



### **Purpose of this report**

This report updates Board members on progress against priority issues since the last Board meeting as well as other significant updates which I wish to bring to the Board's and public's attention.

### **Welcome**

I am pleased to present my second report to the Board as we approach the end of the calendar year. The past 12-months has tested us in many ways, yet also demonstrated the strength, resilience and talent of our teams as well as presenting future opportunities for NHS Grampian. This report highlights areas where we can evidence progress being made and updates on our targeted improvement plans to reduce our longest waits, strengthened collaborative and system working and the delivery of value-based care. Whilst there are green shoots of progress, we continue to face very considerable challenges across areas where performance is well below the national standard and that which we aspire to provide for our patients and the communities we serve. Additional, rapid action is being taken to restore flow and capacity in our system recognising that too many of our patients are experiencing unacceptably long waits for access to emergency care and treatment and that winter is now here.

### **Sub-National Planning and Delivery Structures**

The recent announcement of new sub-national planning and delivery structures for NHS Scotland by the Cabinet Secretary offers us further opportunity to strengthen collaborative, cross boundary and inter-Board working to deliver sustainable, patient-centred solutions across Scotland. The establishment of East and West of Scotland planning and delivery structures provides the potential to harness collective expertise to deliver high-quality, safe and equitable care for every community - reducing unwarranted variation, strengthening clinical resilience, and improving financial sustainability through smarter use of shared resources across Scotland.

Both myself and NHS Grampian's Board Chair are already fully engaged and participating in the process to agree how we best work together with other Boards on the initial priority areas which have been identified which include system flow for emergency healthcare services, Digital Front Door, orthopaedic elective waits and business systems to deliver solutions that not only meet today's challenges but are future-proofed. I look forward to bringing future updates on this exciting work as the new East and West Planning and Delivery Committees are stood up and as plans are developed collaboratively for 2026/27 so we can ensure the Grampian voice is a strong one in leading and delivery sustainable, patient-centred solutions.

## **Annual Review 2024/25**

Our recent Annual Review meeting was an inspiring opportunity to reflect on a year of progress, collaboration and refocus. Stakeholders and members of the public heard about our performance across key areas and a number of innovative programmes and initiatives that have enhanced patient outcomes and experience. We were delighted to welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care as well as the Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Executive for the NHS in Scotland, who engaged directly with patient and staff groups. Listening to their experience of receiving care across Grampian and hearing what it is like to work at NHS Grampian prompted constructive conversations around their personal accounts.

While celebrating successes, we also acknowledged the challenging context and areas of underperformance that must be addressed to ensure patients more consistently receive timely care in the most appropriate setting. Through positive and transparent discussion, we underscored our determination to improve and reaffirmed the commitments in our Plan for the Future, which is built on compassion, accountability, and continuous improvement.

## **Assurance Board**

I continue to be encouraged by the positive engagement with the Scottish Government-Chaired Assurance Board and the constructive dialogue at our bi-weekly meetings. These meetings continue to provide a forum for our performance to be challenged, plans and progress scrutinised and for appropriate support to be provided to the Board where this is needed, including from other Health Boards.

Since our last public Board meeting, NHS Grampian has welcomed the external diagnostic review commissioned by the Scottish Government and we have already begun taking action in response to many of its recommendations. This includes the development of an Improvement Plan that will be overseen by the Assurance Board as well as our own Board and supported by further enhanced internal governance arrangements.

Recent discussions at the Assurance Board have focused on delivering agreed actions to improve emergency access performance and safety at the pace required, as well as our associated strengthened governance arrangements. We have also continued to focus on improvement work in the priority areas of planned care and value and sustainability (finance) recognising the latter was key to our escalation to Level 4 status of the NHS Scotland Support and Intervention Framework.

Planned care updates to the Assurance Board have included the external and peer review which has been completed and identified some constructive opportunities for further improvement. We are already acting on these via our Planned Care Programme Board.

## **Section 22 Report**

The recent Section 22 report from the Auditor General reflects on issues identified during the audit of NHS Grampian's Accounts. While this report and process rightly recognises the significance of our challenges, I view this report as nothing other than a positive opportunity to learn, adapt, and build a stronger organisation. Whilst a number of those challenges remain and are being responded to, as you will hear through items on the agenda at our December 2025 Board meeting, our commitment is to move forward with clarity and confidence providing evidence of continuous improvement as we do so. Using these and other insights, including the recently-published external diagnostic report and wider support we are receiving, we will shape a future where NHS Grampian is more resilient, innovative, and known for delivering excellence for the communities we serve.

We have already taken significant steps to respond, including the comprehensive Improvement Plan the Board will consider at December 2025's meeting, which focuses on financial recovery, strengthening leadership, and redesigning services to ensure sustainability and better outcomes for patients.

## **iMatter**

The recently published national iMatter results provide valuable benchmarking and evidence of where we need to focus our efforts moving forward. Looking ahead we will not only seek staff feedback but, critically, will act on it at both organisational and local level so that we improve people's experience of working here. Whilst our response rate was better than the national average, action planning within eight weeks improved and our Employee Engagement Index score was consistent with the national average, we need to improve in key areas. These include staff health and wellbeing, managing performance, Board visibility and involving staff in decision-making, which we will do via a number of new and emerging mechanisms that will strengthen both governance and accountability. As we go into 2026, there will also be a greater focus on improving staff appraisal and statutory and mandatory training rates. Our new Culture Programme Board will provide a mechanism for delivery of our culture programme and staff engagement and experience activity, which will become a strengthened focus as we look to 2026/27.

## **Celebrating success**

This month, I would like to conclude my report by highlighting the outstanding achievements of our staff, whose dedication continues to make a profound impact across NHS Grampian.

Firstly, my heartfelt congratulations to Wendy Harper, winner in the Support Category at this year's Scotland's Health Awards. This national recognition reflects her exceptional commitment to supporting colleagues and improving patient care.

Similarly, the leadership and expertise exhibited by; Lisa Malcolmson (Regional Consultant Nurse for Perinatal Mental Health and Deputy Clinical Director Mental Health Specialisms) and Rachael McBride (Specialist Nurse in Child Protection) has been honoured with the prestigious Queen's Nurse Award for exemplifying the highest standards of nursing practice.

I also commend the Medical Paediatric Team for earning recognition at the Paediatric Awards for Training Achievements – the awards run by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health which celebrate excellence in paediatric training across the UK. The team's dedication to delivering exceptional care and training for children and young people is truly inspiring.

And finally my gratitude extends to Grampian Hospital Radio, who are recipients of the King's Award - the highest accolade in the voluntary sector. This achievement is a testament to their unwavering service and the vital role they play in lifting the spirits of our inpatients as well as connecting us with our community.

These successes reflect the passion, professionalism, and collaborative spirit that define NHS Grampian. We thank all involved for their outstanding contributions.

Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive