

Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee – 12 November 2025 Service Achievements

1. Justice Service

On 19th September, the Justice Service in Caithness opened its doors to the public. Members of the public, professionals, members of voluntary organisations and Community Councils attended and learnt about the services provided by Social Workers, Justice Officers and the unpaid work carried out in their local community. The feedback provided by attendees was incredibly positive with many acknowledging that they did not know much about the work our service provides to the local community.

2. Children and Young People's Participation Strategy.

As part of Highland's ongoing journey to implement the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy, a new programme of work has been launched through the Rights and Participation Group and its Implementation Subgroup.

We are pleased to share that a submission showcasing elements of this work was entered into the COSLA Excellence Awards—and we have been shortlisted as finalists! Out of only 15 shortlisted projects across Scotland, we are one of three finalists in the 'Strengthening Communities and Democracy' category.

The submission highlights several key initiatives:

- Capacity Research (Participation ROCCS)
- Library of Voices
- Voice & Influence Process for the Integrated Children's Services Board
- Ongoing Child-Friendly Complaints work

A presentation was delivered to a panel of nine judges on 2nd October, and the winner will be announced at the COSLA Excellence Awards Ceremony.

3. Whole Family Wellbeing Programme

The Whole Family Wellbeing Programme in Highland is making good progress with both parts of its funding – Element 1 and Element 2 – in line with the overall funding strategy. The [Funding Activity Overview and Analysis Report](#) gives a clear picture of what's been done so far and shows how the funding is being used to support six key family types, as set out in the national [Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022–2026](#). By focusing on these priority groups, the programme is helping to deliver joined-up wellbeing support in local communities, making a real difference for some of Highland's most vulnerable families.

4. Mental Health Officer (MHO)

Michelle Stokoe recently graduated from the Trainee programme with flying colours. Michelle is the second trainee to graduate this year. We wish Michelle well as she moves into her role as a qualified MHO.

5. Orchard-Celebrating the Opening of Our New Short Breaks Service

We are delighted to announce the successful opening of our new Short Breaks Service. This is a proud moment for our teams, our young people, and our community. The service has been created with care, dedication, and a firm commitment to the children and families of the Highlands.

This provision offers valuable respite for families and carers and provides a warm, nurturing environment where children and young people can enjoy new experiences, build relationships, and feel at home. Our staff have shown real passion and professionalism in preparing the service to reflect the high standards we hold across Highland Council.

Access to the service is currently part time as we take a steady, thoughtful approach rooted in quality and safety. This phased opening ensures we continue to build strong foundations, uphold good practice, and provide the level of care our families deserve. We look forward to expanding in the near future as we develop our team and capacity.

Thank you to everyone involved for your hard work, teamwork, and belief in the purpose of this service. Your commitment has brought this vision to life, and we are excited for the positive difference it will make across our communities.

6. Thor House

Preparation is underway to open short break care for Children & Families in the Caithness and Sutherland area. Registration for this valuable respite provision with the Care Inspectorate is progressing alongside staff recruitment. Discussions with local families have begun with a desire that this service is available in the coming months.

7. Skye (Taigh Blabhain)

Currently a day support service is available which covers the Skye and Wester Ross area while development of an adapted house in Portree continues to allow for overnight short breaks to recommence. Staff recruitment is ongoing as there has been limited response to recent recruitment campaigns. It is currently expected that overnight short breaks will resume in Spring 2026.

(Fiona Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer)