

NHSI and NHS England plan closer collaboration

30 November 2017

At an NHSI board meeting today, Baroness Harding said the regulator wanted to explore more collaboration with NHS England around what work needed to be done once, what needed to be shared and what the organisations should do separately.

Baroness Harding said it was 'very clear' there needed to be better collaboration 'across the system'

The comments indicate the national bodies moving closer together, however Parliament would have to pass legislation if they were ever to merge, which is not thought likely for many years.

Legal advice to NHS England has made clear the organisations cannot merge or share a chief executive without primary legislation.

Baroness Harding, who was appointed in October, said she was coming into the role “very clear” there needed to be better collaboration “across the system”.

She said: “One of the things I want to do is to work even more collaboratively with other NHS arm’s length bodies, particularly NHS England.”

She said the organisations would work together “on a particular piece of work to really understand what we should do once only and where we should govern together and where we should continue to separately do things”.

She said this would improve communications and could involve some joint board meetings between the two organisations.

NHSI medical director Kathy Mclean warned the board it needed to be conscious of the pressures on staff while “building the aircraft in flight”.

Baroness Harding said she agreed and the regulator would ring-fence funding for a small group to undertake the work.

The two organisations have already made several joint appointments but this could be expanded, as well as setting up joint committees on issues such as finance.

There have been regular complaints from local NHS leaders that they receive duplicate or contradictory instructions from the national bodies.

A paper to NHS England’s board meeting, also held today, said: “Primary legislation would be needed to fully combine NHS England and NHS Improvement (and external legal advice is that without that, NHS England and NHS Improvement cannot have a joint board, single chair or single chief executive).

“The law also says that every part of England must be covered by a CCG. However, our aim is to go as far as possible to combine and align our shared work, and we will use the time between now and March to consider with NHSI the shape of this work programme, with a view to freeing up significantly more management cost savings across the national bodies, trusts, CCGs [and commissioning support units] than are currently earmarked for reinvestment in patient care through to 2020.”