

From the Permanent Secretary
Sir Chris Wormald



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Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
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Sent via email to: pubaccom@parliament.uk

Dear Chair

17 June 2022

House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts Ninety-Sixth Report of Session 2017-2019, Adult Health Screening

I am writing to provide the Committee with an update from the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS Digital and NHS England & NHS Improvement (NHSEI) on progress against the outstanding recommendation in the above-named report.

5: PAC conclusion: We are extremely doubtful that NHS England will be able to successfully bring the failing IT system that supports the cervical programme back in-house, remove the backlog of samples that are waiting to be tested, and roll-out a new testing regime in just 6 months' time.

5: PAC recommendation: NHS England should set out a clear plan for how it intends to deliver this inherently risky project on time without making the service provided to women undergoing screening even worse.

The work to deliver a new NHS cervical screening management system (CSMS) for the NHS in England is part of a wider piece of work to decommission the National Health Application and Infrastructure Service (NHAIS). NHAIS is the IT platform that is currently used to run the national call and recall system for the NHS Cervical Screening Programme and has historically also been used for a range of primary care support services. CSMS is designed to be a like-for-like interim solution, replacing the existing NHAIS based call and recall cervical screening system.

In 2019, NHSEI transferred the provision of Cervical Screening administration from Capita to the NHS North of England Commissioning Support Unit (NECS) and NHS Digital commenced work to build CSMS.

As the migration work is underway, Cervical Screening Administration Service continues to operate using NHAIS. NECS continues to run the Cervical Screening Administration Service successfully using NHAIS and the stability of the service has increased.

In 2020/21, 4.59 million eligible individuals were invited for screening with coverage of 70.2%, where coverage for the programme is defined as the percentage of those eligible and registered as

female aged 25 to 64 screened within the last 3.5 or 5.5 years (depending on age) on 31 March 2021.

The change to HPV primary screening (a new testing regime) was successfully completed in December 2019 overseen by the NHSEI Cervical Screening Programme Board which was also established in 2019.

NHSEI and NHS Digital acknowledge that progress on completion of the new CSMS has not delivered to the planned timetable and are taking the following steps to address the situation.

As of May 2022, the core design of CSMS by NHS Digital is now complete. There are 32 end-to-end user scenarios which collectively cover the CSMS product functionality. Of the 32, NHS Digital have so far built 21. Of these 21, 10 are fully complete and 11 are in functional testing. The 11 remaining form part of the ongoing delivery pipeline.

NHSEI and NHS Digital have strengthened both technical expertise and leadership. In March 2022 NHSEI appointed a National Director of Vaccination and Screening, and in May 2022 they assumed interim SRO responsibility for the Digital Transformation of Screening, including CSMS. In May 2022 NHS Digital appointed a new Executive Director of Product Delivery who is overseeing the CSMS development team and a new experienced Programme Director is leading the programme. This project is a high priority for both new appointees.

Following these changes, a bottom up review of the status of the programme, a timeline for completion and changes to governance are underway to improve confidence in future delivery. We will write to the Committee later this Summer to provide a further update.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Wormald', is written over a long, thin blue diagonal line that extends from the bottom left towards the top right of the page.

SIR CHRIS WORMALD
PERMANENT SECRETARY