

Caring for digital health



Mid Cheshire Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

How to find your new Chief Information Officer

SUMMARY

Populo have 15 years specialist experience in finding the best candidates for healthcare IT roles. In Spring 2021 the CEO at Mid Cheshire selected Populo to help recruit their new Chief Information Officer.

BACKGROUND

Mid Cheshire Hospitals employ 4500 staff, they have 450 beds and provide a range of services including A&E, maternity, outpatients, inpatients, therapies and children's health. As well as 3 main hospitals, Leighton near Crewe, Victoria Infirmary in Northwich and Elmhurst Immediate Care Centre in Winsford they also partner with Central Cheshire Integrated Care Partnership (CCICP) providing a range of community health services for people across South Cheshire and Vale Royal. The board have agreed 5 strategic objectives supporting them on their journey progressing from a 'Good' to 'Outstanding' CQC rating.

- Delivering outstanding clinical quality, safety and experience
- Being a leading partner in a progressive health economy
- Striving for outstanding organisational effectiveness
- Aspiring to excellence in practice through our workforce
- Creating a 21st century infrastructure for transformative health and social care

Digitisation is a key part of delivering the objectives so the Trust's new CIO needed to have the skills, knowledge and experience that would support their delivery. The Populo and Mid Cheshire teams worked hand in hand to find the right person for the job matching Populo's experience and networks with Mid Cheshire's requirements.



APPROACH

Populo used their 4 step approach to recruitment beginning by agreeing a person specification for the new CIO.

Step 1: Person specification

Thinking carefully about the skills required, the new CIO needed experience and knowledge that equipped them to lead the IT culture of Mid Cheshire into the future. Ability to determine the long term strategy working in harmony with the other executive directors outside the technology function was a prerequisite.

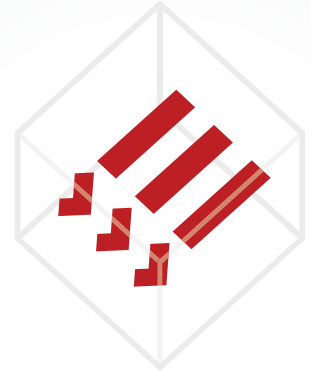
Unlike most other roles where staff tend to work within their own peer groups the CIO is an executive role where the successful candidate must have an understanding of the other functions that report to the CEO. An appreciation of Finance, HR, Procurement, Estates and Facilities and Operational Management is essential. They need a sound understanding of finance to be able to budget, how to recruit the right people for their projects, ensure they understand the compliance requirements for procurement and how the operational business works on a day to day basis. An overall understanding of the Trust is a key part of a CIO's suitability for the role. They will always take advice and draw on expertise working as a closely knit team with the other executives but a good understanding of the wider directorates is essential to ensure the IT function works in harmony.

One of key risks any Trust faces as they search is whether they have the technical knowledge required to recruit the right person. A CIO is not all about IT but it is their specialism and it can sometimes be seen as dark art. Unless the people selecting and interviewing work in IT they don't necessarily have the technical understanding required to sift out unqualified applicants.

How do they know which candidates have the right technical experience and skills if they are not IT experts themselves?

This is the strength that Populo brings. Darren Mills, who ran the project has over 15 years experience recruiting into senior technology and CIO roles. He has the large network and understanding of a CIO role necessary to find the right person.

So what skills does a candidate need to be considered for a CIO role? They must be 'business savvy', be able to motivate their staff and retain the good ones, be a strategic thinker and translate this into delivery, be able to manage large programmes of work and ensure they are complementary to the corporate objectives, be able to explain complex technical concepts in a non-technical way to make them understandable, have a detailed grasp on digital transformation, data and infrastructure technology, a good awareness of cyber security, clinical safety and information governance and be able to direct suppliers to get the best out of them to the Trust's advantage.



**ADVISORY
SERVICES**



Step 1: Person specification (Continued)**KEY SKILLS & EXPERIENCE**

Business transformation and acumen

Team development & motivation

Strategic thinking

Project execution

Communication

Digital Technology depth

Information security

Supplier Management

Cultural awareness of the organisation

Organisation partnership awareness

Data and Infrastructure knowledge

“These were leaders known to have the right experience and skills.”

Step 2: Selection and Shortlisting

Once the role description and personal attributes along with the knowledge and experience were agreed with Mid Cheshire Populo began the search for potential candidates.

A formal advert was written and published on NHS Jobs. This was live for 4 weeks and ran alongside Populo’s own networking and head hunting activities. Approaches were made to senior IT individuals and CIOs who might want to be considered and who were already inside the Populo network. These were leaders known to have the right experience and skills.

Populo expanded the net by searching on other professional networks to identify further possible candidates. This created a longlist of 40 applicants. Populo then had the first pass at shifting out those applicants that didn’t match the role specification. A shortlist was confirmed and taken to Mid Cheshire for debate and discussion. A list of four was agreed. Populo informed the unsuccessful applicants and the final four candidates were invited to interview.



Step 3: Interview and Selection

The interview process was thorough; two panel discussions with senior Trust leads and a final board panel consisting of the CEO, Non- Executive Directors, the Trust Chairman with Populo Consultants providing support.

As well as the key skills and experience it was important the successful candidate demonstrated a good cultural match for the organisation. It was essential to ensure the successful candidate would 'fit' into the organisation and test to see if they would be able lead the digital change the Trust required. They needed to be able to work with other executives, garnering respect and support from their peers and their teams. Without this leaders cannot successfully deliver change.

The interviews were therefore created to ensure open questions were included in the panel discussions in a way that would both test the candidate, challenge them and allow the Trust to establish which had the technical and soft skills required.

Open questions are essential, such as 'Can you give me an example of when....?' Rather than just asking candidate to chat through their cv. This gave the panel members an opportunity to drill down into the candidates experience so they could explain how they would handle change and their approach to developing an IT strategy.

For example: "Describe your approach to digital strategy within a healthcare environment and the key things that differentiate it from traditional IT planning?"

It was important to see how each candidate applied themselves in a challenging environment and test their competencies. "What is your approach to developing a digital team and what have you learnt previously that will help you grow the capacity and capability at Mid Cheshire?"

This exploration of their ideas also identified if the candidate had 'done their homework' on the organisation. Did they understand where Mid Cheshire wanted to be, the corporate objectives and explain how they would be able to help achieve them?

Good communication is essential as a CIO so this was each candidate's opportunity to express themselves clearly and demonstrate they could do the role they had applied for. There were also some more negative questions included "Can you give an example of when you have failed, how did you recover the situation and what did you learn?" to test each candidates ability to learn lessons and apply them.

Commitment to the role is important. Candidates should be aspirational, looking for growth, enthusiastic and driven but not so inexperienced they don't have the requisite skills to perform effectively. It was important to establish a candidate's loyalty or if they were just looking for a short term leap up the ladder. Would they be a flight risk part way through the implementation of the digital programme? The interviews tested this by asking about investment in their own CPD and what they would strive to achieve for Mid Cheshire within the next 5 years.

Each candidate's answers were scored and the overall selection was agreed amongst the panel. Populo managed the candidate updates and informed the interviewees whether they had been successful or not.

Step 4: Confirm successful candidate, Take references & Confirm contract

The next step was taking references on the preferred candidate and approving the go-ahead to make an offer. Populo also managed the Terms and Conditions contract negotiations for the client and facilitated discussions between the appointee and Mid Cheshire to reduce the administrative burden at both ends.



BENEFITS OF POPULO'S EXPERIENCE:

There are a number of points a Trust should consider when deciding on how to recruit a new CIO:

Trust:

Benefit of Populo:

What do we do if we don't have the in-house skills to be able to identify the right person with the right experience?

Populo have a wide network of senior IT executives, CIOs, Programme Directors and Technical experts to approach on behalf of their clients. They have over 15 years experience selecting the best candidates for interview

What technical questions should we ask?

The Populo team have a wealth of technical knowledge to draw on guiding Trusts to develop challenging questions

How do we know the answers to the more technical questions are correct?

Populo consultants will help define both the questions and the answers a Trust should be looking for

Is an advert the best way to advertise our requirement?

Using Populo's extensive network of candidates is a great way to reach the right people in addition to a traditional advert

Some candidates are good on paper and interview well but how do we really know their references are accurate, up to date and valid?

Populo know and have vetted each candidate personally. A Trust can be sure all references are honest and candid giving a true picture of all candidates

"Darren and the team at Populo are consummate professionals. They provided us with essential expertise to find best person for the job, partnering us through the whole process."

"As a result we are delighted to have appointed our new CIO who starts with us in September 2021"

James Sumner, CEO Mid Cheshire Hospitals Foundation Trust.

OVER 15 YEARS EXPERIENCE

EXTENSIVE NETWORK

A WEALTH OF TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

