

SECTION 1. WHAT ACTION IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING AND WHY?

The Health and Social Care Winter Plan is being developed in order to set out the high level responsibilities and commitments of both the Welsh Government and its partner organisations to meet the demands of winter 2021/22. It also confirms the priorities for Regional Partnership Boards, Health Boards and NHS Trusts to maintain our key services for the people of Wales during the winter, and to keep Wales safe.

Health and social care services experience pressures all year round, but winter can be a particularly challenging period. Colder and more hazardous weather conditions; increases or changes in activity in some parts of the system; and spreading of infectious diseases such as Covid-19 and influenza can all result in additional pressure for front line staff, and negatively impact on timeliness of access and experience.

The NHS in Wales always plans for the winter months to ensure that the health and social care service is ready to cope with the extra demands that the cold weather brings and the increase in illnesses that patients face. This year the anticipated challenges are increased, with the impact of Covid-19 likely to continue to place excess demands on our services.

The **Health and Social Care** Winter Plan has been developed consistently with the *Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* at the centre of our thinking, drawing on the five ways of working, and aligning with the commitments made in *A Healthier Wales*.

Long term

This Winter Plan covers the winter period 2021/221 but brings together the actions and developments since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, including the learning, innovation and new ways of working that will stand the population in good stead for the future.

This year has continued to present us with challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The health and social care system has felt ongoing pressure from the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic along with a range of other factors resulting in high levels of escalation in our services.

Covid-19 has been a pandemic which affected the whole world, reaching Europe in spring 2020. In Wales, as of 30 September 2021, more than 355,000 people have been confirmed as having had Covid-19 and there have been nearly 6,000 deaths (5,892).

We need to continue to plan and consider the way we live our lives and the way in which we deliver our health and social services to adapt to current and future challenges to our health system.

The Winter Plan addresses the five harms associated with Covid-19:

- Harm from itself
- Harm from overwhelmed NHS and social care system
- Harm from reduction in non activity
- Harm from wider societal actions / restrictions
- Harm from new or existing inequalities either directly or indirectly from Covid-19

The Winter Plan is an integrated plan which sets out how organisations working across the health and social care community will need to contribute in order that all services can deliver effective care to the people of Wales this winter. It will offer a blueprint for the longer term.

The plan seeks to support the delivery of the longer term benefits such as A Healthier Wales' vision for integrated and sustainable health and social care and supporting the delivery of the Programme for Government 'Taking Wales Forward'.

The lessons learnt from the work undertaken to respond to the pandemic will be critical in supporting recovery and long-term continuity. The Winter Plan will draw on the opportunities that have emerged during the pandemic to support new ways of working, such as the introduction of innovative and digital solutions, financial investment and strengthened partnership, governance and planning arrangements.

Prevention

The Welsh Government has developed strategies and has approached Covid-19 with strong emphasis on prevention. It builds on existing programmes such as the planned care and unscheduled care programmes that set a broad commitment to focus on a broader view of prevention starting with opportunities for personal wellbeing.

As a government we have sought to protect and support our NHS with additional investment to deliver rapid change in service models to maintain access to essential services and to increase service capacity for Covid-19.

We have invested £240million to support and accelerate the recovery of our planned care services to ensure that people have their assessment and treatment as quickly as possible. We have also invested £25million on a recurrent basis to support the transformation of our urgent and emergency care services to deliver the right care in the right place, first time.

The success of the Covid-19 vaccination programme has allowed our society much-needed freedoms and supported the re-opening of our economy but the shadow of the pandemic remains over us as we move into winter. We have seen rising infections rates and increased hospitalisations associated with the Coronavirus.

Through ongoing monitoring and modelling of the rates of infection and hospitalisations and tracking the risks related to the emergence of new variants plus active infection prevention and control measures in our health and social care settings we will continue to manage the risks related to Coronavirus.

The vaccination programme is ongoing and in line with the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccines and Immunisation and Chief Nursing Officers, will continue

to deliver first vaccinations to the extended groups, alongside third vaccinations and boosters.

Alongside the Covid-19 vaccination programme we will need to deliver the seasonal influenza vaccination programme as a preventive measure for at risk groups (e.g. people with clinical conditions) and for our health and social care teams. Last winter, uptake of influenza vaccination was the highest ever recorded in Wales and we want to ensure a similarly good outcome this year.

The plan also sets out priorities to support;

- people with respiratory conditions;
- children and young people,
- the resilience of primary care and planned care services
- the development of services that provide safe alternatives to admission to hospital.

The plan recognises that many of the levers to maintain health and wellbeing, particularly in areas such as the mental health impact of COVID, lie outside of the health and social care system. Welsh Government action and investment in areas that protect and prevent ill health such as employment support, homelessness prevention, debt advice and community resilience are crucial.

Integration

Prosperity for All has been considered. The aims and objectives of scoping and producing the Winter Plan is aligned to the need to build an integrated and seamless health and social care environment.

The Winter Plan recognises that the National Lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid-19 earlier in the year was detrimental to a significant number of people, especially those already suffering from a mental health condition.

In terms of mental health, referrals have been increasing across a number of service areas, in particular child and adolescent mental health services. It is important that services continue to respond to mental health needs in the context of this increasing demand and the Winter Plan underlines the fact that mental health (including substance misuse services) have been designated as 'essential' and therefore must be maintained. It is particularly important that people are encouraged to access mental health services when they need them, now and in the future.

Collaboration

Prosperity for All champions working collaboratively across boundaries to deliver improvement in health and well-being for the population of Wales.

The Winter Plan is a high level document that draws on the partnerships that exist across the health and social care community. The Winter Plan requires all partner organisations to demonstrate their contribution to tackling Covid-19 and to preventing further spread and impact from the disease contribute over the next six months.

To date all key partners, namely NHS Wales, Local Authorities, the wider social care sector (care providers and third sector), universities and partnership structures such as Regional Partnership Boards and Public Service Bodies have worked collaboratively to address the challenges Covid-19 has brought to Wales. That same commitment is shown in the Winter Plan and the Welsh Government has ensured that a wide range of stakeholders have been sighted on its development.

The Welsh Government is committed to a collaborative response ensuring that Regional Partnership Boards, and their respective health and social care partners, work collectively through a range of plans and data returns to provide robust reassurance that this winter services will be effective and resilient.

Involvement

The Winter Plan has been developed by the Welsh Government in order to guide the Winter Planning that is traditionally undertaken in autumn each year.

NHS Wales organisations, and local authorities, have been made aware of its development and the plan has been shared with NHS and Local Authority Chief Executive Officers and LA Leaders. However, because of the speed of response necessary, during what is a traditional summer break period, the demands meant that there was less opportunity to fully involve colleagues in the development than would be ideally supported.

Impact

The Winter Plan is important as it provides the overarching context within which the Welsh Government and its partners are expecting to address the challenges for health and social care this winter.

The Winter Plan will build on learning from previous winter periods and throughout the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. It will provide reassurance and direction around what is needed next to keep services joined up and support patients and staff over the coming months. It will provide clear messages to the public and stakeholders that further work will be undertaken to support our response to challenges the health and social care system faces this winter including continued delivery of Covid-19 vaccines to the additional groups (12 -15 year old young people) alongside booster vaccinations and a comprehensive flu vaccination campaigns this autumn.

Costs and Savings

No financial cost will be incurred in scoping and developing the Winter Plan for health and social care, however there has already been considerable investment in the health and social care infrastructure during 2021-22 to support the main requirements set out in the Winter Plan. For example this includes:

- Recovery funding issued for planned care (£140m in addition to the £100m already allocated)
- Social care funding of £48m

- £25m funding made available to improve delivery of urgent and emergency care services. This funding will be used to support many of the actions which set out in the Winter Plan.

Mechanism

Legislation is not proposed as part of this work, a regulatory impact assessment is not necessary.

SECTION 7. CONCLUSION

Joint working with stakeholders, including NHS Wales, local authorities, third and independent sectors, and Regional Partnership Boards has been undertaken in the months leading up to the publication of the Winter Plan requirements.

All stakeholders have been kept informed of the production of the Winter Plan Oral statements were made by the Minister for Health and Social Services on 6th and 19th October 2021 ahead of the publication of the plan on 21st October 2021.

Since then, the development of the Winter Plan has been undertaken through discussion with colleagues across the Health and Social services department within Welsh Government, professional leads and senior colleagues from within the service such as NHS Chief Executives, Directors of Social Services etc.

In early September all stakeholders have been made aware that publication of the plan will be October 2021. It brings together the range of existing and expected preparations for winter and stakeholders are already sighted on the majority of areas.

7.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

The Winter Plan should have a positive impact on people across Wales. The Winter Plan is the Welsh Government's overarching plan that will set out the broad context and direction of travel for health and social care until March 2022.

It sets out the requirements of stakeholders, about the range of actions and contingencies that they are expected to put in place across the health and social care system, and with wider partners, to manage the public health recovery phase, while providing services over the coming challenging winter period. It provides assurance to the public that we are working together across the country to keep Wales safe.

The main impacts will be positive in that the Winter Plan is aimed at all people regardless of age, race, religion, etc. The Winter Plan does recognise that some groups of people may be more adversely affected by Covid-19. It will help people to understand their personal responsibility for themselves and the impact on others, as well as what the Welsh Government is doing to continue to help them and to protect the NHS. The Winter Plan sets out actions for the NHS in Wales, and their partners to undertake, to mitigate the challenges faced by the service this winter.

Likewise, the Winter Plan recognises the need for essential services operate during winter 2021/22 to ensure that people with non Covid-19 conditions are able to seek advice and treatment safely and in a timely manner.

Where some people do fall into a vulnerable group, whether because of their underlying health conditions or their ethnicity, then the Winter Plan highlights the need for organisations to address these in the way in which they deliver their services.

7.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

- **Maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven wellbeing goals and/or;**
- **Avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts**

The Winter Plan will contribute to the well-being goal of 'A Healthier Wales' because it addresses the need for all stakeholders and the public to work together to ensure that the health and social services in Wales can provide appropriate treatment and care for people with Covid-19 symptoms and those with other conditions.

The Winter Plan promotes a whole system approach to health and social care that will enable individual needs and preferences to be met and; make an effort to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities.

Through ongoing monitoring and modelling rates of infection and hospitalisations and tracking the risks related to the emergence of new variants plus active infection prevention and control measures in our health and social care settings we will continue to manage the risks related to Covid-19.

The vaccination programme is ongoing and in line with the advice of JCVI and will continue to deliver first vaccinations, alongside third vaccinations and boosters.

7.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

The winter plans completed by health and social care organisations and coordinated via regional partnership boards will be assessed by the Health and Social Services Group's seasonal planning task group and feedback provided via RPBs.

The NHS Planning and Performance Team will work with health boards to monitor their plans throughout the winter period.

*****A separate Children's Risk Impact Assessment has been completed and published (Annex A) to accompany this document.*****

1. Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on people with protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010.

Cold weather conditions are associated with an increase in illness and injuries. Cold weather increases the risk of heart attacks, strokes, lung illnesses, flu and other diseases. People slip and fall in the snow or ice, sometimes suffering serious injuries. Some groups, such as older people, very young children, and people with serious medical conditions are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cold weather.

As described above, the Winter Plan is aimed at all people regardless of age, race, religion, etc. but does recognise that can vulnerable groups including the elderly and people with underlying health conditions can be more adversely affected by winter challenges including cold weather and seasonal respiratory diseases like influenza. It also recognises the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, vulnerable groups and poorer communities.

The plan sets out actions for the NHS in Wales, and their partners to undertake, to mitigate the challenges faced by the service this winter and to help provide an equitable service for all. It aligns to the Government's commitment to reducing health inequalities and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

The plan outlines our priorities, which include ensuring sufficient capacity and access to health and care services for all population groups, with a focus on those most at risk over winter. It recognises the need to balance the risk of harm and benefit of treatment and the need to ensure that vulnerable groups are supported to access the treatment that they require.

The development of local integrated plans, led by regional partnership boards will describe how services will be delivered at a local level to ensure they meet the needs of the communities they serve, including those from protected groups. The national plan sets out the expectation for health and social care partners to co-ordinate their services and pool or align resources in order to ensure that the regional integrated plan has maximum impact for people living in those communities.

The Welsh Government will continue to assess the situation and the risks posed by Covid-19 and, based on clinical advice, will respond accordingly to keep the most vulnerable safe.

Disparities in vaccination coverage between socio-economic, age groups and ethnic groups, as well as people from different international backgrounds, continues to be a focus for action. The vaccine programme has made a clear commitment to ensuring equity of opportunity and access for all.

The winter plans completed by health and social care organisations and coordinated via regional partnership boards will be assessed by the Health and Social Services Group's seasonal planning task group and feedback provided via RPBs.