

Chief Executive's Report  
13 August 2026 Board Meeting  
Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive

Board Meeting  
13.08.26  
Open Session  
Item 6



## **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 another busy and productive period across the organisation.

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 to ensure delivery of our agreed priorities for the year and continuous and the sustained improvements we need to see across all aspects of our performance spanning: clinical quality and safety, people, culture and governance, prevention, operational performance (unscheduled care and planned care, including cancer care) and financial performance and sustainability. At this month's Board meeting I look forward to discussing our Quarter One progress against our strategic priorities (see below).

## **Sub-National update – Scotland East**

Work to meet the requirements of DL (2025) 25 on Sub-National planning continues. Work is underway at Sub-National level to further improve waiting times for patients in Scotland, with a focus on reducing and eliminating 52-week waits in Scotland. NHS Grampian faces significant backlogs and challenges with long waits, which I know from the correspondence I receive, and the many conversations I have with patients and their families, is having a profound impact on too many of our patients and their families, for which I apologise. We welcome the £9.7million funding we have received for 2026/27 to further improve our waiting times and reduce long wait patients, and we are committed to continuing our improvement work within NHS Grampian and to working collaboratively with Boards in the East of Scotland on solutions at Sub-National level to reduce waits further, recognising we need this support to map our route to reaching zero for 52-week waits. This only is this what the people of Grampian deserve, it is also a clear ask from the Scottish Government.

The Sub-National workstream on unscheduled care and improving access and flow for patients, which I am the East Chief Executive lead for, held a workshop for clinical and operational leaders across the East of Scotland in Stirling on 29 June 2026. This proved to be an incredibly productive day in shaping how we move and

improve patient access to unscheduled services across our health and care system, with much appetite for changes to our current system in order to redesign emergency healthcare in the years to come so we have a system that is better equipped to deliver for the people of Scotland.

A new weekly East performance meeting attended by all Chief Executives and the Centre for Sustainable Delivery is also now in place to focus on operational performance improvements and delivery needed across all Boards. Please see the paper on the public Board agenda re: Sub-National for a fuller update.

### **NHS Grampian Assurance Board**

The Assurance Board is meeting monthly presently, which is welcomed, as this provides the opportunity for the NHS Grampian team to progress the work that is necessary between meetings to support delivery of our priorities. The meeting held on 30 June 2026 covered areas including: the sharing of the NHS Grampian iMatter (staff survey) results, unscheduled care and discussed an updated proposal to consolidate and expand the current acute frailty bed base. With demand for frailty services exceeding current capacity, a model to create additional dedicated frailty capacity, alongside a Rapid Frailty Assessment Unit, enabling earlier comprehensive assessment, faster senior clinical decision-making and greater opportunities to avoid unnecessary admissions was welcomed by Assurance Board members and noted the potential contribution of this work to improving overall unscheduled care performance across the system.

The Chief Executive of Scottish Ambulance Service also attended to give a perspective of the improving relationship and engagement between our organisations. A number of updates were provided in relation to Clinical Governance, including an update on where we are within the Clinical Quality and Safety Improvement Board, the wider improvement work, including at Dr Gray's Hospital, and a brief verbal update on the progress with the Healthcare Improvement Scotland Diagnostic which I have commissioned. There was an update on our Value and Sustainability Programme and Month 2 Financial results. The Chair of NHS Grampian's Financial Recovery Board (FRB) also attended to provide an overview of the impact in relation to the FRB, which again was welcome to bring in an additional perspective into the Assurance Board. The most recent Assurance Board meeting took place on 11 August 2026 in Aberdeen and the minutes will be published online by the Scottish Government for openness and transparency once they have been finalised.

### **2026/27 strategic priorities – Quarter One progress update**

Our first staff briefing session on our priorities progress took place on 28 July 2026. These briefings will happen quarterly and are a valuable opportunity to share updates on all our priorities with our staff. In addition, the first issue of the 'Priorities

Post' newsletter, written with both staff and the wider public in mind, has just been published.

### **iMatter (staff survey) 2026 results**

Since our last meeting, the iMatter reports for 2026 have been issued. While we didn't quite reach our target of 65% return rate we set ourselves, we got to 62%, which is 3% more than last year and an extra 400 staff completing the survey; an early sign that staff engagement is improving.

We are developing a programme of quarterly "pulse" surveys to complement iMatter, as one of our People, Leadership and Governance priorities for the year. The first of these is planned to launch in September 2026 and will ensure we receive real-time staff feedback throughout the year which is hugely important. Both the annual iMatter survey, which allows benchmarking with other Health Boards, and more real-time feedback throughout the year from our staff, are needed if we are to meaningfully improve staff experience and engagement.

Our focus with iMatter has now turned to action planning, with a deadline of 17 August 2026 and teams being encouraged to meet, reflect on their local reports, and identify one clear action for the next 12 months to further improve peoples' experience of working here.

### **Baird Family Hospital and ANCHOR Centre update**

In June 2026, a Baird and ANCHOR Oversight Board was stood up, chaired by Christine McLaughlin, the Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer for NHS Scotland, to provide additional scrutiny and support to this project, as well as maximising learning we can bring to these schemes from other capital projects in Scotland. I welcome the Oversight Board, which meets monthly, being in place and the extra level of assurance it will bring to the projects. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the Scottish Government in the coming weeks and months in order to move closer to safely opening these new facilities which remains our focus. Christine visited Aberdeen in July 2026, and this included a walkabout of the Baird and ANCHOR facilities as well as discussion with teams leading this work and work to improve the timeliness of care for our emergency patients by walking the emergency pathway at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

We continue to work with the contractor to resolve the remaining issues in order to achieve a Key Stage Assurance Review (KSAR) approved status with NHS Assure. Once these buildings are open, patients from NHS Grampian and further afield, will have excellent facilities that will serve them for the decades to come.

In June 2026, we brought together teams to engage and listen to staff as we develop our response to the independent whistleblowing report related to the Baird and

ANCHOR. The consolidated Action Plan resulting from this meeting and proposed governance arrangements will be shared with Board members in August 2026 for agreement.

### **Director of Public Health report**

This was shared at our June 2026 Board meeting. In July 2026 we publicised the report with the help of a medical student who spoke eloquently about her own experience of endometriosis. I would like to thank the student and our teams for their support in raising awareness of this issue and the need to tackle inequalities in women's health, which were central to the message promoted as part of our communications.

### **Magnet® designation achievement**

In my previous report I updated on the progress of our Magnet® journey at the Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital (RACH). I was delighted to join colleagues there on 24 June 2026 to hear, first hand, confirmation that the hospital had been awarded designation with distinction for care excellence - the highest possible international standard for nursing care. RACH has become the first children's hospital in Europe and the first hospital in Scotland to achieve this honour and I cannot praise the team enough. Their commitment to improving both patient outcomes and staff experience has shone through for the duration of this process. They should be rightly proud of this award and our Board Chair and I have written to all staff at RACH on behalf of the NHS Grampian Board to extend our congratulations, as has the Chief Executive of NHS Scotland. The comments on our social media posts announcing their Magnet® designation speak volumes for the high regard in which the whole RACH team is held by people in Grampian, and beyond.

### **Maternity at Dr Gray's Hospital**

This same aspiration to deliver the best possible care applies to the services we provide to the people of Moray, including women and babies. On Friday 31 July 2026, with our Director of Midwifery and Board Chair I met Laura Mitchell MSP for Moray and Keep MUM, the local campaign group in Elgin, to discuss the latest progress in our work to expand the Maternity Service at Dr Gray's Hospital.

We described the progress made, our aim to provide care locally wherever possible and that the main elements of a consultant-supported maternity service will be in place by the end of 2026. We also set out that in order to move beyond where we are now and run a full service requires the necessary staff (including theatre and anaesthetic staff), training and operational arrangements to be in place to ensure we can deliver a safe and sustainable service.

To date, despite our best efforts, recruitment has proved extremely challenging to these remaining highly skilled posts. Work is ongoing to explore every possible option and we continue to work towards achieving the safe delivery of a consultant-supported maternity service at Dr Gray's Hospital.

We will fulsomely engage and contribute to the recently announced National Maternity Review which is being led by Professor Christine McCourt - and which will focus on rural care (including Elgin), safety culture and inequalities.

### **Meningitis B vaccination programme**

A national vaccination programme, offering the Meningitis B vaccination to specific groups of young people, launched in June 2026. Our local vaccination teams worked at pace to get an online booking system in place, recognising those eligible are in a demographic which see online booking as the default option. Their hard and speedy work has certainly borne fruit, with Grampian leading the way in appointments booked and vaccinations administered. This was an excellent and innovative piece of work which is being shared with colleagues in other Health Boards and could apply to other vaccination programmes. The Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations has made further recommendations about the roll out of this particular vaccine; these are currently under consideration across the four nations.

