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7 October 2015

Dear Ali

Clinical Commissioning Group Annual Assurance 2014/15

Many thanks for meeting with us on 29th June 2015 to discuss the annual assessment of Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and establish the actions and development priorities for the coming year. This letter is a summary of the assurance meetings that we have held over the last year and provides a synopsis of the improvements and ambitions for future development laid out against the assurance domains. This is the final review using the six domains. Subsequent assurance meetings will be held on the basis of the new assurance framework with its five components: well led organisation, delegated functions, performance & outcomes, financial management and planning.

I am grateful to you and your team for the work you had done to prepare for the meeting and the open and transparent nature of our dialogue which has led to productive discussions. This letter sets out the key points we covered in the discussion outlined above.

Key Areas of Strength / Areas of Good Practice

We would like to acknowledge the overall progress the CCG has made to date with the ongoing establishment of the organisation and in addressing local issues and challenges. The work in relation to major strategic and service transformation is complex and challenging. We recognise the progress made by the CCG which has resulted in some very tangible outcomes for patients. These achievements include a 1.9% reduction in non-elective activity, the delivery of a discharge target of 50% for patients with learning disabilities without a discharge plan and the delivery of a new eye service.

You have detailed the support that you have been receiving from the North of England Commissioning Support Unit (NECS) including progress through quarter 4 and into quarter 1 2015/16 on the commissioning of support services for 2016/17 and potential use of the Lead Provider Framework.

The CCG has made good progress during 2014/15 for example with the evolving strategic partnership with Darlington Borough Council, the implementation of the Better Care Fund schemes; and the work linked to the Regional Back Pain Pathway. Positive references were also made to the 'Primary Healthcare Darlington' work undertaken as a result of the Prime Minister's Challenge Fund, as well as continuation of positive patient and public engagement.

The CCG has, clear emphasis on organisational development demonstrated in the recent refresh of Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG) organisation development plan and associated action plan for identified priorities.

Action: CCG to maintain progress with initiatives for the community.

NHS Constitution Standards

Key indicators within the NHS England delivery dashboard have shown some improvements throughout the year, for example in ambulance response times. However there are still ongoing challenges in delivery of some NHS Constitutional Standards notably accident and emergency waiting times, diagnostics, and cancer waits (including 2 week breast, 31 day surgery and 62 day waits).

Some quality issues continue to prove a challenge locally e.g. 12 hour breaches and healthcare associated infections (HCAI).

A framework is needed to focus on quality and performance issues and activity management; this should also include financial control.

Action: CCG to focus on key performance and quality priorities and meet constitutional standards.

Action: Framework to be developed and shared with NHS England by the end August.

Five Year Forward View

During the year we have discussed the CCG's vision for primary and out-of hospital care along with geographic and patient flow. The CCG needs to adapt its local strategy to incorporate the Five Year Forward View into a clear long term plan and we are expecting to see timescales by which this will be shared for discussion. We acknowledge the development within primary care though there is a need to bring this together into a collective sense of overall direction.

Action: CCG to translate local strategy into a clear long term plan.

Action: CCG to develop a vision for primary care by December 2015.

NHS Statutory Duties

We have received your annual report and accounts and through these reports are assured that the CCG is meeting all of its statutory duties.

Discussions throughout the year have demonstrated the focus and action taken within the CCG on addressing parity of esteem, which has seen significant improvements for the local population.

The CCG has demonstrated a financial commitment to mental health and learning disabilities. The approach is evidenced in the range of commissioned mental health liaison services working in acute hospitals, community services and care homes to ensure that people with concurrent mental health problems are able to access services appropriately. In addition Darlington CCG is currently undertaking a benchmarking exercise to understand how the level of investment in mental health compares to other areas.

Significant time and effort has been invested into collaboration to develop partnership arrangements, notably with Darlington Borough Council and good progress has been made.

Action: CCG to maintain and enhance relationships with partners.

Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response (EPRR)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your commitment to the work of the Local Health Resilience Partnership in the past year and in particular the undertaking of the on-call provision, a major component of your role as a Category 2 Responder as defined in the Civil Contingencies Act.

