NHS 24
BOARD MEETING
18 DECEMBER 2025
ITEM NO. 7
FOR ASSURANCE

EXECUTIVE REPORT TO THE NHS 24 BOARD

Executive Sponsor:
Jim Miller, Chief Executive Officer

Purpose:
This paper provides an overview of progress on the high-level activity associated with the delivery of the NHS 24 2025/26 Strategic Priorities and the NHS 24 2023-2028 Corporate Strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report provides updates against the agreed strategic priorities from our 2023-2028 Strategy.

2. DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE, HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES

2.1 Supporting the Delivery of Urgent and Unscheduled Care

2.1.1 Winter Planning

Winter planning and surge demand preparedness activities have been a key organisational priority since August. Whilst peak festive activity is a regular occurrence for NHS 24, each year brings unique challenges, and a fresh approach has been implemented to understand how best to support staff and patients across a period of sustained high pressure.

External engagement activities have focused on NHS 24's flagship 'Powered by People' campaign, which continues to direct people to the right care at the right time, promoting digital resources and delivered in local communities. A series of performance improvement initiatives have been implemented in advance of Winter through Patient Flow Improvement Programme, overseen by the Performance Board. Robust demand modelling to support resourcing has taken place, with staff working patterns issued for October 2025 to January 2026, to enable staff to balance their work and home lives across the busy festive period in particular.

A number of contingency planning activities have also taken place, with joint resilience exercises between NHS 24 and Scottish Ambulance Service, and a refresh of existing business continuity and escalation plans. Hybrid working has proven to improve resilience of frontline services to date and is a key part of ongoing winter planning activity through December.

2.1.2   Digital Transformation Programme (DTP)

The national roll out of the new Contact Centre/Customer Relationship Management Solution (CC/CRM) system (phase 2) went live on 21 October, marking an important milestone for Service Delivery. Frontline staff and managers were supported during the initial few weeks post go live, with suppliers and subject matter experts providing real time on the floor support in all centres to identify and resolve any minor issues quickly. Given the scale of the change, the transition has been relatively seamless with minimal disruption to patients and the feedback from staff and managers has been overwhelmingly positive and is testimony to the hard work of everyone involved. We will continue to work with staff to identify how the system can be further improved to enhance their experience as users and the service provided to patients. There was engagement with partner Health Boards and various stakeholders before, during and after the roll out of the new system. which was appreciated, and no major issues were identified by Health Boards, and the feedback was positive about the smooth transition to the new system.

2.1.3   Virtual Beds SLWG

Many of the territorial Health Boards have been working to innovate and develop a range of Virtual Beds including Hospital at Home provision. NHS 24 was invited to participate in the establishment of a Primary Care based Short Life Working Group (SLWG), to focus on the impact of development of virtual beds across the primary care system and the roles of NHS 24 and GP Out of Hours services (GP OOH) in delivery of safe and effective patient care in the Out of Hours period. Initial work has commenced to collate the current provision of services delivered through each of the GP OOH services nationally, with the next phase to consider opportunities of where best to support these new care models.

2.1.4   Primary Care Toolkit

The first version of the Primary Care Toolkit has been finalised; discussions have commenced with wider Primary Care stakeholders regarding the content and anticipated use of this resource, which outlines the wide variety of services provided by NHS 24. Evaluation will be carried out in a number of Boards involving a targeted approach within Primary Care. Development of informatics for use on digital screens in Primary Care waiting areas is underway with the aim of providing information directly to patients and signposting to wider services for example Pharmacy First.

2.1.5   Scottish Government Primary Care Division Recommendation Panel

Dr Kerry Neylon, Associate Medical Director for Primary Care, represented NHS 24 on the Scottish Government Primary Care Division Recommendation Panel for the recently announced Walk-in Primary Care Service. The panel's responsibility is to review proposals submitted by territorial Health Boards. Consideration is being given to the role of NHS 24 in these models given the significant experience and expertise our organisation can offer in the triage of patients in the urgent care space.

2.1.6 Unscheduled Care: 999 Taskforce Work

Following a SAS Test of Change (TOC) weekend where NHS 24's 999 requests were filtered through the SAS Integrated Clinical Hub (ICH), themes were identified to drive further collaborative improvement. Members of the Executive and Senior Management Team attended the ICH to gain a better understanding of its role and review the range of NHS 24 generated 999 requests. Following --this, a cross-directorate NHS 24 999 Taskforce has been established. This Taskforce includes representation from Service Delivery, Nursing & Care and Medical Directorates to define the issues and develop a robust improvement plan to reduce unnecessary 999 referrals and contribute to managing expected winter pressures.

2.1.7 Advanced Nurse Practitioner Phase 3 Test of Change

Having established and evidenced the clinical benefit of the use of video triage in enhancing NHS 24 clinical assessment, Phase 3 of the Test of Change work will focus on improving chest pain triage across the organisation by evaluating the use of a validated triage tool which could be utilised within wider clinician decision support. The five-week test of change which commenced on 20 November 2025 will filter chest pain calls to the Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) Team to prospectively utilise the tool in their decision making.

2.1.8 Held in Mind

NHS 24 met the Programme for Government target of an expanded offer of mental health support by introducing digital psychological interventions for people who may benefit from early interventions. A protocol was disseminated across the Mental Health Hub to raise awareness of the new treatment and to encourage referrals. This service development is in line with NHS 24 strategy, Scotland's Population Health and Renewal Frameworks and the 18-week Referral to Treatment Target for psychological therapies.

2.2 Delivering Enhanced ICT & Digital Capability

2.2.1 Digital Patient Handover Project

The Digital Patient Handover project between NHS 24 and the Scottish Ambulance Service has delivered significant improvements in patient safety, operational efficiency, and service quality. The new electronic system enables swift, accurate transfer of patient data, virtually eliminating transcription errors and manual handling, while freeing up staff to serve more patients. Enhanced location accuracy through Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) ensures precise ambulance dispatch, especially in complex or rural areas. Over 90% of eligible incidents are now transferred digitally, saving substantial time equivalent to 335 eight-hour shifts from April to August 2025. The project also demonstrates robust multi-agency collaboration, supports strong governance and auditability, and aligns with NHS Scotland's strategic priorities. Additionally, the initiative has improved the patient journey for mental health cases by enabling direct transfers to the NHS 24 Mental Health Hub, reducing unnecessary ambulance deployments.

3. PROVIDING A WORKPLACE IN WHICH OUR PEOPLE CAN THRIVE

3.1 Developing & Empowering Our Workforce

3.1.1 Vaccination Programme

The NHS 24 Staff Flu Vaccination programme commenced on 22 October until 5th December 2025, it was reported that 19.5% of NHS 24 staff were vaccinated at our in-house clinics. Additionally, another 11.5% of our staff received their vaccinations at national clinics bringing the overall vaccination rate to 31% of all NHS 24 staff. The current NHS Scotland national uptake for 'all health care workers' is 33%.

For comparison in 2024/25, 32% of NHS 24 staff were vaccinated.

4. BEING A COLLABORATIVE FORWARD-THINKING PARTNER

4.1 Continuing to Strengthen NHS 24's Organisational Effectiveness

4.1.1 International Collaboration in Digital Health

On 23 October 2025, NHS 24 welcomed a delegation from The Capital Region of Denmark's Emergency Medical Service. The visit marked the second international collaboration event in Autumn 2025, following on from the successful September visit from the Ministry of Health, Singapore.

Colleagues from Service Delivery, Medical, Nursing and Care, and Communications Directorates shared knowledge and expertise with a range of Clinical and Operational Leaders from Denmark, regarding:
- The critical role of multichannel digital healthcare services in local and national health and social care systems
- Operational planning and delivery of telehealth services and the opportunities for digital multichannel evolution
- The ongoing need to shift the balance of care from secondary care to local community-based delivery models

Of particular interest was NHS 24's advanced operational planning capabilities, in addition to the multidisciplinary staffing approach to support a model of remote clinical triage. In turn, our colleagues from Denmark showcased some innovative ways to promote integration of digital pathways to augment more traditional telephony models.

This visit fostered meaningful dialogue, shared learning, and strengthened opportunities for future collaboration.

4.1.2 NHS 24 Realistic Medicine Action Plan 2025/26

NHS 24's Associate Clinical Director met with the Scottish Government Realistic Medicine Policy Team to review progress on the NHS 24 Realistic Medicine Action Plan for 2025/26. The Policy Team expressed appreciation for the integration of

collaboRATE® questions used to assess shared decision-making during calls into the NHS 24 Patient Experience Survey, noting an average score of 88% for October 2025 for positive satisfaction with the care patients received. They also acknowledged the establishment of the SCReaM staff network, which focused on Sustainability, Climate, and Realistic Medicine, as a positive step in promoting awareness of realistic medicine and value-based health and care principles throughout the organisation. Additional progress was highlighted in areas such as content development for NHS inform and the redesign of unscheduled care processes related to Flow Navigation Centres.

