

Agenda Item	13
Report No	SR/24/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee

Date: 1 September 2025

Report Title: Annual Report on Operational Activities at the Old Man of Storr: First Full Year of Delivery

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The site at the Old Man of Storr has been developed to support sustainable tourism and improve the overall visitor experience. The infrastructure now in place includes:

- **Ionad an Stòir (The Storr Centre)**, a retail space and a multi-purpose room.
- **Car parking facilities** expanded and managed parking provision to support increased visitor demand while mitigating traffic congestion and environmental impact.
- A developing and maintained **path network**.
- **Public conveniences**, accessible, well maintained toilets ensuring visitor comfort and hygiene.

1.2 This report presents a summary of key operational activities and strategic developments at the Old Man of Storr during its first full year of delivery, particularly highlighting the Benefits Delivered. These are discussed in more detail in their respective sections:

- Section 6 - Economic and Environmental stewardship
- Section 7 - Income Generation
- Section 8 - Our Natural Assets
- Section 9 - Responding to Local Employment Needs
- Section 10 - Economic Development
- Section 11 - Carbon Impact
- Section 12 - Capital Asset
- Section 13 - Recognition
- Section 14 - Future Initiatives
- Section 15 - Sustainability
- Section 16 - Summary

1.3 This report brings together operational data and strategic insights to provide Members with a clear, evidence-based understanding of the Old Man of Storr site's accomplishments to date and its projected direction.

1.4 The report is structured to:

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

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Consider and **note** the achievements delivered at the Old Man of Storr whole site to date and support the continued development of this important initiative for the Skye and Raasay area.
- ii. **Note** the ongoing developments at the Old Man of Storr site to ensure it continues to serve both visitors and the local community effectively.
- iii. **Note** that regular reports will continue to be taken to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee.

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource:** Implications are discussed throughout this report. The Project Sponsor is the ACE – Corporate, supported by the Chief Officer – Revenues and Commercialisation, and the project is managed by existing resources within THC.

3.2 **Legal:** There are no legal implications arising from this report.

3.3 **Risk:** Risks continue to be managed through the Income Generation Project Board.

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

3.5 **Gaelic:** The Storr has a particular opportunity to support Gaelic through effective promotion of Gaelic culture to visitors. The various initiatives include effective bilingual signage, site interpretation, the Storr website and social media page, and the development of high-quality materials with partnership initiatives such as the Skye Iconic Sites Project and engagement with local community trusts.

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 an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background

5.1 Initiated in November 2021, the Storr Project was developed in response to Skye & Raasay Members' requests to explore sustainable tourism opportunities. A robust business case led to a governance structure and project team, aligning with:

- The Highland Council's Strategic Programme
- Skye and Raasay Future (SARF) Plan
- Scottish Government's Net Zero Agenda

5.2 In July 2024, Ionad an Stòir commenced operations and officially opened in August 2024, representing a landmark achievement in sustainable, community-led development.

5.3 Ionad an Stòir was substantially funded through the Islands Infrastructure Fund, with a contribution by the Area's Ward discretionary budget. Complementary projects at the Old Man of Storr site received support from the Community Regeneration Fund, the Place-Based Investment Fund and the Coastal Communities Fund. This multi-source funding approach avoided the need for capital borrowing.

6. Economic and Environmental Stewardship

6.1 The Storr project was designed to promote sustainable tourism, economic resilience, and community empowerment. It supports key local priorities including job creation, infrastructure improvement, environmental stewardship, and cultural celebration—particularly through the integration of Gaelic language and identity. The initiative aligns with the Skye and Raasay Future (SARF) plan, The Highland Council's strategic programme, and national NetZero goals. Further information on economic development including local jobs is discussed later in this report.

7. Income Generation

7.1 Income Streams and Associated Costs at the Old Man of Storr Site

7.1.1 Members are advised that the Old Man of Storr site comprises a range of facilities and assets which generate income and incur associated operational costs. These include:

- Ionad an Stòir (The Storr Centre)
- Car Parking Facilities - both on street and off street parking
- The Old Man of Storr Path Network
- Public Conveniences

7.2 Visitor Numbers to the Old Man of Storr

7.2.1

Year	Visitors	Growth vs. Prior Year
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2022	205,056	-
2023	274,009	+34%
2024	293,000	+7%

7.2.2 The Old Man of Storr and associated path network is a major tourist draw on the Isle of Skye.

7.2.3 There is a clear demand for the provision of local services to support visitors at the Old Man of Storr and it is estimated that 2025 will see a 4% increase in visitor numbers on prior year.

7.3 **Ionad an Stòir (The Storr Centre)**

7.3.1



7.3.2 Despite the typical challenges associated with establishing a new enterprise, Ionad an Stòir delivered strong financial performance in its first year of operation (1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025):

- Gross sales totalled £505k
- Net sales (excluding VAT) totalled £426k
- Projected year one excess of income over direct expenditure of £61k for Ionad an Stòir.

7.3.3 Costs, including start-up expenses and buying retail stock, were fully covered by the income it generated, showing a clear focus on financial independence.

7.3.4 July 2025 marks the first opportunity to conduct a direct year-on-year comparison with July 2024, enabling the collection of meaningful business intelligence and performance insights. Gross sales in July 2025 were 60% higher than those recorded in July 2024, evidencing a marked increase in visitor demand and retail performance.

7.3.5 Looking ahead to the second year of operations, financial projections indicate continued net revenue growth, with an estimated surplus of £150,000 (income over expenditure).

7.3.6 These projections are based on the continued assumption that Ionad an Stòir will remain financially independent, covering all operational costs without reliance on Council funding. This reinforces Ionad an Stòir's role as a resilient and economically viable asset within the wider Old Man of Storr site and its valuable contribution to local infrastructure projects.

7.3.7 Current business at Ionad an Stòir will continue to develop to meet the growing demand from visitors, to further support local businesses, and enhance the overall visitor experience, and Phase 2 of the Storr Project is currently underway and is scheduled for completion by March 2026.

7.3.8 Due to the ongoing refurbishment of Tigh-na-Sgìre in Portree, the multi-purpose room at Ionad an Stòir will be utilised to host between 25 and 30 weddings over the coming months. Consequently, Ionad an Stòir has not yet had the opportunity to generate its own wedding-related income. However, once the redevelopment of Tigh-na-Sgìre is complete, Ionad an Stòir will be well-positioned to deliver commercial wedding services at the scale originally envisioned for the 2024/25 period, building on the momentum, operational experience, and insights gained during this collaborative phase.

7.4 Car Parking Facilities

7.4.1 As part of the Old Man of Storr project, a revised car parking pricing strategy was implemented in April 2023. This adjustment was initially projected to generate approximately £200,000 in additional gross annual income.

7.4.2 Actual performance has exceeded expectations:

- In 2023/24, additional gross income compared to the previous year totalled **£192,000**
- In 2024/25, this figure rose by **£230,000**

7.4.3 These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the revised pricing model in supporting site sustainability and generating consistent revenue to offset operational costs. The enhanced and expanded services at the Old Man of Storr are a key driver in attracting visitors to the site.

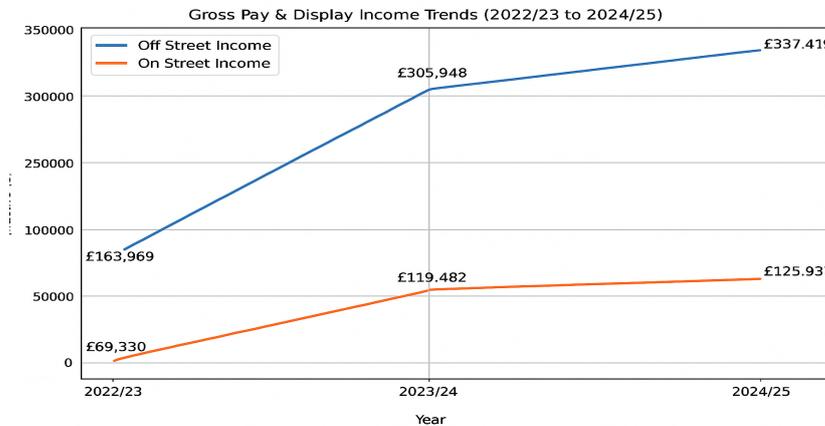
7.4.4 The Old Man of Storr- Parking Income - Gross

Financial Year	Income £	Growth vs. Prior Year
2022/23	233,319	-
2023/24	425,430	+82%
2024/25	463,356	+9%

7.4.5 A combination of revised pricing, increased visitor numbers, and enhanced car park management, contributed to a significant uplift in gross car park income across both 2023/24 and 2024/25. This outcome demonstrates the effectiveness of the Storr project in delivering sustainable income streams to support local infrastructure and services.

7.4.6 The Old Man of Storr Parking Gross Income Trends (2022/23 to 2024/25) are detailed in the graph below. The evidential material increase in income is attributable to the reasons set out in paragraph 7.4.5. Members will note that since April 2023, Gross parking income has increased by £230K, from £233k in 2022/23 to £463k in 2024/25.

The Old Man of Storr Gross Income for Pay & Display



7.4.7 On 30 June 2025, the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee received an update on Pay and Display income generated from Council-operated car parks within their wards. The report included detailed figures for key locations such as the Storr Car Park and the Storr Roadside parking area. Members are reminded that for the off-street parking income, the net income after costs, is distributed 50:50 between the Area and the Council.

7.4.8 Reinvestment and Cost Offset - Income generated through the revised car parking pricing strategy directly supports reinvestment in local site infrastructure and offsets operational costs that would otherwise fall to the Council. This includes:

- A recurring annual investment of £40,000 from 2023/24 in the development and maintenance of the path network, ensuring safe and sustainable access for visitors.
- An annual contribution from 2023/24 of £32,000 towards the operation of public conveniences—an unbudgeted cost that, without this income, would require direct Council funding.

7.4.9 This whole site approach reinforces the site's financial resilience and reduces pressure on core Council budgets.

7.4.10 In addition to reinvestment directly at the Old Man of Storr site, income raised at the Old Man of Storr has also to date contributed £282k for road improvement projects across the Ward, including to the Fairy Pools, Neist Point and Coral Beach and also towards supporting the ongoing employment of an Active Travel officer for Skye & Raasay.

7.5 As the facilities and assets at the Old Man of Storr are closely interconnected, it is both practical and appropriate to assess income and expenditure at the overall site level, rather than isolating individual components.

7.6	Financial performance - The Old Man of Storr	
	12 Month Period	£
Ionad an Stòir surplus	1/7/24 - 30/6/25	61,490
Car Parking Facilities surplus (off street and on street)	1/4/24 - 31/3/25	388,806
The Old Man of Storr surplus net of costs		<u><u>450,296</u></u>

Note :

These figures are after accounting for a £40k Path Investment and a £32k Public Convenience contribution. As noted in section 7.3.8, no wedding income has been credited, and all EV-related income, approx. £10k has been reinvested into the ongoing development and operational expansion of the Highland Council's charging network, supporting long-term infrastructure sustainability.

8. Our Natural Assets

- 8.1 A key ambition of the Storr Project has been the effective stewardship of our natural assets. This continues to be addressed through strengthened site management measures. However, the successful implementation of these measures relies on the availability of appropriate financial resources to support ongoing site management.
- 8.2 As previously advised, the increase in revenue generation at the site, has enabled recurring annual reinvestment of £40,000 in the path network and £32,000 in the maintenance and operation of Public Conveniences.
- 8.3 These investments align with the sustainability commitments made to NatureScot during the land acquisition by Highland Council, for example Eco-friendly infrastructure, visitor safety and accessibility.
- 8.4 Visitor Experience (VE) Rangers play a vital role in safeguarding the Old Man of Storr while delivering a positive and educational experience for visitors. Their work blends direct visitor engagement with hands on environmental stewardship. Regular reporting outlines the team's priorities, planned actions, and ongoing responsibilities, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement in site management.
- 8.5 Key highlights from the most recent Visitor Experience Ranger report (May to August 2025) include:
- The VE Ranger team, who are employed on full-time permanent basis, has focused on managing peak visitor numbers, protecting sensitive habitats, responding to incidents, and enhancing public engagement. The presence of the VE Rangers has significantly improved proactive interventions and site management.



- Off-path behaviour reduced to 1.7%, down from 26.3% last year due to new barriers and active VE Ranger presence.
- 18 minor incidents managed onsite, including first aid and lost persons. 4 Mountain Rescue Team callouts avoided through early intervention, saving approx. 126 emergency service hours.



- Rope barriers, drainage improvements and path repairs underway.

- Positive regrowth of native species, including alpine ladies' mantle, in protected zones. Invasive New Zealand willow herb identified; mitigation in progress.



- VE Ranger Chat Spot trialled, Gaelic learning and storytelling on Instagram and youth engagement ongoing. Plans to expand school programmes and launch guided tours.



9. Responding to Local Employment Needs

- 9.1 The project has created six full-time, permanent jobs, directly benefiting this island community.
- 9.2 Local employment delivers a range of benefits including economic stimulation, skills development, and cultural preservation.
 - Two Visitor Experience Supervisors, previously employed by VisitScotland, have recently been recruited at Ionad an Stòir. Their migration to us from VisitScotland has been a straightforward process and positive. They both bring a wealth of local knowledge, visitor experience and enthusiasm for Skye and the Highlands. The Highland Council's creation of the VE Supervisor positions has enabled these Supervisors to continue to work within tourism and not be lost to the sector.
 - Skills Development: Employment opportunities offer training and experience in Outdoor Access, hospitality, event management, facilities maintenance, and customer service.

- **Community Cohesion:** Employing people who live and are invested in the island, fosters a sense of ownership and pride within the community.
- **Sustainability:** Supporting local employment reduces the need for commuting and contributes to a more sustainable, locally rooted workforce.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Local staff bring local knowledge and cultural understanding, enriching the experience for visitors and helping preserve local heritage.
- **Appendix 1**, at the end of this report, details the extensive responsibilities of the VE Supervisor, VE Rangers and VE Officers. Highlighting both the core duties and the areas where the role requires adaptability. Staff at the Old Man of Storr are adept at juggling multiple tasks, prioritising effectively, and adapting to changing circumstances with the aim of consistently providing a first-class visitor experience.

10. Economic Development

- 10.1 We currently support over 20 local suppliers, helping build community wealth. Our range of 150 local products is regularly reviewed to stay sustainable, maintain quality, and maximise income generation, with a strong focus on growing new supplier relationships with many new local and Highland suppliers showing interest to be associated with the Storr Centre.
- 10.2 Products include locally crafted souvenirs, Isle of Skye & Raasay produced whisky, gin, and beer, and Storr-branded T-shirts, caps, and outdoor gear, carefully tailored to visitors exploring the Isle of Skye.
- 10.3 Creating six full-time, permanent jobs for local residents, contributes significantly to the island economy and helps retain local talent. The estimated annual economic value of these roles could be estimated to be in the region of over £320k. In rural areas such as Skye and the Highlands, a conservative economic multiplier of 1.7 to 2.0 is typically applied, reflecting how wages circulate through the local economy by supporting shops, services, etc.

11. Carbon Impact

- 11.1 Carbon emissions are reduced through sustainable infrastructure and planning.
- 11.2 There is EV charging available 24/7 (2 * AC and 2 *DC). Income from the EV network is re-invested into the operational ongoing development across the Highland Council to allow a commercially viable network going into the next stage of development.

12. Capital Asset

- 12.1 As previously noted, Ionad an Stòir was predominately funded through external sources, eliminating the need for capital borrowing. It has since been added to the Council's Asset Register at a cost value of £609,000, with a revaluation scheduled for the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

