

<b>NHS 24 BOARD MEETING</b>	<b>8 OCTOBER 2020 ITEM NO 9.3 FOR ASSURANCE</b>  <b>WINTER PREPAREDNESS</b>
<b>Executive Sponsor:</b>	<b>Director of Service Delivery</b>
<b>Lead Officer/Author:</b>	<b>Director of Service Delivery</b>
<b>Action Required</b>	The Board are asked to note current preparations for winter 2020
<b>Key Points</b>	Key points to note are : 1) NHS 24 will be expected to maintain the national COVID-19 pathway throughout the winter, as well as the predicted seasonal increase in demand we generally prepare for.  2) Supporting our workforce to keep well and able to continue to deliver this increased service will be critical. We are aiming to significantly increase the proportion of staff vaccinated for flu this year and to maintain and strengthen our arrangements in place in respect of COVID-19.  3) NHS 24 is also playing an enhanced role this winter in supporting the test and protect arrangements in place for Scotland and the expansion of flu vaccination. This includes provision of the national helpline but also continued development of our online resources and information through NHS inform.
<b>Financial Implications</b>	Workforce requirements for winter, inclusive of COVID, helpline, and redesign of urgent care have financial implications as part of NHS Scotland commitments.
<b>Timing</b>	This report covers winter 2020.
<b>Contribution to NHS 24 strategy</b>	Delivery of high quality sustainable services and improving access to services are key strategic priorities for NHS 24
<b>Contribution to the 2020 Vision and National Health and Social Care Delivery Plan (Dec 2016)</b>	The paper will provide a contribution to supporting NHS 24 achieve their strategic objectives.
<b>Equality and Diversity</b>	There are no immediate E&D issues within the paper.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 This paper sets out the key elements of NHS 24's winter planning and preparedness. The Board will recognise that this is likely to be an extraordinary winter and, to reflect that, revised arrangements have been put in place.
- 1.2 The EMT has remitted responsibility for winter planning to the IMT this year. The IMT has co-ordinated NHS 24's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to do so throughout this winter. Given the anticipated rise in respiratory and COVID-19 symptoms, as well as the evident increase in COVID-19 cases in recent weeks, there is a clear alignment of winter planning and continued management of the pandemic through IMT.

## **2. WINTER PREPAREDNESS**

- 2.1 As in previous years, detailed workforce modelling to cover the three week festive period has been undertaken and festive rotas are being developed to provide additional cover and capacity over this period. Whilst it is recognised that some of this increased demand will be COVID-19 related, it is not possible to quantify the precise balance between COVID-19 symptoms and general respiratory and flu-like presentations. It is also important to note the shift between in and out of hours as a result of COVID-19. On this basis, winter demand projections has been calculated based on historical trends and COVID-19 demand has been overlaid onto this, notably in hours.
- 2.2 The festive period this year also encompasses two four-day weekends, which generally results in higher levels of demand to the 111 service whilst GPs are closed. Clearly, again, the situation this year may change, however, at this point our assumption is that GP surgeries will be closed for the full four days of each weekend. NHS 24 has, together with colleagues in the Board out of hours services, requested that consideration be given to opening GP surgeries this year given the additional pressures of COVID-19.
- 2.3 Our assumptions are that this winter, NHS 24 will continue to deliver the full 111 service, inclusive of 24/7 national COVID pathway and mental health hub. The additional factor for 2020 is the anticipated impact of the redesign of urgent care and the role NHS 24 will deliver as the single national number initially for those looking to access emergency departments and minor injury units. Demand modelling and workforce profiling in respect of this has also informed the total workforce required throughout the winter period, significantly greater than in previous years although deployed more evenly across the hours of the day.
- 2.4 In addition to the 111 enhanced serviced in 2020, NHS 24 is also delivering an expanded flu helpline this year. This is in addition to maintaining the non-symptomatic COVID helpline, including supporting access to testing. Given the extension of access to flu vaccinations this year and the shift from largely GP delivered to wider Health Board provision of vaccines, for instance, through local walk in and drive through facilities, demand to this helpline has been significant in

its first few weeks. This reflects the change in process and some delay to local communication resulting in high numbers of calls for information to our helpline.

- 2.5 Our online offering through NHS inform continues to be developed in line with this, including self-help guides, information and access to testing for those with symptoms of COVID-19. We will continue to exploit all opportunities to route patients and public to these digital resources, which have formed a significant component of our COVID-19 response reflected in the significantly increased levels of awareness and trust we have seen amongst the people of Scotland.
- 2.5 Internally, NHS 24 has developed its flu vaccination programme aiming to increase vaccination levels this year. This is especially important this year to minimise staff absence as a result of flu, but also in terms of general resilience amongst staff and maintaining critical COVID-19 response and the additional demands of the redesign of urgent care. Our aim is to significantly increase the proportion of staff vaccinated this year and proactive promotion of the value and importance of staff vaccinations is already underway. The vaccination programme is due to commence at the beginning of October.
- 2.6 NHS 24 is also responsible for the national winter media campaign on behalf of NHS Scotland. This year, the focus of that campaign will be different to reflect the ongoing pandemic, the expansion of flu vaccination and the redesign of urgent care. Extensive use of social media will continue throughout to ensure the public and patients are able to access care throughout winter and manage the demand to NHS 24 services.
- 2.7 There are a number of additional risks for NHS 24 this year in contrast to a normal winter, as the Board will appreciate. Clearly, we anticipate higher than normal levels of demand to the 111 service and the 0800 helpline and we are preparing for that as set out. We are also anticipating increased absence levels; this is a normal pattern in the winter months, however, the increasing levels of COVID-19 and the potential for staff to be self-isolating, shielding and, indeed, symptomatic has also increased. There is also the additional risk that we may lose capacity in any of our centres as a result of contact tracing, which will be mitigated against once we have additional space within our estate by November to offer some additional resilience. Whilst these all present additional risks to the service that are expected to be exacerbated through the coming winter, they are risks we have been managing throughout the pandemic and have robust arrangements in place.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Board is asked to note progress in NHS 24's winter planning and preparedness.