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Martin Phillips and Andrea Jones  
Accountable Officer and Chair  
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16<sup>th</sup> July 2014

Dear Martin and Andrea,

**Re: CCG Annual Assurance**

Many thanks for meeting with us on 22nd May 2014 to discuss the annual assessment of Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and to establish the development priorities for the coming year. This letter is a summary of the Quarterly 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.

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 discussions which have led to productive discussions. This letter sets out the key points we covered in the discussion outlined and complements the separate summary notes and action points from the meeting.

**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 getting to grips with the local agenda and challenges. There is a large agenda which is complex and challenging

in terms of major strategic and service transformation and change. There is evidence of strong CCG leadership and evolving positive relationships with key strategic partners, particularly with Darlington Borough Council, who are all signed up, in varying degrees, to the ambitious vision which will see significant improvements to the provision of care to the local population. You have noted the valuable support that you have been receiving from the North East Commissioning Support Group, whilst acknowledging that you are reviewing the support you receive from the CSU along with other CCGs.

You described some key areas of good practice that you have demonstrated during the past year, which have included the Care Home pilot, the development of the Patient and Public Engagement Charter and the development of a Primary care Strategy. These are positive examples of some of your many achievements during 2013/14.

### **NHS Constitution standards**

Key indicators within the Delivery Dashboard have shown significant improvements throughout the year, though there are some areas that continue to require ongoing attention and further action. In particular, continued attention is required in the area of Cancer 62 day waiting times, whilst the recent declaration of the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) regarding it being unlikely to achieve its Referral to Treatment target during quarter 1, along with its wider national importance, means that this is an area that will require some sustained attention and focus during 2014/15.

A&E continues to prove a challenge locally with CDDFT failing the 4 hour target for 2 out of the 4 quarters of the year, alongside the significant number of ambulance handover and turnaround delays. The learning and evaluation from the 2013/14 winter, such as the impact of the co-location of services at Dr. Piper House, is critical to delivering improved performance through 2014/15.

## **NHS Statutory Duties**

Discussions throughout the year have demonstrated the focus and action taken within the CCG on addressing parity of esteem and Improving Access to Psychological therapies (IAPT) performance, which was a cause for concern earlier in the year. It is pleasing to see improved performance in this important area as a result of the CCG taking proactive action.

Similarly your model of patient and public involvement as a CCG has been shown to have significant impact on the development and delivery of plans and it is acknowledged that this has been a key area of focus which underpins much of your work.

In relation to local government and public health, it is positive to see the maturing and collaborative relationships that are developing strongly, especially with Darlington Borough Council and the alignment and development of the joint strategic plans is encouraging given the financial and service challenges of the coming year.

## **Key Areas of Challenge**

The CCG is continuing to work through its significant and multi-faceted financial challenges that were characteristic of its first year of operation, much of which were beyond their own direct control. Significant time and effort, with the support of the Area Team finance team, has gone into managing the year end outturn and minimising the risks as much as possible for 2014/15. You are aware of the ongoing risks, including the contract with CDDFT and the potential implications of the Better Care Fund, but you are working these through and not allowing this to dampen your ambitions and outcomes for patients and service users in Darlington.

## **Key Interdependencies and Associated Issues**

The strategic plan submitted shows a significant level of maturity of partnership and governance arrangements, based around the Health and Well being Board and its Health and Well being Strategy. We also recognise the work that has taken place in nurturing the Unit of Planning arrangements and in developing the vision and

priorities for both the Strategic Plan and the Better Care Fund, as well as the leadership of the SeQiHS initiative.

### **Development Needs and Agreed Actions**

The separate note and agreed actions provide a more detailed summary of the discussion, including the agreed actions from the meeting.

Overall we would like to congratulate you on the progress and achievements you have made over your first full year of operation, with lots of successes and learning to take forward into 2014/15.

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 the discussions and clearly indicates the next steps. We look forward to working with you on progressing work against the domains outlined above.

Yours sincerely,



**Caroline Thurlbeck**

**Director of Operations and Delivery**

**NHS England – Durham, Darlington and Tees Area Team**