

# National Care Service: Revised Government plans

## Introduction

The Minister for Social Care set out radically revised plans for a National Care Service in December 2023 (in letters to two parliamentary committees). These new plans follow negotiations over the summer with COSLA and the NHS.

A revised [Financial Memorandum](#) setting out the costs associated with this revised plan was presented to the Finance Committee on 11 December along with a Business Case.

This briefing outlines what we know about the revised structure of a NCS. The Government [still intends to progress](#) the current Bill. The deadline for the Stage 1 vote is now 1 March, following another postponement.

## What are the new plans?

### KEY POINTS

- **Local authorities will retain responsibility** for all current functions and the delivery of social work and social care services. The government is no longer planning the transfer of staff or assets.
- **Statutory delivery functions will also remain with NHS Boards.**
- **There will be “shared legal accountability”** between national and local government – the details of which have not yet been explained.
- **Integration Authorities (IAs)/Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) will be reformed** and the plan for ministerially appointed local Care Boards abandoned.
- **A National Care Service Board will be established**, to which IJBs will be accountable in terms of their strategic planning, performance, and finances.

### A National Care Board – proposals

- Shared accountability for services will be achieved through the creation of a National Care Board.
- The size and composition of the Board will be decided by Ministers after the legislation is passed, but will include, as a minimum, an independent chair, representatives from local government, the NHS and people with lived experience.
- It is uncertain whether the Board will be part of the Scottish Government (the original intention), or be constituted as a new public body (Community Justice Scotland is cited as the preferred model).
- Current Ministerial powers of direction over LAs/HBs/IJBs will be retained, with the ‘planning assumption’ that Ministerial powers of intervention will transfer to the National Board. Ministers will exercise ‘strategic framework accountability’ for NCS services including a role in setting policy.
- A full list of the high level functions of the Board agreed with COSLA and NHS is [here](#) (see page 5).

### KEY POINTS:

- **Statutory functions, staff and assets will remain with local authorities.**
- **Statutory delivery functions will remain with NHS Boards.**
- **Integration Joint Boards will be reformed and the plan for local Care Boards abandoned.**
- **A National Care Board will be created to which IJBs will be accountable.**

## Reform of Integration Authorities/IJBs - proposals

- IJBs will be accountable to the new National Care Board.
- Voting rights on IJBs will be extended more widely and will include people with lived experience.
- Funding will continue to flow as per current arrangements, but the framework bill *will enable direct funding of IJBs for specifically agreed purposes*.
- The VAT implications of funding IJBs directly will be considered on a case-by-case basis - the Government still does not know what these are.
- The appointment of “local Independent Chairs” is being considered. These would provide advice to and be accountable to the National Care Board.
- IJBs would continue to have the power to directly employ chief officers and other staff (as per the 2014 Act) but “this is not being retained for wholesale application”.
- There is an expressed desire to streamline the operations of IJBs including consistent schemes of delegation, put on a statutory footing.
- Greater integration, including “greater cooperation and pooling of resources across integration authority boundaries, beyond what is currently explicitly provided for in the 2014 Act”.
- Opportunities for IJBs to join up across geographic boundaries to achieve economies of scale, greater consistency and quality will be strengthened.
- The government is investigating whether the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 can be amended to achieve the intended reforms.

## When will this happen?

The revised plan is for the NCS to be up and running 3 years later than intended - by 2029 rather than 2026. This pushes it into the next Parliamentary term.

- The national level part of the NCS is expected to be established during 2025-26.
- NCS local Care Boards were originally assumed to go live during 2028-29. IJBs already exist but in terms of the timescale for reforms to be complete, the revised Financial Memorandum now re-phases associated costs across a ten-year period ending 2031-32.

## How much will the revised NCS cost to establish?

In line with the changes announced, the costs related to the Bill have been scaled down and are now estimated to be between £631m - £916m over a 10-year period (for comparison, the costs associated with the original plan are between £1.9bn - £3.6bn over 10 years). These costs are for the Bill and do not include the delivery of care services.

## How much have preparations for the NCS cost so far?

According to the figures provided by the Minister on 16 June 2023, spending on the NCS amounted to £1.785m in 2021-22 and £12.643m in 2022- 23. Costs incurred during months 1-6 of 2023-24 (April to September 2023), amounted to £5.066m.

## Additional reading

The Government’s revised plans are set out in:

- [Letter of 6 Dec to the Health Social Care & Sport Committee](#)
- [Letter of 11 Dec to the Finance Committee \(includes a revised Financial Memorandum for the Bill\)](#)

How the new plans will be taken forward in legislation:

- [Letter of 10 Jan to the Health Social Care & Sport Committee](#)



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