

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	8
Report No	HCW-23-25

Committee: Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Date: 12 November 2025

Report Title: Delivery Plan – Person Centred Solutions Q2 2025/2026

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Delivery Plan 2024-2027 consists of 57 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.
- 1.2 This report provides financial, performance, risk and general information on the following Delivery Plan projects/Programme:
- Kinship & Foster Carers
 - Developing the Workforce
 - Improving Transition Outcomes
 - Replacement Case Management System
 - Digital Options
- 1.3 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:
- i. scrutinise and **note** the Delivery Plan Project updates provided in this report.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - There are no resource implications arising as a direct result of this report. Resource implications (if any) for delivery plan projects or programmes will be detailed in the Financials sections of each of the project updates provided below.

- 3.2 **Legal** - 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.
- 3.4 **Risk** - There are no risk implications arising as a direct result of this report. Project/Programme risks are identified via the council risk management process and monitored through the Portfolio Boards and are reported by exception only in paragraphs relating to Risk within each of the project updates below.
- 3.5 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no implications arising as a direct result of this report.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - There are no implications arising as a direct result of this report.

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. Kinship and Foster Carers

5.1 Overall RAG



The aim of this workstream is to ensure children will achieve more sustainable family-based care through the development of a kinship team and recruitment of more foster carers. This will increase the proportion of children in kinship care, and more foster carers will ensure Highland children remain with Highland families.

Kinship

Kinship team being fully operational timescales have been delayed and it is currently Amber. A manager, 2 social workers and business administration are now in post and are supporting Kinship carers on a reduced level. Recruitment of 3 support workers in partnership with the 3rd sector is proceeding. It is expected there will be a full team compliment by December 2025, and the team will be fully operational at this point.

Recruitment remains ongoing for the new service – social work staff have been appointed, and it is the intention the support worker roles are advertised in the

autumn following Whole Family Wellbeing investment. Work is underway in developing the service including consultation with kinship carers and families. The number of children on residence orders in kinship has reduced overall this month – this is a result of children reaching an age where they no longer meet the criteria for kinship allowance.

Kinship placements accounted for 26.99% of our total looked after away from home population which has remained on an upward trend. A consultation event with kinship carers is planned to be supported by the Childs Rights and Participation team – this will inform support services going forward.

Fostering

A direct award to CAN digital has been approved for a change management review. Milestones will be reviewed following the completion of the Change management review and presented to the Portfolio Board for their consideration once this is complete.

5.2 Key Milestones & Requests for Change

MILESTONES		CURRENT STATUS
<i>Starts Apr24 / Completes Jan25</i>	Kinship & Foster Carers: Establish Kinship team	M12 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Dec26 / Completes Dec26</i>	Kinship & Foster Carers: Kinship Team mid way evaluation	
<i>Starts Sep25 / Completes Dec25</i>	Kinship: Team full operational	M6 25/26 Some Slippage
<i>Starts Sep25 / Completes Oct25</i>	Foster Carers: Audit of service processes to be completed	M6 25/26 On Target
<i>TBD</i>	Foster Carers: Implementation of recommendations	

- Kinship team fully operational (December 2025)
- Review progress Kinship Team mid-point evaluation (December 2026)
- Foster Care Audit of service processes to be completed by CAN digital (October 2025)
- Foster Care implementation of recommendations (timescale to be agreed after audit).

5.3 Financial Summary

- Savings

	Children's Services : Family First Approach - FY 24-28	£ 0
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Planning is underway for an exit strategy for the four workstreams which are funded via the Families First Approach. In addition, significant scrutiny has taken place across commissioned and non-commissioned services to identify savings. Current projections are that Families First interventions are on target to achieve the savings target of 700k.

- Investment

	Families First: Investment: EMR	£ 1,234,000
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In FY2025/2026 it is current forecast that the Families First workstream will spend £1,234,000 of the £2M approved Earmarked Balance.

