

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	EDU/25/25

Committee: Education

Date: 27 August 2025

Report Title: Performance Monitoring and Delivery Plan Update – Q1 2025/2026

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Members with the Q1 2025/2026 Service Performance and Delivery Plan progress monitoring position relevant to the Education part of the People Cluster.

1.2 This report provides performance information on:

- Corporate Indicators
- Contribution to the Performance Plan
- Service Plan progress
- Service updates

1.3 For the purpose of this report, details have been provided from the PRMS dashboard showing the latest updates on the Education Service Plan for 2023/2024 where actions have continued into 2025/2026.

1.4 The Delivery Plan 2024-2027 consists of 64 projects/programmes, managed through 6 Portfolio Boards. Each project is reported to a relevant committee for consideration and scrutiny in terms of the Portfolio Reporting Cycle agreed at Council on 15 May 2025. Exceptions to this general rule may apply when for example circumstances merit a standalone project/programme report to either Committee or Council. If exceptions apply this report will signpost to where the relevant reporting can be found.

1.5 This report provides financial, performance, risk, and general information on the following Delivery Plan project(s):

- Capacity Building – ELC / Childcare

1.6 The content and structure of the report is intended to:

- assist Member scrutiny and performance management;
- inform decision making and aid continuous improvement; and,
- provide transparency and accessibility,

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **scrutinise** and **note**:

- i. the Service's performance and risk information; and
- ii. the Delivery Plan progress information.

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource** - There are no specific recommendations at this time with particular implications to highlight.

3.2 **Legal** - No particular implications to highlight. This report contributes to the Council's statutory duties to report performance and secure best value in terms of: Section 1(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1992, and Section 1 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, respectively.

3.3 **Risk** - Risk implications will be kept under regular review and any risks identified reported to future Committees.

Portfolio/Project risks are identified via the Council's risk management process and monitored through the Portfolio Boards and are reported by exception only.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - There are no immediate health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.5 **Gaelic** – No particular implications to highlight.

4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Service Performance – Corporate Indicators

5.1 Service performance in relation to Absence, Complaints, FOIs, and Invoice Payments are set out in the following sub-sections.

5.2 Service Attendance Management

Staff absence is a nationally benchmarked indicator. Effective absence management supports staff, maintains productivity, and contributes to the Council's benchmarked performance. In Q4 2024/2025, the Service lost an average of 4.55 days per employee compared to an average of 3.95 for the Council as a whole.

Service Sickness Absence - Education and Learning

Average number working days per employee lost through sickness absence

Average Days Lost	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26
EDL Non-Teaching	2.08	4.21	4.82	3.88	2.67	4.00	4.55	4.00
EDL - Teachers	0.98	2.65	2.80	2.38	1.47	2.70	3.40	2.62
Highland Council	2.08	3.35	3.48	3.24	2.54	3.42	3.95	3.55

The Service is taking a more pro-active approach to managing absence. Detailed absence data is being regularly reviewed at Senior Leadership Team level and a more robust approach has been adopted to understanding and acting on staff absence, ensuring Council Absence Management policies and guidance are being implemented consistently and staff are being appropriately supported to return to the workplace. The new area-based management structure will also work with school leaders to address absence at a school level for both teaching and non-teaching staff.

5.3 Service Complaints Response Times

Monitoring complaints provides important feedback which can facilitate decision making and service design. Services are responsible for responding to complaints which are issued on their behalf by the Complaints and Information Team ('C&IT').

Performance for complaints during Q1 against a corporate target of 80% was as follows:

Service Complaints - Education and Learning

Number of closed complaints and the % compliant with the legislative timescale

Frontline Resolution within 5 days

	Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26	
Education and Learning	9	67 %	14	93 %	22	95 %	52	96 %	14	93 %	12	92 %	12	92 %	21	90 %
Highland Council	132	78 %	150	80 %	189	76 %	219	84 %	196	78 %	155	88 %	183	87 %	177	92 %

Investigation Resolution within 20 days

	Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26	
Education and Learning	18	67 %	28	61 %	44	48 %	30	57 %	23	65 %	24	83 %	29	69 %	25	56 %
Highland Council	85	49 %	67	48 %	98	46 %	86	47 %	101	57 %	90	42 %	71	51 %	68	47 %

Escalated Resolution within 20 days

	Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26	
Education and Learning	3	0 %	2	50 %	0		3	33 %	2	50 %	2	50 %	2	50 %	1	0 %
Highland Council	32	41 %	28	57 %	34	35 %	47	32 %	28	50 %	26	46 %	34	44 %	30	33 %

Response times for Stage 1 complaints remain high and are well ahead of the Corporate target of 80%. At Stage 2, response times are less positive, though consistently ahead of the Council average. Timescales at Stage 2 reflect the complexity of complaints that cannot be resolved at Stage 1.

5.4 Service Freedom of Information ('FOI') Response Times

FOI requests are co-ordinated by C&IT in collaboration with the Service teams which may hold information relevant to the request.

The performance for FOI response times during Q1 against a corporate target of 90% was as follows:

Service Freedom of Information Requests - Education and Learning

% of FOIs closed compliant with the legislative timescale

% FOIs Compliant - Education and Learning	Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26	
	52	96 %	35	91 %	57	65 %	46	87 %	41	56 %	90	70 %	74	57 %	65	83 %

% FOIs Compliant - Highland Council	Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26	
	333	88 %	338	89 %	548	77 %	511	81 %	479	76 %	568	73 %	616	71 %	577	81 %

Tables display the number of FOIs closed within the quarter and % of those that were compliant with the legislative timescale (20 working days) for the service and the Highland Council overall. The Scottish Information Commissioner requires the Council to achieve a minimum compliance rate of 90%.

The Service is taking a pro-active approach to improving response times for FOIs and it is anticipated that performance will continue to improve for future cycles.

5.5 Service Invoice Payment Times

Payment of invoices within 30 days of receipt is a Council Statutory Performance Indicator. The Council also monitors the number of invoices paid within 10 days of receipt.

The performance for invoice payment times within 30 and 10 days during Q1 against a target of 95% and 77%, respectively, was as follows:

Service Invoice Payment Times - Education & Learning

Invoice Payment within 30 days	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26
Education and Learning	88.8 %	92.3 %	92.1 %	89.2 %	82.7 %	90.0 %	90.7 %	91.2 %
Highland Council	96.7 %	95.6 %	93.6 %	87.7 %	91.4 %	92.9 %	92.9 %	93.0 %

Invoice Payment less than 10 days	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26
Education and Learning	72.8 %	77.3 %	76.3 %	68.7 %	63.7 %	71.8 %	72.7 %	71.2 %
Highland Council	80.9 %	75.3 %	69.7 %	57.0 %	68.5 %	63.8 %	63.3 %	64.7 %

6. Service Contribution to the Performance Plan (Corporate Plan)

- 6.1 The full Performance Plan, “Our Future Highland”, can be viewed on the Highland Council website. It sets out how the Council will deliver the Council programme for 2022-2027 and is reviewed annually. The Service’s contribution to the Performance Plan is set out below.

Attainment performance information is provided for the academic year 2023/24. SCQF and School Leaver tariff scores for most recent academic year are not available until the national Insights data is published in February 2026, although an update on Highland performance will be provided to Committee ahead of this. Positive Destinations data will likewise not be available until early in 2026.

For ACEL data (P1, P4, P7 and S3), the information for the most recent academic year will be provided at the next Education Committee, in November 2025. There is also an intention to hold a Members’ briefing ahead of that so that information on attainment can be shared as early as possible.

See comments above regarding gaps in the attainment data.

Education & Learning: Contribution to the Performance Plan							
Strategic Priority 1 Fair & Caring Highland		Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
SCQF Level 5 attainment by all children CP1.01 CHN04	AY 23/24	63.5 %	AY 24/25				annual update February
SCQF Level 6 attainment by all children CP1.01 CHN05	AY 23/24	32.0 %	AY 24/25				annual update February
% P1/4/7 Pupils Achieving in Literacy CP1.01 CHN13a	AY 23/24	68.7 %	AY 24/25				annual update December
% P1/4/7 Pupils Achieving in Numeracy CP1.01 CHN13b	AY 23/24	74.4 %	AY 24/25				annual update December
School attendance rates % Bi-ennial CP1.01 CHN19a	AY 2021 - 2023	90.00 %	AY 2023 - 2025	89.60 %			update December every 2 yrs
School attendance rates (Care Experienced) % Bi-ennial CP1.01 CHN19b	AY 2021 - 2023	83.30 %	AY 2023 - 2025				update July every 2 yrs
School Leavers - Highest attaining 20% - Complementary Tariff Score CP1.01	AY 23/24	1,238	AY 24/25				annual update February
School Leavers - Lowest attaining 20% - Complementary Tariff Score CP1.01	AY 23/24	110	AY 24/25				annual update February
School Leavers - Middle attaining 60% - Complementary Tariff Score CP1.01	AY 23/24	565	AY 24/25				annual update February
SCQF Level 5 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds CP1.02 CHN06	AY 23/24	40.0 %	AY 24/25				annual update February
SCQF Level 6 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds CP1.02 CHN07	AY 23/24	12.0 %	AY 24/25				annual update February
Pupils entering positive destinations CP1.03 CHN11	AY 23/24	96.50 %	AY 24/25				annual update April
% Highland popn with HLH Card CP1.05	FY 23/24	29.0 %	FY 24/25	29.0 %			annual update August
Develop & implement new SLA with Eden Court Highlands CP1.10 (Completed Q4 23/24)	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26				Completed Q4 23/24
HLH contract review completed CP1.10 (Completed Q2 24/25)	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26				Completed Q2 24/25
% Gaelic Learner Secondary Pupils CP1.11	AY 23/24	15.18 %	AY 24/25	16.14 %			annual update January
% GM Nursery Pupils CP1.11	AY 23/24	9.25 %	AY 24/25	9.89 %			annual update January
% GM Primary Pupils CP1.11	AY 23/24	6.71 %	AY 24/25	6.82 %			annual update January
% Gaidhlig Secondary Pupils CP1.11	AY 23/24	3.17 %	AY 24/25	3.60 %			annual update January
New measures and indicators for Gaelic developed as part of the new GLP CP1.11 (Completed Q1 23/24)	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26				Completed Q1 23/24
Strategic Priority 5 A Resilient and Sustainable Council		Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
ERDs being completed - EDL CP5.01	Q4 24/25	Completed	Q1 25/26				Due to complete Q4 24/25

8. Service Plan Progress

8.1 The intent within this report is to provide high level dashboard information across a range of performance measures for the whole Service. Through these quarterly reports, officers will highlight key matters for Members to consider, significant variations, or key developments in the quarter.

Separate reports are provided to Committee on a regular basis to provide more in-depth consideration of key priorities and performance. This includes, for example, Attainment, School Improvement and High Life Highland.

8.2 The Service performance indicators illustrated in 8.4 include the whole Service dashboard. This is provided for completeness which means it includes indicators which may not have moved during the quarter, those with only an annual update, and those indicators which have no exceptions to highlight, as well as those that are relevant to the quarter being reported against. The format of presentation aims to balance the need to provide Members with visibility of the complete performance dashboard, while ensuring that there is clarity on which subset of those indicators are more relevant, or with points to note, for the current quarter.

8.3 As the main focus of work is establishing the programmes and projects within the Council's Operational Delivery Plan and the development of meaningful measures of success and milestones, work on a Service Plan for 2025/26 is on hold, as it is across all Services. This report therefore contains progress on Actions within the 2023/24 Service Plan which remain ongoing.

8.4

Relationships - Ensure Service Delivery Meets Need Q1 25/26						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Support schools undertaking Rights Respecting Schools award - due to start Q2 23/24	Q4 24/25	On Target	Q1 25/26	On Target		Ongoing
Use of Implementation Science to implement local approach to support	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q3 23/24

Relationships - Progress Community Initiatives Q1 25/26						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Evaluate and review the impact of existing CLD plan - due to start Q2 23/24	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25
Strategic delivery of CLD Plan 2021-24	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25

Values-based Leadership - Improved Quality of Leadership Q1 25/26						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
ERDs being completed - EDL CP5.01	Q4 24/25	Completed	Q1 25/26			Due to complete Q4 24/25
Design and deliver a Head Teacher induction programme	Q4 24/25	Completed	Q1 25/26			Due to complete Q1 25/26
Highland Professional Learning & Leadership Academy Established	Q4 24/25	Completed	Q1 25/26			Due to complete Q4 24/25
New Headteacher feedback from staff survey indicates supported in role	AY 23/24	4.7	AY 24/25		4.5	annual update August
Present options for development of a Highland Professional Learning and Leadership Academy	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q1 24/25

Opportunities - Implement Service-wide MIS Q1 25/26

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Cross service asset rationalisation board meets quarterly - due to start Q2 23/24	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q1 24/25
Ensure mothballed schools are kept under regular review	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q1 24/25
GME School catchment areas established and any consultations complete	Q4 24/25	On Target	Q1 25/26	On Target		Due to complete Q2 25/26
SEEMIS EYMIS - live and operational by target dates	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25
SEEMIS EYMIS - project benefits realised	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25
SEEMIS EYMIS - user training and support delivered	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25

Opportunities - Stakeholder Engagement Q1 25/26

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
% Highland popn with HLH Card CP1.05	FY 23/24	29.0 %	FY 24/25	29.0 %	29.0 %	annual update August
Develop & implement new SLA with Eden Court Highlands CP1.10 (Completed Q4 23/24)	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q4 23/24
HLH contract review completed CP1.10 (Completed Q2 24/25)	Q4 24/25	Completed	Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25
Contribute to the Active Highland Strategy - due to start Q2 23/24	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q1 24/25
New Parental Engagement Strategy and Action Plan created	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q4 23/24
Parental Engagement Strategy & Action Plan - Reference Group established	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q1 24/25
Review existing SLAs/implement recommendations [exc. HLH & Eden Court]	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage	Q1 25/26	Completed		Due to complete Q4 24/25

Entitlement, Excellence & Equity - Improved Outcomes Q1 25/26						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
3 Year ASL implementation plan delivered	Q4 24/25	On Target	Q1 25/26	On Target		Due to complete Q2 26/27
Activity to achieve stretch aims agreed with Education Scotland	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q4 23/24
All performance data analysed to set targets and determine next steps - PRIMARY	AY 23/24	100 %	AY 24/25		80 %	Update due following September
All performance data analysed to set targets and determine next steps - SECONDARY	AY 23/24	100 %	AY 24/25		80 %	Update due following September
Annual monitoring of quality and standards in schools - PRIMARY	Q4 24/25	On Target	Q1 25/26	On Target		Ongoing until Q2 25/26
Annual monitoring of quality and standards in schools - SECONDARY	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Ongoing until Q2 25/26
Collaborative Improvement Framework embedded consistently across the Authority - PRIMARY	AY 23/24	100 %	AY 24/25		80 %	Update due September
Collaborative Improvement Framework embedded consistently across the Authority - SECONDARY	AY 23/24	100 %	AY 24/25		80 %	Update due September
Continue to review underpinning of approach to ASL	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25
Effectiveness and impact of leadership of Learning Training	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q3 24/25
Establish local collaborative networks	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 23/24
Establish the Performance and Achievement tracking system in Primary	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q3 23/24
Improved Head Teacher and Officer collaboration	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q1 24/25
Improvements in admissions procedures for special schools	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q4 23/24
Increase in children reporting wellbeing needs are being met	AY 2021 - 2023	72.8 %	AY 2023 - 2025		74.6 %	Survey results every 2 years
LAC considered for a Coordinated Support Plan	FY 23/24		FY 24/25		80 %	Update due Dec 24
Leadership of Learning training completed	AY 23/24	100 %	AY 24/25		80 %	Training completed
Progress and Achievement model used in Primary schools	AY 23/24	100 %	AY 24/25		80 %	Update due following September

Entitlement, Excellence & Equity - Improve the Consistency and Quality of Provision Q1 25/26						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Develop a Learning and Teaching Policy	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25
Improve quality of ELC provision	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage	Q1 25/26	Some Slippage		Due to complete Q2 24/25
Improved Leadership of Learning and Teaching	AY 23/24		AY 24/25			Reporting will begin Sept25 (AY24/25)

Entitlement, Excellence & Equity - Net Zero Carbon Targets Q1 25/26						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Develop promotional plan to support Learning for Sustainability - due to start Q2 23/24	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q2 24/25
Research funding resource to recruit a development officer - due to start Q2 23/24	Q4 24/25		Q1 25/26			Completed Q3 23/24

9. Delivery Plan Progress Update – ELC and Childcare

9.1 Overall RAG

Project: Early Learning & Childcare [ELC] / Childcare

R ●
 A ●
 G ●
 C ●

Escalated to Portfolio Board that assistance is required with regards to the contracting and procurement aspects of the project to allow this piece of work to move forward. This is being actively considered in terms of where the support can be provided from.

