

Audit scope

NHS in Scotland 2022

NHS recovery

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland

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Background

The Auditor General for Scotland publishes an annual report on the performance of the NHS in Scotland. Our NHS in Scotland [2020](#) and [2021](#) reports focused on the response to, and recovery from, the Covid-19 pandemic. They highlighted the scale of the challenges brought about by Covid-19 and the extraordinary commitment of the NHS workforce in responding to the pandemic. The NHS in Scotland 2021 report also stated that reform is key to the sustainability of the NHS.

In August 2021, the Scottish Government published its NHS Recovery Plan 2021-2026. The plan outlines how the Scottish Government aims to increase NHS capacity and address the backlog of healthcare while meeting ongoing healthcare needs. It includes the principles that will shape NHS recovery and details the short-, medium- and long-term investment planned to deliver improvements.

The NHS in Scotland 2022 report will move from our traditional format of a general overview report to focus instead on the Scottish Government's NHS Recovery Plan.

This audit will review the Recovery Plan to assess its progress and future deliverability. It will revisit the risks to successful recovery that we identified in our NHS in Scotland 2021 report and assess how those risks are being managed.

We aim to answer the following audit questions in the NHS in Scotland 2022 report:

- What is the scale of the backlog of healthcare that has built up during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- Are the ambitions laid out in the Scottish Government's NHS Recovery Plan 2021-26 deliverable and will they help to address the backlog and make services more sustainable?
- What is the financial position of the NHS in Scotland and what funding commitments has the Scottish Government made to support NHS recovery?

Why is this audit important?

The NHS in Scotland is at a crucial juncture as it emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic. The way services were delivered before the pandemic was already unsustainable and that has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19. There is an opportunity now to build on the innovation and momentum of the last two years to reform NHS services and implement sustainable change.

Our NHS in Scotland 2021 report noted that the NHS Recovery Plan is ambitious and would be challenging to deliver. The plan outlines the ambition to increase NHS capacity by at least ten per cent to clear the backlog of patients built up during the pandemic. This is to be achieved partly through the development of a network of National Treatment Centres (NTCs) for planned elective procedures and diagnostic care. The Scottish Government plans to recruit significant numbers of workers for the NTCs and across the NHS. This is on top of existing workforce commitments.

We identified a series of risks to the successful delivery of the NHS Recovery Plan. Most notably, there are considerable challenges around workforce recruitment and wellbeing.

By carrying out an assessment of the deliverability of the NHS Recovery Plan, we can have an impact on how it is implemented and how risks are managed and mitigated. This would help build firmer foundations upon which a sustainable service delivery model can be built.

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, NHS boards, professional bodies, and third and community sector groups. We will adopt a

case study approach to examine how recovery plans are progressing at NHS board level.

What do we want to happen as a result?

This audit will provide an independent assessment of how well placed the Scottish Government and NHS boards are to deliver against the ambitions in the NHS Recovery Plan and tackle the backlog of healthcare built up during the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to provide assurance to the public, the Scottish Parliament, and other stakeholders, enabling greater transparency and scrutiny of NHS performance and finances.

Timetable

We aim to publish the report in February 2023. Following publication, the Auditor General will present our findings to the Scottish Parliament's Public Audit 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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Audit Scotland, 4th Floor,
102 West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN
T: 0131 625 1500
E: info@audit-scotland.gov.uk
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk