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Cymru
Public Health
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Judith Paget
Director General Health and Social Services/
NHS Wales Chief Executive
Health and Social Services Group

Our Ref:

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Dear Judith,

Public Health Wales Joint Executive Team Meeting

Thank you for your recent letter inviting us to our end of year Joint Executive Team (JET) meeting on the 1 July 2022. We are looking forward to the opportunity to reflect on the last year, update on our performance including lessons learned, how we have responded to the Ministers' stated priorities and share a forward look on our plans with you and your colleagues.

At our mid-year JET, we reflected with you on how it had been an extremely busy time in the first half of the year as we continued to play a pivotal role in an unprecedented public health response. It has been another year of transition and unpredictability with the majority of our staff mobilised into our COVID-19 health protection response up until June 2021. From June, we were able to commence the gradual mobilisation and repatriation of many of our staff back to their core roles in order to achieve the reactivation of our core and statutory public health functions, although a number of staff remained mobilised into the health protection response until October 2021. This meant that 2021/2022 continued to be a year of transition for us and, despite this, our incredible staff delivered a substantial volume of work across all of our public health functions and activities.

We have worked very closely with our partners throughout the year – across all setting and sectors. This has involved not only working together to tackle the communicable disease nature of COVID-19, but also in addressing the burden of disease and the broader direct and indirect health and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. This has included engagement with NHS partners, local authorities, education, business, emergency services and the third sector. Our relationship with our local authority colleagues has continued to strengthen through the year, including fortnightly meetings

with local authority chief executives, as we collectively continue to manage through the pandemic.

We have delivered yet another year of an intense health protection response to COVID-19. This has included delivering rapid epidemiology and population surveillance, providing guidance to partners across all sectors and providing technical advice to the Chief Medical Officer, other Welsh Government officials and Ministers, to support our response in Wales through the year. This has evolved as the pandemic has continued to progress through its different phases, and as our knowledge and system infrastructure has enabled a more sustainable and managed response. In addition, our microbiology service has continued to evolve through the year to not only provide the response to COVID-19 testing, but also to mainstream this as part of our normal respiratory testing. In addition, our teams across Wales have continued to undertake significant numbers of non-COVID testing in order to respond to the infection needs of our population. Our Pathogen Genomics Unit has also continued to perform exceptionally well in order to support our knowledge of COVID-19, and has continued to be world leading in its work.

Throughout the year, we have worked closely with our partners in Wales, across the UK and internationally, in order to be best positioned in our continued response to the pandemic. This has also involved very close working with yourself, the Chief Medical Officer and other Welsh Government colleagues across the different portfolio areas, in order to provide timely and effective evidence and advice. We have also had regular meetings with the Minister for Health and Social Services, and other Ministers as appropriate, in order to update on our work and also to understand how we can continue to best support Ministerial priorities and the delivery of the Programme for Government. In addition, our team has worked closely with Welsh Government colleagues, across a number of departments, in the development of the Welsh Government publication of *"Together for a safer future: Wales' long-term COVID-19 transition from pandemic to endemic"*. We will continue to work with Welsh Government colleagues and partners to support the implementation of the Plan.

From February 2022, our teams have also been working closely with partners, Welsh Government colleagues, UK public health agencies and with international partners in relation to the conflict in Ukraine. This has resulted in the rapid development of guidance for health screening and also, through our Adverse Childhood Experience Hub, the development of trauma-informed guidance and information in Welsh, English, Ukrainian and Polish to support people from Ukraine seeking asylum and also for people supporting them.

During the year, we also continued to reactivate and develop our screening programmes. As you know, our previously paused programmes had been reinstated in a phased and risk based approach. With our Bowel Screening Wales programme recovered by October 2021, and our Cervical Screening Wales programme by December 2021. We have had considerable challenges in our reactivation as a direct and indirect result of COVID-19. These have included the reduced numbers of participants being able to be offered screening in each clinic due to COVID-19 safe pathways, limitations in the availability of clinic locations (particularly for Diabetic Eye Screening) and the

reduction in staff availability at any given time. Whilst continued progress is made in screening performance in a number of areas, there continues to be challenges with services that we commission from the NHS. This is as a result of the recovery pressures across NHS generally and we continue to work closely with NHS colleagues to try and address this. On a positive note, we are delighted to recently open our first new Screening Hub to improve the facility for both the public and our staff in Mountain Ash.

In relation to our screening reactivation, the recovery plan was developed, costed and agreed. This has previously been shared with you and it focuses on increased screening activity and associated actions including:

- additional staffing
- additional hours undertaken by existing staff
- increasing the number of clinic venues and efficiency with existing venues
- increasing the invitation numbers with an associated in-year increase in consumables
- improving practices to increase efficiency e.g. outsourced mailing, telephone triage and open invitations.

A key achievement to note is the increased activity of the Diabetic Eye Screening (DESW) programme through a novel optometry pathway delivered from November 2021 to March 2022. This offered participants who were identified at low risk of diabetic retinopathy, a retinal review with optometry. Over 166 optometrists across Wales supported this novel pathway and each local authority was represented. Over 28,000 invitations were issued and over 10,000 appointments were taken up during this period. However, we recognise that the programme needs a more transformational approach to identify a sustainable service model that can be utilised in Wales and that is work that we are taking forward through this year. With the expertise of our Data, Knowledge and Research team, we commenced a discovery piece of work with participants of DESW, together with key stakeholders, to develop a more user-based approach to the design of the service going forward which will be key in informing the transformation of the programme.

Our focus on the broader health improvement agenda has increased through the year. This has included close working with Directors of Public Health and Welsh Government colleagues as we pick up the pace collectively in tackling and enabling the healthy behaviours across Wales. This has included the development of an all-Wales Diabetes Prevention Programme, accelerating our contributions to *Healthy Weight Healthy Wales* and the successful recruitment of a number of key consultants in this area.

We have also increased our focus on understanding, developing evidence for, and advising on the medium and longer term direct and indirect population health impacts of COVID-19, which has become even more significant for us and for Wales. Our World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Investment for Health and Well-being, has worked closely with Welsh Government colleagues, and the WHO, in order to help inform the development of policy, advice, guidance and knowledge to best tackle the population challenges that we are currently facing. This included our report on the '*Cost of Health Inequality to the NHS in Wales*' focusing on the 'Cost Associated with

Inequalities in Hospital Service Utilisation to the NHS in Wales' which was published on the 16 December 2021. The report estimates the costs associated with inequality in hospital service use to the NHS in Wales to help inform decision-making and investment prioritisation towards prevention and early intervention through an equity lens. In March, we were delighted to be re-designated as a WHO Collaborating Centre for a further four years which is an excellent recognition of the quality, leadership and contributions from the team.

We have also accelerated our work on Behaviour Science through the year, culminating in a recent formal launch of our Behavioural Science Unit for Health and Well-being in Wales.

After consultation and involvement with Welsh Government colleagues, we developed a new Improvement Cymru strategy, *Achieving Quality and Safety Improvement 2021-2026*, and aligned to the publication of the Welsh Government's Quality and Safety Framework. The strategy is being delivered through one comprehensive programme called 'Safe Care Together'. We are working closely with health boards and trusts to identify where we can support their priorities and developing agreements to take this forward. The strategy and our approach has been socialised through regular attendance at the national Peer Groups and through continued engagement with key partners, including the Welsh Government. Improvement Cymru worked with key stakeholders to develop a strong understanding of the quality and safety needs of the health and care services in response to ongoing challenges, the pandemic and policy developments and has accelerated its response to supporting the NHS at this challenging time.

In relation to supporting and enabling the well-being and welfare for all staff, this has continued to be a pivotal priority for us - ensuring a holistic approach that embeds this focus at the heart of everything we do. Our third staff well-being survey was launched in November 2021, with the aim of ensuring that we have a better understanding of what has worked well and where we need to improve. Analysis has allowed us to identify three key themes to consider further, namely, communications and engagement, the working day and leadership and line management. We will continue to work on the themes in partnership with our staff networks, our directorate/divisional leads and our staff side colleagues. We continue to offer tailored Well-being Workshops for our managers, access to a range of national mental health resources remains in place, as well as our Employee Assistance Programme. Self-care support is available through our Care Space sessions, which are open to all staff. We have continued to offer our new managers a development programme which includes supporting managers to have honest conversations, develop healthy working relationships and managing attendance at work, in line with our compassionate policy and processes

'*Work How it Works Best*' has officially launched as a trial of increased flexibility and choice for all, so staff can better harmonise work and life in ways which positively contribute to their health and well-being. This was as a result of 'Our Conversation' with our staff over the last year.

Given the increased activity and pressures associated with the Omicron variant, we made the decision to extend the timelines for a number of change processes going on

in the organisation. These included the combining of our WHO Collaborating Centre and our Health and Well-being Directorate - which will now take place from April 2023, and the collaborative decision with health boards to delay the transfer of our Local Public Health Teams to health boards which will now take place on the 30 September 2022.

Our current Long Term Strategy, 2018-2030, was developed during 2017/2018 following an extensive and inclusive process. During 2020, given the substantial and significant challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the organisation and the nation, the Board made the decision to undertake a review of our Long Term Strategy during 2021/2022 in order to re-assess our priorities to transform health in Wales over the coming years. To begin the process a Board workshop was held in June 2021, this provided an opportunity for the Board to discuss the strategic opportunities and challenges facing us as we continue through and beyond the pandemic, and the potential impact these have on Wales and our existing strategy. This will now be further informed by a number of key drivers including a review of evidence, feedback from stakeholders and engagement with our staff. As work on this is now progressing, we look forward to engaging with you and your colleagues on this.

Access to high quality, timely and robust performance information is essential in providing assurance on our ongoing COVID-19 response, delivery of public health services and statutory responsibilities. A key component of our organisational recovery plan was the next phase in the development of our Performance and Assurance Dashboard and supporting insights report. These are now part of our monthly performance assurance reporting through to Board, and are enclosed here as part of our JET submission.

Preparation for the forthcoming Public Inquiry is taking up an increasing amount of our time and resource and will clearly be a feature for us over the next few years.

We will also be working closely with Welsh Government colleagues to support the establishment of the NHS Executive and will be supporting the hosted entities within Public Health Wales that will be moving into the new NHS Executive.

Moving to our focus for this year, through our recently submitted Integrated Medium Term Plan (Our Strategic Plan), we have set out ambitious plans for the delivery of our work over the next three years. Our strategic themes, and associated actions, have been shaped by the population health challenges facing Wales, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and long-standing health inequalities. In responding to the existing and emerging challenges and unpredictable nature of the current environment, we recognise that we need to maintain our ability to operate dynamically and flexibly, including mobilising resources around key priorities as they emerge. This will require us to continue to review this Plan and make adjustments accordingly.

In closing, I would like to say an enormous thanks to our Executive Team, our Board and, of course, our exceptional staff, who have demonstrated unwavering commitment, professionalism and high quality contributions in what has been yet another extremely challenging year for us.

Finally, I would like to thank you, and all of our Welsh Government colleagues, for all of your support to us through the year and we look forward to working closely with you in the months to come.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tracey Cooper
Chief Executive

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English