

News release

For immediate use

PPE contracts awarded fairly

The Scottish public body that procured PPE during the pandemic acted fairly and appropriately when awarding contracts.

NHS National Services Scotland (NSS) used emergency procurement provisions to award PPE contracts without competition during the first wave of Covid-19. There was some variation in the contracts, but auditors were satisfied with the procurement arrangements.

No evidence of preferential treatment or bias was found in the awarding of contracts. But award notices were not published within the required timescales for most of the PPE contracts, reducing the transparency of decision making.

NHS NSS worked well with national enterprise agencies and other partners to increase the amount of PPE produced in Scotland, making the supply chain more resilient. It set up and runs the Test and Protect programme. It also built and decommissioned the NHS Louisa Jordan field hospital at a cost of £51.2 million, and it continues to work well to support the vaccination programme.

Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland, said:

"NHS NSS has been integral to Scotland's response to the pandemic, and it had to procure PPE in very difficult circumstances.

"Staff were working under extreme pressure and did not have time to follow standard procurement processes. But they did a good job of managing the risks of awarding contracts under emergency arrangements to ensure PPE was secured for front-line staff."

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Notes to editors

1. Audit work did not find any issues with the quality of PPE procured by NSS or the companies it contracted.
2. NHS NSS is a non-departmental public body. It was established to provide national strategic support services and advice to the rest of NHS Scotland. More recently the remit of NHS NSS has been extended to enable it provide services to other public sector bodies across Scotland.
3. The global Covid-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the staff and services of NHS NSS. The workload of key services, particularly national procurement and Digital and Security, has significantly increased.
4. NHS NSS' Digital and Security team has enabled the roll-out of technology to support home working across the NHS in Scotland and supports the digital platform for contact tracing and vaccinations.

5. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

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