

13 October 2022

Mr Gerard Hayes  
Health Services Union  
L2/109 Pitt Street  
SYDNEY NSW 1215

**Attention: Jeremy Lappin – Industrial Officer and Tracey Gaddelin - Organiser**

Via email: [Jeremy.Lappin@hsu.asn.au](mailto:Jeremy.Lappin@hsu.asn.au) [Tracey.Gaddelin@hsu.asn.au](mailto:Tracey.Gaddelin@hsu.asn.au) and [secretary@hsu.asn.au](mailto:secretary@hsu.asn.au)

Dear Mr Hayes,

**Re: Lower Hunter Sector Maintenance Restructure – Gardeners**

I refer to the email from the HSU dated 10 August 2022 which advised that the District's response was inadequate and failed to address several concerns relating to the proposed LHS Maintenance restructure in respect of gardening services.

The following response is provided to the concerns raised:

- *The proposed schedule has no consideration of the old Maitland or Dungog Hospitals. Both sites have significant work for gardeners on an ongoing basis. What is HNELHD's plan for the completion of that work?*

Currently, the Dungog Hospital grounds are maintained by a handyman and the site Maintenance Supervisor and the proposal for gardening services does not change that existing arrangement. Maintenance of the grounds of the old Maitland Hospital site are currently performed by the existing gardeners who are employed by Healthshare NSW. The continued maintenance of the old Maitland Hospital is provided by the current maintenance team based at the new hospital site.

- *Your response suggests that the handyman position will be able to provide significant assistance with gardening and waste removal. What are the gardening and waste removal duties of the handyman positions at each of the relevant sites? How will gardening work be allocated to the position? Considering the shortfall in gardeners, it is likely that the already busy handyman position will be unable to pick up the additional work required.*

The handyman positions are on site to support the trades staff and provide basic maintenance coverage on each site. The handyman may be asked to support a gardener or any other trades person where the work requires additional staffing to assist in completing the task as may be required. Allocation of work tasks to the handyman will be determined by the specific site Maintenance Supervisor or as directed by the Building & Maintenance Services Supervisor.

- *We note in the first example it there is a line for a gardener without a certificate. Please confirm that should the transferee hold a gardening certificate, the position will be upgraded appropriately.*

The classification of the position is a gardener and is paid at the salary rate applicable to the employee's training and/or qualification. This means that the current substantive position holder will continue to be remunerated as a gardener without certificate. In the event that the position became vacant in the future it would be advertised as a gardener position and remuneration will be based on the qualification held by the successful candidate e.g gardener with certificate or gardener without certificate.

- *We understand that despite consultation being ongoing, HNELHD have indicated to gardeners, before hearing our response to the further information and responses provided, that the restructure will go ahead. Predetermining decisions prior to the end of consultation is a failure to properly consult.*

Recently all LHS Maintenance staff were provided an update on the progress of the proposed restructure in so far as that the restructure had progressed for some trades staff in position not covered by the HSU where an offer of voluntary redundancy had been made which had been part of consultation and agreement by the applicable industrial association which covered those particular craft groups.

- *The negative impacts on the relevant staff members will be profound. The increase in interest rates and costs of living mean that any person made redundant will struggle to pay their bills. Should the restructure occur, the increased travel time and distances will also negatively impact employees' finances.*

The District's decision to restructure any service is never undertaken lightly especially where there is a direct impact on employees where those decision result in redundancy. At the same time the District also has a responsibility to deliver health care services within a finite fiscal budget and that this means we are regularly required to review how services are provided in clinical and non-clinical areas.

In so far as increased travel times and distances negatively impacting employee's finances, the District will consider this point with further consultation to be undertaken with all of the maintenance staff once the Building and Maintenance Manager is appointed will lead the proposal to centralise the trades team or determining the location of particular trades teams at each hospital site.

- *Halving the number of staff while increasing the amount of work is very likely to lead to a loss of job satisfactions, difficulties with recruitment and retention, stress, fatigue, and possible injuries. HNELHD holds the principal duty to ensure the health and safety of its employees as far as reasonably practicable. It is obviously an unreasonable step to reduce current staffing levels while increasing workloads.*

The district will be monitoring the workload of all trade groups including the gardening staff to ensure the workload is reasonable and does not impact their health, safety and wellbeing. It is anticipated that the removal of non-gardening functions and improvement to the planning and scheduling of work will better utilise the time available to gardening staff to complete the required work schedule.

- *It appears obvious that there will be a shortfall of work and a later reliance on contractors to fill the gaps. The HSU strongly objects to the use of contractors and will take whatever action required in the future to ensure workers are directly employed by the LHD.*

The objection to the use of contractors is noted. There is no plan to contract out any services which are not currently being utilised.

- *The work schedule does not account for currently employed part-time employees. Further, the schedule provides for a 19 day month, instead of the current 9 day fortnight worked by gardeners.*

The schedules provided were an example of how the proposed 2.0FTE gardening positions could be utilised. The Building and Maintenance Manager will be responsible for the scheduling of gardening services in consultation with the gardening staff, this will include the current 9 day fortnight arrangement worked by the gardeners.

- *The schedule appears to calculate travel on the basis of per vehicle and not per staff member. It is very unlikely that all staff members will travel in the same vehicle to each site, particularly where they are required to travel to sites remote from their primary workplace directly from home.*  
The gardening scheduling examples provided considers travel together and separately depending on the option provided. The gardening services schedule will consider travel times and the most appropriate location and use of resources. Further consultation on this point will be undertaken with staff by the Building and Maintenance Manager on their appointment.
- *Our members are distressed, confused and hurt by the approach HNELHD appears to be taking. They have given decades of loyal service to the LHD which appears to be disregarded.*

We apologise to your members for their feelings of distress, confusion and hurt due to the decisions made by the District in respect of the proposed maintenance restructure. These decisions are in no way a reflection on the many years of local service, dedication and quality work produced by your members is acknowledged.

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at (02) 4087 2058 or Lynn Hurst, Senior Human Resource Consultant on (02) 4985 3449 or to contact us via email.

Yours sincerely,



**Christine Osborne**  
A/General Manager  
Lower Hunter Sector