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Ms Cathie Cowan
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Dear Ms Cowan

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

The Sharing Intelligence for Health & Care Group (referred to as ‘the Group’) considered NHS Forth Valley at our meeting on 24 September 2020, 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 wish to acknowledge, and show our appreciation for, the great efforts of staff from NHS Forth Valley and the two Health & Social Care Partnerships in the region in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In our annual report for 2018-19, we highlighted the committed workforce in Scotland that has continued to deliver high-quality care. Colleagues’ expertise, professionalism, commitment and compassion are needed now more than ever. We also understand that local health and care systems are currently in the process of restarting many services, and the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact on front line services for a considerable time to come.

The seven national organisations on the Group have also made changes to our work programmes, with the ultimate aim of supporting front line services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is having some impact on the intelligence that is readily available to us. We are, however, continuing to share

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.
and consider intelligence regularly throughout the current pandemic – as we have a duty to make the best use possible of existing data, knowledge and intelligence. One of our main objectives is to ensure that, when any of the seven agencies on the Group have a potentially serious concern about a care system, then this is shared and responded to as necessary. Sharing concerns at the right time can help identify emerging problems which can then be acted upon.

The intelligence considered by the Group on 24 September should already be known to NHS Forth Valley, including a range of information which is already in the public domain. It is important to note that we only consider data/information that is held by the seven agencies represented on the Group. This sort of intelligence helps us identify things that are working well, as well as emerging problems. It does not, however, allow us to make a comprehensive assessment of the quality of care – nor is it the role of the Group to do this. Furthermore, we are prioritising the points that we feed back to individual NHS boards during 2020-21, with the aim of drawing attention to points that continue to be relevant at the time of the current pandemic.

**NHS Forth Valley**

When we considered NHS Forth Valley on 24 September 2020, 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 Forth Valley. This will help inform the work we carry out as national organisations. As described below, we were pleased to note aspects of your local system that are working well. We also discussed some risks to the quality of care delivered for the residents of Forth Valley. We acknowledge that work is already being carried out locally to respond to these issues, sometimes with input from one or more of the partner agencies on the Group.

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. When we considered NHS Forth Valley in 2019, we noted that there had not recently been significant changes in your senior management team. At our meeting last month, we learned that NHS Forth Valley continues to have stable and effective leadership.

We have also previously highlighted the importance of collaborative leadership across the different components of health and social care systems. One of the main areas we have highlighted previously as a Group for Forth Valley is progress in the provision of integrated health and social care. Last year, we noted that the need to strengthen collaborative leadership was one of the main findings of a joint inspection of strategic planning in the Clackmannanshire & Stirling Health and Social Care Partnership. More recently, we learned that a joint inspection, led by the Care Inspectorate, of services for children and young people in need of care and protection in Stirling has assessed collaborative leadership as being adequate.

As a Group, we previously highlighted the significant financial pressures being experienced by care systems across the country. Audit Scotland informed the Group that NHS Forth Valley continues to have good financial management, together with appropriate and effective governance arrangements that support scrutiny of decisions made by the Board. We learned that NHS Forth Valley met its financial targets for 2019-20, although this continues to be reliant on non-recurrent savings. Efficiency savings of £19.25 million were achieved after relying on non-recurrent savings of £7.7 million. NHS Forth Valley has an approved five-year, medium-term financial plan in place. This identifies a significant financial gap of £20.6 million in 2020-21, with savings of £42 million required over the next three financial years. We note that, as for NHS boards across the country, NHS Forth Valley is assessing the financial impact of COVID-19.
Our meeting on 24 September 2020 provided an opportunity for the partner agencies on the Group to share information with each other about the quality of other front line services in Forth Valley. For example, we found it helpful to learn from Healthcare Improvement Scotland about the findings of an unannounced inspection to Falkirk Community Hospital. Patients were treated with dignity and respect – and comments received from patients, visitors and carers were mainly positive. Staff engaged well with the inspection team and saw the inspection as being supportive. The main areas for improvement identified were around documentation. The joint inspection of services for children in Stirling mentioned above also found that health services had embedded getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) principles and processes particularly well, which was helping identify risk and need at an early stage. Access to Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services was also identified as being relatively good.

The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland explained that they are currently carrying out an investigation in relation to a small group of female prisoners who were in HMP Cornton Vale and experienced significant delays in being transferred to hospital. The Commission is also following up on some other cases where there have been reported delays in transfer from prison to hospital. The Commission reported that work is being carried out to tackle significantly delayed discharges for the learning disability service, and some positive progress with this has been made at the unit at Lochview. The Commission also reported that there continues to be some delays with your significant adverse event review process.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland reported that NHS Forth Valley has engaged in a range of nationally-led quality improvement activities. Successes prior to COVID-19 include a sustained improvement at NHS board level for the rate of cardiac arrest, and a low incidence of pressure ulcer damage. However, there has been no improvement in the rate of falls with harm, and a sustained deterioration in the rate of all falls.

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.

We hope you find this summary of our discussions helpful. As a Group, we will continue to share intelligence in order to inform the work we carry out as seven national agencies. If you have any suggestions for how our Group can better support your work to deliver high quality care for the residents of Forth Valley then please don’t hesitate to let us know.

Yours sincerely

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