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Richard Leonard MSP
Convener
Public Audit Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

18 November 2025

Dear Convener,

Follow-up information: implementation of the sub-national planning approach across NHS Scotland

I am writing to provide further detail on the Scottish Government's new sub-national planning approach, which complements the population-level planning framework referenced in my letter to the Committee of 31 October 2025.

Scottish Ministers have now issued a Ministerial Direction – [The Co-operation and Planning Directions 2025 \(DL 2025/25\)](#) requiring Health Boards to work together in order to meet specific objectives, including the development of joint plans for service delivery at a sub-national level. This approach directly responds to issues raised by Audit Scotland around variation, siloed planning and the need for more coherent governance across NHS Scotland.

The sub-national planning model will:

- **Reduce duplication** by enabling services to be planned once at the appropriate scale;
- **Strengthen sustainability** of specialist services by consolidating clinical expertise, peer support and safe staffing levels;
- **Improve equity and access** by reducing unwarranted variation in care pathways and waiting times between regions; and
- **Enhance accountability** by creating clearer links between planning decisions, service delivery and system performance.

This marks a shift from organisation-based planning to population-focused service design, aligned with the [Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework](#) and the broader ambitions of public service reform.

To implement the Directions, Health Boards are going to establish Sub-National Planning and Delivery Committees (SPDCs) (Scotland East and Scotland West). These Committees will be responsible for prioritising and agreeing sub-national plans and reporting progress through NHS Scotland's governance and assurance structures.

Importantly, individual Health Boards will remain legally accountable for service delivery, and no new public bodies are being created.

Governance and the Committee's Interests

The Committee has previously emphasised the need for governance arrangements that are clear and avoid unnecessary complexity. The sub-national model addresses this by introducing:

- A single sub-national decision-making forum;
- Standardised reporting mechanisms; and
- Transparent evaluation of impact against national outcomes.

This approach directly implements Audit Scotland's recommendations on improving governance clarity, aligning planning with delivery and strengthening accountability. It represents a significant improvement in how NHS Scotland plans and delivers services.

I trust this provides the clarity the Committee requested. I will continue to keep you updated as this work progresses, including sharing early outputs from joint sub-national plans when available.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if further information would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lamb
Director-General Health & Social Care
Chief Executive, NHS Scotland