

News release

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NHS Highland urgently needs to redesign services

NHS Highland must focus on making significant and long-term changes in order to deal with its complex and ongoing problems.

In a report to the Scottish Parliament, Auditor General for Scotland Caroline Gardner said she had concerns about the NHS board's capacity to make the urgent and major changes required, given its significant and long-standing problems and track record in addressing these issues.

In 2018/19, NHS Highland had identified savings of £50.5 million. The board only realised planned savings of £26.6 million and a further £5.9 million from other savings and benefits. The board required Scottish Government loans of £18 m to meet its financial targets.

The board faces a range of other long-standing issues, including: considerable overspends on drugs and adult social care; a rising locum staffing bill; significant organisational and leadership changes, continuing difficulties recruiting staff and incidents of bullying.

Caroline Gardner said: "NHS Highland urgently needs a clear and achievable plan to redesign services. This must go beyond the series of short-term fixes we have seen in the past. Longer-term planning is critical in ensuring it can continue to deliver the services needed by people living across the NHS Highland area. The scale of changes needed are such that the board is unlikely to become financially stable in the next two years.

"Given the board's past record in addressing problems, and the current leadership and organisational difficulties it faces, I am concerned about its capacity to bring about the necessary changes."

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Notes to editors

1. The Auditor General has prepared these reports on the 2018/19 accounts of NHS Highland under Section 22 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. This allows the Auditor General to bring to the Parliament and the public's attention matters of public interest related to the financial statements of public bodies.
2. Section 22 reports are submitted to Scottish Ministers for laying in the Parliament along with the accounts of the relevant body. While there are statutory deadlines for these reports, the actual timing of publication is determined by when the report is laid in the Scottish Parliament by Scottish Ministers.
3. This is Auditor General's second consecutive report on NHS Highland, and the fourth report in six years.

4. The independent audit opinion on the 2018/19 accounts is unqualified. This means that they show a true and fair picture, follow accounting standards and the income and expenditure for the year is lawful.