

REPORT CLASSIFICATION	✓	CATEGORY OF PAPER	✓
Official	✓	Proposes specific action	✓
Official: Sensitive Commercial		Provides assurance	✓
Official: Sensitive Personal		For information only	

BOARD

29 JULY 2025

Report Title:

**North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System
Winter Plan 2025/26**

Purpose of report

This report provides a draft of the NENC ICS Winter Plan for review by the ICB Board.

The Board are asked:

- **to note** the planning process undertaken in preparation for winter 2025/26 across NENC, led by the ICB alongside partners across the Integrated Care System.
- **to note** the expectation that a final version of the 2025/26 NENC Winter Plan will be submitted for Executive Committee and Board approval during September and that a Board Assurance Statement needs to be submitted to NHS England **by 30 September 2025**.

Key points

The aim of the NENC ICS from the outset has been to develop a whole-system approach to the winter planning process, which can successfully deliver safe and effective patient care across our complex, multi-agency UEC system. We are building on from a strong platform, with comparatively strong performance across the key UEC metrics in our area, however there is still more we can and should be doing to improve. We also have a history of strong system and clinical leadership in NENC, supported by well-established and functioning local governance structures (Local A&E Delivery Boards – LAEDBs) overseen by the NENC Urgent and Emergency Care Network, working together to deliver the network's vision of providing safe, effective, quality and equitable healthcare to our whole population. We will do this by reducing unwarranted variation and improving the quality, safety and equity of urgent and emergency care provision by bringing together all stakeholders to radically transform the system at scale and pace.

The NENC ICS winter plan reflects national UEC requirements and is underpinned by an extensive programme of work to deliver improvements across urgent and emergency care that are currently in the process of being implemented. This plan, along with our NENC primary care and elective recovery plans, and the broader strategic and operational plans and priorities for the NHS, provides a firm basis for preparing for the 2025/26 winter period.

Whilst our partners across the ICS are undertaking significant programmes of work to recover and improve services there is a collective responsibility to ensure that all parts of our system have robust plans in place to remain as resilient as possible and maintaining the ability to respond to operational pressures over what is sure to be another challenging winter period.

By enhancing and bringing forward the start of the 2025/26 winter planning process in comparison to previous years we have created additional time and space for the thorough assurance and testing of our plans well ahead of winter. Following the Winter Readiness Workshop held on 17 July, LAEDBs have been tasked with undertaking 'check and challenge' of their readiness self-assessments with the offer of support from ICB and UECN colleagues to facilitate peer review between local systems.

Throughout August LAEDBs will be expected to refine their plans and identify the specific actions that will be delivered to turn their proposals into reality. Progress will be overseen by the Winter Planning Assurance & Delivery Group and supported by the UECN and LAWP alongside ICB Transformation and Planning & Performance colleagues.

NHSE have set an expectation that all ICBs and Trusts stress test their draft winter plans by participating in an NHS England hosted exercise in September. NHSE regional teams will arrange these events and appropriate ICB participation will be coordinated by the SCC and Planning & Performance team.

On 22 July the ICB Executive Committee recommended that this draft version of the NENC Winter Plan 2025/26 was to be shared with the **ICB Board on 29 July** to provide an update on progress to date and assurance that our preparations for winter are well underway.

Following completion of the regional testing exercises in September, NHSE have mandated that ICB and Trust Boards should sign-off winter plans and submit a **Board Assurance Statement**. Whilst NHSE do not require organisations to submit their detailed plans for review, they do require assurance that Boards have robustly tested the specific key lines of enquiry to make sure that patients can access the care they need this winter.

Completed Board Assurance Statements, signed off by ICB Chairs and Chief Executive Officers, need to be submitted to the national UEC team by **30 September 2025**. Trust Board Assurance Statements do not need to be assured by the ICB before submission; however, we will be asking for sight of these documents from all of our trust partners in the spirit of collaboration and system working.

The Winter Planning Assurance & Delivery Group will work with Governance colleagues to ensure that a final version of the ICB Winter Plan is available to be reviewed by the Board in line with the national timeline and following the completion of the regional testing exercises alongside providing assurance that the each of key actions outlined in the 2025/26 Winter Plan checklist have been addressed.

Risks and issues

Winter planning and delivery of system and local priorities involves several risks that need to be carefully managed to ensure the system remains resilient and can provide safe, high-quality care. Risks include managing increased demand on NHS services, staffing shortages, financial constraints, and achievement of planned activity trajectories. The **Winter Planning Delivery and Assurance Group** will monitor and manage these risks, along with any others identified in the system readiness assessments, with appropriate escalation to the ICB Executive Committee.

Assurances and supporting documentation

- Assurance and points of escalation for the 25/26 winter plan will be provided to the ICB Executive Committee and managed via the **Winter Plan Delivery & Assurance group**
- The **UEC Network** and **Living and Ageing Well Partnership** will continue to receive assurance and escalation for their programme of delivery supported by the joint **Clinical Advisory Group**
- Urgent and emergency care plan 2025/26: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Urgent-and-emergency-care-plan-2025-26.pdf>

Recommendation/action required

The Board are asked to do the following:

- **to note** the planning process undertaken in preparation for winter 2025/26 across NENC, led by the ICB alongside partners across the Integrated Care System
- **to note** the expectation that a final version of the 2025/26 NENC Winter Plan will be submitted for Executive Committee and Board approval during September and that a Board Assurance Statement needs to be submitted to NHS England **by 30 September 2025**

Acronyms and abbreviations explained

UECN – Urgent and Emergency Care Network

LAWP – Living and Ageing Well Partnership

LAEDB – Local A&E Delivery Board

SVOC – System Vaccination Operations Centre

SCC – System Co-ordination Centre						
Sponsor/Approving Executive Director(s)	Dr Neil O'Brien – CMO, NENC ICB					
Date approved by Executive Director	22/07/2025					
Report authors	ICB Planning & Performance Team ICB Transformation Team ICB System Coordination Centre ICB Winter Planning Assurance & Delivery Group					
Link to ICP strategy priorities						
Longer and Healthier Lives						
Fairer Outcomes for All					✓	
Better Health and Care Services					✓	
Giving Children and Young People the Best Start in Life						
Relevant legal/statutory issues						
N/A						
Any potential/actual conflicts of interest associated with the paper? (please tick)	Yes		No	✓	N/A	
Equality analysis completed	Yes		No		N/A	✓
If there is an expected impact on patient outcomes and/or experience, has a quality impact assessment been undertaken?	Yes		No		N/A	✓
Essential considerations						
Financial implications and considerations	At the current point in time, no additional funding for winter planning priorities is expected to be available, however system partners will be asked to have potential business cases prepared and 'on the shelf' should any funding become available.					
Contracting and Procurement	Not applicable					
Local Delivery Team	LDTs are fully engaged in the winter planning process through representation on LAEDBs and will ensure that local priorities are reflected in system level plans.					
Digital implications	Not applicable.					
Clinical involvement	ICB CMO chairs the Winter Planning Assurance and Delivery Group which includes representation from relevant ICB Medical Directors and Clinical Leads.					
Health inequalities	System winter plans will include a focus on reducing inequality.					
Patient and public involvement	Not applicable.					
Partner and/or other stakeholder engagement	NENC ICS Urgent & Emergency Care Network NENC ICS UEC Clinical Advisory Group NENC ICS Living & Ageing Well Partnership Local A&E Delivery Boards System Vaccination Operations Centre (SVOC)					
Other resources	None					