

Annual Report and Accounts

2024-2025



The North West Neurosurgery Specialised Services Clinical Network Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25.

Presented to NHS England, under Schedule 2F (Clinical Networks) provisions of the NHS Standard Contract 2025/26, The Particulars.

Following the delegation of specialised commissioning in April 2024, also presented to:

- **NHS Cheshire and Merseyside**
- **NHS Greater Manchester**
- **NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria**

The North West Neurosurgery Specialised Services Clinical Network, funded by NHS England, is hosted by Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust with leadership from Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust.

[Contact the Network](#)



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Summary

Welcome to the second Annual Report from the new North West Neurosurgery Specialised Services Clinical Network.

This report covers the period from April 2024 to March 2025.

The report celebrates the Network's continued progress in establishing, developing credibility, and integrating with the region's health economy.

The included Highlight Report and Financial Summary are essential to the Network's reporting requirements.

The Network looks forward to progressing and working with members and partners to develop its strategy and exciting plans over the next year.



A Message from the Chair

Welcome to the second Annual Report from the North West Neurosurgery Specialised Services Clinical Network. This is my first report as Chair.

I am excited to have been appointed Chair in September 2024, following a thorough selection process. I have experience as the GIRFT Paediatric Neurosurgery National Clinical Lead, Chair of the Adult Neurosurgical Clinical Reference Group, Clinical Chair of the Trauma Programme of Care Board for NHS England, and former President of the Society of British Neurological Surgeons (SBNS). I look forward to leading the Network as it completes its establishment phase and transitions into delivery.



Professor Paul May.
Network Chair

This year, our focus has been on developing the right roles, recruiting the right people, and creating a structure to support the Network. I am delighted that we have appointed four clinical leads to devise our plans in collaboration with their respective Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and our Provider Members. We have also made significant progress in developing performance assessment methods using our data dashboards. We are advancing plans to integrate the Low-Volume High-Complexity commissioning model into the region. Additionally, we are moving towards establishing more partnership working arrangements with other Networks to share our efforts and benefits.

As the Network grows in its role over the coming year, I look forward to leading the Board and sharing our progress in the following Annual Report and Accounts.



About The Specialised Services Clinical Network

The North West Neurosurgery Specialised Services Clinical Network (SSCN) is a new collaboration model. Since mid-January 2024, it has started bringing together the three North West specialised neurosurgery providers. Previously known as Operational Delivery Networks, SSCN principles recognise the broader contribution collaborative approaches have on the NHS Triple Aim, the healthcare system, the economy, and population health.

The North West SSCN is one of eight Neurosurgery Networks funded by NHS England to

- Advance regional collaboration
- Release efficiencies
- Accelerate transformation

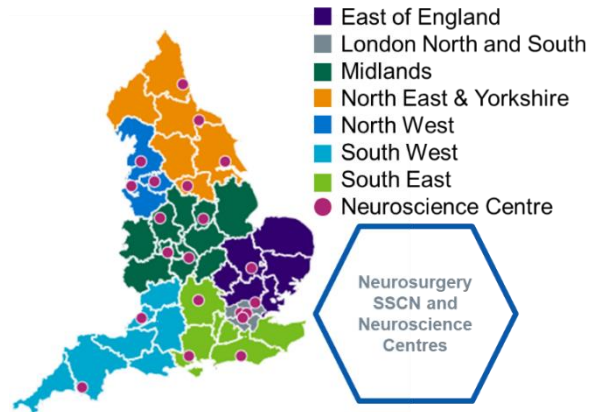


Figure 1

The SSCN has a catchment population of over nine million and coincides with three Integrated Care Boards. Table 1 lists the NHS Provider Members. From April 2024, the Network became further embedded in regional strategy and decision making, as the North West was included in the first phase of regions to delegate specialised services commissioning to Integrated Care Boards.

NHS Provider	Integrated Care Board	Catchment Population (Millions)
Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	NHS Lancashire & South Cumbria	1.9M
Manchester Centre for Clinical Neurosciences (Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust) and SSCN Host	NHS Greater Manchester	3.3M
The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust	NHS Cheshire and Merseyside	4.3M

Table 1

The SSCN is building strategic relationships with the North West Regional Spine Network and Strategic Clinical Networks, such as the Greater Manchester Neurorehabilitation & Integrated Stroke Delivery Network. The SSCN has a long-term vision to build a collaborative approach, working with and beyond the health sector to expand its influence and impact.



Network Functions

The SSCN contributes to the healthcare system through seven functions, described in the National Clinical Network Specification¹.



Figure 2

¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/specialised-services-clinical-network-specifications/#neuro>

North West Neurosurgery NHS Providers

The three North West neurosurgery NHS Providers are SSCN founding members. Together, they provide neurosurgery in three neuroscience centres and two satellite hospitals.



Figure 3

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

The Neurosurgery Directorate is a regional tertiary service for Lancashire and South Cumbria and supports the Regional Major Trauma service. As part of the Regional Neuroscience Centre, based at Royal Preston Hospital, the Directorate is closely linked with the Neurology, Neurophysiology, and Psychology Directorates, providing integrated care. The Neurosurgery Directorate provides a range of sub-specialisations with assigned theatre and ward facilities. These specialities offer clinics and complex Multi-Disciplinary Team Meetings (MDT) and liaise with other directorates.



The Directorate has a three-year strategy focusing on four strategic objectives.



1. To provide outstanding and sustainable healthcare to our local communities
2. To offer a range of high-quality specialist services to patients in Lancashire and South Cumbria
3. To drive health innovation through world-class education, training, and research
4. System working in a new NHS landscape

Manchester Centre for Clinical Neurosciences (Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust)

The neurosurgical service at Salford Royal Hospital serves the Greater Manchester and Eastern & Mid-Cheshire districts.

Through its well-developed subspeciality configuration, the service provides a broad range of care, with the largest clinical output of all providers in England², from the less complex end of the speciality to low-volume, high-complexity procedures. The service offers complex spinal surgery, Neuro-rehabilitation services, and the Greater Manchester Comprehensive Stroke Centre, including thrombectomy services. It also offers responsive emergency care in collaboration with co-located services such as the Greater Manchester Major Trauma Hospital.



The Manchester Centre for Clinical Neurosciences leads research through the Geoffrey Jefferson Brain Research Centre, a leading partnership with the University of Manchester and Health Innovation Manchester.

In 2023/24, the Neurosurgery service significantly improved the waiting list position, approximately halving the number of patients on the waiting list. This work has continued in 2024/25.

The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust

The Walton Centre is the only specialist NHS Trust in the UK dedicated to providing comprehensive neurosurgery, neurology, spinal, and pain management services. It is rated Outstanding by the Care Quality Commission. The Walton Centre is a teaching hospital closely associated with the



² As reported by [NHS England » The Model Health System](#)

University of Liverpool and Edge Hill University. The Trust was awarded University status in 2022.

The Neurosurgery Division is one of the busiest in the UK, offering a full spectrum of services and interventions. It is focused on delivering safe, effective, and timely care, and is committed to further reducing patients' waiting times while supporting the broader healthcare system.

The Trust provides emergency care as part of the Major Trauma Centre Collaborative and is co-located with the Major Trauma Centre at Aintree University Hospital.

The Neurosurgery Division also leads research through the Neuroscience Research Centre, working in partnership to lead and undertake academic and commercial research in all aspects of neurological, neurosurgical, and pain conditions.



National Transformation Programme

The Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) programme reviewed adult Neurosurgery services. In June 2018, the National Speciality Report³ described 15 recommendations to justify further reducing unwarranted variation and increasing pathway agility.

In 2020, the Nuffield Trust independently reviewed neurosurgery services, finding themes and improvement opportunities similar to those recommended by GIRFT.

The COVID-19 Pandemic tested the healthcare system and exacerbated the themes described by GIRFT and the Nuffield Trust, requiring a focus on recovering Neurosurgery services and ensuring pathways are sustainable.

Supported by the National Transformation Clinical Reference Group (CRG), NHS England responded to these drivers by sponsoring a Neurosurgery Transformation Programme (NSTP). The initiative brings together stakeholders and is aligned with the GIRFT programme to understand challenges, capture insights, and support improvements in specialised Adult Neurosurgery services in England.

³ [Cranial Neurosurgery - Getting It Right First Time - GIRFT](#)



The National Neurosurgery Challenge

The NSTP summarised the context as 'The National Neurosurgery Challenge', Figure 4.

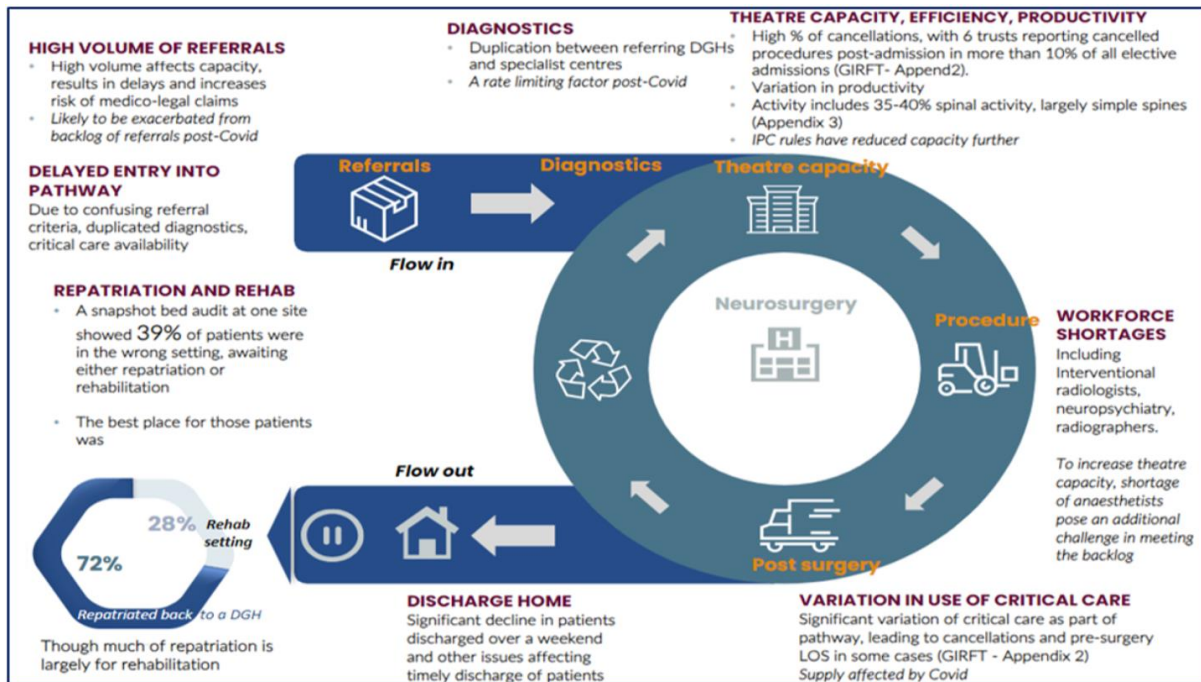


Figure 4

Rising to the Challenge

The NSTP has delivered four interventions and identified five Recovery High Impact Changes (RHIC) to respond to the National Neurosurgery Challenge (Figure 5), including creating Neurosurgery SSCN.

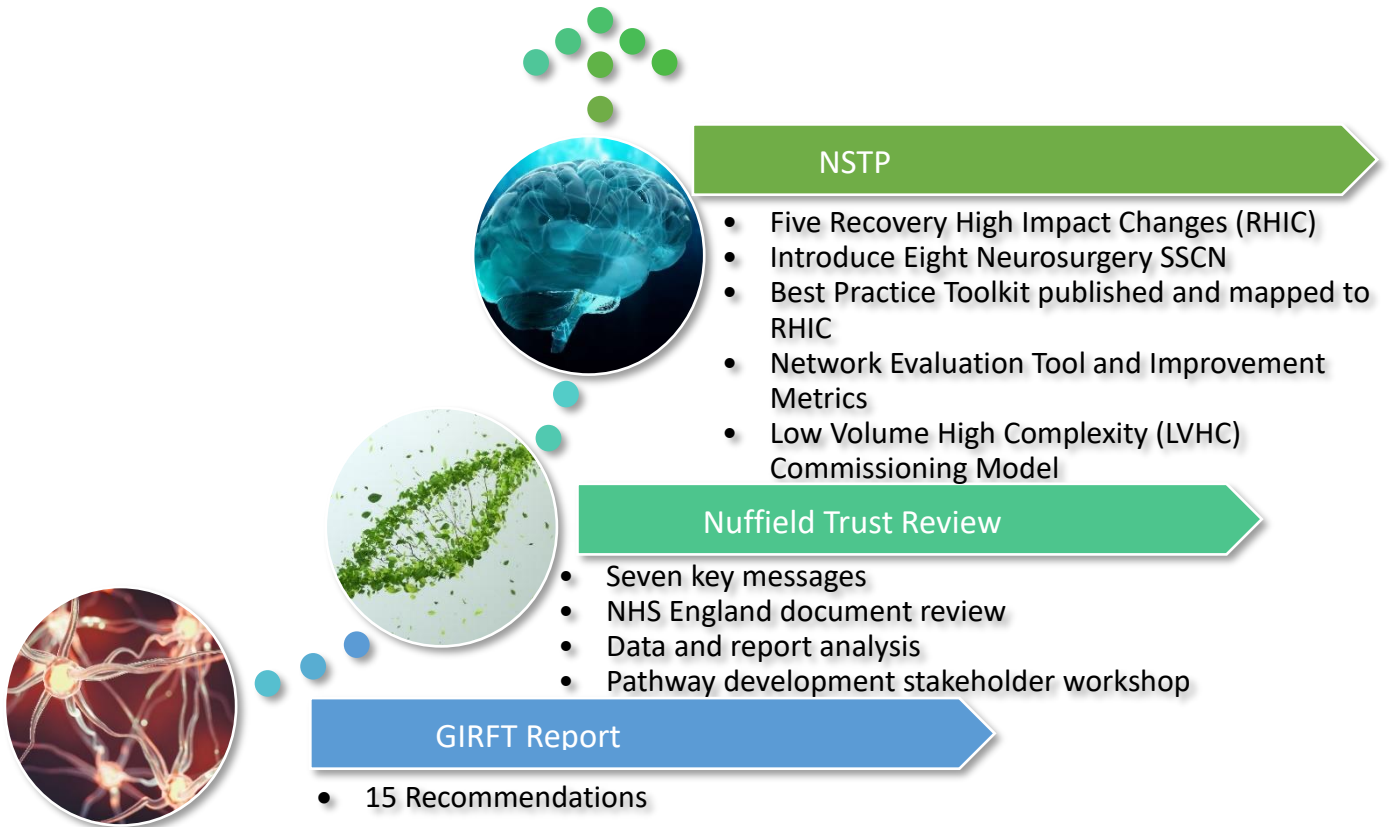


Figure 5

In April 2024, NSTP transferred to a business-as-usual model. The Network has incorporated the NSTP's legacy into the SSCN's strategy, recognising the early priority of adapting and adopting the LVHC Care Model in the North West.



Network Overview 2024/25

The North West Neurosurgery Specialised Services Clinical Network is a collaborative NHS Network completing its establishment phase.







The SSCN's single priority is to establish **a structure, strategy, and annual plan by summer 2025.**

By summer 2025, the SSCN will have completed its single priority and transition to a permanent delivery phase.

This year, the Network Manager and Chair have focused on recruiting Network Officers, subject matter experts and developing a structure to enable an effective Network Board. This has contributed to improving compliance with Network Performance Indicators.

Our People

We have created a robust team of Network Officers to lead the SSCN through the Board.

Network Officers		Officers work together to lead the Network	
Chair Professor Paul May		Network Manager Alastair Leslie-Dakers	
Clinical Lead, Cheshire & Merseyside Professor Michael Jenkinson		Joint Clinical Lead, Greater Manchester Professor Andrew King	
Joint Clinical Lead, Greater Manchester Ms Tina Karabatsou		Clinical Lead, Lancashire & South Cumbria Mr Aprajay Golash	



We are recruiting Subject Matter Experts. Reporting to the Board, these roles enable the SSCN to deliver our strategy and annual plan.

Roles in recruitment include:

- Operational Leads
- Continuous Improvement Lead
- Project, Communications and Engagement Officer

Principles

With our Network Officers, we have developed a set of enduring principles. The SSCN Principles provide a method for decision-making and impact assessment by linking strategic aims with three common, long-standing, and relatable Principles. These complement the Vision and Purpose statements and SSCN functions set by the National Clinical Network Specification.

Access	Outcomes	Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilising, organising, and enhancing the Network's resources and those which it influences for the benefit of stakeholders whilst overcoming interaction limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effect and result of utilising, organising and enhancing the Network's resources and those which it influences on stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder's impressions resulting from utilising, organising, and enhancing the Network's resources and those which it influences

Structure

The SCN has developed a structure, Figure 6, to enable its business as it transitions to delivery.



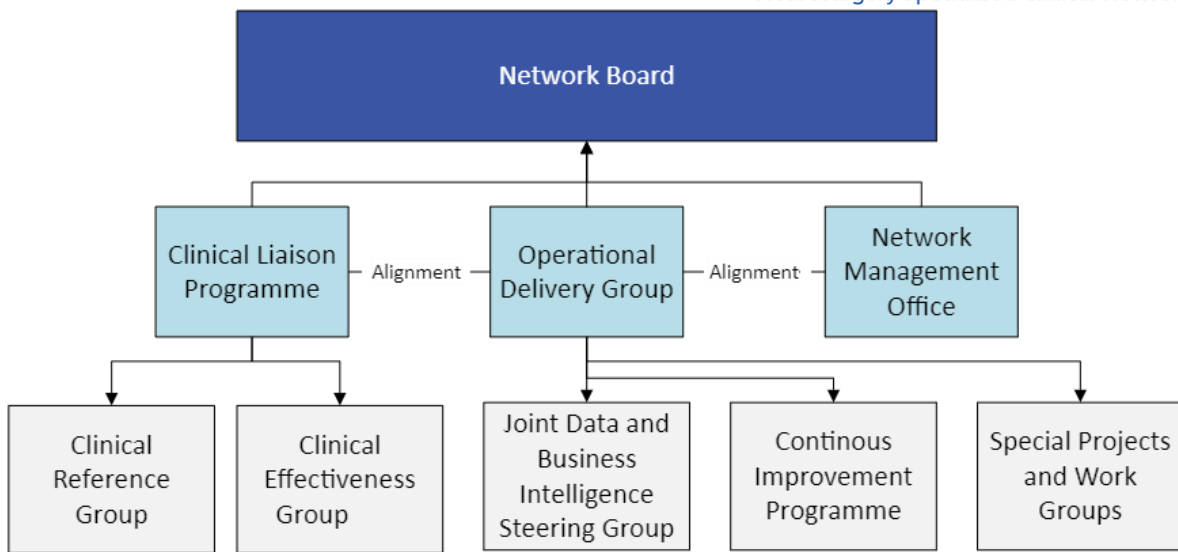


Figure 6



Performance Assessment

The National Clinical Network Specification sets a series of Network Performance Indicators. In 2024/25, the SSCN has improved on all indicators compared to the 2023/24 baseline. The SSCN is fully compliant with ten of the sixteen indicators and has initiated plans to develop compliance with the remaining in 2025/26.

Table 2 illustrates the SSCN's position at the end of 2024/25.

Indicator	2023/24 Status	2024/25 Status
There is an appropriate network management team in post with the skills to deliver the specification.	Orange	Green
The network board meets at least thrice yearly, is quorate, and records minutes, actions, and risks.	Red	Green
As appropriate to the network specification, there are regular network specialist Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings (or equivalent)	Orange	Green
IT facilities enable communication across the network, support image transfer, and allow remote participation in the MDT.	Orange	Green
An annual work plan has been agreed upon with the network's commissioners.	Red	Green
There is an agreed plan for PPV engagement.	Red	Orange
There is an analysis of the service needs of the population served by the network, a gap analysis and a plan agreed upon with the network's commissioners to meet those needs.	Red	Orange
There are network-agreed patient pathways, procedures, and protocols.	Red	Orange
An analysis of workforce requirements and a plan agreed upon with network members to meet these requirements are needed.	Red	Orange
Some arrangements (passporting) enable workforce flexibility between providers within the network.	Red	Green
An analysis of training needs and an annual network training plan is agreed upon with network members.	Red	Orange
The network's data and information needs are analysed, and a plan to meet these requirements is agreed upon with network members.	Red	Green
There is a network-agreed research strategy, including access and participation in clinical trials.	Red	Orange
The annual work plan includes at least one quality improvement initiative.	Red	Green



An annual report summarising the network's work and outcomes is produced and includes a financial statement.	Red	Green
The network participates in the national network of networks.	Orange	Green

Key

Standard Not Met	Standard Partially Met	Standard Met
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Table 2



Highlight Report

The Highlight Report demonstrates the SSCN's contribution in 2024/25 towards the NHS triple aim.

Neurosurgery Specialised Services Clinical Network		
Network Manager:	Alastair Leslie-Dakers	
Network Co-Clinical Leads:	Professor Andrew King, Mr Aprajay Golash, Professor Michael Jenkinson, Ms Tina Karabatsou,	
Contact email:	Alastair.lesliedakers@nca.nhs.uk	
Alert	Action	Owner
SSCN's ability to fully allocate and utilise recurrent income in the short term (2025/2026)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular dialogue with the host Finance Business Partner Develop a recruitment and finance plan with the Network Board Finance use and reporting process embedded in the Standard Operating Policy Shared expectation between Network and Host that funding is ring-fenced 	Network Board
SSCN investment may be required to realise NSTP outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSTP engagement through Network of Networks meetings Expectation setting through the delegation of the specialised services commissioning process 	Network Board
There is variation in capital equipment and estate between providers. For example, the availability of intra-operative MRI Scanners, dedicated theatres, separation of services between hospital buildings, limited and shared clinic and office space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provider-based Positional Analysis in development to inform strategy and annual plan 	Network Board
Advise		
The first Network Board meeting is planned for June 2025, following a scene-setting away day between Network Officers in April 2025. The Network Board will focus on plans to address the remaining Network Performance Indicators and Network Functions.		
Assure		
The SSCN's improved performance indicators show full compliance with ten out of sixteen indicators and plans to address the remaining ones by 2025/26.		
Applaud		
The successful establishment of a robust group of Network Offices and Subject Matter Experts who are working collaboratively to enhance the SSCN's structure and effectiveness, contributing to improved compliance with Network Performance Indicators.		



Accounts

Financial Summary

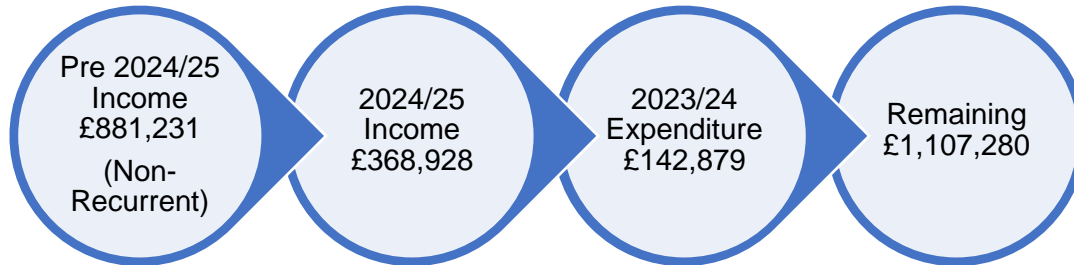


Figure 7

Financial Position

The SSCN received £368,928 in funding from NHS England for 2024/25. Funding was also available for Networks from previous financial years, which has now been allocated and is available as a non-recurrent resource.

The primary expenditure in 2024/25 was pay, which is expected to continue in the long term, as Networks are people and knowledge-based.

With a favourable cash position, plans are in development to create significant business cases, including the integration of the Low-Volume High-Complexity model, workforce engagement, and pathway optimisation in 2025/26.

The SSCN depends on recurrent funding from NHS England to be sustainable in the

long term. It expects to receive £374,000 from NHS England in 2025/26, with an uplift to be confirmed.

Finance Risks

The SSCN has identified three sources of financial risk. See the Strategic Risks section for further details.

1. SSCN's ability to fully allocate and utilise recurrent income in the short term (2025/26)
2. SSCN investment may be required to realise NSTP outcomes
3. External factors, such as inflation, pay awards, industrial action, and organisational and care model restructure may introduce financial pressures in the medium to long-term



Risk Management

The SSCN operates a risk management framework that distinguishes between various risks we encounter.

Strategic risks impact the ability to deliver the strategy. These are reported externally to NHS England and the Integrated Care Boards and feature in the Annual Report.

Programme risks affect the SSCN work programmes.

Operational risks are associated with internal operations, processes, and the way the SSCN operates.

Uncertainties and Assumptions

Topics which the SSCN is aware of, but more information is needed to understand the impact and form a response.



Strategic Risks

Risk	Management Approach
<p>SSCN's ability to fully allocate and utilise recurrent income in the short term (2025/2026)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular dialogue with the host Finance Business Partner • Develop a recruitment and finance plan with the Network Board • Finance use and reporting process embedded in the Standard Operating Policy • Shared expectation between Network and Host that funding is ring-fenced
<p>SSCN investment may be required to realise NSTP outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSTP engagement through Network of Networks meetings • Expectation setting through delegation of the specialised services commissioning process
<p>External factors, such as inflation, pay awards, industrial action, and organisational and care model restructure may introduce financial pressures in the medium to long-term</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horizon scanning • Contingency funding included in finance planning
<p>There is variation in capital equipment and estate between providers. For example, the availability of intra-operative MRI Scanners, dedicated theatres, separation of services between hospital buildings, limited and shared clinic and office space</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider-based Positional Analysis in development to inform strategy and annual plan

