

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

Dr Martin Cheyne and Angiolina Foster CBE
NHS 24 Chair and Chief Executive

18th November 2020

Dear Chair and Chief Executive,

NHS 24 – ANNUAL REVIEW 2019/20

1. I am writing to you following the NHS 24 Annual Review held via Microsoft Teams on Monday 19 October 2020. I would like to record my thanks to you and everyone who was involved in the preparations for this Review.
2. This letter summarises the main points discussed and the actions arising from the Review.

PRE-COVID PERFORMANCE TO END OF 2019/20

3. Against a challenging background and a recorded call demand of 1,426,611 calls to 111 in the first 11 months of 2019/20, overall performance against your key indicators remained positive for the Service, particularly around your focus on delivering advice and support at the first point of contact rather than placing patients in a queue for a clinical call back. Some challenges remain with regard to call answering standards and it is clear you are working hard to overcome these challenges.
4. I was interested to hear of your patient engagement work which is helping you to reshape your measurement framework to make it more patient outcome focussed and more aligned to what patients tell you they expect from the Service. You confirmed that you will continue to work on the development of this framework in the coming months with the sponsorship team.
5. I was pleased to hear of your work on increasing staff attendance rates including the completion of your first phase of the shift review and the introduction of a new clinical

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supervision model and I look forward to seeing the impact these structural changes have on improving your absence rates.

6. I want to recognise the challenging work that you and your staff have undertaken in that period for the benefit of people, and want to record my thanks to both for their on-going efforts, professionalism and commitment in providing a highly effective, safe triage system to the people of Scotland.

COVID-19 INITIAL RESPONSE (FEB/MARCH - JULY 2020)

7. There is no doubt NHS 24 has performed exceptionally well in response to covid-19 and I acknowledge the significant effort and achievements that you have made since the pandemic took hold, including;
 - The transformation/upscale of the service to a single national access point for the public, through 111 24/7 for Covid-19 related care in and out of hours, which required you to change your remit to provide support and advice for patients;
 - The development of your dedicated national Non-Clinical helpline to support people with general queries around Covid-19
 - The expansion of your Mental Health hub to a 24/7 service; and
 - The development and enhancement of your digital products, including NHS inform and Self Help Guides.
8. I appreciate the pace at which you have had to develop and change your services in the past months and the impact this can have on staff and I was interested to hear your reflections on how the organisation supported staff through this period of change.
9. As we move into the winter months and the work on the re-design of urgent care progresses further these challenges for staff are set to continue and it was clear you are fully aware of these challenges and have plans in place to support staff throughout, both with internal support mechanisms and through the use of Territorial Board services as and when required.

FUTURE PLANNING

10. As previously stated I want to thank you for all the work that you and your team have done in setting out your plans against the objectives and principles for safe and effective remobilisation.
11. You will be aware from correspondence that our four key priorities for the next phase to March 2021 are:
 - Securing exit from the acute pandemic phase through an effective mass population vaccination programme;
 - Suppressing the virus through sustainable precision public health measures such as Test and Protect, Surveillance and Response;

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- Keeping people alive and well through provision of essential health and social care services including those that promote wellbeing; and
- Supporting people through incentives and clear communication to comply with public health guidance.

It was interesting to hear how the service is planning to deliver against the four Ministerial priorities above and note that NHS 24 have agreed the following key areas of focus through to 31 March 2021 in support of these priorities:

1. Commit to continuing current levels of COVID-19 resource through to March 2021, at least.
2. Working with partners to develop a national urgent care pathway
3. Continue to expand and build on 24/7 Mental Health hub
4. Strategic review of NHS inform and its role within the refreshed Digital Health and Care Strategy
5. Supporting public health priorities

I am also interested in your related focus on three enabling themes that will support the delivery of this plan and progression of wider priorities:

- Continue to support the Workforce.
- Securing additional Estate to build on NHS 24 capacity.
- The continuation on building and enhancing NHS 24's Digital capacity and capability.

12. With regards to the Redesign of Urgent Care, I note the challenges/risks the organisation may face due to the multiple changes to the service at once and I will be interested to see how the pilot of this work with NHS Ayrshire and Arran works in practice.

13. I was also very pleased to hear of the successful work you have undertaken in the upscaling of the Mental Health Hub to 24/7. With over 2000 calls per week and over 300 DBI referrals per month, this indicates that the hub is providing a much needed service for patients in distress. I note the risk to workforce stability created by the non-recurring nature of related funding streams and have asked my officials to consider how this might be addressed.

FINANCE

14. I am pleased to note you have again delivered a balanced position in 2019/20 which I recognised was achieved in the context of what has been a challenging year.

15. As I stated during the review, you will receive an allocation of £14.2 million within the £1.1 billion funding announcement towards your projected costs of £19.75 million.

16. The funding will be allocated to Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships across Scotland to help them meet Covid-19 related costs such as additional staffing or sickness expenditure, enhanced infection prevention and control measures, and the purchase of PPE.

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CONCLUSION

17. I am pleased by the progress you have made throughout 2019/20 and challenges you have overcome, especially in light of Covid-19. As you continue to change and enhance your services through delivering of your key priorities listed above, I look forward to you focussing on how you can support the wider healthcare system through the Redesign of Urgent Care and I am encouraged to see how the organisation continues to develop in the coming months.

Clare Haughey

CLARE HAUGHEY

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St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
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