

# NHS Highland Chief Executive's Update

## January 2026



**Fiona Davies,**  
**Chief Executive NHS Highland**

### Raigmore Hospital Visit

Before Christmas, I spent valuable time at Raigmore Hospital meeting with teams across several key service areas. I received a high-level briefing on our Scheduled and Unscheduled Care pathways from the senior leadership team, followed by a Planned Care and Improvement project update in the Theatres. I was then provided with a Same Day Emergency Care and Frailty & Falls Department update in the Clinical Areas.

It was particularly valuable spending time in the Coffee Lounge with staff from areas that had been impacted by the recent flu outbreak. Hearing directly from our General Care, 3A, and CNMs teams about their experiences during this challenging period

reinforced my admiration for their resilience and commitment to patient care. These face-to-face conversations are essential, and I remain committed to spending time with our frontline teams to understand both the successes and the very real pressures they are managing daily.

### Winter Resilience Response

I want to take this opportunity to update the Board on the significant winter resilience challenge we faced earlier this month. From 31st December through to 12th January, we responded to severe wintry weather conditions across Highland for 12 consecutive days. Our Incident Management Teams worked alongside multi-agency partners through the Care for People arrangements to support our wider communities during this exceptionally challenging period. I am grateful for the vital support we received from Highland 4x4 Response, Maritime Coastguard Agency, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, Bear Scotland and The Highland Council, all of whom worked alongside us to ensure we could continue delivering services to our communities despite the extremely difficult conditions.



What struck me most during this incident was the collaborative response across our Health and Social Care Partnership system and with our external partners.

I am acutely aware that this was an extended incident that began on a public holiday and concluded on a Sunday, placing considerable strain on our staff and services as teams

worked continuously to deliver care against the backdrop of treacherous road conditions and ongoing access challenges. I want to place on record my recognition and gratitude to all our staff and

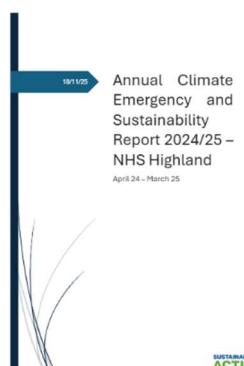
partners for their resilience and the incredible support they collectively provided to ensure everyone across Highland was cared for throughout this period. We are now conducting a lessons learned review to ensure we incorporate these experiences into our future plans and processes, strengthening our preparedness for any similar events ahead.

### **Scotland West Sub-National Planning**

I am pleased to update the Board on the establishment of the Scotland West Strategic Planning and Delivery Committee (SPDC), which held its inaugural meeting in December. This new sub-national planning structure brings together the seven health boards across Scotland West - NHS Ayrshire & Arran, Dumfries & Galloway, Forth Valley, Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Highland, Lanarkshire, and Western Isles - to support population-based planning with a focus on reducing unwarranted variation in access and outcomes, improving financial sustainability through smarter use of shared resources, and improving clinical sustainability of services by planning across a wider footprint.

The Committee, chaired by Dr Lesley Thomson (Chair of NHSGGC), will oversee the development and delivery of the Scotland West Plan and consolidated financial plan for 2026-27. I have commenced as co-chair of the Finance, Planning, Performance and Workforce delivery group, which is a significant responsibility and reflects the important contribution NHS Highland will make to this collaborative planning approach. The four immediate sub-national priorities are Orthopaedic Elective Care Services, Digital Front Door, Emergency Access Standards, and Business Systems. I will be working closely with colleagues across all seven boards through the Strategic Planning and Delivery Executive Group to drive progress on these priorities and ensure NHS Highland's voice is heard in shaping the future of healthcare delivery across the West of Scotland.

### **NHS Highland Climate Emergency and Sustainability Annual Report 2024/25**



This report represents a significant milestone as NHS Highland's first comprehensive Climate Emergency and Sustainability Annual Report, covering the period April 2024 to March 2025. Developing this baseline report has been a considerable undertaking for the organisation, requiring the establishment of robust data collection systems across our vast and geographically diverse estate—the largest territorial health board in Scotland.

The process has involved extensive collaboration across departments to capture emissions data, track resource use, and document sustainability initiatives that were previously happening in silos. This foundation work now provides us with the benchmark against which we will measure future progress toward our commitment to become a net-zero organisation by 2045 and enables us to report transparently on our environmental impact to staff, communities, and stakeholders.

The report reveals that our total greenhouse gas emissions for 2024/25 were 34,370 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e, representing a 10.64% increase from 2023/24, primarily driven by increased building energy consumption (up 17.1%) and fleet travel (up 34.7%). However, we have achieved notable successes: medical gas emissions decreased by 13.7%, inhaler propellant emissions reduced by 2%, and waste sent to landfill decreased by 45.95%.

Our sustainability programme has delivered tangible progress including LED lighting upgrades across multiple sites, installation of EV charging infrastructure throughout the region, the successful paper towel recycling project at Raigmore Hospital, expansion of active travel facilities with new bike storage at four locations, and enhanced greenspace programmes at New Craigs Hospital and Raigmore. The establishment of our Environment and Sustainability Board, chaired by Richard MacDonald, Director of Estates, Facilities and Capital Planning, with Gerry O'Brien as Non-Executive

Sustainability Champion, provides the governance structure to drive our climate action plan forward and develop the strategic initiatives needed to reverse the upward emissions trend identified in this baseline year.

### **National Treatment Centre-Highland: First Four Joint Replacement Patient**

I'm delighted to share that the National Treatment Centre-Highland has reached a significant milestone with Chris Caldwell becoming the first patient to complete all four joint replacements at the facility since we opened in April 2024. Chris, who lives in Feughside and transferred his care from NHS Grampian, has undergone two hip replacements and two knee replacements over a 16-month period between June 2024 and October 2025.



What makes his story particularly powerful is the transformation in his waiting time - he had initially faced a two-year wait at Woodend Hospital in Aberdeen, but following his referral to NTC-Highland in early May 2024, his first surgery was scheduled for just eight weeks later on 26th June 2024. This demonstrates exactly the kind of impact we hoped this specialist facility would deliver. I'm also pleased to note that the care pathway between NHS Grampian and NHS Highland has continued to improve throughout Chris's journey, with his final surgery being arranged through direct contact with NTC-Highland, showing the growing integration and collaboration between our health boards.

Chris has taken the time to write to us about his experience, and his feedback speaks volumes about what our teams at NTC-Highland are achieving. He describes the purpose-built facility as "modern, very spacious" and notes that "the staff are obviously very happy there and proud of the service they are providing" - from the welcoming team at the main entrance right through to our surgical and physiotherapy teams. This pride and positivity in our workforce is exactly what we want to foster, and it's clearly making a real difference to patient experience.

Chris has kindly agreed to share his story publicly, which gives us a wonderful opportunity to showcase NTC-Highland as a centre of excellence and to demonstrate how specialist facilities can transform waiting times while delivering genuinely patient-centred care across the north of Scotland.

*Fiona Davies, Chief Executive NHS Highland*