

Independent Scrutiny Panel publishes Report on NHS Dumfries & Galloway's Service Change Proposals

The Independent Scrutiny Panel formed to scrutinise proposals for changes to clinical services in Dumfries & Galloway has concluded that, whilst the Health Board's proposals are generally soundly based, there are a number of issues which the Board will require to consider before it begins its public consultation.

Over the last two years, NHS Dumfries & Galloway has been developing proposals for changing how it provides its clinical services across the whole area covered by the Health Board. There is a range of factors which mean that change is necessary in order to ensure that the Health Board can continue to meet the health needs of its local population. Significant amongst these factors are:

- The impact of demographic change;
- The need to ensure that services reflect best clinical practice and are safe and sustainable;
- The need to ensure that its buildings and facilities are fit for purpose; and
- The requirement for the Board to operate within the resources made available to it.

Through a lengthy process, involving staff, local people and other stakeholders, the Health Board has developed options which set out alternative possibilities for how the services could be changed, including significant reconfiguration of community hospitals.

The Panel has submitted its report to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and has also sent a copy of the report to the Health Board. The report will now be considered by the Health Board in finalising its plans for public consultation on the proposals.

The role of the Panel was to test the process which the Board had used to develop its proposals, and the evidence base for those proposals, against a range of criteria which were set out in its remit. These criteria included consideration of whether the proposals were safe, sustainable, 'patient centred' and represented value for money. The Panel also looked at the proposals in light of the Scottish Government's policy presumption against the centralisation of health services.

The report highlights a significant number of constructive suggestions which the Panel believes the Board should consider prior to commencing its public consultation. Examples of these points are:

- The need for the Health Board to set out a “compelling vision” for the changes it wishes to make to clinical services, in order to set its sometimes complex proposals in a more easily understood context
- The importance of the Board showing that it has taken appropriate account of the impact that proposed service changes would have on local communities, for example, in relation to transport for patients and visitors
- The need for a clearer indication of the commitment required from the Health Board’s key partners (including the local Council and the Scottish Ambulance Service) in order to implement the options
- The need for the Health Board to revisit its financial planning assumptions at each stage in the process, in light of the current and projected economic environment.

Professor Frank Clark, CBE, Chair of Panel said:

“The Panel believes that the general direction of travel proposed by the Health Board is sound, but we believe that there is further work that they could usefully do to gain the maximum benefit for all concerned from the public consultation exercise which will follow.”

“During our scrutiny process, we were contacted by some local groups and individuals who already had strong views about some of the Health Board’s proposed options, and we have considered these views when assessing the Board’s proposals. It is clear to us that no final decisions have been made by the Board and there is therefore still plenty of opportunity for those people – and others within the various communities – to have their say, and to inform the Board’s thinking.”

Ends

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Notes for Editors:

1. The Independent Scrutiny Panel was established by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing in order to provide an impartial assessment of NHS Dumfries & Galloway's proposals. The Panel's report is available on its website: www.independentscrutinypanels.org.uk

2. The Scottish Government previously established two Independent Scrutiny Panels, both in 2007; one to consider proposals for Accident & Emergency Services in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire & Arran, and another to consider proposals for health service changes in the Clyde area.

3. Membership of the Independent Scrutiny Panel is as follows:

The Panel is chaired by Professor Frank Clark CBE. Professor Clark has been Convenor of the Care Commission since his appointment in October 2006. His previous experience includes 11 years as Chief Executive of NHS Lanarkshire, and spells as Chairman of Forth Valley Primary Care Trust and Forth Valley NHS Board.

Professor Jane Farmer is Chair of Rural Health Policy and Management at the UHI Millennium Institute. Her research interests focus on rural healthcare provision, including ways of providing services to remote and rural areas and involving stakeholders in service design.

Professor Gordon Peterkin was the founding Director of the Scottish Centre for Telehealth. He is a former GP and also served as Medical Director of Grampian Healthcare. His expertise includes health service redesign, unscheduled care and community hospitals.

4. The Panel's remit did not include an assessment of how the Board had involved the public throughout the process it had followed. This is because the role of assessing whether NHS Boards have followed relevant guidance on public involvement lies with the Scottish Health Council. The Cabinet Secretary asked the Scottish Health Council to produce a report on how the public had been involved in developing the Board's pre-consultation proposals. The report is available on the Scottish Health Council's website www.scottishhealthcouncil.org

5. The Panel's work is now complete. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing is in receipt of both the Panel's report and a separate report from the Scottish Health Council (see note 4 above). It is now for the Board to reflect on both of these reports and take full account of them in agreeing the service proposals it then takes to formal public consultation.

6. More information about the Board's proposals is available on its website: www.nhsdg.scot.nhs.uk.