

Guidance on sustainability for NHS Non-Executive Directors (NEDs)



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Authors of the report

This report has been compiled by The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and Nature Positive, an RSK Group company. This report discusses the sustainability risks and challenges faced by the NHS and offers some practical guidance for Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) on how sustainability could be incorporated into their role.

IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment) is the professional body for everyone working, studying or interested in environment and sustainability. IEMA provide resources, tools, knowledge and research sharing to meet the real-world needs of our members. Together positively changing attitudes to sustainability as a progressive force for good.

Nature Positive is a sustainability consultancy, within the RSK Group, composed of a unique combination of environmental, sustainability and business specialists who work with organisation leaders to help solve their sustainability challenges.

RSK is a global leader in the delivery of sustainable solutions. Its family of more than 175 environmental, engineering, and technical services businesses work



together to provide practical solutions to some of the greatest challenges societies have ever faced.

The company operates in most sectors of the economy, including many of those most critical to future global sustainability such as water, energy, healthcare, food and drink, infrastructure and urban development. With its integrated offering across research and development, consultancy, and on-the-ground application RSK can deliver a complete solution that is unrivaled in the market.

1. Executive Summary

In the face of a global climate and biodiversity crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a range of social and economic risks, sustainability has moved up the agenda of countries and organisations. These interrelated and compounding challenges will ultimately affect, and in some cases determine, the health of our planet and people across the world. Sustainability is therefore a crucial and growing agenda. It aims to improve the quality of our lives, protect the natural world and preserve natural resources for future generations.



The NHS is an important institution which plays a key role in the health and well-being of all people in the United Kingdom. The NHS has a range of opportunities to contribute to deliver sustainability and to have a positive impact on people and planet. To implement sustainability across Trusts/Health Boards will require significant engagement from a range of roles throughout the NHS, with one key role being Non-Executive Directors (NEDs). In their role, NEDs can have significant influence over the strategic direction of their Trust/Health Board and therefore will play a key role in the integration of sustainability. However, our research and discussions within the NHS have revealed that, often, NEDs feel they do not have the knowledge or confidence to raise or challenge on sustainability within the NHS.

To address this gap and to empower NEDs, this report has been created as a first step in supporting them to understand the sustainability issues that face the NHS, as well as providing tools to enable them to advise, challenge and action sustainability within their Trust/Healthboard.

The report has been written by Nature Positive, an RSK Group company, and IEMA, using extensive consultation through a survey, roundtables and interviews with sustainability leads and NEDs in the NHS.

2. Sustainability and the role of NEDs

What is sustainability?

The concept of sustainability is defined by the United Nations as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Sustainability is often referred to as having three core pillars: environmental, social and economic. All three elements need to be balanced and considered to achieve holistic sustainability.

- **Environmental** – this refers to maintaining a healthy environment by using natural resources at a rate where they can be replenished and reducing environmental damage through human activities, with growing recognition of the additional need to restore nature.
- **Social** – social sustainability refers to reducing negative impacts on people and ensuring that the basic necessities can be attainable to all people to create healthy, liveable and thriving communities.
- **Economic** – refers to sustaining and safeguarding human and natural resources through our financial systems and structures, to ensure the long-term viability of the economy, our communities and the environment.

These three pillars can be applied to countries and policies, organisations and projects to balance needs and ensure that sustainable decisions are made.

Figure 1 – Three Pillars of Sustainability



The [United Nations developed the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) in 2015, to provide global goals and an associated framework of targets for a peaceful and prosperous future for people and planet by 2030. These goals provide a planetary framework for sustainability. They were adopted by all UN member states, including the UK. The SDGs split sustainable development into 17 goals which cover key environmental, social and economic drivers for a more sustainable society. In these 17 SDGs, there are a further 169 targets and 247 indicators on which to build a sustainable, inclusive and prosperous world.

While these goals were originally designed to be reported at a national level, it is appreciated that the SDGs will only be met with effective management from all sectors of the economy. SDGs are now being translated and used by organisations to inform, and underpin, sustainability strategies and actions.

Figure 2 – UN Sustainable Development Goals



ESG, or environment, social and governance, is a related term that also seeks to address the environmental and social issues affecting an organisation. ESG is a narrower concept to sustainability and sets specific criteria to define environmental, social, and governance systems, and organisational performance as sustainable. ESG frameworks relate to, and can be overarched by, the UNSDGS and provide specific initiatives and criteria which need to be met for each pillar.

Originally, ESG was conceptualised for responsible financial investments; however, it has since spread into the wider corporate world for companies and organisations to report on their contribution on corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

Why is sustainability important?

Failure to act on sustainability represents mounting costs as environmental and social burdens increase into the future. Climate change is resulting in a loss of human life and effects determinants of health, including impacting people from extreme weather events, and changing climates. Biodiversity loss can have significant effects on human health if services from nature (ecosystem services) are compromised or lost. There are direct financial benefits and cost savings from implementing sustainable practices. Becoming sustainable can drive positive change across these areas, improving the resilience and efficiency across both our broader society as well as the NHS.



The role of NEDs

According to the Institute of Directors, the role of a NED is 'to provide a creative contribution to the Board by providing independent oversight and constructive challenge to the executive directors'. By bringing independent judgement on the issues of strategy, performance and resources, NEDs contribute to the strategic direction, leadership and management of an organisation.

For NHS Trusts/Health Boards, the NEDs' responsibilities include supporting, encouraging, challenging, assuring and promoting activities to ensure that local and national targets will be met. Often NEDs have specific clinical, finance or management experience required for their appointment. Once appointed, they often take on further link or champion roles to ensure that focus is maintained on priority areas for the Trust/Health Board, for example a champion of sustainability, well-being or freedom to speak up.

Their role at a strategic level can lend itself to promoting and integrating new concepts, such as sustainability, into strategies and working practices. NEDs can and will be critical to enabling short- and long-term change to achieve a more sustainable future for the NHS.

3. Sustainability in the NHS: Policy background

UK sustainability commitments

Further to the UN SDGs, there are several commitments to which the UK Government has signed up:

- [The Paris Agreement](#) is a global, legally binding international treaty on climate change and was adopted in 2015 with a goal of limiting global temperature increases to well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels.
- [Net Zero by 2050](#) is a binding target for government, local government, regulators, businesses and consumers to bring all UK greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, set in 2019. This was an update to the UK's 2008 Climate Change Act, increasing the ambition set by the original targets. In 2021, the United Kingdom committed to reducing national emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels.
- [The Environment Act \(2021\)](#) focuses on improving air and water quality, restoring biodiversity and reducing waste. These changes will be driven by legally binding environmental targets, and enforced by the independent Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) which will hold government and public bodies to account on their environmental obligations.

(Note: parts of the Environment Act are relevant to all the UK whilst others are England specific.)

Net Zero NHS

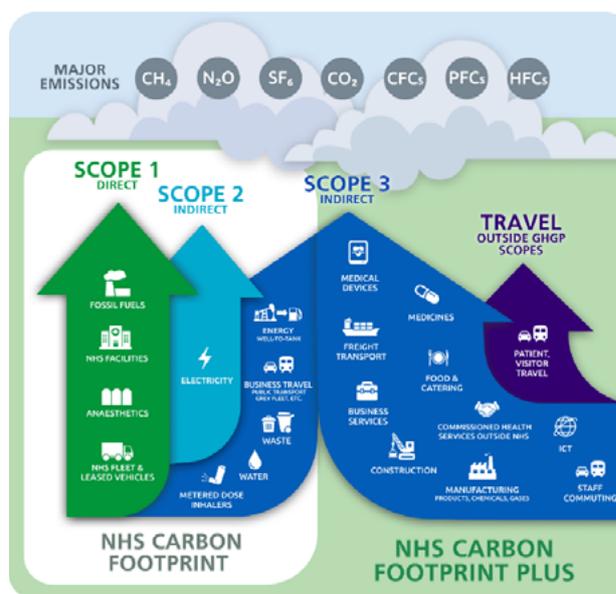
Below we have outlined a range of the key regulation across the devolved NHS bodies

NHS ENGLAND

The Delivering a Net Zero National Health Service report sets out two clear targets:

- to achieve net zero for scope 1 and 2 emissions (the emissions the NHS controls directly) by 2040
- net zero for scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions (the emissions the NHS has the ability to influence) by 2045.

Figure 3 – Green House Gas Protocol (GHGP) scopes in the context of the NHS



In July 2022, NHS England became the first health system to embed net zero into legislation through the Health and Social Care Act 2022, which means the 'Delivering a Net Zero National Health Service' report is statutory guidance.

This report is based on the understanding that climate change undermines the foundations of good health, and can be a contributing factor to cardiovascular disease, asthma and cancer. Taking action to reduce climate change could reduce the burden of diseases caused by air pollution, obesity and poor diet, for example by a greater use of electric vehicles, or encouraging low carbon modes of transport such as cycling or walking in urban areas.

The Net Zero report place new duties on all Trusts, foundation trusts and integrated care boards to contribute towards statutory emissions and environmental targets.

Source: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2021/02/NZR-Scopes.png>

The Greener NHS Programme

The Greener NHS Programme works with staff, hospitals and partners of NHS England to reduce the impact of public health on the environment to both save money and reach carbon net zero. The Greener NHS Strategy has set targets for each sector of the NHS, including estates and facilities, travel and transport, the supply chain, medicines and equipment, and research and offsetting.

NHS Green Plans

To ensure all Trusts and integrated care systems (ICS) are supporting the NHS England-wide net zero ambition, there is a requirement that every Trust and ICS submit their own Green Plan. This is a three-year carbon reduction strategy and is a structured way for Trusts and ICS to create their own initiatives. The three-year timeframe should allow for Green Plans to make immediate carbon reductions in some areas, alongside strategic development of capability in other areas.

The structure of Green Plans will vary depending on the local context, work delivered to date and local priorities. Key information includes:

1. Every Trust and ICS are expected to have a Green Plan approved by the organisation's Board or governing body.
2. Every Trust and ICS needs to ensure a Board member is responsible for their net zero targets and Green Plan. This is generally an existing executive director.

NHS SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework sets out a net zero target of 2045, which is five years earlier than the UK-wide commitment.

NHS Scotland climate emergency and sustainability strategy: 2022–2026

The NHS Scotland climate emergency and sustainability strategy: 2022–2026 outlines the plan for NHS Scotland to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and impact on the environment, adapt to climate change and to better contribute to the UN SDGs. It sets out a clear target for NHS Scotland to become net zero by 2040.

The strategy is structured around five main themes with the aim of focusing activity around improving the environmental sustainability of NHS Scotland, whilst also recognising the broader role the NHS plays in relation to social and economic development. The five main themes are:

- sustainable buildings and land
- sustainable travel
- sustainable goods and services
- sustainable care
- sustainable communities

Sustainability Action Brand

To promote sustainability awareness across the NHS, NHS Scotland has established an overarching brand for sustainability called: Sustainability Action. The brand aims to explain what sustainability is and highlight the actions staff can take, as well as raise its profile and support co-ordinated communications.

NHS WALES

Wales has set an ambition for the public sector to be net zero by 2030, and to have 70% of Welsh electricity consumption from renewables by 2030. Regulation in Wales is supported by the Wales Environment Act 2016 and Climate Change Regulations 2018.

NHS Wales Decarbonisation Strategic Delivery Plan 2021–2030

As the largest public sector organisation in Wales, NHS Wales has an important role in supporting the ambition for the Welsh public sector to be net zero by 2030. NHS Wales launched its Decarbonisation Strategic Delivery Plan 2021–2030 setting out 50 clear, ambitious and achievable initiatives across 6 main themes. Initiatives include:

- by 2025, all lighting across estates will be LED
- reducing emissions will be mandated within new procurement contracts for major suppliers
- the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust will aim for all rapid response vehicles procured after 2022 to be at least plug-in hybrid EV, or fully battery-electric in appropriate locations.

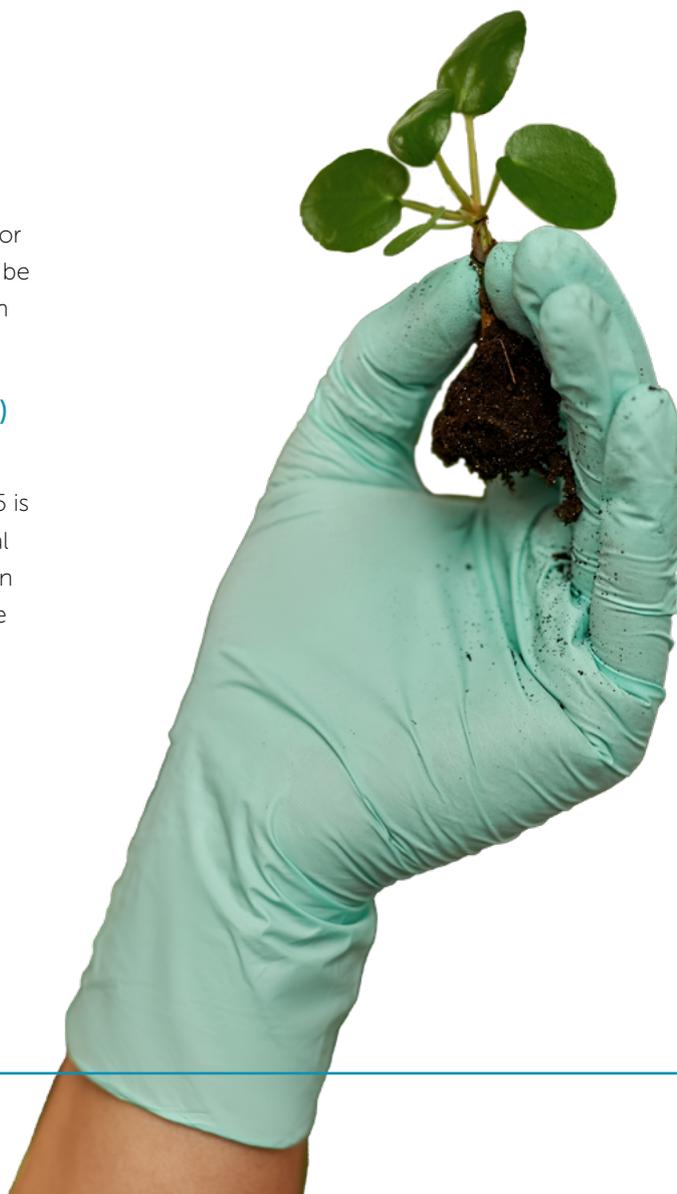
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is set up to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It provides a common purpose for public bodies to work together to improve the general well-being of Wales. This report highlights the need for public bodies, including NHS Wales, to address social and economic issues alongside the climate crisis.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Northern Ireland health service has confirmed its commitment to achieving net zero. For health and social care in Northern Ireland, this will require:

- the development of a sustainable and low-carbon health system
- calculating its greenhouse gas emissions and development of an associated action plan
- engaging with its supply chain to reduce its carbon emissions
- assessing and monitoring risks associated with climate change adaptation.



4. Sustainability in the NHS: Key issues

The NHS, including NHS Trusts/Health Boards, has a wide range of activities with the primary aim of providing high-quality patient care. Sustainability impacts almost all of these activities and not addressing sustainability poses significant risks to the resilience of the NHS. When considering sustainability and the NHS, it is important to consider a wide range of environmental, social and economic issues together and not in silos. There are many overlaps and interactions that when addressed together can result in significantly greater benefits.

Climate change and decarbonisation

Climate change in the UK is a long-term shift in temperatures and weather patterns, caused by the continued burning of fossil fuels and release of carbon and nitrogen emissions.

Across the UK, we expect to see:

- Warmer and wetter winters
- Hotter and drier summers
- More frequent and intense weather extremes

Climate change will make these conditions more likely.

The NHS accounts for 4% of England's carbon emissions and is an important part of meeting the UK's net zero targets. Three key contributors to the NHS's carbon footprint are supply chain, estates and facilities, and

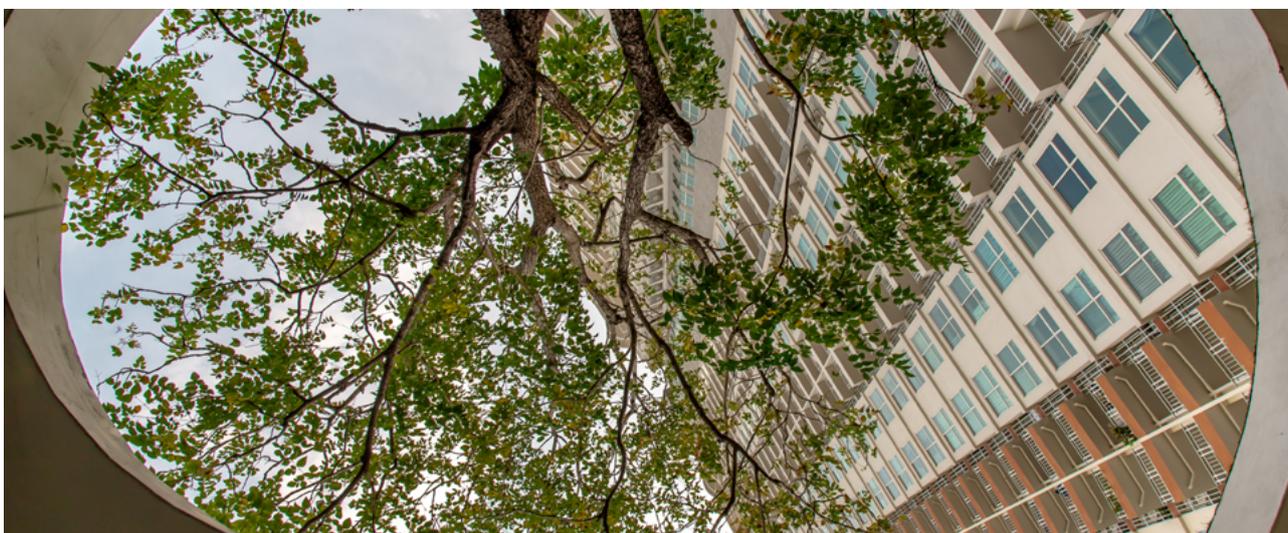
transport:

- The supply chain contributes 62%.
- NHS estates and supporting facilities contribute 15%.
- Patient, visitor, staff and supplier transport to the NHS accounts for 14%.

(Note: NHS England figures have been used for this illustration with Wales and Scotland carbon footprints showing similar scales. NI do not currently have an NHS carbon footprint. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/nhs-scotland-climate-emergency-sustainability-strategy-2022-2026/> <https://gov.wales/nhs-wales-carbon-footprint-2018-2019>)

Reducing the carbon emissions of the supply chain will require the NHS to embed sustainability principles into procurement, such as selecting suppliers that adopt circular economy principles, and ensure that all Trusts and Health Boards are implementing procurement sustainability policy guidance. Decarbonising supply chains can present many challenges because they are complex and often opaque.

Reducing the carbon emissions of the estate and supporting facilities can be achieved through retrofitting insulation or renewable energy; however improvements to building structure (e.g. air tightness) and components are often required before sustainability enhancements



can be made, thus increasing the required investment.

To reduce the carbon emissions of patient, visitor, staff and supplier transport requires increased encouragement and access to low-emissions forms of transport such as electric buses, trains or charging points for electric cars.

Trusts and Health Boards should be looking to invest in sustainability throughout their supply chain, estates and facilities, and transport to reach NHS and national net zero commitments. This may have an upfront cost but can yield cost savings in the long term. For example, introducing 100% LED lighting would cost NHS England £492 million but would provide an estimated saving of £3 billion over the next 30 years.



Case study: Greener NHS » Boosting healthy and sustainable travel in Manchester (england.nhs.uk)

Case Study: Greener NHS » Solar power sparks an electrical future for Milton Keynes University Hospital (england.nhs.uk)

Climate adaptation

Climate change is likely to result in warmer, wetter winters, hotter, drier summers and more frequent extreme weather events, such as heatwaves and floods. Increased temperatures are also expanding the ranges where certain diseases thrive, such as malaria, dengue and Lyme disease. This is likely to alter infectious disease patterns in the UK and may also increase the frequency of future epidemics or pandemics.

The impact of climate change is likely to increase demand on health services; for example, heat-related mortality in persons older than 65 increased by 21% between 2004–2018. This increased demand is likely to present a significant cost burden on the NHS to provide health services.

Climate change impacts are also likely to impact the resilience of the NHS's services, with heatwaves having the potential to cause power outages which could put patients at risk through reduced access to home oxygen, water and air conditioning. Additionally, more frequent flooding events may disrupt access to health centres and delivering health services. To understand the projected effects of climate change in your area, the Met Office worked in collaboration with the BBC to create a useful visualisation tool for climate change in the UK.

Resilience to climate change impacts will be vital for NHS Trusts and Health Boards to continue to provide facilities and services despite increasing hazards and minimise costs. Extreme weather events will challenge access and safe conditions for patients, and so long-term adaptation plans should be in place to prepare the NHS for future climate extremes. Working with your Trusts' or Health Boards' business continuity or emergency teams will help you to understand which areas are at higher risk due to climate change, to prioritise responses accordingly. The NHS has also outlined steps to identify risks and build resilience through their Health and Care Adaptation Report. These actions will safeguard patients and reduce long-term costs involved with increased energy usage, asset damage or temporary solutions.

Case study: NHS Deliver Critical Message On Weather Through ITV (itvmedia.co.uk)

Air quality and pollution

Air pollution, both particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), are a substantial environmental risk to public health in the UK, with long-term exposure to air pollutants causing chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

The annual mortality caused by human-made air pollution in the UK each year is between 28,000 – 36,000 deaths. It was estimated that the potential cost to the England NHS and social care system due to the health impacts of PM2.5 and NO₂ particles between 2017–2025 is £1.69 billion. The NHS also accounts for a significant amount of road traffic, with 3.5% of all England road traffic contributed to the NHS, and can lead to localised air pollution around health facilities.

Air pollution should be reduced to a minimum, especially around healthcare facilities, to prevent further adverse health effects. Reducing transport emissions by encouraging walking, cycling and public transport, and for where it is financially viable transitioning to electric vehicles, will help to reduce overall localised pollution levels in communities and hospital environments. Converting ambulances and other fleet vehicles to low to zero carbon forms (e.g. electric, hydrogen) as well as vehicles in the supply chain would also contribute to reducing overall pollution levels.

Case study: Greener NHS » Green transport delivers life-saving drugs and improves patient experience (england.nhs.uk)

Water resources

Climate and land use change is likely to put UK water resources under increasing pressure. An increasing population, hotter drier summers and a need for greater storage could lead to increasing pressure on water resources, for example Southeast England. According to Department of Health, NHS England uses 39 billion litres of water per year. Reduced water resources in the future could impact the NHS through higher prices for water, reduced availability, or targets to reduce water consumption.

The NHS healthcare sector has already reduced its water consumption by 21% between 2010–2017; however, more can still be done to reduce the cost and consumption of water. For example, introducing rainwater harvesting for non-potable uses (water that is not suitable for drinking purposes), utilising other water-saving technologies, such as dual flushing loos, or simply quickly addressing leaks. Increasing the efficiency of water use within NHS operations will be vital to help safeguard water resources and reduce future water costs.

Case study: NHS Highland reduces water bill by a third in three years (scot.nhs.uk)

Biodiversity and nature-based solutions

Biodiversity and well-functioning ecosystems provide our fundamental needs, such as clean air, medicine, water and food. Unfortunately, the UK is in the bottom 12% globally for biodiversity loss, having only retained 50% of its natural biodiversity.

Healthy ecosystems, and their services, provide the foundation for a healthy population in ways that we may not realise. For example, 80% of registered medicines either come from or have been inspired by the natural world. Nature-rich green spaces also provide health benefits and can be utilised by the NHS to improve patient experiences. A frequently referenced study found that post-operative patients with a room overlooking nature had a shorter patient stay, which could also yield cost savings.

Nature can also contribute to climate change adaptation to aid with supporting buildings and occupants against extreme weather such as heatwaves. For example, the right amount of tree cover can reduce daytime temperatures by 10°C.

The NHS can negatively impact biodiversity through both its direct operations, such as building over green spaces, and its supply chain, through raw material extraction, processing and transport. It is important that the NHS understands its impact on biodiversity and works both on its own sites and with suppliers to protect natural assets



and promote a resilient healthcare system. Enhancing local nature can also provide opportunities to improve health benefits and offer alternative treatments.

Case study: The NHS Forest Nature Recovery Rangers scheme developed green spaces that could then be used for treatment such as physiotherapy or mental health.

Social well-being

Social well-being is the ability for people to hold relationships, be a part of a community and have a general sense of contentedness and belonging. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified mental health as the third leading cause of overall disease burden, which suggests significant demands will continue to be made on mental health services across NHS providers.

Mental health impacts can often be caused by a breakdown in social systems such as rising inequality or the loss of community support systems. There are also environmental inequalities which can lead to mental and physical health impacts. For example, poorer communities have a higher exposure to climate shocks, air pollution and poor water quality in rivers.

There are opportunities for the NHS to improve mental health using sustainability principles through community outreach, such as social prescribing, and through spending time in nature, also known as green social prescribing. These methods can help to improve one's mood, reduce feelings of stress and reduce loneliness.

Source: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

Case study: NHS England » Health and wellbeing service rebuilds trust with Grenfell community

Food, catering and nutrition

According to the BMA, around 63% of the UK population is overweight and 27% are obese, which can cause many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Obesity alone costs the NHS around £6 billion per year.

Supporting patients to consume a healthy, balanced diet can help with improved physical and mental health. It was found that offering good nutrition in hospitals has the potential to reduce recovery times, improve patient outcomes and therefore reduce costs to the NHS.

The NHS is the second biggest provider of meals in the UK public sector and served 141 million inpatient meals in 2018. For Trusts and Health Boards, it is important that their catering continues to have good nutrition that is in line with the Greener NHS programme and wider NHS Hospital Food Review, to improve patient health, reduce costs and support the environment.

Cast study: Hawkshead Community Hospital Gardening Club

Inequality

The effects of climate change are likely to affect different groups more severely than others, which is known as environmental inequality.

Environmental inequalities will result in certain groups of people experiencing greater negative health impacts due to climate change. For example, those who are older, have pre-existing medical conditions, or have social deprivation will experience more adverse health effects due to climate change.

The NHS will need to consider the unequal health outcomes related to climate change impacts and address these accordingly. Investing in health education can help increase the adaptive capacity of certain groups to address and recognise health problems. Working on providing equal healthcare for all groups in the UK will contribute to meeting social goals of sustainability within the NHS.

Case study: Glasgow and Clyde British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan – NHSGGC

Waste, recycling and circular economy

Waste is a significant challenge for the NHS, as healthcare practices use large quantities of single-use items to help stop the spread of infection, such as PPE.

Each patient that visits the NHS produces an average of 5.5kg of waste each day. Much of this waste will head to landfill or be incinerated, sometimes due to its actual or perceived hazardous/infectious nature, which results in significant pollution and increases the demand for primary resources to make new products. As resource supplies dwindle, this could mean increased costs for new items in the future.

Circular economy principles offer an opportunity, with the right re-use methods, for the NHS to reduce long-term costs and environmental impacts by switching from single-use items to reusable items. Switching to reusable items can also reduce carbon emissions. One study found that switching from single-use to reusable anaesthetic equipment in operating rooms can halve carbon emissions. Trusts or Health Boards should look at incorporating circular economy principles to contribute to the NHS's net zero targets.

Case study: Greener NHS » Reducing unnecessary cannulation at Charing Cross Hospital (england.nhs.uk)

5. Challenges and opportunities with implementing sustainability across the NHS

Challenges and opportunities with implementing sustainability

When considering how to address sustainability within the NHS, it is also important to understand the challenges associated with implementation. Understanding and addressing these can support efficient and effective implementation of sustainability initiatives and enable lasting change.

The challenges include:

- developing the required knowledge and skills to implement new approaches or treatments
- accessing the capital investment required to implement some sustainability initiatives such as retrofitting the estate, or purchasing re-useable equipment
- ensuring the continued quality of care through transitions to new working methods or processes by using methods such as using trial periods or pilots
- competing priorities across the NHS, reducing the time and skills required to identify and implement the changes required to deliver sustainability.

However, there are also a number of opportunities embedding sustainability can help to achieve:

- improving patient health outcomes through improving the healthcare environment, e.g. improved air quality within hospitals
- reduced operating costs and increased resilience against sustainability risks, e.g. through own provision of onsite renewable energy
- reduced treatment costs and improved patient outcomes through the use of social and environmental initiatives such as social prescribing.

6. What can NEDs in the NHS do to integrate sustainability?

NEDs within the NHS play an important role in setting the strategic direction of the Trusts/Health Boards, as well as undertaking assurance and challenge. This results in NEDs being in a unique position to help integrate sustainability into NHS Trusts/Health Boards.

Sustainability is a relatively new but important area for the NHS and integrating sustainability into the role of NEDs current and future, both as a primary area of focus or in specific champion roles, is a key mechanism to bringing about organisational-wide change.



Seek evidence from executives that sustainability is integrated across each directorate.



Delivering sustainability is not just the role of the sustainability team but all teams. Discussing with each executive how they contribute to the delivery of the sustainability targets will ensure all directorates are working towards the required goals.

Promote the benefits of sustainability on health outcomes.



The NHS's primary purpose is to improve health and well-being and it is important to understand that sustainability is not separate to this, addressing sustainability issues can also contribute to this purpose, whether through green spaces, reducing pollution or by supporting communities.

Ensure sustainability targets, reporting and governance is established and effective.



This should involve all directorates and targets should deliver against the priority sustainability areas for each Trust/Health Board. Reporting needs to meet the requirements of the NHS whilst also providing useful information to boards and NEDs to further understanding and enable evidence-based decision making.

Promote the work of the sustainability team.



Linking in with the Trust/Health Board sustainability team or associated roles within the Trust/Health Board will help increase visibility of their activities and support culture change across the organisation.

Understand the sustainability risks for the organisation



Include whether there are plans in place to mitigate these risks, including emergency procedures. Risk management is a clear and useful tool to manage activities and increase awareness.

Engage and seek out best practice initiatives across the country and join sustainability networks.



Across the NHS there is sustainability guidance and networks, which can be used to identify innovation and improve sustainability actions. See further information and reading at the end of this document for more details.

Challenge on sustainability progress and support the identification of sustainability opportunities.



As well as understanding the sustainability risks and actions, it is important to challenge on progress and ensure the organisation continues to strive for greater progress and integrate emerging best practice.

Ensure all investment, budget and design decisions are undertaken with a sustainability lens.



As investment and design decisions are usually taken early on in the overall process, they present a significant opportunity to integrate sustainability in a meaningful and effective way.

7. Sustainability conversation starters for NEDs

A key part of a NED's role in sustainability is to **seek evidence from executives that sustainability is integrated across each directorate**. To support NEDs to have these conversations with different members of the Board, we have developed a range of conversation starters that will direct the discussion towards key levers that can be used to improve sustainability. Where these conversations are technical in nature, involving your head of sustainability can be of benefit to guide the discussion and provide useful advice and knowledge:

Procurement

1. What and how is sustainability supplier assessment criteria being implemented and how is it impacting procurement decisions? NHS guidance on supplier assessments for sustainability through social value criteria can be found in the Policy Procurement Note 06/20
2. How is sustainability incorporated within procurement decisions alongside cost and quality?
3. How do we work with suppliers to improve the sustainability credentials of their products and what data do we collect?
4. What opportunities are there for implementing circular economy into the products we procure or identifying low-impact products, i.e. recycled or from community initiatives?

Finance

1. How is sustainability incorporated into all business cases and investment decisions? Do they consider social, environmental as well as economic factors?
2. Do we consider the long-term and short-term sustainability risks and opportunities associated with business cases and investment decisions?
3. How do we consider sustainability when undertaking budgeting and allocations?
4. Is sustainability fully embedded within our annual reporting processes?

Estates

1. How is sustainability incorporated into the estates and capital investment plan?
2. How is sustainability incorporated into estate maintenance and operations?
3. What green spaces are we developing and how are they being integrated into patient care for improved outcomes?
4. What estate climate adaptation plans do we have in place?

IT and data

1. What data in relation to sustainability do we collate and how is it presented?
2. Where have we updated workflows to incorporate sustainability and support sustainable decisions? Are there any other workflows we could update or tools we could use to encourage new behaviours that promote sustainability?

HR

1. What opportunities are there to integrate sustainability into leadership performance targets and objectives?
2. How can we integrate sustainability into role descriptions across the organisation?
3. Do we have an understanding of our sustainability skills gaps within the Trust/ Health Board?

Operations and clinical

1. How are we utilising alternative treatments and ways of working that are better for sustainability?
2. How is implementation of social prescribing progressing? Are there further opportunities?
3. Have we considered the use of circular economy principles in our delivery methods?

Risk and governance

1. What governance is currently in place for monitoring sustainability targets and actions? Is there enough integration and control through to Board level to influence and assure?
2. What are our sustainability risks across the organisation? Are there other emerging risks we are likely to add in the future?
3. How are we managing the link between service resilience risks and climate adaptation risks?
4. What plans are in place to address sustainability risks both in everyday and emergency situations?

Marketing and communication

1. How are we communicating progress, initiatives and education on sustainability?

Sustainability team

1. What data is available to understand our current sustainability risks and opportunities?
2. What are our current priorities and plans in relation to sustainability?
3. How can I support your team to meet the targets we have and expand our achievements?

8. 3 key steps NED's can take to develop sustainability within their organisation



The role NEDs can play in sustainability is broad and may take some time to be embedded and delivered. To support NEDs in establishing this role, the following set of actions have been developed to help prioritise and structure how it is adopted.

Step 1 – Developing knowledge and setting the ambition

- A. Undertake basic sustainability training to develop knowledge and confidence to challenge and promote sustainability.
- B. Understand the current sustainability ambition of your organisation and discuss with each member of the Executive Board their directorate's ambition on sustainability, including implementation and ongoing reviewing of the Green Plan.
- C. Consider options for incorporating sustainability as a skills requirement of future NEDs, ready for future appointments.
- D. Understand the sustainability risks for your organisation and review with the executive leadership team.

Step 2 – Establishing accountability

- A. Ensure sustainability risks and mitigation plans are discussed in detail at Board meetings at least three times a year.
- B. Ensure sustainability risks are allocated to one or more executive leadership team member.
- C. Assure the creation of sustainability targets that cover environmental, social and economic elements of sustainability and support the delivery of UK-wide sustainability commitments.
- D. Assure the establishment of organisation-wide sustainability governance forums to deliver and monitor action plans.
- E. Be an active participant to champion sustainability-led initiatives, and be a 'critical friend' where financial decisions may be negatively impacting sustainability initiatives.

Step 3 – Challenge and monitor the implementation of sustainability

- A. Review plans set by each executive for their directorate to contribute to the sustainability targets set.
- B. Challenge with the Executive Board how the sustainability risks are being mitigated and the residual risk that remains.
- C. Support executives to engage with local or national partners to undertake a systems approach to implementing sustainability initiatives.
- D. Review and monitor progress against targets.

As in many roles held by NEDs, sustainability requires significant engagement with the executive leadership team, and for the Board to undertake a range of activities. It is important for executives to also be given support and knowledge to understand and implement sustainability into their directorates.

9. Further reading

Recommended first reading:

- [Royal College of Physicians – Breaking the Fever Report](#)
- [Centre for Sustainable Healthcare](#)
- [Greener NHS](#)
- [Net Zero National Health Service report](#)
- [The Broadway Initiative](#)
- [A blueprint for green workforce transformation](#)

Training:

- [IEMA Training and professional development](#)
- [Carbon Literacy Project](#)
- [Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership \(CISL\)](#)
- [Centre for Sustainable Healthcare](#)

Other reading to explore areas of interest or priority further

The aim of this reading list is to provide some sample reading as an introduction to the sustainability topic. There are numerous other readings and therefore this list is not exhaustive.

Environmental

- [The United Nations](#)
- [The Living Planet Report](#)
- [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#)
- [NASA Global Climate Change](#)

Social

- [UN Global Compact](#)
- [Sustainable Development and Human Wellbeing](#)
- [UNSDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [PPN 06/20](#)

Economic

- [UNSDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production](#)
- [The Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#)
- [UN Global Compact Supply Chain Sustainability](#)
- [World Economic Forum](#)

Healthcare

- [Nature Positive – Healthy People, Healthy Planet](#)
- [Delivering a Net Zero NHS](#)
- [Healthcare Ocean](#)
- [Centre for Sustainable Healthcare](#)
- [Resources for Implementing your NHS Green Plan](#)

If you are interested in finding out more about RSK's services in healthcare and sustainability, please get in touch or access the website:

- [RSK Healthcare](#)
- [Nature Positive](#)

If you are interested in finding out more about IEMA's services around sustainability and how we support Trusts and Health Boards, please get in touch or access the website:

- [IEMA – Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment](#)
- [IEMA Corporate Partnership Programmes](#)

10. Acknowledgements

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More information on sustainability terminology

For up to date information and to stay informed on sustainability and current terminology please visit www.iema.net/resources



About IEMA

IEMA is the professional body for everyone working in environment and sustainability. We're committed to supporting, encouraging and improving the confidence and performance, profile and recognition of all these professionals. We do this by providing resources and tools, research and knowledge sharing along with high-quality formal training and qualifications to meet the real-world needs of members from their first steps on the career ladder, right to the very top. We believe that together we can change perceptions and attitudes about the relevance and vital importance of sustainability as a progressive force for good. Together we're transforming the world to sustainability.

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