

CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY 2024-2027





Foreword

I am delighted to present the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Strategy on Climate Emergency and Sustainability for 2024–2027 to support the wider NHS Scotland effort to address the climate emergency. The challenges facing our planet, our country and our healthcare systems because of the effects of the climate emergency are unprecedented and the impacts are already with us. These will only accelerate in future unless we take urgent action. We must act now, to mitigate the harms that will be caused to society which may be irreversible unless we act now.

NHS Scotland is an important partner in the fight against climate change, and the harms caused by the climate emergency will manifest themselves in a greater need for healthcare across the globe. It is essential therefore that our healthcare systems stand ready to support the global response, and for NES to play its part in that response.

In terms of sustainability, we must reduce our impact on natural and physical resources, so they are available in the long term, and that includes the resources that we have to deliver health and social care services, now and for future generations.

Healthcare is responsible for the discharge of over 4% of carbon emissions, which are the greatest cause of global warming. Healthcare systems, including the Health and Social Care system in Scotland, must therefore examine their own activities, and make necessary changes to delivery models, to make sure that they operate in such a way that enables them to reduce their causative effects on the climate emergency.

NES is a key enabler in supporting the wider NHS and Social Care sector in Scotland. As the principal provider of education and training to the workforce, we will influence how awareness of the climate emergency is raised and understood, and how and when changes to clinical practice are developed and embedded into our education and training programmes and technology development.

As part of our broader NES Strategy, we will be focusing on how we mitigate the impact of climate change in the way we use technology and innovation to support the development and delivery of our education and training for the Health and Social Care workforce. We will always seek to deliver education and training in ways that reduce carbon emissions while supporting the need for multi-disciplinary and team learning.

Those living in the most deprived communities in Scotland continue to experience poorer health and wellbeing and life expectancy is falling as a result. Improving population health, tackling health inequalities and action to address the climate emergency are interlinked. The resilience of communities to the impact of climate change and the actions to respond to it are not distributed equally across the population.

NHS Education for Scotland will look for opportunities to align our work on climate change and sustainability with our vision: “Supporting better rights-based quality care and outcomes for every person in Scotland through a skilled, capable and resilient health and social care workforce.”

NES is also working to make changes to how we currently operate to reduce our own direct carbon emissions. How we operate our buildings, deliver our education and training and carry out travel for business activities will all be reviewed, and improvement programmes developed.

Given the importance to the entire planet of tackling this climate emergency with the utmost urgency, I present this Strategy to summarise NHS Education for Scotland’s activity in support of the wider NHS and Social Care response. This Strategy covers the three-year period 2024 to 2027, but this Strategy will be reviewed on a regular basis, as the actions to address the climate emergency will be a long-term project for all of us.

Professor Karen Reid, Chief Executive, NHS Education for Scotland





Introduction

Climate change presents one of the most significant risks to both physical and mental health that we face in the 21st century. The severity of the impact it will have on the health of populations and the planet depends on urgent action taken now, providing us with the opportunity to address both current and future threats with our choices.

The impact will not affect communities equally and principles of equity and the right to the highest attainable standard of health will underpin our approach to our Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy.

The Scottish Government has already published its Policy for NHS Scotland on the Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development (DL (2012) 38) in November 2021, followed by the publication of the [NHS Scotland Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy](#) in August 2022.

As well as working towards achieving net zero by 2040, or earlier, within its own estate through implementation of robust policies and practices, NHS Education for Scotland (NES) is in a unique position to effect real, long-term positive change through the discharge of its core statutory responsibility - education and training for the NHS and social care workforce.

By teaching and training the NHS Scotland and social care workforce, NES can support the delivery of the national Strategy, including the achievement of net zero NHS by 2040. NES can help to support the implementation of a consistent level of knowledge and best practice, and to embed sustainability throughout the national workforce and thereby contribute to NHS Scotland's overall success in improving both our current position and future outcomes in health and sustainability.



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals identified by the United Nations in their '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (2015) are incorporated into Scotland's National Performance Framework, shown in the accompanying image.

The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland have committed to pursuing these goals within their own strategies to achieve a sustainable health service, and NES will join all other NHS Scotland Health Boards in contributing to this aim by utilising its unique strengths and position within the service.





Our Aims

Our principal aims are to comply with the Scottish Government Policy for NHS Scotland on the Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development and to support the delivery of the [NHS Scotland Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy](#). To that aim we are structuring our efforts in a number of key areas of activity.





Education and Training

We are collaborating with other health Boards and social care organisations to implement meaningful and accessible education and training programmes that actively embed a strong climate emergency and sustainability culture in all areas of our work.

We are focusing on developing education and training that can be delivered in a remote/hybrid manner to reduce travel and minimise the effect on service provision within other NHS health and social care settings.

We are designing and implementing meaningful, data-driven behaviour change campaigns to inform frontline and other staff on best practice for climate emergency and sustainability in their area.



Clinical

We are working with our clinical colleagues to ensure robust, consistent education and training on the specific sustainability requirements related to clinical practice and waste.



Transport and Travel

Work-related travel is minimised to the furthest extent possible, leading with a 'digital first' approach to the delivery of education and training where possible, as well as for day-to-day business requirements.

The health and wellbeing of our staff in terms of travel for work purposes is factored into decisions regarding NES's overall estate and reflected in our travel policies.

We develop resources to assist attendees of training events. Where in-person learning is required, we make informed choices about their travel to the education and training site.



Procurement

We are proactively engaging and complying with all legislation, regulations and other guidance on measures to assess the climate emergency and sustainability credentials of contractors and other partners from whom we commission services to support our own activities.

Our tendering, evaluation and contracting processes pay full regard to the activities that partners carry out to ensure that they, in turn, support the aims of the national Strategy for NHS Scotland. Our tendering documentation explicitly seeks assurance from partners that they are working towards measures to reduce harmful emissions.



Digital Infrastructure

A strategic plan for Infrastructure & Operations will include the rationalisation of all data centres and server rooms, and decommissioning/repurposing of hardware while capturing the reduction in carbon metrics. Scoping of any new data centre requirements will also consider and reflect sustainability requirements in support of significantly reducing our environmental impact.



Governance and Policy

We are developing a robust governance structure to monitor and progress our approach to sustainability within NES, ensuring we stay on track in achieving our goals.



Waste

In our buildings, education and training programmes we prevent and/or reduce unnecessary waste in the first instance, and reuse and/or re-purpose items where possible. Where no further use can be found we prioritise recycling of suitable waste.



Capital Projects and Adaptation

Energy efficiency is considered when making changes to the NES estate, and energy saving measures implemented where practically, and financially, viable.



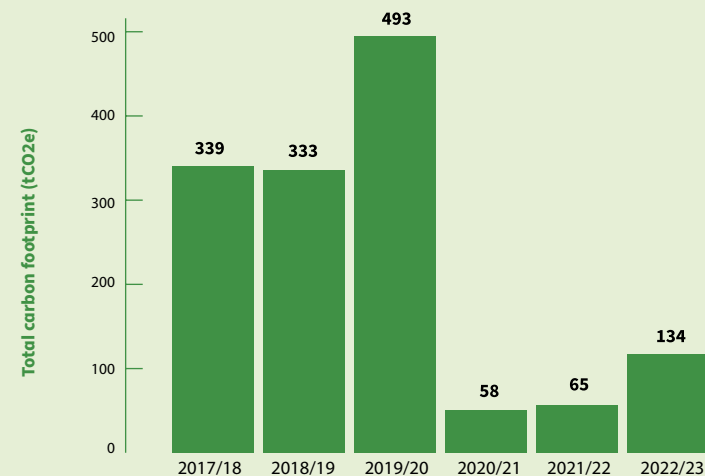
Greenspace and Biodiversity

Where services under NES management have access to greenspace, information and guidance are provided to staff to maximise its utilisation within the service.



Our Impact

NES Carbon Emissions Discharged 2017 – 2023

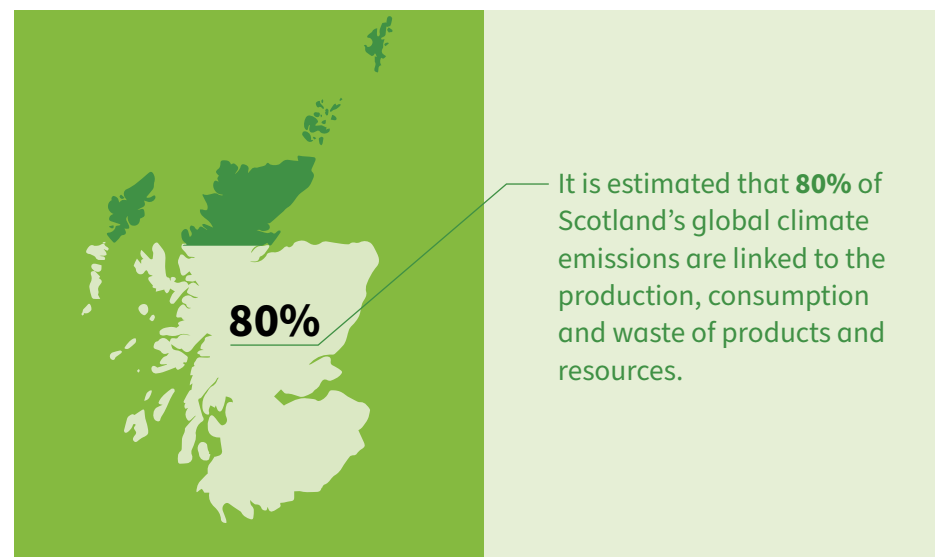


4.4%

NHS Scotland's emissions from heating and electricity reduced by 4.4% between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

64%

Emissions from heating and electricity from territorial Health Boards have fallen by 64% between 2020/21 and the baseline year of 1989/90.





Education and Training

People, Partnership, Performance

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) helps people who work in health and social care to get the education and skills they need to provide good quality care for people in Scotland. This puts our Board in a unique position to educate, train and influence the knowledge and behaviour of staff to embed a culture of health equity and sustainability within a broad spectrum of clinical and non-clinical areas of health and social care. Focusing on delivering robust, accessible education and training on sustainability to disseminate consistent information and best practice to health Boards and social care organisations will contribute significantly to meeting environmental targets, and achieving overall sustainability and population health equity aims. NES will collaborate with Public Health Scotland to ensure our education and training on sustainability reflects the link between climate change, population health and equity.

Digital First

NES's 'digital first' approach, both to the work of its own staff and the delivery of training, is influential in informing the Board's direction of travel in terms of sustainability. Not only does this reduce our own emissions, leading to a smaller carbon footprint, but we can help other Boards and social care organisations eliminate needless travel by opting for remote learning where possible.

While we understand that, especially in health and social care settings, in-person learning will always be required for certain areas and specific skills, our aim is to move to a digital model outwith these exceptions. Work to ensure consistency and quality in the delivery of remote training is paramount, and the investment of time by our staff in this will see benefits across NHS Scotland and the wider social care sector.

Collaborative Delivery

Collaboration between health Boards and social care organisations is one of our most important tools in tackling the climate crisis. In 2024 we are embarking on a project with National Services Scotland (NSS) to develop and deliver a suite of eModules providing training on both general aspects and specific topics within sustainability.

Utilising the specialist knowledge of their team, the modules will be developed internally within NSS. Following this, NES will be instrumental in hosting and delivering these to the NHS Scotland workforce, including data tracking for uptake and completion.



Clinical

Where we are—2024

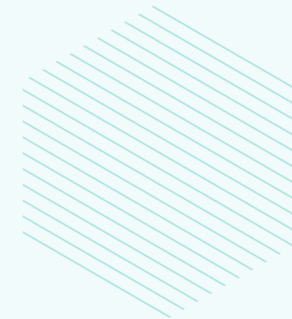
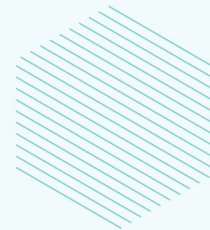
While NES does not carry out direct clinical work, we have various directorates that represent clinical areas and a range of networks that bring clinical staff together to effect change in their area. Our position in centralising the response to education and training needs within the NHS Scotland and social care workforces allows us unique opportunities to influence operational elements throughout health and social care.

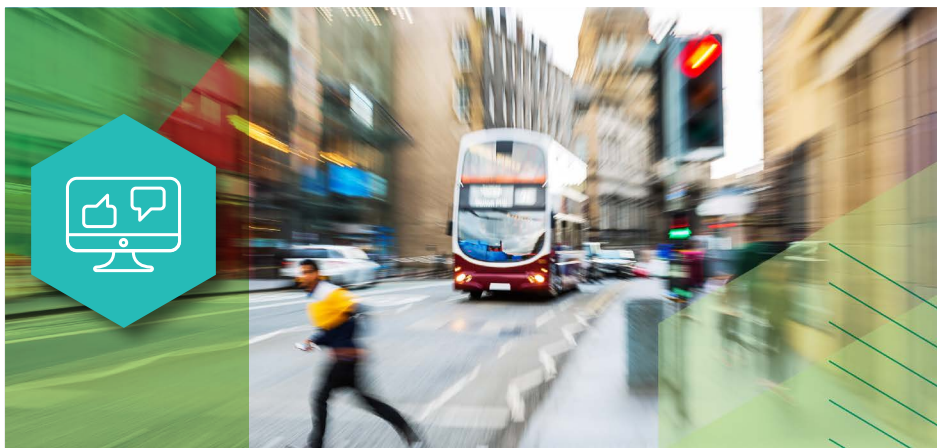
Our commitment

NES is committed to continuing to engage both internal and external clinical staff with specialist knowledge of their area and utilise this engagement to develop appropriate approaches to address the sustainability needs within clinical practice. To help achieve this, the NES Climate Emergency and Sustainability Clinical Subgroup was established in 2023 and is working towards formalising their approach throughout 2024 and beyond.

One of the main aims of Realistic Medicine is for people using healthcare services and their families to feel empowered to discuss their treatment fully with healthcare professionals. Everyone should feel able to ask their healthcare professional why they've suggested a test, treatment or procedure, and all decisions about a person's care should be made jointly between the individual and their healthcare team.

We will work to make sure that NES' education and training programmes allow healthcare professionals to have discussions with patients that take account not only of the direct clinical impacts and implications, but also of the wider environmental impacts of courses of action. This will allow healthcare professionals and patients to agree treatments that consider the wider impacts of decisions they might make.





Transport and Travel

Where We Are—2024

Mirroring the trend seen across many sectors following the COVID-19 pandemic, business travel for NES declined significantly from early 2020 and has remained well below pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

However, where the delivery of in-person education and training is deemed essential and unavoidable, there are implications for travel in terms of NES staff, trainees and external trainers travelling to delivery sites.

As the Board continues with its remote-friendly approach to working and to delivering training and education, new data will be required to accurately measure the environmental impact of the reduction in, as well as residual travel.

NHS Education for Scotland Business Travel by Public Transport



Our Commitment

We are continuing with our approach to supporting remote-friendly working, education and training and to encourage consideration of 'digital first' methods of service delivery to further reduce the impact of travel by staff, trainers and attendees. This will ensure that no unnecessary travel is undertaken for meetings, training or events that can be held effectively remotely. It will also establish provision of necessary support for all staff.

Additionally, the NES travel policy will be reviewed and updated to reflect the prioritisation of a digital approach. This will provide information on the 'travel hierarchy' and guidance on applicable exceptions.

To ensure the Board's continued improvement, new metrics for data collection on travel associated with NES's work will be developed. This will be carried out through cross-department collaboration to consider all elements required in measuring the Board's impact, and a practical approach to meaningful collation implemented. The ability to benchmark is crucial in NES being able to set and achieve targets.





Procurement

Where we are—2024

NES is uniquely positioned to positively impact the procurement process within NHS Scotland. In support of the Sustainable Procurement Duty we also believe that it would be most effective if NHS Scotland Procurement act as one. There is now an established and formalised steering group (SPSG) reporting to the NHS Scotland Procurement Services Senior Management Team (PS-SMT), who formulate and drive action planning across all procurement teams.

The steering group is chaired by a member of the PS-SMT with a core of procurement professionals on the group, sustainability experts and representation from Scottish Government. It also has links to other sustainability groups such as the National Environmental Sustainability Group and Transport & Logistics Services Experts Group. The role of the SPSG is to provide a core oversight group for sustainable procurement activities across NHS Scotland.

We continue to ensure that there is a focus on Sustainable Procurement training for staff which is critical in addressing the wider issues with sustainable procurement.

While NES's procurement of physical goods is limited in the context of the organisation as a whole, the service providers utilised by the Board are required to give due consideration in relation to their environmental impact.

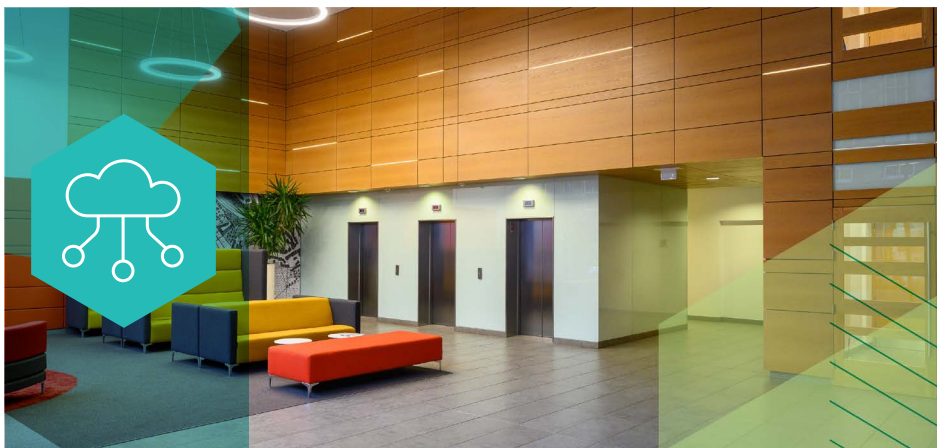
Our commitment

Our Procurement Strategy is structured to support effective sustainable procurement across NES to ensure that we deliver the NES vision. It allows NES to respond to the changing public-sector Procurement environment whilst encouraging continual improvement and innovation. Our outcomes are aligned to the Sustainable Procurement Duty, which requires us to buy in a way which is:

- > good for businesses and employees
- > good for society
- > good for places and communities
- > open and connected

NES recognise the commitment of the educational institutions we work with in terms of their own sustainability strategies. We will proactively engage with all guidance from the Scottish Government on measures to assess the sustainability of contractors engaged in our procurement process.





Digital Infrastructure

Where we are—2024

The NES Digital Infrastructure very much reflects the pre COVID19 world where supporting a remote-working user base, and delivering remote Digital Services were not the primary considerations they are today.

Typical Hardware lifecycles of three to five years mean that NES has an ideal opportunity over the next few years to reimagine how we better meet our commitments to our staff and service users, with heavy emphasis placed upon delivering on our environmental responsibilities.

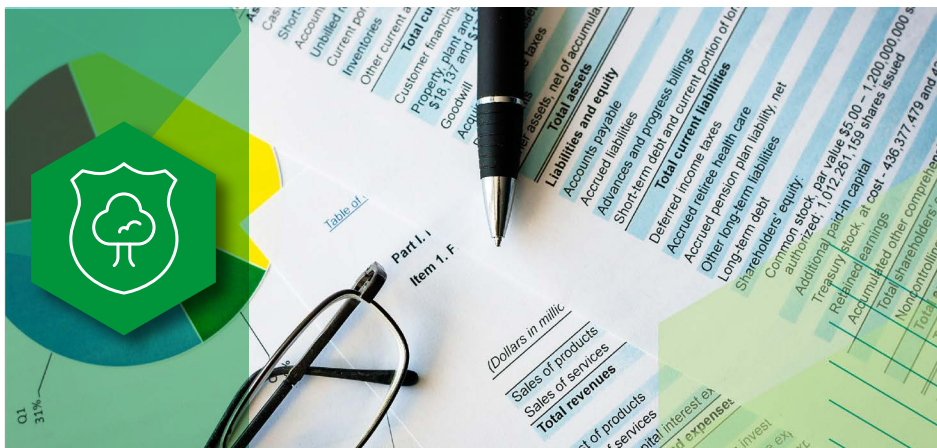
Our commitment

We are committed to consolidation and reduction of our on-premises architecture, alongside maintaining and being an exemplar for the 'Cloud-First' approach which is a cornerstone of NES being able to demonstrate our green credentials.

We will ensure that our digital infrastructure and associated supply chains are rationalised, responsible, and resilient, creating environmental and economic benefits by default.

Our decision-making processes will ensure that the climate emergency and sustainability impacts are always considered and we will focus on three key outcomes:

- 1 The reduction of carbon and cost through removal of waste (redundant services, duplication, legacy systems)
- 2 Consolidation of services upon common platforms to ensure efficiencies
- 3 Enterprise Architecture as strategy to facilitate us to meeting all our sustainability and environmental objectives.



Governance and Policy

Where we are—2024

NES's development of its sustainability governance is ongoing, utilising the knowledge and work of staff throughout different directorates within the organisation.

Our existing policies that impact environmental sustainability, such as the NES travel policy, require updating in line with this Strategy. New policies will come into being based on the aims and targets identified by the Board.

Our commitment

In all our decision-making processes, we will make sure that climate emergency and sustainability impacts are considered, where appropriate. We will create a culture of consistency and accountability in relation to environmental sustainability in how we structure our service delivery.

We will make sure that our policies are updated with evolving best practice in addressing climate emergency and sustainability. We will also continue to build relationships with other stakeholders to advance our compliance with the NHS Scotland agenda, and to support the sharing of knowledge and resources in this area.





Waste

Where we are—2024

The creation of waste happens at all levels of industries, and healthcare generates both universal and specific types of waste that must be reduced (where prevention isn't possible), handled, processed and, if required, disposed of in a way that reduces negative environmental outcomes.

Some of these have already been addressed, such as paper and food waste being actively prevented within NES's office sites, through only printing when justifiably required and the conscious ordering of catering to ensure no food waste is generated. In others areas, especially in clinical settings, efforts to determine the most beneficial approach are ongoing.

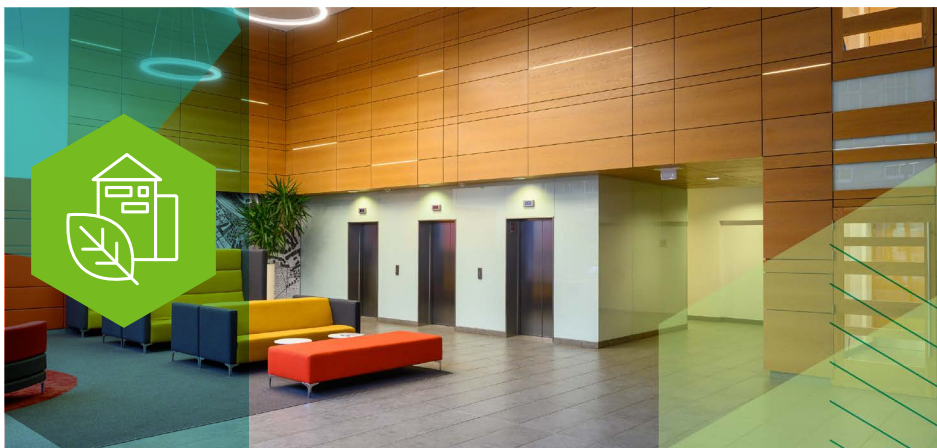
Our commitment

NES recognises its role in preventing, reducing and processing waste in both its own estate as well contributing towards how this is carried out in other areas such as clinical settings.

Continued improvement at a Board level to minimise the contribution of NES sites is a priority. We will work towards a comprehensive circular economy approach, adhering to the waste hierarchy by preventing and reducing unnecessary waste in the first instance, reusing/repurposing items where possible, recycling where no further use can be found, and recovering any elements of the waste where practical prior to disposal where unavoidable.

Additionally, waste will remain a focus of development and training for those working in health and social care roles, to ensure staff are informed on how specific waste is reduced and dealt with. Current areas NES staff are involved in include disposal of medication and prescribing of inhalers.





Capital Projects and Adaptation

Where we are—2024

While NES has a relatively small physical estate, this does not diminish our responsibility in contributing to NHS Scotland's attainment of net zero at the earliest opportunity. Work has been carried out over recent years within each site to assess the level of utilisation of office and meeting space to inform decision making in relation to the provision of on-site facilities.

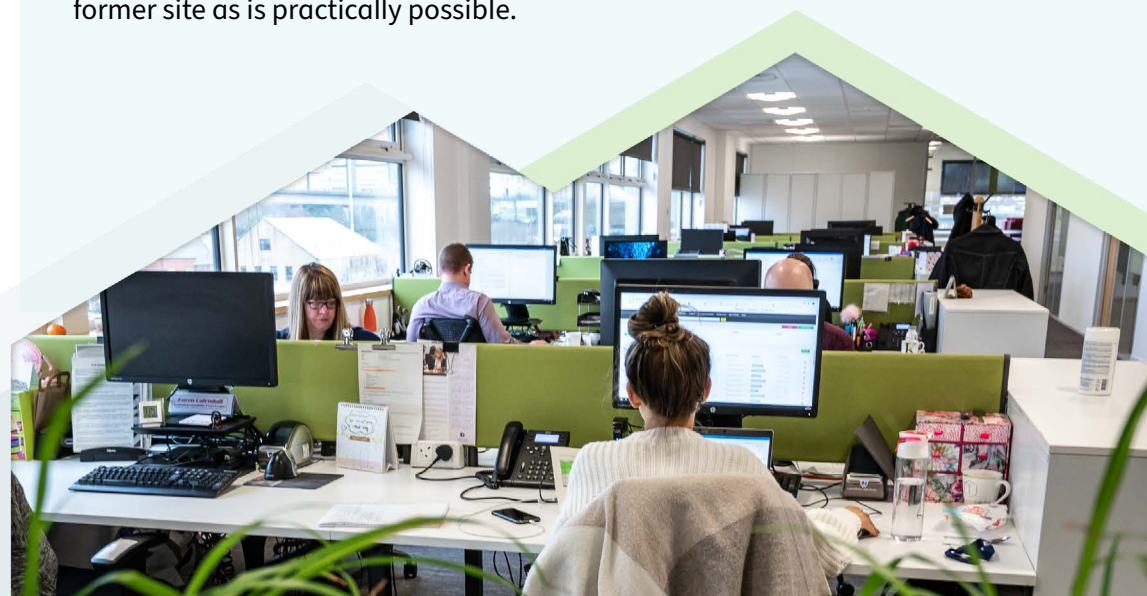
While reductions and consolidations are being identified in this area, opportunities for prudent investment within the retained estate must also be evaluated to increase efficiency and reduce the Board's remaining environmental impact.

Our commitment

Over the coming years, NES will be reviewing its property estate to make sure it is fit for our business needs, but also is no greater than it needs to be. As well as driving out cost efficiencies for the benefit of the wider NHS Scotland, we will also be conducting the review with tackling the climate emergency very much at the forefront of our considerations. Energy efficiency and sustainability will feature very heavily in the decisions we will make, and our overall business model will also be structured in a way that minimises our impact on the environment. Decision taken will be taken with the aim of contributing substantially to NES's progress in achieving its net zero targets in relation to its physical estate.

Within the retained estate, an evaluation of potential changes that can improve the environmental performance of sites will be carried out. These can be implemented during required or routine maintenance, or as standalone projects where the justification exists.

When moving locations or removing sites from the estate, NES is committed to eliminating any unnecessary waste by repurposing, relocating and recycling as much of the obsolete elements of the former site as is practically possible.





Greenspace, Nature and Biodiversity

Where we are—2024

Due to the nature of its physical estate and limited involvement in clinical settings, Greenspace, Nature and Biodiversity is a more limited area for NES. However, there are two distinct areas where we can have a positive impact on behaviour and, therefore, outcomes: sustainable prescribing and the disposal of medication and medical waste, and service access to greenspace.

While NES has no significant greenspace within its estate, other areas related to NES's work, such as childcare facilities and care homes, often do. In our training and education programmes we will raise awareness of the potential to use such spaces for in the provision of health and care services.



Our commitment

In our development and implementation of training throughout the NHS Scotland workforce, our aim is to effect meaningful learning in all areas with the potential to have an impact on the organisation's net zero progress. While many of these can be easy to identify, some can be less obvious. The effects of medication in water supplies and impacts of certain inhalers and medical gases on the environment are pertinent examples of these within a healthcare setting. Robust education and training on prescribing and disposal will contribute to an improved environmental outlook in these areas.

Providing practical, accessible guidance on utilising greenspace, where available in services, to access both the environmental benefits and improved health outcomes will allow NES to positively impact an area where it has reduced opportunities in its own estate. This will inform the development and dissemination of relevant information in collaboration with other health Boards and areas.



CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

2024-2027

ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on **0131 656 3200** or email **altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk** to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.



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