

# Structured Assessment 2021: Phase 1 Operational Planning Arrangements – Velindre University NHS Trust

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# Contents

Summary report	
About this report	4
Key messages	4
Detailed report	
Scope and coverage of the 2020-21 Quarters Three-Four Plan	6
Arrangements for developing operational plans	6
Arrangements for monitoring delivery of operational plans	9

# 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 Velindre University 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 **the Trust's arrangements for developing operational plans and monitoring their delivery are effective and have the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.**
- 7 The Trust's Quarters' Three-Four Plan 2020-21 (the Quarters' 3-4 Plan) was submitted to the Welsh Government within the required timeframe, covers all necessary areas within the planning framework guidance and received the required Board scrutiny.
- 8 The Trust has maintained the same approach for developing its quarterly plans as was the case for developing IMTPs in previous years. The Quarters' 3-4 Plan is a progression from the previous two quarterly plans and is underpinned with best

possible information available given the uncertainty the pandemic presents. Arrangements to deliver the Quarters' 3-4 Plan are dynamic and have responded to the changing circumstances and supported the wider NHS.

- 9 The Trust has effective operational and strategic arrangements to monitor progress against operational plans. The Board regularly reviews progress in delivering the priorities set out in operational plans.
- 10 We have not made any new recommendations based on our 2021 Structured Assessment phase one work.

# Detailed report

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

- 11 Our work considered the scope and coverage of the Trust's Quarters' 3-4 Plan in line with Welsh Government planning guidance.
- 12 We found **the Trust's Quarters' 3-4 Plan was submitted to the Welsh Government within the required timeframe, covers all necessary areas within the planning framework guidance and received the required Board scrutiny.**
- 13 Whilst the Trust developed the Quarters' 3-4 Plan, it regularly informed the Board about the underlying clinical principles and planning assumptions via board briefing sessions and formal board and committee meetings. The Quarters' 3-4 Plan was not discussed and approved at a public Board meeting prior to its submission, as no meeting was scheduled for October. However, the Board did discuss and consider the Quarters' 3-4 Plan in a private session on 22 October 2020, and the report was approved via a Chair's Urgent Action on the 23 October 2020. The Plan was presented at the public Board meeting on the 26 November 2020 for noting, and the Chair's Urgent action was ratified.
- 14 The Quarters' 3-4 Plan's is comprehensive and satisfies the requirements set out in the Welsh Government's planning framework. In respect of blood and cancer services, the extent and impact of the disruption resulting from COVID-19 is explained. Assurance is provided about the continuation of essential services. The resources needed to deliver the Quarters' 3-4 Plan are also clearly set out. The Trust completed all applicable metrics in the supporting Minimum Dataset.
- 15 The Trust's mission and objectives underpin the Quarters' 3-4 Plan, with a focus on supporting the delivery of safe and compassionate clinical services and providing a safe environment for staff. All actions set out in the Quarters' 3-4 Plan have defined delivery milestones with a summary of the status/progress at the time the plan was submitted. The risks to delivery of actions are transparent and mitigating actions are provided.

## Arrangements for developing operational plans

- 16 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.
- 17 We found **the Trust's operational planning approach is robust and has the flexibility to adjust priorities to respond to changing circumstances.**
- 18 The Quarters' 3-4 Plan is a clear progression of the operational plans for quarters one and two and provides a summary of the progress made against actions set out in both plans. The Trust reflected upon the feedback received from Welsh Government and applied lessons learned in developing the Quarters' 3-4 Plan, such as ensuring earlier engagement with the Community Health Council.

- 19 The Trust's approach for developing its quarterly plans is unchanged. The Quarters' 3-4 Plan was developed by operational teams with input from clinicians and enabler services, including workforce, finance and information technology, were integral to the process. Planning decisions made within the command and tactical cell structure set up to respond to COVID-19 in quarters one and two have informed the Quarters' 3-4 Plan.
- 20 Day-to-day operational decision making in the Trust changed significantly in response to COVID-19 in 2020. The Trust established Gold Command (strategic) and two Silver Command (operational) management groups and a cell structure to enable rapid decision-making. Cells are structured to include relevant personnel including clinicians, finance, workforce, and planning representatives, to look at Trust-wide issues, such as social distancing and personal protective equipment. The command and cell structures have enabled linkage between the operational aspirations set out in the quarterly plans and day-to-day decision making and delivery.
- 21 The Quarters' 3-4 Plan is underpinned by ongoing forecasting of potential demand for blood and cancer services. Forecasting is based on pre-pandemic levels of demand to predict expected future demand, taking into account suppressed demand and changes to patient treatment pathways as a result of the pandemic.
- 22 Demand for blood will increase in line with the ability of health boards to resume elective surgery, and demand for cancer services will increase in line with diagnostic screening levels. As the COVID-19 infection rate, and consequently hospital admissions, increased during the winter period, actual demand for blood and cancer services was lower than anticipated. The Trust engages regularly with health boards to understand their ability to resume routine activity, so as to determine how this may impact the Trust.
- 23 Capacity planning takes account of influencing factors, such as COVID-19 guidance, social distancing, and workforce availability. Given the uncertainty over the level and timing of demand, the Trust has identified the maximum functional capacity it can provide, and what additional capacity could be made available. Velindre Cancer Centre has developed plans to deliver additional capacity by increasing use of Tenovus to deliver outreach services, and the independent sector to deliver aspects of cancer care.
- 24 The Trust has maintained regular engagement with staff throughout the pandemic and information from staff and patient/donor surveys in 2020 informed its Quarters' 3-4 Plan. The Trust acknowledges it needs to ensure meaningful, ongoing engagement with patients and donors in respect of understanding their views on new ways of working introduced as a result of the pandemic. When developing the Quarters' 3-4 Plan, the Trust engaged earlier with the Community Health Council than was the case for the first two quarterly plans. The Trust has set out its intent to incorporate more integrated processes for involving external partners in developing future operational plans to ensure aligned service planning.

- 25 There are arrangements in place to prioritise patients based on clinical need. The Trust developed a Clinical Governance and Operating Framework to support cancer clinical prioritisation and treatment decision making during COVID-19. The framework has been updated twice and supports a balance between patient risk from COVID-19 versus treatment options when making decisions.
- 26 The Trust's Research, Development and Innovation division developed and implemented business continuity plans to ensure cancer patients could safely continue or access new critical research studies throughout the phases of the pandemic. The Trust has also taken part in COVID-19 research studies.
- 27 In its quarterly plans, the Trust set out what returning to 'normal' will look like. The Quarters' 3-4 Plan set out the Trust's plan to reinstate outreach clinics at hospital sites across South East Wales. However, the increase in community transmission and subsequent increase in COVID-19 admission towards the latter part of 2020 limited the rate of progress the Trust could make.
- 28 Arrangements to deliver the Quarters' 3-4 Plan are dynamic and adaptable to changing circumstances. For instance, the Trust intended to maintain Velindre Hospital as a COVID-19 free site but rising COVID-19 admissions across health boards led to the Trust deciding to admit COVID-19 positive patients where this was the best treatment option for patients.
- 29 The Trust has also organised itself to collaborate with and support the wider NHS Wales response to the pandemic. Examples include:
- developing a plan to vaccinate its staff, the staff of other health and social care related bodies and Velindre Cancer Centre patients (according to nationally agreed vaccination priorities) although the Trust did not have statutory responsibility to do so;
  - utilising Welsh Blood Centre resources and expertise to help with the successful implementation of the vaccination programme;
  - taking a lead role in the COVID-19 convalescent plasma programme, by collecting the plasma containing COVID-19 antibodies to support clinical trials for potential treatment for patients with severe COVID-19 disease; and
  - collaborating with Public Health Wales to allow the use of Welsh Blood Service mobile collection vehicles to support screening services.
- 30 During 2020, the Trust reviewed new ways of working implemented in response to COVID-19, such as digital working and centralised blood collection, to incorporate learning into the annual plan for 2021-22. The Trust has also considered the currency of the priorities it set out in the IMTP 2020-23 (prior to the pandemic) to assess which can be progressed during 2021-22. Prior to the pandemic, the Trust was developing a 10-year strategic plan and new strategic objectives with separate underpinning 5-year clinical plans for cancer and blood services and supporting enabling plans. Whilst work on these plans has paused, the Trust will recommence the work in 2021.

## Arrangements for monitoring delivery of operational plans

- 31 Our work considered the Trust's arrangements for monitoring and reporting on the delivery of the Quarters' 3-4 Plan.
- 32 We found **the Trust has effective arrangements to monitor progress against operational plans.**
- 33 The Trust has a Consolidated Action Tracker, which contains each of the actions from the three quarterly plans with delivery timescale and responsible lead. The tracker is regularly updated with a short summary of progress against each action and a traffic light system shows the status of the action. The tracker is reviewed each month by the Operational Management Groups and the Executive Management Board.
- 34 The Trust provides a summary of progress against actions set out in the quarterly plans at each meeting of the Board and Quality, Safety and Performance Committee.
- 35 The Board also receives information on the Trust's response to COVID-19 and associated decision making, through its Board briefings, and meetings of the Board meetings and Quality, Safety and Performance Committee. Information provided includes key areas of focus in respect of operational delivery, highlighting any challenges/risks, any changes needed to service delivery and workforce metrics.



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