

Better health and wellbeing for all...

Annual report summary
2024-25



Highlights of the year...

Our Clinical Conditions Strategic Plan targets 12 health conditions making the biggest impact on people:

Adults



Lung cancer



Cardiovascular health



Respiratory health



Lower back pain



Anxiety and depression

Children



Diabetes



Asthma



Epilepsy



Obesity



Oral health



Anxiety and mental health



Autism and learning disabilities

Primary care...

Our GP practices offered more appointments than ever

Pharmacies now offering a wider range of services

New Urgent Dental Access Centres in Darlington and Carlisle are providing 14,000 appointments per year. An extra 109,000 access appointments were provided by dental practices for patients in the greatest need



Children and young people...

Three trusts - South Tees, Northumbria, South Tyneside and Sunderland - rated 'better than expected' in children and young people's survey

New housing strategy to provide more supported living options for people with complex care needs



More funding for **neurodiversity**, plus a review to improve care and support in the region

Vaccination rates for flu, Covid-19 and whooping cough for pregnant women above national average, supported by our award-winning Trusted Voices campaign



Our first **community diagnostic centres** – in Gateshead and Stockton – are helping reduce waiting times



62% REDUCTION

in North East **adult smoking** – from 29% in 2005 to 11% in latest figures



Doing things better...

15k

People sharing ideas and knowhow through the **Boost** learning community

136

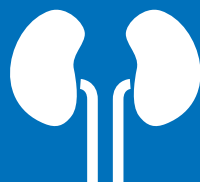
Organisations signed up to the **Health and Life Sciences Pledge** to support innovation – with Health Innovation North East and North Cumbria

300

Adult social care providers helped to move from **paper to digital** records

£1m

Per year **saved** by reducing unused spaces and buildings



Chronic kidney disease will be diagnosed and treated quicker thanks to an innovative new partnership with Boehringer Ingelheim and Health Innovation NENC

500

people diagnosed with lung cancer earlier, thanks to the screening programme



Women's health...

Our three women's health hubs **expanded their services**

300 people attended our second women's health conference

5,000 women highlighted concerns like mental health, bones and muscle health through the Big Conversation

Winter planning



43 acute respiratory hubs helped over 36k patients during winter

Extra trained staff at A&E directing patients to the best service for their needs

More 'virtual wards' and community services providing care outside hospital

Mental health...

NHS 111 now the single, easy-to-remember number for mental health crisis support

24-hour mental health crisis **texting service** launched

Safe havens have opened in Ashington and Newcastle



Helping hands...

- **Waiting Well** helped 1,460 patients prepare for surgery
- With the Department for Work and Pensions, **£19 million** secured to help people back to work with one-to-one coaching in practices



Thank you

Together we have achieved a lot. Our thanks go to everyone who has been part of this – from GP practices, pharmacies and dental teams to trusts, collaboratives, councils, voluntary organisations and patients.

Chair's foreword

Professor Sir Liam Donaldson



This year's annual report comes at a time of change. Since our last report, we have had a change in Government; this is a moment that inevitably signals shifts in policy direction and priorities.

The Government's NHS 10 Year Health Plan was published after our annual report was approved by our board. The 10 Year Health Plan sets the direction for the next decade, built around three

strategic shifts: treatment to prevention, hospital to community, and analogue to digital.

As part of the Government's plan to transform Integrated Care Boards, we are making changes to our functions and reducing costs by £32.5 million.

These reforms will impact our staff, and I have made a personal commitment, shared by our Board, to ensure staff are supported compassionately throughout.

We're making a difference

In times of upheaval, it's easy to overlook what has been achieved. Many shared achievements are set out in these pages, and we must build on these to make the most of opportunities that can also come with reform.

Much of what we report here already aligns with the three strategic shifts. Delivering them will be critical, not only to improve health outcomes, but to reduce pressure on acute services and ensure the NHS's sustainability.

Our Integrated Care Partnership has helped us work towards our ambition for longer and healthier lives. Working with combined authorities, we're beginning to open new opportunities to reduce health inequalities and tackle preventable illness.

Our work on supporting better housing to improve health, and helping people keep well so they can stay in work, recognises that the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age are as crucial to health as the care we receive.

This year has seen us renew our focus on tackling the growing crisis of obesity, which is having a serious effect on our communities, leading to higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, and mental health conditions. Our new strategy focuses long-term investment on prevention, treatment and support to increase the number of people at a healthy weight by 10%.

Prevention

We are beginning to see the results of our prevention work. Smoking rates have continued to fall, and the introduction of alcohol care teams in hospitals led to fewer admissions and attendances among those receiving support.

We welcome the expansion of water fluoridation in the North East. This is a significant step in reducing tooth decay, alongside our strategy to protect and stabilise dental care and services.

Safety and innovation

This report also highlights innovation. From digital tools for faster diagnosis and more care at home, to cutting-edge research and new treatments, innovation is helping us do things differently and better for the people we serve.

Safety is at the heart of everything we do. Our work on patient safety culture, infection prevention, and quality improvement reflects an enduring commitment to learning and improvement.

Finally, as we manage change, financial pressures and rising demand, our shared responsibility is to keep improving, keep innovating, and above all, keep listening to data, evidence, our staff, and the people we serve.



Chief executive's statement

Samantha Allen



For too long, our region has lived with poorer health than the rest of England. Shorter lives, more long-term conditions, and one in five facing anxiety or depression. This must change, and it is changing.

Working with our partners, we are meeting these challenges head-on.

Our clinical conditions strategic plan highlights 12 priority areas where we can make the greatest impact. We've started to embed ambitious quality and safety standards, and our People and Culture Strategy clearly sets out our goal: to make the North East and North Cumbria the best place to work in health and care.

Strong foundations

We have laid strong foundations for long-term transformation – grounded in partnership, driven by data, and shaped by local people.

And while there are challenges, we are seeing real progress. GP practices are offering more appointments than ever, and pharmacies a wider range of services.

After taking on responsibility for dentistry, we quickly invested in better services – with more to come in the months ahead.

Progress

Better access to urgent and emergency care, record levels of cancer diagnosis and a reduction in long waits are important milestones as we work towards better health and care for all. We are the best performing region for 18-week referral to treatment, and North East Ambulance Service ranks first for category one and two response times.

Our region's two new community diagnostic centres will help reduce waiting times further.



Supporting mental health

I am passionate about the need to treat and value mental health as importantly as physical health. We have strengthened support for mental health, learning disabilities and neurodiversity. New community-based services opened in Newcastle and Ashington and NHS 111 is now established as the single number to call if you are in crisis.

We have increased funding for neurodiversity support and launched a review of access, clinical capacity and support before and after diagnosis. But in all these areas, there is much more to do.

Our long-term 'Better Health and Wellbeing for All' strategy provides the focus for everything we do: a clear vision to help us collaborate effectively with local and combined authorities, NHS providers, voluntary and community partners, and most importantly, patients.

Complex needs

A particular focus has been on helping people with complex needs move into their own homes, sometimes after decades in hospital. These life-changing moves give people the dignity and independence they deserve.

David's story

When our ICB was established two years ago, we were concerned for a small number of people with complex needs who had spent decades living in hospitals.

We made a concerted effort to work with patients and families, developing special care and support packages so they can live in their own homes.

David, a North East man in his 40s, entered care as a young boy after severe trauma, and was later detained under the Mental Health Act. For over two decades, he lived in hospitals, often far from familiar people and places.

After more than 20 years, David is finally home. ICB and council staff worked to overcome complex legal and clinical issues to adapt a bungalow for his needs.

David was involved in choosing the furnishings, making it truly his own. His move meant so much more than a change of address: a new chapter, with dignity, stability and the chance to live a full life in the community.

[David's name has been changed to protect his privacy.]



Likewise, our prevention programmes are showing the power of partnership. It's great to see adult smoking rates reach a record low in a region that once had the worst figures in England. Alcohol, healthy weight and better housing are also key areas for partnership work.

Tackling barriers

With economic inactivity levels among the highest in the country, we welcomed the chance to take a proactive approach to tackling health-related barriers to work. As one of only three Health and Growth Accelerator sites, we secured £19m to deliver tailored support through work coaches at GP practices and health settings.



Our learning and improvement community, Boost, now has more than 15,000 members. Alongside its recently launched Academy, Boost is a hub for innovation, idea-sharing and improvement efforts.

The Staff Wellbeing Hub plays a vital role in supporting health and care colleagues who often work under great pressure to serve our communities.

Looking ahead

Looking ahead, we can expect further reform, with NHS England's functions moving to the Department of Health and Social Care, changes ahead for ICBs and a new 10 Year Health Plan.

We are working towards a system-wide medium-term financial plan to deliver financial sustainability by 2028, addressing a funding gap of more than £1 billion. These changes bring considerable challenges, and a renewed imperative to work differently, together, and with focus.

The scale of change is significant, but I am optimistic – especially as ICBs' strategic commissioning role remains fundamental.

I want to thank everyone who has played a part in the year's achievements. Your dedication, compassion and determination to improve the health and wellbeing of our region continue to shine through.

Here in the North East and North Cumbria, we have what we need to succeed: strong foundations, collaborative partnerships, a skilled and dedicated workforce, and an unwavering commitment to improving health and wellbeing.

"I want to thank everyone who has played a part in the year's achievements. Your dedication, compassion and determination to improve the health and wellbeing of our region continue to shine through."

Samantha Allen, chief executive

Better health and wellbeing for all...

Our integrated care strategy for the North East and North Cumbria



**Longer and
healthier
lives**



**Fairer
outcomes
for all**



**Better health
and care
services**



**Giving children and
young people the
best start in life**



New buildings, more services at village practices

Two village practices are providing more services after securing better premises with ICB support.

Middleton and Dinsdale Medical Practice near Darlington is caring for its 6,000 patients from a brand new building, while Pinfold practice in Butterknowle now offers 500 more appointments a month thanks to new clinical rooms. Both practices are able to host more medical students and offer extra services like physiotherapy.

Healthier and fairer

We want to make life healthier and fairer for everyone, addressing unfair health gaps and inequalities. Prevention is a key part of this, with schemes in place to address issues with alcohol, tobacco and obesity.

The Deep End network of practices in deprived communities runs projects reducing opioid prescribing, improving vaccination rates and offering clinical psychology in surgeries, as well as extra training and support to improve staff retention.

The Waiting Well programme supports people waiting for surgical procedures, targeting those who can benefit most. Other initiatives like Core20+5 and Inclusion Health are also focused on narrowing healthcare inequalities.

More than 200 staff have trained in poverty proofing, so that people on low incomes are not further disadvantaged by the way we provide services. 1,200 colleagues have taken health literacy training to ensure the information we provide to patients is clear and easy to understand.

Our digital strategy aims to ensure that no one is 'left behind' by new technologies, while a data-driven 'population management' approach is helping us direct resources where they are most needed.

General practice

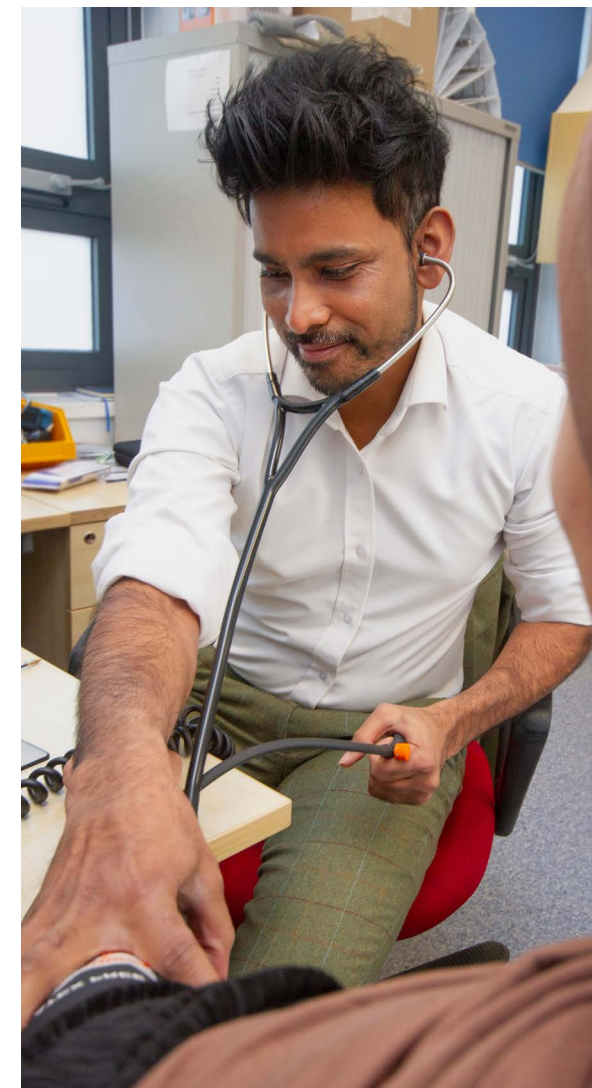
Our GP practices offer more appointments than ever – often with patients who need higher levels of care – despite some real challenges around workforce.

Our two-year Primary Care Access Recovery Plan focuses on stability and resilience, joint working through primary care networks and strengthening the workforce.

More appointments

Digital technology is reducing the '8am rush', as new digital tools make it easier to book and attend appointments.

Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme funding has enabled practices to employ nearly 2,000 more staff, while extra clinical space means several practices can now offer more appointments.



Community pharmacy

Our community pharmacies now provide more than 60,000 Pharmacy First consultations every month, for conditions from sore throats and sinusitis to shingles and urinary tract infections.

Pharmacies deliver over 50% of our region's Covid vaccinations, and more than 8,000 oral contraception consultations per month.

Optometry

Primary care opticians in County Durham and North Cumbria are now helping to take pressure off acute trusts by providing enhanced minor eye care services.

Optometry practices are taking part in pilot studies for the National Shared Record system, and the EyeV digital referral platform which can streamline patient referrals to secondary care. Work is also underway on a new primary care optometry strategy.

Dentistry

In our second year with responsibility for dentistry, we continued to stabilise and improve access to NHS dentists.

Following a £3 million investment to strengthen local services, we worked to increase urgent care appointments, out of hours treatment and minor oral surgery capacity, with the aim of a network of Urgent Dental Access Centres.



Making better use of medicines

Our new medicines strategy aims to use medicines better, waste less, and help people stay healthy for longer.

Every year, over £1 billion is spent on medicines in our region. Our aim is to make sure medicines are used in the best way, give patients a bigger say in their treatment, use fewer antibiotics and painkillers when they aren't needed, and help people understand their medicines better so they can stay well for longer.

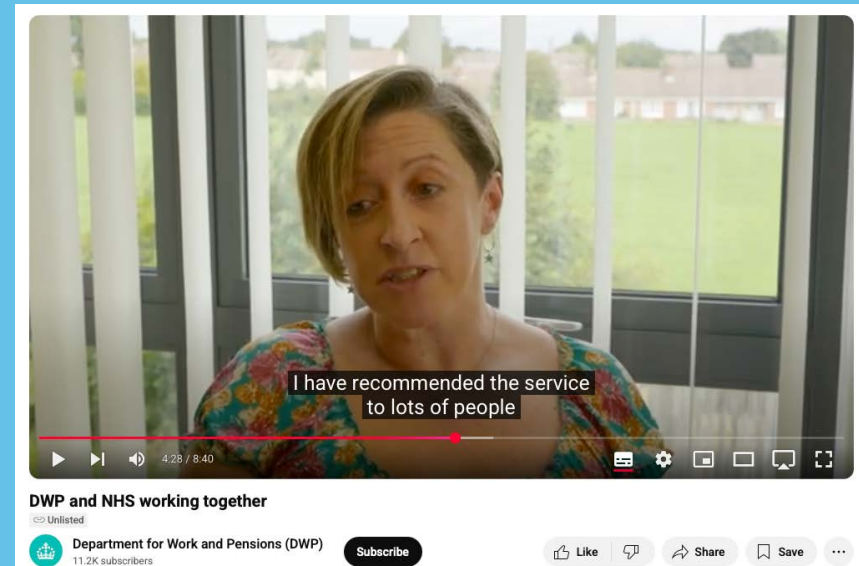
This includes reducing unnecessary prescribing, reviewing antidepressant use and making patients safer by reducing long-term use of opioids.

NHS job coaching 'changed my life'

Our WorkWell programme was awarded £19 million through the national Health and Growth Accelerator initiative – making us one of only three ICBs in England to receive this investment.

WorkWell brings together the NHS, combined and local authorities, Department of Work and Pensions, employers and voluntary organisations to support people whose health is making it harder to work – or preventing them from returning.

For Stockton resident Julie, this was a game-changer: “I’m completely different to the person who walked in for the first meeting. There was a real focus on my wellbeing and what I needed as an individual,” she said.



"They really care about getting me in the best possible place"

Improving fitness, diet or mental health can help us recover better after surgery. Our Waiting Well programme helps thousands of people to prepare mentally, emotionally and physically for their procedure.

Redcar resident Kay is waiting for a knee replacement. She says: “I trained to be a dancer and broke my knee, so I’ve had various operations. Waiting Well really care – their job is to get me the fittest and strongest I can be before my surgery. It’s had such an impact on my life.”





"Another few weeks and I'd have had my chips!" How cancer screening saved Margaret

When Margaret, 71, was invited for lung screening, she wasn't sure about it: "I wasn't going to go – I thought 'I'm alright, no symptoms, no cough or anything'. I couldn't believe it when they said I had stage three cancer. Another few weeks and I'd have had my chips!"

Spotting cancer earlier

Margaret is one of 500 people diagnosed earlier by the region's Lung Cancer Screening Programme, which aims to spot cancer at an earlier stage, when it can be cured.

More than 180,000 people have so far been invited for lung health checks, with a focus on people aged 55-74 who have smoked.

Looking forward

After chemotherapy and radiotherapy, Margaret is looking forward to getting back to cycling, swimming, and running her pest control company.

Performance and improvement

Performance challenges

It remains a challenging time for the NHS and social care, and our vision for healthier and fairer lives depends on addressing continuing pressure from the Covid pandemic, industrial action and the cost of living crisis.

Other specific pressures include elective waiting lists, access to primary care, ambulance handover delays, urgent and emergency care capacity and increased need for mental health, learning disability and neurodiversity pathways.

Elective care

Thanks to the dedication and compassion of our workforce, we are the **best performing region on 18-week referral to treatment standards**, though this remains below the NHS Constitution's 92% standard.

With a strong focus on the longest waits, we have almost eliminated 104-week waits and substantially reduced waits of more than 65 weeks.

Cancer

Our performance against the 62-day standard and the 28-day faster diagnosis standard are above national targets, but slightly below our own more demanding ambitions. Ongoing work is focused on challenges in the urological, lung, upper and lower gastrointestinal pathways.

Urgent and emergency care

An ambitious programme of improvements included a new System Co-ordination Centre, increased clinical validation of 999 calls, a system approach to ambulance handovers and greater use of Same Day Emergency Care.

The Accident and Emergency 4-hour response time measures the percentage of patients who are admitted to hospital, transferred to a more appropriate setting, or discharged within four hours.

A&E performance has improved, with 78.8% of patients seen within 4 hours. This was better than the national standard of 78%, but fell short of our own target.

Our ambulance services continue to lead the way, with North East Ambulance Service ranking first for both category one and two response times. Category two performance has improved by 10 minutes year on year.



A&E performance improved again this year - with 79% of patients seen within 4 hours



Primary and community care

Our GP practices offered 1.7 million appointments by the end of March – the highest number ever. New digital tools and promotion of the NHS App have made it easier to book and attend appointments.

But we know that some patients still face challenges getting appointments, and GP collective action also made an impact this year. A key focus has been the Primary Care Access Recovery Plan, to help providers increase capacity and get the most out of available resources.

Urgent Community Response teams provide urgent care in patients' homes, helping people stay out of hospital and live independently for longer. The teams have consistently exceeded the 70% threshold for seeing referrals within two hours.

Dentistry

NHS dentistry across the country continues to face challenges. We continued to progress our recovery plan to stabilise local NHS dentistry and improve access to services, through:

- Additional urgent care appointments, out of hours treatment and minor oral surgery capacity
- New Urgent Dental Access Centres to treat urgent and emergency dental needs
- New contracts to provide more routine and general dental services
- Reviewing payment rates to dentists, and direct support to practices at risk of handing back their NHS contracts
- Working with the deanery to stabilise and grow the dental workforce



**North East Ambulance
Service ranked country's
best for Category One and
Category Two call responses**



**Best performing
region for referral to
elective care treatment
within 18 weeks**



Performance dashboard...

A snapshot of service performance during March 2025



North East and
North Cumbria

KEY Arrows - based on Statistical Process Control (SPC) trend: Green = Improving Red = Worsening | **Targets** - based against submitted plan: Green = on track Red = off track

Urgent and emergency care

(Reporting period March 25)

*National target of 18mins



Ambulance response times: **7 mins** NEAS ranked No1 in England ★ **Cat 2** Improved to 20.54 mins Ranked 1st of 11 ★

Ambulance handovers: **97.5%** under 60 minutes



A&E 4 hour target: **78.8%** 🎯 Ranked 6th of 42 ICBs



Waits to discharge, admission or transfer longer than 12 hours: **2.3%** 🎯

9.8% Patients not meeting criteria to reside 🎯

Cancer

(Reporting period February - March 25)

728 people waiting over 62 days for treatment ↓

67.3% of people treated within 62 days

82.6% cancer faster diagnosis - above national average of 80.2%

Planned elective care



(Reporting period February 25)

People waiting:

351,422 waiting across our region ↓ 🎯

Waiting times:

4,754 people waiting 52+ weeks ↓ 🎯

326 people waiting 65+ weeks ↓ 🎯

Ranked 17th of 42 ICBs for 78+ weeks waiting for surgery - 23 people ↓ 🎯

Ranked 1st of 42 ICBs for people receiving treatment within 18 weeks from referral **69.5%** - national average 58.2% ★

Mental health



(Reporting period January - February 25)

48.0% Talking Therapies - reliable recovery ↓ **67.2%** Talking Therapies - reliable improvement ↓

59,175 young people accessing mental health support

30,400 people supported by community mental health services ↑ 🎯

Dementia diagnosis rate at: **68.7%** ↑ 🎯

2,275 accessed perinatal mental health support

69.9% of people on the GP learning disability register had an annual health check 🎯

Primary care



(Reporting period February - March 25)

GP appointments:

1.65m monthly appointments in general practice

79.3% within two weeks ↓ 🎯 **61.9%** same or next day ↓

Dentistry:

78.4% Percentage of planned dental activity delivered - below the national average of 81.1%

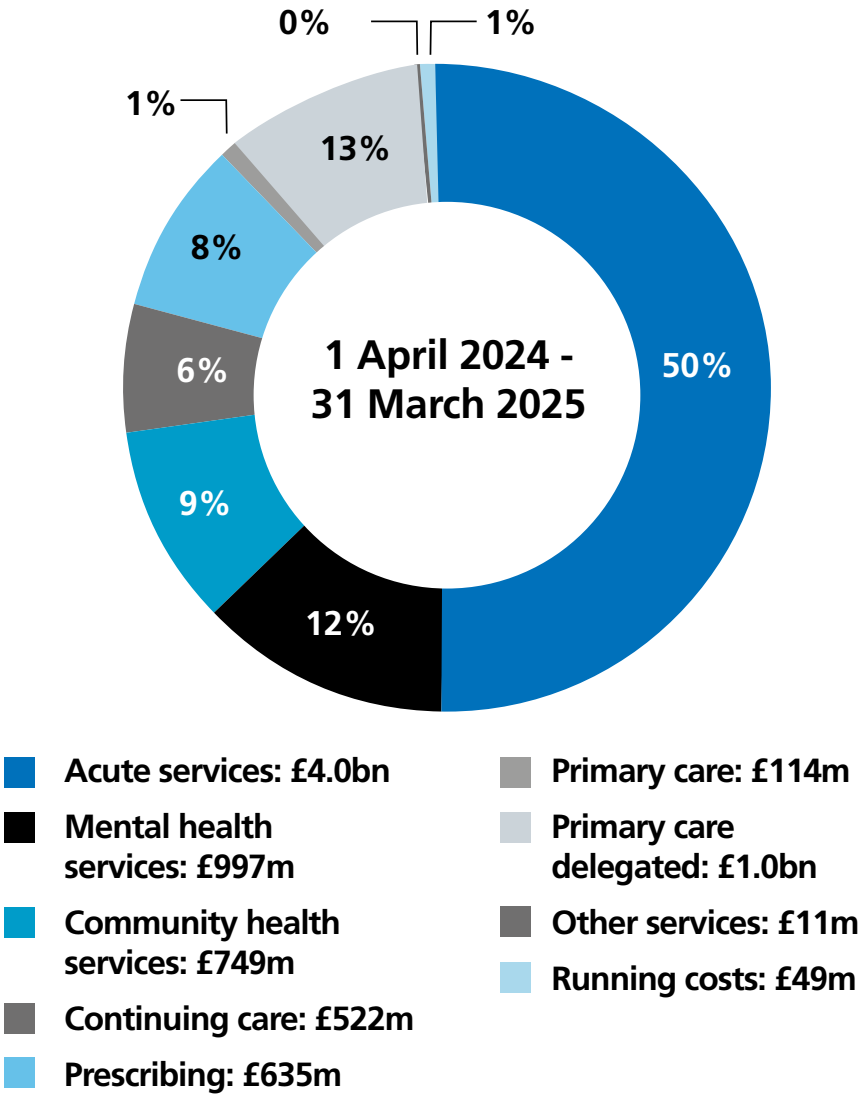
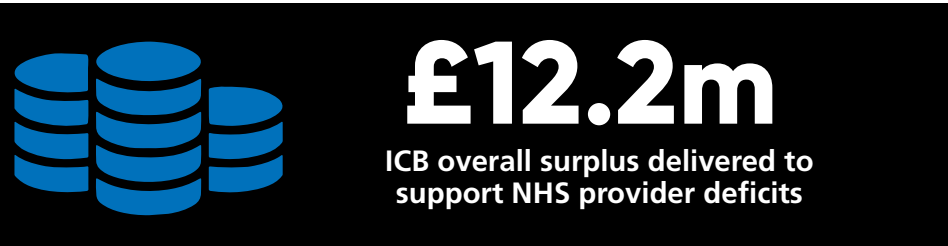
Our finances

Where the money goes

The ICB continued its strong financial performance by fulfilling all its financial duties for 2024-25. An underspend was delivered in administrative spend which allowed additional funding to be spent on frontline healthcare services.

An overall ICB surplus of £12.2m was delivered in order to offset deficits in NHS provider trusts within the system. The original planned ICB surplus was £53.6m. In January, the Board approved a reduction to the ICB surplus of £50m to support specific financial pressures within a number of provider trusts, with a corresponding improvement in provider deficit position ensuring no net impact on the overall Integrated Care System* (ICS) position. This resulted in a revised ICB planned surplus of £3.6m. The improvement in the ICB's actual surplus position compared to plan was agreed to offset a deterioration in the overall provider position.

*The Integrated Care System, or ICS, is a statutory partnership of organisations who plan, buy, and provide health and care services in our region. This includes all NHS organisations in the North East and North Cumbria.



Efficiencies

Efficiencies totalling £120.67m (compared to a plan of £117.71m) were delivered during the year, which has supported the overall financial position. This has included particular efficiencies in medicines optimisation and in the delivery of individual packages of care.



ICS financial position

Along with other system partners, the ICB has a shared responsibility for achieving financial balance at ICS level.

For 2024-25, an overall deficit financial plan of £49.95m for the ICS was agreed with NHS England at the start of the year.

An additional funding allocation of £49.95m was subsequently received from NHS England, which has allowed the ICS to report an overall break-even position for the year. The reported outturn position for the ICS was a surplus of £0.4m.

Looking ahead...

2025-26 is expected to be a hugely challenging year financially, both for the ICB and wider ICS.

The high level of non-recurring benefits being used to support the ICS financial position in 2024-25, combined with low levels of recurrent efficiencies delivered in previous years and lower than average net growth for 2025-26 mean it will be very challenging to deliver a balanced financial plan without taking some extremely difficult decisions.

The financial plan for 2025-26 shows an overall break-even position across the ICS, (after receipt of deficit support funding of £33.3m) and a planned £11.8m surplus for the ICB. This includes extremely challenging efficiency plans and significant additional risks compared to 2024-25, with a net total risk of over £240m across the ICS.

Across the system, work continues to manage the position and deliver the transformation required to address underlying recurrent financial pressures.

Want to know more?

If you would like to find out more about NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and would like to view our annual report and accounts in full, please go to:

northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/about-us/corporate-information



www.northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk

July 2025

