

Ministear airson Slàinte Phoblach is Slàinte
Bhoireannach
Jenni Minto BPA



Minister for Public Health and Women's Health
Jenni Minto MSP

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

Keith Redpath
Chair
NHS National Services Scotland
via email: Keith.Redpath@nhs.scot

Cc: Mary Morgan, Chief Executive

28 January 2025

Dear Keith

NHS NATIONAL SERVICES SCOTLAND (NSS) – ANNUAL REVIEW 2023-24

I am writing to you following the Annual Review held at the Jack Copland Centre on Monday 4 November 2024, which was supported by Christine McLaughlin, Co-Director of Population Health and NSS Sponsor Director.

This round of Annual Reviews continued to include digital access elements wherever possible to maximise attendance and participation, including those stakeholders who may have been precluded from attending due to the need to travel.

I would like to record our thanks to you, Mary and everyone who was involved across the various meetings; both in-person and online. It was a highly informative day and I hope everyone who participated found it equally worthwhile. This letter summarises the key points of discussion.

Site Visit

Meeting and discussing key workstreams directly with representatives across service areas gave an insight into the breadth of work delivered by NSS to support NHSScotland. There was focus on NSS sustainability, National Procurement (NP), the Central Legal Office (CLO) and

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1 3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

<https://www.nhsinform.scot>



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

Accredited
Until 2020



the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS), with discussions highlighting the essential contribution and achievements from the past year.

With tackling the Climate Emergency being one of this Government's key priorities, it was particularly interesting to hear how NSS is supporting sustainability throughout the organisation with action being taken to achieve commitments set out in your Environmental and Sustainability Strategy. We discussed the benefits of incorporating wellbeing in the workplace as part of sustainability considerations, and improvements in our sustainability data collection through the installation of Automatic Meter Readers across several NSS sites to measure water and energy use. Achievements of National Procurement teams are also noted as teams have worked towards developing a sustainability dashboard and eliminating the use of fossil fuel energy across NHSScotland.

I welcomed the opportunity to meet with colleagues in CLO and recognise and appreciate their continued and extensive support to NHS Boards as they respond to Public Inquiries, including the UK Infected Blood Inquiry, the Scottish Hospitals Inquiry, the Historic Abuse Inquiry and two COVID-19 Inquiries. SNBTS colleagues were also recognised for their support to the Infected Blood Inquiry which they continue through the Scottish Government Infected Blood Inquiry Oversight and Assurance Group. Being able to see and discuss the work SNBTS were involved in highlighted the great work of blood services in Scotland and the essential contribution made by blood, platelet and plasma donors.

Partnership Forum

I was pleased to meet with the Partnership Forum and it was clear there are strong relationships in place. The on-going commitment of staff in the face of unprecedented pressures has been fundamental to a number of developments and improvements that have been delivered. We also acknowledged that very many pressures remain on staff throughout the NHS and with planning partners; and I am conscious of the cumulative impact on the health and social care workforce.

I welcomed discussion on NSS's work in-year, building on feedback from Trade Union representatives to safeguard staff wellbeing. I note the continued efforts of NSS to create an inclusive culture across the organisation and I was particularly impressed with the level of engagement evidenced in your recent budget seminars. I also recognise the on-going efforts in reviewing and updating workforce policies to support hybrid working and the implementation of the first 30 minute reduction to the working week as part of the Agenda for Change Reform.

Public Session

The public session was streamed live online and began with your presentation on the range of NSS's services and performance, focusing on key achievements and challenge across strategic objectives with a look back and look forward. This covered key activity to support recovery and reform in line with national priorities and NSS's role as an Anchor Institution. We then undertook a Q&A session which began with questions submitted in advance before a number were asked from the floor.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1 3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

<https://www.nhsinform.scot>



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

Accredited
Until 2020



I particularly appreciated the opportunity to conclude the session by awarding the certificate to a donor in recognition of their service in undertaking over 150 blood donations. We are grateful to you, the Board and NSS staff, and to wider audience members for their attendance, engagement and considered questions.

Private Session

We then moved into private session with yourself as Board Chair and Mary as Chief Executive to discuss performance in more detail.

Finance

NSS delivered a balanced financial outturn in 2023-24. This was achieved as a result of NSS's delivery of £11.7 million savings in-year and implementation of £1.2 million non-recurring measures, which exceeded the 3% baseline target. For 2024-25, NSS continue to forecast the delivery of financial balance through effective financial management and the anticipated delivery of £16.5 million of savings in-year.