4.1.3   Raising Standards in Inclusive Employment

NHS 24 has been recognised as a workplace dedicated to raising standards in inclusive employment. Apt 30 is a project run by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment and was launched as part of their 30-year anniversary celebrations, to recognise 30 inclusive employers in Scotland. NHS 24 achieved recognition as a leading inclusive employer.

4.1.4   Once for Scotland Policies

'Once for Scotland' NHS Scotland Workforce Policies Phase 3 commenced a soft launch on 3 November 2025 and runs to 3 February 2026. This preparatory period will allow NHS Boards to review refreshed policies, plan local implementation, and conduct equality impact assessments before the full rollout in March 2026. Key areas include mental health, menopause and menstrual health, adverse weather, alcohol and substance misuse, smoking and vaping, work-related stress, violence and aggression, and driving risks. These policies underpin the Staff Governance Standard and reflect a national commitment to modern, exemplar employment practice.

4.1.5   Copilot licences

NHS 24 has adopted Microsoft Copilot licences as part of a phased rollout to enhance productivity and streamline administrative tasks. The initiative began with a pilot cohort and expanded through subsequent phases, ultimately reaching a total allocation of 308 licences across the organisation. The deployment strategy prioritised roles with significant administrative responsibilities, ensuring that Copilot delivers meaningful efficiency gains. Training has been integral, with structured sessions and ongoing support via Teams channels and drop-in clinics to build confidence in effective prompting and secure usage. Governance and compliance had been central, with clear guidance that Copilot is restricted to non-clinical, non-patient data tasks. ICT and Workforce teams had collaborated to manage licence distribution, monitor active usage, and align the rollout with NHS 24's digital transformation goals, while exploring advanced capabilities such as Copilot agents for future innovation.

4.1.6   Emerging Leaders Programme

The pre-work phase for the Emerging Leaders Programme commenced mid-November with 360-degree feedback and 1:1 goal setting sessions, the programme

was a pilot cohort of Band 5 staff and specifically aimed at new and aspiring leaders. The programme follows a similar structure to existing Leadership Development Programmes to ensure the learning is tailored to individual needs, as well as NHS 24 strategic priorities. The first full workshop took place on 10 December, and the final workshop will be on 30 March 2026.

The themes for the Emerging Leaders Programme were inclusive leadership, communication and collaboration, managing priorities and decision making. The pilot programme would be closely evaluated to ensure readiness for the wider programme launch in 2026.

4.1.7 Digital Skills and Confidence

A Digital Skills and Confidence Survey was conducted to establish a baseline in using digital tools and platforms. The survey findings have shaped an action plan for digital upskilling that would include developing targeted learning resources and practical guidance; introduction of digital champions and bite sized training; and the promotion of safe and inclusive digital practices. The survey will be repeated in 2026 to measure progress and inform next steps.

4.1.8 iMatter 2025 National Report

NHS 24 demonstrated strong performance in the iMatter 2025 national report, positioning itself among the highest performing Boards and reflecting considerable progress made:

- **NHS 24 Response rate**: highest amongst patient facing Boards and exceeds the national average by 25%.
- **NHS 24 Employee Engagement Index score**: highest amongst patient facing Boards and exceeds the national average by 2 points.
- **NHS 24 Action Plan Completion**: highest of all Boards and exceeds the national average by 39%.
- **Staff Experience**: NHS 24 is the joint highest patient facing Board for "organisation is a good place to work" and highest patient facing Board for "my team is a good one to be part of".

The report also recognises a significant 3-point increase in both Board visibility and support for learning and growth, with NHS 24 feedback on these areas noted to share with other Boards.

4.1.9 Memorandum of Understanding between NHS 24 and NHS NSS

NHS 24 has provided support to NHS National Services Scotland (NSS) over the past two to three years, with a key focus on enhancing public protection through educational initiatives, expert advice, and fostering collaborative relationships. The partnership was formally established via a memorandum of understanding, securing ongoing cooperation and oversight. NHS 24 views the arrangement as a positive step towards advancing public protection expertise within NSS and ensuring continued improvement in safeguarding practices.

4.1.10   Corporate Escalation Level

NHS 24 continues to operate at Moderate level within the Corporate Escalation Framework.

5.   RECOMMENDATION

5.1   The Board is asked to note progress against NHS 24's agreed strategic priorities. Members of the Executive Management Team are happy to provide further detail or answer questions in relation to any of the content of this paper.