- Mitigation

There is a risk that savings will not be achieved due to the projected overspend across Children's Service budget. Activities to mitigate the overspend are being reported through the BRG and the Home in Highland workstream. A significant portion of the overspend (£2.4 million) is due to the rising costs of purchased residential. Efforts will continue to increase the number of children placed in kinship and fostering arrangements as these are best value placement options as well as evidencing better outcomes for children. However, it is recognised that despite an ongoing increase in kinship placements these are not currently mitigating against the significant increase in purchased residential provision. Work is underway with support from Finance Service to shift the balance of care from purchased placements, predominantly outside of Highland to either Family based care or increasing local residential care provisions. This will achieve a reduction in children moving away from their local communities and supports alongside a reduction in overspend, and ultimately savings.

5.4 Key Risks

KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE	CURRENT RISK RATING	RESPONSE
Kinship and Foster Carers: National foster carer recruitment challenges	12	Tolerate
Kinship and Foster Carers: First adopter risk	12	Tolerate
Kinship and Foster Carers: Processes not ready to handle more enquiries and assessments	12	Tolerate
Kinship and Foster Carers: Insufficient budget	12	Tolerate

The current work to promote and support Kinship and foster care will be reviewed in November 2025 (foster care) after consideration of the awaited CAN digital report and inhouse review of these services. This will identify clear key risks and responses required from the service.

5.5 Forward Plan

Kinship – progress recruitment of Support Workers through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

Fostering – Continue Change Management Review process. Report of review expected in November and action plan will be developed based upon findings.

A review of the Families First budget plan is currently under way in terms the priorities within available funds for FY26/27.

6. Developing the Workforce

6.1 Overall RAG

Project: Developing the Workforce

R ●
A ●
G ●
C ●

A summation of the current status and reasons for listing the project as green on its RAG status are as follows:

- Induction Plan completed; Succession Plan at approval stage (and on target). Strategy sub projects have been kicked off and are on target.
- All agreed milestones to date have been completed. In addition, the Induction Plan milestone has been completed ahead of schedule (being already completed against a Jan 26 deadline).
- In parallel with that, the Succession Planning milestone is already well advanced and likely will also be completed ahead of the timeframe set out in the milestone calendar.
- The Workforce strategy elements are on course to meet their deadlines.

Taking these elements in the round, it seems clear that the project is green and on target.

6.2 Key Milestones & Requests for Change

All milestones within the project are on, or ahead of, target.

MILESTONES		CURRENT STATUS
<i>Project commences Jan25</i>	Developing the Workforce: Project Commences	M10 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Dec24 / Completes Jan25</i>	Developing the Workforce: Strategic Steering Group in place	M12 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Jul25 / Completes Jan26</i>	Developing the Workforce: Finalise common HSC succession planning framework.	M6 25/26 On Target
<i>Starts Jul25 / Completes Jan26</i>	Developing the Workforce: Finalise common HSC induction framework	M5 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts Sep25/ Completes Jun26</i>	Developing the Workforce: Draft Child Health Workforce Strategy	M6 25/26 On Target
<i>Starts Sep25/ Completes Jun26</i>	Developing the Workforce: Draft Social Work Workforce Strategy.	M6 25/26 On Target
<i>Starts Sep25/ Completes Jun26</i>	Developing the Workforce: Draft Mental Health Officer Workforce Strategy	M6 25/26 On Target
<i>Starts Jan27 / Completes Jun27</i>	Developing the Workforce: Project Completion, move to BAU	

6.3 Financial Summary

There are no Delivery Plan financial elements directly associated with this project.

6.4 Key Risks

KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE	CURRENT RISK RATING	RESPONSE
Developing the Workforce: Legislative Requirements	9	Tolerate

The reasons that the project is listed as 'tolerate' are as follows:

- There is drift nationally in the implementation of the Health and Care Staffing (Scotland) Act 2019. This is because of the lack of systems and processes to fully implement requirements such as "real time staffing". The Highland position is broadly consistent with the rest of Scotland. Within the Highland Council however Child Health have been able to develop a "workaround" to real time staffing methods, which is now fully rolled out as of 6 October 2025.
- There is no financial element to the project, so its financial risk is zero.
- The 'do nothing' option keeps the business at the current BAU status so the project should provide degrees of 'upside' rather than 'downside'.
- The risk involved around not developing the workforce are currently inherent in the organisation, i.e. we are working with this risk being in place.
- All milestones have either been met before due date or are on target to be met on time.

6.5 Forward Plan

The Succession Planning framework will be implemented by November 2025, ahead of its January 2026 target. This will provide an actionable plan aimed at increasing internal movement and career progression, in parallel with a reduction in attrition.

Workforce Strategy documents are on target for June 2026 delivery.

In addition to the agreed milestones, the Developing the Workforce Project is working closely with the My Highland Future programme, to increase visibility and participation across careers fairs/schools and UHI students.

Housing solutions are being explored collaboratively across The Highland Council and with external providers.

7. **Improving Transition Outcomes**

7.1 Overall RAG

Project: Improving Transition Outcomes	R ●
	A ●
	G ●
	C ●

A draft Financial Plan has been developed by NHS Highland which includes a cost containment plan for this financial year as well as a longer-term transformation plan linked to the Target Operating Model. This draft Plan will be presented through a number of governance stages before it can be published. In the meantime, work is continuing to move the programme forward and to progress existing projects

including Local Care Models, Self-Service and Income Maximisation, TVI technology Projects and the Lochaber Project. Commissioning work for Shared Lives (being led by NHS) has also started. All of these projects will have elements addressing the transitions group of young adults and once implemented will have a positive impact to improve outcomes for younger adults transitioning from Children's Services. It is anticipated that the renewed financial plan will be signed off in October enabling the Programme Team to ensure that Programme resources are appropriately aligned to deliver the plan and change the overall workstream status to amber and then green.

It is also acknowledged that two audits have recently been undertaken of Transitions processes within The Highland Council and NHS Highland. Once signed off by The Highland Council Audit and Scrutiny Committee, the implications of any recommendations will be assessed and considered in any future work progressed via the Programme around Transitions.

7.2 Key Milestones & Requests for Change

As projects develop within the Programme, we will continue to develop Milestones and Measures of Success and work with the Portfolio Management Office to include these within PRMS.

The key initiatives that make up the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme and will have impacts on managing transition outcomes are:

- Self Service and Income Maximisation
- Lochaber Project
- Digital Projects
- Local Care Models and Self-Directed Support (SDS) Project.
- Handyperson and Care and Repair Scheme
- Shared Lives Service

Some Programme highlights include:

Self Service and Income Maximisation

- A cross-organisation steering group is in place to direct this project and includes representation from across NHS Highland, The Highland Council and 3rd sector organisations representing carers. The initial workshops have focused on the main objective and potential solutions. It has been agreed that we need to improve our online presence and associated communications to enable people to access available funding and organisations that can help to support them to stay healthy and within their own community for as long as possible. This project's ultimate objective is to address our challenges by implementing a proactive self-help approach in North Highland Adult Social Care.
- The project aims to deliver a solution that will:
Reduce pressure on Adult Social Care statutory services through redirecting demand; Reduce reliance on Adult Social Care statutory services to meet care need; Increase personal resilience and planning; Increase the opportunity and choice to become more self-supporting by increasing the level of financial benefits claimed.
- The Business Case for this project will be developed by the end of October and will address the requirement for a communications strategy to support any self-service solution and detail the potential non-financial benefits to be achieved.

Lochaber - The Communications and Engagement Plan is in progress and will be presented to The Adult Social Care Programme Board in October. The intention is for multiple local events, facilitated by In Control Scotland, to engage with people in their communities to begin co-development of local care models. We intend to use the Lochaber Community Planning Event (12th November) as the start of the engagement phase.

Digital Projects – Further detail is provided in section 8.0 (Digital Options) on plans for a Proof of Concept of Vocala technology, which is intelligent, voice-activated software based on a standard Amazon Alexa and will be used to augment the care of a number of groups of younger adults with learning disabilities.

Local Care Models

- Local care models' engagement is going well covering Skye, Strontian, Caithness and Sutherland.
- Currently co-producing change initiatives and a community brokerage proposal on Skye.
- All initiatives are still relatively small scale but are working well as a proof of concept and learnings are being applied in planning to broaden out the approach of community led support across the Highland area.
- A governance and ongoing monitoring process requires to be agreed for the allocation of funds to each individual community group within the framework – the Project Lead has developed a proposal to manage bids and allocate this investment to community groups, once approved by NHS Highland this will be presented to the joint CEXs to consider and agree as soon as possible.

Handyperson & Care and Repair - New contract is in place and working well. Work is now underway to agree Service Level Agreements between contracting organisations.

Shared Lives - A lead officer has been appointed to take forward the procurement exercise on behalf of NHS Highland. The budget has been approved and team identified to develop the specification for a Highland-wide service, with an indicative contract start date of May/June 2026.

7.3 Financial Summary

A number of Business Cases are currently being assessed and evaluated through the agreed programme governance processes between The Highland Council and NHS Highland, so the levels of reserves committed to projects is continually changing.

7.4 Key Risks

KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE	CURRENT	
	RISK RATING	RESPONSE
Improving Transition Outcomes: Insufficient Alternative Providers	9	Tolerate
Improving Transition Outcomes: Not realising the Benefits of the Programme	12	Tolerate

The Portfolio Board acknowledges these risks and has agreed to tolerate based on the following:

- A transformation programme is in place to manage the changes necessary to deliver a sustainable Adult Social Care Service for the Highlands in the future.
- Programme and project management resources have been put in place to support the delivery of the changes necessary.
- The Council has created a £20m transformation reserve to help support the delivery of the changes needed.
- A new Target Operating Model has been agreed to help shape the programme and to focus both organisations on the changes needed to re-shape the delivery of services.

7.5 Forward Plan

Self Service and Income Maximisation

- The Business Case for this project will be developed by the end of October and will address the requirement for a communications strategy to support any self service solution and detail the potential non-financial benefits to be achieved.

Lochaber - The intention is for multiple local events, facilitated by In Control Scotland, to engage with people in their communities to begin co-development of local care models. We intend to use the Lochaber Community Planning Event (12th November) as the start of the engagement phase.

Digital Projects – Please see section 8.5 ‘Forward Plan’ of this report for planned activities of this project in the next quarter.

Local Care Models

- All initiatives are still relatively small scale but are working well as a proof of concept and learnings are being applied in planning to broaden out the approach of community led support across the Highland area.
- A governance and ongoing monitoring process requires to be agreed for the allocation of funds to each individual community group within the framework – the Project Lead has developed a proposal to manage bids and allocate this investment to community groups, once approved by NHS Highland this will be presented to the joint CEXs to consider and agree as soon as possible.

Handyperson & Care and Repair - New contract is in place and working well. Work will be completed in the next quarter to agree Service Level Agreements between contracting organisations.

Shared Lives - Commissioning tender plan and specification will be agreed and completed in the next quarter.

8. **Digital Options**

8.1 Overall RAG



The aim of this project is to seek opportunities to deploy effective and transformative digital solutions across Health and Social Care. It sits within the wider Digital Solutions workstream.

This project comprises two substantive digital opportunities presented to The Highland Council by Triple Value Impact. The first is a Proof of Concept of Vocala technology, which is intelligent, voice-activated software based on a standard Alexa. Up to 50 adults with learning disabilities across four independent care providers would trial the technology for a minimum of six months. We will measure whether Vocala can enhance support, independence and efficiency.

The second activity is an implementation of Ampliwork AI Digital Agents in two areas of Adult Social Care: 1) Commissioning, and 2) Financial Assessments. We anticipate that this innovative 'Robotic Process Automation' will support the completion of routine, labour-intensive activities. This will help teams to focus their time on pro-active, strategic activities, amongst a range of other potential benefits such as reducing aged and long-term debt.

Both digital activities are on target and have been supported by NHS Highland's Senior Leadership Team. In addition, both business cases have now been approved by the Joint Officers Group (03/10/25). However, the final decision regarding whether these digital activities will be implemented rests with Partnership Chief Executives. It is this remaining uncertainty around definitive funding that gives the project its current amber status. The corresponding corrective action is for the business cases to be reviewed at a meeting of the Chief Executives (date TBC), and for funding to be approved. The project would return to green once these corrective actions are complete.

8.2 Key Milestones & Requests for Change

MILESTONES		CURRENT STATUS
<i>Starts Aug25 / Completes Dec25</i>	Balance Care & Accommodation: Ampliwork	M6 25/26 On Target
<i>Starts Aug25 / Completes Nov25</i>	Balance Care & Accommodation: Vocala	M6 25/26 On Target

8.3 Financial Summary

There are no Delivery Plan financial elements directly associated with this project.

