

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

BOARD

30 SEPTEMBER 2025

Report Title: NENC ICS Winter Plan 2025/26 and Board Assurance Statement

Purpose of report

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

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.

Throughout August and September LAEDBs have refined their plans to identify the specific actions that will be delivered to turn their proposals into reality. Progress has been overseen by the Winter Planning Assurance & Delivery Group and supported by the UECN and LAWP alongside ICB Transformation and Planning & Performance colleagues. 'Check and challenge' sessions with LAEDBs have resulted in revised self-assessments being submitted and the overall level of risk in the plan has been reduced (see LAEDB Winter Readiness section earlier in this report).

NHSE set an expectation that all ICBs and Trusts stress test their draft winter plans by participating in an NHS England hosted exercise. For the North East and Yorkshire region this exercise was held in York on Wednesday 3 September and a group of over 30 colleagues from across the NENC ICS attended, led by

our nominated Winter Director - Jacqueline Myers, to undertake live scenario testing of our plans with regional and national NHSE colleagues. Our approach to oversight and escalation, including our SCC arrangements and our well-functioning UECN/LAEDB infrastructure, were highly commended alongside our use of real-time data and predictive modelling using the UEC RAIDR tool to support our response to surge and periods of sustained pressure. The key lessons learned from the event, including tactical deployment of Health Co-ordination Groups (HCGs) and a consistent approach to escalation to regional and national colleagues, have been incorporated into this plan.

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**.

The ICB Board Assurance statement asks for confirmation that the following steps have been undertaken:

- The Board has assured the ICB Winter Plan for 2025/26.
- A robust quality and equality impact assessment (QEIA) informed development of the ICB's plan, and this has been reviewed by the Board.
- The ICB's plan was developed with appropriate levels of engagement across all system partners, including primary care, 111 providers, community, acute and specialist trusts, mental health, ambulance services, local authorities and social care provider colleagues.
- The Board has tested the plan during a regionally led winter exercise, reviewed the outcome, and incorporated lessons learned.
- The Board has identified an Executive accountable for the winter period, and ensured mechanisms are in place to keep the Board informed on the response to pressures.
- The Board is assured that the ICB's plan addresses the key actions outlined in the 2025/26 Winter Plan checklist
- The Board has considered key risks to quality and is assured that appropriate mitigations are in place for base, moderate, and extreme escalations of winter pressures.
- The Board is assured there will be an appropriately skilled and resourced system control centre in place over the winter period to enable the sharing of intelligence and risk balance to ensure this is appropriately managed across all partners.

The Winter Planning Assurance & Delivery Group and the ICB Executive Committee have reviewed and recommended this final draft version of the ICB Winter Plan for review and approval by the Board in line with the national timeline. The plan provides assurance that the each of key actions outlined in the Board Assurance Statement and 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 review and approve the final draft of the plan• to note and that a Board Assurance Statement, signed by the ICB CEO and Chair needs to be submitted to NHS England by 30 September 2025 following Board review and approval of the Winter Plan						
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 – Chief Medical Officer				
Date approved by Executive Director		23 September 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	Detail public communications and engagement programme detailed within the plan.
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