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Update on planning for 2024/25

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To:

- Integrated care board (ICB) and trust:
 - chief executives
 - chairs
 - directors of finance
 - chief operating officers
 - medical directors
 - chief nurses
 - chief people officers

cc:

- Regional directors

Dear colleague

Update on planning for 2024/25

Thank you for all you have contributed to the NHS and the people we serve over the last year. We are enormously grateful for the commitment, adaptability and professionalism colleagues across the NHS have shown in responding to the significant challenges we face – including the strikes that are happening today.

We are particularly thankful for all your work to ensure the NHS is as prepared as possible for this winter. This includes the very significant expansion of core G&A beds, virtual ward and ambulance capacity, and the continued development of clinically-led System Control Centres to effectively manage risk. Despite industrial action and continued pressures on social care capacity, we have seen sustained improvements in headline A&E and ambulance service performance compared to last year, as well as increased discharge volumes.

In November, we wrote following discussions with Government to provide clarity on the funding and actions the NHS has been asked to take over the remainder of 2023/24 to manage the financial pressures created by industrial action. Since then we have been working to agree expectations and priorities for 2024/25. Discussions with Government on this remain live, and we will therefore not be able to publish the 2024/25 priorities and planning guidance until the new calendar year.

In the meantime, we are asking that you do not wait to start planning for next year. We have already published financial allocations for 2024/25. The overall financial framework will remain consistent, including the payment approach used to support elective recovery. System plans will need to achieve and prioritise financial balance.

The priorities and objectives set out in 2023/24 planning guidance (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/2023-24-priorities-and-operational-planning-guidance/>) and the published recovery plans on urgent and emergency care (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/delivery-plan-for-recovering-urgent-and-emergency-care-services/>), primary care access (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/delivery-plan-for-recovering-access-to-primary-care/>), and elective and cancer care (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/delivery-plan-for-tackling-the-covid-19-backlog-of-elective-care/>) will not fundamentally change.

The key requirements will be for systems to maintain the increase in core UEC capacity established in 2023/24, complete the agreed investment plans to increase diagnostic and elective activity and reduce waiting times for patients, and maximise the gain from the investment in primary care in improving access for patients, including the new pharmacy first service. The final position and performance expectations will be confirmed in Planning Guidance.

As we have talked about in various settings, the coming year will require us to continue to focus on recovering our core service delivery and productivity. We will continue to target a reduction in the cost of temporary staffing. We will also work

with ICBs and providers to agree a standard set of metrics that all executive teams and boards should use as a minimum to track productivity alongside service delivery.

We will set out the details of the national planning process and timetable separately, but systems should work on the basis that initial planning returns will be expected by the end of February.

Alongside this letter, we are publishing the following documents, which would ordinarily accompany planning guidance:

- [Draft NHS Standard Contract for 2024/25 and associated documents](https://www.england.nhs.uk/nhs-standard-contract/24-25/)
(<https://www.england.nhs.uk/nhs-standard-contract/24-25/>)
- [Proposed amendments to the NHS Payment Scheme for 2024/25](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/amendments-2023-25-nhs-payment-scheme/)
(<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/amendments-2023-25-nhs-payment-scheme/>)
- [Updated Joint Forward Planning guidance for 2024/25](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/joint-forward-plan/)
(<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/joint-forward-plan/>)
- [Guidance on developing 2024/25 Joint Capital Resource Use plans](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/joint-forward-plan/)
(<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/joint-forward-plan/>)

We will be setting up a webinar for finance directors, as well as wider engagement, in the new year to discuss this further. In the interim, please do raise any questions with your relevant regional teams, and we will endeavour to provide any clarifications that we are able, particularly where these are material to any procurement or commissioning decisions required to maintain continuity of services beyond the end of this financial year.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Pritchard, NHS Chief Executive.

Julian Kelly, Chief Financial Officer.

Emily Lawson, Chief Operating Officer (Interim).

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