

Chief Executive's Report  
8 October 2026 Board Meeting  
Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive



## **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 the public's attention.

## **Welcome**

I am pleased to present my report following another busy and productive period across NHS Grampian. This report reflects both the scale of the change around us and the importance of consistency around our purpose and priorities: to improve outcomes and experience for patients, support our staff and work collaboratively with partners to build safe and sustainable services for the future.

I begin by reflecting on my first year as Chief Executive and the progress made through the collective efforts of Team Grampian, before considering the national context created by the Programme for Government and turning to more immediate considerations - specifically how we are planning for winter, our commitment to learning from feedback and changes in Board leadership.

## **One year on**

September 2026 marked one year since I joined NHS Grampian as Chief Executive. Over that period, I have sought to lead with openness and honesty, consistently display visible and compassionate leadership and prioritise listening to and acting on patient, community and staff feedback to help shape our direction. What has struck me most strongly is that NHS Grampian's greatest strength is its people. I am grateful for the dedication, professionalism and compassion shown by our staff every day across our services and professions.

We should recognise the progress made together while remaining clear about the operational, financial and workforce pressures we face. During the year we moved to a single improvement plan and agreed six strategic priorities, sustained delivery against financial savings targets, continued work to improve the timeliness of care for our urgent and emergency patients and patients waiting for operations, appointments and tests and scans. We have also had a renewed focus on keeping staff well-informed, staff engagement, involvement and improving our organisational culture.

My commitment remains creating an organisation that is safe, sustainable and focused on continuous improvement. Psychological safety, openness, partnership

and collaborative working will be central to achieving that ambition, alongside empowering frontline teams and communities to shape and lead solutions. Significant work remains ahead of us. However, the stronger sense of purpose, alignment and collaboration across Team Grampian gives me confidence in our ability to continue improving for patients, the communities we serve and our staff. That local progress, along with our proactive engagement in the East of Scotland Sub-National arrangements, provides a firm foundation as we consider a changing national policy and reform environment which presents opportunities for improvement and sustainability for NHS Grampian.

## **Programme for Government and NHS reform**

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government has opened an important national conversation about the future of health and care services in Scotland. It sets ambitions to improve access, reduce waiting times, address unwarranted variation, strengthen services closer to home and create a more sustainable NHS. It also proposes wider public service reform, including simplifying NHS structures through two Strategic Health Boards serving the East and West of Scotland.

NHS Grampian welcomes the focus on tangible benefits for patients, communities and staff. Structural change must ultimately be judged by the difference it makes to people's experience of care and the outcomes achieved. Reform may create further opportunities for more effective planning across larger populations, reduced duplication, more consistent access and better use of collective expertise and capacity. At the same time, strong local arrangements will remain essential so that care continues to reflect the needs of the communities we serve across Grampian and both are necessary.

Implementation must recognise the opportunities and challenges of delivering services across our urban, rural and remote communities. The commitment to rural equity is therefore particularly welcome, while the emphasis on digital innovation, including MyCare.scot and wider digital health and care records, aligns with our ambition to improve access, experience and outcomes for our patients.

There will be no immediate change to services or to our organisational priorities. I am very clear that we must remain absolutely focused on the improvement path we are on, which includes implementing and delivering on the priorities we have set ourselves in our six strategic objective areas, notably: clinical quality and safety, people, leadership and governance, planned care, urgent and unscheduled care, prevention, and value and sustainability. In parallel, we will work with the Scottish Government, regional partners, staff representatives and communities so that Grampian's voice informs the development of national plans and that reform is shaped through meaningful engagement.

While national reform develops, our immediate responsibility is to maintain safe, effective services through the most demanding part of the year and continue our

work to deliver improvements for our patients and staff and step further to de-escalating from Stage 4 of the NHS Scotland Support and Intervention Framework.

## **Preparing for winter**

NHS Grampian is preparing for what is traditionally one of the most demanding periods for health and care services. Seasonal illness, adverse weather, increased hospital admissions and wider system pressures can create significant additional demand over the winter period. Across the organisation and with partners, planning is focused on resilience, patient flow, waiting times, capacity, and safe and timely discharge from hospital.

This operational work will be supported by public messaging that encourages people to stay well, choose the service most appropriate to their needs and access care in the right place at the right time. Messages include using community pharmacy for many minor illnesses, self-care where appropriate, trusted advice through NHS Inform, vaccination, and practical steps to reduce illness and injury during cold weather.

The public can help services remain available for those who need them most by choosing the right service, planning repeat prescriptions, using community pharmacies and protecting themselves and others from winter illness. I would like to thank our staff and partners for the considerable amount of preparation that has been undertaken. Winter will undoubtedly bring challenges, but shared planning, mutual support and informed choices by the public will help us maintain safe, effective and sustainable services.

## **Winter Vaccination Programme**

The NHS Grampian Winter Vaccination Programme is now underway, with all 324,000 eligible citizens either offered an appointment, invited to book or issued with a consent form through school.

The programme continues to enhance access and patient experience through digital innovation. Building on the successful implementation of online self-booking for the Meningitis B programme, online booking has now been extended to parents and carers of children aged 2 to 5 years for flu vaccination appointments.

Workforce vaccination activity is also progressing well, with the peer-to-peer vaccination programme continuing to expand and a number of staff vaccination clinics already delivered during September 2026 to support winter resilience.

## **Safety and respect for our staff**

Violence, aggression and abusive behaviour towards NHS staff remains a serious concern across NHS Grampian. Reported incidents span verbal abuse, threats, intimidation and physical assault, particularly in high-pressure frontline settings such as our Emergency Department, but also some of our busy acute hospital wards. We recognise that patients, families and visitors may be anxious, distressed or frustrated. However, this cannot excuse abuse or violence. Every member of staff has the right to feel safe and respected at work, and we recognise the physical and psychological effect these incidents can have on individuals, teams and services which will not be tolerated.

NHS Grampian has developed a Standards of Behaviour Protocol for patients, service users and visitors, informed by strong staff and partnership engagement. It is intended to support a consistent, lawful and proportionate response to challenging, violent or aggressive behaviour. The protocol reinforces clear expectations while recognising clinical circumstances, safeguarding responsibilities and individual needs. It also provides guidance on escalation, reporting, documentation and support, and makes clear that staff should not be expected to remain in situations they reasonably judge to be unsafe.

In addition, a public-facing communications campaign, developed with staff and grounded in the experiences of frontline colleagues is underway that humanises healthcare workers, reinforce expectations of respectful behaviour, explains the impact of abuse on staff wellbeing and patient care, and makes clear that violence and aggression have consequences. Together, I believe the protocol, staff support and public engagement campaign demonstrates a compassionate but unequivocal commitment that aggression is not part of the job.

## **Learning from feedback**

For an example of patient and public feedback informing improvement this month I wanted to share an example from Dr Gray's Hospital recognising that, despite its challenges, some exemplary care is delivered there every day. Through engagement with women, families and community groups across Moray, the Maternity Service heard that access to urgent maternity advice was not always clear, particularly during evenings and overnight. People described uncertainty about whom to contact and how to obtain timely advice when worried about a pregnancy, adding stress at an already anxious time.

The maternity team used that feedback to inform a service redesign. Work has been undertaken to introduce a more structured maternity triage model, including a 24-hour telephone triage service and a more consistent approach to assessment and prioritisation when women arrive for care. Shaped by the experiences shared through engagement, the model aims to provide clearer routes to support, earlier reassurance and more timely advice when concerns arise.

This illustrates our commitment to listening, learning and improving. Feedback must do more than describe experience; it should help us make practical changes to care. As services continue to develop, the voices of patients, families and communities will remain central to shaping improvement across NHS Grampian.

## **Board leadership transitions**

This meeting marks an important transition as we recognise Alison Evison's contribution at the conclusion of her four-year term as Chair. Alison has provided vital leadership through significant challenge and change, strengthening relationships across health, social care, local government, education, the third sector and local business, while supporting preparations for future transformation and reform. On behalf of the Board, I offer my thanks for her dedication, leadership and service.

## **Chief Executive's Diary**

I recently enjoyed spending time with staff across a range of departments at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, including some Surgical Wards, our acute stroke service and Nuclear Medicine, Radiotherapy Physics and Oncology Inpatient Services.

I also spent a morning with teams at Royal Cornhill Hospital, hearing directly from colleagues about both the successes and challenges facing mental health services across Grampian. I welcomed the opportunity to listen to staff experiences, learn more about their important work and discuss how we can continue to support improvement and sustainability across our mental health services.

In August 2026, we welcomed the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care to Dr Gray's Hospital, where she met staff from the ambulance service, our Emergency Department and Maternity Service. The visit provided an important opportunity to discuss the importance of Dr Gray's Hospital to NHS Grampian and the health and care system in the North-East of Scotland, as well as our ongoing work to support safe and sustainable services for our communities with care delivered locally where clinically appropriate to do so.

I also joined other Executive Directors for an important relationship meeting with our third sector partners to discuss opportunities for closer and joint working in the year ahead, with a focus on urgent and unscheduled care and prevention.

We welcomed the Scotland's Patient Safety Commissioner to NHS Grampian, including Dr Gray's Hospital, Inverurie Community Hospital and Aberdeen Royal Infirmary where she met with staff to hear about our challenges and improvement work.

Separately, I was delighted to join staff and partners at the opening of our new nature garden at Foresterhill Campus. This biodiverse greenspace in the heart of our

site has been created by NHS Grampian Charity and NHS Grampian's Sustainability team thanks to a generous grant from NHS Charities Together's Greener Communities Fund in partnership with Starbucks and Hubbub. This garden is a peaceful space that can be used and enjoyed by patients, visitors, and staff.

### **Celebrating 60 years of NHS service**

Finally, this month I am delighted to recognise an extraordinary milestone: 60 years of service in the NHS by Helen Smith, Support Services Manager. This achievement represents far more than longevity. It is a lifetime of dedication to patients, service to communities and support for staff, sustained through remarkable change in healthcare and society.

Across six decades, Helen has seen handwritten records give way to digital information systems, diagnostic and treatment options advance, facilities open, services evolve and professional roles expand. They have adapted through periods of challenge and achievement, shared knowledge with generations of colleagues and provided a living connection with the history of healthcare in Grampian.

I had the pleasure of joining Helen and her colleagues to mark this special milestone and personally thank Helen on behalf of the NHS Grampian Board. Her achievement is a fitting note on which to close this report, reminding us that our future will be built through the same values and public service that have sustained the NHS across generations.

**Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive**