

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

24th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Tuesday, 5 September 2023

Winter planning 2023-24

Note by the clerk

Background

1. At its meeting on 30 May 2023, the Committee agreed to conduct a short inquiry into winter preparedness and planning within health and social care over the 2023-24 winter period.
2. In recent years, the Committee has taken evidence on winter preparedness and winter plans for the NHS and social care. This scrutiny has explored what planning has taken place to ensure the safe and effective operation of health and social care services over the winter months.
3. The Committee's scrutiny of winter planning this year is intended to be taken in advance of the publication of this year's Scottish Government winter plan. It will examine the effectiveness of last year's planning and is intended to inform the formulation of this year's plan while it is still in development.

Scottish Government winter planning

4. Last year, on 4 October 2022, the Scottish Government published its [Health and social care: winter resilience overview 2022 to 2023](#) which set out a range of actions to support the health and social care sector throughout the winter period. This was published alongside the [annual progress update](#) on the NHS Recovery Plan 2021-2026.
5. Previous winter plans have been based on four key principles:
 - Maximising capacity
 - Ensuring staff wellbeing
 - Ensuring system flow
 - Improving outcomes
6. Within last year's plan, the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care outlined a set of eight priorities to guide and focus collective efforts in preparing for winter:

- Where clinically appropriate, ensure people receive care at home, or as close to home as possible – promoting messaging that supports access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time.
 - Focus on expanding our workforce over the course of the winter, through recruitment, retention and wellbeing of our health and social care workforce. All with the aim of expanding and supporting our workforce over the course of the winter period.
 - Support the delivery of health and social care services that are as safe as possible throughout the autumn/winter period, including delivery of a winter vaccination programme for Covid-19 and Flu.
 - Maximising capacity to meet demand and maintaining integrated health and social care services throughout autumn and winter.
 - Protect planned care with a focus on continuing to reduce long waits.
 - Prioritise care for the most vulnerable in our communities.
 - Ensure people who provide unpaid care are supported in their caring roles, recognising the value of unpaid care in alleviating pressure across health and social care.
 - Work in partnership across health and social care, and where necessary, with other partners, to deliver this plan.
7. Within the plan, the then Cabinet Secretary also highlighted the additional challenges of the winter period including the escalating cost crisis, continued uncertainty around Covid-19, and a resurgence of Flu. He further noted that the above priorities are supported by a wider package of over £3 billion investment to mitigate the impact of the cost crisis.

Structure of the inquiry

8. To inform this year's inquiry, the Committee issued a targeted call for evidence to the following recipients:
- NHS boards
 - Local Authorities
 - Health and Social Care Partnerships/Integration Joint Boards
 - Audit Scotland
 - Key professional groups
 - Trade unions
 - Patient groups
9. The call for evidence opened on 2 June 2023 and closed on 14 July 2023. The Committee received 44 responses which can be read here: https://yourviews.parliament.scot/health/winter_planning
10. A summary of written responses was produced by research colleagues and can be read here: [winter-planning-2324-evidence-summary.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](https://www.parliament.scot/yourviews/winter-planning-2324-evidence-summary.pdf).

Today's meeting

11. At today's meeting, the Committee will take evidence from:

- Representatives of the NHS and social care sector

And then from

- Caroline Lamb, Chief Executive of NHS Scotland and Director-General Health and Social Care

Clerks to the Committee
31 August 2023