

Board Meeting: 20 March 2020

Chair's Report

Recommendation / action required:

The Board is asked to **note** the report.

Author: David Crichton, Board Chair

12 March 2020

Chair's Report

This being the final report of the final Chair to the last NHS Health Scotland Board meeting, I think it's appropriate to take a different approach to my report on this occasion. I have of course been attending my usual cycle of meetings. Most of them are noted elsewhere in our agenda so I needn't comment on them here.

What I want to do instead is to share reflections on my own experience as Chair and on the strengths and opportunities that NHS Health Scotland now passes on to Public Health Scotland.

I was appointed in December 2015, succeeding Margaret Burns, and I recorded at the time my appreciation to Margaret for handing over an organisation in such fine fettle. Since it was confirmed that we would be merging into the new organisation, I have been determined to ensure that the new Chair and Board of Public Health Scotland feel the same way about their inheritance. I am sure that is the case.

My time as Chair has been personally enriching. Although not a stranger to the National Health Service, I had no previous experience in the science and practice of public health improvement. I am still no expert of course but thanks to my colleagues in NHS Health Scotland I now understand the causes of poor and unequal public health, the robust evidence and analysis which explain them, and the personal, social, economic and human rights costs of allowing them to continue.

We have reached into the fields of childhood experience, education, physical planning, substance abuse, mental health, suicide prevention, the justice system, workplaces, policy design and many others in a thoughtful, integrated way which very few areas of public service have achieved. Health inequalities are neither acceptable nor inevitable, and they are everyone's responsibility. That isn't a mantra which I drafted but one which I will continue to promote at every opportunity.

I am unreservedly optimistic about the durability of NHS Health Scotland's values, mission and work as they transfer into Public Health Scotland. The new body must of course wrap them into its own identity, culture, practice and apply its own fresh thinking to them. But they are based on methodical research, a compelling strategy and years of designing and delivering best practice. Most important, they will be taken forward by a hugely talented, highly motivated group of people who combine intellect and passion in a way that I have rarely seen in any organisation. It is a very powerful combination, and one which any new body would be delighted to inherit.

My own term in office amounts to only four years of NHS Health Scotland's seventeen. So I want to pay tribute to all the Chairs, Board Members and staff who preceded me and have helped revolutionise our understanding of health inequalities – and, more important, do something about them.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my current Board colleagues, our management team and all our staff. One thing I have never lacked in these four years has been the unstinting support of all of them. They have counselled, supported and challenged in exactly the way that any Chair needs, and I wish them the very best as we close this particular phase of the journey towards a fairer, healthier Scotland.

David Crichton
Board Chair
13 March 2020