



T: 0300 244 4000  
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Ms Esther Robertson  
Chair  
NHS 24

By email.

7 June 2019

Dear Esther,

## **NHS 24 – ANNUAL REVIEW 2017/18**

1. I am writing to you following the NHS 24 Annual Review held at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Clydebank on Monday 7 December 2018 and the subsequent public session which was held on 31 January 2019. I would like to record my thanks to you and everyone who was involved in the preparations for both days which both ran very smoothly. Of particular note was the good attendance at your public session and the level of engagement with the audience. I also noted that the session was streamed live providing those who could not attend with an opportunity to participate and pose questions.
2. NHS 24 has an important role to play in supporting NHS Scotland to deliver health services for the people of Scotland. The annual review gave me the chance to hear about progress against your continued commitment to developing your services through your 5 year strategy which is aligned to Scottish Government priorities.
3. This letter summarises the main points discussed and the actions arising from the Review.

### **Performance**

4. October 2017 saw the full launch of your new IT and telephony system. This was a significant achievement bearing in mind the organisation's previous efforts to update your systems. A key consideration was the need to instill confidence in your staff and stakeholders as you moved forward towards the introduction of the new system. You put in place a full and comprehensive engagement programme with staff and stakeholders, developed and delivered a timely, thorough training programme for hundreds of staff and developed a model office for a trial period, all of which

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)



successfully contributed to building confidence and trust in NHS 24's ability to deliver which was key to achieving your goal. You explained that the requirement for this extensive training, coupled with a bedding in period for the new IT had a significant impact on performance against your key performance target of answering 90% of calls within 30 seconds. However, your focus on ensuring that clinical call backs were carried out within timescales during this challenging period ensured that there was no impact on patient safety.

5. Moving forward, you explained your current focus on looking at the way you measure performance, with your patient engagement activity giving you insights into expectation of patients when they call NHS 24, and the fact that patients, on the whole, are willing to wait longer for their call to be answered in order for them to receive advice at the first point of contact, without the need to be placed in a queue. You intend to expand this work and carry out further engagement with patients with the potential to look at your performance measurement framework for the future and ensure it is clearly focussed on reflecting outcomes for patients. I trust you will continue to engage with Scottish Government through the sponsorship team as this work develops.

## Strategic Direction

6. Your Strategic Delivery Programme focuses on key areas of work, including supporting GP practices during the in hours period, providing clinical support within your contact centres, mental health and modernising outpatients. Through this work NHS 24 has a real contribution to make in improving healthcare systems across the board and shifting the balance of care. Connections between NHS 24 and key partners across the system at a management level are key to taking forward your strategic programme.
7. A full evaluation of the pilot undertaken at Riverside Medical practice in East Lothian has now been completed which has shown the benefits which NHS 24 phone triage for patients can bring. This includes ensuring patients see the right health professional first time to meet their needs and freeing up GP time to allow them to spend more time with patients who require their support. Over the next year I trust that you will be looking at how this successful work can be rolled out more widely throughout the country.
8. I was pleased to hear about the collaborative work that has taken place between NHS 24, the Scottish Ambulance Service and Police Scotland in making improvements to the management of calls regarding mental health. The development of the NHS 24 mental health hub will have a real, tangible impact on the care provided to mental health patients. The collaborative work undertaken to date has received extremely positive feedback and I expect that this will continue as you look to develop a shared understanding of risks across the whole system which will help in the development of appropriate pathways to improve care to mental health patients.

## Digital

9. It was encouraging to hear about the significant increase in NHS Inform activity over the past year. NHS Inform has an essential role to play in the healthcare system, helping patients to identify the most appropriate support for their condition. It is clear that NHS 24 is proactive in looking at how digital enhancements can support the delivery of your services and improve channel choice for patients and I trust this will continue to be an important part of your agenda moving forward.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)



## Staffing

10. Engagement with staff throughout the implementation of the new system was key in its successful roll out and it was evident throughout the day that staff felt involved and supported. Roll out of Imatter within the organisation has begun with a high response rate and it is clear that staff feel able to raise any issues affecting them. Continued collaboration with the Area Partnership Forum will ensure staff continue to feel valued and their views heard.
11. Issues with staff sickness absence rate remain a clear challenge for the organisation with rates for 2017/18 among the highest in the NHS. You advised that there are a number of factors contributing to absence rates and you are working proactively to tackle these issues. The new clinical supervision model you are introducing will provide staff with additional support and a better sense of being part of a team. The shift review being carried is also expected to have a positive impact on absence rates. It is important that clear governance is in place as this review is carried out and that responsibilities such as child care requirements for staff are taken into account. I trust that improving sickness rates will remain a key priority for the Service moving forward.

## Resources

12. I was pleased to note that NHS 24 achieved all financial targets in 2017-18, including remaining within its Revenue Resource Limit (RRL) and Capital Resource Limit (CRL). This outturn was underpinned by efficiency savings totalling £2.4 million which covered a number of schemes all without any adverse impact on patient care.

## Conclusion

13. I am pleased by the progress NHS 24 has made over the last year, especially in light of its organisational improvement programme. As the technology platform is now operational, I look forward to you focussing on how NHS 24 can support the wider healthcare system through the continued delivery of your strategy. I am interested to see how the organisation continues to develop in the coming months.

Regards,  
Clare Haughey

**CLARE HAUGHEY**



