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Lewis Macdonald MSP
Convener
Health & Sport Committee

By Email.

15 May 2020

Dear Lewis,

NHS Highland: Argyll and Bute Review

As you are aware, one of the recommendations arising from John Sturrock QC's review into cultural issues in NHS Highland was that a separate independent review in Argyll & Bute Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) should be carried out.

In November 2019 Progressive Partnership were commissioned by NHS Highland to carry out a review of staff working in Argyll & Bute HSCP with the principal focus being to gain a quantitative measure of the existence of issues of bullying and harassment and any underlying cultural factors that may have contributed to this.

A survey, which formed the basis of the review was open between 18th February and 3rd April 2020, and the final report of the results of the survey are due to be published on Tuesday 19 May 2020. The NHS Highland Board has advised me that it accepts the findings in full.

I am pleased that this review has concluded and that the report is now available as it provides NHS Highland a complete picture of the culture across the Board area. Whilst the findings of this survey cannot necessarily be compared directly with the Sturrock Review because of differences in the methodology and approach, it is clear that the major themes identified by Progressive Partnership are similar to those identified in the Sturrock Review. They include:

- History and connection to NHS Highland
- Challenges of remote and rural communities
- Confidence in our processes
- Leadership and Management skills
- Individuals' expectations

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I have always been clear that I expected NHS Highland to bring forward a healing process to deal with issues raised by current and former employees and that those issues should be responded to on a case-by-case basis, with the principles of fairness, kindness and compassion underpinning the whole process as recommended by the Sturrock Review.

The Board has now done this, and while there were numerous complex and sensitive issues to be addressed, input from all parties involved helped ensure risks were mitigated where possible and the healing process put in place.

I recognise that these have been difficult times for all involved. I now hope that all those affected in NHS Highland, including staff working in the Argyll and Bute HSCP, will take the opportunity to participate in NHS Highland's Healing Process, which was developed in consultation with representatives of the whistleblowers who first brought this to my attention, as well as the trade unions.

Whilst I am clear that it is important that issues are addressed on a case-by-case basis, it is vital that there is a consistent approach to addressing the issues which have been unveiled by the overall review and I encourage staff affected to access NHS Highland's Healing Process which will launch on 27 May 2020.

In addition, you will wish to note that the board have confirmed that they are undertaking the following in response to the review:

- Launch of an Employee Assistance programme for confidential advice and support (including a dedicated manager support and advice line).
- Communication of the survey findings - NHS Highland accepts and acknowledges the experiences which have been shared and is committed to openly and promptly sharing these with colleagues and acting swiftly to address these. A programme of colleague sessions are already in place across Argyll & Bute.
- Communication around the support available and contact points to raise concerns across NHS Highland.
- Independent external hotline with for discussion and support for bullying concerns until the Guardian Service goes live on 1 July.
- Healing Process to help current and former colleagues deal with past concerns and gain resolution and support in a fair and non-judgemental setting.

Priority actions which are being brought forward in response to the Review include:

- Increase the sense of inclusion of Argyll & Bute colleagues and communities within the NHS Highland Board area.
- Urgently accelerate the review and improvement of the operation of key People Processes (disciplinary, grievance, bullying and harassment, recruitment) across NHS Highland.
- Provide assurance and oversight of hiring decisions across NHS Highland to build trust and confidence in colleagues.
- Build good relationship skills across the organisation through training all colleagues and managers in Courageous Conversations.
- Set clear role expectations and behaviours for all colleagues and managers across NHS Highland.

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Furthermore, the Board is holding a series of stakeholder meetings on Friday 15 May and will subsequently publish further information on Tuesday 19 May.

Finally, I would once again wish to record my heartfelt thanks to the whistleblowers who initially brought this to my attention and to all those who participated in the Sturrock Review and the subsequent review in Argyll & Bute. I recognise that this cannot have been easy for those involved, but I do hope that the Healing Process will allow healing to take place and for the Board to move forward.

Kind regards,

JEANE FREEMAN

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