

Structured Assessment 2021 (Phase One) – Operational Planning Arrangements – Public Health Wales NHS Trust

Audit year: 2021

Date issued: August 2021

Document reference: 2596A2021-22

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Summary report

About this report

- 1 This report sets out the findings from phase one of the Auditor General's 2021 Structured Assessment on the operational planning arrangements at Public Health Wales NHS Trust (the Trust). Our Structured Assessment is designed to help discharge the Auditor General's statutory requirement to be satisfied that NHS bodies have made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in their use of resources under section 61 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2014.
- 2 Health bodies are required to submit a three-year Integrated Medium Term Plan (IMTP) to the Welsh Government on an annual basis. In January 2020, health bodies submitted IMTPs, covering the period 2020-2023, for approval. However, the Welsh Government suspended the process for approving IMTPs to allow health bodies to focus on responding to the unprecedented and ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 The Minister for Health, Social Services and Sport set out shorter planning cycles for health bodies covering 2020-21. Guidance set out key considerations for planning, with the requirement for health bodies to produce a quarter one plan by 18 May 2020, a quarter two plan by 3 July 2020, and a combined plan covering quarters three and four by 19 October 2020.
- 4 The planning framework for quarters three and four 2020-21 covers the maintenance of effective and efficient operational planning arrangements in health bodies to guide their continuing response to the pandemic as well as responding to winter pressures and the implications of EU transition. Health bodies also need to continue to lay the foundations for effective recovery beyond 2020-21.
- 5 In our [2020 Structured Assessment report](#) we considered the Trust's planning arrangements for developing the quarters one and two plans. This report considers the planning arrangements underpinning the development of the operational plan for quarters three and four of 2020-21.

Key messages

- 6 Overall, we found **that the Trust has strong operational planning arrangements, which continue to improve. Planning arrangements around the Trust's strategic priorities have improved integration and the performance and assurance dashboard is a useful tool for management and Board scrutiny.**
- 7 The Trust's operational plans are based on financial and workforce modelling, effective engagement with stakeholders and input from its Board. The Trust has adapted its plans based on Welsh Government feedback and its own reviews of progress during the year. It adapted its Operational Plan 2020-22 to reflect its immediate and medium-term response to COVID-19 and similarly intends to review its long-term strategy. Planning structures and processes provide an integrated approach to operational planning. Good quality information and clear transparent reporting mechanisms ensure performance is reported effectively. In particular, the performance and assurance dashboard enables scrutiny by the Board and managers. Officers continue to give clear presentations explaining the context of performance information whilst Board members provide strong constructive challenge.

Detailed report

Scope and coverage of the 2020-21 Quarters Three-Four Plan

- 8 Our work considered the scope and coverage of the Trust's 2020-21 Quarters Three-Four Plan (the Quarters 3-4 Plan) in line with Welsh Government planning guidance.
- 9 We found **that the Trust has a clear Quarters 3-4 Plan, which balances its COVID response with organisational recovery and reactivation of services. Operational planning is based on workforce and financial modelling to identify gaps and dependencies between areas of work.**
- 10 The Trust revised its 2020-22 Operational Plan as an in-year variation to its IMTP 2019-22. The new Plan reflects the radically different operating context due to the pandemic and sets out six priority areas for delivery:
- effective and sustainable delivery of the health protection response to COVID-19;
 - broader population health impacts;
 - effective reactivation of prioritised public health services and functions;
 - organisational learning, knowledge and the COVID-19 narrative;
 - organisational recovery and developing a 'new normal'; and
 - enabling delivery and supporting corporate transformation.

The Trust engaged effectively with its Board to revise the Operational Plan. Members discussed emerging priorities for delivery in a Board development session on 2 October 2020. Officers then shared a draft plan with the Board for comment. The Board had a thorough discussion on the draft plan before approving it in its meeting of 29 October. The Trust's Quarters 3-4 Plan summarises the Operational Plan. It was developed in line with Welsh Government guidelines and submitted to the Welsh Government on 21 October. The Trust presented the Quarters 3-4 Plan to Board on 26 November.

- 11 Both the Operational and Quarters 3-4 plans build on the Trust's quarter one and two plans, balancing its ongoing COVID response with reactivation of services and broader organisational recovery. Both plans recognise the importance of flexibility to respond to the evolving pandemic, and the UK's exit from the European Union. The Quarters 3-4 Plan demonstrates that addressing the 'four harms'¹ set out in the Welsh Government's Operating Framework is integral to the Trust's strategic priorities and the way it supports its own workforce.

¹ Harm from COVID-19; harm from an overwhelmed health and social care system; harm from reduced non-COVID activity; harm from wider societal actions such as lockdowns.

- 12 The Operational and Quarters 3-4 plans are based on workforce and financial modelling, with this detail set out in supporting documents². The Plans highlighted significant gaps in resources to be addressed by the Trust's Public Health Protection Business Case to the Welsh Government. The Business Case sets out the Trust's plans to increase public health protection capacity and create a long-term resilient service. The Operational Plan describes temporary arrangements to manage demand for health protection services prior to approval of the Business Case. The Welsh Government approved the Business Case in February 2021. The Trust mapped dependencies between work to deliver each of its six strategic priorities and enabler functions such as people and finance. Information on dependencies is set out in supporting documents³ and is discussed at regular 'planning lead forum' meetings (see section 1.2).
- 13 In October 2020, the Business Executive Team formally agreed a fixed baseline for measuring progress against the Operational Plan. Baselines are based on the Trust's current position and targets for delivery. The Team looked at milestones for each strategic priority alongside financial and human resources. The Trust will assess its baseline in the event of significant internal or external change. It also plans periodic checks on each priority such as mid-year assessments, which may also require revised baselines. The Quarters 3-4 Plan sets out milestones for delivery of each priority. It measures progress against each milestone in an interactive performance and assurance dashboard and supporting integrated performance report (see section 1.3). The dashboard also shows performance against key service indicators including individual screening services.

Arrangements for developing operational plans

- 14 Our work considered the Trust's arrangements for developing the Quarters 3-4 Plan to support its ongoing response to COVID-19, maintain essential services and resume more routine services.
- 15 We found **the Trust has effective operational planning arrangements based on engagement with internal and external stakeholders. It has refined its approach to better integrate enabler and delivery functions and ensure changes to delivery are well managed and transparent.**
- 16 The Quarters 3-4 Plan incorporates learning from the Welsh Government's review of the quarter one and two plans and the Trust's review of its stage one⁴ and two plans to deliver Test, Trace, Protect. In developing the Operational and Quarters 3-4 plans, the Trust also drew on evaluations of specific workstreams, such as

² Including a workforce mapping exercise, resourcing and recruitment plans, and a review of the Trust's organisational workforce plan.

³ Including planning templates for each priority area.

⁴ Stage one ran from March until early June. Stage two went from June to the end of September. The plans formed the basis for quarters one and two.

contact tracing, sampling, and its enclosed settings work. The plans also set out the Trust's intention to develop a more systematic approach to capturing and sharing learning in the near future.

- 17 The Trust engaged systematically with all staff via staff surveys, stakeholder groups, and virtual meetings to enable staff to question the teams developing the plans for each strategic priority. It engaged with external stakeholders to develop specific aspects of the plan on an ad hoc basis. The Trust also worked with health boards, local authorities, local resilience fora, and the Welsh Government to develop the all-Wales approach to the pandemic. More broadly, the Trust worked with UK and international organisations to share learning on aspects of the pandemic, which have informed its operational plans.
- 18 During 2020-21, the Trust's planning approach became more focused and better integrated. It has six multi-disciplinary teams to plan and oversee delivery of its six strategic priorities. Each priority has a named Senior Responsible Officer, planning lead, and a supporting 'planning squad', including staff from enabling functions such as people and organisational development. Each priority team works together to complete a planning template with key information on the resources, risks and dependencies associated with delivery. Planning leads meet regularly through the planning leads forum to discuss progress, provide constructive challenge, and share information on emerging issues. The approach improves integration across the organisation and with the Trust's wider operational and strategic plans.
- 19 The Trust refreshed its Operational Plan in March 2021. More broadly, it will review its long-term strategy in 2021 to consider whether the priorities and delivery mechanisms are still relevant.
- 20 The Operational and Quarters 3-4 Plans set out the need to respond flexibly to changing circumstances – in the short term and within the period covered by the Operational Plan. For instance, the Trust has plans to flex workforce capacity to respond to changes in demand in its contact centre, but has also recognised it may need to respond in the medium term to a Welsh Government system wide review of health and social care. In addition, the Trust has effective change management controls to document changes to planned delivery, the reason behind each change, and revised delivery arrangements.

Arrangements for monitoring delivery of operational plans

- 21 Our work considered the Trust's arrangements for monitoring and reporting on the delivery of its Quarters 3-4 Plan.
- 22 We found **the Trust has strong arrangements for overseeing delivery of its operational plans supported by an interactive performance and assurance dashboard and good Board scrutiny.**

- 23 The Trust's arrangements for overseeing delivery of its operational plans remain strong. Since our Structured Assessment work in 2020, the Trust has developed its performance assurance dashboard. The dashboard combines key information on the Trust's COVID-19 response, finances, workforce, quality, and delivery of its operational plan. The dashboard is presented at each Board meeting and available to members in between meetings to scrutinise in detail. Officers give clear verbal presentations on the information in the dashboard explaining key issues affecting performance and any actions needed to improve performance. The Business Executive Team review the dashboard on a monthly basis. During critical periods of the pandemic, the Trust's Gold Group monitored key aspects of its COVID response more regularly. The Trust also writes an integrated performance report describing performance and the context around it. The report is supported by a PDF document with images from the dashboard to provide clear information on performance for the public⁵.
- 24 The dashboard also gives assurance on the quality of performance data. The Trust's corporate analytics team assesses and awards each data source a bronze, silver or gold rating based on recognised quality standards. Data which do not meet the standards are not included until the Trust can improve them. The source and quality of data are set out in the dashboard so the Board can clearly assess the strength of assurance given. An Internal Audit Report in March 2021 gave substantial assurance on the Trust's arrangements for managing the quality of data used in the dashboard.
- 25 The Trust continues to use the Delivery Confidence Assessments which set out the likely successful delivery of its COVID response based on progress, risk management, financial and workforce information.

⁵ The public cannot access the performance and assurance dashboard itself.



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