



# FROM POST OFFICE TO NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

**Rob Houghton**, the chief operations officer for the Post Office, explains what attracted him to the role of non-executive director for technology and innovation at the NHS Supply Chain.

Houghton joined the NHS Supply Chain as an IT-focused non-executive director earlier this year, with straight-forward goals to spend less, save more, and improve services. He brings with him over 20 years working in IT and change management in telecoms and financial services, and he's no stranger to major overhauls. Houghton is currently the chief operations officer for the Post Office, and he led the work to replace its technology across the entire estate - a modernisation of the largest retail network in Europe. And he's keen to bring this approach to the NHS supply chain, despite a very different operating model.

"With most industries and businesses, we're in an age where technology innovation is disrupting business models in a fundamental way. This is usually driven from digital innovations and the application of machine learning and AI concepts. I'm keen to assist with this on the supply chain agenda and ensure efficient delivery from these innovations.

"And on a side note my wife is a lifelong NHS nurse, having been a senior nurse and now going back to her roots as a community nurse, so I have a close and personal desire to help the NHS agenda."

Rob is a technologist by trade and has strong experience across retail and financial services on digital, agile methods and the application of technologies to enable business outcomes. Although it's early days, he is looking forward to contributing to the NHS Supply Chain's transformational plans.

"I'm still getting my head around a complex

operating model and structure which is fairly unique to the NHS public sector! However, I do think that the opportunities are obvious. Every trust leveraging common provision of services and products seems really obvious – why wouldn't you buy into this?

"I'm a true Northerner so the opportunity to spend less, save money and improve services seems a huge opportunity to me!"

## **NHS Supply Chain's technology transformation programme**

Part of Houghton and the NHS Supply Chain's challenge is to deliver a programme of digital transformation. Lord Carter's report, 'Operational productivity and performance in English NHS acute hospitals: Unwarranted variations', published in 2015, identified unwarranted variation in procurement across the NHS for everyday hospital items. This led to the Department of Health and Social Care establishing the Procurement Transformation Programme (PTP) to deliver a new operating model for the NHS's supply chain.

As part of the overall PTP Business Case, transformation funding was agreed to enable significant technological change, make service improvements and provide the capability to expand the services.

The new systems being introduced will be more flexible and robust and lead to improved service levels. As the NHS Supply Chain is focusing on getting the basics right first, some of the benefits will not be visible straight away.

The initial phase of the technology transformation programme aims to replace the core legacy IT environment, and in particular, the Order Management and Warehouse Management systems. The applications and network will be updated to support the future Supply Chain operations. This change will replace ageing core systems that limit the ability of the NHS Supply Chain to introduce new services and take full advantage of modern technology developments.

The cloud-based environments which are being introduced aim to unlock numerous opportunities for:

- Improving customer order handling
- Management information and business intelligence
- Overall service resilience
- Significant operational enhancements for the logistics function.

Future phases of the transformation programme will update the customer and supplier interfaces and facilities to make the NHS Supply Chain even easier to do business with from a customer and supplier perspective. In addition, the transformation programme will provide the capability for integrating many other functional enhancements.

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