NHS Grampian

Meeting:	NHS Grampian Board
Meeting date:	19 March 2026
Item Number:	9
Title:	Digital Delivery Plan 2026/27 & Strategy Refresh
Responsible Executive:	Stuart Humphreys, Director of Marketing & Communications
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1 Purpose and recommendations

This paper is presented to the Board for:

- Endorsement

Recommendations

The Board is asked to endorse:

- deferral of the Digital Strategy refresh work to ensure alignment with the Plan for the Future update, beginning in Q3 2026
- the content of the Digital Delivery Plan 2026/27 attached at Appendix 2, which allocates digital resource to those projects that support NHS Grampian's 2026/27 priorities and known national/sub-national commitments
- governance of the Digital Delivery Plan 2026/27 through the Digital Board with escalation to Chief Executive Team if required, which provides a mechanism to prioritise/reprioritise resources effectively – both to avoid new unplanned asks placing the delivery of agreed objectives at risk and mitigate risks to delivery from inadequate staff capacity and/or financial support.

This report relates to:
- NHS Grampian Strategy: Plan for the Future Government policy/directive
- Local policy

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 affectively maintain and invest in NHS Grampian's infrastructure
- 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

2   Report summary

2.1   Situation

The Plan for the Future (2022–2032) remains the long-term strategic anchor for NHS Grampian. However, a refresh of the plan is proposed to commence later in 2026. Since Digital should be an enabler of organisational direction, not a parallel or competing strategy, work to refresh the organisation's Digital Strategy requires to be sequenced with the Plan for the Future work to ensure alignment and coherence with its longer-term objectives.

In addition, significant national priorities - including the Operational Improvement Plan for 2026/27 - are yet to be published, while sub-national planning frameworks and plans continue to mature. Therefore refreshing the Digital Strategy before these work streams have reached a settled position risks producing something that may not include important content, quickly become outdated and lack the necessary coherence.

NHS Grampian's digital capability is essential to the success of organisational recovery and transformation. In the current context, prioritising activity that supports near-term recovery, performance improvement and national/subnational commitments is the recommended, proportionate way forward.

2.2   Background

NHS Grampian's Digital Strategy was launched in 2020 following extensive consultation with internal and external stakeholders, including local health and social care partners as well as citizens. It was an ambitious strategy seeking to modernise working practices and place digital at the heart of how our citizens experience health and care in order to support improved outcomes.

The document identified 62 projects made up of local, regional and national initiatives to form a cross-system digital strategy. It incorporated projects that could be solely delivered by NHS Grampian, as well as those requiring support from partners and some that were out with NHS Grampian's control (such as government targets for broadband coverage).

The subsequent pandemic drove a number of changes in working practices, including increased home working and demand for supporting digital solutions and equipment. This had a material impact on NHS Grampian's digital estate, requiring greater connectivity (the number of network points has risen to c36,000 from c10,000 just 10 years ago), the rapid deployment of MS Teams and a growth in devices (which now number c17,000 compared to c9,000 in 2020).

These unforeseen changes and requirement for digital to support them impacted the lifecycle of the strategy. Its content was therefore reviewed and refreshed in 2023 before being approved by the Board in December that year. This process saw the overall number of objectives in the strategy reduce from 62 to 43, reflecting those already delivered or no longer relevant as well as the addition of new ones. However, rather than resetting the Strategy for further five years, the update only extended the lifecycle of the Strategy from 2025 to 2027 (Appendix 1).

To support the development of a new Digital Strategy to commence from 2027, a series of workshops and leadership engagement sessions began in January 2025. As with the development of the extant strategy, these sessions were designed to ensure that content will reflect the interconnectivity of our health and care system and incorporate views gathered from stakeholders across Grampian and nationally.

Three engagement sessions were held and views captured from a wide representation including; Executive and non-Executive Board members, NHS Grampian staff, colleagues from other Health Boards, and partners from Aberdeenshire Council and NHS Scotland.

These sessions were designed to look at how we evolve digital services, infrastructure and solutions across three key areas:

- Improving Digital Infrastructure
- Improving Colleague Experience and Efficiency
- Improving Citizen Experience and Outcomes

Each being underpinned by three golden threads:

- Driving improvement in equality and equity of service
- Supporting improved organisational decision-making through access to data and insight
- Providing value for money through innovation and maximising use of digital solutions to reduce future cost burden to public purse

In addition, a number of smaller, less formal digital take over sessions were held with our equality networks focusing on how digital technologies could be better harnessed going forward.

However, despite the utility of these initial engagement sessions, further planned engagement activity was paused in January following the establishment of sub-national planning and delivery structures and as the proposed timeline for refreshing the Plan for the Future was set out. The intent being to resume and align with that work later in the year.

2.3 Assessment

The extant approved Digital Strategy 2023-2027 remains relevant and still has utility, with 40% of projects having been delivered and a further 35% having commenced but not as yet concluded.

In addition, initial engagement activity intended to support it to be refreshed has captured useful insights that can be returned to and built upon at an agreed later date.

A number of national, sub-national and local priorities are in train and our current context places constraints on both capacity and finances which are affecting the digital team as well as services required to support significant digital change programmes.

Sequencing a full Digital Strategy refresh with Plan for the Future work later in 2026 will therefore ensure that digital transformation is grounded within a wider coherent strategic framework and supported by appropriate organisational capacity.

A pragmatic, implementable digital plan is therefore needed to support the organisation's near-term priorities and meet known national and subnational commitments and expectations. Prioritising a delivery-focused digital plan for 2026/27 will:

- Support stabilisation and Improvement Plan delivery
- Strengthen performance and patient experience
- Enable workforce productivity
- Ensure alignment with emerging national and local priorities

This will ensure resource is focused on those pieces of work that will deliver tangible improvements and enable established reporting and escalation structures to prioritise and de-prioritise if required in response to emerging needs. This will enable the Digital Directorate to operate within its resource and capacity envelope.

The Digital Delivery Plan (Appendix 2):

- Aligns digital priority progammes to wider organisational priorities, the Improvement Plan and national/sub-national work
- Prioritises delivery, adoption and optimisation of existing/funded digital investments
- Allocates resource to digital enablers that support plans for:
  - Unscheduled (Emergency) Care, Planned Care, Value & Sustainability, People, Leadership & Governance and Prevention
  - NHS Grampian's Single Improvement Plan
  - National & subnational programmes (e.g. Digital Front Door, Laboratory Information Management System (LIMs), Theatre Scheduling) workforce productivity and experience
  - Maintaining financial sustainability, cyber resilience, safety, quality and patient experience
- Is underpinned by a list of objectives, with measurable milestones and outcomes that will form the basis of reporting, oversight and Board assurance

<u>Governance & Assurance</u>

Oversight of the Digital Delivery Plan will be provided through existing performance reporting and structures.

- Progress updates and exception reporting will be received by the Digital Board (Appendix 3) which reports to the Chief Executive Team (CET) through Chair's Assurance Reports.
- In addition to monitoring progress against the Plan, the Digital Board and existing SBAR process provides the forum for check and challenge before approving/declining new digital projects and de-prioritising/re-prioritising resources to facilitate work
- Where resource is insufficient and a project is identified as both important and urgent, this will be escalated to CET with recommendations from the Digital Board for decision
- Updates on specific activities, such as implementation of recommendations from internal audit, will continue to be provided through existing governance structures to the most relevant Committee of the Board (e.g. Audit & Risk Committee) on request or as required by Committee reporting cycles

2.3.1 Quality / Patient Care

The intent of both the Digital Delivery Plan and subsequent refresh of the Digital Strategy is to improve the quality of care for all patients across Scotland through the application of digital technologies.

2.3.2 Workforce

The intent of both the Digital Delivery Plan and subsequent refresh of the Digital Strategy is to realise greater efficiency in our use of resources, thereby reducing the burden on staff and releasing capacity.

2.3.3 Financial

The intent of the Digital Delivery Plan is to deliver the agreed activity within the resource envelope available and use appropriate reporting and escalation routes to escalate issues and re-prioritise where necessary to address any shortfall should the need arise.

2.3.4 Risk Assessment / Management

Finite digital capacity, technical deficit, an increasing cost base for digital solutions (driven by the centrally procured solutions and the sector's move to expensive subscription models rather than traditional capital procurement), plus advances in technology are the key risk factors. This means that the effective prioritisation and allocation of our digital resources and capital investment is vital, alongside adequate training of staff and the acquisition of new skills to realise the benefit or new technologies.

2.3.5 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

Both the Digital Delivery Plan and subsequent refresh of the Digital Strategy seek to improve access, reduce waits and enhance the patient journey. However, we are mindful of digital literacy levels in Grampian and the potential for inequity among those who do not have access to digital devices or are unable to use them. Integrated Impact Assessments will be used to surface and mitigate these risks prior to delivery as projects mature and their potential impact on service users is understood.

2.3.6 Other impacts

N/A

2.3.7 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

As evidenced by the engagement activity undertaken thus far to refresh the Digital Strategy, which is currently in abeyance, we remain committed to involving and consulting with staff, partners and patients before implementing digital solutions. We are already actively engaged with a range of partners through the planning and/or delivery of activities captured within the Digital Delivery Plan and this will continue. In addition, once approved, NHS Grampian will undertake a communications campaign to ensure the Digital Delivery Plan is promoted widely.

2.3.8 Route to the Meeting

The transition to a pragmatic Digital Delivery Plan for 2026/27 and realignment of the five-year Digital Strategy with the Plan for the Future was discussed at a workshop with the Chief Executive Team on 6 January 2025. Consensus was reached that developing a standalone digital strategy was suboptimal and would likely jeopardise ongoing project delivery, since the same colleagues across digital and organisational leadership would be required to undertake work. It was therefore agreed this would not be an effective use of resource.

The Digital Team has also communicated the proposed way forward to members of the Digital Board, which currently updating its Terms of Reference and will ensure these align with the role and governance process outlined above to support delivery.

Digital Strategy updates have also been provided to two meetings of the Integrated Planning Group, thereby ensuring that digital is considered and embedded within our wider organisational planning process.

2.4 Recommendations

NHS Grampian's digital capability is essential to the success of organisational recovery and transformation. In the current context, prioritising activity that supports near-term recovery, performance improvement and national/subnational commitments is the recommended, proportionate way forward.

The Board is asked to endorse:

- deferral of the Digital Strategy refresh work to ensure alignment with the Plan for the Future update, beginning in Q3 2026
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3 List of appendices

The following appendices are included with this report:

- Appendix 1 – NHS Grampian Digital Strategy 2023-2027
- Appendix 2 – High-level Digital Delivery Plan 2026/27
- Appendix 3 – Digital Board Terms of Reference