

# How to produce a Green Plan: A three-year strategy towards net zero



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# 1. Introduction

In October 2020, the Greener NHS National Programme published its new strategy, [\*Delivering a net zero National Health Service\*](#). This report highlighted that left unabated climate change will disrupt care, with poor environmental health contributing to major diseases, including cardiac problems, asthma and cancer.

The report set out trajectories and actions for the entire NHS to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040 for the emissions it controls directly, and 2045 for those it can influence (such as those embedded within the supply chain).

To support the co-ordination of carbon reduction efforts across the NHS and the translation of this national strategy to the local level, the 2021/22 NHS Standard Contract set out the requirement for trusts to develop a Green Plan to detail their approaches to reducing their emissions in line with the national trajectories. Given the pivotal role that integrated care systems (ICSs) play, this has been expanded to include the expectation that each system develops its own Green Plan, based on the strategies of its member organisations.

Having replaced the previous Sustainable Development Management Plans (SDMP) in 2020, the new suite of Green Plans is expected to match the increased net zero ambition and renewed delivery focus, with three clear outcomes:

- ensure every NHS organisation is supporting the NHS-wide ambition to become the world's first healthcare system to reach net zero carbon emissions
- prioritise interventions which simultaneously improve patient care and community wellbeing while tackling climate change and broader sustainability issues
- support organisations to plan and make prudent capital investments while increasing efficiencies.

This guidance explains how NHS organisations should construct their Green Plans, and the areas and initiatives that the plans should cover.

## 2. Developing a trust or ICS Green Plan

Green Plans provide a structured way for each trust and ICS to set out the carbon reduction initiatives that are already underway and their plans for the subsequent three years (for this cycle, 2022/23 to 2024/25). A three-year timeframe should allow Green Plans to strike an appropriate balance between immediate carbon reductions in some areas, alongside strategic development of capability in others. In all cases, Green Plans should reflect national priorities by aligning with the plans, actions and timescales laid out in *Delivering a net zero National Health Service*.

Every trust and every ICS is expected to have a Green Plan approved by that organisation's board or governing body. For trusts, these should be finalised and submitted to ICSs by 14 January 2022. Each ICS is then asked to develop a consolidated system-wide Green Plan by 31 March 2022, to be peer reviewed regionally and subsequently published.

These ICS strategies should summarise the Green Plans of relevant member organisations, while also commenting on system-wide priorities and co-ordination. They should also focus on the integration of trust Green Plans with the efforts of primary care, local authorities and other local care partners.

In developing a Green Plan, each organisation should:

- review progress since the organisation's last Green Plan (or equivalent), to determine what facets have worked well and which need renewed focus or a different approach
- take into account the national targets (and interim 80% carbon reduction goals) for the NHS carbon footprint and carbon footprint plus, as well as learning from trusts which are already aiming to exceed these ambitions
- engage widely with internal stakeholders and key partner organisations to inform sustainability priorities and identify areas for productive collaboration

- develop and refine SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) actions focused on early efforts to directly reduce carbon emissions
- develop systems and processes to measure and report on progress against plans and commitments, annually.

Green Plans are not currently required for non-NHS organisations delivering health or social care, although this template and guidance can certainly be applied to those settings if useful.

Organisations which have produced a Green Plan, SDMP or similar recently (published in 2019/20 or 2020/21) will not need to draft a new Green Plan until the three-year cycle is complete. However, these organisations are encouraged to review and potentially update these plans in light of this guidance and the *Delivering a net zero National Health Service* report, and then to focus on accelerated delivery of their existing plans.

# 3. The structure of a Green Plan

The shape and structure of Green Plans will vary by organisation, depending on local context, work delivered to date and local priorities. Allowing for this variation, the chapters of *Delivering a net zero National Health Service* provide a useful outline for the structure of a Green Plan, ensuring each trust and ICS has a comprehensive strategy that addresses all of the major sources of carbon emissions.

Some organisations may choose to add additional chapters – such as those focused on improving air quality or reducing plastic waste – based on their own sustainability priorities. To this end, the example chapters shown below should not necessarily be considered exhaustive.

## 3.1 Introduction

Introduce your organisation, including the number of employees, key services provided, size, configuration, geography and any other pertinent background information to set the context for the Green Plan. This should also include pertinent demographic and socioeconomic details of the local populations served.

## 3.2 Organisational vision

Set out your organisation's vision and priorities for carbon reduction and sustainable development. When considering your organisational vision, it may be worth reflecting on the following questions:

- Which environmental, financial and social issues are most important to the communities and people your organisation serves?
- What specific improvements would most benefit your local communities, staff and the overall organisation?

- Which specific actions and initiatives will your organisation prioritise over the next three years to lay strong foundations for your longer-term net zero strategy?

## 3.3 Areas of focus

This section outlines the core chapters of a Green Plan, aligned to the main drivers of change and sources of carbon emissions across the NHS.

- 3.3.1 **Workforce and system leadership:** This chapter should set out your approach to engaging and developing your workforce and system partners in defining and delivering carbon reduction initiatives and broader sustainability goals, where appropriate. It may cover the operation of sustainability committees and working groups; development of online sustainability training and pledge platforms for staff; and investment in specific staff to support sustainability goals.
- 3.3.2 **Sustainable models of care:** Embedding net zero principles across all clinical services is critical, with this section considering carbon reduction opportunities in the way care is delivered. Examples may include the provision of care closer to home; default preferences for lower-carbon interventions where they are clinically equivalent; and reducing unwarranted variations in care delivery and outcomes that result in unnecessary increases in carbon emissions.
- 3.3.3 **Digital transformation:** The direct alignments between the digital transformation agenda and a net zero NHS are clear. This section seeks to focus on ways to harness existing digital technology and systems to streamline your service delivery and supporting functions while improving the associated use of resources and reducing carbon emissions. Examples could include a consideration of expanding the use of telemedicine to deliver some care remotely and using digital systems to reduce the use of paper records, printing and postage.

**3.3.4 Travel and transport:** This chapter should outline plans to reduce the carbon emissions arising from the travel and transport associated with each organisation. It should explore interventions to reduce carbon, by:

- increasing levels of active travel and public transport
- investing in ultra-low emission and zero-emission vehicles for owned and leased fleets
- maximising efficiencies in the transport of goods and services commissioned by the organisation, such as patient transport, courier services and deliveries.

**3.3.5 Estates and facilities:** The chapter should focus on reducing the carbon emissions arising from the organisation's buildings and infrastructure, including:

- improving energy efficiency and reducing energy usage
- decarbonising heating and hot water systems
- waste reduction and the circular economy
- building design and refurbishments.

**3.3.6 Medicines:** This chapter should examine the key opportunities to reduce the carbon emissions related to the organisation's prescribing and use of medicines and medical products. Areas of focus could include medicines optimisation and reducing waste; responsible capture or disposal of waste medicines and considering lower carbon alternative medicines. The 2021/22 NHS Standard Contract set out inhalers and anaesthetic gases as two key areas for early action in this area, and so every Green Plan should cover these two areas of focus within this chapter.

**3.3.7 Supply chain and procurement:** The NHS supply chain accounts for approximately 62% of total carbon emissions and is a clear priority area for focus in every Green Plan. This chapter should consider how NHS organisations may use their individual or collective purchasing power and decisions to reduce carbon embedded in their supply chains. Examples may include reducing the use of clinical and non-clinical single-use plastic items; reusing or reprocessing equipment (such as walking aids)



where appropriate; and considering lower carbon alternative supplies, such as recycled paper.

**3.3.8 Food and nutrition:** This chapter should consider ways to reduce the carbon emissions from the food made, processed or served within the organisation. Where possible, this may include reducing overall food waste and ensuring the provision of healthier, locally sourced and seasonal menus high in fruits and vegetables, and low in heavily processed foods.

**3.3.9 Adaptation:** This section should summarise your organisation's plans to mitigate the risks or effects of climate change and severe weather conditions on its business and functions. This may include plans to mitigate the effects of flooding or heatwaves on the organisation's infrastructure, patients, and staff.

For the purposes of this round of Green Plans, organisations are advised not to actively consider offsetting, and instead focus on efforts to tangibly reduce carbon emissions. Nationwide schemes for carbon offsetting may be considered at a later date, if required, and once all opportunities for carbon reduction have been exhausted.

# 4. The foundations of a Green Plan

While Green Plans are expected to be three-year strategies, several early interventions have already been taken by a wide variety of trusts and ICSs. These interventions (collated below) should be considered the minimum foundations for all trusts and ICSs to have ensured by the end of the 2021/22 financial year and before the publication of their Green Plans.

## **As per the 2021/22 NHS Standard Contract:**

1. Every trust to ensure a board member is responsible for their net zero targets and their Green Plan. Similarly, every ICS is asked to designate a board-level lead to oversee the development of their own Green Plan.
2. Every trust to purchase 100% renewable energy from April 2021, with supply contracts changing as soon as possible.
3. Every trust to reduce its use of desflurane in surgery to less than 10% of its total volatile anaesthetic gas use, by volume.
4. Every ICS to develop plans for clinically appropriate prescribing of lower carbon inhalers.

## **As per *Delivering a net zero National Health Service***

5. Ensure that, for new purchases and lease arrangements, systems and trusts solely purchase and lease cars that are ultra-low emissions vehicles (ULEVs) or zero emissions vehicles (ZEVs).
6. Develop a green travel plan to support active travel and public transport for staff, patients and visitors.

## **As per the 2021/22 NHS planning guidance**

7. Where outpatient attendances are clinically necessary, at least 25% of outpatient activity should be delivered remotely, resulting in direct and tangible carbon reductions.

# 5. Green Plan governance

The development of a Green Plan should be led by a designated board-level net zero lead, which should generally be one of the existing executive directors.

The plan will require senior, expert input from a broad range of disciplines and functions, including clinicians, estates and facilities, procurement, finance and human resources. These senior individuals should also be informed by vibrant, representative and well-supported sustainability groups and networks drawn from a wide range of staff across each NHS organisation or ICS.

A Green Plan must be approved by the trust board or ICS governing body. Trust-level Green Plans should be submitted to ICSs by 14 January 2022, to be consolidated into system-wide strategies. These, in turn, should be submitted to the relevant NHS England and NHS Improvement regional team for final peer review, ahead of publication. Each region has received significant additional funding from the Greener NHS National Programme to recruit and run regional greener NHS teams to help co-ordinate and catalyse net zero progress within ICSs and trusts.

Progress against an approved Green Plan should be formally reported annually to the trust board or ICS governing body. Progress should also be reported formally to the relevant regional greener NHS team, in a format and frequency agreed with them.

While approved Green Plans cover a three-year period, each trust and ICS should formally review and update their plans annually to consider:

- the progress made and the ability to increase or accelerate agreed actions
- new initiatives generated by staff or partner organisations
- advancements in technology and other enablers
- the likely increase in ambition and breadth of national carbon reduction initiatives and targets.

At a national level, progress towards the NHS's net zero carbon emission targets is reported twice a year to the NHS public boards. The regional teams will hold ICSs to account on delivery of the latter's Green Plans, and ICSs will be tasked with holding organisations within their system to account in a similar fashion.

# 6. Tracking and reporting progress

Since 2008, the NHS has tracked and reported its carbon footprint, regularly improving its methods and monitoring across the NHS. Annex 2 of *Delivering a net zero National Health Service* describes the analytical approach to this in detail.

To support the net zero ambition, new data collection methods are being developed to enable the more granular calculation of carbon footprints at regional, ICS and trust levels.

The Greener NHS Data Collection was launched on 30 April 2021 to understand actions that are taking place during 2021/22 and provide a baseline from which progress can be understood. The Greener NHS National Programme will use this information to calculate and release regional and ICS baseline carbon footprints by 30 September 2021 (with trust footprints developed thereafter). To this end, the timely, accurate, and comprehensive completion of this data collection is essential. Going forward, similar national data collections will occur quarterly. For any questions about these quarterly data returns, please email us at [greener.nhs@nhs.net](mailto:greener.nhs@nhs.net).

With regional, ICS, and trust carbon footprints provided by the national team in line with the timelines above, organisations are not expected to calculate their overall carbon footprint. In the meantime, all NHS organisations should make plans to deliver carbon reductions through the actions and initiatives outlined in this guidance.

# 7. Supporting resources

A wide variety of resources are available to support the development and delivery of each NHS organisation's Green Plan and net zero strategy.

## 7.1 Technical resources

Over the years, several technical tools and frameworks have been developed, and the documents below, available on the [Greener NHS Programme's FutureNHS workspace](#)<sup>1</sup> may be of particular interest:

- *Delivering a net zero National Health Service* report
- Greener NHS Dashboard
- Greener NHS Quarterly Data Collection documents
- Health Outcomes of Travel Tool (HOTT)
- Health Outcomes of Stationary Sources Tool (HOST)

In addition, a number of additional tools and national guidance is currently in development, including national delivery plans for key carbon emission sources (medicines, supply chain, digital care, and estates and facilities); a sustainable model of care framework; a 'What Good Looks Like' framework for digital transformation; and the third health and social care adaptation report.

Several trusts and systems are already planning to go 'further and faster' than the national ambition. Examples and case studies of excellent progress and early delivery will be continuously collated and highlighted through national communications, to support shared learning. Any such case studies should be emailed to [Greener.nhs@nhs.net](mailto:Greener.nhs@nhs.net).

<sup>1</sup> For any access queries regarding the Greener NHS Programme FutureNHS workspace, please email [sustainabilitynetwork-manager@future.nhs.uk](mailto:sustainabilitynetwork-manager@future.nhs.uk)

As a rapidly evolving field, this information will be continually updated on the Greener NHS Programme's FutureNHS workspace and [www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs](http://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs), so that it is made available to all NHS staff and partner organisations.

## 7.2 Financial resource

*Delivering a net zero National Health Service* makes clear that many of the interventions described are either cost-neutral or can provide an immediate cost benefit. These range from efforts to reduce plastics and food waste through to low-carbon procurement and optimisation of medicine usage. Yet more are directly aligned with existing priorities – such as the digital transformation agenda and the commitment within the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) to reduce polluting emissions from the NHS fleet. These are areas where quick progress should be made in all trusts and ICSs.

A further set of initiatives may require initial capital investment, followed by efficiency savings over the long run. Examples of this include investments in LED lighting, systems to manage and reduce energy consumption, and the electrification of transport fleets as costs fall. In developing a Green Plan, organisations should also consider how net zero principles can be routinely integrated into all business-as-usual upgrades and maintenance. This may facilitate the use of funding set aside for backlog maintenance to be deployed more effectively to reduce future costs and carbon emissions, while improving resilience to the local effects of climate change.

Beyond this, sources of additional funding to support the UK-wide move to net zero enshrined in the Climate Change Act are increasingly forthcoming. Recent examples of additional funding made available to NHS trusts include the £50 million NHS Energy Efficiency Fund for LED lighting, and £260 million awarded to the NHS from the government's public sector decarbonisation scheme. Details of new schemes and funding available across the UK will be maintained on the Greener NHS Programme's FutureNHS workspace, including eligibility criteria, and support navigating the application process.

# 8. Key messages and conclusion

This guidance has provided an overview of the process for developing a Green Plan and outlined the structure each ICS and trust strategy is expected to take. Six key conclusions are summarised below:

- **Focus and ambition:** Both the scale and pace of carbon reduction ambitions across the NHS have increased markedly over the last 18 months. Each trust or ICS is now asked to develop or update their Green Plan to reflect and support our new collective net zero goals.
- **Timeframes:** Each trust is asked to finalise its new Green Plan by 14 January 2022, to share with their ICS. Each ICS is then asked to collate trust Green Plans into an overarching ICS Green Plan, to share with their regional greener NHS team by 31 March 2022.
- **Governance:** The development of each Green Plan should be led by an appropriate board-level net zero lead. The plan should be built on broad engagement with internal and external stakeholders, and formally approved by the trust board or ICS governing body, as appropriate.
- **Structure:** This guidance provides an outline structure for trusts and ICSs to follow to develop a comprehensive Green Plan covering all of the major sources of carbon emissions across the NHS.
- **Supporting resources:** A range of additional resources is already available to support NHS organisations in developing their Green Plans. These are available on the [Greener NHS Programme's FutureNHS workspace](#). A range of other supporting resources are under development and will be published on this workspace in due course.
- **Analytics development:** Further work is underway to develop accurate carbon footprint calculations at regional and ICS levels initially. These are expected to be available by 30 September 2021 and will then be followed by trust-level carbon footprints. This ongoing development should not



preclude or delay NHS organisations from planning and taking action to reduce carbon emissions in the meantime.

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