8.4 Key Risks

KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE	CURRENT RISK RATING	RESPONSE
Digital Options: Missing quick wins	9	Tolerate
Digital Options: Not ready to adopt new technologies	4	Tolerate
Digital Options: Not solving our most important challenges	9	Tolerate
Digital Options: Insufficient financial impact	6	Tolerate

Digital Options risks to be Closed:

- 'Missing quick wins'
- 'Not ready to adopt new technologies'

The rationale for closing these risks is, 1) the concept of considering 'quick win' improvements is now embedded in our thinking and processes, and 2) it is highly unlikely that we would implement technologies that we are not ready for or are not compatible with, given our close Partnership working and various levels of governance from day-to-day operational to Chief Executive.

8.5 Forward Plan

Key activities include business case reviews by the Joint Officers Group (03/10/25) and Chief Executives. These meetings will determine whether the digital activities noted will proceed to implementation. Implementation planning will also progress, including procurement route, logistics, governance, and the involvement of NHS Highland eHealth. We will also plan the activities necessary across 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 to promote a smooth transition to 'Business As Usual'.

9. **Replacement Case Management System**

9.1 Overall RAG

Project: Replacement Case Management System

R ●
A ●
G ●
C ●

The Health and Social Care service is working with the Shared Procurement Service to select a new Social Care case management system using a purchasing framework. Bids have been received for the tender and the scoring against the specification of requirements is now underway.

Colleagues from across the relevant teams within the Council (Childrens, MHO, Justice, ICT/Business Solutions etc) and NHS Highland (Adult Social Care) have had input into the requirements specification and are involved in the scoring process.

This programme of work is ragged as amber because there have been some unanticipated challenges during this process which have been managed following guidance from senior stakeholders and the Shared Procurement Service. While this has led to delays it is now nearing the end of the procurement phase.

9.2 Key Milestones & Requests for Change

MILESTONES		CURRENT STATUS
<i>Starts Jun24 / Completes Dec25</i>	Replacement CMS: Funding secured & tender documentation completed	M11 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Feb25 / Completes Apr25</i>	Replacement CMS: Conclusion of tender publishing period	M1 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts May25 / Completes Sep25</i>	Replacement CMS: Tender evaluation process	M7 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts Jul25 / Completes Oct25</i>	Replacement CMS: Contract drafted and Award Notice Issued	M7 25/26 Some Slippage
<i>Starts Mar26 / Completes Apr27</i>	Replacement CMS: System Implementation	
<i>Starts Feb26 / Completes Mar27</i>	Replacement CMS: Data Migration	
<i>Starts Mar26 / Completes Apr27</i>	Replacement CMS: System Testing	
<i>Starts May27 / Completes Jun27</i>	Replacement CMS: System Go Live and Project Closure	

The milestone 'Replacement CMS: Contract drafted, and Award Notice Issued' is rated as amber because there have been some unanticipated challenges during this process which have been managed following guidance from senior stakeholders and the Commercial & Procurement Shared Service (CPSS). While this has led to delays, the tender evaluation process has now concluded. The preferred bidder has been selected, and the procurement standstill period has now begun. Following revised planning with the CPSS the procurement process is now projected to conclude by December 2025.

9.3 Financial Summary

There are no Delivery Plan financial elements directly associated with this workstream.

9.4 Key Risks

The following key risks are being monitored for this project:

KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE	CURRENT RISK RATING	RESPONSE
Case Management System Replacement Programme Budget V2	12	Tolerate
Case Management Replacement Resourcing v2	12	Tolerate

This response to the risks above was previously 'Treat' but the response is now 'Tolerate' because the Budget Review Group (BRG) earmarked funding, including for resourcing, for the replacement of the case management system on 7 February 2025.

9.5 Forward Plan

Following completion of the scoring and consensus meetings evaluation the next phase of the procurement process will be the supplier selection and contract award stage. This will also require some additional work prior to contract signature, during

which further details of the selected supplier's offering will be elaborated to ensure alignment with the programme's requirements.

Once the contract is signed, detailed planning will commence with the successful bidder which will confirm timescales and resources required to deliver the new system and the associated change.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 10 October 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: None