagues bring their best selves to work. A key part of that is their ability to look after themselves and each other. So in order to remind them that help is available, we have been sending our 'wellness texts' every few weeks.

We want colleagues to know that help and resources are available for the problems and issues they might be facing and encourage them to take this up as well as look out for each other.

And once colleagues have begun to look for support, we make sure it's there. We have a strong wellbeing offer including Occupational Health and Employee Assistance programme, offering targeted interventions and 24/7 access online, by telephone and through face-to-face services.

Our infrastructure supports flexible working by default and through our eRostering system, bank colleagues can pick their own shifts while overtime and holiday allocation can be managed fairly – reducing the pressure.

And a modern, well-liked appraisal process reaching almost every colleague, which 70% of colleagues say helps them do their job and which has been enhanced in the past year by our "How are you?" conversations which help managers and colleagues have positive conversations about wellbeing, objectives and development plans.

2. Responding to new challenges and opportunities

COVID-19 created additional challenges for **keeping our colleagues safe and well**. Our targeted support was well received - more than three quarters of our colleagues told us they **felt cared for** during the first six months of the pandemic¹.

We launched new interventions through our **Wellness Centre to support colleagues** through counselling, maintained access for all colleagues to appropriate PPE throughout, completed risk assessments with vulnerable staff and published details before this was mandated by the NHS, and **introduced 'How Are You?' conversations** to minimise the burden of annual appraisals during the busiest time.



And, after the initial surge, our Chief Executive personally wrote cards to our colleagues along with a small token of appreciation to say thank you for everything our colleagues had done to keep services running, and our service users safe.

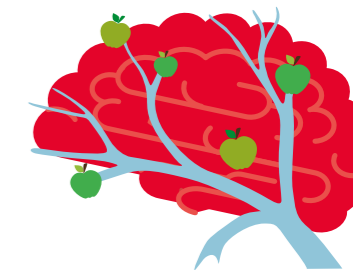


Our leaders also published weekly videos, including encouragement to rest, avoiding burnout and encouraging open dialogue and we actively promote through regular campaigns our Freedom To Speak Up scheme, ensuring colleagues always know how to have their say if they need to.



Over the next year, we're going to go even further. **Helping colleagues stay active and well is at the core of the People Plan**, so we'll re-launch our Cycle to Work scheme, we'll launch add financial wellbeing support to our Wellness Centre, and we've begun a project looking at the main causes of personal stress leading to absence and **how we can better support colleagues**.

Deliver inclusive leadership – at all levels



The NHS People Plan says “powerful leadership can be found at all levels, across all roles, and in all teams in the NHS”. And we agree.

Over the last four years, we've developed and implemented a **leadership and behaviours framework** which shows how every single person across our organisation, no matter their role is a **very important leader** – of the business, a function, a service, a team and themselves.

We've introduced **360 degree feedback for managers at all levels, including clinicians**, and we've seen an more inclusive culture develop, making our colleagues happier in their jobs. And we know that **when colleagues are happier, so are the people who use our services**.

We've empowered colleagues to start staff networks. Our **BAME Network** has formed, taking in members from across the country, and together with our senior leadership team is helping us to develop a more consistent, inclusive culture.

We want to be the most inclusive health and care provider – where all our colleagues and the people who need and use our services thrive by achieving their full potential.

In the rest of the year, we'll focus on developing our middle management leadership skills. So often, middle managers have been promoted to a people manager role because they are good at their specialism, but they've never been able to take any management training to set them up for success. We think that's wrong – for colleagues, and for managers – so we're fixing it.

We'll also continue work to focus on our **employee voice** ensuring that our colleagues can get their ideas and feedback heard throughout the organisation. We do this through our Partnership Forums, bringing together colleagues and managers, as well as through our Striving for Better Networks which bring together colleagues by speciality from across the organisation. In July 2020, we became a signatory of the Business in the Community Race at Work charter.



Retaining our people through flexible working

Across all industries, demand for flexible working of all types are increasing and since 2014, although legislation has meant anyone can request flexible working arrangements, its adoption has not been as widespread as might have been expected. The pandemic, though, has changed that – with many people forced to switch to working differently, and this has had a big impact.

When we surveyed our colleagues this year, demand was even greater – more than three quarters (76%) said that being able to work flexibly would be important to them in the future. And in our annual colleague survey, colleagues who had tried out flexible working for the first time during the pandemic said they wanted to continue.

“Flexible working for me is fantastic. Being able to take my children to school, collect them, and fit in a whole days work by working flexibly has really personally helped me and reduced stress in my personal and work life.”



The NHS People Plan sets out how health providers need to accommodate flexible working. Like most businesses we've had a flexible working policy for many years, all of our roles are advertised as being open to flexible working practices, and we've encouraged adoption of digital solutions to facilitate more flexible ways of working – but take-up hasn't increased as far as we'd like.

Flexible working has many advantages, and not just for colleagues, because many service users also want to access the health and care services we provide more flexibly to fit around their own lives.

Our **Board, Executive Team and Senior Leadership team are all champions of flexible working**. They are supporting, role modelling and encouraging flexible approaches to work.

In some services, we have been able to end the need for both planned and unplanned overtime through flexible working powered by our eRostering platform. And, patients benefitted too – with appointments outside of the normal 9 'till 5.

Over the coming year, we'll be **working with service colleagues to promote flexible working and use our digitally enabled service design to create more flexible working opportunities** that benefit everyone.

We'll continue to develop our 'staff bank' to encourage more flexible approaches, enabled by technology, and reduce agency expenditure in the process.

And we'll also look at how we run our 'staff bank' to encourage more flexible approaches, enabled by technology; and our Senior Leadership Team, Executive Team and Board will all focus on supporting, role modelling and encouraging flexible approaches to work.

Creating belonging – an inclusive and diverse place to work

Ensuring we have a diverse workforce, and prioritise and deliver real equality, is hugely important. Not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it delivers better outcomes – for us as an organisation, for colleagues, and for the communities we serve.

And the events of 2020 have shown, compassionate and inclusivity are more critical than ever. The NHS, as the People Plan says, was established on the principles of social justice and equity so the service, and providers within it, must have the same approach internally.

Virgin Care must welcome all and understand, encourage and celebrate diversity in all of its forms. Plus, as the NHS People Plan sets out, there is strong evidence that where a health and social care workforce is representative of the community it serves, patient experience improves.

We have a strong track record of **zero tolerance to bullying, harassment and discrimination**. In our most recent colleague survey, we continued to see a reduction in the number of people experiencing physical or verbal abuse at work and an increase in the number of people saying that when they do experience it they're reporting it so we can take action.

We have high levels of colleague engagement. **In our most recent colleague survey, our overall engagement was rated at 74%, an increase of 5% year-on-year and 1% higher than the wider NHS.**

Our Senior Leadership Team, Board and Executive reflect the considerable diversity of the communities we serve, but other roles in the organisation – particularly those on the frontline – often don't properly represent the communities we serve.

We've launched a review of our recruitment processes, and signed up to the Community Recruitment Pledge, to help us improve how we perform and we've committed to making progress towards the Model Employer Goals.



As an NHS provider, we take part in the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard Reporting. In our most recent report, we're pleased to see improvements in a number of areas including recruitment, access to non-mandatory training and colleague perception. We're broadly in line with the national industry figures, but we want to be better – and our action plan sets out how we'll do this over the coming 12 months.

Like all companies, we publish our Gender Pay Gap Report annually. We've focused on promoting female representation, and at our last report 52% of our senior leadership team was female; 67% of our exec team was female and we've appointed a female CEO. We're on track to expand our reporting to include ethnicity pay reporting next year.

In addition, increasing flexible working (see page 10) and supporting progression of our colleagues is an important part of our approach to support colleagues from all backgrounds. We're also working to remove bias, auditing job adverts centrally and reviewing job descriptions from across the organisation to ensure they do not contain biased language or unintentionally discourage people from some groups from applying.

And we've reviewed our pay and reward framework to ensure our offering meets the needs of colleagues and attracts the best colleagues to our organisation. Most recently, we reviewed our bonus schemes to continue the positive momentum we have achieved with reducing the gender pay gap in this area.

Finally, we'll also introduce new mandatory training programmes to promote equality, including unconscious bias training, and we'll work with our existing colleague networks and encourage the creation of new ones to encourage greater understanding and celebration of the diversity across our organisation.



Introducing new ways of working and delivering care

As a transformational partner with the NHS and local authorities, introducing new ways of working is a key part of what we do. Change is hard to land and embed and taking people with you is essential – so that means working together to design new ways of working and investing in developing people's skills.

The NHS People Plan says that a continued focus on upskilling, developing skills and expanding capabilities, will create flexibility, boost morale and improve services.

Our industry-leading Service Design function designs services to incorporate new ways of working rather than tacking them on to existing services. This means **we have increased opportunity to learn new skills, take new career pathways and continually improve.**

The Learning Enterprise, our unique Ofsted-registered training college is one of just 20 health education providers with the Skills for Health Quality Mark – and much of our training is delivered by practicing professionals. Through this, **we invest in supporting colleagues to develop new skills and implement new ways of working.**

We have developed and implemented clear pathways, taking colleagues who want to progress from where they join us – sometimes as a volunteer – through to a qualified profession.

Our Transformation team, well known for making us one of the first organisations to launch truly mobile working in District Nursing way back in 2014, are **enhancing our change toolkit to support improved wellbeing during change projects** – using what we've learnt from transforming, at pace, through the 2020 pandemic.



Social Mobility
PLEDGE



Charlie's Story

Charlie is 19. Having grown up in care, he felt confused and lacked purpose. He'd dropped out of school with no qualifications and was working as a forklift driver when he realised that he really wanted to work in medicine. He tried to get a job in nursing but didn't want to go to college as he felt there would be too many distractions in a classroom environment.

His social worker, who'd known him for years, told him about a nursing course which was accessible online – his preferred pathway. All the learning was done online, including a maths GCSE equivalent which he'd previously failed. A mentoring system was in place where he was given small tasks to achieve which were then checked by his 'buddy'. He's now two months into an apprenticeship and is learning on the job, doing health visits and shadowing health professionals. "Virgin Care looks after me really well and it's getting me to where I want to be" he says. Charlie found that this system really suited him:



"There's so many different people around to help you out and there's never a dull day. I love my job."

He is on his way to getting into adult nursing as his final goal. He recognises that his teenage years were difficult and he failed in school as a result, so he'd also like to help other children facing similar challenges growing up in care.



Growing the workforce for the future

There are shortages in the workforce across the health and care industry, an issue that is only going to get worse with an aging population and advancing technologies meaning more complex cases and treatments.

The NHS People Plan points out that the 2020 pandemic has created a new, strong interest in careers in the health and care sector – but it takes time to train a nurse, or a doctor, and so while this must be encouraged we also must look to grow the workforce, and close skills gaps, now.



We're training new health and care colleagues. Through our learning and development arm The Learning Enterprise, we have strong relationships with local universities and with Health Education England. As a healthcare provider and an education provider, we're uniquely able to integrate education and training – through on-the-job training, apprenticeships and other schemes.



We were among the first to offer the nursing degree apprenticeship as a 'earn while you learn' route into registered nursing, and during the pandemic we were the first organisation to develop virtual placements to allow shielding students to continue their studies – and help guarantee the workforce of the future.

We support student nurse placements across all of our services. Over the next year, we'll increase the number of placements we can support.

We'll launch a proactive talent management approach to help us secure the future of services for the next generation. This will include launching more career pathways, recruiting from more diverse backgrounds and creating opportunities for progression across the organisation for colleagues already working for us.

Our **operating model** supports this, allowing colleagues to experience work outside of their own area of the organisation and making it easier to work on a wider range of projects as part of personal development plans.



More than 2% of our workforce are taking apprenticeships to build new skills and we're recruiting all the time including through our, Community Recruitment Pledge.

Get in touch

Virgin Care works across England supporting local authorities, commissioners and providers in the NHS, third sector and independent sector operators to deliver transformations to make services more efficient, improve the service user experience and deliver positive outcomes.

For more information or to see how we can support you, email info@virginicare.co.uk

The information contained with this report was correct at the time of writing (October 2020) to the best of our knowledge. We will endeavour to update this report should any changes occur, so please check our website for the latest version.

Colleague comments included in this report from our annual survey have been edited for length and to ensure colleagues cannot be identified. Virgin Care's survey is run by an independent market research company on our behalf, and the identity of respondents is confidential between the respondent and the research company.