

# The Improvement Unit Annual Review 2024/25

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# Our year



**I am pleased to present The Improvement Unit's Annual Review for 2024/25.**

This Annual Review showcases the work and the impact of the Improvement Unit over the past 12 months.

We are immensely proud to be part of the NHS family working with providers, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and NHS England (NHSE) on a regional and national basis, to deliver sustainable improvements across a wider variety of health and care areas.

We have a track record of achieving excellent outcomes for our clients. This is delivered by working in partnership to fully understand their needs and developing tailored solutions, underpinned by our operational excellence ethos. We are also able to draw on the breadth of skills and experience from the Improvement Unit team and our wider network of subject matter experts.

The Review gives a snapshot of the diversity of our programmes of work and the impact that has been achieved.

Looking forward, we are continuing to build on our improvement work, with the emphasis on rapid improvement initiatives and quality improvement strategic partnering, as well as developing our approach to recovery and assurance of complex programmes.

Finally, I would like to thank all the team and those involved in our programmes for their fantastic efforts in delivering for our clients, partners and patients.



**Ratna Taylor**

Director of the Improvement Unit



## A selection of our focus areas

For more detail, please see the [case studies](#) section of this report or our website.

### 1. Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) Start for Life Programme

The Improvement Unit undertakes a collaborative, targeted review of the DHSC's Start for Life programme, leading to improved programme management, assurance and delivery processes

### 2. Improving Dementia Care Through a National Self-Assessment Toolkit

The Improvement Unit creates, tests, and rolls out a national Dementia 100 self-assessment toolkit, bringing together a wide range of policies, standards and recommendations into one place

### 3. General Practice Improvement Programme (GPIP)

The Improvement Unit, as part of the CSU collaborative, provides hands-on support to practices wanting to implement opportunities to improve productivity, patient outcomes and staff wellbeing



# Our impact over 2024/25

Delivering innovative and tailored consultancy and project support across the NHS



30+



highly skilled programme, project and improvement specialists

Worked on

11

national Programmes of work, alongside NHSE and DHSC

29



projects or programmes of work delivered to 11 different customers across health and social care

We were delighted to partner with

8

brand new customers during 2024/25

We received a

100%



customer satisfaction score for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year running



# Our customers

*During 2024/25 we worked alongside a wide range of NHS and health and care related organisations.*



**Our work has ranged from large national programmes of work with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHSE, to local and neighbourhood level engagement.**

## **NHS Provider Trusts**

- Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS FT
- Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS FT
- North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS FT

## **Integrated Care Boards**

- Lancashire and South Cumbria
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

## **NHSE Regional Team Northwest**

- Breast Screening
- Health and Justice
- Specialised Commissioning

## **NHSE Regional Team Midlands**

- Histopathology
- Pathology

## **Department of Health and Social Care**

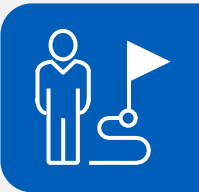
- Dementia 100
- Start for Life

## **NHSE National**

- Digital Pharmacy
- Digital Prevention
- Future For Medicines
- GP Improvement Programme
- Health Equity Audit Guidance
- National Prevention
- New Hospital Programme
- One Digital
- Primary Care Support Services



# Our expertise



**The Improvement Unit works in partnership with a wide range of public sector organisations (including NHS and care organisations), supporting them in developing and delivering their improvement, transformation, and innovation plans, projects, and strategies.**

Through collaborative design and delivery, we support improving clinical outcomes, better patient experiences, adding value, and improving quality and productivity:

- As an NHS organisation, we share your values, with unparalleled NHS experience and health system relationships.
- Our team members are qualified experts in quality improvements and programme and project management.
- Our place on all the major NHS and public sector procurement frameworks makes us very easy to access.
- Our support ranges from project management of small, bespoke interventions to major change and improvement strategies and nationwide initiatives involving multiple partners.
- Our ability to rapidly deploy resources will support you quickly and efficiently.



## Quality Improvement

Our team are highly experienced and trained to deliver a range of CQI methodologies to support organisational improvement activities, including:

- Lean 6 Sigma
- QSIR
- Model for Improvement

Our extensive experience also enables us to co-design bespoke CQI methodologies, enabling improvement approaches to be tailored to individual organisational needs.

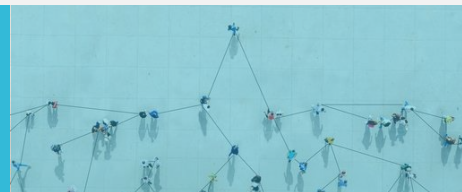


## Programme Management

Our team provides all aspects of project and programme management including project scoping, planning, delivery, monitoring, risk management and stakeholder engagement.

Our expertise is underpinned by industry standard qualifications in:

- PRINCE2
- MSP



## Leadership and Coaching

Our team are experts in leading for change, with the ability to influence and motivate others towards achieving a common goal.

Our expertise is underpinned by qualifications in:

- NHS Health and Care Leadership
- Coaching



# Case Study:

## Programme Improvement for DHSC's Start for Life Programme



Start for Life is a national programme, providing trusted NHS advice and guidance to ensure a healthy and happy start for children during pregnancy and early parenthood. The Start for Life Unit at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) were approaching a critical point in their programme and requested support to review aspects of the programme, make quick-win improvements and provide recommendations for further developments.

The Improvement Unit provided support to identify the gaps, opportunities and strengths of the current processes, and then strengthened assurance, risk management and implementing best practice approaches.

### What we did:

The Improvement Unit established 5 workstreams for programme improvement, utilising a co-development approach with DHSC and Department for Education (DfE) colleagues. Our actions included:

- **A desktop review** of 4 workstreams: Programme Assurance, Programme Management, Programme Reporting and Family Hub, Parent and Carer Panels and Start for Life provision
- **Conducting a comprehensive lessons learnt exercise** (workstream 5)
- **Developing a roadmap** for reporting future benefits realisation
- **Developing a new assurance report** utilising existing intelligence
- **Delivering quick-win improvements** of the programme management approach, including risk management
- **Undertaking comprehensive mapping** of each local authority's offers, highlighting examples of best practice and areas requiring further support
- **Delivering a final report with clear recommendations** and suggested SMART action plans to promote sustainable long-term programme improvements

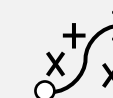


### Outcomes:

**Further strengthened joint working** across DHSC and DfE teams, with the development of a joint work plan



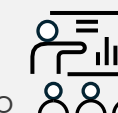
**Moved the programme towards more streamlined and effective processes**, tools and guidance for programme delivery, such as reporting and assurance



**Increased clarity on challenges and opportunities** with realistic, co-designed suggestions for further actions to promote sustainable improvements



**Increased clarity on areas of best practice** and common challenges faced by local authorities delivering the programme, with opportunities to continue to spread best practice across all local authorities



Please find the full case study on our website - [Start for Life Case Study](#)





# Case Study:

## Improving Dementia care through a national self-assessment toolkit



### Project Aims:

The pathway for people living with dementia and their carers is complex, commissioned and delivered by multiple agencies and disciplines, and guided by a wide range of policies, standards and recommendations.

The Department of Health and Social Care commissioned ML Improvement Unit to create, test and roll out a **national dementia 100 self-assessment tool** to bring together these policies, standards and recommendations into one place.

Development of a Place-based tool was required to enable a route for identifying opportunities for improvement, supporting strategy development and reducing variation across a System.

### What we did:

**Research:** We undertook a full literature review to understand existing guidance, alongside qualitative research, with a range of health and social care professionals.

**Pilots:** We piloted the self-assessment tool with 14 Places across 4 Systems and established an Expert Advisory Group to undertake a desktop review. Combined findings and experiences were used to inform the final design of the resources.



**Service user engagement:** We facilitated co-production with the Alzheimer's Society Lived Experience Group and Carers Services to support a holistic approach and inform the context of the work.

**National rollout:** We supported national rollout through a robust communication strategy, including written and verbal communications, engagement across a wide range of partners and the production of training materials.

The Dementia 100 self-assessment tool will provide Places and Integrated Care Systems with a standardised and evidence-based framework to:

**Work towards a Neighbourhood Health approach** across services for people living with dementia



**Quality assess and assure**, enabling services to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of dementia care provision



**Reduce variation and create economies of scale** through identification and spread of best practice



“The tool has enabled us to understand the baseline in our services in order to know where to focus our efforts for improvement and reduce variation across the system. Our patients will gain the benefits of this which is our ultimate aim.”

For a full introduction to the tool and its use please follow this link: [National dementia 100 self-assessment tool](#)

**Mental Health Programme Manager**  
Lancashire & South Cumbria ICB





# Case Study:

## Driving Continuous Improvement in Histopathology Services



### Project Aims:

NHS England Midlands commissioned NHS Midlands and Lancashire's Improvement Unit (IU) to conduct a review of Histopathology local improvements, and to:

- Provide region wide understanding of Histopathology improvements, impacts, benefits and challenges.
- Support networks to embed a continuous improvement and learning culture.
- Make recommendations to improve performance of individual laboratories and wider Pathology networks in support of their move to digitisation, progression of their six-point plans, and in achieving network maturity.



### What we did:

**Defined the review's scope and priorities** in collaboration with the Histopathology network stakeholders, and established governance and reporting structures to ensure clarity and accountability throughout the review.

**Managed stakeholder engagement activities**, including:

- **One-to-one engagement sessions with laboratory sites** to gather critical intelligence on local issues and identify opportunities for improvement.
- **Face-to-face workshop design and facilitation** to present progress and celebrate successes, reinforcing the cultural importance of LEAN and continuous improvement.
- **Facilitated a virtual feedback session** to share initial findings with network representatives and SMEs, allowing further feedback to refine recommendations.

**Conducted site visits** to gain practical, on-the-ground understanding of laboratory processes, operational challenges, and the impact of their improvement activities.

**Analysed data** from desktop reviews, process mapping, and virtual workshop feedback to identify themes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement across the network.

**Provided key findings, strategic recommendations and guidance** to drive performance improvements, achieve sustainability, and promote a culture of excellence.

### Outcomes:

#### **Supported improved quality, efficiency, and productivity**

across the Histopathology network, by identifying specific areas for improvement addressing challenges within laboratory processes and workflows



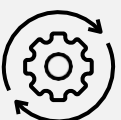
#### **Fostered a culture of continuous improvement**

through engagement sessions and workshops, aligning stakeholders across the Histopathology network to embrace improvement methodologies and resolve challenges collaboratively



#### **Supported improved operational efficiency and performance**

through sharing of best practice. We expect this to lead to improvements in diagnostic accuracy and reduced turnaround times to directly benefit patient care and service delivery



Please find the full case study on our website – [Histopathology Case Study](#)



# Case Study:

## Cost Improvement Programme: Project Management Support



### Project Aims:

To provide project management support to an NHS Hospital Trust in the North-West to progress their Cost Improvement Programme (CIP) schemes of work that had not reached delivery. NHS Trusts undertake CIP schemes to secure financial savings without impacting on services and patient safety. Establishment of strong systems, processes and governance is required to ensure the success of CIP schemes.

### What we did:

- **Established positive working relationships** with Trust colleagues and scheme owners.
- **Allocated resource** to each Care Group (Surgery, Medicine, Core Clinical & Community)
- **Undertook training** on the CIP software solution and subsequently managed this system to record scheme progress.
- **Attended** all relevant Finance Improvement Programme meetings with senior Trust colleagues.
- **Prioritised schemes** and identified those which would benefit most from project management support.
- **Worked with scheme owners** to identify, document and track milestones. Liaised with the wider teams and supported completion.
- **Facilitated the completion** of Quality Impact Assessment and Equality Impact Assessments.
- **Captured risks/issues and themes** for wider improvements.



### Outcomes:

**Enabled the trust to realise an estimated £1.5m in savings** as part of their CIP programme



**Significant number of cost improvement schemes progressed** from identifying a scheme owner towards having an action plan to support delivery



**Improved 'real time' view of the status of schemes,** achieved by fewer delays in updates to the CIP system and greater understanding of the requirements for them to be progressed



**Improved consistency of approach to CIP management** across the Care Groups to promote effective scheme delivery and activity



Please find the full case study on our website : [CIP Project Management Support Case Study](#)



# Case Study:

## Prescribing Pilots for Pharmacotherapy

### Project Aims:

Following the publication of the NICE Technology Appraisal for Semaglutide (Wegovy), the Department for Health and Social Care asked NHS England to design a nationwide pilot for 9000 patients, with an aim of exploring alternative pathways to access pharmacotherapies for the management of obesity in adults, and to inform future measures to alter the environment for obesity. NHSE commissioned NHS Midlands and Lancashire's Improvement Unit to work on the Obesity Prevention Programme and provide project support with planning and delivery management. Due to significant public interest in this work, including high-level government and media, exceptional stakeholder management was critical.

### What we did:

**National Consultation:** We supported a series of workshops with stakeholders to share national updates, hosted deep-dive 121 interviews with service delivery leads, and designed a Pilot Proposal template document for ICBs, inclusive of supporting information.

**Ensured Equality, Diversity & Inclusion:** We collaborated with DHSE to produce comprehensive EHIA and HEAT assessments to understand impact and to support ICBs with internal governance and sign-off. We created 'patient profiles' to test models against the 9 protected characteristics.



**Options Appraisal:** We undertook process mapping for Dispense & Delivery service options and potential patient pathways, containing critical risks and issues, legal guidance and restrictions.

**Procurement Support:** We produced the Business Case, Service Specifications and supporting documents. We created Prior Information Notice (PIN), and Invitation to Tender (ITT) document.

Please find further case studies on our website: [LINK](#)

### Outcomes:

**Our consultation and options appraisal support** identified that the recommendations issued in NICE Early Value Assessments (EVAs) may not match the needs of patients in clinical trials / pilots



**We highlighted the legal requirement** to include Community Pharmacy in dispensing services as per NHS Act Section 7



**Programme findings have informed future approaches** for the management of obesity via pharmacotherapy, with learnings already being applied for the rollout of Tirzepatide



*“ The Health Equity Assessment is one of the best I have ever seen. Well done to all involved. We are sharing this as an example of best practice to all our staff. ”*

**Senior Principal for Health Equity**  
Black Country ICB



# Other areas of focus



The Improvement Unit are immensely proud to be part of the NHS family, working in partnership to fully understand our clients needs and to develop tailored solutions underpinned by our skills and experience.

## Health Inequalities

The Improvement Unit is committed to supporting the enduring mission of the NHS to ensure quality care for all. We have supported systems to understand where health inequalities in service provision exist, enabled engagement to ensure the voice of lived experience is included in commissioning and improvement, and developed offers to support NHS systems to better understand their own populations.

## Mobilisation

Our approach to mobilisation, which can be bespoke to meet system plans, supports systems to navigate through the challenges and barriers involved with their change programmes, ensuring timely delivery and supporting teams to optimise the realisation of benefits.

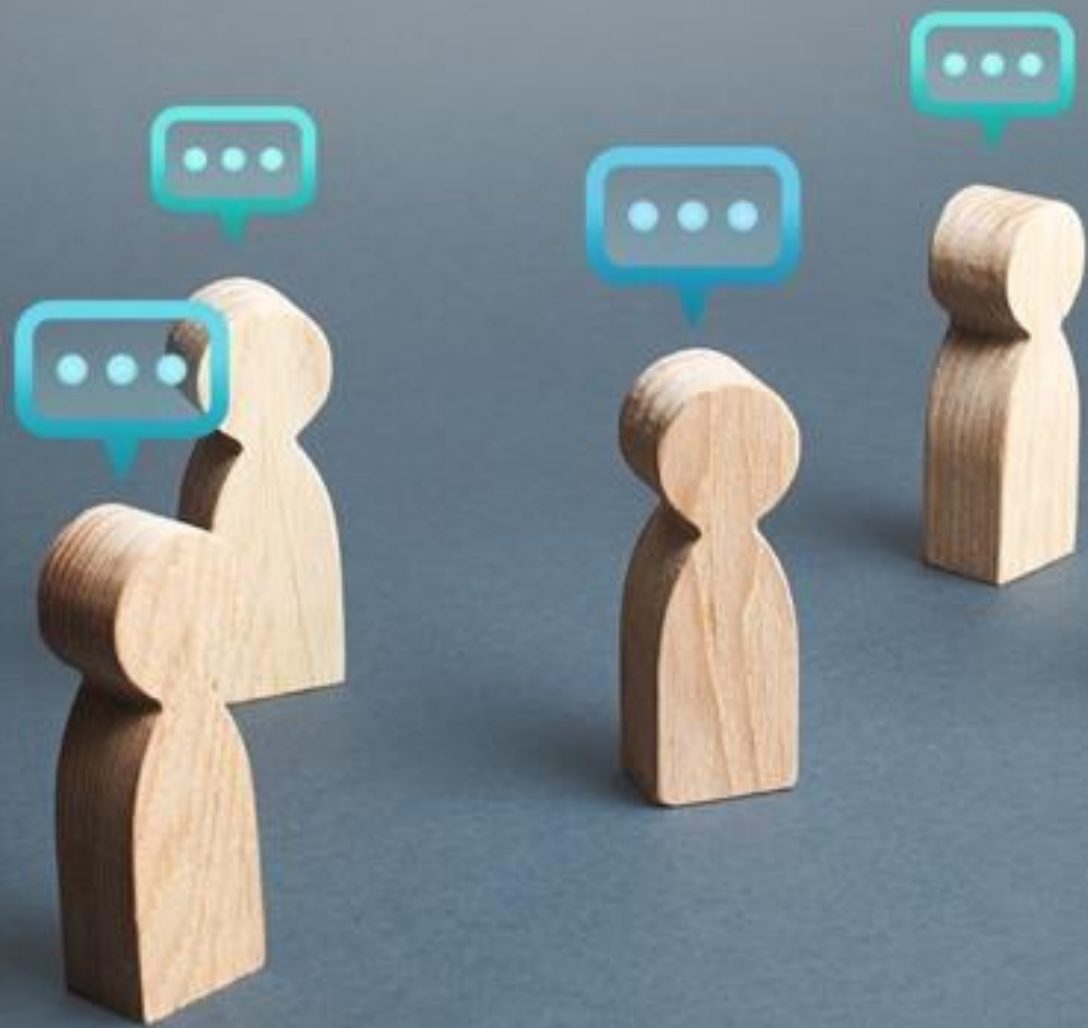
## System working

We have a proven approach to integrating into systems building key relationships, focussing on shared knowledge and expertise, to support systems in optimising the delivery of their strategic and operational plans. In addition, we are able to bring a wide range of subject matter expertise to system programmes, ensuring comprehensive, accurate knowledge, data enhances system plans.





# Customer feedback



“ The work completed has supported and informed our decisions around the future commissioning of the services reviewed”

“ The team demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and softer skills throughout the project to overcome the challenges and resistance they encountered”

“ Despite tight deadlines, the team stayed focused, organised, and supportive of one another, which allowed us to deliver a high-quality piece of work”

“ Fantastic to work with.....patient, approachable and went out of their way to answer our questions and find ways to support our ideas. They genuinely cared about the project and their passion and belief for the service was inspiring.

“ Just wanted to say, I think what you have done here is brilliant and will save so much time in the future”

“ The Improvement Consultants have been a pleasure to work with and have become an integral part of the operational team in their support, understanding and drive for success. The overall improvement journey would not have been realised without them”

“ The team worked at pace and collaboratively with all partners involved, producing clear recommendations and practical insights that will help inform our next steps”

“ Totally inclusive and welcoming of any of my ideas and challenges and genuinely a great team all round”

The Improvement Unit delivers four core services to support NHS, care organisations and related sectors in developing and delivering their improvement, transformation, and innovation plans, projects, and strategies.

## Project & Programme Management

Our Improvement Unit team will rapidly mobilise and provide all aspects of project and programme management, optimisation, assurance and recovery, supporting you to deliver lasting change, to deadline and within budget

## Improve Performance, Quality & Efficiency

Our Improvement Unit team will work with you to agree on a clear understanding of your improvement requirements, enabling us to co-design a flexible approach and develop realistic, practical solutions that are effective and sustainable

## Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Our Improvement Unit team will apply our robust Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) operational framework to support you in developing a continuous quality improvement culture, with enhanced improvement capabilities and capacity

## Strengthen System Partnerships and Collaboration

Our Improvement Unit team will work with you and your system partners to build an approach to prioritised system change and transformation through collaboration and partnership working





# Our services: key activities



Through collaborative design and delivery, we support improving clinical outcomes, better patient experiences, adding value, and improving quality and productivity.



## Project & Programme Management

### Key activities we can undertake to support you:

- Rapid mobilisation of a Programme Management Office with a dedicated team of resources
- Provide programme optimisation, assurance and/or recovery, to meet your deadlines and your budget
- Lead on project scoping, planning, delivery, monitoring, risk management and stakeholder engagement
- Adopt best practice tools and techniques, such as PRINCE2 and MSP
- Work across footprints from Place level to nationwide, in partnership with clients

**We will help ensure programmes and projects are delivered on time and within budget**



## Improve Performance, Quality & Efficiency

### Key activities we can undertake to support you:

- Analyse root causes of system and pathway challenges
- Co-design and deliver improvements with key stakeholders
- Facilitate system learning and innovation through benchmarking, best practice identification and establishing collaborative learning networks
- Apply improvement methodology, tools and techniques to reduce waste, add value and improve outcomes
- Support system integration efficiencies through alignment of processes across organisations

**We will deliver successful and sustainable service-level improvement programmes**



# Our services: key activities



As an NHS organisation, we share your values, with unparalleled NHS experience and health system relationships



## Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

### Key activities we can undertake to support you:

- Board level engagement to align CQI with your priorities
- Collaborate and co-design with staff, system-wide partners and people with lived experience
- Develop a CQI leadership and management approach
- Build improvement capacity and capability across your organisation through a tailored education dosing strategy
- Develop your Quality Management System (QMS) to ensure improvement is built into your organisation's infrastructure, its systems and its daily processes

**We will develop a continuous quality improvement culture across your organisation**



## Strengthen System Partnerships and Collaboration

### Key activities we can undertake to support you:

- Build system relationships through clear and planned communications and facilitated engagement events
- Co-design and implement system change, patient pathways and transformation
- Establish and strengthen provider collaboratives
- Provide a structured approach to reducing variation amongst system partners to enhance quality
- Supporting mergers and formation of new organisations to understand shared values, priorities and change plans

**We will maximise opportunities for creating system efficiencies and improving patient outcomes**





# Our tailored support offers



Alongside our core service offers we also provide tailored support offers for key parts of the system. For more information on our services and offers, please review the full details on the Improvement Unit [website](#), or contact us by email on: [mlcsu.improvement@nhs.net](mailto:mlcsu.improvement@nhs.net)

## Supporting the optimisation, assurance and recovery of programmes

We can help you optimise and rapidly recover your programme, to help it get back on track and achieve your objectives.

Our extensive knowledge and experience in health and care programme delivery uniquely positions us to understand and address the challenges you face.

*How we can help you:*

- **Rapid diagnostics** to identify enhancements, quick wins and long-term developments
- **Recovery** plan development and implementation to improve and refocus
- **Assure** the programme's optimisation and recovery, providing remedial action, assessing KPIs and measuring success
- **Sustain** all aspects of programme management to ensure the programme is back on track, through a range of support and expertise

## Rapid Improvement Programmes Support

Our Rapid Improvement programmes support offer provides a structured route to learn, collaborate, review, test and improve.

Our methodology will ensure our work with you is sustainable and scalable. Not only will processes and outcomes be improved, but behaviours and systems surrounding them are transformed in support.

*How we can help you:*

- **Design** shared challenges and mobilise teams ready for launch
- **Analyse** current state data to understand challenges and opportunities
- **Coach & facilitate** to challenge teams to set ambitious goals, develop plans for testing, pilot small changes and spread successful change
- **Sustain** improvements by embedding into business-as-usual activities

## Providing tailored support to national population screening programmes and teams

We will support you to build realistic next steps to design your future screening delivery.

We acknowledge that every system and team has a unique legacy or bespoke regional delivery across the screening programmes. We would like to explore your challenges with you, and to create meaningful opportunities for improvement within your screening pathway.

*How we can help you:*

- **Health equity audit** support and training, utilising data and geospatial mapping tools
- **Equity of access** evidence-based review of mobile breast screening site locations
- **Delivering pilots** for individuals with a learning disability to support equity of access
- **Supporting integration** of breast screening services to improve standardisation

# The year ahead 2025/26



**In the year ahead, our focus will be on supporting organisations to deliver the three strategic shifts through our services**

## **Shift 1: Moving care from hospitals to communities**

- **Utilising our expertise in strengthening system partnerships and collaboration,** we can encourage a structured approach to reducing variation amongst system partners, Our support could include co-designing and implementing system change, such as supporting teams to move from delivering care in hospitals to care in the community.
- **Applying our bespoke Continuous Quality Improvement offer,** we can support organisations to make evidence-based improvements, such as adapting or extending clinics, surgeries and other facilities in our neighbourhoods, so they can provide services closer to home and reduce the overwhelming demand on acute services.

## **Shift 2: Making better use of technology**

- **Bringing our skills and experience in improving performance, quality and efficiency,** we can facilitate system learning and innovation through benchmarking, best practice identification and establishing collaborative learning networks, with a focus around improved technology use across health and care.

## **Shift 3: Preventing sickness, not just treating it**

- **Applying our programme and project management expertise** we can support organisations to deliver their projects on time and within budget, such as weight management programmes that encourage people to live healthier lifestyles and prevent obesity.



# Contact Us

For more information about the work of The Improvement Unit, or to discuss how we can provide support to you or your organisation, please contact either:

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Director of The Improvement Unit

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