9.2 Key Milestones and Requests for change

MILESTONES		CURRENT STATUS
Starts Apr24 / Completes Jun24	ELC/Childcare: Commence Engagement	M3 24/25 Completed
Starts Apr24 / Completes Jun24	ELC/Childcare: Launch Assertive Highland Campaign	M3 24/25 Completed
Starts Aug24 / Completes Jan 25	ELC/Childcare: Implementation plan in place	M11 24/25 Completed
Starts Dec24 / Completes Jun25	ELC/Childcare: Support for business development & compliance	M3 25/26 Some Slippage
Starts Dec24 / Completes Jun25	ELC/Childcare: Agree governance for changes to provision and delivery model	M1 25/26 Completed
Starts Jan25 / Completes Mar25	ELC/Childcare: Engagement to agree next steps/solutions for settings with falling rolls	M12 24/25 Completed
Starts Mar25 / Completes Apr25	ELC/Childcare: Engage with procurement to develop a robust procurement and contracting process for ELC partners	M3 25/26 Some Slippage
Starts Apr25 / Completes Aug25	ELC/Childcare: Offers giving flexibility and choice in delivery models available to communities	M3 25/26 On Target
Start TBC / Completes May25	ELC/Childcare: Community wealth building	M12 24/25 Completed
Starts Oct26 / Completes Mar27	ELC/Childcare: Project Closure and transfer to BAU	

9.3 Financial Summary

The project is intended to realise savings of £500k by FY 2026/27.

9.4 Key Risks

KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE	CURRENT RISK RATING	RESPONSE
ELC/Childcare: Savings Not Achieved	10	Tolerate
ELC/Childcare: Insufficient Childcare Availability	9	Tolerate

9.5 Update by areas of Interest

9.5.1 West Coast

ARDNAMURCHAN ASSOCIATED SCHOOL GROUP (ASG)

This ASG is one of only 6 across the Council which has no PVI (Private, Voluntary and Independent) childcare. However, services are registered to take 2-year-olds in 4 out of 5 Local Authority nurseries, and all primaries have an associated ELC setting. The Morvern peninsula, south of Ardnamurchan, contains only Lochaline Primary and is therefore one of the most isolated regions in the area for childcare. A provision in Strontian could also serve this community.

MALLAIG ASG

The Moidart peninsula is almost as large as Ardnamurchan and currently has 26 nursery-aged children. This ASG has Council settings (9am-3pm for 3-5yrs) but there is no PVI childcare and there is no provision for wrap around and out of school childcare. There could be an opportunity for a Single Care Model (SCM) pilot if the community wanted to take forward, and provision in Acharacle could serve a large part of the Moidart peninsula.

The Development Manager at Urram SCIO, Strontian has submitted a proposal for:

- A) Community-run early years childcare for 0–2-year-olds, delivered in two locations – Strontian and Acharacle.
- B) Holiday/wrap around childcare for 0–8-year-olds.

Work is ongoing to develop and move forward solutions.

9.5.2 Lochaber

KINLOCHLEVEN ASG

This ASG is one of only 6 across the Council which has no PVI childcare. The only provision for 2-year-olds is in Kinlochleven Primary School.

Kinlochleven – There has been a proposal from KCT (Kinlochleven Community Trust) to run a recruitment drive for childminders to support existing and newly proposed activities, groups, and workshops, and to encourage families from Ballachulish and Glencoe to make use of these.

Duror

Proposal received from Duror Parent/Toddler Group to consider ELC provision within Duror Primary School. Currently no appropriate or available accommodation on site and local ELC provision at Ballachulish is 8 miles away.

Work is ongoing to develop and move forward solutions.

9.5.3 Ross-Shire

GAIRLOCH ASG

Rural communities with a significant drop in pupil numbers in the past 3 years, leading to 3 out of 5 nurseries becoming mothballed/inactive: Aultbea, Poolewe and Kinlochewe.

Childcare, including for 2-year-olds, is provided at Toybox in Gairloch, a PVI provider in partnership with the Council. Several parents across Ross-shire are travelling to use this service.

Bualnaluib is mothballed for 2025/26. Following an onsite in-person meeting with parents, parent council members and the acting head teacher, discussions and proposals are being considered for ELC provision for 2026/27 when it is anticipated that there will be 3 children enrolling for ELC. Consideration of making provision available on site rather than travelling 1 mile to the offsite ELC provision.

Kinlochewe – School closure proposal went to Education Committee 4 June 2025 and was agreed.

A group of parents are interested in ELC provision and are open to considering alternatives to a standard ELC nursery model. Nearest provision is Shieldaig (17 miles) or Gairloch (20 miles).

Work is ongoing to develop and move forward solutions.

Badcaul – School closure proposal went to Education Committee 4 June 2025. To remain mothballed at present.

Following frequent and regular attempts to gain contact details and have discussions with local parents, and an in-person, on site visit 9 July 2025 to which only 1 parent attended, there is insufficient demand to explore options for an ELC setting. There is, however, an opportunity to potentially make use of the school building to develop potential for a local childminding needs-led childcare facility.

Work is ongoing to develop and move forward solutions.

9.5.4 **Sutherland**

Kinlochbervie ASG

This ASG sits within Sutherland North-West. It has no PVI settings and no childminders. Each of the 3 Primary School settings is registered to take 2-year-olds.

Durness – Parents and community are keen to re-open Durness ELC rather than consider any alternative to a Local Authority setting provision. There are 3 nursery aged children for the 2025/26 session. Recruitment has been very challenging with staffing in place to deliver 2 ½ days per week in Durness with parents accessing, if they choose to, alternative provision at Kinlochbervie with some subsidised travel funding available for the 2 days that Durness is unavailable.

9.6 **Subsidised Childminder Model Update**

9.6.1 **Purpose**

To pilot a subsidised childminding model in remote Highland areas where traditional childcare is not viable, ensuring access to Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and supporting community sustainability.

9.6.2 **Key Features**

- Eligibility: Operate in designated rural/depopulated areas with no existing funded ELC provision.

- Contract: 3-year agreement with Highland Council, with a 12-month break clause.
- Requirements: Must care for at least one funded child, hold or work toward SVQ3/SCQF Level 7 qualification, and operate from suitable, secure premises.
- Delivery: Provide 1140 hours of funded ELC for children aged 2–5, diversify services (e.g., wraparound care), and maintain transparent business and financial records.

9.6.3 Subsidy Details

- Amount: Varies depending on enrolment numbers but will ensure a guaranteed real living wage income with incentives to grow and expand the business towards sustainability.
- Capital Grants: Available for property improvements (25% co-funding required).

9.6.4 Governance & Compliance

- Must align with UK Subsidy Control Act 2022.
- Must not distort competition or duplicate existing services.
- Quality assurance and parental consultation are required.

9.6.5 Monitoring & Evaluation

- Regular updates, parental feedback, and review processes.
- Pilot outcomes will inform future policy and potential expansion.

9.7 Single Care Model Update

9.7.1 Summary of the Single Care Model (SCM) Pilot

The SCM is a proposed pilot to address the crisis in care services—both childcare and adult care—in rural and island communities across the Highlands. It aims to improve service accessibility, support working families, and reduce depopulation.

9.7.2 Key Challenges

- Workforce shortages and retention issues
- Low population density affecting service viability
- High qualification and regulatory demands
- Lack of affordable housing and transport
- Inflexible national policies and funding models

9.7.3 Pilot Implementation

- Two rural communities selected for testing
- Models include:
 - Staff delivering both adult and childcare services
 - Single employer model with integrated care roles
- Supported by Highland Council, CALA, HIE, NHS Highland, and regulatory bodies

9.7.4 Next Steps

- Community engagement and needs assessment
- Funding sought for a dedicated project manager and evaluation support
- Aim to inform strategic policy change and improve rural care provision
- Continue to pursue regulatory change through Scottish Government officials and at ministerial level.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 16 July 2025

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Background Papers: N/A

Appendices: N/A