News release

For immediate use

NHS Tayside's mental health services still face significant issues

Long-standing challenges across NHS Tayside's mental health services remain, despite some progress, with a lack of clarity and complex governance impeding the changes needed.

Following a highly critical independent inquiry into the services, published in 2020, the health board set up a Whole System Change Programme (WSCP) in 2023 to deliver the changes needed.

Governance and leadership arrangements for the WSCP are complicated, unclear and not working well. Progress of the WSCP is not being reported transparently enough to enable good scrutiny and oversight.

There remains a lack of clarity about the purpose, roles and responsibilities of the groups involved in delivering improvements across NHS Tayside's mental health services.

The WSCP has reduced the scope of its activities, due to limited skills and capacity. There now needs to be clearly defined priorities for improvement with specific actions, timescales and costs identified.

Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland said:

'Long-standing issues with the provision and delivery of mental health services across NHS Tayside remain, impacting patients, their families and staff. Efforts to address this have made some progress but haven't yet delivered significant change.

'Urgent action is needed to be clear on the priorities for improvement, with specific actions, timescales and costs detailed. It must be made clear who is responsible for delivering on this, and progress monitored and reported publicly.'

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Notes to Editor:

1. A highly critical independent inquiry into mental health services in Tayside was published in February 2020. An Independent Oversight and Assurance Group (IOAG) was appointed by Scottish Ministers in October 2021 to provide independent assurance on the progress made by NHS Tayside against the 51 recommendations from the independent inquiry.

2. The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care requested a detailed action plan setting out how the priorities identified by the IOAG would be addressed. In response, the Whole System Change Programme (WSCP) in June 2023 was established.

3. The Whole System Change Programme has made some limited progress – see Exhibit 1, s22 report on NHS Tayside. Reported progress includes: improving mental health delayed discharges; addressing most of the maintenance backlog at Strathmartine and establishing a mental health safety and quality forum focusing on quality improvement.

4. The Auditor General for Scotland has reported on NHS Tayside previously. In 2020 the Auditor General presented the sixth consecutive report on the audit of NHS Tayside was to Parliament. Previous reports highlighted a series of significant concerns, covering financial, performance and governance issues.

5. NHS Tayside has continued to make progress in meeting its financial targets. In 2024/25 the board achieved financial balance with no requirement for brokerage funding from the Scottish Government. However, it did rely on non-recurring savings and late funding allocations to break even.

6. The Auditor General has prepared a report on NHS Tayside's 2024/25 accounts under Section 22 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. This allows the Auditor General to bring to the Parliament's and the public's attention matters of public interest related to the financial statements of public bodies.

7. Section 22 reports are submitted to Scottish Ministers for laying in the Parliament along with the accounts of the relevant body. While there are statutory deadlines for these reports, the actual timing of publication is determined by when the report is laid in the Scottish Parliament by Scottish Ministers.

8. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit.scot

- The Auditor General appoints auditors to Scotland's central government and NHS bodies; examines how public bodies spend public money; helps them to manage their finances to the highest standards; and checks whether they achieve value for money. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament

- Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland.

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