13. Recognition

- 13.1 This project was recognised in The Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards in 2024 when it received the Convenor's Award. Convenor of The Highland Council, Councillor Bill Lobban, said "Projects like the Storr Project show what the council can achieve in terms of innovation and income generation while working all the time closely with key stakeholders within the council, the community and with local members".
- 13.2 The Storr has been awarded a Travellers' Choice Award by TripAdvisor for both 2024 and 2025. Travellers' Choice recognises businesses that earn consistently great reviews. Since this Project, it is now ranked amongst the top 10% of listings on Tripadvisor.
- 13.3 A bilingual website (thestorr.com) and Instagram (the.storr) with a unique brand identity, promotes the site and local culture. Both the website and social media channel play a key role in raising awareness of the Storr, supporting visitor planning through timely access to essential information such as path conditions and weather forecasts, and promoting educational content focused on local history, geology, culture, and the Gaelic language.
- 13.4 On 29 May 2025, an online booking system for Ranger-Guided Walks was successfully launched, allowing visitors to plan and secure their experiences in advance. This initiative has enhanced visitor engagement by offering structured opportunities to explore the distinctive geology, diverse wildlife, and rich Gaelic heritage of the Old Man of Storr.
- 13.5 One of the highlights of the season was a June 2025 guided walk, led by our two Visitor Experience Rangers, for 'Voices from the Heart'. The group, comprising members from across New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts, provided highly positive feedback on their experience, further demonstrating the site's reputation as a destination of international interest and cultural significance.



14. Future Initiatives

- 14.1 To meet the growing demand from visitors, increase revenue across the site, support local businesses, and enhance the overall visitor experience, Phase 2 of the Storr Project is currently underway. The project is scheduled for completion by March 2026.



Visual representation of Ionad an Stòir Phase 2 extension.

- 14.2 The Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 29 May 2025 approved an application to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for £550,000 for an extension, providing an increase in retail space and improved amenities & services. Key expansion plans include:

- **Additional Retail Space:** Increased revenue for Ionad an Stòir and commercial opportunities for suppliers.
- **Diversified Product Range:** Enabling greater inclusion of local producers, addressing current capacity restraints.
- **Introduction of Wedding Packages:** Including alcohol sales to enhance event offerings.
- **Wedding Venue Enhancement:** Increasing capacity from 8–10 to 30–40 guests.

- 14.3 Ecommerce Capabilities: Extending Ionad an Stòir's reach to online customers and enhancing brand visibility. This on target to go live by October 2025.

- 14.4 The Storr project continues to deliver strong economic, environmental, and community outcomes, underpinned by sound financial performance and strategic alignment with local and national priorities. With Phase 2 now underway, the site is well-positioned to build on its success, enhance visitor experiences, and further embed community benefit.

15. Sustainability

- 15.1 The project has been designed with long-term sustainability in mind:

- **Site income:** is reinvested into infrastructure ensuring ongoing maintenance and improvement. A review of the car park charging policy will be undertaken to inform prices for 2026/27 when the phase 2 extension is expected to be

completed. This review will be reported to this committee for consideration and approval.

- Staffing Model: Creation of permanent roles ensures continuity in site management and visitor experience.
- Environmental Planning: The Site Management Plan, developed with NatureScot, safeguards the natural environment.
- Scalability: The project serves as a replicable framework for other Highland projects.

16. Summary

16.1

Section	Commentary
Purpose & Scope	First full year of delivery at the Old Man of Storr, focused on sustainable tourism and enhanced visitor experience.
Economic & Environmental Stewardship	Project aligns with local and national priorities, promoting resilience, stewardship, and Gaelic culture.
Income Generation	The Old Man of Storr site generated a surplus of £450,296, with Ionad an Stòir and car parking delivering strong financial performance.
Natural Assets	Visitor numbers rose 43% since 2022; reinvestment supports path network and public conveniences.
Local Employment	Six permanent jobs are created; supports skills development, cultural preservation, and community cohesion.
Economic Development	Over 20 local suppliers supported; 150 local products offered; a strong focus on sustainability and quality.
Carbon Impact	EV charging infrastructure in place; income reinvested to support a viable regional network.
Capital Asset	Ionad an Stòir added to Council's Asset Register at £609,000; fully funded with no borrowing required.
Recognition	Project received Highland Council Convenor's Award and TripAdvisor Traveller's Choice Awards (2024 & 2025).
Future Initiatives	Phase 2 underway with £550k UKSPF funding; includes retail expansion, wedding services, and ecommerce.
Sustainability	Long-term sustainability built into staffing, planning, and reinvestment; model replicable across Highland communities.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

Date: 18 August 2025

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Alister MacBain, Business Management Analyst (Income Generation)
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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Visitor Experience Roles

Appendix 1

Responsibilities for VE (Visitor Experience) Supervisors, highlighting both the core duties and the areas where the role requires adaptability. Our VE Supervisors are adept at juggling multiple tasks, prioritizing effectively, and adapting to changing circumstances with the aim of consistently providing a first-class visitor experience.

Core responsibilities

- Shop sales and stock management: This includes aspects like managing inventory, processing purchase orders (both sending and receiving), conducting cycle counts and stock takes, ensuring proper display of merchandise, and interacting with suppliers.
- Customer service and visitor management: This encompasses answering diverse questions from visitors, addressing parking issues (tickets, poor parking), managing traffic flow, and providing assistance to visitors, even if it falls outside the normal scope of duties.
- Operational duties: This includes cleaning of the Storr centre, managing weddings and guided walks, and contributing to the Storr social media accounts. E-commerce will be an additional duty from September onwards.
- First Aid: All trained team members handle first aid, responding to a large number of medical situations both at the Storr centre and on the hill over the course of a year.
- Toilet Management: While not directly involved in cleaning, Supervisors handle complaints, check facilities, replenish supplies, and contact the maintenance team when required.

Responsibilities for VE (Visitor Experience) Rangers play a crucial role in managing and protecting the Storr while ensuring a positive and educational experience for visitors. At the Storr the aim is to blend visitor interaction with hands-on environmental stewardship.

Breakdown of the duties outlined:

- Litter and waste collection around the Storr: Rangers are directly involved in maintaining the cleanliness and natural beauty of the site, collecting litter and managing waste to reduce environmental impact.

- Biodiversity monitoring: Rangers are observing and recording the flora and fauna of the area, contributing to the understanding and conservation of the site's biodiversity.
- Path and environmental management: This involves maintaining paths, fencing repairs, preventing erosion, and managing visitor impact on the environment to ensure sustainable access. This all helps to improve visitor experience and protect the Storr environment.
- Visitor management: This includes guiding visitors along with guided walks, providing information, enforcing regulations, and promoting responsible outdoor access to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all.
- Monitoring and recording visitor data: This involves counting visitors, tracking their movements, and gathering feedback to inform visitor management strategies and assess the impact of tourism on the site
- Education, Outreach & Interpretation: Offering guided sessions for local youth groups. Continuing Gaelic learning and story clips on online platforms along with a Ranger Chat Spot at the hill base twice weekly during July and August.

Building on the responsibilities of the VE Supervisor and VE Ranger, **the Visitor Experience Officer (VEO)** at Storr assumes an expanded role with strategic and managerial duties. This is a blend of frontline visitor interaction, site management, team leadership, strategic planning, and external stakeholder engagement.

Key responsibilities and requirements

1. Site management (Storr and Storr Centre):
 1. Overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Storr site, including visitor facilities, paths, and infrastructure (Parking & Toilets)
 2. Ensuring the smooth running and maintenance of the Storr Centre.
 3. Managing resources effectively to ensure high standards of cleanliness, safety, and visitor experience, potentially involving tasks like maintaining facilities, overseeing litter collection and waste management, and coordinating basic maintenance.
2. Team leadership and management:
 1. Managing, supervising, and motivating a team of Visitor Experience Supervisors and Rangers.

2. Delegating tasks and responsibilities, providing guidance and support, and fostering a positive work environment.
 3. Conducting staff training and development, including first aid training and health and safety compliance.
 4. Managing performance and addressing any issues proactively.
3. Strategic planning and development:
1. Developing and implementing the future plan for the Storr, aligning with the Highland Council's sustainable tourism strategy.
 2. This may involve identifying areas for improvement, proposing new initiatives, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the site.
 3. Monitoring and recording visitor data to inform decision-making.
4. Partner and stakeholder engagement:
1. Collaborating with various partners, including local landowners, community groups, and other tourism organizations.
 2. Building and maintaining strong relationships to achieve shared goals for the Storr.
 3. Liaising with agencies like NatureScot and OATS regarding environmental initiatives.
5. Safety, security, and compliance:
1. Monitoring and maintaining visitor and site safety and security.
 2. Ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations for both staff and visitors.
 3. Conducting risk assessments and implementing necessary control measures.
4. Conflict resolution and complaint handling: Addressing complaints and resolving issues ensuring a positive visitor experience.