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Review of Unscheduled Care – Project Brief

Background

- 1 The Auditor General has a statutory requirement to satisfy himself that NHS and local councils have proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of their resources as set out in Section 17 and Section 61 of the Public Audit Wales Act 2004.
- 2 In April 2022, we published a blog '[Unscheduled Care – a system under real pressure](#)' which described the numerous and significant challenges currently being experienced by the unscheduled care system in Wales. The blog considered the impact these pressures are having on patients and staff, the factors contributing to the pressure and what is being done in response. It also set out the Auditor General's intention to undertake a programme of work that will assess the extent to which the system and its leadership structures are responding to the pressures in the unscheduled system.
- 3 This project brief sets out the main areas of focus for our work on unscheduled care, together with the overall approach and timing of our audit work. Our approach recognises that the unscheduled care system is complex, with many different organisations involved in providing emergency and urgent care and ensuring that the wider system operates effectively and efficiently. Our work comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on unscheduled care services. While there was an initial easing of pressures on the ambulance service and emergency departments as people stayed home at the beginning of the pandemic, demand has since surpassed the pre-pandemic levels. Pressures within the wider system also means that there are significant challenges discharging patients out of hospital impacting on patient flow, with ambulance handover delays the worst on record and some patients experiencing severe delays in receiving an ambulance response and treatment in emergency departments. More detailed and up-to-date information on how the system is performing across a range of key indicators can be found in the [Unscheduled Care Data Tool](#) that accompanied [our blog](#).

Audit approach

- 4 Our work will allow the Auditor General to answer the overall question: **Does NHS Wales and its partners have effective arrangements for unscheduled care to ensure patients have access to the right care at the right time?**
- 5 Given the complex and interconnecting nature of the issues within the unscheduled care pathway, we will be undertaking the work in three parts:
 - **Part 1 – patient flow out of hospital.** This element of our work will seek to address the following question: **Do health and social care bodies have effective arrangements in place to ensure efficient discharge of medically fit patients out of hospital?**
 - **Part 2 – access to unscheduled care services.** This element of our work will seek to address the following question: **Are health bodies effectively managing the demand for unscheduled care services to reduce unnecessary pressure on the system?**
 - **Part 3 – national arrangements.** This element of our work will seek to address the following question: **Are the national arrangements and leadership structures effectively overseeing, scrutinising, and driving change in the unscheduled care system?**
- 6 **Exhibit 1** sets out the key lines of enquiry we will consider for the different parts of the work.

Exhibit 1: key lines of enquiry

Level one	Level two
<p>Do health and social care bodies have effective arrangements in place to ensure efficient discharge of medically fit patients out of hospital?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do health and social care bodies have effective plans and procedures in place for discharge out of hospital? • Are patients able to flow through the unscheduled care system in a timely and efficient way? • Are health and social care bodies doing enough to review services relating to discharge out of hospital and apply lessons learned to improve further?
<p>Are health bodies effectively managing the demand for unscheduled care services to reduce unnecessary pressure on the system?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do health bodies have effective plans in place to manage demand for unscheduled care services? • Are arrangements in place to enable and encourage people to access the right care, in the right place, at the right time, and are these working? • Are health bodies doing enough to review unscheduled care services and apply lessons learned to improve further?

Level one	Level two
<p>Are the national arrangements and leadership structures effectively overseeing, scrutinising and driving change in the unscheduled care system?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the national arrangements (including the national programme boards) clearly set out and working as intended? • Are there realistic and ambitious plans in place to respond to the system challenges? • Are the national arrangements (including the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee) leading to improvements?

- 7 All three elements of our work will be based on documentation, observations of relevant forums, and structured interviews with the appropriate people in NHS bodies and local councils, and Welsh Government.
- 8 For our work on patient flow out of hospital, we will also hold workshops with discharge co-ordinators and social care staff, and request and analyse data not already included in the Unscheduled Care Data Tool relating to discharge and social care capacity. Health Boards will also be required to complete a self-assessment against our previous 2017 discharge planning recommendations. Particular attention will be given to the role of the Regional Partnership Boards and the use of additional monies provided by the Welsh Government, for example, the Regional Integration Fund.
- 9 For our work on access to unscheduled care services, we will also look to gather feedback from ambulance crews through workshops and surveys, and review information available to patients via websites and phonelines. Particular attention will be given to how well 111, 'phone first' and 'same day emergency care (SDEC)' arrangements are working in local areas.
- 10 At a national level, we will give particular attention to the newly established Six Goals Board, designed to oversee the delivery of the six goals for urgent and emergency care. We will also include a focus on the role played by the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee.
- 11 We will be undertaking our audit work using a mix of remote and in person working. For any in person work, we will agree this in advance with the relevant contacts and ensure all appropriate risk assessments are undertaken in line with current COVID-19 guidelines.

Timing of our work

- 12 The indicative timescales for the key stages of the audit work are shown in **Exhibit 2**. Where appropriate, we will give interim feedback if issues of concern arise during our work.
- 13 We will keep our delivery arrangements and the timescales under close review and adjust them to avoid unnecessary burden on NHS and local government bodies at a time when services are trying to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exhibit 2: indicative timescales for the work

Audit focus	Key stage		
	Set up	Fieldwork	Reporting
Patient flow out of hospital	September 2022	September – November 2022	November – December 2022
Access to unscheduled care services	November 2022	November 2022 – January 2023	January – March 2023
National arrangements	June 2022	June – December 2022	January – March 2023

Reporting our findings

- 14 We will prepare a number of reports as part of this work setting out our findings and any recommendations. With respect to our focus on patient flow out of hospital, we will prepare local reports based on the seven Regional Partnership Board areas reflecting the findings for the respective NHS and local councils. These reports will be supplemented by a short output for individual health boards specifically setting our progress against our previous 2017 discharge planning recommendations, and a summary of key findings for each local council.
- 15 With respect to access to unscheduled care services, we will prepare local reports for individual health boards and the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust. In line with the Audit Wales arrangements for public reporting, we will publish these reports on our website once they have been formally considered by the relevant Board and Scrutiny committees. Note that as part of our wider work programme, we will also be reporting on how the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust is managing its workforce¹
- 16 With respect to our national focus, we will report these in a single national report which may also include a summary of the findings through our local work on patient flow and access to services, where we identify issues of wider relevance to NHS Wales and the 22 local councils. We may consider laying the report before the Senedd in line with the Auditor General's powers set out in Section 145A of the Government of Wales Act 1988.

¹ This work forms part of our all-Wales NHS thematic review of workforce which will be undertaken across all NHS bodies between September 2022 and March 2023.

Other work of note

- 17 We are aware that commentary on the unscheduled care system is a crowded space in Wales with many interested parties. We have been engaging with relevant stakeholders throughout the scoping of our work, including Age Cymru, Older People's Commissioner for Wales, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, Improvement Cymru and Welsh Government.
- 18 We will continue to engage with key stakeholders during the review to avoid duplication and maximise any opportunities to learn from one another where that may benefit and inform the reviews involved.
- 19 The Auditor General also has a duty under The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to carry out examinations of most public bodies that he audits to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the 'sustainable development principle' when setting and taking steps to meet "well-being objectives". Where relevant, we will apply this duty to our review of unscheduled care services. Findings relating to the application of the 'sustainable development principle' will be used to inform the Auditor General's national report that he must produce before each Senedd election.

Audit Wales contacts

- 20 Further information can be obtained from Anne Beegan, Performance Audit Manager (anne.beegan@audit.wales), Fflur Jones, Performance Audit Lead (fflur.jones@audit.wales) and/or Bethan Hopkins, Performance Audit Lead (bethan.hopkins@audit.wales).

Data Protection

- 21 Where we process personal data, this is in accordance with data protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. Further information is set out in our fair processing notice attached at **Appendix 1**.

Appendix 1 – Fair Processing Notice

This privacy notice tells you about how the Wales Audit Office processes personal data provided by NHS bodies, local authorities, and Welsh Government in connection with our review of unscheduled care services.

Who we are: The Auditor General for Wales examines how public bodies manage and spend public money, and the Wales Audit Office (WAO) provides staff and resources to enable him to carry out his work.

Data Protection Officer (DPO): Our DPO is Martin Peters, who can be contacted by telephone on 029 20320500 or by email at: infoofficer@audit.wales.

The relevant laws (legal basis): We process personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Our lawful basis for processing is the statutory powers and duties under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, the Government of Wales Act 1998, and Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Purpose of processing: We are collecting opinions and information to help us carry out our review of unscheduled care services. Some of this information may be about identifiable individuals, which would make it personal information, even though the purpose of our work is not in itself to collect information about identifiable individuals. The information collected will be used for this work and may also be used in our wider statutory audit work.

Who will see the data? The Auditor General and the WAO audit team will have access to the information provided. We may share some information with senior management at the audited bodies involved, and our published reports may include some information. We may share some data with other regulatory bodies for the purpose of their reviews and such information will be processed in accordance with their respective privacy policies.

How long we keep the data? We will keep the information collected, including personal data, for a period of 6 years following publication of our report, or 25 years if published within a report, and we will hold data securely in accordance with our Information Security Policy.

Your rights: You have rights to ask for a copy of the current personal information held about you or to object to data processing that causes unwarranted and substantial damage and distress. Contact the Information Officer, Wales Audit Office, 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ or email infoofficer@audit.wales.

Our rights: The Auditor General has rights to information, explanation, and assistance under paragraph 17 of schedule 8 Government of Wales Act 2006 and/or section 52 Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and/or section 26 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. It may be a criminal offence, punishable by a fine, for a person to fail to provide information.

The Information Commissioners Office: If you require further information in relation to your rights under data protection law or are dissatisfied with how we are handling your personal data you may contact the Information Commissioner at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF, or email casework@ico.gsi.gov.uk or telephone 01625 545745.