

Chief Executive's Report
19 February 2026 Board Meeting
Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive

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Open Session
Item 5



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 public's attention.

Welcome

I am pleased to bring my third formal report as chief executive to the Board and my first of 2026. Whilst there is much to be optimistic about as we look ahead to 2026/27, I would first like to recognise that we remain in winter and that it has been a very challenging start to the year, with the recent severe weather compounding the existing pressures NHS Grampian and our system partners are responding to in relation to demand on our services, particularly for unscheduled (emergency) care.

The multi-agency response and partnership working seen throughout the recent snow, ice and flooding of the storms we have experienced demonstrated what can be achieved when we pull together and this has been rightly recognised by the communities we serve. I would like to reiterate my own personal thanks to staff and partners who have and continue to go above and beyond to put the care of people and our patients first.

Assurance Board update

Our engagement with the Scottish Government's Assurance Board continues to be constructive and supportive, with bi-weekly meetings providing a valuable space for transparent discussion on our performance, progress, and improvement plans – with a focus on our three priority areas (financial sustainability, planned care and unscheduled care) as well as culture, governance and leadership.

We have been able to report and evidence steady progress on improvements suggested by the external diagnostic review that was published in October 2025. We have sharpened our organisational grip through clear priority programmes spanning the areas described above, are we taking positive steps to improve our organisational culture and we have put structures in place that provide more consistent oversight and a stronger focus on delivery. Supporting actions are also embedded within our single Improvement Plan which the NHS Grampian Board approved in December 2025.

Unscheduled Care

Significant pressures remain across the system on unscheduled care services. These are particularly visible at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI) where high bed occupancy remains and in Aberdeenshire where an Incident Management Team has been established to support patient flow.

While we are far from performance which is acceptable when it comes to the national four-hour emergency access standard and ambulance handover times, if we look beyond these headlines we can start to evidence progress to patient and staff experience as a result of our whole system improvement programme. This includes positive early results from the out of hours primary care service for the Flow Navigation Centre - which is ensuring patients receive care in the right place - an expansion of Hospital at Home into Portlethen and Westhill, and encouraging results from Same Day Emergency Care - the operational model that assesses, treats, and discharges suitable emergency patients on the same day without an overnight admission as a result of an expansion of this service.

A short-term intervention in Aberdeenshire, designed to rapidly move a defined cohort of patients out of hospital into their long-term care placements, also successfully released capacity in community hospitals and supported improved flow from ARI.

We have further strengthened leadership thanks to financial support from Scottish Government, appointing a new Site Director for ARI and a Deputy Medical Director for Unscheduled Care. Both of these clinical colleagues are working closely with teams to support improvement, including our work on improving the discharge experience for our patients and in turn better flow through and out of our hospitals, including Dr Gray's Hospital, which has been under similar pressure since the start of the year.

Planned Care

Notwithstanding the challenge presented by the Central Decontamination Unit shutdown since October 2025, we can evidence progress against this priority area with a significant reduction in patients waiting over 52-weeks for appointments and operations. This is the result of improvement work at NHS Grampian, mutual aid from other Health Boards and more Independent Sector support in specialties such as Urology and Dermatology. We have requested Scottish Government support to extend key funding streams into Quarter 1 of 2026/27 and a comprehensive set of recommendations from the external review is informing improvements which are being overseen by our Planned Care Board.

Work to refurbish and upgrade the Foresterhill Central Decontamination Unit following an equipment failure has concluded. The unit reopened on schedule at the end of January following the successful installation and commissioning of two new machines. The resilience of our CDU will be further improved by the installation of

three more machines, scheduled for later this month, thanks to support funding from the Scottish Government.

From a patient care perspective, the incident required approximately 749 elective surgical procedures and 739 dental appointments to be postponed. Whilst, urgent, emergency and cancer care services have been maintained throughout the disruption and the rebooking of affected patients is nearing completion, we are mindful that there are people behind these numbers and I would like to reiterate my apologies to all those whose treatment has been affected.

I would also like to recognise the exceptional efforts of CDU staff and partner Health Boards throughout this period, all of whom I have written to on behalf of the Board to express my appreciation. Their commitment and provision of mutual aid has helped to protect patient safety and minimise the impact on patients' access to treatment.

Value and Sustainability

A full finance update appears on the main agenda, so for the purposes of this report, I will simply update that we continue to make strong progress against our financial and savings plan for the year. In recent weeks we have had confirmation that we will achieve our £45m maximum deficit position, which is an incredible achievement and the result of continued hard work across the organisation. For the sixth consecutive month we have delivered savings which exceed our plan. We remain on track to achieve our £61.8m savings requirement for the year which is a considerable step forward.

Strengthening Operational governance

Work is underway to review, reshape and further strengthen NHS Grampian's operational governance arrangements to ensure they are effective and support the needs of the organisation moving forward. This involves mapping and reviewing the purpose and membership of key forums in which strategic and operational discussions are held and decisions made.

Over the coming month we will engage with leaders and staff from across the organisation to share these developments, strengthen collective ownership and ensure that any revised arrangements are practical, well understood and aligned to organisational priorities before progressing further. So, whilst this work remains in development, I wanted you to be aware of our intent and I look forward to bringing forward more details on its progress in due course, recognising this was a recommendation in the external diagnostic report that features in our Improvement Plan referred to above.

Community Appointment Day and Women's Health Plan Launch

I attended the first Women's Health Community Appointment Day (CAD) at the Aberdeen City Vaccination and Wellbeing Hub in January, which provided a powerful demonstration of our commitment to improving women's health across Grampian. It was a privilege to welcome Jenni Minto MSP, Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, to the event which was the launch pad for Phase Two of the

Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan given that it strongly reflected the plan's values and ambitions.

The day was characterised by genuine partnership and co-design. NHS services worked alongside local authorities, third sector partners and, most importantly, women from our communities to create a welcoming, non-clinical environment. This approach exemplified our commitment to putting people first, reducing barriers to access and encouraging meaningful conversations about what matters most to individuals.

Community Appointment Days continue to demonstrate how joined-up, preventative and person-centred approaches can support earlier intervention, self-management and improved experience. The success of this event, and previous CADs, has been thanks to the strong engagement from participants and partners, providing confidence and momentum as we continue to address inequalities and improve outcomes for women across Grampian. These events are receiving much attention from Scottish Government and other health boards, recognising the effectiveness of the model and its links to the principles in the Service Renewal Framework and Population Health Framework - two key Government policy documents for health and care.

Celebrating success

With regard to the optimism I mentioned earlier, I wanted to recognise a number of individual and organisational achievements.

Among those successes I would draw attention to this month are, Professor Zosia Miedzobrodzka who was awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honours in recognition of her outstanding contribution to medical genetics. This national recognition highlights the exceptional expertise within NHS Grampian, the strength of our partnership with the University of Aberdeen, and is a source of real pride for the organisation and the communities we serve.

Very many congratulations to the four NHS Grampian finalists for this year's Royal College of Nursing Scotland Nurse of the Year Awards, including Patricia Dow, Clinical Nurse Specialist (Adult Nursing Award), Caroline Reid, Clinical Nurse Manager (Clinical Leadership Award) and Laura Reid, Lead Practice Educator, and Vicky Burnett, Practice Educator (both Learning in Practice Award).

Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital has been designated a centre of excellence for the care of children with brain tumours, reinforcing its position as a leader in paediatric care and research. This reflects the sustained commitment of its multidisciplinary teams to delivering compassionate, high-quality care in some of the most challenging circumstances.

Progress also continues on our Magnet designation journey. Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital has successfully progressed to the site-visit assessment stage with no deficiencies identified. This marks a significant milestone and demonstrates the strength of nursing leadership, professional practice and patient experience.

In addition, December saw the successful opening of the new £30 million Integrated Mortuary on the Foresterhill campus. This modern, purpose-built facility represents an important infrastructure milestone. It enhances our ability to provide dignified, high-quality services for patients and families, while supporting staff through improved facilities and working environments.

Final reflection

The way our teams have responded to sustained challenge, maintained focus on quality and safety, and continued to improve and innovate should be recognised. As we move forward, a continued emphasis on putting people first, listening to our communities and staff, and working collaboratively across the system will be critical in ensuring that NHS Grampian is well placed to meet the challenges ahead and make lasting improvements for the people we serve.

The new sub-national arrangements for Scotland East and West have been stood up. I am pleased to share that NHS Grampian is integral to and fully participating in these new structures, recognising the improvement opportunities they present for the communities we serve and the people of Scotland. A full update on sub-national developments and progress since the last Board meeting are included in a separate paper on the agenda, such is the importance of this work.

Laura Skaife-Knight, Chief Executive