### **Awards and achievements**

Zosia Miedzybrodzka, Clinical Director of Genetics Services and Professor of Medical Genetics at the University of Aberdeen, received an OBE in the New Year's Honours. She was formally presented with her honour at the start of July 2026 by King Charles at Holyrood Palace.

July 2026 was also a very busy month for graduations. It was extremely heartening to see so many of the NHS Grampian team collect their qualifications. This reflects our commitment to staff development across all disciplines. Well done to all the graduates; I know it won't have been easy to balance work and study, and your rewards are richly-deserved.

Congratulations also go to the Networked Data Lab, a UK-wide partnership including NHS Grampian data scientists, on their award from the Royal Statistical Society. The Florence Nightingale Award for Excellence in Health and Care Analytics recognised their work to address a significant gap in national evidence: despite the NHS elective waiting list being a major national priority, relatively little was known about who waits longest, what happens to patients while they wait, or how waiting affects their wider use of health services.

## **Staff news**

June Brown, our Executive Nurse Director, is leaving NHS Grampian to take up a new role as Deputy Director of Nursing in the months to come at Public Services Delivery Scotland (PSDS) after 22 years of service to NHS Grampian.

June has dedicated over two decades of service to NHS Grampian, including six years as Executive Nurse Director. June will leave NHS Grampian with much to be proud of and with so many examples of further improving care and experience for patients and the communities we serve. This includes leading NHS Grampian's work to become the first Health Board in Scotland to receive Pathway to Excellence recognition and being first mental health and learning disabilities service in the UK to do so and the Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital becoming the first children's hospital in Europe and the first hospital in Scotland to achieve the prestigious Magnet® designation with distinction for nursing excellence.

June's last day at NHS Grampian will be 25 September 2026. We are seeking Expressions of Interest from experienced external candidates to join us as Interim Executive Nurse Director.

I would like to congratulate June on her new role and thank her for her dedication, commitment, and the positive difference her leadership has had on the experience of our patients and the legacy she leaves, on which we will build, including our Magnet and Pathway to Excellence work, which is key to our continuous improvement work.

It is my pleasure to formally welcome Jay O'Brien, our new substantive Director of People and Culture, to NHS Grampian and to his first Board meeting. My thanks and appreciation go to Melanie Saunders for her work as Interim Director of People and Culture for the excellent work she has led in 2026 and for her strong leadership and experience, which NHS Grampian has benefited from.

I also want to note this meeting will be the first meeting of the Board in public session for Drew McGowan, who has been appointed as our Interim Board Secretary. Drew joins NHS Grampian from Public Services Delivery Scotland Board where he was Board Secretary and Principal Lead for Corporate Governance. He brings to NHS Grampian extensive experience in governance and policy in the public and third sectors. Prior to this he was Associate Director of Governance and Risk at City of Glasgow College. Drew succeeds Sarah Duncan, who has taken up the post of Director of Corporate Services and Chief of Staff at NHS Lothian.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Steven Lindsay on his re-election as our Elected Chair of Staffside. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care has further confirmed his re-appointment as Employee Director for NHS Grampian for another four years, which is welcome news and provides further stability to NHS Grampian during this period of change and transition.

## **Chief Executive's Diary**

I enjoyed spending time with staff across a range of departments at Fraserburgh Community Hospital last month, joined by Non-Executive Board member Ann Bell, who organised the day. This was an important learning exercise for me when it comes to better understanding the challenges and opportunities for our Community Hospitals across Grampian, including Fraserburgh.

I joined other system leaders for the formal opening of Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH), The Nook, in Aberdeen city centre, during June 2026. This excellent new facility provides free, drop-in mental health support hub without the need for appointments or referrals, and is open 7-days a week. The opening in Aberdeen follows a similar one in Glasgow, and has been possible thanks to the vision, commitment and collaborative working of those working across Grampian's public services, local businesses, and the third sector.

I welcomed the opportunity to both attend and speak at the launch of Healing Arts Scotland 2026 which Aberdeen hosted in June 2026. It was an opportunity to thank the Grampian Hospital Arts Trust and City Moves Dance Agency for all they do and acknowledge the positive impact their contribution makes to the experience of our patients, their families and staff.

It was a privilege to lead our latest Long Service Awards, which are held online. At the July 2026 event, we celebrated an incredible 2,555 years' service from staff across NHS Grampian spanning 20-50 years' service. This event is one of the highlights of my calendar, as I get the opportunity to thank staff for their decades of dedication and commitment to our patients and our community.

**Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive**