

Winter plan questions

These are examples of questions that local Healthwatch can ask their local authorities and/or integrated care partnerships and/or integrated care boards as part of holding services to account for their winter plans.

Funding

1. Local authorities [were told earlier this year](#) they would receive a share of £570m of 'flexible funding' to boost the social care workforce over the next two years.

Please confirm the local share received and plans for spending this money this winter. E.g. will directly employed care workers be offered extra pay? Will the council increase fees offered to independent care providers? Or describe any other social care workforce plans that this funding will be used for.

Will this investment increase the estimated number of social care packages this winter available locally, compared to last winter?

2. Local authorities in the most challenged integrated care systems were also [invited in September](#) to bid for a share of a £40m fund to improve social care capacity, strengthen admissions avoidance and boost discharge rates.

Please confirm whether any local authority within the ICS's integrated care partnerships has bid for a share of this £40m, if they have received funding as a result, and the plans for spending this funding.

3. [Some hospital trusts](#) were allocated funding earlier this year to pay for increased capacity in discharge lounges or ambulance hubs. If applicable, how much funding was received, has it been spent and how many extra spaces or how much extra capacity will be created for this winter, compared to last winter?



Capacity

4. How many new hospital beds will be in operation within the ICS this winter, following the government's announcement in the [Urgent and Emergency Care Recovery Plan in January 2023](#) for '5,000 new beds as part of the permanent bed base for next winter'?
5. How many new ambulances, including specialist health ambulances will be 'on the road' covering the ICS patch this winter (as also set out in the [UEC plan](#))?
6. How many patients per month can be treated in virtual ward beds within the ICS this winter? [NHSE recently stated](#) that a target to create 10,000 virtual wards had been met.

Access and patient experience

7. Out of all GP surgeries, how many, or what proportion of GP surgeries within the ICS; a) now have digital telephony systems b) will have it in place by the beginning of December 2023 c) will have it in place by end of March 2024, to improve patient experience in contacting surgeries? [This letter from NHS England](#) states that it expects ICBs to be monitoring this development.
8. Please confirm whether the ICB has expanded self-referral pathways, as was required by the end of September 2023, in seven named service areas such as community musculoskeletal services, audiology for older people and wheelchair and community equipment services. This requirement was set out in [NHS planning guidance in December 2022](#), to free up GP capacity and improve patient experience (note that new planning guidance will be published in December 2023).
9. What steps has the ICB been taking to promote the most appropriate choice of service in primary care during the winter and increase use of community pharmacies as envisioned in the the primary care delivery plan?



10. Relevant local Healthwatch may wish to enquire about the progress of the six 'National Discharge Frontrunners' named by ministers to develop longer-term solutions to reduce discharge delays, at: Sussex Health and Care, the Northern Care Alliance, Humber and North Yorkshire, One Croydon Alliance, Leeds Health and Care Partnership and Warwickshire Place.
11. What percentage of local care home residents and clinically vulnerable patients have received a Covid vaccination since the roll-out began from 11 September 2023? What steps are the ICB taking to ensure pregnant women are encouraged to get a Covid vaccination, flu vaccine and pertussis vaccine, ideally, [as suggested by NHSE](#), at the same time? What steps is the ICB taking to inform and encourage eligible but hesitant people, to take up the Covid vaccine?

Local Healthwatch input and support

12. How assured does the ICB/ICP/LA feel that winter planning for your area has involved input from local Healthwatch and other patient representative groups? This could be via: listening to views expressed in governance structures, reviewing patient experience feedback reports from last winter, asking patient representatives to shape and/or review public winter communications material.
13. How can local Healthwatch best help to support the delivery of winter plans over the coming months?

