APPENDIX 4

NHS Grampian – Strategic Priorities 2026/27

Communications and Engagement Plan

1. Purpose

This paper sets out how NHS Grampian will communicate and engage staff, partners, patients and communities on the Strategic Priorities for 2026/27, ensuring clarity, consistency and sustained visibility throughout the year. It supports delivery of the priorities and underpins the wider organisational approach set out in Plan for the Future.

The plan builds on activity undertaken around the three organisation priorities during Q3 and Q4 2025/26 by:

- Maintaining focus and alignment with current direction whilst expanding to incorporate five areas requiring improvement.
- Applying NHS Grampian's Putting People First approach to ensure evidence-based and inclusive engagement.
- Adopting the same transparency and use of plain English utilised in Plan for the Future and, more recently, our Single Improvement Plan.

2. Context

The Strategic Priorities for 2026/27 build on the stabilisation focus of 2025/26 and respond to:

- Feedback from staff, partners and communities seeking greater clarity, focus and visibility of priorities.
- The need to balance short-term stabilisation with longer-term transformation, prevention and system redesign.

Effective communication and engagement is essential to:

- Help people understand what the priorities are, why they matter, how progress will be measured and how staff, wider stakeholders and the public can influence and contribute.
- Build trust and transparency during a period of continued system pressure and change.
- Create meaningful two-way dialogue so priorities and delivery plans are informed by what matters most to staff and communities.
- Strengthen system collaboration by identifying new opportunities aligned to shared priorities across NHS Grampian and partners.
- Support and develop public and employee advocacy by equipping key stakeholders, such as Community Councils, with information they can help us share.

To help shape our 2026/27 Priorities for Delivery, we worked across our system to ensure we cascaded the draft priorities via established groups and networks and are grateful for the support of our staff, partners and community members to enable us to do this.

We heard from staff that they want more open communication about what will change, how services will work with partners, and more opportunities for staff to be involved in shaping the future.

'From a workforce perspective, what matters most is psychological safety, realistic workload assignment and clarity of contribution. Staff want to see how priorities translate into practical support' - *feedback from a member of NHS Grampian staff*

We heard from community members who emphasised the need for regular updates, and stronger involvement so diverse voices are heard.

'The more the patients are involved in the process and understand the process, I think it would be a little bit easier. It won't solve everything, but I think that needs to be part of your plan as well' - *feedback from a member of the public at a recent community conversation*

The feedback from these engagement activities provided insights which underpin this Communication and Engagement Plan.

3. Objectives

Activity will focus on informing, engaging and enabling participation.

Primary objectives

- Ensure the Strategic Priorities for 2026/27 are shared widely and well understood.
- Build a clear line of sight between day-to-day activity and organisational priorities.
- Support ownership and advocacy among staff and partners.
- Strengthen relationships with staff, stakeholders and our communities to support transformation of care in 26/27 and beyond.

Supporting objectives

- Explain the wider context and constraints facing NHS Grampian, including service demand, workforce capacity and financial savings.
- Provide regular, accessible updates on progress.
- Create opportunities for listening and dialogue with communities to continue shaping future activity and service delivery in collaboration with Health & Social Care Partnerships and existing community engagement structures.

4. Audiences

- Patients, carers and the wider public
- Community groups, Community Councils and Patient Participation Groups
- NHS Grampian staff (incl. specific cohorts/system leaders: e.g. Extended Leadership Team, Grampian Area Partnership Forum (GAPF), Area Clinical Forum (ACF), Grampian Empowered Multicultural staff (GEMs)
- Health and Social Care Partnership colleagues
- Third sector partners
- Board members & Committees of the Board
- Political and strategic stakeholders (MPs & MSPs, Police Scotland etc.)

5. Key Messages

Messages will be adapted by audience but anchored in a small number of consistent themes:

- Our Strategic Priorities for 2026/27 set out the areas we will focus on to stabilise services now and build a more sustainable system for the future.

- Progress will be steady and transparent, with clear measures to show what is improving and where challenges remain.
- Preventing ill health, improving access to care, supporting our workforce and working with partners are central to delivering better outcomes.
- We want to listen and work with staff, partners and communities so our actions reflect what matters most to people.
- Ultimately we recognise having happy colleagues leads to a better patient experience. Doing the best we can to support our staff, and equipping and encouraging teams to help themselves, means they can do the best for their patients.
- In order to transform health and care, in 2026/27 we will strengthen partnerships with the wider public sector, the third sector and our communities.

6. Strategy and Approach

Our approach reflects learning from the recent staff and public engagement activities as well as our Plan for the Future development. It also adheres to Scottish Approach to Change Best Practice and incorporates our own Putting People First principles:

Prioritisation

Communications will spotlight key work around the Priorities, educating and raising awareness among members of the public, staff and partners about the context behind challenges (demographics/scope of work/increasing demand), and what we *are* achieving.

Phasing

A phased approach will be used (which has already begun through meetings, workshops and briefings with partners during development of the Strategic Priorities for 2026/27):

- Pre-launch: awareness building and preparation. *(underway)*
- Launch: clear, visible introduction of priorities.
- Sustain: regular updates, stories and engagement through the year.
- Closing the loop: where feedback is sought/gathered, ensure key groups are informed of where it has been shared/how it has influenced our approach.

Consistency

Agreed language/messages and visuals will be used across channels to reinforce recognition and recall.

7. Channels and Tactics

Internal

- Daily Brief, intranet features, information screens.
- Senior leader briefings (All Staff Briefings, Extended Leadership Team meetings, Ask Laura recordings, Chair's Blog, Chief Executive Board Reports etc.)
- A toolkit for managers to cascade information meaningfully and support team conversations.

External

- Dedicated webpages on NHS Grampian's corporate website.

- Regular bulletins sharing updates and reporting milestones.
- Further Community Conversations and Public Involvement Network activity in collaboration with the three Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray.
- Executive leads for the different Priorities are encouraged to identify one positive media opportunity during the year, using statistics based on key actions and emerging successes, to really bring the Priorities to life for the local media and the wider community.
- Use of new Digital engagement platform 'Engage HQ' to record activity and chart participation.
- Delivery of focussed engagement activity when this is required (for example: when major service change is taking place or where there are equity issues to be considered in improvement activity)

Internal & External Opportunities (Storytelling)

- How Are We Doing Reports.
- Regular staff and partner social media posts explaining/showing how work on the ground links back to priorities.
- Quarterly spotlight features or Ask Laura style video recordings which reflect performance to date and improve understanding of how the health and care system operates.
  - Based on feedback from the local community, this will provide a wider opportunity to dispel myths, highlight success, provide clarity on how things work in practice and, where appropriate, address challenges picked up in news headlines in a pragmatic way. These may pick up a key theme we know people want to understand more about, such as how colleagues work together across primary and secondary care.
- Use of real examples to explain complex change in plain language (e.g. patient story from public and healthcare perspectives).
- Share any positive stories arising from the Real Time Feedback initiative, HOPE Collaborative and population health engagement exercises.

8. Accessibility and Language Discipline

Public facing communications will:

- Use clear, non-technical language.*
- Explain the 'why' behind decisions and changes.
- Describe what service users will see/experience that is different.
- Provide reassurance whilst being honest and transparent about constraints/pace of progress.

Clinical and professional language will be retained where appropriate for staff and specialist audiences.

9. Measurement and Evaluation

Success will be monitored through:

- Website and digital/social media analytics.
- Engagement and participation levels.
- Feedback from staff, partners and public through engagement activity.

- Media coverage and tone.
- Where we are able to tangibly demonstrate how public engagement has influenced a service change/improvement.
- How learning is applied to adapt and improve activity throughout the year.

10. Governance and Reporting

Delivery of and progress against this plan will align with programme governance for each Strategic Priority. Each priority has a corresponding Programme Board, which reports to the Executive Team through Chair's Assurance Reports. Membership of each Programme Board will include a colleague with expertise in communications and engagement to provide advice and guidance. The Senior Responsible Officer for each programme is responsible for ensuring that communication and engagement activity is delivered in line with the agreed overall Communications and Engagement Plan.