Dear Mr Archibald

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

The Sharing Intelligence for Health & Care Group (referred to as ‘the Group’) considered NHS Tayside at our meeting on 24 August 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 Tayside and the three Health & Social Care Partnerships in Tayside 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 is 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 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

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.
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 August should already be known to NHS Tayside, 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 Tayside**

When we considered NHS Tayside on 24 August 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 Tayside. 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 Tayside. 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\(^2\). In 2019, we highlighted that this level of leadership change was greatest in Tayside, and that filling your key leadership vacancies would be critical for establishing stable, effective leadership that can deliver the level of transformation required. We note that in the past year you have made progress with establishing your senior leadership team – although you still have some vacancies, and NHS Tayside currently has an interim Chair.

Last year, we also highlighted the importance of collaborative leadership across the different components of the health and social care system in Tayside. At our meeting on 24 August, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate explained that a joint inspection of service for adults (report published September 2019) found that leadership in Perth & Kinross Health & Social Care Partnership was weak, as was the use of performance information.

Audit Scotland informed the Group that NHS Tayside has adequate corporate governance arrangements in place. We learned that, in 2019/20, some progress was made with strengthening NHS Tayside’s governance arrangements and that further improvements are planned during 2020/21.

As a Group, we previously highlighted the significant financial pressures being experienced by care systems across the country. Audit Scotland explained that NHS Tayside continues to have significant financial challenges, and that the Scottish Government provided £7.0 million of additional financial support to NHS Tayside in 2019-20. We note that NHS Tayside’s three-year financial plan was approved by your Board in April 2020. This plan has been developed on the basis of a breakeven position over the three-year period to 31 March 2023, although the plan excludes any repayment of the aforementioned £7.0 million flexibility funding. As a result of concerns about financial sustainability, NHS Tayside remains at stage 4 on the Scottish Government’s escalation framework\(^3\).

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Audit Scotland explained that your reliance on non-recurring savings is not sustainable in the longer term, and that progress with transformation has been slow. We understand that COVID-19 has accelerated transformation in some services, and NHS Tayside’s re-mobilisation plan will be your new transformation plan. NHS Education for Scotland informed us that your expenditure on medical locum agency, and also supplementary staffing for nursing, has increased. We noted that there has also been a decrease in your workforce (by 377 whole time equivalents in the past year).

In recent years, a number of partner organisations on the Group have highlighted serious concerns about the quality of mental health services delivered in Tayside. When we considered NHS Tayside in June 2019, we noted that the final report of an independent review of mental health services in Tayside was being prepared. However, given the risks identified at that time, Healthcare Improvement Scotland carried out a review of community mental health services in Tayside (report published in July 2020). This review found a committed workforce and some examples of good practice, although it also made a number of recommendations. These include strengthening medical leadership, governance around the use of locums, and arrangements for monitoring/measuring the quality of care. There also needs to be greater equity of service provision across the three Health & Social Care Partnerships.

At our meeting in August 2020, we noted that the final report from the independent review of mental health services in Tayside had highlighted a number of concerns. The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland highlighted that the reliance on locum psychiatrists continues to have an impact on care and treatment – and there are ongoing challenges with staffing, and also delayed discharges, for your learning disability service. The Commission also explained that, as part of your mental health improvement programme, there have been some positive changes to inpatient services. NHS Education for Scotland reported that, because of ongoing concerns about the quality of postgraduate medical training in General Adult Psychiatry across NHS Tayside, this service remains under additional scrutiny through the General Medical Council’s Enhanced Monitoring process. NHS Education for Scotland was due to revisit Tayside with the General Medical Council in June 2020 in relation to these concerns – we note that this visit was postponed due to COVID-19, and is being rescheduled. Partner organisations on the Group are continuing to work together to monitor and support improvements in mental health services in Tayside, co-ordinating this work with the follow up to the independent review.

Our meeting on 24 August 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 Tayside. For example, we found it helpful to learn from Healthcare Improvement Scotland that an inspection of the care of older people at Stracathro Hospital in January 2020 did not identify significant concerns about the quality of care. We were also informed that, prior to COVID-19, NHS Tayside had engaged well with nationally-led quality improvement work. Successes include sustained improvements in the rates of cardiac arrest, pressure ulcers, falls, and term admissions to the neonatal unit.

In summary, the Group acknowledged that there are ongoing concerns about mental health services in Tayside, together with some challenges with leadership, governance, and finances. The Group therefore agreed that, in six months’ time, we will consider the intelligence we have about progress made in relation to these issues. The purpose of this is to make a decision about whether or not there are any additional actions beyond any already planned that any of our 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 Tayside then please don’t hesitate to let us know.
Yours sincerely

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