Dear Anas

**Leadership and workforce challenges: health & social care sectors**

Many thanks for your letter of 30 October 2020, following on from the Roundtable my predecessor attended in March.

Please find below our response to the areas specified in your letter.

**How the pandemic has impacted on your views on leadership and workforce challenges in the health and social care sectors;**

Staff across the NHS, social care and Scottish Government have worked hard, in extremely challenging circumstances, to respond quickly to the pandemic. Leaders in the NHS and social care have gone above and beyond to meet the demands presented by Covid-19 and frontline staff have put themselves at risk, reflecting their extraordinary commitment to public service. Nonetheless the leadership and workforce challenges in the health and social care sectors remain.

As reported regularly in the annual NHS in Scotland report, the NHS workforce has been under pressure for several years. It has been increasingly difficult to recruit enough people with the necessary skills and using temporary staff has become commonplace. During the pandemic, NHS workforce capacity was increased, which enhanced NHS resilience. Some staff have been redeployed and retrained, and new staff have been appointed, to support the response to the pandemic. An accelerated recruitment portal was also launched, which received 16,000 expressions of interest.

As also reported previously in the annual NHS in Scotland report there has been a lack of stable senior leadership in the NHS. This has continued, with high turnover and short-term tenure and several senior posts vacant and interim appointments in place.

**What lessons can be learned from this experience and how can we move forward;**

Some of the innovation that took place during the pandemic in the health and care sector and that would normally have taken years to develop and implement, happened within weeks. For instance, the roll out of digital improvements such as Near Me and establishing community hubs and assessment centres. Maintaining new ways of working and learning from the pandemic will be an essential part of rebuilding the NHS going forward and leaders and staff have a fundamental role in this. The Scottish Government introduced a range of measures to support the health and wellbeing of staff during the pandemic and it will be important to ensure this support remains in place and that sufficient progress is being made.

The shape of the health and social care workforce will need to change going forward. In December 2019, the Scottish Government published an integrated workforce plan for health and social care.

7 December 2020

Anas Sarwar MSP
Acting Convener
Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

By Email
This contains plans and assumptions about the shape of the health and social care workforce in the future, aligned with the medium-term financial framework. The Scottish Government has since recognised that ways of working and roles in the NHS and social care will need to be different after the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the integrated workforce plan is in the process of being refreshed and this will be an important part of planning for the future.

The NHS, now more than ever, requires stable and collaborative leadership, working in partnership across public services to balance the ongoing challenges caused by Covid-19 and to remobilise and transform health and social care. The Scottish Government must ensure that all NHS leaders, particularly those who are newly appointed, have the support they need. Things will not go back to the way that they were before the pandemic and now is a great opportunity to consider the values and traits that staff and the public want from leaders in the NHS and social care.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information on the above.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Stephen Boyle
Auditor General for Scotland