

11 Integrated Care Board

Date of meeting	27 November 2025
Title of paper	NHS Medium Term Planning and Strategic Commissioning Framework Response
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Agenda item	15
Confidential	No

Executive summary

This paper provides an overview of the recently published Medium Term Planning Guidance (October 2025) and the Strategic Commissioning Framework (November 2025), both of which set the strategic direction for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and providers over the next three to five years.

These frameworks represent a fundamental shift towards medium- to long-term planning, integrated commissioning, and population health management — moving the NHS away from short-term cycles to a sustainable model built on innovation, local empowerment, and financial discipline.

Several strategy and planning groups have been convened across the system to ensure effective leadership and connectivity in drafting the numerous products that are required. This paper demonstrates the progress to date and also considers the next steps in the process.

The purpose is to:

- Update the Board on the requirements and implications for our system
- Outline key milestones, deliverables, and assurance expectations
- Set out our progress to date and highlight areas requiring Board oversight or decision

Finally, the paper outlines the risks that are apparent as part of the process along with the proposed mitigations.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Not applicable – the paper is presented for information

Recommendations

The Board is recommended to:

▪ Note the requirements of the suite of guidance issued to the ICB ▪ Note the progress to date and acknowledge the next steps ▪ Note the risks identified and support the proposed mitigations ▪ Note the role and involvement of the Board and its committees throughout the planning process ▪ Note the Governance 'Forward Plan' at Appendix C recognising that submission dates may change, and this will be kept under review				
Which Strategic Objective/s does the report relate to:				Tick
SO1	Improve quality, including safety, clinical outcomes, and patient experience			✓
SO2	To equalise opportunities and clinical outcomes across the area			✓
SO3	Make working in Lancashire and South Cumbria an attractive and desirable option for existing and potential employees			✓
SO4	Meet financial targets and deliver improved productivity			✓
SO5	Meet national and locally determined performance standards and targets			✓
SO6	To develop and implement ambitious, deliverable strategies			✓
Implications				
	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Associated risks	✓			
Are associated risks detailed on the ICB Risk Register?	✓			
Financial Implications			✓	
Where paper has been discussed (list other committees/forums that have discussed this paper)				
Meeting	Date		Outcomes	
Executive Committee	18 November 2025		Approved subject to minor amendments to reflect published guidance	
Conflicts of interest associated with this report				
Not applicable				
Impact assessments				
	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Quality impact assessment completed			✓	
Equality impact assessment completed			✓	
Data privacy impact assessment completed			✓	
Report authorised by: Aaron Cummins, Chief Executive Officer				

Integrated Care Board

27 November 2025

NHS Medium Term Planning and Strategic Commissioning Framework Response

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The ICB has received several documents that provide guidance, direction or a framework to how it will operate in the future. The NHS Planning Framework (August 2025) sets out the high-level direction for strategy development and operational planning in the short and medium term. This was followed by the publication of the Medium-Term Planning Guidance (October 2025) and finally the Strategic Commissioning Framework (November 2025) with further guidance expected.
- 1.2 These frameworks represent a fundamental shift towards medium to long-term planning, integrated commissioning, and population health management — moving the NHS away from short-term cycles to a sustainable model built on innovation, local empowerment, and financial discipline.
- 1.3 The purpose of this paper is:
- To update the Board on the requirements and implications for our System
 - Outline key milestones, deliverables and assurance expectations.
 - Set out progress to date and highlight areas requiring Board engagement, oversight or decision.

2. Medium Term Planning Guidance: Overview

- 2.1 The Medium-Term Planning Guidance sets out next steps to deliver the ambitions of the 10 Year Health Plan. It covers:
- Financial sustainability and productivity
 - Workforce and capacity planning
 - Performance improvement
 - Digital transformation and quality improvement
 - Neighbourhood and community health development
 - New operating models that empower place and provider collaboration.
- 2.2 ICBs will prepare for any transfer of functions from NHS England, and this will be described in the 5-year Strategic Commissioning Plan (This is also referred to as the Office for Pan ICB Commissioning (OPIC)). In addition, ICBs should consider

how they will support Trusts in their preparation to assume responsibilities as Integrated Healthcare Organisations as well as Multi Neighbourhood Providers.

- 2.3 Boards are accountable for both plan development and delivery, ensuring assurance of credibility, deliverability, and affordability across all submissions. **Appendix A** illustrates the medium-term planning guidance product requirements of the ICB.

3. Progress to Date

- 3.1 A System Planning Group meets weekly with all the providers and ICB leads to coordinate operational planning. This is supported by functional subgroups aligned to each planning domain.
- 3.2 An Integrated Planning Delivery Group meets fortnightly to ensure alignment between operational delivery and the emerging strategic plan reporting into a Planning Oversight Board (POB).
- 3.3 Supported by the Population Health Needs Assessment, early work is also underway to develop:
- 5 Year Strategic Commissioning Plan
 - Neighbourhood Health Plans (led by Health and Wellbeing Boards)
 - Clinical Strategy
- 3.4 To support ICBs to assess their own planning activities over the foundational phase (1) of the planning process, NHS England provided an optional tool which organisations can use to demonstrate they have the necessary planning foundations in place, to assess how effective they are and to escalate any issues. The Planning Oversight Board have completed this self-assessment, and it is attached at **Appendix B**. This will also help inform the submission of the board assurance statements that are described in more detail in section 6 of this report.

4. Governance Arrangement

- 4.1 The Planning Oversight Board (POB) has been established to coordinate strategy development, planning and engagement activity, and ensure the progress and delivery of the core planning requirements.
- 4.2 The Executive Committee meets on a weekly basis and will be kept apprised of operational delivery, progress and any risks and mitigation via the POB. Over December and January, the executive will hold check and challenge sessions, stress test plans and inform development of the numerical plans and strategies.
- 4.3 The following sections set the arrangements for Board and Committee oversight, assurance and approval of the core medium term planning requirements and outputs, aligned to two national submission dates:

- **Friday 19 December:** First Submission of numerical plans, integrated planning template and board assurance statement
- **Early February** - Full Plan Submission of refreshed numerical plans, integrated planning template, 5-year strategic commissioning narrative plan and updated board assurance statement.¹

5. **Committee Oversight and Assurance**

5.1 Finance and Contracting Committee (F&CC)

The F&CC will oversee and scrutinise the development of the numerical plans and provide assurances and recommendations to the Board. The committee will have delegated approve for any minor variations to the first and final submissions of the numerical plans, should the timescales require this.

5.2 Quality and Outcomes Committee (Q&OC)

The Q&OC will consider a presentation of the draft strategies in January, with a focus on the Clinical Strategy and population health improvement plan and seek assurance that the strategies align to reducing inequality, unwarranted variation and are implemented to address equity in access, improved experience and outcomes.

5.3 People and Culture Committee

The committee will consider a presentation of the draft strategies in January, with a focus on workforce capacity and capability, and to seek assurance that the strategies and plans support the achievement of the 10 mandated People Functions.

6. **Board Engagement, Oversight and Approval**

6.1 The board has a responsibility to be assured in terms of the credibility, deliverability and affordability of the plans that have been agreed and to rigorously test the plan before finalising it using robust assurance processes.

6.2 To support this NHS England have developed a set of Board Assurance Statements (BAS) and a maturity assessment against the key elements from the planning framework. The statements are required to be completed as part of both submissions and will form an essential component of the Board's involvement and engagement in the plan's development. A board engagement session is planned for 11 December to test assumptions and proposals and consider the position against the board's assurance statements. Outputs from this session will inform the first planning submission.

6.3 A Board development session will be held on 18 December to approve the first planning submission and assurance statements on 19 December, and to shape

¹ *any changes to national submission dates will need to be considered against the governance forward plan

the next steps for the implementation of the Strategic Commissioning Framework.

- 6.4 Throughout the period, the Board will receive assurance via its committees and the executive.
- 6.5 A 'Governance Forward Plan' setting out the route for Board involvement and approval of the core medium term planning requirements and outputs, aligned to two national submission dates is included at **Appendix C**

7. Strategic Commissioning Framework

- 7.1 The Strategic Commissioning Framework supports all ICBs to meet the ambition for the future of strategic commissioning. It acts as a comprehensive guide for ICBs to mature as Strategic Commissioners.
- 7.2 The Framework describes a four-stage approach to Strategic Commissioning:
 - **Understanding the context** – Using integration data and insight to map population health needs, inequalities and service performance
 - **Developing long-term population health strategy** – Redesigning care pathways and population health improvement plans around evidence-based, integrated neighbourhood models.
 - **Delivering through payor function and resource allocation** – Allocating resources strategically, managing provider markets, and commissioning for long-term outcomes.
 - **Evaluating impact** – Systematically measuring outcomes, productivity, and experience to drive improvement.
- 7.3 These are underpinned by seven key enablers including system leadership for population health, clinical and care professional leadership, data analytics and technology, intelligent payor function and partnership with Local Government.
- 7.4 To support the development of skills and capabilities within ICBs, a strategic commissioning development programme will be launch in April 2026 to support ICBs and others who commission NHS services, to develop as strategic commissioners.
- 7.5 The developing Operating Model of the ICB will reflect the requirements of the Strategic Commissioning Framework while working within the financial parameters set within the ICB Blueprint.
- 7.6 A baseline assessment against this framework in March 2026 will also be undertaken to inform the development support required by ICBs. Elements of the framework will be incorporated in the assessment of each ICB as a strategic commissioner that NHS England is required to undertake from

2026/27. **Appendix D** details the requirements of the Strategic Commissioning Framework.

8. Risks and Mitigations

8.1 The table below illustrate the risks to date and the mitigating actions.

Risk	Description	Mitigation
Timing and Guidance Gaps	Some of the key technical guidance not expected until late November.	Develop plans using agreed common assumptions across system partners to maintain momentum.
Financial Allocations Delay	Delay in releasing all the financial allocations may impact the ability to meet the deadlines with an appropriate set of system plans. This will impact on the ability to develop an ICB plan and associated contract values in a short time period, especially given the change to contract mechanisms.	Establish contingency planning scenarios to adjust quickly once allocations confirmed.
Balancing the finance and performance requirements as part of the plan	There is a reliance on System partners to share information in time to allow triangulation of ICB plans	Co designing with Providers a proposal to agree a common set of assumptions and a proposal to address the competing priorities of activity and finance
Output sequencing	Key inputs (e.g. Clinical Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Board led Neighbourhood Plans) are not due to be finalised until after the Medium Term Plan is due	Close working with other workstreams to feed interim inputs on an ongoing basis; alignment on assumptions to inform all outputs
Ongoing organisational change process and impact on Capability and Capacity	ICB Model Blueprint and achievement of running and programme cost reduction Implementation of Strategic Commissioning Framework (SCF) requires enhanced commissioning skills and analytics. It also requires generating meaningful 1-yr, 3-yr and 5-yr outputs all in a very short time period.	Staff engagement on future operating model Proposals on 'do once' functions across the North West Region Engage early with national SCF development programme

9. Next Steps

- 9.1 Collaboration continues between the ICB and Providers on the development of plans. It is acknowledged that the first iteration of the plans will require further development as additional guidance is received. This will include the confirmation of planning assumptions following the publication of technical guidance.
- 9.2 Draft submission of the plans, including the impact of commissioning intentions and the financial frameworks and the board assurance statements will be presented to the Board in December for approval as well as the high-level narrative plans.
- 9.3 Monitoring and assurance of progress and delivery against the 3-year numerical plans and 5-year strategic commissioning plan will be maintained from 2026/27 onwards through the Board and its committees, and a governance forward plan will be presented to the Board in March 2026 alongside the publication of final plans.

10. Recommendations

10.1 The Board is recommended to:

- Note the requirements of the suite of guidance issued to the ICB
- Note the progress to date and acknowledge the next steps
- Note the risks identified and support the proposed mitigations
- Note the role and involvement of the Board and its committees throughout the planning process
- Note the 2025/26 Governance 'Forward Plan' at **Appendix C** recognising that submission dates may change, and this will be kept under review