

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of the Devon, Cornwall, and Isles of Scilly Health Protection Committee, Annual Assurance Report 2023-24 (Report no PH25/02)

The report provides a summary of the assurance functions of the Devon, Cornwall, and Isles of Scilly Health Protection Committee (DCIOS HPC) and reviews performance for the period from **1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024**.

Assurance Arrangements

Local authorities, through their Directors of Public Health, continued their assurance role in protecting the health of their populations. The Committee is mandated by the Health and Wellbeing Boards to provide assurance, via the report, that adequate arrangements are in place for the prevention, surveillance, planning, and response required to protect the public's health.

Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease

UKHSA South West Health Protection Team provided the specialist response to infectious disease and hazard related situations across Devon and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, supported by local, regional, and national expertise. The winter of 2023-2024 was a busy season with high influenza, COVID-19 and Pertussis (whooping cough) prevalence and outbreaks in a variety of settings including, but not limited to, care homes, educational settings, asylum seeker settings and custodial institutions.

The risk to human health from Avian Influenza is monitored by key agencies due to its pandemic potential; whilst human cases of Avian Influenza remain very rare, viruses evolve and UKHSA closely monitor for any evidence of changing risks to the public. Testing for diagnostic and surveillance purposes requires swabbing of symptomatic individuals who have been exposed to a probable or confirmed bird case of Avian Influenza. Devon ICB recorded a risk on their Risk Register during 2023-24 due to the lack of a swabbing pathway in Devon. In 2025 work remains ongoing to address this, and although progress is being made, this risk remains.

A Devon community infection management service is in place in Devon to support health and care settings with infection prevention and control (IPC) proactive advice and to support in response to communicable disease risk and management. Due to additional

funding available to support the pandemic response and recovery a similar offer to non-health and care settings. However as this funding was non-recurrent this resource ended on 31/3/23. Although IPC resources and guidance are shared to a range of settings, the lack of support to non-health settings was added as a risk on the NHS Devon ICB Risk Register due to ICB system pressures.

Screening Programmes

All screening programmes have returned to a business-as-usual footing post pandemic. Age coverage for Bowel cancer screening has been extended and now covering those aged 50 and above. Breast cancer screening continues to improve following disruption during the pandemic – with the SW having second highest screening coverage at 72.1%. Cervical screening rates vary, with lower uptake in the younger population and higher in older population. Work continues to increase coverage and reduce inequalities.

Immunisation Programmes

Seasonal Influenza immunisation uptake varies by age with highest uptake in those aged 65 and over. Work has continued to increase uptake of MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) and child vaccinations and reduce inequalities across Devon. Additional funding and programmes have been in place and seen positive impacts to support increased MMR uptake and catch up in response to the increase in measles cases and outbreaks nationally. Vaccinations in pregnancy include flu and pertussis and more recently RSV (note the RSV vaccine was introduced into the UK schedule in winter 2024 and thus outside the scope of the attached report). NHSE SW has introduced a new Perinatal Pathway work programme to support the planning, delivery and monitoring of the performance and quality of vaccination programmes given during pregnancy. Shingles and pneumococcal vaccination uptake in older people in Devon are slightly above the national average, uptake for RSV will be reported in next year's report or exceptionally on the Board's request.

Healthcare Associated Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) work was impacted by Covid recovery, but the Peninsula Antimicrobial Resistance Group (PARG) has now relaunched with active working groups set up. A new AMR National Action Plan was published later in 2024 and this will influence local AMR work going forward. Investigations into all healthcare-onset, healthcare-

associated cases have been undertaken and key learning themes identified. There has been an increase in numbers of identified *C. Difficile* infections both regionally and nationally and work is currently underway to better understand this locally.

Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response

Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response was led across the region by the NHS with the support of local authority partners as part of the multi-agency partnership, the Devon, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly Local Resilience Forum. Relevant forum members responded to many significant incidents in 2023-24, including several widespread flooding incidents, and a number of NHS system critical incidents including escalating pressures on urgent and emergency care and industrial action.

Climate and Environment

Representation from the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (DCIoS) Climate Impacts Group (CIG) is now part of the Health Protection committee and has a regular agenda item which has enabled join up around work areas as are intrinsically linked with health protection topics. A regional Southwest Climate Change Public Health Leads Network has been established to provide a space for public health leads to share best practice and increase their impact and influence on climate change. The network is also building wider connections with professionals across Greener NHS and emergency planning.