

Councillor Ben Hayhurst
Chair
Health in Hackney Scrutiny Committee
Hackney Council
Room 118, Town Hall
Mare Street
E8 1EA

26th June 2020

Dear Councillor Hayhurst

Re Soft facilities services – Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

I am writing in response to your letter to update you on the Trust's approach to the continuing provision of the soft facilities (cleaning, catering, portering, security etc.) within the acute site and Mary Seacole Nursing Home and regarding the Trust's intention to sign a five year contract with ISS.

First, I wish to make clear that the role that ISS and their staff have played in recent months during the COVID19 pandemic has been significant and is fully recognised and acknowledged. They have undoubtedly played a key role in our overall response to this pandemic and one which has contributed to keeping our patients and staff as safe as possible.

ISS and the team on site have provided a high quality service supporting our hospital and nursing home services throughout recent years. Cleanliness standards in the hospital are very good and catering services to patients and staff have been working well. We have a dedicated portering and security service supporting all aspects of our operation and crucially supporting the delivery of patient services at the Trust. In considering future arrangements we have therefore wanted to ensure that any new contract with ISS is virtually like-for-like – there are no changes to the services that will be delivered and certainly no diminishing of services. It is also worth noting that a number of the services we provide for patients through this contract are much better than in many other NHS Trusts – for example our inpatients have the option of two or three hot meals per day, breakfast (porridge), lunch and dinner whereas other Trusts now only provide one hot meal, usually in the evening. While there have been a small number of changes to certain contractual mechanisms, these are all designed to ensure the partnership between Homerton and ISS continues to develop and secures stability for the Trust, and importantly for the services it provides to patients.

This stability and continuity will be crucial at a time when our energies will be required to be also focussed on the gradual but steady return of services to pre-emergency levels, whilst mindful of having to adapt to any re-emergence of coronavirus in our communities. Additionally, it is still expected that the UK will leave the transition period following departure from the European Union (EU) at the end of this year and the lack of clarity around the arrangements of this departure adds to the uncertainty around services such as these. The primary rationale for the decision we have taken is about patient safety and ensuring the most stable position for Soft Facilities Management services during these incredibly uncertain times.

We have been involved in ongoing dialogue with our unions at the Trust and have also facilitated discussions between ISS and Unison, the union recognised by ISS. We have listened to ISS staff concerns on a number of issues. We have sought firm assurances from ISS that these concerns have been addressed and we are pleased that significant improvements in ISS management have been recognised by the unions in recent weeks. Nonetheless we will separately set clear expectations and seek assurance from ISS regarding the management and leadership development we expect them to undertake; and that these are in line with Homerton University Hospital Foundation Trust's values and behaviours should a new contract be agreed.

Equally the Trust continues to work closely and in detail with ISS and Unison to review the terms and conditions that ISS staff will receive under a new contract. This includes ensuring that we can align the London Living Wage uplifts to ensure that all employees receive the uplift at the earliest opportunity and, where we can, to align the rates of pay within the two current existing contract types. This will benefit the ISS team at the Homerton and is the right thing for us to do but does come at a financial cost to the Trust. We are also currently discussing in detail with ISS what options are available for making further improvements to the sickness policy for those working at the Homerton. Making the scheme more generous will add cost to the contract which would then need to be offset elsewhere through the necessity of savings being made within the overall Trust's expenditure base.

We have not dismissed the in-house option for some facilities services in the future and will explore this option over the medium to longer term but we are simply not in a position to undertake such work over the next few months, which would be required.

In response to the specific questions you raise at the end of your letter;

1. No contract will be signed on the 30th June 2020.
2. The Trust has considered all options around the length of any contract and believes that a five year contract provides the necessary stability and continuity required during these uncertain times.
3. I am actually on leave on the 9th July 2020 but I will discuss with the team at the Trust.

Yours sincerely



Tracey Fletcher
Chief Executive