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Mr Calum Campbell
Chief Executive
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Dear Mr Campbell

Feedback from the Sharing Intelligence for Health & Care Group – NHS Lothian

The Sharing Intelligence for Health & Care Group (referred to as ‘the Group’) considered NHS Lothian at our meeting on 26 April 2021, as part of our routine annual programme of work. We are writing now to summarise the main points we discussed collectively as seven national organisations.¹

First, we would like to thank colleagues from NHS Lothian and the four Health & Social Care Partnerships in the region for their tremendous efforts in the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that the pandemic will continue to cause enormous challenges for front line services for some time to come, and there will be an impact on those heavily involved in the COVID-19 response even once the current challenges recede.

The pandemic has also impacted on the work programmes of the seven national organisations on the Group, and in doing so on some of the intelligence that is available to us. We are, however, continuing to share and consider intelligence regularly – as this helps us identify things that are working well, and also any emerging problems which can then be acted upon. The remit of the Group does not, however, extend to making a comprehensive, system-wide assessment of the quality of care. The intelligence we considered on 26 April should already be known to NHS Lothian, including a range of information which is already in the public domain.

¹ The Sharing Intelligence for Health & Care Group is a partnership involving: Audit Scotland; Care Inspectorate; Healthcare Improvement Scotland; Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland; NHS Education for Scotland; Public Health Scotland, and: Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.
When we considered NHS Lothian on 26 April 2021, the partner agencies on the Group found it helpful to learn from each other about various aspects of the health and social care system in Lothian. This will help inform the work we carry out as national organisations. The Group agreed that, at this time, there are no actions beyond any already planned that any of the seven national agencies need to take.

As a Group, we have previously acknowledged the environment of extreme pressure that the leaders of today’s health and social care systems are working within – together with the significant level of change across Scotland within the senior leadership of NHS boards. At our meeting on 26 April 2021, we acknowledged that there continues to be significant change in the senior leadership of NHS Lothian. We noted that you have now taken up the role of Chief Executive on a permanent basis, and there are also changes for the posts of Director of Public Health & Health Policy, and Director of Midwifery. We understand that Scottish Government is seeking to appoint to the role of Chair of NHS Lothian on a permanent basis.

Leadership in parts of the wider health and social care system across the region has also been looked at as part of joint inspection activity by the Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland. A joint inspection of children’s services in Midlothian found that leaders modelled effective collaborative working to protect children across that partnership. A joint inspection of services for adults in West Lothian reported significant change in the management team and found some strengths with leadership – however there was inconsistency in the commitment to integration of health and social care services. There has continued to be greater stability within the senior leadership team from the City of Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership, and the ambitious transformational change programmes will require significant leadership. Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate are currently engaging with City of Edinburgh about progress with this.

Audit Scotland informed the Group that NHS Lothian currently remains elevated at level 4 of the Scottish Government’s performance framework, in relation to the new Royal Hospital for Children & Young People – and at level 3 for some other performance challenges. We noted that the Royal Hospital for Children & Young People opened in March 2021, after long delays and considerable financial, operational and political issues. The public inquiry about the construction of the hospital started in August 2020 and is ongoing. In the meantime, we noted that NHS Lothian’s internal audit report on this matter concluded that there had been human error and confusion over interpretation of the relevant specifications and guidance, together with a collective failure from the relevant parties involved in the project to spot and rectify the errors.

Audit Scotland informed the Group that NHS Lothian met all its key financial targets for 2019/20, and there are effective arrangements in place for financial planning and monitoring in the short term. NHS Lothian continues to face significant challenges in achieving financial sustainability in the longer term – and for 2020/21, Scottish Government has allocated £78m of funding to NHS Lothian for COVID-19 related costs, together with an additional £3m funding for General Practice.

COVID-19 has exacerbated some existing workforce challenges, including the sustainability of your GP and medical workforce (high on your risk register), and safe staffing levels for nursing has also been identified as a risk. NHS Education for Scotland explained that the percentage of consultant vacancies for NHS Lothian continues to be lower than the Scottish average, although there was a marked increase in medical agency costs. Nursing and midwifery agency and bank costs have also increased, with vacancies higher than the national level – as is the percentage of vacancies for Allied Health

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Professionals. We learned that NHS Lothian engages well in relation to postgraduate medical education and training.

The joint inspection of services for adults in West Lothian, mentioned above, also found that the partnership was performing in line with national trends. Challenges included a need to develop stronger engagement with supported people and carers. The joint inspection of services for children and young people in need of care and protection in Midlothian was positive overall. For example, pre-birth planning arrangements supported early identification of vulnerable pregnant women, and the midwives’ early routine enquiries helped ensure early multiagency intervention for high risk pregnancies. Challenges included some specialist services, such as Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services, not always being available at the time children and young people needed them.

The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland updated the group on how COVID-19 has impacted on mental health services. We also learned that there have been developments with mental health and learning disability services available for children and young people, with the opening of Melville Ward in the new hospital.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland has carried out inspections during 2020 to Midlothian Community Hospital and Ellen’s Glen Hospital, and NHS Lothian has provided action plans to address areas for improvement identified.

Public Health Scotland noted that NHS Lothian performed well against the Scottish Stroke Care Audit standards – although challenges remain at the Western General Hospital, with only 33% of patients being admitted to a stroke unit within 1 day, and only 66% receiving a swallow screen within 4 hours. In addition, the Western General Hospital Surgical High Dependency Unit has previously had a relatively high level of delayed discharges – and the Scottish Intensive Care Society Audit Group is monitoring more recent data to ascertain if this remains an issue to be followed up with NHS Lothian.

While the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman did not identify any significant concerns with complaints handling in NHS Lothian, we noted from your Board papers that NHS Lothian has identified aspects of complaints handling that you are aiming to improve.

We hope you find this summary of our discussions helpful, and we would be grateful if you share this letter with the four Health & Social Care Partnerships in Lothian, together with the Board of NHS Lothian. We will also welcome your feedback on how we can improve how we share and use intelligence as a Group, including how this can be of greatest value to NHS Lothian.

Yours sincerely

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