I recognise the significant pressures NHS Boards are currently operating in, together with the high level of uncertainty and volatility that remains in the system. This context makes longer term planning difficult and I was pleased to hear the Board was working so hard to achieve strategic objectives against the financial challenge to support the Health Portfolio as a whole. We agreed the delivery of recurring efficiencies would be crucial to this and future year budget challenges, with Boards required to focus on delivering at least 3% recurrent savings and develop measures to reduce the financial gap as far as possible.

Key ongoing pressures were also reported in relation to NSD Specialist Services and National Screening Programme spend in addition to uncertainty around Digital Health and Care funding. The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Board to monitor their financial position and assist with longer term financial planning and improvement.

Workforce

I would like to formally record my appreciation to all NSS staff for their consistent dedication and commitment, and to give them assurance that we will continue to do what we can to support them.

Workforce Sustainability is one of NSS's core strategic objectives and we discussed highlights and challenges reported against the Board's Workforce and Great Place to Work Plans which were aligned to the National Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy. Key highlights for 2023-24 included the iMatter response rate which was above target at 78% and 300 action plans completed; increased learning and development opportunities through the move to eLearning software Turas Learn; the development and launch of the NSS retiral dashboard; and the introduction of NSS's first 'Health, Safety and Wellbeing Recognising and Celebrating Excellence' awards.

In regard to NSS's annual sickness absence rate for 2023-24, whilst it had increased by 0.24% the previous year to 4.26%, we noted it remained lower than the national average of 6.2%.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1 3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

<https://www.nhsinform.scot>



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

Accredited
Until 2020



Turnover rates were also outlined to be at 9.69% which represented a decrease of 2.13% and the number of agency employees had decreased significantly from the previous year.

The Board was noted to have experienced challenges in recruiting hard to fill posts especially where there is a recognised skills shortage. This is a challenge across the health and social care system, particularly the case for NSS clinical roles as well as in digital, programme management, legal, procurement, engineering and commercial areas. The proactive approach NSS is taking to address this was noted, including working with third parties to widen the scope for attraction and engagement and exploring options for career pathways to help grow and develop staff in house. Continued action to address potential skills and knowledge gaps as outlined in the NSS 5 Pillars Action Plan is encouraged to maintain service delivery levels.

As recognised in our meetings with teams across Service Areas and the Partnership Forum, we remain very conscious of the cumulative pressures on the health and social care workforce and note the range of actions NSS is taking to focus on several wellbeing strands to promote personal resilience, help prevent mental health issues developing and to support overall wellbeing in the workplace. Such measures will be material in terms of staff recruitment and retention efforts.

Performance and Resilience in Priority Areas

NSS was noted to have fully achieved its statutory financial targets for financial year 2023-24 and achieved 94% of the milestones in its Annual Delivery Plan for the year 2023-24 (deliverables being complete or on track).

Looking back, I recognise the significant body of work NSS has undertaken to support ongoing improvement and resilience in Health and Social Care with a focus on recovery and renewal. This included the leadership of the Seer 2 platform which was highlighted to have helped 20,000 users make data-informed decisions; consistently meeting the requirement for three days blood supply enabling hospitals to access blood and cells needed for patients; cost avoidance of £21.5 million through negotiating improved prices; and the continued planning and advice provided in relation to infection, prevention, and control and wider issues related to the healthcare-built environment.

We discussed some of the learning that has come from the work NSS has taken forward and I know that you will continue to keep the sponsor team apprised of how the organisation is building on these lessons.

Going forward and as you are aware, the financial and operational position of NHSScotland remains challenging and we have asked Boards individually and collectively to work more collaboratively in terms of forward planning and delivery. I appreciate you have recently updated NSS' Strategic Framework for 2024-26 and this sets out the Board's priorities adapted to the post pandemic landscape in line with Scottish Government and NHSScotland policies.

Building on the presentation in the public session, we also discussed potential risks and opportunities to support the achievement of service reform and innovation, particularly in regards to screening, digital and specialist services. I would encourage you to continue to work

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1 3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

<https://www.nhsinform.scot>



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

Accredited
Until 2020



closely with Scottish Government colleagues on commissioning arrangements and communicate where there may be risks in the delivery of particular programmes of work.

Closing Remarks

I hope by the time of the Board's next Ministerial Review we will be free of some of the more extreme pressures of recent years and be able to focus fully on service recovery and renewal. I am, nonetheless, under no illusion that the NHS continues to face one of its most difficult periods and remain grateful for your ongoing efforts to ensure resilience to the NHS in Scotland.

I appreciated the opportunity to recognise and reflect on the scale and breadth of the work NSS has undertaken over the review period and would once again like to extend my gratitude to NSS Staff for their excellent work. As we enter a new year, we will continue to keep activity under close review and to provide as much support as possible.

Yours sincerely,



JENNI MINTO

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1 3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

<https://www.nhsinform.scot>



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

Accredited
Until 2020

