

Welcome to our seventh update on progress towards the replacement for Belford Hospital.

Firstly, thank you to all of those who braved a very wet day and spoke to us at the FW2040 event in Caol at the start of November. It was fantastic to see so many organisations representing their visions for the future for Fort William and Lochaber and great to be able to meet people in person again. There was some much-appreciated feedback on excellent care received in the Belford and beyond, and some interesting discussion about the complexity and sheer number of people involved in healthcare delivery, even for a routine, planned procedure, which is relevant to the topic we wanted to discuss in this column: NHS Scotland Assure.

NHS Scotland Assure was set up in 2020 to provide support to all NHS Scotland Health Boards, with the mission statement of improving how we manage risk in the healthcare built environment in Scotland, covering both new and existing estate. This is done by commissioning research and guidance, sharing intelligence and lessons learnt between boards, providing training and expert advice, and by carrying out Key Stage Assurance Reviews (KSAR) on major projects. The process has been designed to take account of the complexity and number of projects and to include the input of all stakeholders.

Key Stage Assurance Reviews are focussed on ensuring that infection prevention and control is a key consideration in the building design at each stage of the project. They do this by asking boards to provide evidence in response to a series of question sets. These probe the design and how it complies with current best practice and technical guidance; how design decisions are made in terms of who was involved in the discussion and how it was formally approved; and ensuring the health board clearly understand the consequences of a decision, for example in terms of the maintenance required to ensure that a ventilation system can be cleaned and operate safely. While the role of NHS Scotland Assure is to provide assurance and support rather than remove responsibility from individual boards, KSAR approval is required before a business case will be approved by Scottish Government.

Reviews are carried out throughout the project. The first review for Lochaber was at Initial Agreement Stage and focused on governance and set up. We received a positive report: of 27 recommendations, only one was categorised as moderate due to the financial information being incomplete at the point of review, and the others were classed as Minor or Observations, again with many relating to information being incomplete at point of review. The next KSAR will take place prior to Outline Business Case submission at which point there will be a design to assess, and there will be further reviews at Full Business Case when the design is complete, during Construction, and during the Commissioning and Handover phase prior to opening.

Our experience so far is that these reviews have added time to projects, but they've also been thorough and helpful. They've picked up points that have required small amendments in some places, and in others we've reviewed the checks and balances around decisions to ensure all parties have a clear understanding of their implications. The process is still evolving but overall it's been positive in helping us improve how we manage design, but also in giving us confidence that as a board we're getting a lot of things right on our new builds which means we can deliver the right care for our patients.

If you'd like to know more, NHS Scotland Assure is easily searchable online and their website provides lots more detail, including question sets for each review stage.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to answer a question put to us regarding plans for accommodation for staff: I can confirm we are looking at the provision of accommodation, which may be for new staff, both for the hospital and community services, as well as students and on-call staff. We are currently working on understanding likely numbers, which will help inform the options for providing this. We have also had discussions with housing associations across Highland and have been talking locally with West Highland College.

This is obviously a very important issue as we develop our plans for the new hospital and one we will keep you informed about in future columns.

As always, if you'd like to contact us, you can do so via the NHS Highland Feedback team [Nhshighland.feedback@nhs.scot](mailto:Nhshighland.feedback@nhs.scot) or 01463 705997, or our project email address on [nhsh.nhshighlandestatesprojects@nhs.scot](mailto:nhsh.nhshighlandestatesprojects@nhs.scot).

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