

Chief Executive's Report
11 June 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 to the Board following a busy and productive period across the organisation, which has included a number of high-profile visits, staff award wins and further evidence of continued progress against our priority programmes.

While challenges remain across our system, I continue to be encouraged by the level of focus, collaboration and commitment demonstrated by our staff and partners. There are clear signs of progress in several key areas, alongside important opportunities to further strengthen delivery as we build confidence moving forward.

Sub National update

Work to meet the requirements of DL (2025) 25 on Sub National planning continues, with revisions to the plan submitted on 31 March 2026 ongoing. Due to the pre-election period, formal feedback has not been received from the Scottish Government. We anticipate that with Cabinet Secretary appointments now made there will be feedback forthcoming. The Deputy Chief Executive of NHS Scotland has asked that Boards collaborate on all elective work and that the Sub National Planning and Delivery Committees (East and West) bring forward a high-level ask on this by mid-June 2026. NHS Grampian is fully engaged in this piece as part of its annual planning work.

Assurance Board and agreeing de-escalation criteria

Our ongoing engagement with the Scottish Government-Chaired Assurance Board continues to be constructive and focused, with regular discussions providing both support and appropriate challenge and scrutiny, as we progress our improvement priorities which responds to the reasons we were escalated in May 2025 to Stage 4 of the NHS Scotland Support and Intervention Framework.

Work continues at pace against our Single Improvement Plan, which is structured around our 2026/27 priorities. However, there is a clear and shared understanding that delivery of the plan alone is not sufficient. We must evidence measurable progress and sustained improvement across our core areas of focus.

I am very pleased to be bringing forward to today's Board meeting the de-escalation criteria which the Assurance Board has agreed for NHS Grampian. The NHS

Grampian Board requested clear criteria from Scottish Government so we have a route map from Stage 4 to 3 and to give light at the end of the tunnel to our patients, partners and community. We have been shaping the criteria with Scottish Government since the end of 2025 and owning this as a Board. De-escalation will be dependent on our ability to demonstrate evidence-based progress, so this represents a very important further step in our improvement journey.

Providing clarity on expectations and milestones instils confidence that improvements can be sustained as we continue to build confidence with Scottish Government and our wider partners and stakeholders, so I look forward to our discussion on this topic at our public Board meeting.

2026/27 priorities update

Following the Board's approval of NHS Grampian's Priorities for 2026/27 at its March 2026 meeting, individual Programme Boards have now been established that are aligned to each of the five current priorities. These Programme Boards are meeting regularly with appropriate Executive Team leadership, relevant membership and have Terms of Reference in place. The Programme Boards report on a monthly cycle to the Executive Team on progress towards delivery of their agreed Key Performance Indicators and quarterly progress reports summarising how we are doing against our priorities for the year will come to the public Board, commencing August 2026.

Quality and Safety focus

Quality and safety remain at the centre of our improvement work and are being addressed with a strengthened organisation-wide focus, recognising both the significance of recent external feedback and the need for sustained, demonstrable progress across the system.

As our system stabilises, we need to move towards clearer, consistent and demonstrable clinical assurance. As a result, a number of significant actions are underway including the establishment of a Clinical Quality and Safety Improvement Board, co-chaired by our Executive Nurse Director and Medical Director, to provide strengthened oversight, leadership and scrutiny across all areas of clinical quality and safety improvement work that are underway at NHS Grampian.

In addition, we have proactively engaged with Healthcare Improvement Scotland to request their support to undertake a diagnostic programme of support focusing on leadership, culture, staffing, clinical processes and training, recognising the importance of external input, perspectives and challenge alongside internal improvement. This work is now underway.

In the last week of April 2026, we had a series of unannounced Safe Delivery of Care Inspections from Healthcare Improvement Scotland. This included a 2-day inspection of Acute, Mental Health and Maternity Services on 27 and 28 April 2026 at Dr Gray's Hospital followed by a 2-day inspection of Maternity Services at Aberdeen Maternity Hospital. We are currently in the process of providing data

requests to the team at Healthcare Improvement Scotland following these on-site inspections, which present a further opportunity to recognise good practice as well as areas for further learning and improvement.

We look forward to bringing an update on all of these items to a future Clinical Governance Committee meeting and the Board.

Baird Family Hospital and ANCHOR Centre update

The Baird Family Hospital and ANCHOR Centre remain critical strategic investments supporting the future delivery of maternity, neonatal and cancer services across NHS Grampian.

While progress continues towards operational readiness, a number of technical and contractual challenges have emerged which are unfortunately further impacting delivery timelines. These relate primarily to infrastructure and compliance requirements, including electrical systems and ventilation arrangements, as well as additional assurance requirements.

Further work is underway with contractors to resolve these issues at the required pace, with patient safety and service quality remaining the overriding priorities. As the Board will hear today, a delay to the ANCHOR Centre is anticipated while these matters are addressed.

Despite these challenges, there remains a shared commitment to delivering the programme, with costs currently expected to remain within the approved budget, although this will continue to be kept under close review.

We recognise the importance of maintaining staff, public and stakeholder confidence and will continue to ensure clear, co-ordinated communication as further updates become available. We continue to work closely with Scottish Government on these matters also.

Magnet and our Pathway to Excellence

At the end of April 2026, we were pleased to host a visit linked to our Magnet journey at Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital, including engagement with national colleagues.

Magnet recognition represents the global gold standard for nursing excellence, with a strong focus on leadership, professional development, staff engagement and evidence-based practice.

Our work to pursue Magnet designation reflects a broader commitment to improving both patient outcomes and staff experience, fostering a culture where teams are empowered, supported and actively involved in decision-making.

We anticipate a decision on designation later this summer and I would like to recognise the significant effort and commitment of all staff involved in progressing this important work.

In addition, I am delighted that our Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Service achieved Pathway to Excellence® designation on 12 May 2026 which was fittingly International Nurses Day, making NHS Grampian the first health board in Scotland to receive this recognition and the first mental health service in the UK to do so.

This is a significant achievement and reflects the strength of leadership, staff engagement and commitment to high-quality, person-centred care across the service.

National awards

I am also pleased to recognise a number of recent national successes involving NHS Grampian staff.

At the recent Royal College of Nursing Scotland Nurse of the Year Awards, a number of colleagues were recognised, including award winners and highly commended finalists across several categories including Learning in Practice, Clinical Leadership and Adult Nursing.

These achievements reflect the outstanding contribution of our nursing workforce and the high standard of care being delivered across NHS Grampian. I would like to extend my personal congratulations and thanks to all those recognised.

IX Grampian Research and Innovation Conference

Also in May, NHS Grampian hosted the XI Grampian Research Conference at Robert Gordon University, bringing together colleagues from across NHS, academia, industry and partner organisations.

The conference, themed around improving cancer outcomes, provided a valuable platform to showcase the breadth and depth of research activity across the North East, spanning clinical trials, advanced therapies, and innovations aimed at improving equity and access to care.

I was delighted to speak at the event and share our priorities for the coming years, which highlighted both the role of our partners and the strong partnerships NHS Grampian enjoys with the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University and national networks. The importance of collaboration in translating research into improved patient outcomes and ultimately improving patient outcomes was a message I was keen to reinforce.

I also restated our continued commitment to ensuring that research and innovation are embedded within everyday practice and contribute directly to service improvement and patient benefit.

Recent visits to Grampian

We were pleased to welcome both the First Minister and Caroline Lamb to NHS Grampian in recent months, providing important opportunities to showcase progress, innovation and the work of our talented and dedicated teams as well as how we are responding to our challenges.

The First Minister engaged directly with clinical teams and saw first-hand the impact of innovation within our services. This included a demonstration of our use of artificial intelligence in lung cancer pathways, where technology supports clinicians by identifying potential abnormalities across chest X-rays and enabling earlier review and diagnosis.

The visit from Caroline Lamb, Chief Executive of NHS Scotland and Director General for Health and Social Care, included engagement with colleagues at Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital in relation to our Magnet programme, as well as recognising some of the staff that have received STAR Awards.

Overall, these visits provided a valuable opportunity to demonstrate both innovation and the strength of multi-disciplinary teamwork across NHS Grampian, as well as our continued focus on improving patient outcomes and the progress we are making against our improvement priorities.

New Executive Team members

I am pleased to formally welcome Gail Woodcock and Jug Johal to their first Board meeting as new members of the NHS Grampian Executive Team. Gail has been appointed as Director of Strategy, Transformation and Performance and Jug joins us as our Interim Director of Infrastructure and Sustainability, with responsibility for estates and facilities as well as the capital projects that help to provide high-quality environments for patients, staff, and visitors, including being the Board-level lead for the Baird and ANCHOR Centre developments.

Alongside Gail and Jug's appointments, we continue to strengthen our Executive Team and crucially move to substantive arrangements. We have recently appointed Jay O'Brien as our new substantive Director of People and Culture. I look forward to welcoming Jay to NHS Grampian at our August Board meeting after commencing in post on 3 August 2026.

Closing reflection

This has been a period of continued progress, alongside ongoing challenge as we continue to stabilise the organisation, building on the progress we saw in 2025/26. We are seeing improvements in grip, governance and clarity of priorities, and we are further strengthening relationships with local and national partners and stakeholders. At the same time, we are rightly focused on addressing the issues that remain, particularly in relation to performance, infrastructure and financial sustainability. The pace of change required remains significant, but I am confident that, through sustained focus, partnership working and the commitment of our staff, we will

continue to build momentum, deliver improvements and strengthen confidence in NHS Grampian so we continue to move forward positively for the benefit of our patients and staff.

Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive