

Pemberton House
Colima Avenue
Sunderland
SR5 3XB

16 June 2026
Ref: 663/SA

Dear colleagues,

In the 10 Year Health Plan the Government committed to aligning ICB footprints with strategic authorities (one or more) 'wherever feasibly possible'. Parliament has recently passed the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 which streamlines the establishment of strategic authorities and the devolution of powers, subject to local consent.

In recent days, NHS England has written to the Integrated Care Board requesting our views and asking us to engage with local partners regarding this. Our response needs to be with NHS England by 14 July 2026.

They have made clear that our response should:

- Suggest minimum boundary changes necessary to the current footprint to align to strategic authority footprints, or
- Explain why it is not 'feasibly possible' to amend the footprint to align to strategic authority footprints.

As you will be aware, in the run up to the creation of the North East and North Cumbria ICB, we extensively engaged with partners regarding our size and scale. Whilst there were robust debates at the time, it was all accepted that the geography for our ICB, at that time, was appropriate. The reasons for this included:

- Pathways of care across the North East and North Cumbria. This includes the links to two major trauma centres in Tees and Newcastle, population flows across the system and the mutual aid across NHS organisations. Critical mass of hospital services to ensuring there is continuation of access to specialist services for our local populations.
- One ambulance service for the North East with excellent working arrangements with North West Ambulance Service covering North Cumbria.
- Existing Alliances within the region that provide support and identifies areas to reduce duplication and cost through shared services arrangements.
- Workforce models to ensure effective and sustainable service delivery.
- Scale and size of population required for health planning purposes.

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However, it is important to note that since this time, a number of changes have been made to national guidance alongside changes to legislation that should be noted. This includes:

- The creation of the Cumbria Combined Authority.
- The creation of two unitary authorities in Cumbria.
- Significant reductions in running costs for ICBs.
- Changes as a result of the New Devolution Bill.

Whilst evident Cumbria does not have the population levels to justify its own ICB it is also clear the current populations served by the two ICBs (Lancashire and South Cumbria and North East and North Cumbria) are not aligned to the two local authorities and this creates additional complexity. It is therefore appropriate for us to take this opportunity to engage you in your views regarding the footprint of our ICB.

We are also keen to garner your views and would welcome any written comments by 07 July 2026. To assist us with this we have agreed to establish a small working group comprising of representatives of both ICBs and the Directors of Public Health.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'S. Allen', written in a cursive style.

Samantha Allen CBE
Chief Executive