**Following consecutive and hugely disappointing CQC reports, it was upsetting to read Ofsted’s justifications for removing the apprenticeship training contract from our organisation. Themes raised echoed similar identified by the CQC and suggest not much has changed, year on year. My query must therefore be, why do our board members and SLT believe they remain the right people to lead us when theses external agencies identify continued failure across so many parts of our service?**
I don’t want to go off on a soapbox conversation here, because I want to answer your question not just give you all of my thoughts. I’ve been in the organisation twenty odd years, what I’ve seen is so much change in leadership positions that I do wonder sometimes how we try and get stability. Stability has to clearly be the right people, that’s number one, but even now do we have enough stability across us as a leadership team. We have a number of interim posts, we’ve had a lot of changes even in the last six months of people coming in at exec director posts. There’s also a capacity challenge here as well, trying to juggle so much in a really big organisation. Also in the Trust board, we’ve had people leave, we’ve had new members come in in the last twelve months as well.

So, my bit in there is, change is good if change leads to something, but also there has to be an element in there about stability, there has to be balance. I know when I speak to staff, one of the things I always pick up is around stability of a chief executive. We’ve got Tom Abell coming in next month, actually what I’d really love for this organisation is a period of stability, for us to get our teeth into some of the bits overall. You heard my comments earlier about some of the behavioural conversations as well, and I’m really happy to have the conversation with people around behavioural elements of, how much is it driven by myself influencing it, versus people’s own responsibility as well because that’s the honesty in the conversation. What we may think is ok, versus not ok. My responsibility around that is how I support, how I’m responsible, and believe me the sleepless nights I’ve had in this organisation in various roles, even now, because I worry about how were looking after you, how we’re looking after patients. That’s my job, but please don’t think I go to bed early, in a contented place thinking we’re doing a perfect job.

Some of this is also around cultural change, and cultural change does not stop, or have an end point that says in three months time everything is going to be better because it doesn’t. It takes time for people to trust, it takes time for people to feel they can speak out, it takes time for people to feel they’re going to deal with stuff reasonably and fairly, equitably. It takes us time to make sure, and I think that’s the balance for me of, we have to have people in roles, all of us, and I put myself in that pot, who can do the job, who are trained, who are supported. They have to be the right people, you have to go through the right process, it has to be fair process and all of that takes time to support.

Within that, you have to have objectives and accountability framework as well. It’s about providing the feedback, it’s about providing the check and it’s about providing the challenge as well. When I’ve talked in the past about us collectively taking responsibility, it really is, and I said this last night I don’t sit here, nor have I ever written an instruction, asking people to behave in a certain way that’s inappropriate, because actually some of that is about how we help and regulate ourselves as well. The call to arms in some of it is the progress we’ve seen in the Pulse Survey and all of these people can take with a pinch of salt, but you have to look at the barometer elements of where we’re moving as an organisation and how do we feel we are going, how do we feel we are taking that journey.

Bit by bit, I’m seeing people speak up, I’m seeing people say they’re ok to speak up. I have never made some of the decisions I’ve made in terms of cases that have come in front of me on my desk, because these are difficult, these are really distressing cases, and also in the past we have not got them right. I look at some of the stuff I inherited, we have not got that right. We have to have a different appetite, we have to have different conversations, we have to balance that with regards to our operational delivery, our education and learning and also rebalancing it as well.

Coming back to that original question to finish, it absolutely has to be a combination of all of those things. It has to be the right people, we have to have stability, we have to have development, an appetite, we have to have an ambition, we have to have accountability and objectives. But above all we have to be able to support, we have to be able to take forward, we have to be able to measure effectively and we have to be brave enough to make decisions and some of these are really difficult decisions.

At the moment not all of these are evident, and it’s really difficult because, and I say this for us on this call, it’s very difficult to be able tell people everything that has happened and everything that is going on, because we have a paramount responsibility of anonymity and also protecting the processes i.e we wouldn’t divulge confidential processes that happen, but all I can say is so much has gone on. So much has gone on to deal with issues and to deal with legacy and history as well as stuff that’s happened now.

Our big bit is to now get ahead of the curve and start doing those conversations where we can talk about values and behaviours and what that means, almost adjusting what people may have thought of as ‘banter’ into social normality and acceptance and saying certain things are not right. Certain things are not appropriate in the workplace and that requires some work as well.

I’m hoping that wasn’t too much of a soapbox conversation but just gave you a flavour of the dimensions that are in there and the pros and cons of all those as well. I guess my last point, is that we are subject to regulator scrutiny and oversight, there’s a lot of support for us out there. If we take a step back we do do a lot of really good stuff, we are very supportive of the system, we are very patient focused as an organisation. I know it won’t feel like it, but actually the whole thing driving us at the moment is safety and that is what I’m looking at, to make sure we are safe for you and safe for patients. That’s why we want to do body worn video cameras, and we’re doing it at pace, because all of those things are the right things to do.

It will be bumpy on the way, but the bit to get ahead of the curve, which is why I’m really keen on the resourcing to help us here is that they allow us some time to have conversations which is really important. As I said, we do get measured and held to account by different groups and measurements that sit behind that as well with our regulators, with our commissioners and also the board and non-exec directors will provide and seek that assurance from us as exec directors as well.