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| <p>NHS 24 BOARD MEETING</p> <p style="text-align: right;">18 AUGUST 2022 ITEM NO 10.4 FOR ASSURANCE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NHS 24 ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21</p> | |
| Executive Sponsor: | Dr Martin Cheyne, NHS 24 Chair |
| Lead Officer/Author: | Geraldine Mathew, Board Secretary |
| Action Required | The Board is asked to formally note the outcome of the NHS 24 Annual Review 2020/21. |
| Key Points | <p>Due to the ongoing COVID-19 measures, the NHS 24 Annual Review 2020/21 took place on 7 June 2022, via Microsoft Teams video conference. The format of the session included both a look back over the period of the pandemic to date, and a look forward in line with current Board resilience and mobilisation plans.</p> <p>The Cabinet Secretary letter to the NHS 24 Board Chair and Chief Executive which details the outcome of the NHS 24 Annual Review 2020/21 is attached and contains an overview of the topics discussed.</p> |
| Date presented to EMT and relevant Committee | This paper is for Board assurance only. |
| Summary of key discussion points/actions arising from respective Committees | This paper is for Board assurance only. |
| Strategic alignment and link to overarching NHS Scotland priorities and strategies | This paper is for Board assurance only. |
| Key Risks | There are no key risks associated with this paper. |
| Financial Implications | There are no financial implications associated with this paper. |
| Equality and Diversity | There are no equality and diversity implications associated with this paper. |

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Board is asked to formally note the outcome of the NHS 24 Annual Review 2020/21.

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Jim Miller and Martin Cheyne
NHS 24
By email
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8 July 2022

Dear Jim/Martin

NHS 24 – ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21

I am writing to you following the NHS 24 Annual Review held via Microsoft Teams on 7 June 2022. I would like to record my thanks to you both and everyone who was involved in the preparations for this Review.

In line with last year, in-person Reviews have not proved possible due to ongoing Covid-19 pandemic measures. Nonetheless, Annual Reviews remain an important part of the accountability process for the NHS. As such, we have arranged appropriate sessions with the Chair and Chief Executive of each Board via video conference. I was supported in the meeting by Policy Officials from the Primary Care Directorate.

The agenda for this year's round of Reviews was split into two sections: a look back over the period of the pandemic to date; and a look forward, in line with the current Board resilience and mobilisation plans.

This letter summarises the main points discussed and the actions arising from the Review.

LOOK BACK

Firstly, I would like to extend again my congratulations to NHS 24 on your 20th anniversary. This is a significant milestone for the organisation. My thanks go to you and all of the staff at NHS 24 for their dedication and commitment, particularly over the last couple of years in such unprecedented circumstances. Indeed, I asked you for options on how I might directly express my gratitude to the NHS 24 workforce and I look forward to progressing this.

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During this Annual Review, we took the opportunity to reflect on how the service has developed over this time, particularly throughout the pandemic period. NHS 24 has played a critical role during this time; through the communication of critical public health information via NHS Inform and through the expansion and development of new services, such as the Mental Health Hub, the Covid helpline and Unscheduled Care pathways.

You confirmed that demand on NHS 24 services has remained high over the past year, peaking during out of hours (weekends and evenings). You commented that, on the recent bank holiday on Friday 3 June, demand was at one of the highest ever on record, and I want to place on record my thanks to all staff for their continued efforts in providing excellent support and care to patients despite these challenging demand levels.

You highlighted that COVID has presented us with many challenges, however it also gave NHS 24 a chance to become more integrated within the wider NHS landscape. We discussed the success of the Redesign of Urgent Care programme, and the significant role NHS 24 has played in this with the public responding positively to pro-active communications. We also discussed the public using NHS 24 to access appropriate services rather than self-presenting at emergency departments. This has helped to reduce pressure on our Hospitals and I am sure will continue to do so as the programme is further developed. You also recalled that prior to the pandemic, NHS 24 had begun pilot projects with a small number of GP Practices, which saw the Service triaging calls from patients and directing patients to the appropriate care for their condition. I have asked my officials to provide me with further detail on the evaluation to determine how we build on the learning from this work.

The data that NHS 24 presents to the Scottish Government is invaluable and moving forward officials will discuss with NHS 24 colleagues, alternative ways to use the data available to improve access to primary care services in places where there may be gaps and room for improvement. You highlighted there is an opportunity now to explore how primary care can be further accessed across the country, and as we move out of the pandemic there will be more time to focus on this. I note that you were keen to explore live data further, including real time information, which will help the public to understand how long calls will take to answer, realistic time of calls with outcomes and the public messaging associated with this. I will be interested to hear how this work progresses.

The challenges that the NHS 24 workforce has faced over the past year are similar to all other areas of the health service. While I am grateful to our health workforce for their commitment over the last 2 years, I also recognise the impact that continued high demand has both on individuals on service delivery. I reiterated my commitment to staff wellbeing and welcomed the support you have in place for staff. You also spoke about career development opportunities that NHS 24 can now offer staff and I welcomed the consideration you are giving to developing 'blended roles' to attract and retain staff. One area that you raised was that territorial boards have access to endowment funds, which can be used to support staff functions and events which can help to support wellbeing. This is currently not available for national boards. I will ask officials to look into this matter further.

You also highlighted the success of the Psychiatric Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP) role which is a new role NHS 24 has developed to deliver 24/7 mental health support through your Mental Health Hub. Extending this service provision has been a significant area of development over the last 2 years and the high demand on this service during this time demonstrates the importance of this service development. I am aware of the challenges in

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recruiting and retaining staff within these roles and am keen to be kept informed on progress as well as how this service might develop further.

Another significant asset of NHS 24 has been NHS Inform, which has been critical in communicating essential information to the public, during the pandemic. I agree that we should work together to further explore how this and other digital services can be further enhanced and I welcomed your example of how chat functionality is increasing accessibility to mental health services.

LOOK FORWARD

In the immediate future, I was eager to hear how prepared you are to scale up operations should there be another wave of COVID infections. It was encouraging to hear that NHS 24 can show such flexibility to respond to emerging demands.

As with other boards, you have submitted a detailed remobilisation plan. It was reassuring to hear that you making good progress in the implementation of your plan, and that you have a number of longer-term ambitions including strategic workforce, finance, infrastructure and digital developments.

You acknowledged that all of the centres that staff work in are now modern and bright, which has helped to improve staff morale. I particularly enjoyed my visit to officially open the new centre in Dundee, where I saw for myself the excellent facilities and surroundings that you have provided for the staff there. The First Minister was also impressed on her recent visit to mark the 20th anniversary of NHS 24.

We discussed financial planning for the year ahead, which I acknowledged, will be challenging given the landscape as we move out of the pandemic. However, I remain committed to providing as much stability as possible moving forwards and officials will continue to work closely with you as financial plans are further developed.

We discussed the idea of bringing together the national boards to discuss common challenges and opportunities that we all face and how you can work more collaboratively to achieve common goals, I have asked officials to take this forward.

After a recent visit to Marie Curie, we had discussions around a possible pathway with NHS 24, and if working in partnership with the third sector could be something that NHS 24 can take forward. Officials will again facilitate discussions around this potential development.

CONCLUSION

I hope that by the time of the next Review we will be free of some of the extreme recent pressures and able to focus fully on renewal. I am, nonetheless, under no illusion that the NHS has faced the most challenging winter in its history and am grateful for your ongoing efforts to ensure resilience. We will continue to keep performance under close review and to provide as much support as possible.

I want to conclude by reiterating my sincere thanks again to the Service and staff for your sustained professionalism and commitment, in the face of unprecedented and unrelenting

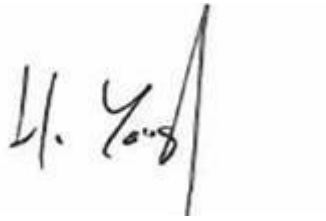
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pressures during both 2020/21 and 2021/22, and for setting out such a comprehensive account of your performance this past year.



HUMZA YOUSAF

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