

Plymouth Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Update on winter plan

January 2026

Managing winter pressures

- At the last OSC meeting, we outlined the Devon winter plan, setting out our approach to reduce delays, support care providers, and maintain patient flow across the system.
- As we move through winter, our focus has remained on ensuring safe, timely hospital discharge and robust community support to manage winter pressures.
- NHS Devon, Plymouth City Council (PCC), University Hospitals Plymouth NHS trust (UHP), Livewell Southwest (LWSW) and other system partners continue to support daily escalation and flow calls to enable hospital discharge for complex patients.
- We work collaboratively with the PCC Commissioning team to ensure we have the sufficient market response and capacity to support our patients with a home first approach to ensure patients can be cared for and supported to regain independence the community.

Managing winter pressures

- We continually monitor our demand and capacity plans to ensure there is sufficient capacity and have maintained the additional capacity commissioned put in place as part of winter plans to support people in their own homes and respond to periods of surge, supporting timely hospital discharge.
- PCC and NHS Devon continue to monitor emerging pressure points and implement mitigations collaboratively.
- Devon-wide system oversight and coordination arrangement in place to ensure partners can respond to any escalations that occur.

Norovirus and Flu Challenges

- Flu and norovirus continue to put pressure on hospitals in the South West, with the numbers rising again last week.
- While flu cases in the community are dropping slightly and we believe we are past the most significant peak of flu cases, the UK Health Security Agency warns that [norovirus](#) continues to surge, with cases 47% higher in the first two weeks of the year than at the same time in 2025.
- Norovirus and similar stomach bugs can be a real threat to hospital patients, so please don't go in to visit your loved ones when you've had diarrhoea or vomiting in the past 48 hours. Help us keep people safe.
- Flu and covid-19 vaccinations are still available across the community.
- There is more information [here](#) on how people can help while the NHS is under pressure this winter.

System communications campaign

A system approach - 2025/26

A professionally developed joined-up system approach, informed by data, insight from previous campaigns and national NHS England messaging. **Informed by behavioural science** – our messages are crafted with behaviour change in mind. Running from September 2025 to March 2026, the approach will focus on:

- *Encouraging people to think Pharmacy First or to contact 111 to ease the pressures on ED and GP services*
- *Encouraging uptake of winter vaccinations*
- *Promoting support and resources to parents of young children*
- *Giving people information so they can make good decisions about staying safe over the winter period*

Winter priority areas

1. **Think Pharmacy First**
2. **Winter vaccinations** - Flu, Covid-19 and RSV
3. **Using 111** - as an alternative to ED departments
4. **Online access** - NHS app, 111 online
5. **Mental health** - local support accessing 111
6. **Stay Well**
7. **MIU and UTC access** - localised messages tailored to each locality relevant to local offer

Planned activity (includes, but not limited to)

- **Local Pharmacy First campaign promotion**, focusing on the conditions that Pharmacy First treat for conditions most likely to occur in winter
- Targeted **digital marketing and social media** across all priority messages
- Paid **outdoor and radio** advertising across Devon
- **Print** advertising to mitigate digital exclusion
- Working with system partners, stakeholders, media, local organisations and VCSE to maximise messaging through **existing channels**
- Local **AI-backed insights** promoting the experience of Pharmacy First and other service experiences
- ‘**Maria and Mel**’ – GP social media influencers promoting winter messaging
- Winter messages and digital marketing to feature on the **My Health Devon webpages**
- **Mental health** campaign activity to promote access to 111
- Regular briefing for **stakeholders** – MPs, OSC, Healthwatch, etc