

Meeting:	NHS Grampian Board
Meeting date:	13 August 2026
Item Number:	12
Title:	Refreshing NHS Grampian's Plan for the Future: From Stabilisation to Redesign and Transformation
Responsible Executive:	Gail Woodcock, Director of Strategy, Transformation and Performance
Report Author:	Gail Woodcock, Director of Strategy, Transformation and Performance

1 Purpose and recommendations

This is presented to the Board for:

- Assurance
- Endorsement

Recommendation(s)

The Board is asked to:

- Assurance** – take assurance from the proposed process to refresh NHS Grampian's Plan for the Future, building on the 2026/27 priorities and current stabilisation work.
- Endorsement** – endorse the proposed approach to developing a refreshed strategic plan that will develop and describe NHS Grampian's future health and care model and associated supporting frameworks, noting that the refresh will be developed through a staged process of engagement, testing and refinement.
- Future reporting** – note that future updates, including the draft and final refresh of the Plan for the Future, will be brought to the Board in line with the proposed timeline contained within this report.

This report relates to:

- NHS Grampian Strategy: Plan for the Future
- Board Annual Delivery Plan
- Government policy/directive

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

- Safe
- Effective
- Person Centred

This subject matter of this report is relevant to the mitigation of the following strategic risks (further information provided in the Risk section below):

- Inability to meet population demand for Planned Care
 - Significant delays in the delivery of Unscheduled Care
 - Inability to effectively maintain and invest in NHS Grampian's infrastructure
 - Deviation from recognised service standards of practice and delivery
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- Inability to achieve the aspirations set out in Plan for the Future due to financial resource constraints and inefficiencies
 - Inability to reduce demand through citizen engagement
 - Insufficient change and innovation to create a system which can meet demand and deliver on our strategic intent
 - Cybersecurity Incident
 - Deteriorating Workforce Engagement
 - Worsening health in Grampian particularly in those who experience multiple disadvantages

2 Report summary

2.1 Situation

NHS Grampian was escalated to Stage 4 of the NHS Scotland Support and Intervention Framework in May 2025, due to concerns about its financial position, governance and leadership, local services and performance against national priorities and standards.

It is recognised that while some improvements and a level of stabilisation are now in place within NHS Grampian, further progress is needed. It is however clear, as confirmed by the external diagnostic commissioned by Scottish Government in 2025, that it will not be possible for NHS Grampian to return to financial balance over the medium-term without a significant redesign across services, pathways and the wider health and care system.

This report sets out, at a strategic level, the key elements required to move NHS Grampian from stabilisation towards a clearly defined future health and care model, and the transformation required to achieve it. The scale of change required is significant and will require a coordinated, organisation-wide approach involving staff, partners and stakeholders, supported by clear governance, transformation capacity and a consistent approach to change delivery.

2.2 Background

In May 2025, the Scottish Government announced the escalation of NHS Grampian to Stage 4 in the NHS Scotland Support and Intervention Framework. The escalation reflects concerns about NHS Grampian's financial position, leadership, governance and local services and performance against national priorities and standards.

The Scottish Government has established an Assurance Board that reports to the Director General of Health and Social Care and Chief Executive of NHS Scotland. As part of the

package of support, the Scottish Government commissioned an external review (diagnostic report) which considered:

- NHS Grampian's leadership and governance arrangements
- Further analysis on the main causes of NHS Grampian's deteriorating financial position
- Potential opportunities for cost savings and optimising current services

Good progress has already been made on many of the findings of the diagnostic review, carried out by KPMG, and NHS Grampian has agreed its six strategic priorities for 2026/27. These priorities, building on the three clear priorities* in 2025/26, represent a key component of the organisation's continuing stabilisation phase and are supporting improvements in performance, governance, financial recovery and organisational resilience:

- Clinical Quality and Safety
- People, Leadership and Governance
- Unscheduled Care*
- Planned Care*
- Prevention
- Value and Sustainability*

The KPMG diagnostic report identified opportunities for NHS Grampian to strengthen governance, improve financial performance and enhance organisational effectiveness. It also highlighted the need for transformational change to address NHS Grampian's underlying financial position, supported by a clearer focus on a smaller number of priorities, meaningful performance measures and effective governance arrangements.

This local diagnostic should also be considered within the wider national context. Audit Scotland's "NHS in Scotland 2025" report highlighted that NHS Scotland is not in a financially sustainable position and that improvements in productivity and reform of the health and care system are essential if outcomes, inequalities and service delivery are to improve. The Scottish Government's escalation letter of 12 May 2025 also recognised that long-standing demographic, demand and capacity pressures across the local health and care system require a comprehensive local strategy and a clear plan to deliver the necessary fundamental transformation.

Taken together, these findings reinforce that continued stabilisation is necessary but not sufficient. NHS Grampian now needs to progress the refresh of its Plan for the Future, to create a stronger, cohesive strategic narrative to move towards its stated goal of sustainable health and care by 2032. The refreshed strategy will describe the future health and care model required to deliver sustainable services and improved outcomes, together with the implications for people, culture, quality, safety, infrastructure, digital, population health and financial sustainability. It will also establish the prioritised delivery programme required to support implementation.

This will bring the strategy in line with the national context (Service Renewal Framework and Population Health Framework) and Sub-national planning arrangements in Scotland (East and West).

The purpose of this report is therefore to set out how NHS Grampian will move from stabilisation to defining its future health and care model, and ultimately to delivering the redesign and transformation required to secure sustainable services and improved outcomes for the population of Grampian.

2.3 Assessment

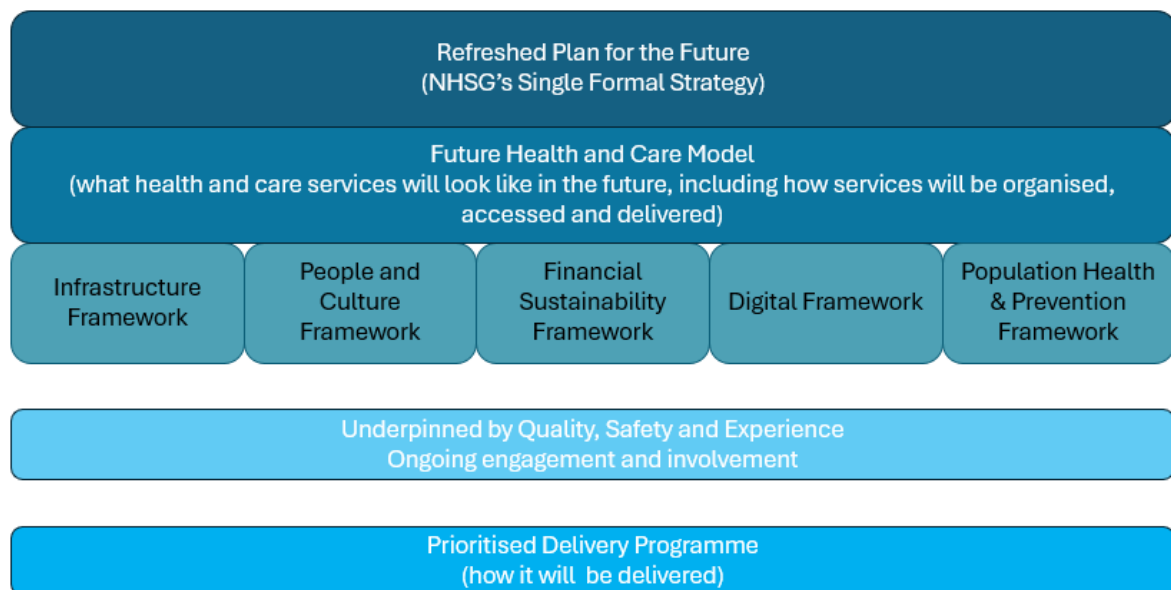
There are early indications of progress within NHS Grampian, and work is underway to establish a number of key building blocks to ensure stabilisation, including the agreement of six clear priorities for 2026/27 (which build on the 2025/26 priorities which gave the organisation focus). The six strategic priorities for 2026/27 provide a focused programme of stabilisation, supporting improvements in financial grip and control, governance, leadership, performance and organisational resilience. This stabilisation work is an essential foundation for the longer-term redesign and transformation required to secure sustainable services and improved outcomes.

Whilst stabilisation remains important, NHS Grampian must now define the future health and care model required to deliver sustainable services and improved outcomes. The progress already made has started to create the conditions for the redesign and transformation that is likely to be required at local, sub-national and national levels.

Whilst the current strategy continues to provide an important foundation, acknowledging it was informed by extensive engagement with staff, communities and partners, NHS Grampian now needs to refresh its Plan for the Future to define the future health and care model required to deliver sustainable services and improved outcomes. The refresh provides an opportunity to respond to the findings of the diagnostic review, reflect the evolving national and sub-national context, and establish a clearer basis for prioritising redesign and transformation activity over the coming years.

The timing of the refresh also allows NHS Grampian to establish a clear local framework while retaining flexibility to respond to national reform direction as it emerges.

The diagram below provides an illustrative example of how the refreshed Plan for the Future could be structured. It is intended to support discussion and engagement and should not be regarded as the final design of the strategy or its supporting components. The final structure will be informed through ongoing engagement with the Board, Executive Team, staff, partners and other stakeholders as the refresh progresses.



The future health and care model will describe how services may need to evolve to improve outcomes, strengthen prevention and support long-term sustainability, together with the implications for workforce, infrastructure, digital and financial planning. Its development will take account of input from HSCPs, relevant IJB strategic plans and engagement already undertaken through local planning processes, recognising the statutory role of IJBs in strategic commissioning of delegated health and social care services. The model will be underpinned by a commitment to delivering high-quality, safe clinical and care services and improving outcomes for the population of Grampian. Establishing a clear view of the future health and care model will provide the direction required for redesign and transformation activity.

Transformation will not be delivered through strategy alone. Delivering the future health and care model will require NHS Grampian to develop a stronger organisational capability for change, including a clear understanding of available transformation capacity, a more consistent approach to programme and project delivery, and stronger alignment between operational leadership, change resources and strategic priorities. This reflects the principle that transformation is not delivered by dedicated change teams alone, but through leadership at all levels of the organisation. This will be supported through the development of a refreshed transformation infrastructure, common methodology and governance approach.

A prioritised delivery programme will be developed to coordinate the work required to deliver the future health and care model and realise the intended strategic benefits. Together, the refreshed strategy, future health and care model, supporting frameworks and delivery programme will be underpinned by NHS Grampian's integrated performance and assurance arrangements, providing a clear line of sight from strategic objectives through to implementation, outcomes, benefits realisation and Board assurance.

Supporting frameworks will be developed to describe the implications of the future health and care model for workforce, digital, estates and infrastructure, population health and prevention, and financial sustainability. These frameworks will be developed in alignment, recognising that clinical redesign, digital transformation and physical infrastructure are interdependent enablers of sustainable service change. These are not separate strategies, but implementation plans describing the implications of the future health and care model.

It is intended that the refreshed strategy will come to the Board for approval in April 2027, and an indicative timeline for progressing this is set out below. The supporting infrastructure and governance are being developed and will include a core development group, supported by a wider stakeholder oversight group with HSCP representation, providing a route for stakeholder input, reporting through to the Executive Team.

Timeline - Plan for the Future Refresh July 2026 - April 2027



**Plan
for the
Future**

**NHS
Grampian**



The refresh will be developed through a staged process, with early engagement used to test the proposed strategic architecture, future health and care model and delivery priorities. This will include opportunities for Board members to contribute at key points during the development process. Input from the Executive Team, Board, staff, clinical leaders, partners and wider stakeholders will be used to refine the draft plan before formal consultation and final Board approval.

The table below summarises the proposed strategic journey for NHS Grampian. The first column describes the ambitions of the current stabilisation activity underway; the second outlines the work required to define the future health and care model; the third highlights areas where redesign and transformation may be required; and the fourth sets out the characteristics and outcomes of a more sustainable health and care system.

Stabilisation	Defining the Future	Transformation	Sustainability
- Grip and control - Financial recovery - Strengthened governance - Performance improvement - Clinical quality and safety focus - Leadership stability, staff experience, engagement and culture	- Plan for the Future Refresh - Future health and care model (new clinical models of care) - Clear strategic framework - Developing longer term direction - Culture, people and leadership arrangements - Clarity on infrastructure, digital and workforce requirements	- Quality, safety and experience improvement - Prevention, early intervention, pathway redesign and clinical service transformation - Transformation of services, pathways and models of care - Responding to national reform, renewal and public service reform - Local NHS Grampian and North-East System redesign - Sub-national planning and collaboration	- Sustainable, high-performing services - Financial and environmental sustainability - Improved outcomes - Contribution to improved population health - Improved patient outcomes, staff experience and public confidence - Public confidence and trust

The refreshed strategy will be cognisant of NHS Grampian's place within our wider system:

System perspective	How this informs the refreshed strategy
Local	North-East System Transformation Group – including NHS Grampian, our three local councils and three Integration Joint Boards, which has been re-established and refreshed in order to identify, analyse and recommend whole system opportunities to redesign services, improve outcomes, reduce duplication and make the best use of collective resources across the Grampian health and social care system. Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) – recognising the important role of partnership working in addressing the wider determinants of health and reducing inequalities. The refreshed strategy will seek alignment with the priorities of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Community Planning Partnerships, supporting a shared focus on prevention, early intervention, wellbeing and improving outcomes for local communities. Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) – the three local Integration Joint Boards are statutory public bodies with responsibility for strategic commissioning of delegated health and social care services. Their strategic plans, informed through community engagement, will be important in shaping the refreshed strategy's consideration of community pathways, prevention, locality planning and social care, recognising local place-based opportunities and challenges.
Sub-national	Sub-national planning arrangements – recognising NHS Grampian's role within emerging NHS Scotland sub-national planning structures. The refreshed strategy will take account of opportunities for greater collaboration across Boards to improve sustainability, reduce unwarranted variation, make best use of specialist clinical expertise and infrastructure, and support the development of clinically and financially sustainable services delivered at the most appropriate level.
National	National policy and strategic direction – ensuring continued alignment with Scottish Government priorities, NHS Scotland planning guidance and national reform programmes. This includes supporting national ambitions around prevention, population health improvement, quality and safety, digital transformation, financial sustainability and the delivery of sustainable models of health and care for the people of Scotland.

The refreshed strategy will therefore seek to balance the needs of the Grampian population with opportunities to improve outcomes through local, regional and national collaboration, ensuring that services are planned and delivered at the level most appropriate to population need and long-term sustainability. This will take account of the interdependence between health and social care services, while recognising the statutory responsibilities of IJBs and partner organisations.

2.3.1 Quality / Patient Care

Quality, safety and experience are fundamental to the delivery of our strategic ambitions and will underpin the development of the refreshed strategic plan. The future health and care model and supporting frameworks will be designed to support continuous improvement in clinical outcomes, patient safety, patient experience and equity of access, ensuring that future service models deliver high-quality care for the population of Grampian.

2.3.2 Workforce

Our workforce is fundamental to the delivery of our strategic ambitions and ensuring that NHS Grampian can continue to provide sustainable services into the future. Alongside the existing People, Leadership and Governance Strategic Priority, engagement with our workforce will help shape the development of our future health and care model. This will be supported by a Workforce Framework which will articulate the workforce implications of the future model and the actions required to attract, develop, support and retain the workforce needed to deliver it.

2.3.3 Financial

Financial sustainability is fundamental to the delivery of our strategic ambitions and ensuring that NHS Grampian can continue to provide sustainable services into the future. The refreshed strategic plan will seek to ensure alignment between future demand, service delivery ambitions and anticipated available resources. This will be supported by a Financial Sustainability Framework which will articulate the revenue, capital and infrastructure affordability implications of the future health and care model, and the actions required to deliver that model within available resources over time.

2.3.4 Risk Assessment / Management

A clear strategic plan will be key to supporting the mitigation of a number of the organisation's strategic risks. A clear process for identifying and managing risks associated with its implementation will be developed over the coming months.

2.3.5 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

The plan for refreshing the strategic plan includes time to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA). It is intended that the IIA will be completed prior to finalisation of the refreshed Plan for the Future, to ensure that Board members are able to take account of the potential impacts of the strategy. This will include consideration of the potential impacts of rurality, transport, digital exclusion, deprivation, demographic change and unpaid caring responsibilities, alongside impacts on people with protected characteristics. It is intended that the IIA is then maintained as a live document, enabling any potential impacts to be identified, reviewed and, if required, mitigations put in place as the delivery of the refreshed strategic plan progresses.

2.3.6 Other impacts

Not applicable.

2.3.7 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

Wide engagement across internal and external stakeholders was undertaken to support the development of the current Plan for the Future. A range of engagement is being planned to ensure key stakeholder input into the refresh, including Board seminars/development sessions; discussion through key governance groups such as the Area Clinical Forum and Area Partnership Forum; engagement with IJBs, HSCP leadership teams, Strategic Planning Groups and locality planning arrangements; workshops for staff; informal and formal opportunities with partners; and a formal consultation period on the final draft. This next stage of engagement will build on previous engagement undertaken for the current Plan for the Future, the development of strategic priorities, and wider system engagement, including engagement undertaken through HSCP and IJB strategic planning processes.

2.3.8 Route to the Meeting

This report has been discussed at an informal meeting of the Executive Team on 27 July 2026. Feedback from that discussion has informed the framing of the report, including the emphasis on maintaining flexibility in response to emerging national policy and reform direction, the importance of prevention and early intervention, and the need to support transformation through workforce, culture, digital, infrastructure and governance enablers.

2.4 Recommendation(s)

The Board is asked to:

- a. **Assurance** – take assurance from the proposed process to refresh NHS Grampian’s Plan for the Future, building on the 2026/27 priorities and current stabilisation work.
- b. **Endorsement** – endorse the proposed approach to developing a refreshed strategic plan that will develop and describe NHS Grampian’s future health and care model and associated supporting frameworks, noting that the refresh will be developed through a staged process of engagement, testing and refinement.
- c. **Future reporting** – note that future updates, including the draft and final refresh of the Plan for the Future, will be brought to the Board in line with the proposed timeline contained within this report.

3 Appendix/List of appendices

There are no appendices to this report.