



Integration Joint Board

24th March 2026

This report relates to
Item 11 on the agenda

Winter De-brief 2025 / 2026

Paper presented by Gareth Marr

For Noting

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List of Background Papers:	N/A
Appendices:	N/A

Direction Required to Council, Health Board or Both	Title	Reference Number
	Direction to:	
	1. No Direction Required	X
	2. Dumfries and Galloway Council	
	3. NHS Dumfries and Galloway	
4. Dumfries and Galloway Council and NHS Dumfries and Galloway		

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Operation Winter Flow's post-winter 2025/26 debrief brought together partners from across the Health and Social Care System to reflect on performance during sustained winter pressures.
- 1.2. The session highlighted several critical lessons and priority actions required to strengthen system resilience ahead of the next winter period 26/27.
- 1.3. Themes emerging from the review emphasised the need for more robust planning, improved exercising of winter arrangements, and deeper collaboration across directorates and external partners.
- 1.4. The learning points collectively underscore the importance of consistent flow processes, enhanced modelling, clearer escalation frameworks, strengthened discharge practice, and improved staff support. These insights will inform preparations for winter 2026/27 to ensure we continue to build on a more coordinated, responsive, and resilient system.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. **The Integration Joint Board is asked to:**
 - **Note the work that is progressing at an operational level to provide assurance against the key action points identified through the Winter 2025/26 debrief and acknowledges that this ongoing activity will support strengthened preparedness and system resilience moving into Winter 2026/27.**

3. Background and Main Report

Background

- 3.1. Operation Winter Flow's post-winter 2025/26 debrief identified key learnings and actions to improve Health and Social Care System responses during winter pressures. The session emphasised the need for enhanced planning, exercising, and collaboration across directorates and partners for the forthcoming winter season. A high-level action list of key areas for improvement is outlined below:
 - **Review flow-related processes:** Priority processes related to patient flow require review over the next year, with Unscheduled Care Steering Group to identify key areas for improvement including data, IT, and communications.
 - **Enhance winter surge modelling:** Seasonal illness modelling is limited; annual modelling by October, linked with partners like SAS, is necessary to predict and prepare for surge demands.
 - **Standardise discharge risk assessment:** The discharge risk assessment tool should be implemented board-wide.
 - **Improve criteria-led discharge processes:** Better advance planning is needed for aspects like prescription timing to align with discharge readiness, supported by process reviews and quality improvement.

- **Clarify and exercise OPEL system:** The Operational Pressure Escalation Levels (OPEL) system faced challenges such as unclear triggers, ownership, and delayed responses; a comprehensive review and exercising across all Directorates and Partners is required. A unified, collaborative surge response is needed, including pre-defined roles, responsibilities, and decisions on service adjustments during capacity pressures.
- **Implement public protection periods:** NHS D&G should adopt defined periods focusing resources on managing surge pressures, minimising business-as-usual activities, and considering multi-skilled staff roles.
- **Recognise staff efforts and support welfare:** Staff exhaustion and morale decline necessitate augmented resource distribution and real-time support mechanisms, alongside formal recognition of the contribution of all staff
- **Capture and apply good practices:** Proactive leadership, improved communication hubs, system pressure huddles, and positive feedback from the Scottish Government highlight effective practices to be incorporated into future planning.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1. The findings from the Winter 2025/26 debrief demonstrate that meaningful progress is already underway across operational teams to address the key actions required for improved winter resilience.
- 4.2. Continued focus on strengthening flow processes, enhancing modelling capabilities, refining escalation arrangements, and supporting staff wellbeing will be essential in preparing for the pressures anticipated in Winter 2026/27.
- 4.3. The work progressing to date provides assurance that the system is acting on the lessons learned and is committed to delivering a more coordinated, proactive, and resilient response in the year ahead.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1. There are no resource implications with this paper.

6. Impact on Integration Joint Board Outcomes, Priorities and Policy

- 6.1. N/A

7. Legal and Risk Implications

- 7.1. Any legal / risk implications are managed at scheme level.

8. Consultation

- 8.1. Unscheduled Care Steering Group
- 8.2. Health and Social Care Leadership Team

9. Equality Impact Assessment

9.1. N/A

10. Consumer Duty

10.1. N/A

11. Glossary

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