

AREA CLINICAL FORUM REPORT TO NHS GRAMPIAN BOARD

Purpose of Report

This report provides the NHS Grampian Board with an update on the key issues discussed at the Area Clinical Forum (ACF) meeting held on 3 September 2026.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to take assurance that the Area Clinical Forum continues to fulfil its advisory role to the NHS Grampian Board and Executive Team, providing multidisciplinary clinical advice on matters affecting patient care, service delivery, workforce sustainability and organisational development. The Board is also asked to note the strategic risks highlighted by the Forum, particularly in relation to primary care sustainability, workforce pressures and implementation of major service redesign programmes, and to support continued organisational focus on quality improvement, adverse event governance, digital innovation and integrated models of care. The Area Clinical Forum met on 3 September 2026 and considered a range of strategic, operational and clinical issues relevant to NHS Grampian.

- **Frailty Bed Expansion Programme**

The Forum received a detailed update regarding the proposed expansion of specialist frailty services at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. The model aims to improve patient outcomes through earlier specialist assessment, reduce avoidable admissions, improve patient flow and support earlier discharge from hospital. Evidence presented suggested that patients managed through specialist frailty pathways experience significantly shorter lengths of stay than those managed through traditional general medical pathways. Members noted delivery risks associated with estate limitations, accommodation constraints, service dependencies involving gastroenterology and urology services and maintenance of planned care activity during implementation. The Forum supported the overall direction of travel and emphasised the importance of strong links with primary care, community services and Health and Social Care Partnerships.

- **Sustainability of Primary Care Services**

The GP Sub-Committee highlighted significant concerns regarding the sustainability of General Practice Enhanced Service contracts. Members heard that many contracts have received limited financial uplift over a prolonged period and are increasingly considered financially unsustainable. Survey findings suggested that 56 of 68 practices may consider relinquishing some or all enhanced service provision. Members discussed the potential implications for patient access, continuity of care and capacity within secondary care services. Services potentially affected include diabetes management, substance misuse treatment, minor surgery and high-risk medication monitoring. The Forum considered this one of the most significant strategic risks highlighted during the meeting.

- **Clinical Quality, Safety and Adverse Event Improvement**

The Forum reviewed progress from the Adverse Events Short Life Working Group, which is leading work to improve the quality, consistency and timeliness of adverse event reviews across NHS Grampian. Proposals include increasing senior oversight, widening reviewer capacity, strengthening training, and improving organisational learning arrangements. Members discussed reviewer capacity, administrative support requirements, and the importance of ensuring effective collaboration across organisational boundaries where incidents involve both primary and secondary care. The Forum strongly supported the direction of travel and recognised the importance of this work in strengthening governance and patient safety. It was recognised that keeping in mind the capacity issues ensuring these processes keep a momentum would reduce the lag of reporting that may lead to lost learning from events being available.

- **Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation**

The Forum received an update on development of the North of Scotland Artificial Intelligence Strategy and emerging national guidance regarding safe adoption of AI technologies. Opportunities identified included clinical documentation, process automation, image analysis, and planned care pathways. Members recognised the potential for AI tools to reduce administrative burden and release clinical time but emphasised the importance of robust governance arrangements, information security, procurement controls and clinical safety assessments. A future update on governance structures and strategy development was requested.

- **Public Health Update**

The Director of Public Health highlighted delays in statutory notification of notifiable diseases and reminded clinicians of their responsibilities in relation to public health reporting. Members also received an update on autumn and winter vaccination programmes, including influenza, COVID-19, RSV and meningitis B delivery. The operational challenges associated with concurrent vaccination programmes were recognised. Discussion also considered emergency department waiting times and the need for systematic monitoring of patient outcomes associated with service changes.

- **Mental Health and Early Intervention**

The Forum welcomed a presentation from The Nook, a community-based mental health and wellbeing service delivered by SAMH. The service is designed to provide accessible early intervention and support for people experiencing mental health challenges. Members noted encouraging levels of public engagement and discussed opportunities to strengthen pathways between NHS services and The Nook. A future update was requested to assess impact, sustainability and contribution to mental health support across Grampian.

- **Advisory Committee Themes**

Updates from advisory committees highlighted recurring themes concerning workforce wellbeing, accommodation pressures, recruitment challenges and increasing administrative burden. Concerns were also raised regarding Occupational Health capacity, diagnostic capacity and the impact of sustained operational pressures on staff experience and service delivery. Alongside these challenges,

committees highlighted positive developments in workforce innovation, educational partnerships, pharmacy training and healthcare science workforce development.

Conclusion

The Board is invited to note this report and take assurance from the continued work taking place across NHS Grampian to improve quality, safety, service delivery and patient outcomes. The Forum remains supportive of transformation programmes including frailty redesign, adverse event improvement and digital innovation whilst highlighting significant strategic risks relating to primary care sustainability, workforce pressures and operational capacity.

Mark Burrell

Chair, Area Clinical Forum

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