Dear Carole

Healthcare Improvement Scotland’s Annual Review 2020/21

Thank you very much for updating me at our meeting on Thursday 02 December 2021 regarding the performance of Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) since April 2020 and for your follow up letter dated 10 December 2021.

Overnight many of us have had to work in different environments and volunteer to do different jobs. I am particularly pleased at how HIS has continued to flex to help us in responding to the pandemic. Please pass on my thanks to everyone working within HIS. I understand that many clinical staff in HIS have recently come forward to support the vaccine roll out. Please relay my special thanks to the individuals involved. It is so important to have the right people, in the right place, at the right time, to enable this to happen.
I was reassured to hear about staff well-being and pleased to understand that collaboration within HIS is increasing. I do recognise that some meetings need to be held face to face, but it sounds like the regular Huddles are well attended, allowing for choice when appropriate in terms of working location. It was good to hear that HIS is using iMatter and WoW for its own purposes and I was reassured to understand that the organisation is keen to attract staff as well as retain and nurture existing skills and capabilities.

Patient safety remains paramount and the recent issues in relation to the QEUH Campus made me reflect on the importance of the Scottish Patient Safety Programme. The pandemic would have been much harder to navigate without the Quality Management System (QMS) mechanisms in place as a result of this programme. I am very grateful to HIS for this, and look forward to seeing the QMS being deployed not just across health.

I am pleased that HIS has managed to engage with the initial consultations around the National Care Service, but as discussed, I am keen to see HIS ‘in with the bricks and designing the National Care Service’. HIS’ experience of driving national improvement programmes will be key to effective development of the National Care Service and HIS will also need to be a key organisation in the delivery that service too. I completely agree that investing in social care staff should be the priority here and that decisions for design need to be driven by evidence. It may also be worth looking at where models of such a service haven’t worked and learning from them too. I am reassured to learn that Robbie will be meeting with Donna Bell and Linda Pollock as a priority and I await the outcome of these discussions via the Sponsor Team.

It was good to hear from Suzanne Dawson about HIS’ variety of different approaches to “Community Engagement” including the Citizens Panel. I appreciate that at present Boards’ capacity to engage in this is limited, but as you know I feel very strongly about the importance of engaging people and communities early and proportionately, using the method of random selection. I believe that if HIS is able to help Boards achieve this, we will not only have health and social care services that the people of Scotland truly need, but it will also prevent issues for Boards further down the line. I reiterate my offer of support to HIS in helping the wider SG and Boards hear more in this area – please do get in touch with the Sponsor Team should you wish to follow through on this offer.

It was good also to hear about Hospital at Home and NHS Near Me. As I mentioned, despite some negative media coverage around this, I have had many constituents approach me about the need to be offered the choice of not having to travel a long way to see a GP and the desire to remain in the comfort of their own surroundings where they feel more empowered talking about their own health matters. It is so important that the whole of our NHS is able to offer such choice and enable patients to be more empowered. It would be good if HIS can help the wider NHS learn from such experiences.
As you know Mental Health remains a key priority for the Scottish Government, both in responding to the challenges of the pandemic and in the longer term. I believe that mental health needs to have the same status as physical health and it is therefore vital, that mental health remains one of HIS’s top priorities. I look forward to hearing more about how HIS continues to work with SG on the mental health standards and their integration.

I acknowledge the system pressures that the whole NHS are facing and understand that HIS is adapting its approach to inspection in the context of service pressures while ensuring HIS continue to deliver their statutory functions. The Cabinet Secretary and I both agree that it is vital that we do not lose sight of the need for continuous improvement, particularly in relation to patient safety. We also understand that due to the pressures upon us that recommendations may not be able to be acted upon in as quick a manner as normal. I am very grateful for HIS’ efforts and flexibility in this independent role and for responding to Ministerial asks for independent assurance.

I was pleased to hear about the HIS Evidence Directorate and how this directorate is central to HIS’ work and the wider Health and Social Care system. I would like to thank SIGN for its continued efforts to develop and refresh guidelines for Scotland. This is helping to ensure that our clinicians have the latest primary guidance in the correct policy context. I was particularly impressed with SIGN’s rapid review work and the influence SIGN has had on the wider UK landscape.

I was pleased to learn that work is underway to review costs in relation to Independent Healthcare. It would be good to have a timescale for reaching an agreed model with SG. It might also be helpful to look at how registered healthcare professionals such as pharmacists enable on-line access.

I was reassured to understand that HIS delivered a balanced position in 2020/21 after the receipt of funding from the SG to meet the additional pressures arising from the Covid-19 pandemic response. I was particularly pleased to hear that HIS delivered savings of £2M in 2020/21, in line with your financial plan.

I recognise that the forthcoming winter is likely to be a real challenge for the entire health and social care service and really appreciate the flexibility that HIS staff are continuing to display. Please do relay my personal thanks to everyone at HIS for their continued effort in responding to the pandemic and their tireless work on remobilisation. HIS’ agility and resilience is supporting front line NHS staff at a time of great need - for which I and the Cabinet Secretary are very grateful.

Maree Todd MSP

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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