2022/23

Annual Report and Accounts

in summary

safe · kind · effective

NHS
Countess of Chester Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

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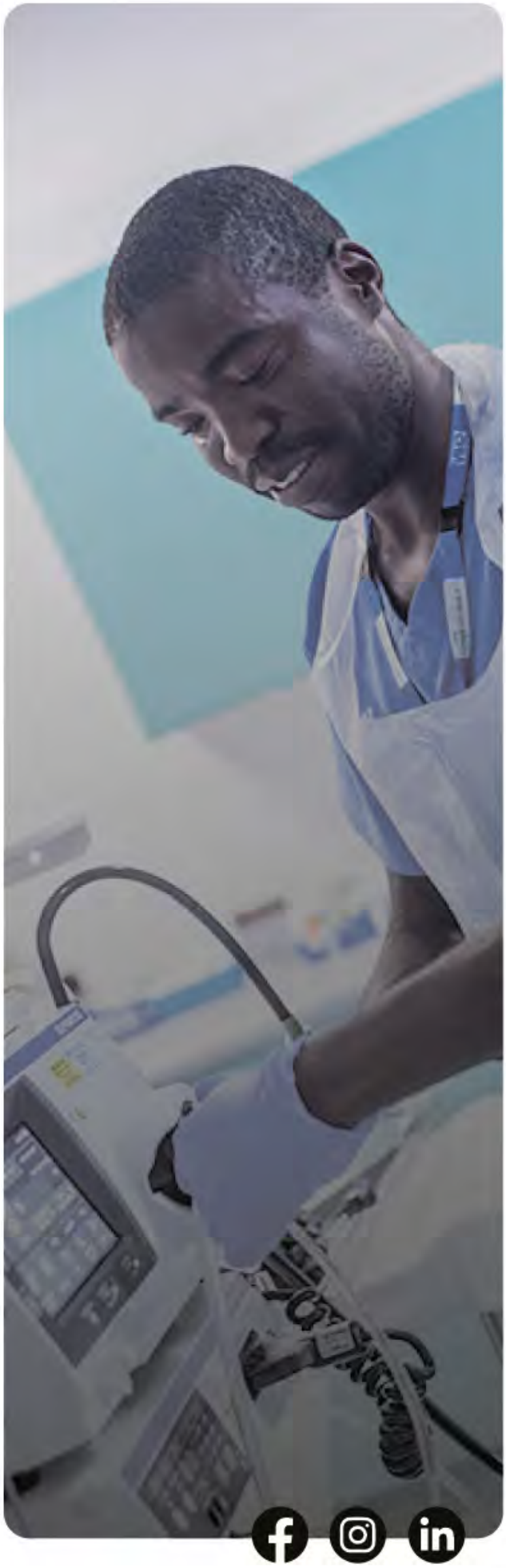


Welcome

We are really pleased to introduce our summary annual report and accounts for 2022/2023. The past year has been one of real focus as we have worked hard to improve our services, ensuring our patients receive the best possible care and have the best experiences in our hospitals.

Our Improvement Plan has formed the basis of much of our work as we have worked to accelerate our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and respond to the Care Quality Commission's inspection in 2022.

Focus has been on our patients, our people and our environment. The Countess team has worked together to develop and deliver our Improvement Plan and whilst there remains more to do, we are proud of what has been achieved so far – much of which you will read about in this document or in our full Annual Report.

Significant highlights include:
Receiving planning permission for our new Women and Children's Building which will open in 2025. The design of the building has been a collaboration with our clinical teams to ensure optimal care and safety for service users and their families who may be accessing services including paediatrics, neonatal, maternity, ultrasound or gynaecology.

Opening our new Same Day Emergency Care facility which provides tailored care to patients all under one roof, improving our ability to manage the demand for our Emergency Department. The SDEC multi-disciplinary team can assess, diagnose, treat and discharge patients within the same day and without the need to be admitted to hospital.

"The year has been one of focus on improving our Trust and our staff have been pivotal in driving forward the changes and improvements we have needed to make for our patients. We want to provide better, more responsive care and to be an employer of choice for our current staff as well as staff of the future. We have made great and robust progress but know we have much more to do."

Jane Tomkinson OBE,
Acting Chief Executive Officer

"Our people have continued to be our strongest asset and I'm immensely proud of the work they have done, the resilience and determination they have demonstrated and the passion they have shown for making sure our patients receive the highest quality and safest possible care."

Ian Haythornthwaite,
Chair

Who we are

Over 6000 people deliver our services to our local communities in West Cheshire and parts of North Wales – which has a population of around 800,000.

We manage three hospital sites:

- The Countess of Chester Hospital: 438 general and acute beds.
- Ellesmere Port Hospital: 56 beds as a rehabilitation, intermediate and outpatient facility.
- Tarporley War Memorial Hospital: a base for community services serving the local rural population.

In the past year we have supported more than half a million inpatient, outpatient and diagnostic attendances ranging from a simple outpatient appointment to major cancer surgery.

The Countess of Chester Hospital is arranged into four clinical divisions: Urgent Care, Planned Care, Diagnostics & Infrastructure and Women & Children's. These are supported by additional services including human resources, corporate services, finance, and informatics.

Our year in numbers

32,573
Hospital admissions
(elective and non-elective)

6,258
Number of staff

2667
COVID vaccines delivered
(54% of frontline healthcare workers)

356,276
Outpatient appointments
(first and follow-up appointments)

3604
Babies born

84,032
ED attendances

3
Hospital sites

A range of community services

113
Number of volunteers
(an increase of 43 since March 2022)

85
Number of apprentices
(an increase of 27 since March 2022)

5,631
Countess members

3060
Staff vaccinated against flu
(64% of frontline healthcare workers)

£22.2 million
Capital Investment
including £5.2 million on medical equipment

£349 million
Income

28,636
Day cases
in 2022/23

523
Hospital beds

Our strategy, vision and values

We are currently refreshing our five-year strategy to ensure it meets the needs of our patients, our local communities and our staff and that it has the ambition to take us to where we want to go

We want to support our patients and the people who may need to use our services in the future by providing excellent, high quality and safe care – to every patient, every time. We want to make sure our Countess team can be the very best they can be by ensuring they are supported in their work, can develop and grow their careers and are assured that their welfare and wellbeing is central to our role as their employer.

Our vision

We will improve the lives of our community and provide excellence in heath and care, through partnership and innovation.

Our values

Our Trust values are to be safe, kind and effective.

These are supported by a set of behaviours which we work by:

- Have a positive attitude
- Be respectful and fair
- Lead to do the best job possible
- Achieve excellence by continuously improving
- Work together

Improving quality

Making our PALS team more accessible
We listened to feedback from our patients and relocated our Patient Advice and Liaison Service into the main entrance of the Countess Hospital to make them easier to find and access.

The team offer confidential advice, support and information to patients, families and the public on matters relating to the health and care provided by the Trust. Patients or their loved ones can drop-in or make an appointment or request a visit from the team to a ward.

> "We want to ensure that each patient receives the very best care, and having more frequent opportunities to speak with our PALS team will undoubtedly improve this."
>
> Samantha Lacey,
> Associate Director of Nursing

New 'Meet your Matron' ward sessions
New weekly drop-ins have been introduced for patients and their families to speak with the ward Matron and share their thoughts about their experience of the care being provided. These take place weekly in all wards and across both hospitals.

> "We have received positive feedback from these sessions and uptake has been great so far. We feel that the opportunity to speak to the Matron offers patients the ability to ask questions about anything they are unsure about and gives greater peace of mind."
>
> Samantha Lacey,
> Associate Director of Nursing

New visiting hours introduced
Following feedback from patients and their loved ones, we introduced open visiting to be more inclusive and give greater flexibility to those visiting patients.

> "This is a fantastic way to allow patients more time each day with their loved ones. Support and contact with family and friends is a huge part in helping patients to feel comfortable during their stay in hospital."
>
> Mel Kynaston,
> Deputy Director of Nursing and Quality

All updated visiting times can be found on our website or by calling the switchboard.

Improving our performance on complaints
Our patients and families told us that they didn't feel listened to when they raised concerns or complaints and we recognised that we needed to do more to ensure we were learning from their experiences. We initiated a recovery programme to improve our performance and which met the expectations of our patients and their loved ones.

We now:

- Ensure communications with patients and families is front and centre of our approach with a dedicated point of contact for each complaint we receive.
- Acknowledge all complaints within three working days (100% compliance)
- Respond to all complaints within 40 working days.
- Manage all complaints effectively and have no outstanding backlog.

Performance

Reducing our waiting lists
Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, waiting lists for hospital treatment had grown with more patients waiting longer for the care they needed.

> "At the Countess, we began our elective recovery work as one of England's most challenged providers but thanks to the dedication of our teams and the effort they have made, we made significant progress and were soon one of the better performing trusts in the North West. We know we have much more to do but we made a strong start and are absolutely committed to reducing our waiting lists so our patients get the care they need as quickly as possible."
>
> Cathy Chadwick,
> Chief Operating Officer

The Trust met the first two key national targets by eliminating long waits due to lack of capacity, firstly for patients waiting over 104 weeks and then those waiting over 78 weeks.

> ""We're now working towards the next national target of having no patients waiting more than 65 weeks by the end of March 2024 and as part of this, we're looking at any patients waiting 52 weeks or more with a clear aim of eliminating these waits as soon as possible.""
>
> Cathy Chadwick,
> Chief Operating Officer

Same Day Emergency Care Unit getting ready to open
To support increased demand for emergency care, the Trust proudly opened its new £15million Same Day Emergency Care Unit (SDEC) in December 2022.

The Unit provides joined up, quicker assessment of patients who may require hospital care or a same day intervention. Patients will be rapidly assessed, diagnosed and treated by healthcare teams across medicine, surgery and geriatrics. Patients are referred to the SDEC directly from the Emergency Department, by NHS111, their local GP or by North West Ambulance Service.

> "The SDEC is one of the many ways the Trust is working to provide right care, in right place, at right time for patients. The SDEC will reduce delays for our patients and ensure they receive the care they need quickly and wherever possible, on the same day so that they can get back home to recover in familiar and more comfortable surroundings."
>
> Cathy Chadwick,
> Chief Operating Officer

Our people

Relaunching our staff networks
Relaunching our staff networks was a key priority for the Trust and with seven groups now reinvigorated, we are pleased that each one has the support they need to drive change within the organisation.

> "We want to create an open culture where people feel they can contribute and have influence in improving the experience of people that work for the Trust.
>
> It's a really positive time and it's great to see staff not only leading these groups but coming together to share their lived experience so that we can all improve the way we work and support each other."
>
> Nicola Price,
> Chief People Officer

The seven networks now working proactively in the Trust are:

- BAME Network
- Carers Network
- Disability and Wellness Network (DAWN)
- Faith and Belief
- LGBTQ+ Network
- Neurodiversity Network
- Women's Network

New focus on equality, diversity and inclusion
Our inclusion agenda has taken a step forward with the appointment of new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Lead Surendra Shroff.

> "I'm really pleased to take on this role and to take forward EDI at the Countess. We know we have a lot of work to do to improve awareness of EDI – for patients as well as for staff– but I am excited by the enthusiasm I see at the Trust to make improvements and make changes."
>
> Surendra Shroff,
> Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead

The Trust's new Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy has been approved and was officially launched in early July 2023. The strategy will be an ongoing focus, with the support of the Trust's EDI Lead.

Wellbeing manager joins the team
Focusing on the wellbeing of staff is essential to providing better, safer, higher quality care. The Trust has had a wellbeing practitioner in post for over 12 months and in 2023, they were joined by a dedicated wellbeing manager, Gareth Siggee.

> "We know that there is a strong link between the wellbeing of our team and the quality of care that we provide patients. Looking after our team and supporting them in their work means they are better able to look after and support our patients."
>
> Gareth Siggee,
> Wellbeing Manager

Learning and improving

Improving the safety of our services: Six steps to safety

Patient safety is the cornerstone of quality care and to improve the Trust's approach, we launched a new initiative called Six Steps to Safety, which aims tosupport the Trust to improve, grow and become an even safer organisation.

> "Each month, staff focus on a different goal for patients. The goals are simple but clear, focusing on areas we have identified as learning points based on patient feedback or experiences. Six Steps to Safety has already made a real and tangible difference to our services, making them even safer.
>
> Importantly, the six steps work has been led by staff – they are identifying areas for improvement and then leading the work to ensure changes are made and sustained."
>
> Liz Kanwar,
> Head of Quality

Staff lead our safety work: Patient Safety Advocates

Patient Safety Advocate Awards have been introduced to recognise colleagues who have gone above and beyond in their daily roles for patient safety, Staff nominate each other monthly, identifying the work individuals have undertaken to raise safety and quality across the organisation.

> "We want to recognise everyone's work to improve patient safety. It doesn't matter where in the hospital they work, from housekeepers and nurses to administration staff, anyone can contribute to, and be nominated for the work they do to improve patient safety."
>
> Liz Kanwar,
> Head of Quality

Safety Summits support learning
In 2022 the Trust introduced Patient Safety Summits as a forum to share learning and improve safety across our hospitals.

> "Our aim is always to reduce the risk of any harm to our patients and each summit has a theme based on incidents reported or issues raised by staff. The summits provide us with a forum where we can openly talk about what has happened and how we can learn and share that learning so that improvements can be made."
>
> Dr Ian Benton
> Patient Safety Lead

Reviewing our Freedom to Speak Up arrangements
Ensuring our staff can raise issues and feel confident that they will be listened to and treated fairly has been a priority for the Trust.

In early 2023, a detailed review of our Freedom To Speak Up (FTSU) service was carried out and as a result we have strengthened our FTSU processes. We now have a lead executive director and non-executive director to support our designated FTSU Guardian, as well as 17 FTSU champions across our workforce to make it easier for staff to raise concerns and do so confidentially. Our Board receive regular anonymised reports to ensure there is board oversight of themes and issues raised by our staff.

We will continue to review our FTSU processes with a view to making improvements and providing staff with the best possible opportunities to raise concerns confidently.

Going Greener to reduce our carbon footprint

In 2022, the Trust launched its Green Plan 2022 – 2025 which sets out our strategy to promote sustainable practices and reduce carbon emissions, making the principles of sustainability a natural part of our workforce and health care activities.

We pledge to make more sustainable choices across our hospitals for both patients and staff and support the NHS target in its drive to reach net zero emissions. Our Going Greener initiative sets out how we will achieve the targets set by NHS England:

- For the emissions we control directly (the NHS Carbon Footprint), we will reach net zero by 2040, with an ambition to reach an 80% reduction by 2028 to 2032;
- For the emissions we can influence (our NHS Carbon Footprint Plus), we will reach net zero by 2045, with an ambition to reach an 80% reduction by 2036 to 2039.

Olympic and World Champion opens new cycling facilities

Olympic gold medal cyclist Chris Boardman MBE, officially opened a new cycle storage unit for staff, launching the Trust's Active Travel plan.

The secure unit has 40 spaces for bikes and was made possible by a grant to the Countess Charity from NHS Charities Together, using donations made during the pandemic to improve the health and wellbeing of NHS staff. New changing facilities have also been opened adjacent to the cycle storage for staff to use before and after travelling to work. The Active Travel Strategy aims to encourage more staff to cycle, run or walk into work and links the Going Greener initiative with health and wellbeing.

Other Going Greener achievements:

- Secured reduced fares for bus journeys to and from Park and Ride at Chester Zoo to reduce the impact of car parking on site, as well as securing a 25% discount for NHS staff using 'Arriva Travel' to and from the workplace.
- The removal of desflurane as an anaesthetic gas within theatres.
- Incorporating sustainability in the design of the new Women and Children's Building (due for completion in 2025) with reduced energy consumption through the use of ground heat pumps and solar panels.
- Use of two fully electrically powered e-vehicles for our Hospital @ Home team as part of the Integrated Discharge Team.
- Taking part in a pilot for a digital twinning project which will enable the Trust to measure efficiencies in energy use, heating and ventilation. The Trust is the only site within NHSE to be chosen to test this technology. We will benefit from the learning and be able to keep the modelling that has been developed for future use as well as using the findings to help further in decarbonisation.

Highlights from our year

Community Diagnostic Centre opens its doors
Patients are now benefitting from earlier diagnostic tests closer to home thanks to the new Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) at Ellesmere Port Hospital.

The Community Diagnostics Centre is a local one-stop shop for diagnostic testing, with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) and ultrasounds taking place. Jayne Beedles, MRI Team Lead, shared her excitement about the new MRI scanner:

> "Along with the technology of the newest type of scanner, there are faster scanning times so the number of patients we can scan will increase, and we can continue to bring the waiting list down."
>
> Jayne Beedles,
> MRI Team Lead

In the four months after the Community Diagnostic Centre opened, an additional 5,642 patients all received life-saving checks, scans and tests closer to their homes.

Making a difference in Maternity
Delivering the safest possible care to expectant and new mothers is the driving force behind the Maternity team's focus on post-partum haemorrhage. The Maternity team have implemented a new pathway – the route or path a patient will take through hospital services once they are referred for treatment - making sure they adhere to the latest clinical guidance. The pathway will help them to improve monitoring and escalation of post-partum haemorrhage (PPH) - excessive bleeding at any time after a baby is born (up to six weeks).

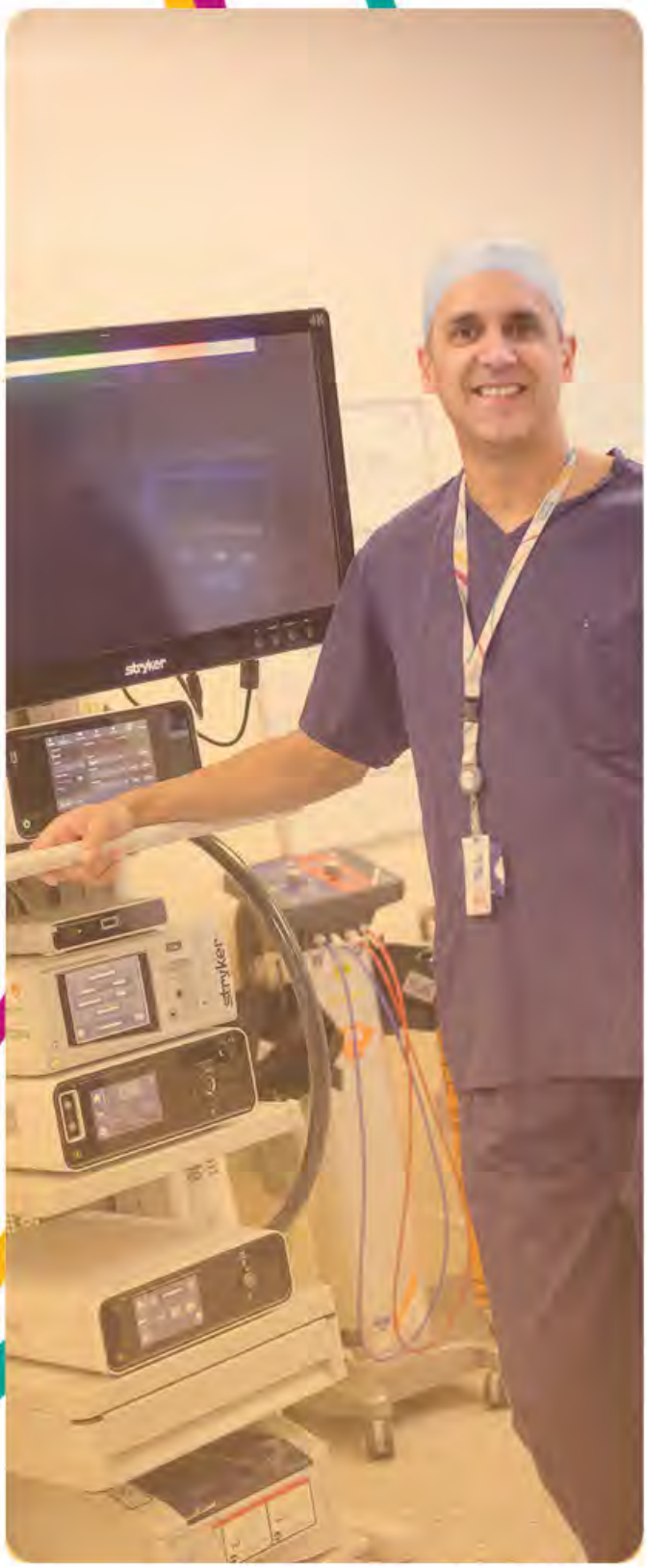
The team's aim was to reduce the harm caused by possible post-partum haemorrhage. A key development was using a ROTEM which is a globally recognised test, carried out using special equipment, to measure bleeding and the body's ability to stop the bleeding and begin to heal. The Maternity team's new ROTEM machine was installed in September 2022.

> "Having a ROTEM on the labour ward is an integral part of the quality improvement project. It allows a measurement of coagulation function to be performed quickly and near to the patient."
>
> David Castillo,
> Consultant Anaesthetist

New support group for skin cancer patients
Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosis in the UK and a new group for patients who have been diagnosed has been set up to help Countess patients.

> "Our vision is to increase the involvement of our patients and local community in their own care. It is a great feeling to be able to help our patients and involve them in their own care. My hope is that this support group will support not only the people who come together to form it but the wider plastic surgery team to help us learn and grow and provide even better care to our patients."
>
> Rishi Sharma,
> Consultant Plastic Surgeon

To find out more about the group and when it is next meeting, please contact the Plastic Surgery Skin Cancer Nurse Specialist, Carole Thompson, on 01244 366751.



Trust invests £600k in new theatres tech

Countess surgeons are now using cutting-edge technology after the Trust invested almost £600,000 in new tower systems that allow them to see inside patient's bodies while they are being operated on.

Ten new Stryker 1688 Advanced Imaging Modalities 4K Platforms have been purchased for use in theatres, which connect to scopes that go inside patients' bodies and enable healthcare professionals to see closely what is happening while a procedure is being carried out.

The new systems, which provide a crisp 4K display giving surgeons greater clarity than ever before, have been rolled out across the Trust over the last few months.

> "The new equipment is state-of-the-art and means surgeons can better see inside the body of the person they're operating on. This means surgeons can be even more accurate and precise when operating which is really important because it means patients will recover more quickly and we can get them home faster."
>
> Dale Vimalachandran,
> Consultant General and Colorectal Surgeon

Hospital at Home reduces care home A&E attendances by 40%

Our Hospital at Home service saved 2654 hospital days over the 2022 winter period, and continues to thrive since support was increased for social care providers in Chester. The scheme, comprising a team of clinical professionals, provides hospital -level treatment in patients' homes, avoiding unnecessary admissions and helping people return home sooner whilst continuing to receive treatment.

> "Strengthening our partnership with local care homes and seeing it have an impact so quickly has been one of the most rewarding pieces of work we've done. Our patients get the treatment they need and can continue their lives otherwise as normal. Hearing how much they, their families and care home staff appreciate what we do makes such a difference."
>
> Alexandra James,
> Advanced Clinical Practitioner

The team provide a response to someone in crisis in their usual place of residence within 2 hours. Typically, the service will respond to a variety of acute issues that would otherwise result in the care home calling an ambulance with this service provided between 8am-8pm, 7 days a week.

> "It was fantastic seeing how open our local care homes have been working with us more closely. Their enthusiasm is what has made it possible for us to make such an impact on A&E attendances."
>
> Alexandra James,
> Advanced Clinical Practitioner

From October to December 2022 a total of 919 patients were seen by Hospital at Home overall, with 92% of those being treated at home and not needing to go into hospital. This equates to an average of 2,507 days in hospital being saved for those patients.

Trust one of only 10 to gain prestigious status
Our Practice Development Team have been awarded the National Preceptorship Interim Quality Mark in recognition of their work to support newly qualified professionals settle into their roles and apply their knowledge into every-day practice.

At the time the award was given, the Trust was one of only two in the North West to achieve this highly credited status with only nine other Trusts nationally having received the Quality Mark.

> "I'm so proud of the team for working so hard to achieve this award. This is a fantastic achievement for them and the Trust as it will support new staff and help our staff retention. It is so positive to see the team's work celebrated at a national level."
>
> Hilda Gwilliams,
> Director of Nursing and Quality

New Women and Children's Building gets the green light

During the year, the Trust received planning approval for a new Women and Children's Building. The proposals reflect our ambition to provide the highest quality care for patients and their families, using modern technology and infrastructure to enhance treatment options for the local community and wider region.

Most of the services currently housed in the existing Women and Children's Building will move into the new development, including maternity, neonatal, paediatrics and gynaecology, with increased capacity and additional modern rest spaces for patients, families and staff to enjoy. We hope that the new building will be open for patients in 2025.

The current Women and Children's Building was built in 1971 – 12 years before the main building first opened and 13 years before the hospital was officially named the 'Countess of Chester' on 30 May 1984.

Maternity services at the Countess currently support around 2,300 expectant families every year from Chester, Ellesmere Port and the surrounding areas including North Wales. As part of the plans, they would use a new ground floor full delivery suite for 11 births, with two obstetric theatres, before moving to a first-floor maternity ward with 24 single bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms.

Get involved with the Countess
Join the conversation and keep up to date with our news by following us on social media. Share your news by using #theCountess.

Our Annual Report
Find out more about us by reading our full Annual Report at www.coch.nhs.uk

This document is available in other formats including large print or other languages. Please contact us on countess.communications@nhs.net or call 01244 362768 if you require an alternative format.

Become a member of the Countess
Would you like to become a member of the Countess and help shape its future? Any one aged 18 or over can become a member. Membership is free and our Membership Team is on hand to support anyone interested in supporting us.

For more information about membership please use this QR code or visit our website at www.coch.nhs.uk or email our Membership Team on: coch.membershipenquiriescoch@nhs.net