

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday 25th November 2024
Report Subject	Response to the Audit Wales Review <i>“Urgent and Emergency Care: Flow out of Hospital – North Wales Region”</i>
Report Author	Chief Officer – Social Services
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Auditor General has undertaken work to examine whole system issues affecting urgent and emergency care services across Wales and the associated demand management. This work included the discharge of patients from hospital, and examined whether health boards and local authorities have effective arrangements in place to ensure the timely discharge of patients out of hospital.

The Auditor General has produced a review report on findings for North Wales. The report concludes that, whilst partners demonstrated an understanding and commitment to improving patient flow out of hospital, performance remains extremely challenging with adverse effects for patient experience. Specifically, the overall finding is that “Partners must continue to work individually and collaboratively to set and implement clear guidance, mitigate the challenges posed by reduced capacity and increased complexity of care, and ensure the impact of activities is continually monitored, challenged, and maximised.”

The review considered the period April 2023 to February 2024, concluding with a set of 16 recommendations for action. Audit Wales will present their report and findings to Governance and Audit Committee on 25 November 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To consider the Wales Audit report and the measures being taken regionally and locally to implement the recommendations made.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT WALES REVIEW “URGENT AND EMERGENCY CARE: FLOW OUT OF HOSPITAL – NORTH WALES REGION”
1.01	The report found that the extent of hospital discharge delays in North Wales has grown significantly in recent years and between April 2023 and February 2024. Each month there were on average 334 medically fit patients across the region whose discharge was delayed, with completion of assessments the main cause for delay.
1.02	For the year to date, up to and including February 2024, the total number of bed days that had been lost to delayed discharges across North Wales was 71,871 with a full-year cost equivalent of £39.202 million. Difficulties with discharge are also impacting on the ability of partner organisations to meet some patients’ needs effectively, especially in the West of the region where a significant proportion of patients are placed in temporary accommodation post hospital discharge.
1.03	Several factors are contributing to delayed discharges. Many patients, especially elderly people with mental health problems, have complex needs that are not easily met by the services that are available. There are also workforce challenges within the social care sector, particularly in the areas of Conwy, Denbighshire, and Gwynedd.
1.04	Work is also needed to address an absence of jointly agreed training and guidance on discharge planning for health and social care staff, and to overcome difficulties in communicating and sharing information across organisational boundaries.
1.05	Improving patient flow is a key feature of plans across the partners which align to the Welsh Government’s six goals for urgent and emergency care. Partners are working together, both strategically and operationally, to improve patient flow, however, pressures on the system are creating an unhelpful blame culture. Financial resources are being applied to improve discharge planning, although financial constraints in partner bodies is leading to the continual roll forward of schemes and ultimately leaves little space for new ideas.
1.06	Partners also need to maximise the use of the Regional Integration Fund (RIF), improve oversight and impact of the initiatives that are being undertaken to support timely and effective discharge, and ensure learning from events is embedded into routine practice.
1.07	Taken together, the above demonstrates that despite hard work and good intentions on the part of organisations within the region, there is still much to do to improve discharge planning and processes. Continued action is needed across a range of areas to secure the improvements which are necessary for patients, their families, and the wider urgent and emergency care system.
1.08	The report identifies gaps and areas for improvement in supporting patient flow but acknowledges the financial constraints in which social care and health agencies are working.

1.09	Sixteen recommendations are made to improve joint working, setting out better ways of working with an expectation that these recommendations are addressed. Recommendations set out expectations for BCUHB and North Wales local authorities, with particular reference to the role of the Regional Partnership Board.
1.10	A key recommendation is that guidance should be agreed between the Health Board and local authorities in North Wales, providing clarity on how discharge planning should work across the region. In response, a guidance summary is being prepared regionally to provide support and guidance to help health and social care colleagues work together better. Within Flintshire Social Services, the document will be shared with all staff involved in supporting discharge planning across Flintshire and will be embedded in training and supervision.
1.11	The report recommends that social care and staff should have consistent access to up to date information about community services. In Flintshire, our Single Point of Access for adult services includes a number of FLVC third sector advisers who have access to a wide range of community resources, and there is also access to the national DEWIS database of community services.
1.12	The report recommends that BCUHB and local authorities should develop information sharing, including wider access to organisational systems. Flintshire Social Services has for some time provided access to our electronic information system to discharge leads within the Home First Bureau to enable access to key information to support discharge planning. Daily meetings are held in each of the hospitals which service Flintshire, where health and social services colleagues share information and make plans for safe discharges.
1.13	The Regional Partnership Board has prepared an action plan to address all the Audit Wales recommendations in a timely way. The report will influence and inform policy and procedure to improve hospital discharges over the coming months.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Revenue: there are no implications for the approved revenue budget for this service for either the current financial year or for future financial years. The recommendations made can be addressed by working more effectively within existing resources and structures.</p> <p>Capital: there are no implications for the approved capital programme for either the current financial year or for future financial years.</p> <p>Human Resources: there are no implications for additional capacity or for any change to current workforce structures or roles.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	An impact assessment is not required as this is a report on progress and provides an overview of the requirements and recommendations set out in the Audit Wales report.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	None required in this case.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Audit Wales – Urgent and Emergency Care: Flow out of Hospital – North Wales Region Report.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Christopher Phillips, Service Manager, Older People Telephone: 01352 702540 E-mail: Christopher.phillips@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	<p>Wales Audit Office: works to support the Auditor General as the public sector watchdog for Wales. They aim to ensure that the people of Wales know whether public money is being managed wisely and that public bodies in Wales understand how to improve outcomes.</p> <p>Regional Integration Fund (RIF): A five-year Welsh Government programme from April 2022 to 2027 to help integrate health and care services.</p> <p>North Wales Regional Partnership Board: Regional Partnership Boards manage and develop services to secure strategic planning and partnership working between local authorities and Local Health Boards and to ensure effective services, care and support are in place to best meet the needs of their respective populations.</p> <p>FLVC: Flintshire Local Voluntary Council supports, promotes and develops the voluntary and community sector in Flintshire.</p>

	<p>Home First Bureau: A BCUHB team covering Wrexham and Flintshire to support discharge planning and co-ordinate discharge activity.</p>
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