

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	8
Report No	G/21/25

Committee: Gaelic Committee

Date: 19 November 2025

Report Title: High Life Highland Progress Report

Report By: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents Members with an overview of how High Life Highland's (HLH) work is contributing to achieving the outcomes of the Gaelic Language Plan and also details some recent highlights.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to discuss and note the report.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource
There are no resource implications associated with Elected Members noting this report.
- 3.2 Legal
There are no legal implications for the Council arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 3.3 Risk
There are no risk implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The HLH Board has a Corporate Risk Register and associated risk management plans.
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)
There are no health and safety risks associated with the recommendations in this report.
- 3.5 Gaelic
The report presents information on the ongoing support for and promotion of Gaelic language and culture within HLH's service provision.

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. Due regard must be given to the findings of any assessment when taking any decision.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background

- 5.1 HLH's purpose is **Making Life Better**. It was established as a charity by the Highland Council (THC) in October 2011 to deliver its Public Services Obligations (PSOs) in: archives; community venues and engagement; countryside rangers; leisure; libraries; museums and galleries; music tuition and sports development.
- 5.2 The Council has a Contract in place to ensure that HLH delivers the specified Council Public Service Obligations (PSO). Supporting and promoting the Gaelic Language and culture is included in the Contract.

6. HLH Service Provision Range and Reach

- 6.1 HLH facilities are situated, and its staff are based right across the region; HLH strives to deliver services as locally and in as many communities as possible. Since its establishment in 2011, HLH has assumed responsibility for additional services at the request of THC, with 43 new services and facilities having been added to its estate.
- 6.2 Digital technology is increasingly being used to deliver services where possible, mitigating geographic remoteness from service hubs centres and improving access to services.
- 6.3 Each Service offers a diverse range of activities and opportunities, seeking to appeal and be of benefit to as wide a range of individuals and communities as possible. Evidence suggests that most Highland residents engage regularly or occasionally with HLH services, as do many visitors to the area at some point prior to, during or after their stay. In 2024/25, there were 5.1million in person and 3.5million digital individual engagements with HLH services, an increase of 0.5million and 0.1million on the previous year.

7. HLH's Contribution to the Gaelic Language Plan Outcomes

- 7.1 **Archives** preserve and provide facilitated access to historical documents, recordings, and materials related to the region's history and cultural heritage. Additionally, through the delivery of community projects, activity programmes, events, exhibitions and collaborations, Archives promote the use and understanding of Gaelic culture and foster cultural continuity and inter-generational engagement. The Service also supports learners and educators, including through Am Baile, the hugely popular bi-lingual cultural heritage website. Am Baile features bilingual descriptions of all content, with new Gaelic material added regularly by specialist translators.

- 7.2 The **Countryside Ranger** Service makes Gaelic visible and audible across its work by incorporating the language into their extensive programmes and learning materials- many of which are available online. In its guided walks, talks, workshops and digital resources, the inextricable links between the language and the landscape, environment and traditions are highlighted and explored.
- 7.3 **Libraries** provide free access to a wide range of Gaelic and local history related publications, supporting Gaelic speakers and learners within their communities. Inverness Library also provides a publicly accessible home for the Gaelic Society of Inverness's library. Regular Gaelic medium sessions of the popular national 'Bookbug' initiative are provided and, in collaboration with partners such as An Comunn Gàidhealach, Fèis Rois and the Blas festival, local libraries regularly host a range of Gaelic related exhibitions, talks, workshops and events.
- 7.4 In HLH's **Museums & Galleries** Gaelic is visible and audible through the permanent displays, temporary exhibitions and traditional craft and practices demonstrations and workshops. Inverness Museum & Art Gallery's permanent displays are entirely bi-lingual and present the Gaelic language in the cultural context of the Highlands- past, present, and future. Visitors to the Highland Folk Museum can experience Gaelic language and traditions in a variety of living history settings- in and out of doors.
- 7.5 The **Music Development** team deliver the Scottish Government funded Youth Music Initiative programme to primary schools across Highland. Within that, two tutors deliver Kodaly musicianship sessions through Gaelic, including online/remotely. Traditional music sessions are also delivered, in conjunction with Fèisean nan Gàidheal. Music Tuition Instructors regularly use traditional music within teaching and lead many community Pipe Bands. At the most advanced level, pupils from across Highland have the opportunity to participate in the Highland Youth Pipe Band and folk groups 'Snas & Beira.
- 7.6 HLH's **Sport Development** service places a strong emphasis on embedding the Gaelic language within its programmes, creating meaningful opportunities for young people to engage with Gaelic through sport. Its partnership with FC Sonas and the newly formed Alba FA has led to new Gaelic medium football sessions being on offer. With the support of the Council's Gaelic Development Team, sports leadership through the medium of Gaelic is being expanded by the Choose to Lead Qualification, delivered to secondary pupils from across the Highlands. Gaelic medium holiday sports camps, facilitated by young leaders who have progressed through the Gaelic Choose to Lead programme, are currently in development. Notably, HLH is seeing pupils from Gaelic education advance into further education and return to Highland as paid coaches – a testament to the long-term impact and value of this integrated approach to sport development.

8. Particular Highlights and Successes

- 8.1 In Ullapool, during Winter into Spring, the local Ranger worked with the Primary School to create the ***Slighe Nàdair Gàidhlig Sound Map***, an interactive, bi-lingual physical and online resource that depicts what the children saw and learnt about on guided nature trail walks locally. The Map combines hand-drawn illustrations, sound and spoken Gaelic into an engaging tool that enables anyone to explore the natural beauty of Ullapool, through the voices of its young residents, learning or sharing some Gaelic along the way.
- 8.2 In February, in celebration of **World Gaelic Week**, the Sports Team, in collaboration with the Highland Council Gaelic Team, hosted a Sports Fèis across Skye and Lochalsh.

Over 200 local school children enjoyed the two-day event, which offered a wide range of activities – including football, shinty, multi-sports, and traditional games – all delivered entirely through Gaelic. Pupils from P1 to P4 took part, demonstrating the growing enthusiasm for Gaelic in sport at the primary level.

- 8.3 **Highland Folk Museum** regularly presents demonstrations and ‘hands on’ experiences of traditional crafts and cultural practices, many of which include Gaelic language. One of the most popular with visitors is performances by the local Badenoch Waulking Group. In August, BBC Scotland visited and filmed one of their performances, which was then broadcast on the BBC Reporting Scotland television evening news, as part of a package about visitors to Scotland’s desire for authentic cultural experiences. The piece was widely shared online, achieving a huge reach, globally.
- 8.4 The redeveloped **Bught Park and Pavilion** has, since opening in August, become something of a regional hub for shinty. The Camanachd Association HQ has relocated there, it hosted the Camanachd Cup Final and the Mowí Shinty Hurling International and will be home for the new “Shinty’s Story – Sgeul na Camanachd”. a permanent, interactive exhibition about the history and cultural significance of shinty.
- 8.5 **Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre** hosted the exhibition ‘*Ùir-sgeul | Earth Story*’ between June and August this year. Created by local artist, musician, visual artist, and educator Eilidh MacKenzie, the bi-lingual exhibition, supported by Highland Council Ward funding, utilised archive resources to explore Skye’s shieling culture, drawing also on oral traditions, historical maps, archaeological findings, and a range of artworks. The latter included paintings, sound pieces, and sculpture, some resulting from creative collaborations with pupils from Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh. Reflecting on themes of cultural memory, land use, and ecological heritage, the exhibition was inspired by historic travel accounts and informed by the artist’s mapping of shieling sites across the island.
- 8.6 For **The Royal National Mòd 2025**, HLH provided support and contributed activities to the vibrant ‘fringe’ events programme. These included the Alba FA run two-day Youth football camp at Lochaber High Astro, a puppet making workshop based on the Gaelic alphabet tree, ‘Bookbug’ story and song workshops, a bi-lingual drop-in craft session, an open music session and the ‘Last Hurrah’ finale event, after the Massed Choirs.
- 8.7 **The Inverness Castle Experience**, the most recent addition to HLH’s services, will be a flagship cultural attraction for the Highlands, rooted in sharing and celebrating the region’s heritage and identity- with the Gaelic language at its heart. From the outset, Gaelic has been embedded as a core element in the Experience; not simply via translation but as an integral part of the narrative told within. The presentation of Gaelic as a language of the past, present, and future of the Highlands will promote its use and recognition among local people and visitors from across the world. The Experience tells stories that are deeply rooted in the landscape, language, and traditions of the Highlands, woven throughout the exhibitions — from iconic figures and folklore to place names and customs. The positioning of Gaelic language as a living language within that will peak visitors’ curiosity and engagement, whether fluent speakers, learners, or newcomers to the language.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Through a varied programme, delivered by all Services, HLH is making a proactive and meaningful contribution, throughout the region, to outcomes in the Gaelic Language Plan.

Designation: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

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