The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust in Harlow, Essex, is a 489-bedded District General Hospital. It provides a comprehensive range of safe and reliable acute and specialist services to a local population of 258,000 people. The hospital is committed to the core principles of the NHS, which are to provide services that meet the health needs of everyone and that are free at the point of delivery. The Hospital is monitored and regulated by the Care Quality Commission and has a Trust Board made up of 12 members: seven Executive directors and five non-Executive directors.

**CHALLENGE**

The Trust has a statutory obligation to hold regular Board meetings both for the public and in private, with the latter attended only by members of the Board. In 2014, Heather Schultz, Head of Corporate Affairs, joined the Hospital. Among other tasks, she is responsible for preparing the Board and Committee meeting agendas as well as collating and distributing the papers for the meetings. But when she started in her role, the hospital trust was circulating meeting papers in hard copy and then moved to using a non-digital system where papers were circulated on email.

“Two months after I arrived, I knew that the process in place wasn’t only not secure enough but it was cumbersome. You couldn’t navigate through the PDF documents and find the sections you needed right away,” said Schultz. “So together with the support of our IT department, we began to search for a digital board portal vendor.”
APPRAOCH

Schultz recalled researching digital board portal providers and how of the three they looked at closely, Diligent Boards stood out positively. “We liked how the navigation worked, as we thought it was user-friendly.” The Hospital’s Trust Board had been looking for easy usability and good security, among other important features, but to Schultz, there was something even more important she wanted in a board portal system – a human support service. She pointed out that in her previous role at another hospital trust, the board portal provider they used had only offered email chat support. She said it wasn’t adequate and just didn’t make the grade in her eyes.

“For me, it was very important to have a company that was willing to listen to our feedback, provide a 24/7 service and especially had a human to whom we could speak – a person over the phone and not through a chat site or an Internet connection. Diligent offered this. And that was an excellent selling point that helped us make the decision to go with them.”

RESULTS

Diligent Boards has been in place at Princess Alexandra Hospital since October 2015, with the implementation going smoothly considering that this was a big technology shift for some non-Executive directors. Schultz said they were perhaps less enthusiastic before Diligent but today are happy with having immediate access and a secure solution. Besides the human-to-human connection, which was very important, the shift to Diligent also streamlined the board materials collation and corporate governance processes. The Hospital has saved three days a month in time and productivity, which has saved money and is a better use of public money. Schultz recalled how incredibly time-consuming and resource-intensive the process was before Diligent Boards. “We would be photocopying for hours on end, at least 500 pages per meeting – it was an onerous task.”

Lastly, Schultz added that the Board has had an overwhelmingly positive experience, with excellent support from the team at Diligent. Even though some users struggled to learn the system at first, Diligent’s dedicated training and one-to-one customer support service meant that these users were able to get up to speed quickly. “Besides having the personal touch, we were able to give Diligent feedback on desired product features and since then, our system has been upgraded and improved, and we are now able to fulfill all of our governance requirements in relation to Board and Committee papers. This kind of support is invaluable.”