

Summary Annual Report 2024-25



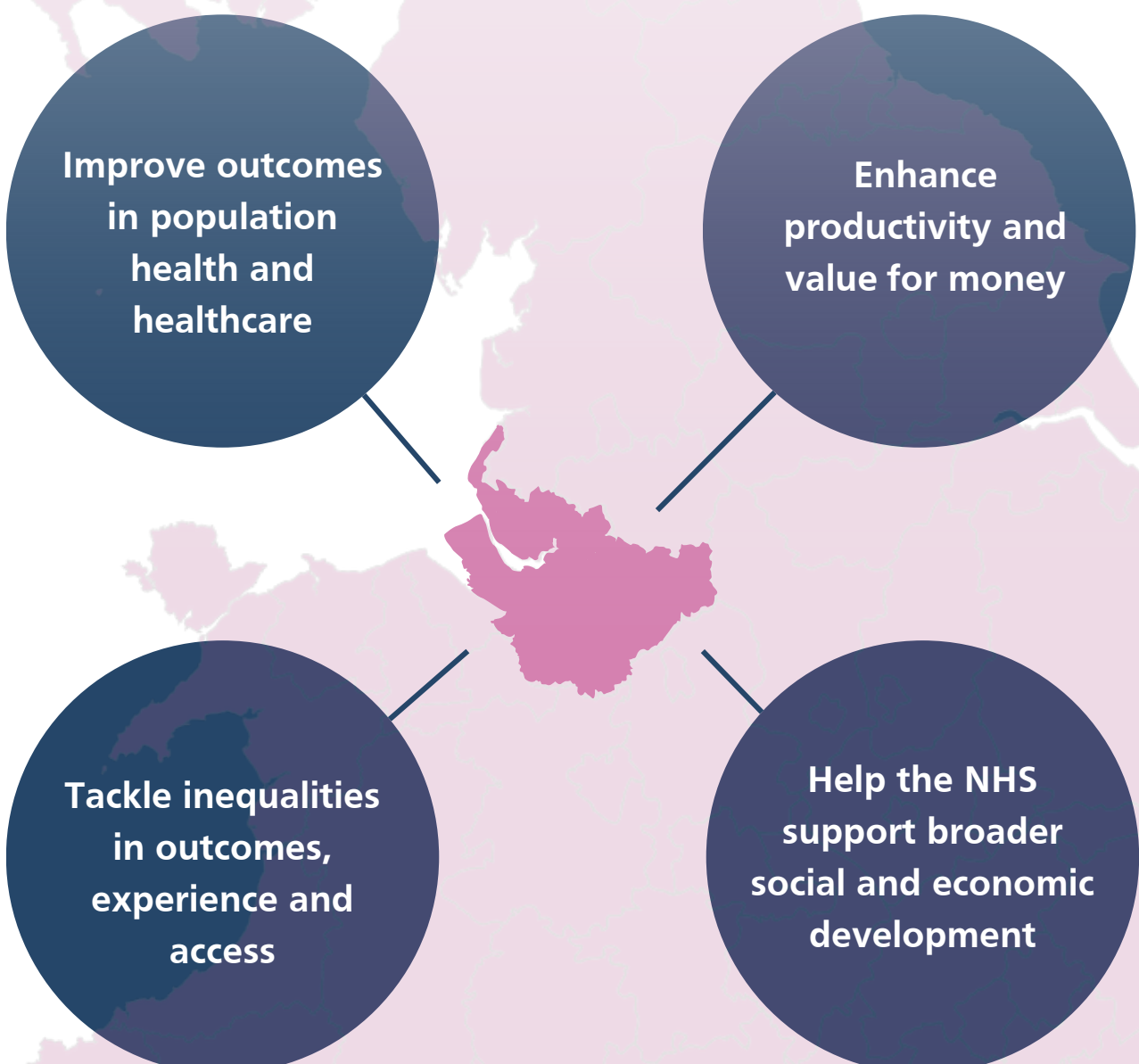
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Introduction

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside was formally established on 1 July 2022 and is one of the largest Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in England, working within and across two devolved combined authorities and nine local authority areas known as Places.

All Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) have four key aims:



**Improve outcomes
in population
health and
healthcare**

**Enhance
productivity and
value for money**

**Tackle inequalities
in outcomes,
experience and
access**

**Help the NHS
support broader
social and economic
development**



Message from Chief Executive Cathy Elliott

With the publication of the 10 Year Health Plan in July 2025 and the opportunity to develop neighbourhood models of healthcare for the future, this is an exciting time to be working in the NHS. I'm confident that strong foundations are already in place to enable Cheshire and Merseyside to deliver on the three key shifts:

- Moving care closer to home
- Making better use of technology
- Focusing more on prevention than treatment

Of course, the organisational change which NHS Cheshire and Merseyside is embarking on in 2025-26 to ready ourselves for the future is significant and we will support colleagues to navigate this testing period. But I am certain that we will emerge on the other side able to forge even stronger links with our system partners and emerging devo footprints as we continue our development into an increasingly strategic commissioning role.

In 2024-25, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, along with its health and care partners across the Integrated Care System, achieved significant successes, met ambitious targets and rightly gained recognition for innovation and expertise. This report highlights just some of the key achievements over the past year, showcasing our ongoing commitment to improvement.

For example, enormous progress has been made to simplify the way hospital services work. The inception of NHS University Hospitals of Liverpool Group brought together adult acute services in the city, while the introduction of shared leadership models in Warrington and Wirral is cultivating increasingly seamless relationships between acute and community care - helping to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and safely discharge people from hospital sooner.

As has been widely acknowledged, waiting lists rose to an unacceptable level during the pandemic and it remains a priority to reduce the time people wait for planned care - in particular for those who have waited longest. Significant strides were made in this area in 2024-25 - with more detail included later on in this report.

For more detailed information on our performance and progress against statutory duties, including activity reports from each of our nine Places, please refer to our full corporate Annual Report, available on the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside website: www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk

Cathy Elliott

Cathy Elliott
Chief Executive



How NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's budget was spent in 2024-2025

As experienced by Integrated Care Boards across the country, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside faced extreme financial pressure during 2024-2025. In response, we changed the way we worked to prioritise financial recovery, while continuing to prioritise quality and patient safety for communities across Cheshire and Merseyside.

As a result of this work, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside delivered a year-end surplus of £25.405 million in 2024-25 from a budget of c£9.9 billion.

Just under half of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's budget was spent on hospital care.

We also met all four key financial duties for Integrated Care Boards in 2024-25 as required under the NHS Act 2006.

Urgent and Emergency Care

In 2024-25 Cheshire and Merseyside's urgent and emergency care services faced significant pressure - especially during the winter months. This pressure was exacerbated by increased levels of flu, COVID-19, winter vomiting bugs and respiratory illnesses, leading to longer ambulance wait times and patients being treated in corridors due to crowded emergency departments.

To help manage and mitigate these pressures, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside further developed its System Coordination Centre (SCC), including the use of the SHREWD digital reporting system, which gives NHS colleagues across the system access to real-time updates on Emergency Department pressures, hospital bed availability and ambulance handover times. Access to the data provided by the SHREWD system has helped frontline teams to respond more quickly and effectively to challenges as they arose.



Planned Care

In 2024-25 a range of initiatives were implemented to enable patients who have been waiting longest to receive the care they need and reduce overall waiting times. As a result, more than 388,000 patients who were at risk of waiting more than 65-weeks were seen sooner.

Working in partnership with Cheshire and Merseyside Acute and Specialist Trust Provider Collaborative (CMAST), NHS Cheshire and Merseyside implemented key initiatives such as the Further Faster programme, which is transforming patient pathways and working to reduce unnecessary follow-up outpatient appointments - thereby improving access and reducing waiting times.

Patient Initiated Follow Up (PIFU), which enables patients to book their own follow-up appointment when they need it rather than at routine intervals, was also introduced.

Early diagnosis is also key to improving patient experience and outcomes, with Cheshire and Merseyside's diagnostic services consistently ranked in the top three nationally and a network of Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) providing a range of essential diagnostic tests closer to people's homes.

Cancer

People in Cheshire and Merseyside are surviving longer after a cancer diagnosis than ever before and – for the first time ever – longer than the national average.

56%

of people now survive for five years or longer after a cancer diagnosis in Cheshire and Merseyside, compared to

55.7%

in the whole of England.

Among the key factors behind this success is the Targeted Lung Health Checks programme – now called Lung Cancer Screening – which tests for lung cancer in those aged 55 to 74 who have a history of smoking.

Since the initiative's launch in 2019, 560 people have had a cancer diagnosis as a result of the Lung Cancer Screening programme in Liverpool, St Helens, Halton, Knowsley, South Sefton, Warrington and Wirral – with around 80% of those being discovered at an early, more treatable stage.

Mental health

During 2024-25, Cheshire and Merseyside's mental health providers made significant strides - exceeding national targets for key measures such as access to adult community mental health care and early intervention in psychosis.

Perinatal mental health services continued to exceed national trajectories too, ensuring that birthing people with moderate to severe mental health difficulties have access to specialist community care from pre-conception to 24 months after birth.

In Wirral, the local Place team was recognised as an Outstanding Commissioner at the Voluntary Sector North West Funding and Commissioning Awards 2024 as a result of its innovative approach to transforming children's mental health services, focusing on collaboration, co-production and long-term sustainability.



Community and primary care services

In General Practice, more than 500,000 additional appointments were delivered across Cheshire and Merseyside compared to the previous year. This has been supported by significant growth in the general practice workforce since 2019, thanks to national funding through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS).

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside launched a two-year Dental Improvement Plan in 2024, resulting in the creation of more than 70,000 additional appointments between April and December 2024 - including 28,367 for children and 45,883 for adults.

Significant improvements were made to Cheshire and Merseyside's community services in 2024-25, with more than 10,600 admissions to virtual wards in-year, which would otherwise have been inpatient stays.

Cheshire and Merseyside's utilisation rate of virtual ward beds increased significantly to an average of 89% - and frequently rising above 90% - taking Cheshire and Merseyside from one of the lowest performing Integrated Care Boards for virtual wards in the country, into the top 10.

Meanwhile, the Urgent Community Response service also grew in 2024-25, with a 70% increase in referrals since 2023.

500k

additional General
Practice appointments

70k

additional dental
appointments

10.6k

admissions to virtual wards,
avoiding inpatient stays

Learning disabilities

Working hand-in-hand with NHS England, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside aims to ensure that at least 75% of people with a learning disability receive an annual health check. By working closely with providers and teams across all nine local authority footprints, this target was exceeded in 2024-25 with more health checks delivered compared to 2023-24.

One of the key challenges in Cheshire and Merseyside is the rise in admissions to mental health beds among people with suspected or diagnosed autism.

To mitigate this, those admitted with a primary mental health condition were identified quickly and cases needing extra support reviewed. Funding was also secured for several projects to develop tailored accommodation, and the Transforming Care Programme continued to invest in community outreach.

Integrated care

When local partners - including the NHS, local authorities and the voluntary sector - work together, they create services that better meet local needs. The Better Care Fund supports this collaboration by encouraging joint planning and funding.

For example, in 2024-2025 work supported by the Better Care Fund helped to reduce falls-related hospital admissions across Cheshire and Merseyside through targeted falls prevention efforts, proactive care and work around case finding and online tools.

Additionally, in St Helens the Warm Homes for Young Lungs project used population health data to tailor essential health support to children with respiratory conditions aged 2-7 who are living in fuel poverty.

Health inequalities

Health inequalities are unfair and preventable differences in health across society. In Cheshire and Merseyside's 2.7 million population, 36% (c1 million people) live in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country, with 26% of children (aged 0-15) living in poverty.

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside are working to tackle health inequalities in several ways - including improving access to blood pressure monitoring in deprived communities, identifying lung conditions through the Targeted Lung Health Check programme, and funding a genetic testing service for Familial Hypercholesterolaemia (FH), a hereditary condition that causes high cholesterol from birth and, if untreated, increases the risk of early heart disease.

Working with Cheshire and Merseyside's nine local authorities and Directors of Public Health, we've also committed £5m to a three-year programme to make Cheshire and Merseyside smoke-free by 2030. This includes advocacy, education, partnerships, regulation, action against illicit tobacco and vapes, smokefree environments, intelligence and support.



Maternity

Launched in January 2025, the Cheshire and Merseyside Women's Health and Maternity App is helping to improve access to trusted information and support. Available in 75 languages, the app includes clinically-approved content on menopause, endometriosis, cervical screening, fertility, pelvic health and pregnancy.

It also offers booking and referral options to ensure women are seen by the right professional in the right place. Feedback from both users and healthcare professionals has been overwhelmingly positive.

Women smoking during pregnancy dropped from

11.3%

in March 2023, to

6.3%

by December 2024.

All NHS Trusts across Cheshire and Merseyside have introduced Maternity Treating Tobacco Dependency Services, leading to a sharp fall in the number of women smoking during pregnancy and at delivery - from 11.3% in March 2023 to 6.3% by December 2024.

Seven Women's Health Hubs are now in place in primary care settings across Cheshire and Merseyside – bringing together menopause care, cervical screening, pessary fitting and more.

Children and Young People

In 2024-25, the Cheshire and Merseyside Children and Young People's Committee focused on enhancing support for children and young people regarding mental health, appropriate care settings, oral health, neurodiversity and children at risk of entering care.

As one strand of these efforts, hundreds of thousands of children across Cheshire and Merseyside received free dental care packs in 2024-25 as part of the All Together Smiling campaign to help prevent tooth decay and promote healthy habits for life.



Environment



NHS Cheshire and Merseyside is dedicated to sustainability, aligning with the NHS Long Term Plan and Delivering a Greener NHS. Our key focus is on reducing emissions, improving health outcomes, addressing inequity and ensuring long-term service resilience through effective adaptation to climate change.

Our Green Plan 2025-28, approved by the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Board in March 2025, outlines our commitment to achieving a net-zero health service by 2040, with ambitious targets and initiatives to reduce environmental impact and enhance resilience to climate change.

Engaging people and communities

During 2024-25, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside published its two-year involvement plan, which provides a practical overview of how we work with people and communities and 10 key objectives, including ensuring that involvement is embedded in our governance and decision-making, ensuring there is a focus on hearing under-represented voices and ensuring there are a range of different routes for people and communities to be involved in our work.

In 2024-2025, several key public engagement activities took place, including:

Improving Gynaecology and Maternity Services in Liverpool

The Women's Hospital Services in Liverpool programme engaged the public between October and November 2024 to reflect on a case for change in maternity and gynaecology services.

Shaping Care Together

This programme focused on urgent and emergency care services in Southport, Formby, and West Lancashire. A public engagement session in July 2024 gathered feedback on proposed changes to these services and was followed by a public consultation starting in July 2025.

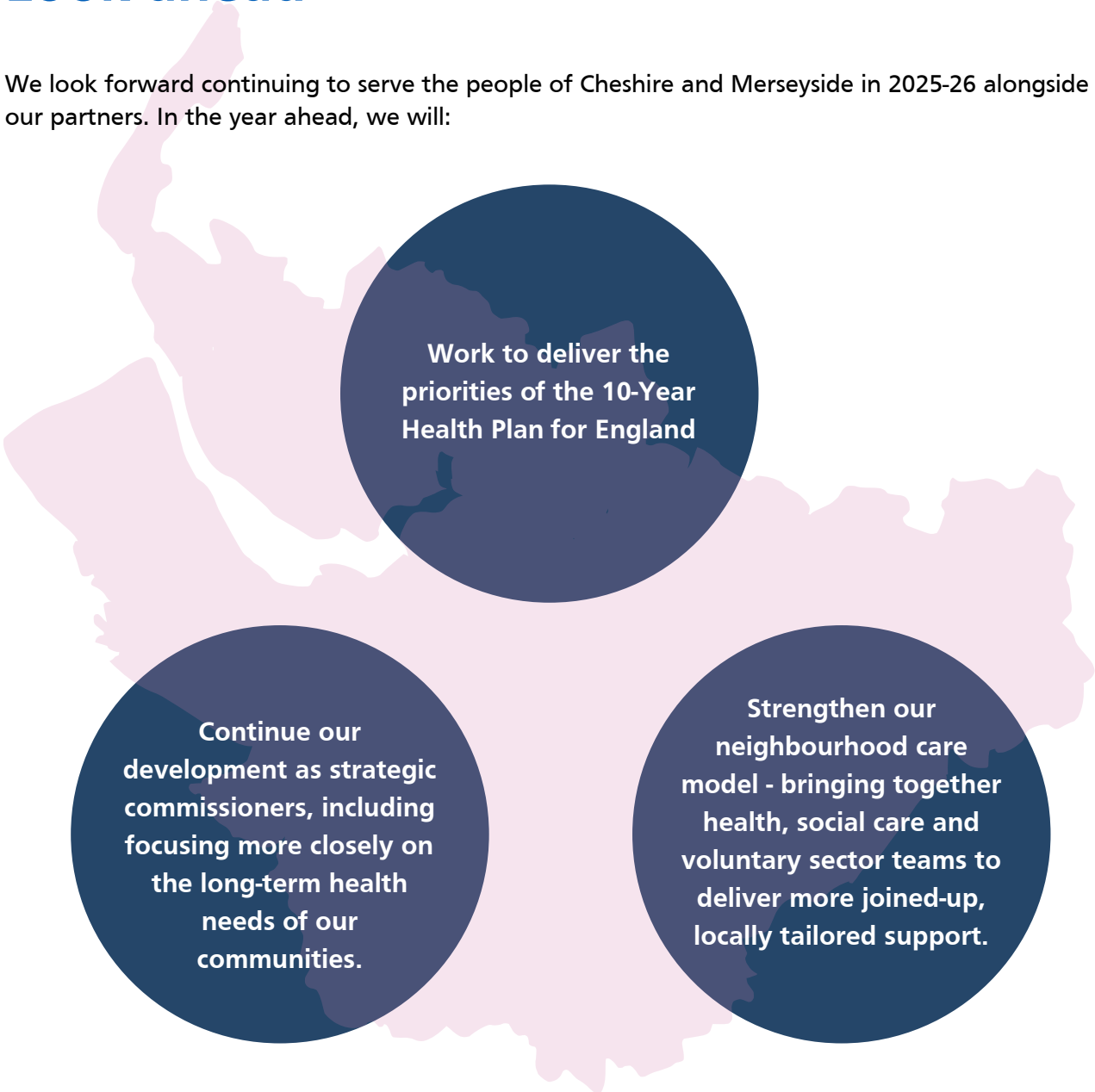
Gluten-Free Prescribing

Between January and March 2025, a public consultation was held on a proposal to stop prescribing gluten-free bread and bread mixes. People were invited to share their thoughts and the impact of these changes.



Look ahead

We look forward continuing to serve the people of Cheshire and Merseyside in 2025-26 alongside our partners. In the year ahead, we will:



Work to deliver the priorities of the 10-Year Health Plan for England

Continue our development as strategic commissioners, including focusing more closely on the long-term health needs of our communities.

Strengthen our neighbourhood care model - bringing together health, social care and voluntary sector teams to deliver more joined-up, locally tailored support.

Keep in touch

For general enquiries, or to share a comment, complaint or compliment about our work, please email: enquiries@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk or write to us at the following postal address:

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To receive updates about our work, please either sign up to receive regular briefings via our website or keep an eye on our website and social media channels:

 www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk

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Interested in having your say on our work? Why not sign up for our Community Voices reference group via email at: engagement@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk