

Meeting: NHSG Open Board
Meeting date: 13 August 2026
Item Number: 9
Title: Scottish Government letter: Frailty Expansion and Emergency Department Consultant Staffing Model
Responsible Executive: Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive
Report Author: Geraldine Fraser, Chief Officer - Acute Services

1 Purpose and Recommendations

This report is presented to the Board for:

- Assurance

Recommendation(s)

- Note receipt of a letter from the Scottish Government approving the Frailty Expansion and Emergency Department Consultant Staffing Model proposals, and confirming that the financial risk in 2027-28 and 2028-29 will be underwritten by the Scottish Government, subject to condition.
- Confirm assurance that governance arrangements are in place to provide open-book updates on performance, expenditure, any financial gap, mitigations and remaining shortfall through the Assurance Board.
- Endorse continued implementation at pace to support front-door performance, reduce ED delays and strengthen quality and safety ahead of winter.

This report relates to:

- Government policy/directive
- Service Operational Plan

This aligns to the following NHS Scotland quality ambition(s):

- Safe
- Effective

Relevant strategic risks

- Significant delays in the delivery of Unscheduled Care
- Inability to achieve the aspirations set out in Plan for the Future due to financial resource constraints and inefficiencies

2 Report summary

2.1 Situation

NHS Grampian Board approved proposals for expanding the frailty bed base and the ED medical workforce at a closed board meeting on 9 July 2026. A letter has subsequently been received from Scottish Government confirming approval of the proposals and providing comfort in relation to the financial shortfall identified in 2027–28. The letter acknowledges the considerable work undertaken by NHS Grampian, notes the confirmation of Board approval on 9 July 2026, and describes the proposals as a strong opportunity to improve patient care through an expanded frailty model and a greater focus on ED performance.

The Board is asked to note the letter and agree the proposed assurance and response arrangements.

2.2 Background

The Scottish Government letter states that the business case is robust, with clear detail on costs and expected benefits, including performance improvements of up to 15 percentage points. It confirms that implementation is already progressing at pace and emphasises the importance of embedding the model ahead of winter.

Approval is conditional. Scottish Government has confirmed that no additional funding is required in 2026–27 and that it will underwrite, rather than fund, the risk in 2027–28 and 2028–29 up to £3.4 million. It has also made clear that all attempts should be made to deliver the proposal within NHS Grampian's existing budget.

2.3 Assessment

The letter is positive and provides conditional national support for a key acute services improvement. It also creates a clear assurance requirement for NHS Grampian to demonstrate delivery grip, financial transparency and mitigation of any funding risk. The principal areas for Board scrutiny are set out below.

Scottish Government requirement	Board update and proposed NHS Grampian response
No additional funding is required in 2026–27.	Note the condition and continue to manage 2026–27 implementation within existing budgets, with any pressure tracked through established financial governance.
Risk in 2027–28 and 2028–29 will be underwritten up to £3.4 million, rather than funded.	Maintain a clear distinction between underwriting and confirmed funding, and continue to develop mitigations to reduce or avoid any requirement to draw on the underwriting arrangement.
Maintain an open-book approach, ideally through the Assurance Board.	Provide routine assurance on performance, expenditure, financial gap, mitigation options and residual shortfall through Assurance Board reporting.

Evidence that all reasonable options to close any funding gap have been fully explored.	Document the options appraisal for closing any gap, including recurrent affordability, workforce implications and operational impact.
Provide further detail on frailty staffing, recruitment confidence and delivery of the planned bed increase by the September target date.	Response submitted by 5 August 2026, with clear delivery milestones and an assessment of recruitment confidence.

2.3.1 Quality / Patient Care

The proposals are intended to improve patient care through an expanded frailty model and greater clinical focus at the hospital front door. Scottish Government highlights the opportunity to improve front-door performance, reduce delays and enhance quality and safety for patients and staff. The Board should seek assurance that implementation milestones, patient flow measures and quality indicators are being tracked consistently through programme governance.

2.3.2 Workforce

Scottish Government specifically requested further detail on the staffing requirements for the frailty model, the details of which have been provided, together with an assessment of confidence in recruiting to the required posts and updated timeline for delivery.

2.3.3 Financial

The financial condition is that no additional funding is required in 2026–27. For 2027–28 and 2028–29, Scottish Government will underwrite the risk up to £3.4 million, but expects NHS Grampian to make all attempts to deliver the proposal within existing budget. There is no provision of this beyond 2028-29.

2.3.4 Risk Assessment / Management

Key risks relate to workforce recruitment, delivery of the planned frailty bed expansion and the management of any financial gap associated with implementation of the proposals. These risks will continue to be monitored through established financial and governance arrangements.

2.3.5 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

The frailty model is relevant to older people and people with complex needs, and has potential to support more timely, person-centred care at the front door. The Board should note the need to ensure that implementation considers access, outcomes and experience for people who may be at higher risk of harm from delay. An Integrated Impact Assessment is being prepared as part of the ongoing implementation work.

Route to the Meeting

- NHS Grampian Board approval confirmed on 9 July 2026, as referenced in the Scottish Government letter.
- Scottish Government update requested by 5 August 2026 to support review ahead of the Assurance Board on 11 August 2026.

2.4 Recommendation(s)

The Board is asked to:

- Note receipt of a letter from the Scottish Government approving the Frailty Expansion and Emergency Department Consultant Staffing Model proposals, and confirming that the financial risk in 2027-28 and 2028-29 will be underwritten by the Scottish Government, subject to condition.
- Confirm assurance that governance arrangements are in place to provide open-book updates on performance, expenditure, any financial gap, mitigations and remaining shortfall through the Assurance Board.
- Endorse continued implementation at pace to support front-door performance, reduce ED delays and strengthen quality and safety ahead of winter.

Appendix / List of appendices

The following appendix is included with this report:

- Appendix 1 – Scottish Government letter: Frailty Expansion and Strengthening of the Emergency Department Consultant Staffing Model, received from Fiona Bennett, Chief Financial Officer Health and Social Care, and Stephen Gallagher, Director of Assurance & Improvement.
- Appendix 2 – NHS Grampian Letter: Frailty Expansion and Strengthening of the Emergency Department Consultant Staffing Model, sent from Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive.