

Nicola Trotter
HIS: NHS Facilities and Environmental Sustainability
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Your Reference: 202600511932

20th May 2026

Dear Ms Trotter,

Thank you for your letter of 30 March 2026 in response to our correspondence of 19 March regarding Insch War Memorial Hospital and the concerns raised on behalf of the Friends of Insch Hospital and Community SCIO and Insch Medical Practice.

We welcome your acknowledgement of the strength of feeling within the local community and the importance of clear, transparent and inclusive processes when considering changes to local health services. However, we remain concerned that the position set out in your response does not fully reflect the circumstances currently affecting services at Insch.

In particular, we note your statement that any decision regarding the future use of the hospital will be determined by NHS Grampian in conjunction with local stakeholders, and that Scottish Government involvement would follow only once such a decision has been reached. Our concern is that, in practice, a substantive service change has already occurred, namely, the prolonged closure of inpatient beds and the withdrawal of associated services, without what we consider to be a compliant process of engagement, consultation, or formal decision-making in line with established guidance.

Furthermore, we consider that the scale and cumulative impact of the service changes already experienced locally, including the closure of inpatient beds and the withdrawal of the Minor Injuries Unit, clearly meet the threshold for a “major service change” as defined in the Scottish Government’s *Identifying Major Service Change* guidance. This guidance makes clear that where changes significantly affect how services are delivered, accessed, or experienced by a community, a formal process must be initiated, including robust public engagement and consultation. In our view, the absence of such a process in this case represents a material deviation from national guidance and raises serious concerns regarding compliance with established requirements.

It is this apparent absence of a transparent and formally recognised service change process that prompted our request for ministerial intervention. We believe there remains a clear role for the Scottish Government in ensuring that national guidance is applied appropriately and that

due process is followed, particularly given the scale and duration of the service changes already experienced by our community.

We note and appreciate that you have referred our concerns to Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS), recognising its role in advising on service change processes and ensuring adherence to appropriate standards. However, we are concerned that, to date, we have not had any direct engagement with HIS, despite representing key local stakeholders alongside Bennachie Community Council.

We had reasonably anticipated that your referral would lead to direct communication from HIS to allow us to discuss these matters openly and to better understand their advice to NHS Grampian and the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership. This has not occurred. We would therefore request that you take steps to facilitate direct engagement between HIS and community representatives as a matter of urgency.

We would also wish to highlight a specific concern regarding an apparent misunderstanding referenced in earlier discussions, namely, the suggestion that Insch War Memorial Hospital was included in the recent Community Hospitals Review. Our understanding is that this facility was uniquely *excluded*, and we would welcome clarification to ensure that any advice being provided is based on an accurate understanding of the position.

Given the continued uncertainty and the importance of ensuring public confidence in the process, we would be grateful if you could clarify:

- Whether the Scottish Government is satisfied that the current status of services at Insch complies with national service change guidance;
- What steps, if any, will be taken to ensure that appropriate processes are followed moving forward; and
- How and when direct engagement between Healthcare Improvement Scotland and local stakeholders will be facilitated.

We remain committed to constructive engagement and to working with all relevant partners to ensure that the future of Insch War Memorial Hospital is considered in a lawful, transparent and meaningful way that reflects both community need and national standards.

We are copying this correspondence to the First Minister for awareness.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Matthews

Chair



CC: firstminister@gov.scot