Working together to prepare for winter across Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire

As winter approaches, partners across Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire are working together to ensure local people continue to receive safe, timely and effective care during what is traditionally one of the busiest periods for health and care services.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board and Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board have developed a single, system-wide winter plan with NHS organisations, local authorities, primary care, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and other partners. The plan builds on the urgent and emergency care work that takes place throughout the year and sets out how partners will strengthen services and coordinate resources to respond to the additional pressures that winter can bring, including seasonal illness, colder weather and increased demand for support.

A key focus of the plan is **prevention and proactive care**. Partners will work together to identify and support people who are most at risk of becoming unwell, helping them to stay healthy, maintain their independence and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions wherever possible. This includes a continued focus on vaccination programmes, long-term condition management and neighbourhood working, alongside community-based campaigns to promote self-care, wellbeing and awareness of how to get NHS help fast when it is needed. Partners will work closely with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, local community networks and trusted community leaders to share practical health advice and support people to access the right service at the right time. Building on learning from targeted community outreach pilots partners will also deliver tailored support and engagement with communities that experience poorer health outcomes or face barriers to accessing care. Supporting the wellbeing of the health and care workforce also remains a priority, recognising that a healthy and resilient workforce is fundamental to delivering high-quality care during periods of increased demand.

The plan also reinforces a shared commitment to ensuring people receive the **right care, in the right place, at the right time**. This means strengthening alternatives to emergency departments, improving access to primary, community and mental health services, enhancing referral and navigation routes, and supporting people to access the most appropriate service first time. Partners will continue to promote a Home First approach wherever clinically appropriate, helping more people remain independent in

their own homes and supporting timely discharge from hospital when specialist care is no longer needed.

Alongside this, health and care organisations are putting **additional capacity** in place to maintain resilience across services throughout the winter months. Work is underway to improve patient flow through hospitals and community services, strengthen discharge pathways and make best use of community services, urgent treatment centres and virtual care models. Robust partnership arrangements and clear escalation processes will enable organisations to respond rapidly to emerging pressures and changing demands.

The success of the winter plan depends on collective action across health and care organisations, local authorities, voluntary sector partners and communities themselves. By working together around a shared set of priorities, partners aim to improve outcomes for local people, reduce health inequalities and maintain public confidence in local services throughout the winter period.

Eileen Doyle, Chief Operating Officer for the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board Cluster, said:

“As strategic commissioners, our role is to work with partners to plan ahead, set direction and ensure services are designed around the needs of local people. Our winter plan builds on the year-round urgent and emergency care work already taking place across Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire, strengthening our collective focus on prevention, Right Care, Right Place and improving patient flow. By bringing partners together around a shared plan, we can respond to winter pressures while continuing to deliver long-term improvements that help people stay well, access care more easily and receive the support they need closer to home.”