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Richard Leonard MSP  
Convenor  
Public Audit Committee

By email: [Publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:Publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot)

6 June 2024

Dear Mr Leonard

### **The 2022/23 Audit of NHS Forth Valley**

Thank you for your letter of 9 May 2024, on behalf of the Public Audit Committee, which has been considering the Auditor General for Scotland's (AGS) section 22 report, The 2022/23 audit of NHS Forth Valley.

You have asked for an update on the progress that NHS Forth Valley is making in response to concerns raised which led to the escalation of the organisation to Stage 4 on the NHS Scotland Support and Intervention Framework in November 2022. I note that NHS Forth Valley have provided a detailed progress report, which was considered by the Public Audit Committee on 2 May 2024. As that report was based on information provided to the Assurance Board, I have therefore not included that detailed information in my response.

Since the start of 2024, and under the leadership of the Interim Chief Executive Amanda Croft, the Assurance Board has begun to see evidence that progress is now being made, not just in implementing the actions in the Assurance and Improvement Plan (the Plan), but in seeing improvement because of those actions. The Plan itself has continued to be updated over the last 18 months, to reflect the recommendations and learning from all the diagnostic work related to escalation, including more recently from the Governance Review, the Audit Scotland Section 22 report and the Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) follow up inspection of Forth Valley Royal Hospital.

The main way in which the Assurance Board measures progress is through delivery of the actions in the Plan and this is reviewed at each Assurance Board meeting. NHS Forth Valley have identified 33 of the 35 high level actions in the plan as being complete. Whilst this demonstrates progress overall, the Assurance Board have sought to distinguish between actions that related to escalation and actions that are 'business as usual' and which may have ongoing action over a longer time frame but are no longer required to be monitored through the Assurance Board. To ensure this is a robust process, there is internal audit work underway within NHS Forth Valley to validate the reported completion of the actions within

the Plan and to ensure that the supporting evidence provided is adequate and relevant. Any recommendations from that audit work will be considered by the Assurance Board.

To give an example of this in the Plan, there was an action to complete a project to improve equitable access to e-Health systems. This action has been marked as complete because a Plan has now been agreed with Falkirk and Stirling Councils to deliver a system by the end of August 2024. There is evidence of supporting plans to ensure the effective roll out, within NHS Forth Valley's established governance and oversight structure and therefore this action has moved into 'business as usual' monitoring.

## **Leadership**

Significant efforts are being made within NHS Forth Valley to enhance leadership capabilities, foster a positive and inclusive culture and strengthen governance structures to ensure accountability and transparency. There have been several appointments made to strengthen the Executive Leadership team, including the appointment of an experienced Interim Chief Executive in September 2023. Recruitment is underway to appoint to this role on a substantive basis, with the process due to conclude later in June. Other recent permanent leadership appointments have included the Director of Acute Services and the Chief Officer of the Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership.

Neena Mahal was appointed as interim Chair in April 2024. Neena is an experienced NHS Chair and will be in post for 12 months and has a specific remit to: oversee the recruitment of the new Chief Executive; implement the recommendations of the governance review; review the capacity and capability of the Board; support progression to achieve de-escalation to at least level 3; and support local partnership working with integration authorities. I attended a development session of the Board in May 2024, shortly after the interim chair took up post. This provided an opportunity for me to make clear to all members of the Board where progress was evident and where further focus and action was required to see improvement in leadership, culture, and governance.

## **Culture**

NHS Forth Valley has been engaged in a programme of Culture Change and Compassionate Leadership. This has involved: extensive listening and learning at all levels of the organisation; rebuilding of trust and partnership working with staffside and clinicians; and significant improvements in executive leadership stability and collaboration, as well as investment in ensuring that colleagues can speak up and have their concerns heard and addressed effectively. The detailed progress and impact of this programme of work and the forward-looking priority actions and outcomes will be the focus of a special meeting of the Assurance Board meeting in July 2024 and on the agenda of the NHS Forth Valley Public Board meeting later that month. This work is going to be critical to sustaining improvement for the longer term and will remain a key focus of the Assurance Board going forward.

## **Governance**

Governance structures have been strengthened to ensure accountability and transparency in decision making processes, and regular audits and reviews are conducted to identify areas for improvement and address issues that may arise. As an example, the NHS Forth Valley Internal Control Evaluation 2023/24 noted that Board assurance committees were better organised. The use of standard committee templates has resulted in more relevant information being provided, which has, in turn, supported improved scrutiny, better quality minutes and improved assurance.

There are a range of recommendations for NHS Forth Valley to take forward from both the Governance review (completed in October 2023) and the outputs from the Blueprint for Good Governance in NHS Scotland's Board Self-Assessment Survey (conducted in September 2023) and these have been incorporated into the Plan. A new Board Assurance Framework is now in place which should also support improved scrutiny and active governance.

## **Improvements in Performance**

The issues of leadership, culture, and governance that led to the escalation of NHS Forth Valley were evident in poor performance across several areas of service delivery. The Assurance Board therefore reviews the level of improvement in these services as part of the evidence of impact of change. The specific areas of performance relate to out of hours services; mental health (CAMHS and Psychological Therapies); unscheduled care; and health and social care integration.

Based on the information provided by NHS Forth Valley and validated by Scottish Government teams, I am satisfied that considerable progress has been made in performance as it relates to standards in out of hours and mental health services, with much more still to do to improve unscheduled care performance. Further detail on all four areas is provided below.

### Out of Hours

Scottish Government officials met with Sir Lewis Ritchie on 17 April 2024, who has been supporting the review of out of hours services in NHS Forth Valley. Sir Lewis confirmed that the out of hours senior management team have been able to demonstrate significant progress in all areas. Colleagues are now looking to formulate a 'soft exit' strategy from further active review, by significantly reducing the current levels of scrutiny before withdrawing completely from the Board later this year, if improvements are maintained.

### Mental Health

The latest performance data showed that for CAMHS, performance against the 18-week referral to treatment standard remained above 95.5% in March 2024. This is a significant improvement from 35% in September 2023. For psychological therapies, whilst the 90% target has not been achieved, we have seen improvement and performance has consistently been above 60%. Latest figures show that for March 2024, performance was at 73.6%.

### Unscheduled Care

Unscheduled care remains an important indicator of progress in NHS Forth Valley and we have still not seen the positive work on governance, leadership, and culture lead to the level of improvement that is required. An immediate intervention plan is in place to improve the 4-hour performance on the Forth Valley Royal Hospital site and is in conjunction with the work being progressed through the Urgent and Unscheduled Care Delivery plan. Actions have been in place since 7 March 2024 and overall compliance is improving with weekly performance between 48% and 51% in recent weeks compared to between 34% and 44% earlier this year, however performance continues to fluctuate. This is being prioritised by the Board and several actions are being progressed, alongside frequent meetings with Scottish Government officials. For this reason, unscheduled care will remain a key focus of the Assurance Board.

## Health & Social Care Integration

Local joint working is key to the success of performance across NHS Forth Valley and the Assurance Board has seen significant improvement in this area. This is evidenced in the completion of the high-level Integration actions in the plan, but there is also positive evidence of improvement through greater collaboration in day-to-day business such as managing unscheduled care and through whole system working on a Forth Valley wide Anchors Plan. I received positive feedback from the Local Authority Chief Executives regarding partnership working, with the work on Anchors being a good example of that collaborative approach.

### **HIS inspection report of Forth Valley Royal Hospital**

A significant component of the escalation of NHS Forth Valley was the HIS inspection of Forth Valley Royal Hospital which took place in September 2022, with the follow up report showing no significant or sustained improvement. The most recent follow up report, published in April 2024, reported findings from an unannounced inspection which took place in January 2024.

This report has been much more positive, relative to the original inspection, reflecting that the Board had continued to focus on a whole system approach to the points identified in the previous inspections and significant improvement work was continuing. 8 out of the 17 requirements have been met, 9 partially met - with plans in place to meet them, and 3 new requirements identified. A new improvement plan, for the 12 requirements has been developed and implementation of this will be critical. The approach that NHS Forth Valley took to implement and sustain improvement, is an excellent example of the improvements in leadership, culture, and governance. It was an open, inclusive process and is an example of what can be achieved across NHS Forth Valley.

### **Next Steps**

NHS Forth Valley is making considerable progress in delivering their Assurance and Improvement Plan and the organisation is now evidencing tangible improvements across the three areas against which they were escalated: leadership, culture, and governance. The Assurance Board is satisfied that appropriate governance is in place within the organisation to provide appropriate monitoring of ongoing work which becomes business as usual, and we will continue to triangulate quantitative information with qualitative information from meaningful discussions with a variety of stakeholders.

The Assurance Board will continue to meet regularly to ensure that NHS Forth Valley continues to make progress and can demonstrate sustainable improvements in performance. There are 4 key areas that will be the focus of the Assurance Board over the next quarter:

- strengthened governance.
- stable executive leadership.
- evidence of cultural change throughout the organisation and a longer-term plan.
- improvement in unscheduled care performance that can be sustained.

The next meeting of the Assurance Board is scheduled for 27 June 2024, and will focus on the implementation of the outstanding recommendations from the HIS report, and the plan to improve unscheduled care performance. This will be followed on 10 July 2024 with a deep dive into the Culture Change and Compassionate Leadership Programme.

I hope you find this information useful, as part of the Committee's consideration of NHS Forth Valley.

Yours sincerely

Christine McLaughlin  
Chair, NHS Forth Valley Assurance Board  
Director Population Health