You may recall in her letter of the 20th May 2015, the NHS England National Director of NHS Operations and Delivery, set out the expectations for the 2015-16 EPRR assurance process which NHS England will use in order to be assured that NHS England and the NHS in England are prepared to respond to an emergency and has resilience in relation to continuing to provide safe patient care. As in the 2014 – 15 assurance process, this year's self-assessment against the NHS England core-standards is a fundamental element of how your CCG is prepared to respond to an emergency and I would wish to thank you in advance of the October submission date for your support in undertaking this vital piece of work.

Key Areas of Challenge

The CCG has outlined key areas of challenge for the year ahead, including delivering the necessary efficiencies and maintaining the constitutional standards given competing pressures. A more productive relationship with County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) is required to deliver the constitutional standards and better outcomes for patients. It was agreed that NHS England would convene a joint meeting with CCGs to discuss a joint approach to CDDFT.

The current healthcare system is unsustainable and collectively there is a need to focus on the reconfiguration required. There is potential for an Acute Collaboration Vanguard bid submission, as well as a requirement to fully engage in the Securing Quality in Hospital Services (SeQiHS) work programme.

We acknowledge that all of these challenges are fully recognised with appropriate risk mitigation plans in place.

Action: CCG to monitor activity closely during 2015/16.

Key Interdependencies and Associated Issues

You explained the vision that you have for transforming services over the next five years and described the progress outlined for primary care in order to support this. We commend the formation of Primary Healthcare Darlington, a federation of Darlington practices.

The CCG has a close working relationship with the local authority that has been strengthened through the work around Better Care Fund. The CCG won 'Best Integration Project of the Year Award' at the inaugural North East and Cumbria Commissioning Awards, for the work done by the CCG and partner organisations in Darlington, who have come together to establish older people multi-disciplinary teams.

Action: CCG to maintain positive work with partners.

CCG Transformational Programmes

NHS England acknowledges the work the CCG has started to transform out-of-hospital care and your work to strengthen primary care provision. We are now looking for CCGs to clarify their intentions and commit to hospital sector transformation to ensure that patients have access to high quality and clinically sustainable services in the medium- to long-term. For Darlington CCG, you described the vehicle for transformational change for your patients as the Securing Quality in Health Services programme (SeQiHS) programme.

To ensure that NHS England in Cumbria and the North East is best placed to support CCGs as they develop and implement their transformational plans and that our approach to assurance is proportionate and value-adding, I am aligning a named NHS England Director to be each CCG's first point of contact. In this instance, Alison Slater, Director of Delivery will be your link-director.

Action: CCG to work with the other CCGs in the Durham, Darlington and Tees area to ensure the SeQiHS Programme has proposals ready to consult on from April 2016.

Development Needs and Agreed Actions

The overall assurance category for the CCG following the local Quarter 4 review and completion of the regional/national moderation process is assured with support.

Assessment against the individual domains is noted below.

Domain	Assurance rating
1. Are patients receiving clinically commissioned, high quality services?	Assured
2. Are patients and the public actively engaged and involved?	Assured
3. Are CCG plans delivering better outcomes for patients?	Assured with support
4. Does the CCG have robust governance arrangements?	Assured
5. Are CCGs working in partnership with others?	Assured
6. Does the CCG have strong and robust leadership?	Assured

The CCG has made good progress particularly around joint working with Darlington Borough Council towards your strategic aims; we indicated a key message around system sustainability and delivery of key constitutional targets.

The six domains of the outgoing assurance framework still provide a platform for continuing organisational development of the CCG and they also will inform the well led organisation component of the new assurance framework.

Action: *Guidance for new assurance framework to be shared with CCG as soon as published.*

Overall we would like to congratulate you on the progress you have made over the last year and the achievements you have made.

Thank you again to you and your team for meeting with us and for the open and constructive dialogue. I hope this letter provides an accurate summary of our discussions and notes the areas for ongoing development going forward. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve the health and wellbeing of the residents of Darlington.

Yours sincerely



Tim Rideout
Director of Commissioning Operations