

NHSL WINTER PLAN 2021/ 2022

Planning for Winter 2021/22 commenced in July and, as in previous years, is a multi-agency approach across NHS Lanarkshire, North and South Lanarkshire Councils together with the respective supports, e.g. SAS, NHS 24 etc. The 'Plan is a dynamic document and will be updated/revised to take account of the level of unpredictability in the wider NHS and Social Care services and, in particular the scarcity of staff of all types and grades. As such, it should be recognised that it will be subject to change throughout the winter period. In this regard, regular monitoring of staff availability and service priorities will be undertaken such that the plan can be flexed accordingly and staff can be directed to those areas of greatest need.

In addition to the foregoing, developments are currently being introduced with a view to identifying mechanisms to increase care in the community and reduce pressure on the acute hospital sites. Plans will be reviewed and revised. This will be with the twin aim of a) seeking to deploy staff to initiatives with greatest impact and b) seeking to deploy the respective resources such that making an investment in one area does not destabilise other areas of the system. Work is continuing across the respective areas at the current time.

There is a range of specific work streams which have been established to take forward the respective work areas as below.

a) Flu and Covid Vaccine Programme – Public

Almost 400k people will be eligible for either a flu vaccine, Covid vaccine or both in 2021 and this will be the largest flu vaccination campaign ever undertaken. Both North and South Lanarkshire Councils have assisted in the identification of the venues for the campaign. The venues have been chosen to get a good balance between accessibility, safety and an ability to get as many people vaccinated safely as quickly as possible. A recruitment drive has sought to maximise as many dedicated staff as possible are available to deliver the vaccination programme, however there will continue to be the requirement to bolster the core staff with a range of bank staff, staff able to do additional hours and also using independent practitioners, e.g. GPs, Optometrists etc. At time of writing, the vaccination programme is on schedule.

b) Flu/Covid Vaccine Programme – Health and Social Care Staff

Similarly to the public vaccination programme, so too there will be the largest ever vaccination programme for staff. This will include NHS employed staff, social care staff from both Council and independent and voluntary sectors in Lanarkshire and all teaching/school based staff who will be eligible for a flu vaccine. Additionally, many of these staff will also be eligible to receive a Covid vaccine and this also features as part of the overall vaccination programme. The programme is well underway.

c) COVID Pathway

Work is ongoing in the redesign of the previous Covid pathway with many GPs now seeing patients who may have Covid in their own practice. Where this is not possible, there remains a pathway for patients to ensure their safe triage and face to face assessment where required.

d) Provision of Urgent Care Flow Hub – Flow Navigation Centre

As part of the planning for winter, the Urgent Care Flow Hub – FNC, established for winter 2020/21, will be expanded to maximise coverage over the peak winter

months. A dedicated public comms campaign is ongoing to encourage as many people as possible who would previously have gone directly to A&E to be managed in a different way. This has also be extended to GPs who rather than refer patients to ERC to arrange admission, will also have the opportunity to discuss cases with an appropriate secondary care clinician with a view to ensuring patients are managed in as 'planned' a way as possible, whether that be to access diagnostics, further assessment or indeed admission.

e) GP and Pharmacy Opening

As in previous years, following the break from this last year, there will again be an NHS Lanarkshire LES (Local Enhanced Service) to support GPs opening on public holidays this year. This will take place on Tuesday, 28 December and Tuesday, 4 January with a view to ensuring there is more access for patients on the 4th day of each of the 4 day public holiday periods. Additionally, GPs will also be offered the opportunity to open on each of Saturday 8th and 15th January. Thus far, just short of 50% of practices have signed up to provide this service. There will also be an extended public holiday pharmacy service available to ensure that people can both access prescriptions as well as being available for re-direction from NHS24/Urgent Care Flow Hub.

f) Planning for Additional Deaths

The resilience planning officers of North and South Lanarkshire previously worked alongside local undertakers to ensure there is sufficient 'pace' of funeral services – both burials and cremations – to support the eventuality of a significant excess of deaths over the winter period. Additional mortuary capacity is also available across the three hospital sites.

g) Staffing

All departments are planning to ensure sufficient staffing to respond to the potential needs over the period.

As noted above, this is of particular importance this year given the two 'four day' weekend/Public Holiday periods.

h) Surge/Bed Capacity

Additional surge capacity has been identified for each of the three hospitals as part of the planning for winter surge. A key component of the planning going forward is the modelling work being undertaken by a range of agencies in predicting inpatient/ITU/other capacity requirements depending on the numbers of patients and length of time associated with further waves of Covid. Omicron is a particular risk in this regard and work is ongoing to assess potential implications as more information becomes known about this new variant. This is in addition to any additional winter pressures. In this respect, it is envisaged that a good take up of covid and flu vaccine across all relevant individuals will assist in reducing incidence of Covid/flu in the community and associated strain in hospital/ITU beds. At time of writing, work is still ongoing in seeking to identify if there will be sufficient staff available to staff all the surge beds in each of the three hospitals. In the event that insufficient staffing is available for all three additional hospital wards, wards will be opened one at a time and used as additional system wide capacity.

i) Supporting Flow

Each of the H&SCPs and hospitals are planning on having a range of additional staff to support flow across the hospital into the community, maximising use of

care home beds, identifying patients suitable for discharge and ensuring full utilisation of 'Planned Date of Discharge'.

j) Adverse Weather

A series of actions is open to the Board/H&SCPs in managing adverse weather and these have been refined over many years of winter planning. Both Councils also assist as part of the planning to mitigate the impact of adverse weather and close working relationships exist with the respective Roads Departments.

k) Overall Resilience Planning

A review of the plan will be undertaken by the NHSL/NLC/SLC resilience planners to give objective opinion as to the range and extent of the mitigating factors introduced to reduce the impact of winter on the overall system. A desk top exercise led by Public Health was held on 26 October, concentrating on management of concurrent respiratory disease across the care home sector. Findings have been shared with the sector and advice given as to preparatory work which should be undertaken in advance of any such incidents.

l) Communications

Work is underway at both local and national levels on the public message in relation to each of the different pathways the public are being asked to follow during this year's winter months. As will be appreciated from the foregoing range of initiatives, there are many areas where the public will be asked to assist in managing the combined impact of winter and Covid and the Board/H&SCPs are actively involved in seeking to ensure the messages are appropriate, shared widely and understood. The publicity campaign has already kicked off and will be continued throughout the period.