

Audit scope

NHS in Scotland 2021



AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland

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Background

Each year the Auditor General for Scotland publishes a report on the NHS in Scotland. The report assesses the financial and operational performance of the NHS and provides an overview of significant issues facing the NHS.

Our last report, [NHS in Scotland 2020](#), focused on the NHS and Scottish Government's initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This year, the report will focus on the ongoing health impact of the pandemic and how the NHS continues to respond. It will also look at the steps being taken to

tackle the long-term effects of the pandemic on how NHS services are delivered.

While the number of Covid-19 admissions to hospitals is relatively low at present, the NHS may be put under further strain if cases start to rise again. We will continue to monitor the situation as part of our work.

In this year's report, we will comment on areas including:

- progress towards remobilising the full range of NHS services, and how NHS boards are

managing the backlog of patients waiting to be seen

- the progress being made to redesign how NHS services are delivered, including examples of innovation and new ways of working that can be maintained in the longer term and spread across Scotland
- the health impact of Covid-19, particularly for those who have been most adversely affected by the pandemic and those whose access to healthcare has been reduced
- the effectiveness of measures to support workforce wellbeing, the implications of the pandemic on workforce planning and NHS leadership challenges
- the financial position of the NHS in 2020/21, including additional expenditure to respond to the pandemic, and the financial outlook for 2021/22 and beyond.

We also intend to publish two briefing papers this year, one on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in June and one in September on the progress of the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

Why is this audit important?

The NHS delivers a range of essential health services to the people of Scotland. Health accounts for a significant proportion of total Scottish Government spending (41 per cent of the total budget in 2019/20). NHS spending has increased substantially since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created significant and unprecedented challenges for the NHS and has exacerbated long-standing health inequalities. There is now a substantial backlog of patients waiting to be seen, and the longer-term health impact of delayed or missed diagnoses is not yet clear. Remobilising the full range of NHS services will be challenging, particularly while managing the ongoing demands caused by Covid-19.

Maintaining and building upon new ways of working and innovation introduced during the pandemic will be essential to ensure the NHS is sustainable. We will report publicly on how the

NHS is dealing with these issues and identify recommendations to help the NHS to improve.

How will we carry out this audit?

We will review and analyse information from a wide range of published reports, strategies, and data. We will draw on the audited annual accounts of NHS boards and annual audit reports. We will supplement this through interviews with senior officials in the Scottish Government, professional bodies and a sample of NHS boards and integration authorities.

What do we want to happen as a result?

Our audit will provide an independent assessment of how well the NHS in Scotland is performing and how it is dealing with the challenges it faces. It aims to provide assurance to the public, the Scottish Parliament, and other stakeholders, enabling greater transparency and scrutiny of NHS performance. The audit will also highlight good practice, what lessons have been learned from the Covid-19 pandemic and make recommendations to support improvement.

Timetable

We aim to publish the report in February 2022. Following publication, the Auditor General will present our findings to the Scottish Parliament's Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee.

Contact

If you have any questions or would like more information about this audit, please contact Derek Hoy, Audit Manager, on 07789 874700 or by email at dhoy@audit-scotland.gov.uk.



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