

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	EDU/36/25

Committee: Education

Date: 19 November 2025

Report Title: High Life Highland Progress Report

Report By: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

1.	Purpose/Executive Summary
1.1	The Contract between THC and HLH was reviewed by the Education Committee in December 2024, and it set out reporting requirements, with HLH reporting twice per year to the Education Committee. At the November Education Committee, the specified reporting comprises: i. provision of the HLH annual report (statutory reporting requirement); ii. customer satisfaction levels; iii. general updates; and iv. information on an area of work or focus topic.
2.	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to note: i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) as detailed in its annual report in Appendix A; ii. the information provided in Appendix B on customer satisfaction levels; iii. the general updates provided in Appendix C; and iv. the information on the archives service in Appendix D.
3.	Implications
3.1	Resource - there are no resource implications associated with Elected Members noting this report. The HLH services fee is part of THC's budget as considered at the Highland Council meeting held on 6 March 2025. An update on HLH's budget in the current financial year was provided at the 4 June 2025 Education Committee meeting and HLH's Annual Report has been provided, as required as part of the new contract monitoring arrangements, in Appendix A.
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 – All HLH services promote Gaelic language and culture. The following provides a summary: • The archive service supports Gaelic language and culture by preserving and providing access to historical documents, recordings, and materials relating to the region's Gaelic heritage. Through community projects, educational and exhibition programmes, and collaborations, the team actively promote the use and understanding of Gaelic, fostering cultural continuity and engagement across generations. • The libraries team supports Gaelic language and culture by providing access to a wide range of Gaelic and local history related publications. In close collaboration with local partners, schools and communities, libraries also play host to a wide range of Gaelic related exhibitions, as well as activities and events for all ages, including storytelling, Gaelic bookbug, author talks and writing workshops. • Music tuition has direct provision in as many of the areas schools as possible for strings (including fiddle), piping and pipe band drumming. In addition to the free weekly lessons (some of which are delivered using a combination of face to face and online delivery which allows the team to reach more schools), the instructors lead a number of extra-curricular groups and activities, including successful youth pipe bands. • In primary schools, the Youth Music Initiative provision delivers sessions in Kodaly music skills and also a trad music project in which is delivered on our behalf by partner organisation Feisen nan Gàidheal. • The sports development team continues to place a strong emphasis on embedding the Gaelic language within its programmes, creating meaningful opportunities for young people to engage with Gaelic through sport. In a celebration of World Gaelic Week, the team, in collaboration with the Highland Council Gaelic Team, hosted a Sports Feis for over 200 local school children in Skye. The two-day event, led by the team and supported by young leaders, offered a wide range of activities including football, shinty, multi-sports, and traditional games all delivered entirely through Gaelic.
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 and physical activity. The Council has a Contract in place to ensure that HLH delivers the specified Council PSOs. The contract was reviewed and updated by the Education Committee at its meeting held on 21 November 2024.				
5.2	The HLH reporting to the Education Committee is specified in the Contract as detailed in the table below: <table> <tr> <th>May/June Meeting</th><th>November/December Meeting</th></tr> <tr> <td> - Contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan. - Annual Performance Indicators: customer engagements (split into in person and digital engagements); services fee as percentage of HLH expenditure; and number of members for the following services: leisure; libraries; music; sports development. - General updates. - Information on an area of work or focus topic. </td><td> - The HLH Annual Report. - Customer satisfaction levels. - General updates. - Information on an area of work or focus topic. </td></tr> </table>	May/June Meeting	November/December Meeting	- Contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan. - Annual Performance Indicators: customer engagements (split into in person and digital engagements); services fee as percentage of HLH expenditure; and number of members for the following services: leisure; libraries; music; sports development. - General updates. - Information on an area of work or focus topic.	- The HLH Annual Report. - Customer satisfaction levels. - General updates. - Information on an area of work or focus topic.
May/June Meeting	November/December Meeting				
- Contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan. - Annual Performance Indicators: customer engagements (split into in person and digital engagements); services fee as percentage of HLH expenditure; and number of members for the following services: leisure; libraries; music; sports development. - General updates. - Information on an area of work or focus topic.	- The HLH Annual Report. - Customer satisfaction levels. - General updates. - Information on an area of work or focus topic.				
5.3	HLH was established to deliver services on behalf of THC and at the same time deliver savings and protect, improve, and develop services. Each year, Arm's Length External Organisation (ALEO) status saves THC c. £2.5m p.a. non-domestic rates relief.				
5.4	HLH has consistently returned revenue savings for THC with recent (5 year) savings averaging £1.55m p.a. (9% of 2025/26 Services Fee). Savings have been achieved through income and efficiencies, whilst minimising service reductions. The partnership has been hallmarked by HLH assuming responsibility for additional services at the request of THC, with 43 new services and facilities having been added to HLH since it was established in 2011.				
6.	HLH Governance				
6.1	HLH Directors are appointed by THC (8 independent Directors and 4 Councillor Directors). The HLH Directors can be found on the HLH web site: https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/board-directors/ .				
6.2	The HLH Trading Board Directors are appointed by the HLH Board (a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 HLH Board Directors with the remaining independent). The trading company Directors can be found on the HLH web site: https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/trading-company-directors/				
7.	HLH Annual Report 2025-26				
7.1	HLH's Annual Report is a statutory requirement. The 2025-26 Annual Report was approved by the HLH Board at its 3 September 2025 meeting and can be seen in Appendix A .				

8.	Customer Satisfaction Levels
8.1	This is a new indicator which was introduced when the contract was reviewed in December 2024. Since then, HLH has introduced the net promoter score ¹ (NPS) survey as a way of assessing customer satisfaction levels. Initial responses have been very good with monthly average scores ranging from 24% to 79%. An NPS score above 0 is regarded as being good, with a score above 50 regarded as being excellent. Part of the value of the NPS is in its use over time to track trends and HLH is developing the approach it takes to extend the reach of the survey amongst customers to support service improvement.
8.2	While the above is being further developed, information for Elected Members is provided on the School's Out summer programme below and a libraries non-customer survey in Appendix B . The libraries survey sought to obtain information from people who are not library customers and it includes an action plan to increase customer numbers.
8.3	The annual School's Out summer activity programme has been an important service for parents and children for many years and is therefore important to HLH. The overall quality of the programme was assessed by asking parents whether they would recommend it to a friend and the response to this was positive to this with 92% saying that they would. In addition to that both the range of activities on offer and the pricing were viewed positively with: 79% reporting that the range of activities was excellent or good and 83% giving the same responses for pricing.
9.	General Updates
9.1	As part of HLH's reporting, general updates since the previous report to the Education Committee are provided and Appendix C provides updates and good news stories since the June 2025 meeting.
9.2	The Inverness Castle Experience project is being progressed by the Council and preparations are being made by HLH for its opening in 2025: • The new programme aims to achieve a soft launch opening date of November 2025. • The final preparations are underway for the build, fit out and design. • Gardens have been planted, and external landscaping is nearing completion. • All key staff have been successfully recruited with the Visitor Experience Assistants scheduled to take up their posts in November. • Staff training, customer testing and stakeholder events have been scheduled in the lead up to opening. • Tickets will be on sale a minimum of 3 weeks prior to opening. • THC colleagues have arrangements in train for a formal official opening
9.3	A new fund aimed at getting more people active was launched at Bught Park in Inverness. 'Get Active Scotland' is a two-year funding partnership between national and local partners – including the London Marathon Foundation, sportscotland , High Life Highland, and Glasgow Life. The Fund will be one of Scotland's largest programmes focused on increasing participation in physical activity, particularly for the least-active

¹ Net promoter score (NPS) is a market research metric that is based on a single survey question asking respondents to rate the likelihood that they would recommend a company, product, or service. The NPS has been widely adopted.

	children and young people, and communities living in areas affected by deprivation and rural isolation. Get Active Scotland will fund groups in two regions: the Highlands, managed by High Life Highland, and Glasgow, managed by Glasgow Life. To mark the launch in the Highlands, Inverness track star and Olympian Megan Keith was joined by pupils from Kinmylies Primary School, leading the children's daily mile activity in the recently refurbished Bught Park. The scheme will offer financial support to Community groups in the Highlands by applying for a Get Active Scotland grant of up to £5,000.
9.4	High Life Highland has embraced the new fitness phenomenon that is Hyrox with training classes now taking place in leisure centres in Aviemore, Grantown, Inverness and Fort William – with Lochaber Leisure having hosted its first ever Hyrox Simulation (Sim) event last month. Inverness Leisure has recently expanded its Hyrox training programme, with a special refurbishment and fit out of its largest Studio to accommodate more people and more classes. There is currently capacity for 400 class participants per week.
10.	Archives Service
10.1	The focus topic in this report is the work of the archives team. The team provides an archives service, which has wide public appeal, and a records management service for THC. There are four archive centres: Wick; Inverness; Portree and Fort William. The digital/on-line services, including the Am Baile web site form an important part of service delivery. The archives annual review can be seen in Appendix D. Highlights of what has been achieved by the team include: • being named as the UK & Ireland 'Recordkeeping Service of the Year 2024' in the Archive and Records Association (ARA) Excellence Awards; and • winning the first Highland Council/High Life Highland Partnership Award at the Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards.
	Designation: Chief Executive, High Life Highland Date: 15 October 2025 Author: Douglas Wilby, Steve Walsh Appendices: - Appendix A - HLH annual report 2024/25. - Appendix B – Libraries non-customer survey. - Appendix C - General updates. - Appendix D – Archives annual review.



MAKING **LIFE** BETTER

Report and Financial Statements
Aithisg agus Aithrisean Ionmhasail
31 March 2025 | 31 Màrt 2025

COMPANY INFORMATION

FIOSRACHADH COMPANAIDH

DIRECTORS

M Golding
T Ligema
A Jarvie
D Finlayson
I Campbell
N Finnigan
M Hutchison
R Henry
K Ross
M Boylan
A Vass
A Millar

COMPANY SECRETARY

S Fraser

AUDITORS

Saffery LLP
Torridon House
Beechwood Park
Inverness
IV2 3BW

BANKERS

Virgin Money
15 Academy Street
Inverness
IV1 1JN

REGISTERED OFFICE

Highland Archive Centre
Bught Road
Inverness
IV3 5SS

Our purpose is to
Make Life Better by
providing affordable access
to opportunities in sport,
leisure and culture across
the length and breadth
of the Highlands.

High Life Highland
A company limited by guarantee
Company Number SC407011
Charity Number SC042593

High Life na Gàidhealtachd
Companaidh cuibhrichte le
barrantas

Contents

Clàr-innse

The Story So Far An Sgeul gu Ruige Seo	2
Report of the Chair Aithisg a' Chathraiche	4
Report of the Chief Executive Aithisg an Àrd-Oifigeir	6
Trustees' and Directors' Report – including the Strategic Report Aithisg nan Urrasairean is nan Stiùirichean – a' gabhail a-steach na h-Aithisg Ro-innleachdail	8
Report of the Independent Auditors Aithisg an Luchd-sgrùdaidh Neo-eisimeileach	51
Group Statement of Financial Activities Aithris Buidhne air Gnìomhachd Ionmhasail	56
Company Statement of Financial Activities Aithris Companaidh air Gnìomhachd Ionmhasail	57
Group Balance Sheet Cunntas Cothromachaidh Buidhne	58
Company Balance Sheet Cunntas Cothromachaidh Companaidh	59
Notes to the Financial Statements Notaichean do na h-Aithrisean Ionmhasail	60



43 facilities and services incorporated since 2011

The Story So Far An Sgeul gu Ruige Seo

Effectiveness

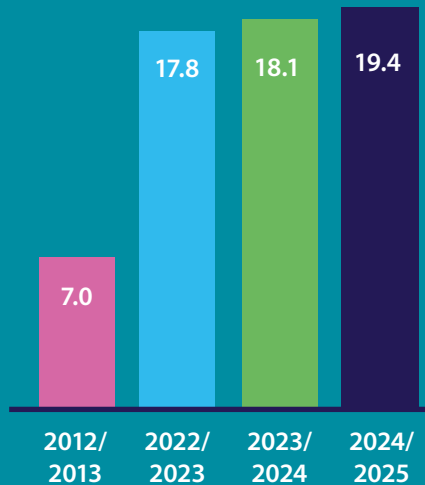
Since it was set up High Life Highland has proven to be both efficient and effective in delivery of public services on behalf of The Highland Council. In 2011/12 it had 2.3 million customer visits across its service areas. By 2024/25 this has reached 8.6 million and the services it delivers has become significantly more important to the people of the Highlands than they have ever been.

Enabled savings to The Highland Council since formation

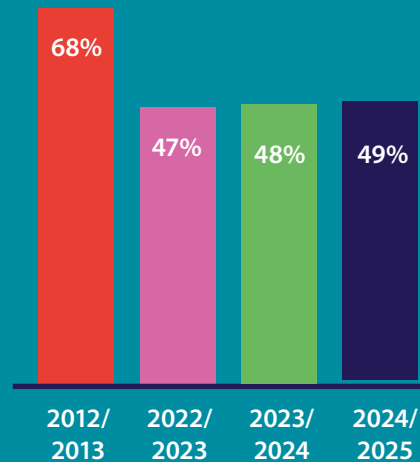
£38,494,974



Income generated
(£ Millions)



Reliance on
Council Funding



Customer Engagements

Service	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Adult Learning	13,668	13,668	8,841
Archives	2,002,219	2,332,211	2,431,025
Countryside Rangers	13,400	38,276	110,839
Leisure	2,178,579	2,420,457	2,584,832
Libraries	2,187,883	2,524,587	2,747,393
Museums & Galleries	231,947	174,087	239,058
Music Tuition	105,821	100,745	102,428
Sport	274,822	277,706	325,748
Youth Services	74,595	81,606	41,851
Total	7,081,243	8,014,070	8,592,015

Efficiency

As the growth in customer numbers was being achieved, the charity was becoming more efficient – when it was set up in 2011/12 79% of its funding came from The Highland Council and by 2024/25 this had reduced to 49%. This balance of efficiency and effectiveness has enabled High Life Highland to deliver £38.5m in savings to The Highland Council over 13 years.

Adaptability

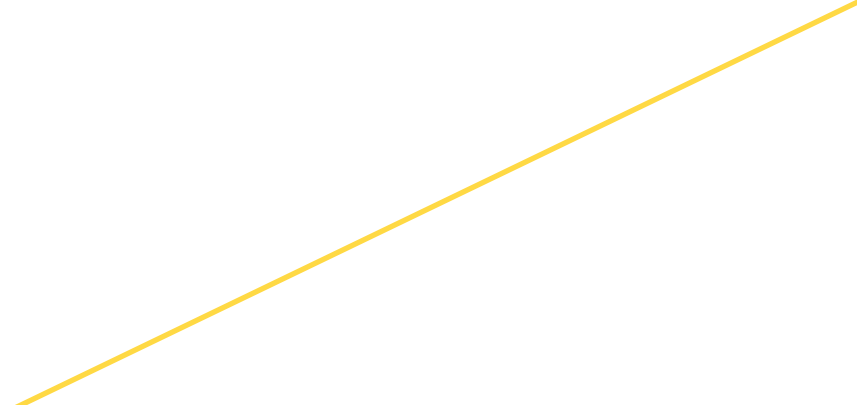
Part of the growth has been due to High Life Highland's willingness to adapt, take risks and deliver new services. High Life Highland delivers 9 service areas and has taken on a total of 43 new buildings and services in the 13 years of its existence.

Report of the Chair

Aithisg a' Chathraiche



On behalf of the Board as the incoming Chair, it is my privilege to present the 2024-25 Annual Report for High Life Highland. The Highlands are constantly evolving, with change unfolding across the region as it becomes more sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive.



It has been a honour to serve my first year as Chair of High Life Highland, and I am proud to reflect on a year of progress, renewal, and shared purpose. As an organisation rooted in the Highlands, our work continues to make a meaningful difference to the lives of individuals and communities across the region.

A major milestone in 2024 was the development and implementation of our new five-year strategy. This forward-looking plan sets out our ambitions and priorities, ensuring we remain focused on delivering high-quality services that reflect the needs and aspirations of Highland communities. It is a strategy built on collaboration, innovation, and a deep commitment to our purpose of **making life better**.

Towards the end of the financial year, we welcomed new Directors to both our Charity Board and Trading Board, bringing fresh perspectives and energy to our governance. At the same time, we bid farewell to several experienced Directors whose contributions have left a lasting legacy. Their dedication and insight helped shape the organisation we are today, and we thank them sincerely.

We were also proud to sign up to the Highland Charter for Climate, Nature & Health – a significant step that reflects our values and our responsibility as a community-focused charity. This commitment reinforces our role in supporting environmental sustainability and promoting healthier lifestyles, both of which are central to our work.

Our partnership with The Highland Council remains strong and continues to be a cornerstone of our success. We share the Council's visionary approach outlined in the Highland Investment Plan, with community involvement at the core of infrastructure projects. Together, we will continue to deliver services and initiatives that benefit the region, and we are grateful for their ongoing support and shared ambition.

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to our Chief Executive, the leadership team, and all our employees and volunteers. Their dedication, professionalism, and passion are the driving force behind High Life Highland's achievements. It was a pleasure to celebrate their contributions at the annual i-care awards in November – a fitting tribute to the people who make our organisation exceptional.

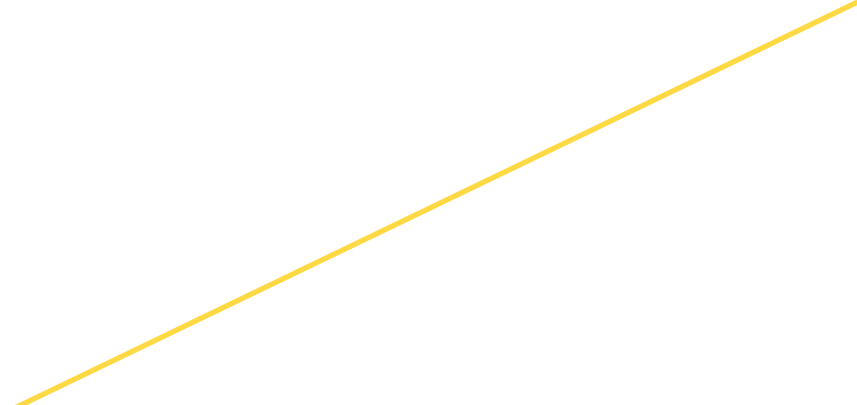
As we look ahead, I am confident that High Life Highland will continue to thrive, innovate, and serve. Thank you for your continued support as we work together to build a brighter future for the Highlands.

Michael Golding
Chair

Report of the Chief Executive Aithisg an Àrd-Oifigeir



As one of Scotland's largest Leisure and Culture Trusts, High Life Highland has significant reach across an area covering one third of Scotland. This has been a year of purposeful change, proud achievements, and continued momentum for High Life Highland.



This year has been one of meaningful transition, proud recognition, and continued progress for High Life Highland. With our services reaching deeply into communities across the region, we remain committed to our purpose of **making life better** for the people of the Highlands.

High Life Highland operates with a social conscience, delivering public services that generate social good. Our core business isn't about making profit — it's about purpose: helping people first. Over the past year, our focus has been on supporting society to become healthier and happier, employing local people, creating safe spaces for everyone, connecting communities, working towards net zero, and ensuring residents across the Highlands have access to quality, affordable cultural, health, and wellbeing services — regardless of age or ability.

We were also delighted to see our work recognised, with 2024 becoming a year of national awards for High Life Highland. These accolades reflect the exceptional efforts of our teams, particularly in the areas of environmental sustainability and heritage. A special mention must go to our Archives Service, which was named National Recordkeeper of the Year — a testament to the passion and expertise of our colleagues in preserving and promoting Highland history.

Looking ahead, the Inverness Castle Experience edges ever closer to opening. This landmark project will celebrate Highland culture and heritage, offering a world-class visitor attraction in the heart of the Highland capital. It represents a major milestone in our region's cultural journey and, alongside recent investments in facilities at the Bught and Northern Meeting Parks, will bring lasting benefits to the tourism economy — while ensuring that the local population can enjoy access to facilities.

Operationally, the strategic decision to transfer the Adult Learning and Youth Work service to The Highland Council has created the capacity to absorb Inverness Castle into the High Life Highland portfolio. The professionalism and dedication shown by staff across both organisations ensured a seamless transition, and we are proud of the collaborative spirit that made this possible.

None of this would be possible without the continued support and partnership of The Highland Council, whose commitment to our shared goals remains vital. We are also deeply grateful to our customers, funders, donors, volunteers, and staff — all of whom contribute to the success of High Life Highland.

As we reflect on the past year and look to the future, we remain inspired by the resilience and spirit of Highland communities. Together, we will continue to deliver services that make a real and lasting difference.

Steve Walsh, OBE
Chief Executive



Trustees' and Directors' Report – including the Strategic Report at 31 March 2025

**Aithisg nan Urrasairean
is nan Stiùirichean – a' gabhail
a-steach na h-Aithisg
Ro-innleachdail
aig 31 Màrt 2025**



The Trustees, who are also the Directors of the Company for the purposes of Company law, present their report and the group financial statements for the year to 31 March 2025.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the Company's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, the Charities Accounts (Scotland).

Regulations 2006 (as amended), the Companies Act 2006, and the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

Formation of High Life Highland

Cruthachadh High Life na Gàidhealtachd

High Life Highland is a charitable Company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland. Its registered office address is Highland Archive Centre, Bught Road, Inverness, IV3 5SS (Company number SC407011, Charity number SC042593). It is a subsidiary of The Highland Council, by virtue of it being the sole member of the company and having the power to appoint its Directors. The Company was formed on 8 September 2011 to deliver a range of community learning and leisure services on behalf of The Highland Council and was registered as a charity on 15 September 2011.

It has one subsidiary Company: High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C. (Community Interest Company) (Company number SC408067) whose principal aim is to generate funds which will be utilised by the charity in pursuit of its charitable objectives.



Principal activities and objectives

Prìomh ghnìomhachd agus mhion-amasan

The purpose of the Company is to **make life better** through developing and promoting opportunities in culture, learning, sport, leisure and health and wellbeing

The Company's aim is to be acknowledged and respected as the leading organisation for developing and promoting opportunities in these areas and to grow the business in a sustainable way by providing services that the public value and by being viewed as a trusted partner making the Highlands a better place to live, work and visit.

HLH operates across the Highlands of Scotland, currently within the geographical boundary of The Highland Council's administrative area.

The main business of the Company is the delivery of a Service Delivery Contract for The Highland Council across 9 areas of work;

- Adult Learning
- Archives
- Countryside Rangers
- Leisure Facilities
- Libraries
- Museums and Galleries
- Music Development
- Sport
- Youth Work

Directors Stiùirichean

The trustees, who are also the Directors for the purposes of Company law, who served the charity during the year, and up to the date of signing the financial statements were:

M Golding
T Ligema
M Tate (resigned 19 March 2025)
A Jarvie
D Finlayson
I Campbell
K Nicol (resigned 19 March 2025)
N Finnigan
M Hutchison
R Henry
K Ross
M Boylan (appointed 19 March 2025)
A Vass (appointed 19 March 2025)
A Millar

There are no Directors' interests requiring disclosure under the Companies Act 2006.

The Board consists of 8 independent Directors and 4 Highland Council nominated Directors. The retiral and replacement of the Directors is also governed by the Articles of Association.

The Company has a nominations committee, the purpose of which is to oversee the selection of Directors to the Board and to make recommendations for appointment to the Council. In carrying out its function the committee set an appropriate skills matrix to guide it through the selection and evaluation process. Nominations are sought from a range of appropriate sources. Once appointed, Directors undergo induction and training in line with the established recruitment process for Directors.

The strategic management and policy decisions of the Company are the responsibility of the Board of Directors who are elected under the terms of the Company's Articles of Association. The day to day management of the Company is the responsibility of the Chief Executive, Steve Walsh in consultation with the appointed Service Directors; Director of Corporate Performance, Douglas Wilby; Director of Inverness Castle, Fiona Hampton; Director of Culture & Learning, John West and Director of Sport, Leisure & Safeguarding, James Martin. The pay of key management personnel is part of the Highland Council Payscale, subject to NJC national agreement.

The Company has an established Finance and Audit committee, the purpose of which is to assist the Board of Directors in fulfilling its responsibilities with regard to the Company's financial reporting, Audit and the company's internal control procedures including risk management. The Company has a Chief Executive Performance Review Committee whose remit is to agree the annual performance objectives and targets of the Chief Executive.

Our advisors An luchd-comhairleachaidh againn

Our advisors are listed on the Company Information page.

Disabled employees

Luchd-obrach ciorramach



The Company and group give full consideration to applications for employment from disabled persons where the candidate's particular aptitudes and abilities are consistent with adequately meeting the requirements of the job.

Opportunities are available to disabled employees for training, career development and promotion.

Where existing employees become disabled, it is the group's policy to provide continuing employment wherever practicable in the same or an alternative position and to provide appropriate training to achieve this aim.



Reserves policy

Poileasaidh chùl-stòran

The purpose of the reserves policy is to advance the charitable objectives of the company, the Directors have agreed a long-term target to build up unrestricted reserves (excluding designated funds) to 3% of the total revenue budget, recognising the need for reserves particularly for business outwith the Service Delivery Contract agreement with The Highland Council and noting the difficulty in achieving this target in the current economic climate.

The total reserves held at year end excluding the pension asset of £26,230,000 (2024 – £12,993,000) was £2,047,696 (2024 – £1,098,896), of which £1,339,880 (2024 – £685,017) was unrestricted and £707,816 (2024 – £413,879) was restricted. Of the £1,339,880 unrestricted reserves, £139,715 has been designated for capital works at Inverness Leisure following the transfer of business from Inverness Leisure to High Life Highland on 1 April 2016, the £300,000 which had been designated for backpay related to the remodelling of the company's pay structure was undesignated during the year as no longer required. The uncommitted, unrestricted reserve balance of £1,200,165 at 31st March 2025 represents 3% of budgeted turnover of which £813k is planned to be utilised in the coming financial year leaving a projected balance of £387k at 31st March 2026.

Breakdown of reserves at 31 March 2025:

Unrestricted	£1,200,165
Unrestricted - Designated	£139,715
Restricted	£707,816
Total	£2,047,696

Total reserves held at year end

£2.0m

Results and Performance

Toraidhean agus Coileanadh

Full details of the results are included in the Strategic Report.

Strategy 2025-2030

Ro-innleachd 2025-2030

A new 5-year strategy covering the period to March 2030 has been prepared, setting out the Company's objectives and plans for the future.

The strategy includes priorities for growth, supported by individual Service Plans to guide activity across the company in a co-ordinated, measurable way.



Investment policy

Poileasaidh cur an seilbh

The Directors are governed by the Memorandum and Articles which permit funds to be invested as the Directors see fit.

High Life Highland Strategy 2025-2030

Strategic Ambition

Purpose

MAKING LIFE BETTER

So that we can reach our **vision** of affordable access to health and wellbeing, learning and culture for everyone in the Highlands.

By being/having **values**

- Integrity
- Community
- Accountability
- Respect
- Example

Contributing to our High Level Outcome

Making a positive impact across the Highlands by improving physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.

Strategic Objectives

Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region.

Key Actions

- 1) Optimise service delivery to meet community needs.
- 2) Ensure the affordability and accessibility of services to the community.
- 3) Flexibly adapt services to align with local opportunity.

Maximise and grow our income to re-invest across our services.

Key Actions

- 1) Increase income from highlife memberships.
- 2) Maximise all income streams.

Ensure a consistent high value of delivery across HLH services.

Key Actions

- 1) Monitor and improve the customer experience.
- 2) Demonstrate how each service brings value to our customers.

Commit to the net zero and sustainability agenda.

Key Actions

- 1) Develop an action plan for net zero and sustainability for each service.
- 2) Reduce energy consumption across our services.
- 3) Implement findings of energy surveys.

Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes.

Key Actions

- 1) Continuous staff deployment to meet customer requirements efficiently.
- 2) Develop training needs analysis to support delivery of our strategic objectives at service level.
- 3) Develop a digital plan for service delivery and efficiency.
- 4) Improve services by using the customer journey mechanism.

Critical Audiences

- The Highland Council
- Customers (residents, visitors, business community)
- Staff and Volunteers
- Funding Partners
- Community Planning Partners
- Regulatory & Compliance Bodies
- Media
- Political

Outcomes - What will success look like?

Increase Member Numbers

- Member retention levels
- Corporate memberships
- Under-represented client groups

Increase Service Users

- By individual service & by geography
- By penetration levels & reach

Improving User/Service Satisfaction Levels

Improving Staff Satisfaction Levels

- Staff turnover and absences

Improving Financial Sustainability

- Hold appropriate reserves
- Meet short-to-long term commitments whilst maximising affordable access

Capital Investment Levels

- Increasing capital investment
- Individual facility improvement
- Health & Safety Performance

Sustainability Results

- Local supply chain benefits
- Narratives and case studies

Review of the Business

Ath-sgrùdadh dhen Ghnothachas

During the year a new five year strategy, summarised on one page, was developed detailing the charity's ambitions, objectives and planned outcomes up to 2030.

In collaboration with colleagues at The Highland Council, the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) governing the services provided by the charity on behalf of the Council was revised and updated for the

first time since its inception in 2011 to reflect the changing environment and ensuring the continuing financial viability of the organisation.





Five Ways to Wellbeing

Còig dòighean gu sunnd

'Five Ways to Wellbeing', outlining a series of simple steps that people can take:

Connect – good relationships with family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and people with similar interests are important for mental wellbeing.

Learn – there are lots of different ways to bring learning into our lives. Try something new, rediscover an old interest, sign up for a course.

Be active – discovering a physical activity which we enjoy and that suits our level of mobility and fitness is vital. Movement usually makes you feel good.

Take notice – being aware of the world around us and what we are feeling (some people call this awareness “mindfulness”).

Give – acts of kindness. Doing something nice for another person, thanking someone, volunteering our time.

Adult Learning

Ionnsachadh Inbheach

Adult Learning provides a range of learning activities in communities across Highland which help with everyday life skills such as reading, writing, using numbers, English as a second language and digital literacy. On 1st December 2024, the Adult Learning transferred to The Highland Council along with the Youth Work service.

The transfer aligned with the Highland Council's 'Workforce for the Future Portfolio' which has a strong focus on career pathways and lifelong learning; strengthening and expanding the accredited achievement programmes in all Highland schools; and linking more closely with the work of the Council's employability service in supporting adults into employment.

Life Long Learning: Family Cooking on a Budget

Family numeracy sessions in Lochaber help families to build skills and make memories together. Working closely with a network of partners, including two local primary schools, and funded by the UKSPF Multiply fund, this year family cookery sessions at Caol Youth Café were offered on a weekly basis.

Working together as a family, parents and children prepared a family meal each week, learning new skills with a particular focus on where we use numeracy in our everyday lives. Parents also learned skills for supporting their child's personal development, gaining confidence to engage in their child's learning and the wider school community. Experiencing new foods and discovering how to make family favourites together was a big hit with everyone. Families had fun scoring each new dish out of ten and documenting each recipe in their family scrapbook. As well as enjoying making tasty dishes, the children loved returning to school and shared their creations with their teachers and friends; if there was any left!

The weekly sessions also provided opportunities to discuss eating and drinking well, and the chance for the parents to socialise and build friendships. The group visited the local food larder to see what was available and explored how those items can be used in the kitchen. Learning how to save money and reduce food waste was also very rewarding.

“Adult learning services are essential as they help individuals improve communication skills, foster creativity, encourage community engagement, and support personal growth.
Angela, Adult Learner - Inverness **”**

Developing Better Digital skills

Helping adults improve their computer literacy skills was the focus of High Life Highland's Learning for Life team in Ross-shire. Digital skills courses commenced at Dingwall Library and Alness Library, offering participants a social and supportive space where they learn more about the digital world and develop their IT skills.

From online banking and shopping to making a GP's appointment or a job application, everything is done online nowadays but for some people this is not easy. The aim of the free digital skills sessions was to help people become more confident in using a computer, smartphone or tablet so they can carry out all these day to day tasks with ease.

For every
£1 → **£21.60**
invested in adult learning **is returned to the**
at SCQF level 4 **economy**

56
learners gained
SQA
qualifications



Adult Learning Re-Launches as 'Learning for Life'

Launched during Adult Learners Week (18th-24th May 2024), 'Learning for Life' was launched as the new title for the Adult Learning skills provision. The service re-launch affirmed its identity as a lifelong, life-wide and people-centred service.



To celebrate the launch of Learning for Life, the service shared a new video featuring adult learner Sheryl who shares her own experiences of how the charity helped her. Scan the QR code to watch and hear Sheryl's touching story.

86%
of learners report
improved confidence
in their core skills

A Year of Accolades

Bliadhna nan Duaisean



Record Keeping Service of the Year 2024

The Archive and Records Association (ARA) Excellence Awards, took place on 29th August in Birmingham with the Highland Archive Service triumphant in the Record Keeping Service of the Year category, the only Scottish service to feature. The Highland Archive Service took 63% of the public vote, with fellow nominees being the Essex Police Museum and Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Ruth MacLeod, Chair of the Archives and Records Association UK & Ireland travelled to Inverness to hand over the trophy and congratulate the team in person, at their main headquarters in Inverness.

Speaking at the Highland Archive and Registration Centre, Ruth said: "The awards we give out each year are a great opportunity to celebrate all that is good about our profession and all the nominees for Recordkeeping Service of the Year, were I'm sure, deserving of the award, but I was particularly glad, as a Highlander, to see the Highland Archive Service win with such a resounding proportion of the public vote.



Community Leisure UK Seriously Social 2024 Award Winner - Environment

In November 2024, High Life Highland came out tops for its environmental credentials in the first ever Seriously Social Awards.

Organised by Community Leisure UK – a members' association that specialises in charitable trusts delivering public leisure and culture services across the UK – the prestigious national awards ceremony took place in Manchester, with Sally Gunnell OBE as host.

High Life Highland's dedication to **Making Life Better** across the region through a wide array of projects, exhibitions, and educational initiatives aims to ensure that everyone can access, protect, and enjoy the natural world – this being a primary reason that the organisation was shortlisted in the Environment category.

The charity's range of services featured in the award-winning submission from the GROW gardeners project at the Inverness Botanic Gardens and the restoration of the Highland Folk Museum's curling pond with the Cairngorms National Park Junior Rangers, the Learning for Life team have been supporting asylum seekers learning English to explore the local environment and the library service has seen many of its facilities become green hubs of environmental education and climate engagement.

In addition, the High Life Highland Countryside Rangers have been instrumental in the creation of the Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic project, which has resulted in over 60 vibrant meadows being created in communities supported by volunteers. The service also carries out an array of biodiversity monitoring, practical environment conservation activities and educational initiatives.



Green Apple Environment Award - Gold

The High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service was recognised in the annual Green Apple Environment Awards. They were awarded gold in the Education and Training: Conservation and Wildlife Projects category for the Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic Project.

The Green Apple Environment Awards, launched in 1994, recognise, reward and promote environmental best practice around the world. This green award was the second for High Life Highland having won the Environment Category at the first ever Seriously Social Awards the previous month.

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers have been instrumental in the creation of the Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic project along with the Highland Environment Forum, which has resulted in around 100 vibrant little meadows being created in communities across the region, supported by a band of volunteers.



Archives Tasglannan

High Life Highland's four Archive Centres—located in Inverness, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, and Caithness—enable people to explore and understand the heritage of the Highlands.

Working with school pupils of all ages continues to be a key part of our engagement programme, and it has been fantastic over the past few months to collaborate with schools from across Inverness, as well as pupils from Fortrose, Alness, Aldourie, Dornoch, and even as far afield as Hertfordshire! We have also welcomed home-educated children from across the Highlands to the Highland Archive Centre to learn more about our collections and our work.

2.4m
customer engagements
in our archives service



Transnational Island Museologies

In June, our Community Engagement Officer joined Dr Stephen Mullen, Dr Henderson Carter, and Dr Heather Cateau (pictured below) for a roundtable discussion at the Transnational Island Museologies conference at the University of St Andrews. The session focused on Eric Williams' seminal 1944 book *Capitalism and Slavery*, and included sharing her experiences of using archives related to enslavement with a range of audiences.

Over 180 participants from 47 countries attended the conference, and we were delighted to be involved.



Memories of the First Mobile Library in Lochaber

Often, the pictures and recordings on Am Baile prompt happy memories and reminiscences, and we thought we'd share an example of that in this report. Mary Bruce has shared her memories of being the driver of the first Mobile Library in Lochaber:

"In 1975, the first Lochaber Mobile Library was brought down to Fort William. I can remember my horror at discovering that my first experience of driving the vehicle was to take it out from the courtyard at the County Buildings in Inverness, through a narrow opening, with library staff watching my efforts!

After a short drive around to acclimatise myself with the vehicle, I was loaded up with stock and sent on my way back to Fort William. I was given access to a room at Caol Library for my excess stock, and from there I organised my exchanges of books and my returns. Mrs White and Mrs MacAllister were invaluable to me for their advice on library matters—their kindness is still remembered—as was Mrs MacLaren at Fort William Library, who was always ready to answer my queries.

The following week, accompanied by the Regional Librarian, Donald Anderson, I set off around Lochaber to establish a route with stopping places and times for the Mobile. It was a great week, weather-wise, and a wonderful opportunity to get to know the people of the area the Library was to cover. We arranged times for visits to the local schools, Glencoe Hospital, and Dalmhor House in Strontian. All villages that had formerly had a small 'village' library were now to be covered by the Mobile.

The Mobile Library was to cover all of Lochaber, leaving from Fort William each day to destinations as far as King's House in Glencoe, Lochaline and Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, and Mallaig and 'all places in between'—even as far north as Cluny Mains near Newtonmore, and over the hill to Dalwhinnie.

As Highland Council was taking over parts of the areas formerly covered by a Mobile Library from Argyll County Council, we were also responsible for retrieving all books that had been issued by them. Some days, as the shelves of the Mobile were full, the floor was also littered with boxes of books—not the neat and orderly library I had hoped for!"

Countryside Rangers

Maoir-dhùthcha

The High Life Highland Ranger Service successfully implemented numerous community and school-based educational programmes, significantly contributing to Highland's biodiversity obligations.

One of the highlights was a group of conservation-minded volunteers who came together to build new homes for local wildlife in Caithness, with support from High Life Highland Countryside Rangers.

Caithness Environment Volunteers gathered at High Life Highland's ranger base at the Seadrift Centre in Dunnet for a productive and inspiring session focused on creating habitats to boost biodiversity and support wildlife across the county. The industrious group had a fantastic day crafting a variety of homes for different species. Their efforts included two bat boxes, four hedgehog boxes, and two tawny owl boxes destined for Wick Riverside, alongside two rabbit escape tunnels for the Farr Glebe Bumblebee conservation site, which has recently had rabbit-proof fencing added to protect it from grazing.

Additionally, the Seadrift Centre itself benefited from their work, with the creation of eight new house martin nests—enhancing the centre's contribution to local biodiversity.

"It was a joy to host this dedicated team and witness their wonderful contribution to the region's wildlife."



Gaelic Inclusion

In-ghabhail Ghàidhlig

High Life Highland collaborates with The Highland Council's Gaelic Team to deliver specific targets and support the promotion of Gaelic language and culture, primarily through its Archives, Museums, and Music Tuition services.

Countryside Rangers continue to promote the use of Gaelic, incorporating it into their programmes and educational materials. This ensures strong links with cultural heritage and supports language preservation.

Gaelic Sports Leadership Courses are available to young people, along with resources for primary school leadership training.

Am Baile, a bilingual cultural heritage website managed by the HLH Highland Archive Service, has seen increasing customer engagement. The site features bilingual descriptions of content, and new Gaelic material is added regularly by skilled Gaelic translators. In addition, its social media content attracted more than 1.5 million engagements.

All interpretation at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery is bilingual, and the museum offers two permanent display sections

that explain and promote Gaelic. These include an interactive exhibit that gives visitors the opportunity to learn Gaelic words and try out the language. At the Highland Folk Museum, visitors can experience Gaelic language and traditions in a variety of living history settings, including Gaelic psalm singing in the church and regular waulking the cloth demonstrations.

Skye and Lochaber Archive Centres regularly support and work in partnership with Gaelic-medium schools in their areas. They also collaborate with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and several community groups on initiatives aimed at sustaining and transmitting Gaelic language and culture.

The Inverness Gaelic Society Library is housed within Inverness Public Library, and Gaelic book collections are available throughout all Highland Libraries. Regular Gaelic Bookbug sessions—rhyme, song, and storytelling sessions for children aged 0–4 and their parents/carers—are delivered from multiple library locations.

Health & Wellbeing

Slàinte & Sunnd

The High Life Highland Active Health Programme offers people with a range of long-term health conditions access to exercise classes in leisure facilities, supporting their physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing.

Targeted projects delivered by High Life Highland that contribute to improving mental health and wellbeing include: falls prevention, cardiac rehabilitation, cancer rehabilitation, older adults' health and wellbeing, Type 2 diabetes and physical activity, physiotherapy in leisure centres, pain management, the GP movement and activity programme, and dementia-friendly initiatives—including the museums service-led House of Memories.

The You Time programme is delivered across Highland and includes activities provided by archives, leisure facilities, libraries, and countryside rangers. It supports older people to sustain and improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, while also helping to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Last year, there were over 44,216 attendances at these classes.

In October 2024, Living with Type 2 Diabetes programme was launched at Inverness Leisure to support individuals at risk of, or living with, Type 2 Diabetes. The programme promotes better health and wellbeing through regular physical activity, which has been shown to reduce risk and help manage the condition. A mix of cardiovascular and resistance exercises can improve blood sugar control, fitness, weight management, and emotional wellbeing.

'i-care' Awards

Duaisean 'i-care'



Inspiring i-care awards evening for High Life Highland staff and volunteers

The historic Strathpeffer Pavilion was the venue in November for the 2024 High Life Highland i-care awards with over 100 people attending to celebrate the many ways in which staff and volunteers are Making Life Better for residents and visitors across the Highlands. Hosted by STV's Nicola McAlley and with musical entertainment from High Life Highland's music tuition service, the evening saw awards presented to outstanding employees, inspiring young people and inspirational volunteers as well as members of staff receiving long service awards.

Chair of the High Life Highland Board, Michael Golding said: "This annual event, sponsored this year by Technogym, is a wonderful way to celebrate our staff and volunteers and all the fantastic work they do day in day out. The response to our plea for nominations across the different categories was quite overwhelming – and all well deserved. It was extremely difficult to narrow the nominations down to a shortlist, so as well as congratulating all our 2024 winners, I would also like to congratulate and thank everyone who received a nomination. They are all doing such a great job across all our services."



The winners of the 2024 High Life Highland i-care awards

Outstanding Employee of the Year Award, sponsored by Aqua Leisure:
Ian Munro (Inverness Leisure)

High Performing Team of the Year Award, sponsored by Zoggs:
High Life Highland Mobile Library Team

Star Volunteer of the Year Award, sponsored by Askews & Holts Library Services:
Rheannan Rigby from Invergordon

Inspiring Young Leader of the Year Award, sponsored by Stagecoach:
Archie Webster from Inverness

Peoples Choice Award, sponsored by Stagecoach:
Jenny Rankine from Dingwall Leisure Centre

The Highland Council Collaboration Award, sponsored by Haydock Music Ltd:
The Highland Council's Payroll Team

Chair of the Highland Council Education Committee Award, sponsored by MacCallum Bagpipes:
Sarah Ross (Active Schools Co-ordinator, Portree)

High Life Highland Trading Company Chair Award, sponsored by Dynam:
High Life Highland Development Team

High Life Highland Charity Chair Award, sponsored by MacGregor Industrial Supplies:
Hugo Taillandier and Niamh Sutherland (Youth Support Officers)

Awards were also presented to long-serving members of staff, with 10 individuals recognised for 20 years of service, another 10 for 25 years, and five celebrating 30 years with the organisation. Meanwhile, eight members of staff were congratulated on reaching 35 years of service, and one member—Jackie Mackenzie—marked an impressive 40 years.



With thanks to our Award Sponsors



Inverness Botanic Gardens

Gàrraidhean Luibh-eòlais Inbhir Nis

Inverness Botanic Gardens is fully committed to 100% recycling and is a sector leader in carbon reduction and biodiversity.

High Life Highland signed the Highland Charter for Climate, Nature and Health. The new Charter—launched at Inverness Botanic Gardens—is a pledge to place climate, nature, and the benefits of green and blue health at the heart of decision-making and action. Its aim is to ensure that both the natural environment and the people of the Highlands experience improved health, wellbeing, and resilience.

The Highland Charter for Climate, Nature and Health builds on its predecessor, the Climate Charter, by recognising that all three elements are essential for the health of the planet and its people.



Introducing Artwork to Cafe Botanics

Hot on the heels of her involvement in the last Inverness Botanic Gardens exhibition, Margaret Cowie had a solo exhibition on display at the popular city attraction. Adorning the walls of Café Botanics during November and December was a beautiful, colourful display of her floral inspired works.

Margaret Cowie is a stalwart of the Inverness art scene and enjoys working with all types of painting media and tackling a wide range of subject matter. She is particularly drawn to still life but also enjoys landscape, townscape/village scenes and also figurative drawing and painting and abstract art.

Pamela Sutherland, Head Gardener at Inverness Botanic Gardens said: “We were very honoured and excited to show Margaret’s first solo exhibition at the Inverness Botanic Gardens Café. It was wonderful to have such a colourful display of works for visitors to enjoy in the run up to Christmas.”



Celebrating the GROW Gardeners

The enthusiasm and passion for all things horticultural shone through at a celebratory summer evening for participants taking part in a very special project at the Inverness Botanic Gardens.

Receiving certificates and portfolios – and in some cases – long service awards from writer and broadcaster Nicky Marr, the vocational gardeners from the GROW project had their efforts applauded by family and friends. Over half of the garden area in the Inverness Botanic Gardens is tended and cared for by the GROW Project, which offers people with additional support needs the opportunity to get involved in practical horticulture, learn new skills and make new friends.

Rain or shine the GROW gardeners are at the High Life Highland attraction every week taking part in a range of gardening related activities that are helping to build their confidence and enhance their physical and mental wellbeing.

Ewan MacKintosh, Facilities Manager with High Life Highland said: “I would like to offer all our gardeners a massive congratulations on all their horticultural and personal achievements and an enormous thank you to the wonderful team of volunteers who help us ensure that everyone has an enjoyable time.

“The GROW Project promotes horticultural happiness and social inclusion, aided by our amazing team of community volunteers. Depending on the season, you will find fruit trees, vegetable plots, wild flowers, bulbs, herb beds, a bug hotel to encourage insect life, and much more – all created and maintained by our project participants here at the Inverness Botanic Gardens. It is a wonderful example of how High Life Highland is making life better for people.”

Inverness Castle Project

Pròiseact Caisteal Inbhir Nis

In October 2024, Inverness Castle Experience was thrilled to announce its collaboration with Stephen Spencer + Associates (SS+A), experts in creating captivating customer retail experiences. SS+A will design a unique retail experience at the castle, celebrating the best of the Highlands as part of this exciting new visitor attraction.

SS+A places people at the heart of their designs, ensuring every visitor interaction tells a compelling brand story. Their approach—known as “Ambience”—enhances the overall visitor experience through all senses, driving commercial success while enriching cultural and retail spaces.

An exciting 3D scanning project, digitally capturing historical objects from museums across the Highlands, was also completed in October. This initiative will form a vital component of the immersive storytelling experience at Inverness Castle Experience, showcasing artefacts that represent the region’s rich cultural history.

Key historical objects—such as a powder horn (used to hold blasting powder), the Ballachulish Goddess, and a Mesolithic harpoon—are among the fascinating items that have been scanned. These artefacts, and many others, will be featured in the People Room within Inverness Castle’s South Tower Experience, where they will serve as signposts guiding visitors to the individual museums where the original pieces are housed.



Presenting Seanchaidh (shen-heh-kay), a bespoke Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky crafted by the Own Label Company. This limited-edition whisky captures the essence of the Scottish Highlands in every drop, with a name that means “storyteller” in Gaelic, honouring the Highland tradition of storytelling woven into its culture.

In December, a special stall in the Victorian Market in Inverness offered for sale 300 limited-edition, individually numbered bottles of Seanchaidh. This exclusive release was highly sought-after to own a special bottle of this exceptional Highland Single Malt, making it an unmissable event for whisky enthusiasts and collectors alike.

In February 2025 The Inverness Castle Experience reached two key milestones: the completion of glazing on the new link building and the installation of the fully refurbished Rose Window in the South Tower Story Room. These achievements marked significant progress as the attraction prepares to open later this year.

The contemporary link building will house the Saltire Bistro, offering visitors a unique space to enjoy Highland hospitality. The glazing, meticulously crafted and installed by specialist contractors, has been delivered to the highest standards under the supervision of Bancon Construction, the project’s main contractor.

Adding to the sense of achievement, the stunning Rose Window, a cherished historic feature, has been fully refurbished and now takes centre stage in the South Tower Story Room. Suspended from the ceiling within a bespoke steel frame, the intricate window has been restored to showcase its original craftsmanship, creating a breathtaking focal point in the room where visitors will immerse themselves in the stories of the Highlands.



The Inverness Castle Experience has revealed its ticket pricing structure ahead of its highly anticipated opening this year. A key highlight is the introduction of a special pass – an initiative offering Highland residents unlimited return visits from October to March, along with a 10% discount on food and drinks (excluding alcohol) after purchasing full-price tickets.

The Inverness Castle project is part of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, a joint initiative supported by up to £315m investment from the UK and Scottish governments, The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the University of the Highlands and Islands, aimed at stimulating sustainable regional economic growth.

When buying a ticket online, Highland residents can unlock a special pass using their *highlife* card. This pass grants unlimited, bookable repeat visits to the Inverness Castle Experience from October to March (terms and conditions will apply). This exclusive opportunity allows locals to explore the attraction as often as they like, immersing themselves in Spirit of the Highlands stories while enjoying discounted food and drinks.



Libraries Leabharlannan

1,430

Number of local children who took part in the Summer Reading Challenge

HLH library staff deliver an extensive programme of activities to support early years literacy and numeracy, including Bookbug sessions and early years/family STEM activities. Book collections to support reading for learning and recreation are provided in both hard copy and digital format. Libraries also support learning and teaching through the provision of the school library service. HLH Libraries offer no-cost family activity programmes that support literacy, STEM learning, digital and social inclusion. Highlights from the year include:

- In May 2024, High Life Highland libraries celebrated Bookbug Week with a series of engaging events for children aged 0–5, centred around the theme of saying “hello” in multiple languages. The initiative highlighted Scotland’s linguistic diversity, with a focus on Gaelic, French, Spanish, and German.

- Inshes Library, in partnership with Fèis a’ Bhaile, launched a creative music project supported by funding from The Highland Council Ward Discretionary Fund. A key feature was the installation of a publicly accessible electric piano, promoting inclusion and creativity. Plans are underway to establish a free keyboard club offering taster sessions for children in P4–P7.

- Furthering its commitment to sustainability and community engagement, High Life Highland established four new Green Hubs in Dingwall, Caol, Wick, and Ardnamurchan libraries, supported by CILIPS Green Libraries Scotland. These hubs feature climate-themed book collections, educational displays, and collaborative programming with Countryside Rangers and local partners. Initiatives include after-school nature clubs, nature explorer bags for families, and Seed Libraries in Caol and Wick, encouraging biodiversity and sustainable living.

2.7m

customer engagements
with our libraries



Levelling Up Ìre suas

Three major projects along the River Ness in Inverness received nearly £20 million from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund, aimed at enhancing the city's cultural, sporting, and environmental infrastructure while supporting net zero carbon targets.

Bught Park: Supported by lead contractor Clark Contracts, the redevelopment began in January 2024 and scheduled for completion by July 2025. The project supports local employment, with over £4 million reinvested into the regional economy through local subcontractors. Improvements will enhance the park's appeal for sports and events.

Castle Street Energy Centre: This new sustainable facility will supply renewable energy to Inverness Castle and Town House via heat pumps, significantly reducing carbon emissions. Designed to complement the landscape, the centre also improves pedestrian access to the redeveloped castle. Construction is complete, with landscaping to follow in mid-2025.

Northern Meeting Park: Refurbishment works began in late 2024, led by Morrison Construction – Highland, and are expected to conclude by June 2025. The project includes restoration of the Victorian grandstand, improved green space access, upgraded event infrastructure, and a new community pavilion, reinforcing the park's role as a key cultural and sporting venue.

almost
£20m
awarded from the
UK Levelling Up Fund



Leisure

Cur-seachad

High Life Highland provides modern apprenticeships through its leisure facilities including qualifications in Group fitness, Personal training and gym instructor which support young people who wish to remain in Highland and develop their careers at home.

Gyms are key to the financial sustainability of leisure centres and help the service to provide less financially viable activity such as swimming lessons for children and the budget scheme for people and families on low incomes. The programme of upgrades to gyms in the High Life Highland portfolio has been continued with recent upgrades in Sutherland, Caithness, Lochaber, and Badenoch seeing a variety of new equipment introduced and upgrades to fitness suites to provide customers with more choice and an improved experience and helping to make life better across the region.

The Sutherland centre gym is one such facility which has seen the introduction of a new, dedicated strength and conditioning area while the East Coast Community Facility in Wick has had a full refresh in terms of its cardio offering. At the Leven Centre in Lochaber, customers can experience the benefits of new and improved strength and cardio equipment and earlier in the year, the Badenoch Centre gym in Kingussie re-opened with a full new fitness suite and strength area upgrade.

High Life Highland runs a learn to swim programme which had an average of

4,700 participants per month during 2024/25



Celebrating 50 years of Dingwall Leisure Centre

The weekend of the 22–24 November 2024 marked the golden anniversary of Dingwall Leisure Centre, which has been at the centre of the community since it was built in 1974. As part of the celebrations, highlife members and non-members streamed through the doors and took part in a variety of fun free activities including 70s themed roller-disco, swimming, body pump, yoga and much more.



November marked Men's Health Month—a global campaign aimed at raising awareness of key health issues, particularly mental health, suicide prevention, and cancer.

With the growing popularity of walking football, men are finding new opportunities to reconnect with the sport—and it's having a significant impact on their physical and mental wellbeing. In Lochaber, High Life Highland runs a men's walking football group in Fort William on Monday nights, led by the local leisure centre manager.

Walking football is designed for people aged 50 and over and is exactly what it sounds like—a standard game of football where players walk instead of run. It helps individuals get fit or maintain an active lifestyle regardless of age or fitness level, and also supports those returning to the sport after stepping away due to age or injury.



Membership and Promotions

Ballrachd agus àrdachaidhean dreuchd

High Life Subscriptions increased by
1,164 from April 2024
 to March 2025

Corporate Membership re-launches as Employee Wellbeing Membership Scheme

The charity rebranded its previous corporate membership programme to better reflect a desire from employers to support both their employees and their families physical and mental health, which in turn helps foster positive working environments. Numerous studies have shown that being active daily is not only good for a person's physical wellbeing it also boosts mood and can greatly help with improved mental health and can offer many social benefits too.

The employee wellbeing subscriptions increased from 3692 in April 2024 to 4577 in March 2025 with 50 new corporate membership clients.

Membership Campaigns

HLH continues to deliver an extensive range of membership campaigns designed to attract new audience to our leisure facilities and retain our existing members:

- Refer a Friend
- 3-day and 7-day pass
- Ten days for £10.00
- Happy 18th Birthday
- UHI Freshers Month
- National Fitness Week
- Every Membership Counts
- Bring a Buddy
- Be Active to Thrive
- Flash 24 hour offers

Museums and Galleries

Taighean-tasgaidh agus Gailearaidhean

High Life Highland operates the two regional museums, the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum and Art Gallery and one county museum, the North Coast Visitor Centre.

They offer the opportunity to experience and understand the uniqueness of the Highlands and to be part of carrying forward its traditions and heritage. In addition to the core offer of visiting the museum and self-guiding through the exhibits, the museums offer an ongoing programme of classes, events, and opportunities to engage further.



Restoration of the Woodsman's Caravan at the Highland Folk Museum

A much-loved exhibit at the Highland Folk Museum, the Woodsman's Caravan, has been fully restored following severe storm damage during Storm Arwen in 2021. Originally the home of Carrbridge sawmill worker Charlie Ross for over 60 years, the caravan was donated to the museum in 2020. Restoration was made possible through a £2,500 donation from local supporters Steve and Mary MacLennan, with museum staff and volunteers ensuring the preservation of its original features. The exhibit now stands proudly near the pinewoods entrance, offering visitors a glimpse into a unique piece of Highland heritage.



At Inverness Museum and Art Gallery (IMAG), an exhibition celebrated the ash tree—its beauty and its importance as a material for distinctive furniture and artworks. The exhibition was created by the Scottish Furniture Makers Association in partnership with Scottish Forestry and the Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers, with additional funding from Creative Scotland.

The ash tree is a vital native species in Scotland, supporting biodiversity and providing a habitat for rare mosses and lichens that are key to the country's temperate rainforest ecosystem.

Ash Rise showcases work from 20 leading and emerging furniture makers and artists, using timber from ash trees grown in Stirlingshire that had to be felled due to ash dieback. Their creations demonstrate the versatility of ash as a material, with each piece thoughtfully and meticulously crafted to reflect the tree's natural beauty and characteristics.

IMAG also collaborated with Eden Court Galleries and Wasps' Inverness Creative Academy to present a multi-site exhibition featuring works by artists inspired by the Gaelic language, culture, and connection to the land. Buaille features 20 artists from across Scotland who explore their creative processes through a Gaelic lens.

Our Visual Arts Programme Curator at High Life Highland's Inverness Museum and Art Gallery shared:

"Buaille has been made possible thanks to the generous support of Maoin nan Ealan Gàidhlig (Gaelic Arts Fund), which has enabled us to bring together a new generation of artists from across the Highlands and Islands, as well as undertake school workshops alongside the exhibitions.

We are delighted at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery to have the works of eight fantastic artists on display for two months as part of this celebration of Gaelic culture."

Music Development

Leasachadh Ciùil

On Thursday 30 May 2024, the Dingwall Area String Club and Inverness Schools' String Orchestra held their summer concert at The Pavilion in Strathpeffer. Both groups are led by High Life Highland (HLH) String Instructors. More than 60 young string players, ranging from P4 to S3, performed a varied programme of music to a large audience. The concert concluded with a joint performance of a piece that both groups had been rehearsing individually.

High Life Highland also marked its first international music tour with a strong debut. The newly formed HLH Pipe Band and folk group Beira travelled to Belgium to perform at Schotts Weekend in Alden Biesen—a well-established piping competition and festival.

Despite having only four rehearsals together due to the wide geographic spread of members, the HLH Pipe Band achieved third place overall in their first competition, including first place in both drumming and ensemble categories. Beira performed twice at the festival: a full stage set that included collaborative pieces with the pipe band, which received an enthusiastic response from the audience, and a second performance on the acoustic stage. The latter, held in a more intimate setting, showcased the group's adaptability and musical skill.



4,200
undertaking music
tuition in March 2025



The lead singer of Scottish band Tide Lines says he owes his career to the experiences and opportunities he was given growing up in Lochaber and being involved in Highland Young Musicians.

Robert Robertson was the guest performer at a special High Life Highland ceilidh in January which was organised to raise funds towards helping two particular Highland Young Musicians bands attend upcoming competitions and performances. 'Beira' and members of the High Life Highland Pipe Band provided entertainment at the event alongside Robert and there were some excellent ceilidh tunes courtesy of High Life Highland music instructors.

Speaking after the sell-out fundraising concert at the Strathpeffer Pavilion, Robert Robertson praised High Life Highland's Music Service for the chances it gives young people regardless of whether they intend to pursue a professional music career or just enjoy it as a hobby.



Over 250 young musicians joined together for the annual Highland Young Musician Groups Taster Day on 21st September at Inverness High School. After numerous weekend rehearsals and practising at home this culminated in another sell out concert at Eden Court Theatre on 22nd March 2025.

As ever, the young musicians rose to the occasion and all musical groups gave stunning performances throughout the afternoon. For the first time, the musical journeys of two Highland Young Musicians, Ethan and Polly, were documented in a short film which was released after the concert. You can watch and hear from both young people by scanning the QR code at the side.

The following day, some of the young musicians involved went straight into a completely different musical environment at the 2025 Highland Young Musician of the Year competition.

Megan Campbell, 15, from Portree High School, was awarded the coveted title of Highland Young Musician of the Year 2025 at yesterday's (23 March) event at the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness.

Megan impressed the judges with her flute programme in which she performed 'Sentimentale' by Claude Bolling; 'Petite Valse' by Andre Caplet & Leonard Bernstein's 'Mambo'. She will now represent the Highland region in the Scottish Young Musician of the Year competition, which is being held in May at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow.

The competition's two runners up were pianist Jack Bungey, 17, from Ardnarmurchan High School and violinist Rebekah Bullivant, also 17, who is a student at UHI and member of the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra. Fellow competitors were Talitha Williamson (violin); Fiona Langley (voice) and Blythe Bullen (violin).



Scan the QR code to watch our video about Ethan and Polly, two Highland Young Musicians.



Sport Spòrs

sportscotland started the Active Schools programme in 2004 working in partnership with all 32 local authorities across the country – with the aim of getting more children, more active, more often. This year High Life Highland Active Schools are celebrating their 20th Anniversary. Thousands of young people in the Highlands have benefitted from this national programme during this time – with some now even employed as a local Active Schools Coordinator and motivating the next generation.

Alongside the 20th Anniversary of Active Schools, HLH also marked Women & Girls in Sport Week. Female participation across primary and secondary schools across the region up 7% from the previous year. The charity's figures show that in the Ardnamurchan school group, 83% of female pupils are being physically active through Active Schools, while in the Mallaig school group, 80% of female pupils are participating in Active Schools sessions.

In November, over 100 primary pupils experienced their first ever para-sports festival, hosted by High Life Highland and Alness Academy. The event was an opportunity to try out different disability sports and adaptive physical activity drills with their peers from across the Active Schools cluster, with everyone agreeing it was a really fun way to learn more about para-sports. Active Schools Young Leaders were on hand to help deliver the para-sports festival having received training from High Life Highland's Disability Sport Officer.

"It was great to see the Sports Leaders running a para-sport event in Alness, hopefully this is something that they will continue to do more of to create more inclusive opportunities in sport locally.

The Leaders were all fantastic and drew on their own strengths and interests to provide a day full of variety. It was great to see them all grow in confidence during the session. All the participants looked like they had a great time, some trying activities for the first time."

Gold for Team GB's ATAS athlete Emily!

16-year-old, Emily Rothney from Carrbridge wrote her place in GB sporting history at the 17th European Youth Winter Olympic Festival in Bakuriani in Georgia. Emily has been supported in her sports progression by the Highland Athlete Travel Award Scheme (ATAS). ATAS is delivered through a partnership between sportscotland and High Life Highland and is designed to help performance level athletes living within the Highland area who face considerable travel costs for training and competitions

20 years of McRobert Cup

Over 750 primary school pupils from Inverness and the surrounding area donned their trainers and determination on 26 March in a bid to bag a podium finish at one of the Highland's most prestigious sporting events! The 20th McRobert Cup was held again this year at Torvean Park, which offers runners a fun and challenging course in beautiful surroundings. The race for Highland primary school pupils is proving more popular than ever with a record number of entries. The weather proved favourable and with lots of family and friends there to support the runners from 36 different schools, the atmosphere was electric. With thanks to Cllr Alex Graham, Cllr Michael Gregson and High Life Highland Board Member David Finlayson who presented the medals and trophies on the day.



School's Out Sgoil a-muigh

School's Out Summer Activity Programme

High Life Highland's School's Out Summer Activity Programme runs throughout the six-week school summer holiday period, offering a wide-ranging schedule of activities designed to keep children and young people active, engaged, and socially connected. Delivered across all HLH services—including sports, libraries, arts and crafts, outdoor adventures, and nature-based experiences—the programme provides a balanced mix of free and paid activities.

The initiative represents excellent value for families, with additional benefits available to those subscribed to the High Life card. Activities are designed to be inclusive and accessible, supporting physical and mental wellbeing while encouraging creativity, learning, and social interaction.

By offering structured, enjoyable experiences during the summer break, School's Out plays a key role in helping children maintain healthy routines, build friendships, and explore new interests in a safe and supportive environment.

21,190
attendees throughout School's Out
Summer Activity Programme



Youth Work

Obair Òigridh

Youth work staff provide opportunities for young people to gain achievement awards – Youth Achievement Awards; Dynamic Youth Awards; Hi5 Awards; Saltire Awards; John Muir Award; SQA awards and Duke of Edinburgh Awards which are of significant benefit for young people in gaining employment or higher and further education places.

On 1st December 2024, the Adult Learning transferred to The Highland Council alongside the Youth Work service.

Dynamic Youth Awards

The Hub in Aviemore was the venue for an awards ceremony to celebrate the outstanding achievements of the area's youth. The Dynamic Youth Awards – hosted by High Life Highland and IRL Education – recognised the efforts made across a wide range of activities from producing radio shows on Speysound to designing promotional materials for local charities.

"The dedication and hard work of these young individuals has positively impacted the local community while also helping them develop valuable skills and confidence. Their efforts demonstrate the significant contributions young people can make through commitment and initiative."

Highland Youth Parliament

The annual Highland Youth Parliament was held in Inverness in June, focusing on young people's mental wellbeing. Over 100 delegates from secondary schools and youth services attended the event at Inverness Leisure.

Activities included a symbolic "Walk a Mile" for mental health, supported by 'See Me', and various wellbeing sessions such as swimming, yoga, and visits to local attractions. The Parliament also launched a mental health support poster to help young people assist their peers.

Leadership Programme

7751

young leaders have come through the programme

1069

have registered in this academic year

This amounts to at the very least 27,425 leadership hours

1097 Hoodies awarded this academic year

- 4 Diamond Hoodies
- 7 Platinum Hoodies
- 30 Gold Hoodies
- 54 Silver Hoodies
- 17 red Hoodies
- 75 Green Hoodies
- 155 Purple Hoodies
- 478 Navy Hoodies

There were also 269 T-shirts awarded

SCQF HLH Choose To Lead Awards

51

Level 4 Reg

8 passed
43 ongoing

19

Level 5 Reg

5 passed
14 ongoing



Junior Leadership – Primary schools

1657

**junior leaders trained
since 2023**

- 697 Junior Leaders
- 27 Football leaders
- 26 Dance Leaders
- 31 Games Leaders

Movers & Shakers Dance Leaders

71 Dance Leaders trained

11 Junior Leaders trained

26 children delivered within 13 Primary Schools



Key Performance Indicators

Prìomh Chomharran Coileanaidh

The Finance and Audit Committee is responsible for developing and setting performance indicators for each of the business outcomes, which are reported to the Board.

Non-Financial KPI's reported throughout the year:

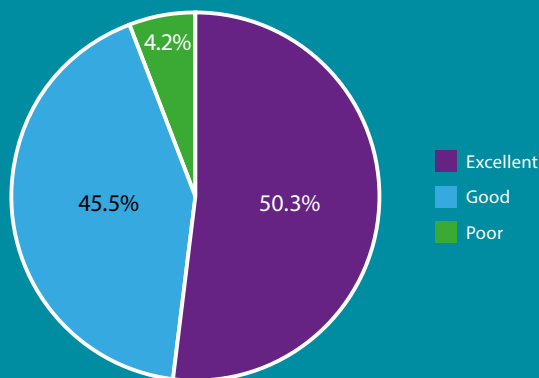
	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Customer Engagements	8,496,970	8,014,070	7,081,243
High Life Subscriptions (monthly average for year)	19,744	17,075	12,451
Average Monthly Staff Turnover	0.95%	0.96%	0.85%
Average Staff Absence Rate	4.4%	5.1%	3.63%
Number of Complaints Received	129	98	69
RIDDOR Accidents/Incidents	1	3	6

In addition, there are 3 non-numeric performance indicators as follows:

- **Delivery of the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) with The Highland Council (THC)** – this is assessed twice per year by THC and the Council's Education Committee noted that HLH had met or exceeded the requirements set out in the Service Delivery Contract.
- **Health and safety audit** – the annual external health and safety audit found that there were no company wide actions required.

• Customer surveys

What is your overall experience of High Life Highland?



Results and Performance

Toraidhean agus Coileanadh

The Trustees are satisfied with the level of results achieved during the year and with the financial position at year-end.

During the year ended 31 March 2025, the charity successfully delivered and developed its services, recording a surplus of £948,800 (2024 – deficit of £236,496). This figure includes an actuarial gain of £75,000 (2024 – £29,000) posted through the Statement of Financial Activities in relation to the pension fund for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The Trading Company recorded a profit of £614,238 for the year (2024 – £506,430). The Company's revenue stream is largely tied to the terms of its Service Delivery Contract with The Highland Council. Under this contract, there is a direct link between the level of service required by the Council and the amount of funding provided to the Company to deliver those services.

High Life leisure membership income continues to thrive, with the number of subscriptions increasing by 5% to over 20,000 during the year. Other earned income streams also performed strongly, with revenue from Museums and Galleries growing by 10%. Following the revision of the Service Delivery Contract with The Highland Council, funding support for inflationary salary increases has helped address a significant financial challenge for the Company.

Looking ahead to the new financial year, the opening of the Inverness Castle Experience is expected to significantly expand the charity's operations, driving growth in revenue, staffing, and visitor numbers, while delivering wider benefits to the Highland area.

The Directors consider that, with the assurance of support from The Highland Council and adequate reserves, the Company has access to sufficient funds to continue as a going concern for the next 12 months.

At the year-end, the Charity reported a surplus on its balance sheet of £2,041,620 (2024 – £1,092,820), including the actuarial adjustment. As noted above, there is a link between the level of service required and the funding provided. The future level of contributions to the pension fund has been agreed by the Charity and The Highland Council, in consultation with the scheme's actuaries.

At the year-end, the Charity's share of the pension fund shows a net asset position of £26,230,000 (2024 – £12,993,000). HLH does not expect to receive any future benefit from the scheme, and as such, this asset has not been recognised. While the improvement in the net asset position is welcomed, the Directors and Senior Management acknowledge that the pension fund valuation can fluctuate significantly from year to year.

As the sole owner of High Life Highland, The Highland Council has committed to act as guarantor to cover potential pension risks while the Company remains an Admitted Body within its pension scheme.

Risks and Uncertainties

Cunnartan agus Mì-chinntean

The Company maintains a comprehensive risk register which is reviewed monthly by Senior Managers and is reported to the Finance and Audit Committee on a quarterly basis with an annual review by the Board. The most significant risk facing The Company at present is lack of investment in facilities in addition to reducing maintenance budgets leading to facility decline, poor customer experience and lack of ability to increase customer numbers.

Statement on Business Relationships

Aithris air dàimhean gnìomhachais

Our valued relationships: strengthening the Highland community

At High Life Highland, strong and collaborative business relationships are central to achieving its purpose of “Making Life Better” for the people of the Highlands. High Life Highland recognizes the vital contribution made by its partners and stakeholders in delivering its charitable mission and ensuring the sustainability of services for the communities it serves.

Key partnerships and their impact

- **The Highland Council:** As the sole shareholder and parent organisation of High Life Highland, the Highland Council is a key strategic partner. HLH delivers a broad range of Public Service Obligations on behalf of the Council through a formal Service Delivery Contract. A collaborative relationship with the Council is vital to achieving service efficiencies, maintaining affordability, and enabling joint decision-making around service development and capital investment.
- **Local Businesses and High Life Loyalty Scheme:** High Life Highland fosters relationships with local, regional, and national businesses through the High Life Loyalty scheme. This partnership offers businesses a platform to promote their services to High Life cardholders, while providing members with discounts and benefits, enhancing the value of membership and generating additional revenue for High Life Highland’s charitable activities.
- **Leisure Link Partnership:** HLH actively participates in the Leisure Link Partnership, a reciprocal scheme with other leisure trusts across Scotland. High Life members can access facilities in participating areas at no extra cost, providing greater flexibility and convenience for individuals and families traveling within Scotland.

- **Community and Voluntary Organizations:** High Life Highland recognizes and values the contributions of the many vibrant social, sporting and cultural voluntary organizations in the Highlands. High Life Highland works collaboratively with these groups to ensure that services are effectively delivered and meet the diverse needs of communities.

- **UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands):** High Life Highland has a partnership with UHI, offering discounted leisure memberships to students and staff. This collaboration supports the well-being of the university community and promotes access to health and fitness opportunities.

- **Suppliers:** High Life Highland engages with suppliers to procure the goods and services necessary for delivering its wide range of services. The procurement process is governed by strict policies and standards to ensure fairness, accountability, and best value for money.

Ongoing commitment

High Life Highland remains committed to nurturing and developing its business relationships. These partnerships are instrumental in supporting its mission, enhancing its services, increasing income generation, and ultimately, ensuring that High Life Highland continues to “Make Life Better” for the people of the Highlands. By collaborating with partners, High Life Highland aims to expand its reach and maximize its positive impact on the well-being of the communities it serves.

Energy and Carbon Report

Aithisg air Lùth is Carbon

This company is a member of a group where the parent of that group, The Highland Council, prepares the disclosures required under the Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting requirements. The company has therefore taken advantage of the exemptions available under these regulations from reporting this information at an individual company level.

Statement of Engagement with Employees

Aithris Ceangail le Luchd-obrach

Our people: inspiring passion, driving purpose

At High Life Highland, employees are considered the heart of the organisation. The organisation is dedicated to improving life for people and communities across the Highlands. Its staff is key to achieving this purpose. Their commitment to delivering high-quality, accessible, and inclusive services enables High Life Highland to positively impact the physical, mental, and social well-being of the region.

Creating an environment where employees can flourish

High Life Highland aims to foster a supportive and engaging environment where all employees can thrive. The approach to employee engagement focuses on several key pillars:

- **Valuing and Recognising Contribution:** The organization actively celebrates staff contributions through initiatives like the i-care Awards, which recognize excellence based on core values of Integrity, Community, Accountability, Respect, and Example. Long-serving employees are also recognised, celebrating their dedication to High Life Highland and the Highlands.
- **Investing in Development:** High Life Highland is committed to the continuous learning and development of its workforce, providing the necessary training for their roles and utilizing a six-monthly appraisal system to focus on their development needs and future aspirations.
- **Promoting Well-being:** The organization prioritizes the health and well-being of its employees. It strives to provide a family-friendly environment, offering flexible working arrangements and benefits

that support work-life balance. Additionally, opportunities such as discounts on the highlife membership scheme are offered and promoted, encouraging employees to prioritize their physical and mental health.

- **Fostering a Culture of Open Communication and Feedback:** High Life Highland encourages open and honest two-way communication and provides avenues for employees to share their feedback, challenge views, and contribute their expertise and ideas. High Life Highland partners with Trade Unions - GMB, Unison, and Unite - to ensure fair representation and to address workplace issues through formal and informal meetings.

- **Embracing Inclusion and Diversity:** High Life Highland is dedicated to creating an inclusive workplace where every employee feels valued and respected, regardless of their background or characteristics. High Life Highland ensures that no job applicant or employee receives less favorable treatment due to factors such as age, color, disability, or gender reassignment.

The organization remains committed to its staff, which is its single largest resource. The continued focus on employee engagement allows High Life Highland to attract, retain, and motivate dedicated individuals. This enables the organization to deliver essential services and make a real difference in the lives of people throughout the Highlands. High Life Highland is proud of its team and their unwavering commitment to the mission of 'Making Life Better'.

Section 172 Statement

Aithris Earrann 172

The directors of High Life Highland are committed to fulfilling the duty under Section 172 of the Companies Act 2006. In making decisions and developing strategy, the directors have considered factors including the likely long-term consequences of decisions, employee interests, fostering business relationships, the impact of operations on the community and environment, maintaining a reputation for high standards of business conduct, and the need to act fairly.

By considering these matters, the Directors aim to ensure High Life Highland continues to make life better for the people of the Highlands and fosters a sustainable future for the organization and the communities it serves.

Statement of Trustees' and Directors' responsibilities

Aithris mu dhleastanasan nan Urrasairean is nan Stiùirichean

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Trustees' and Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulation.

Company law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law the Directors have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (United Kingdom Accounting Standards and applicable law) including FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland". Under company law the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the group and of the surplus or deficit of the group for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the Directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the group will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the group's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the group and the company hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Directors' statement as to disclosure of information to auditors

Aithris nan Stiùirichean a thaobh mar a dh'fhoillsicheadh fiosrachadh dhan luchd-sgrùdaidh

The Directors who are members of the Board at the time of approving the Directors' report are listed on the Company Information page. Having made enquiries of fellow Directors and of the Company's auditors, each of the Directors confirms that:

- to the best of each Director's knowledge and belief, there is no information relevant to the preparation of their report of which the Company's auditors are unaware; and
- each Director has taken all the steps a Director might reasonably be expected to have taken to be aware of relevant audit information and to establish that the Company's auditors are aware of that information.

Auditors Luchd-sgrùdaidh

The auditors, Saffery LLP, will be proposed for reappointment in accordance with section 485 of the Companies Act 2006.

In signing this report, the Trustees confirm that they have approved the strategic report in their capacity as Company Directors of High Life Highland Limited.

This report was approved by the Board and signed on its behalf.

Michael Golding
Director

Date:

Financial Statements

Aithrisean Ionmhasail

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of High Life Highland (the 'parent charitable company') and its subsidiaries (the 'group') for the year ended 31 March 2025 which comprise the group statement of financial activities, company statement of financial activities, group balance sheet, company balance sheet and notes to the financial statements, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the affairs of the group and the parent charitable company as at 31 March 2025 and of the group's incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and regulations 6 and 8 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended).

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the group and parent charitable company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions related to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the group or the parent charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

The trustees are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information; we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the Trustees' Annual Report which includes the Directors' Report and the Strategic Report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the Trustees' Annual Report which includes the Directors' Report and the Strategic Report have been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the group and parent charitable company and their environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Trustees' Annual Report and Strategic Report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended) requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- proper accounting records have not been kept by the parent charitable company, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the parent charitable company's financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities set out on page 44, the trustees (who are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the group and the parent charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the group or the parent charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

We have been appointed as auditors under the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and under the Companies Act 2006 and report in accordance with regulations made under those Acts.

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the group and parent financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The specific procedures for this engagement and the extent to which these are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud are detailed below.

High Life Highland
(A company limited by guarantee)

Independent auditor's report (continued)
To the members of High Life Highland

Charity number: SC042593
Company number: SC407011

Identifying and assessing risks related to irregularities:

We assessed the susceptibility of the group and parent charitable company's financial statements to material misstatement and how fraud might occur, including through discussions with the trustees, discussions within our audit team planning meeting, updating our record of internal controls and ensuring these controls operated as intended. We evaluated possible incentives and opportunities for fraudulent manipulation of the financial statements. We identified laws and regulations that are of significance in the context of the group and parent charitable company by discussions with trustees and updating our understanding of the sector in which the group and parent charitable company operate.

Laws and regulations of direct significance in the context of the group and parent charitable company include The Companies Act 2006, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended) and guidance issued by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

Audit response to risks identified:

We considered the extent of compliance with these laws and regulations as part of our audit procedures on the related financial statement items including a review of financial statement disclosures. We reviewed the parent charitable company's records of breaches of laws and regulations, minutes of meetings and correspondence with relevant authorities to identify potential material misstatements arising. We discussed the parent charitable company's policies and procedures for compliance with laws and regulations with members of management responsible for compliance.

During the planning meeting with the audit team, the engagement partner drew attention to the key areas which might involve non-compliance with laws and regulations or fraud. We enquired of management whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations or knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud. We addressed the risk of fraud through management override of controls by testing the appropriateness of journal entries and identifying any significant transactions that were unusual or outside the normal course of business. We assessed whether judgements made in making accounting estimates gave rise to a possible indication of management bias. At the completion stage of the audit, the engagement partner's review included ensuring that the team had approached their work with appropriate professional scepticism and thus the capacity to identify non-compliance with laws and regulations and fraud.

High Life Highland
(A company limited by guarantee)

Independent auditor's report (continued)
To the members of High Life Highland

Charity number: SC042593
Company number: SC407011

There are inherent limitations in the audit procedures described above and the further removed non-compliance with laws and regulations is from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, the less likely we would become aware of it. Also, the risk of not detecting a material misstatement due to fraud is higher than the risk of not detecting one resulting from error, as fraud may involve deliberate concealment by, for example, forgery or intentional misrepresentations, or through collusion.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the parent charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006, and to the parent charitable company's trustees, as a body, in accordance with Regulation 10 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the parent charitable company's members and trustees those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the parent charitable company, the parent charitable company's members and trustees as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

.....
Eunice McAdam (Senior Statutory Auditor)
for and on behalf of Saffery LLP

Statutory Auditors

.....
Torridon House
Beechwood Park
Inverness
IV2 3BW

Saffery LLP is eligible to act as an auditor in terms of section 1212 of the Companies Act 2006

High Life Highland
(A company limited by guarantee)
Group statement of financial activities (including the income and expenditure account)
For the year ended 31 March 2025

Charity number: SC042593
Company number: SC407011

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2025 total £	2024 total £
Income from:					
Donations and legacies	4	2,242,824	-	2,242,824	2,242,824
Charitable activities	5	32,320,291	3,144,358	35,464,649	34,087,467
Other trading activities	6	2,309,879	-	2,309,879	2,184,774
Total income		36,872,994	3,144,358	40,017,352	38,515,065
Expenditure on:					
Raising funds	6	1,695,641	-	1,695,641	1,678,344
Charitable activities	7	34,390,892	3,057,019	37,447,911	37,102,217
Total expenditure		36,086,533	3,057,019	39,143,552	38,780,561
Net income/(expenditure)		786,461	87,339	873,800	(265,496)
Transfers between funds		(206,598)	206,598	-	-
Other recognised gains:					
Actuarial gains on defined benefit pension schemes	20	75,000	-	75,000	29,000
Net movement in funds		654,863	293,937	948,800	(236,496)
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		685,017	413,879	1,098,896	1,335,392
Total funds carried forward		1,339,880	707,816	2,047,696	1,098,896

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The notes on pages 60 to 79 form part of these financial statements.

High Life Highland
(A company limited by guarantee)
Company statement of financial activities (including the income and expenditure account)
For the year ended 31 March 2025

Charity number: SC042593
Company number: SC407011

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2025 total £	2024 total £
Income from:					
Donations and legacies	4	2,857,062	-	2,857,062	2,748,405
Charitable activities	5	32,320,291	3,144,358	35,464,649	34,087,467
Total income		35,177,353	3,144,358	38,321,711	36,835,872
Charitable activities	7	34,390,892	3,057,019	37,447,911	37,102,217
Total expenditure		34,390,892	3,057,019	37,447,911	37,102,217
Net income/(expenditure)		786,461	87,339	873,800	(266,345)
Transfers between funds		(206,598)	206,598	-	-
Other recognised gains:					
Actuarial gains on defined benefit pension schemes	20	75,000	-	75,000	29,000
Net movement in funds		654,863	293,937	948,800	(237,345)
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		678,941	413,879	1,092,820	1,330,165
Total funds carried forward		1,333,804	707,816	2,041,620	1,092,820

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The notes on pages 60 to 79 form part of these financial statements.

High Life Highland
(A company limited by guarantee)

Group balance sheet
As at 31 March 2025

Charity number: SC042593
Company number: SC407011

		2025		2024	
	Note	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets					
Tangible assets	11		1,012,937		1,189,342
Current assets					
Stocks	13	118,809		117,818	
Debtors	14	2,518,849		1,337,213	
Cash at bank and in hand		22,370		20,432	
		<u>2,660,028</u>		<u>1,475,463</u>	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	15	(1,625,269)		(1,565,909)	
Net current (liabilities)/assets			<u>1,034,759</u>		<u>(90,446)</u>
Net assets excluding pension liability			<u>2,047,696</u>		<u>1,098,896</u>
Defined benefit pension scheme liability	20		-		-
Net assets			<u><u>2,047,696</u></u>		<u><u>1,098,896</u></u>
Funds					
Unrestricted funds	17		1,339,880		685,017
Restricted funds	18		707,816		413,879
Pension reserve	20		-		-
Total funds			<u><u>2,047,696</u></u>		<u><u>1,098,896</u></u>

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the board and were signed on its behalf by

.....
Michael Golding
Director

.....
Tracy Ligema
Director

Date:

The notes on pages 60 to 79 form part of these financial statements.

High Life Highland
(A company limited by guarantee)

Company balance sheet
As at 31 March 2025

Charity number: SC042593
Company number: SC407011

		2025	2024
	Note	£	£
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	11	1,012,937	1,189,342
Investments	12	100	100
		<u>1,013,037</u>	<u>1,189,442</u>
Current assets			
Stocks	13	9,250	26,312
Debtors	14	2,622,234	1,422,543
Cash at bank and in hand		22,368	20,432
		<u>2,653,852</u>	<u>1,469,287</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	15	(1,625,269)	(1,565,909)
Net current (liabilities)/assets		<u>1,028,583</u>	<u>(96,622)</u>
Net assets excluding pension liability		<u>2,041,620</u>	<u>1,092,820</u>
Defined benefit pension scheme liability	20	-	-
Net assets		<u><u>2,041,620</u></u>	<u><u>1,092,820</u></u>
Funds			
Unrestricted funds	17	1,333,804	678,941
Restricted funds	18	707,816	413,879
Pension reserve	20	-	-
Total funds		<u><u>2,041,620</u></u>	<u><u>1,092,820</u></u>

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the board and were signed on its behalf by

.....
Michael Golding **Tracy Ligema**
Director **Director**

Date:

The notes on pages 60 to 79 form part of these financial statements.

1 Accounting policies

Company information

High Life Highland is a company limited by guarantee and incorporated in Scotland. The registered office is High Life Highland, Highland Archive Centre, Bught Road, Inverness, IV3 5SS.

1.1 Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

The charity meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value.

The financial statements are prepared in sterling, which is the functional currency of the group. Monetary amounts in these financial statements are rounded to the nearest £ unless otherwise stated.

The principal accounting policies adopted in the preparation of the financial statements are as follows:

1.2 Going concern

The charity is dependent upon revenue funding provided by the Highland Council under a contract running to 2036. The level of the management fee is agreed annually. The funding for the year ended 31 March 2026 is agreed at £15,579,979. The funding for future years is subject to review. The Highland Council has committed to support the ongoing financial sustainability of High Life Highland, guaranteeing £0.894m of additional financial support for the year ended 31 March 2026. The directors are confident that the level of funding available through the Highland Council under the funding agreement when taken together with other anticipated revenues will be sufficient to enable the charity to continue trading and meet its obligations as they fall due for at least 12 months from the date of signing these financial statements.

1.3 Group financial statements

The consolidated accounts incorporate the accounts of the company and its subsidiary undertaking for the year ended 31 March 2025.

1.4 Incoming resources

Income is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

1.4 Incoming resources (continued)

Donation of services is recognised in the accounts at the amount that the charity would pay in the open market for an alternative item that would provide an equivalent benefit to the charity as the donated service.

Income from government and other grants, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Income received in advance of the provision of a specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

1.5 Resources expended

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- Costs of raising funds comprise the costs of commercial trading activities, including retail and catering facilities at sites operated by High Life Highland.
- Expenditure on charitable activities includes all the costs on activities undertaken to further the purposes of the charity and their associated support costs.

Where costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings they have been allocated to activities on a basis consistent with the use of the resources. Support costs are those costs incurred directly in support of expenditure on the objects of the charity. Management and administration costs are those incurred in connection with administration of the charity and compliance with constitutional and statutory requirements.

1.6 Fund accounting

Unrestricted funds are available to spend on activities that further any of the purposes of the charity. Designated funds are unrestricted funds of the charity which the trustees have decided at their discretion to set aside to use for a specific purpose.

Restricted funds are funds which are to be used in accordance with specific restrictions imposed by the donors or which have been raised by the charity for a particular purpose. The cost of raising and administering such funds are charged against the specific fund. The aim and use of each restricted fund is set out in the notes to the financial statements.

1.7 Employee benefits

The cost of any unused holiday entitlement is recognised in the period in which the employees services are received.

Termination benefits are recognised immediately as an expense when the company is demonstrably committed to terminate the employment of an employee or to provide termination benefits.

Pension costs

The charity participates in The Highland Council Pension Fund, a defined benefit scheme. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the charity in an independently administered trust. The fund is valued every three years by a professionally qualified independent actuary and is updated at each balance sheet date with contribution payments made to the plan to ensure that the plan's assets are sufficient to cover future liabilities. Pension plan assets are measured using market values. Pension plan liabilities are measured using the projected unit method and discounted by the yield available on long-dated high quality corporate bonds. The amounts charged to the statement of financial activities in respect of the defined benefit scheme are the current service costs and gains and losses on settlements and curtailments. Past service costs are recognised immediately in the statement of financial activities if the benefits have vested. If the costs have not vested immediately, the costs are recognised over the period until vesting occurs. The interest cost and expected return on assets are charged to resources expended. Actuarial gains and losses are recognised immediately in the statement of financial activities.

1.8 Fixed assets

The ownership of the buildings and open spaces managed by the charity is retained by The Highland Council. As part of the transfer process undertaken on 1 October 2011, the contents and equipment within these buildings was sold by The Highland Council to High Life Highland for £1. This amount was expensed in the year ended 31 March 2012.

Tangible fixed assets are stated at cost less depreciation. Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its expected useful life as follows:

Plant and equipment	10% to 20% per annum straight line basis
Fixtures and fittings	10% to 20% per annum straight line basis

1.9 Investments

Fixed asset investments are stated at cost less provision for diminution in value.

1.10 Stocks

Stocks are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value with proper provision being made for obsolete and slow moving stock. Cost comprises the invoiced price of goods and materials purchased on a first in first out basis.

1.11 Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any discounts due.

1.12 Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any discounts due.

1.13 Financial instruments

The charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value.

1.14 Operating leases

Rentals payable under operating leases are charged in the profit and loss account on a straight line basis over the lease term. Lease incentives are recognised over the lease term on a straight line basis.

1.15 Taxation

Income is stated net of VAT and expenditure includes VAT where this is not recoverable.

The group's financial statements include the relevant corporation tax in respect of the subsidiary undertaking.

1.16 Cash flow statement

The financial results of the charity are consolidated into those of The Highland Council and consequently the company has taken advantage of the exemption available under FRS 102 from preparing a cash flow statement under the requirements of section 7 - Statement of Cash Flows and section 3 - Financial Statement Presentation paragraph 3.17d.

2 Legal status of the charity

The charity is a company limited by guarantee and has no share capital. The liability of each member in the event of winding-up is limited to £1.

3 Critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

In the application of the charity's accounting policies, the directors are required to make judgements, estimates and assumptions about the carrying amount of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. The estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and other factors that are considered to be relevant. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised where the revision affects only that period, or in the period of the revision and future periods where the revision affects both current and future periods.

Key sources of estimation uncertainty

The estimates and assumptions which have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amount of assets and liabilities are as follows:

Pension

The charity participates in The Highland Council Pension Fund, a defined benefit scheme. The amounts charged to the statement of financial activities in respect of the defined benefit scheme and the asset/liability at the reporting date are the result of a number of assumptions or estimates such as discount rate, inflation rate, mortality assumptions and salary growth. These assumptions are reviewed annually in consultation with the scheme's actuaries.

4 Income from donations and legacies (group and company)

	2025		2024	
	Group	Charity	Group	Charity
	£	£	£	£
Gift aid donation from subsidiary	-	614,238	-	505,581
Donation of services - overheads	2,242,824	2,242,824	2,242,824	2,242,824
	<u>2,242,824</u>	<u>2,857,062</u>	<u>2,242,824</u>	<u>2,748,405</u>

All income from donations and legacies in the current and prior year was unrestricted.

5 Income from charitable activities (group)

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2025 total	2024 total
	£	£	£	£
Management fee - The Highland Council	19,315,891	324,455	19,640,346	18,974,559
Other grants	308,588	2,577,752	2,886,340	3,341,221
Delivery of service delivery contract	12,695,812	242,151	12,937,963	11,771,687
	<u>32,320,291</u>	<u>3,144,358</u>	<u>35,464,649</u>	<u>34,087,467</u>

Income from charitable activities was £35,464,649 (2024 - £34,087,467) of which £32,320,291 (2024 - £30,425,064) was unrestricted and £3,144,358 (2024 - £3,662,403) was restricted.

5 Income from charitable activities (company)

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2025 total	2024 total
	£	£	£	£
Management fee - The Highland Council	19,315,891	324,455	19,640,346	18,974,559
Other grants	308,588	2,577,752	2,886,340	3,341,221
Delivery of service delivery contract	12,695,812	242,151	12,937,963	11,771,687
	<u>32,320,291</u>	<u>3,144,358</u>	<u>35,464,649</u>	<u>34,087,467</u>

Income from charitable activities was £35,464,649 (2024 - £34,087,467) of which £32,320,291 (2024 - £30,425,064) was unrestricted and £3,144,358 (2024 - £3,662,403) was restricted.

6 Income from other trading activities (group)

The wholly owned subsidiary, High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C., is a company registered in Scotland (registration number SC408067) which provides retail and catering facilities at sites operated by High Life Highland.

A summary of the trading results is shown below:

	High Life Highland (Trading)	
	C.I.C.	
	2025	2024
	£	£
Turnover	2,309,879	2,184,774
Cost of sales and administrative expenses	(1,695,641)	(1,678,344)
Other income	-	-
Profit before taxation	614,238	506,430
Taxation	-	-
Net (loss)/profit for the year	614,238	506,430

Distributions paid to the parent charity under the gift aid scheme were £614,238 (2024 - £505,581). Expenditure on raising funds included in the group statement of financial activities on page 56 includes cost of sales, administrative expenses and taxation amounting to £1,695,641 (2024 - £1,678,344).

	High Life Highland (Trading)	
	C.I.C.	
	2025	2024
	£	£
The assets and liabilities of the subsidiary were:		
Current assets	109,559	91,506
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(103,383)	(85,330)
Net assets	6,176	6,176
Capital and reserves	6,176	6,176

7 Expenditure on charitable activities (group and company)

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2025 total £	2024 total £
Wages and salaries	24,274,373	1,986,304	26,260,677	25,710,351
Property costs	761,732	56,874	818,606	744,388
Travel and transport	413,283	22,965	436,248	348,263
Supplies and services	5,032,741	558,280	5,591,021	5,407,787
Other project payments	226,310	98,285	324,595	655,851
Depreciation	403,250	68,514	471,764	436,273
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(3,852,000)	-	(3,852,000)	(3,228,000)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	3,239,000	-	3,239,000	2,921,000
Pension scheme service cost	3,869,203	265,797	4,135,000	4,080,000
Audit and accountancy fees	23,000	-	23,000	25,000
Directors' expenses reimbursed	-	-	-	1,304
	34,390,892	3,057,019	37,447,911	37,102,217

Expenditure on charitable activities was £37,447,911 (2024 - £37,102,217) of which £34,390,892 (2024 - £33,153,206) was unrestricted and £3,057,019 (2024 - £3,949,011) was restricted.

8 Net income/(expenditure) for the year

	2025	2024
	£	£
This is stated after charging:		
Fees payable to the group's auditor:		
Audit of High Life Highland	19,150	18,400
Audit of High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C.	2,350	2,200
Preparation of financial statements	2,350	2,200
Tax compliance	1,750	1,650
Operating lease rentals	-	20,857
Depreciation	471,764	436,273
	<u>471,764</u>	<u>436,273</u>

9 Trustee remuneration

The trustees are not entitled to any emoluments during the year. Travel expenses totalling £934 (2024 - £1,304) were reimbursed to 3 trustees during the year (2024 - 3).

10 Analysis of staff costs and the cost of key management personnel

	2025	2024
	£	£
Wages and salaries	24,095,514	23,637,730
Social security costs	1,984,247	1,947,163
Pension costs	3,464,197	3,734,463
	<u>29,543,958</u>	<u>29,319,356</u>

In 2024/25 the employer's contribution rate was 17.5% of pensionable pay.

The average weekly number of employees during the year was as follows:

	2025	2024
	Number	Number
Management	5	5
Support services	31	27
Operations	1,273	1,290
	<u>1,309</u>	<u>1,322</u>

10 Analysis of staff costs and the cost of key management personnel (continued)

The number of employees remunerated at a rate of over £60,000 per annum was as follows:

	2025 Number	2024 Number
£60,001 - £70,000	4	2
£70,001 - £80,000	1	1
£80,001 - £90,000	3	4
£90,001 - £100,000	1	-
£100,001 - £110,000	1	1

Key management personnel

The key management personnel of the group comprise the trustees, the Chief Executive, the Director of Sport and Leisure, the Director of Corporate Services, the Director of Inverness Castle and the Director of Culture and Learning. The total employee benefits of the key management personnel of the group was £590,903 (2024 - £586,673).

Redundancies and terminations

The total amount charged for the year in relation to redundancies and terminations was £nil (2024 - £41,981). All amounts were fully paid in the prior year and therefore there are no liabilities at the balance sheet date.

11 Tangible fixed assets (group and company)

	Plant and equipment £	Fixtures and fittings £	Total £
Cost			
At 1 April 2024	3,088,905	10,431	3,099,336
Additions	295,359	-	295,359
Disposals	-	-	-
At 31 March 2025	3,384,264	10,431	3,394,695
Depreciation			
At 1 April 2024	1,899,563	10,431	1,909,994
Charge for the year	471,764	-	471,764
On disposals	-	-	-
At 31 March 2025	2,371,327	10,431	2,381,758
Net book value			
At 31 March 2025	1,012,937	-	1,012,937
At 31 March 2024	1,189,342	-	1,189,342

12 Fixed asset investments

**Shares in
subsidiary
£**

Cost and net book value

At 1 April 2024 and at 31 March 2025

100

The company holds 100% of the ordinary share capital of High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C., a company incorporated in Scotland. The activities and results of this company are summarised in note 6.

13 Stocks

	2025		2024	
	Group	Charity	Group	Charity
	£	£	£	£
Goods for resale	118,809	9,250	117,818	26,312
	<u>118,809</u>	<u>9,250</u>	<u>117,818</u>	<u>26,312</u>

14 Debtors

	2025		2024	
	Group	Charity	Group	Charity
	£	£	£	£
Trade debtors	401,451	401,451	268,335	268,335
Prepayments and accrued income	678,212	678,212	459,786	459,786
Corporation tax recoverable	-	-	-	-
Amounts owed by group undertakings	1,439,186	1,542,571	609,092	694,422
	<u>2,518,849</u>	<u>2,622,234</u>	<u>1,337,213</u>	<u>1,422,543</u>

The charity does not operate a bank account. All receipts and payments are made by The Highland Council on behalf of the charity and its subsidiary. High Life Highland has complete control over cash management in that all receipts and payments are accounted for and authorised independently of The Highland Council. High Life Highland is set up as a separate charity in the council's financial system with a separately identifiable intercompany account in the ledger which records all cash transactions. At each year end, a reconciliation is completed and High Life Highland receives interest on the average cash balance held throughout the year. Therefore at any point in time High Life Highland's cash balances can be separately identified from the Council through the intercompany account, with all transactions controlled and authorised by High Life Highland management.

14 Debtors (continued)

Included in amounts owed by group undertakings is £1,439,186 (2024 - £609,092) due from The Highland Council, which represents income received on behalf of High Life Highland.

15 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2025		2024	
	Group	Charity	Group	Charity
	£	£	£	£
Trade creditors	23,642	23,642	22,057	22,057
Other creditors and accruals	1,601,627	1,601,627	1,543,852	1,543,852
Amounts owed to group undertakings	-	-	-	-
	<u>1,625,269</u>	<u>1,625,269</u>	<u>1,565,909</u>	<u>1,565,909</u>

Deferred income

	2025	
	Group	Charity
	£	£
At 1 April 2024	20,927	20,927
Amount deferred in year	-	-
Amount released to income	(20,927)	(20,927)
At 31 March 2025	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

Deferred income is included within other creditors and accruals and represents grant income for which performance conditions had not been met at the year end and sales invoices raised in advance.

16 Analysis of net liabilities between funds

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total £
Group			
Fixed assets	1,012,937	-	1,012,937
Current assets	1,952,212	707,816	2,660,028
Current liabilities	(1,625,269)	-	(1,625,269)
Pension liability	-	-	-
	<u>1,339,880</u>	<u>707,816</u>	<u>2,047,696</u>
Charity			
Fixed assets	1,013,037	-	1,013,037
Current assets	1,946,036	707,816	2,653,852
Current liabilities	(1,625,269)	-	(1,625,269)
Pension liability	-	-	-
	<u>1,333,804</u>	<u>707,816</u>	<u>2,041,620</u>

17 Unrestricted funds

	At 1 April 2024 £	Incoming resources £	Outgoing resources £	Actuarial (loss)/gain £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2025 £
Group						
General fund	685,017	36,872,994	(36,011,533)	-	(206,598)	1,339,880
Pension reserve	-	-	(75,000)	75,000	-	-
	<u>685,017</u>	<u>36,872,994</u>	<u>(36,086,533)</u>	<u>75,000</u>	<u>(206,598)</u>	<u>1,339,880</u>
Company						
General fund	678,941	35,177,353	(34,315,892)	-	(206,598)	1,333,804
Pension reserve	-	-	(75,000)	75,000	-	-
	<u>678,941</u>	<u>35,177,353</u>	<u>(34,390,892)</u>	<u>75,000</u>	<u>(206,598)</u>	<u>1,333,804</u>

17 Unrestricted funds (continued)

Designated funds

Of the £784,999 of reserves transferred across as part of the charity combination with Inverness Leisure in 2016, the remaining £139,715 has been designated for capital works at Inverness Leisure. These £139,715 of designated funds are included as part of the general fund. The £300,000 of reserves previously designated for the retrospective remodelling of the charity's pay structure was undesignated by the Board at its meeting of 19th March 2025 as no longer required.

18 Restricted funds (group and company)

	At 1 April 2024	Incoming resources	Outgoing resources	Transfers	At 31 March 2025
	£	£	£	£	£
Archives	27,780	17,505	(29,826)		15,459
Museums & Galleries	129,619	187,730	(216,548)	-	100,801
Adult Learning	-	34,864	(34,864)	-	-
Leisure	107,639	19,021	(44,766)	-	81,894
Grow Project	56,355	100,264	(85,093)	-	71,526
Libraries	8,846	22,394	(25,333)	-	5,907
Inverness Castle	55,507	488,136	(413,253)	-	130,390
Health & Wellbeing	131,010	21,324	(19,076)	-	133,258
Inverness Common Good	11,418	-	-	-	11,418
Youth Music Initiative	(154,453)	487,157	(493,308)	160,604	-
Music	8,118	48,958	(38,576)	-	18,500
Countryside Rangers	15,347	-	-	-	15,347
Sport	98,916	89,530	(72,736)	-	115,710
Sportscotland - Active Schc	18,382	1,124,113	(1,134,889)	-	7,606
Youthwork	(100,605)	503,362	(448,751)	45,994	-
	413,879	3,144,358	(3,057,019)	206,598	707,816

The charity receives funding from a variety of sources for different purposes, all within the overall objectives of the company. The purposes of the above restricted funds are as follows:

- Archives - Funding received from various providers to support the Archive service in the Highlands.
- Museums & Galleries - Funding provided by Museums Galleries Scotland and other providers to support arts and culture in the Highlands.
- Adult Learning - Funding received from UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support Adult Literacy.

18 Restricted funds (group and company) (continued)

- Leisure - Funding received from various providers to support health and fitness in the Highlands.
Grow Project - Funding provided by NHS Highland and The David Sutherland Trust to provide opportunities for practical horticulture for adults with a learning disability.
- Libraries - Funding received from various providers to support literacy and use of libraries.
Inverness Castle - Funding from The Highland Council and other providers for the project management of the development of Inverness Castle into a visitor attraction.
- Health & Wellbeing - Funding from NHS Highland and other providers to support healthy living and recovery from illness.
Inverness Common Good Fund - Funding from the Inverness Common Good Fund to host events including The Highland Games, Bonfire Night and Halloween.
- Youth Music Initiative - Funding received from Creative Scotland to provide access to high quality music making opportunities for young people and support the development of the youth music sector.
- Music - Funding received from various providers to support music education for young people in the Highlands.
Countryside Rangers - Funding received from various providers to encourage engagement and education of the Highland countryside.
- Sport - Funding received from various providers to promote youth sport in the Highlands.
Sportscotland - Active Schools - Funding received from sportscotland to develop, promote and encourage sport in the Highlands.
- Youthwork - Funding received to provide targeted youthwork and services in specific areas of the Highlands

19 Controlling interest

The company is under the ultimate control of the Highland Council (having regard to the Council's powers as sole member) but without prejudice to the directors' duties under company law and charity law to exercise independent judgement and to further what they consider to be the best interests of the company.

The largest group and the smallest group for which consolidated financial statements are prepared which include High Life Highland is that of The Highland Council. Copies of these financial statements can be obtained from www.highland.gov.uk.

20 Pension commitments

The charity is an admitted body of The Highland Council Pension Fund which provides pension benefits under the Local Government Pension Scheme to employees of High Life Highland. Contributions are made to this scheme, on the advice of an independent qualified actuary, to ensure that the plan's assets are sufficient to cover future liabilities. The assets of the scheme are held separately from the charity in an independently administered fund. Contributions are recognised in the statement of financial activities in the period in which they become payable.

The valuation used for the FRS 102 disclosures has been based on rolling forward the value of the employer's liabilities from a starting position of zero at 1 October 2011, allowing for the different financial assumptions required under FRS 102. The valuation used has been based on the most recent actuarial valuation at 31 March 2023, and was updated by the actuary to assess the liabilities of the schemes at 31 March 2025. The assumptions that have the most significant effect on the results of the valuation are those relating to price increases, the rate of increases in salaries and pensions and the discount rate. Scheme assets are stated at their bid value at the balance sheet dates.

With effect from 1 April 2015, a schedule of contributions was put in place to fund the scheme's defined benefits at the current rate of 17.5% p.a. of total payroll.

20 Pension commitments (continued)

The assets and liabilities of the schemes are:

	2025	2024
	£000's	£000's
Fair value of scheme assets	84,324	77,672
Present value of scheme liabilities	(58,080)	(64,664)
Present value of unfunded liabilities	(14)	(15)
Unrecognised asset	(26,230)	(12,993)
Liability in the scheme	-	-

The major categories of scheme assets as a percentage of total scheme assets are:

	2025	2024
Equities	54%	69%
Bonds	26%	10%
Property	14%	15%
Cash	6%	6%

The amounts recognised in the statement of financial activities are analysed as follows:

	2025	2024
	£000's	£000's
Recognised in the statement of financial activities:		
Current service cost	(4,135)	(4,054)
Past service cost	-	(26)
Interest on obligation	(3,239)	(2,921)
Expected return on scheme assets	3,852	3,228
	(3,522)	(3,773)

20 Pension commitments (continued)

The principal assumptions at the opening and closing balance sheet date were:

	2025	2024
Rate of salary increases (over life of the scheme)	3.55%	3.55%
Rate of increases in pensions in payment	2.75%	2.75%
Discount rate	5.80%	4.85%
Post retirement mortality:		
	2025	2024
Current pensions at 65 (male)	20.6 yrs	20.7 yrs
Current pensions at 65 (female)	23.7 yrs	23.7 yrs
Future pensions at 65 (male)	21.3 yrs	21.4 yrs
Future pensions at 65 (female)	25.2 yrs	25.2 yrs

Life expectancy is based on the Fund's VitaCurves with improvements in line with the CMI 2023 model, with a 15% weighting of 2023 (and 2022) data, a 0% weighting of 2021 (and 2020) data, standard smoothing (Sk7), initial adjustment of 0.25% and a long term rate of improvement of 1.5% p.a. for both males and females. Based on these assumptions, the average future life expectancies at age 65 for the Employer are summarised above. These assumptions will be reconsidered when the next triennial review of The Highland Council Pension Scheme is undertaken.

Change in assumptions at 31 March 2025:

	Approximate % increase to defined benefit obligation	Approximate monetary amount £000's
0.1% decrease in real discount rate	2%	1,299
1 year increase in member life expectancy	4%	2,324
0.1% increase in salary increase rate	0%	60
0.1% increase in pension increase rate	2%	1,274

20 Pension commitments (continued)

Changes in the present value of the defined benefit obligations are analysed as follows:

	2025	2024
	£000's	£000's
Opening defined benefit obligations	64,679	59,407
Current service cost	4,135	4,054
Past service cost	-	26
Interest cost	3,239	2,921
Actuarial loss/(gain)	(14,188)	(1,610)
Benefits paid	(942)	(1,286)
Contributions by scheme participants	1,172	1,168
Estimated unfunded benefits paid	(1)	(1)
	58,094	64,679

Changes in the fair value of the plan assets are analysed as follows:

	2025	2024
	£000's	£000's
Opening fair value of scheme assets	77,672	66,032
Expected return on scheme assets	3,852	3,228
Employer contributions	3,446	3,743
Contributions in respect of unfunded benefits	1	1
Contributions by scheme members	1,172	1,168
Benefits paid	(942)	(1,286)
Actuarial gain/(loss)	(876)	4,787
Estimated unfunded benefits paid	(1)	(1)
	84,324	77,672

The amount of actuarial gains and losses recognised in the statement of financial activities was an actuarial gain of £75,000 (2024 - £29,000).

The best estimate of contributions to be paid by the group to the scheme for the year beginning after 31 March 2025 is £3,446,000.

20 Pension commitments (continued)

Amounts for the closing and opening balance sheet are as follows:

	2025	2024	2023	2022
	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Fair value of scheme assets	84,324	77,672	66,032	64,086
Present value of defined benefit obligation	(58,094)	(64,679)	(59,407)	(89,849)
Unrecognised asset	(26,230)	(12,993)	(6,625)	-
Net asset/(liability) recognised	-	-	-	(25,763)

The Highland Council acts as guarantor as long as High Life Highland remains an admitted body within the Council's pension scheme.



HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND
LIBRARIES

NON-USER SURVEY REPORT

2025



Summary

High Life Highland operates 40 public libraries, 4 mobile libraries and 1 housebound service on behalf of the Highland Council.

The service conducted a survey with those not currently using libraries during March 2025. The aim of the survey was to identify the reasons why some people are not using their local library and to determine what the service can do to encourage future use.

Surveys were carried out online, at local leisure centres, visitor attractions, community centres, and at community events.

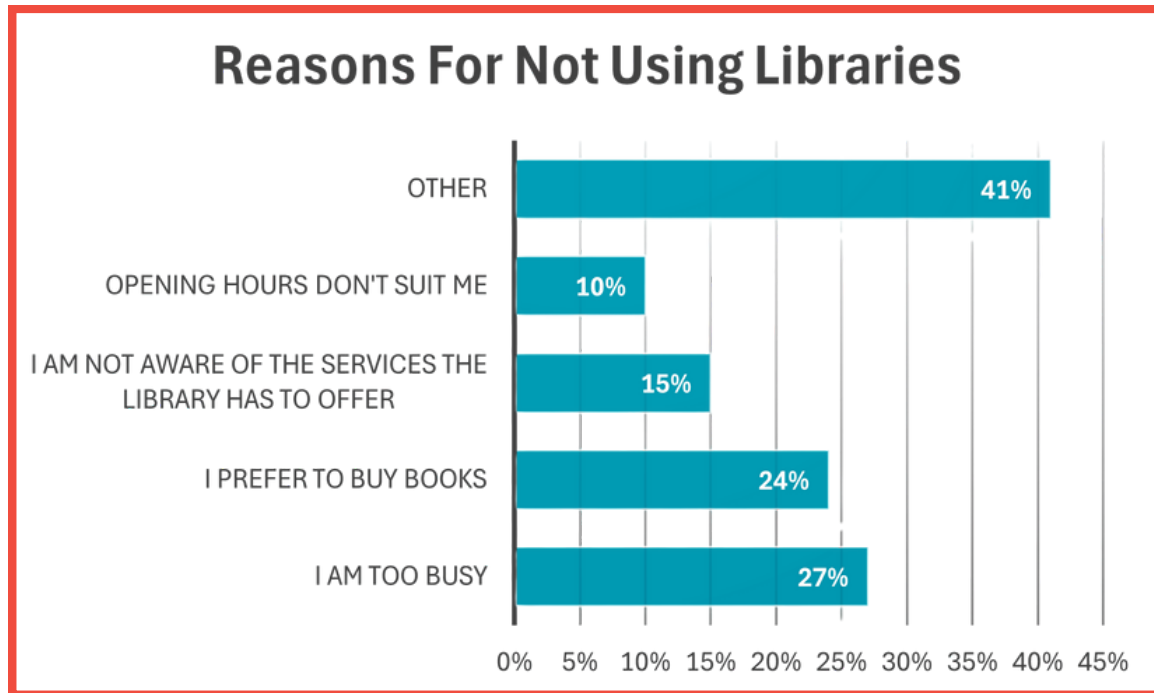
A total of 755 people responded to the survey, 184 of which said that they had used their library within the past 12 months. Those that had not (571 respondents) formed the basis for the survey.



Key Findings

- ❶ Only 10% of non-users said they were unlikely to use their local library in the future.
- ❷ Nearly half of respondents indicated that if they were to use libraries in the future, they would visit the library in-person and also use online resources. 28% expressed interest solely in services within library buildings, while 24% were only interested in online resources.
- ❸ The main reasons cited by respondents for not using their local library were being too busy (27%) or preferring to buy their own books (24%).
- ❹ 41% of respondents selected 'other' as their reason for not using their local library. Some of the reasons given included- lack of parking or having to pay for parking, no longer having a mobile library visiting, not living near a library, currently reading on a kindle or online, their library having a poor selection of books, not being a reader, ill health, and having a disability such as sight impairments, arthritis, and dyslexia.
- ❺ Some respondents believed that the service still charged fines for overdue books and cited this as a barrier to using the service.
- ❻ Some respondents did not class themselves as a library user even though they stated that they make use of the library's online services such as e-books, e-audiobooks and digital newspapers.
- ❼ 23% respondents said that they did not use other services provided by High Life Highland.

Reasons for not using Libraries

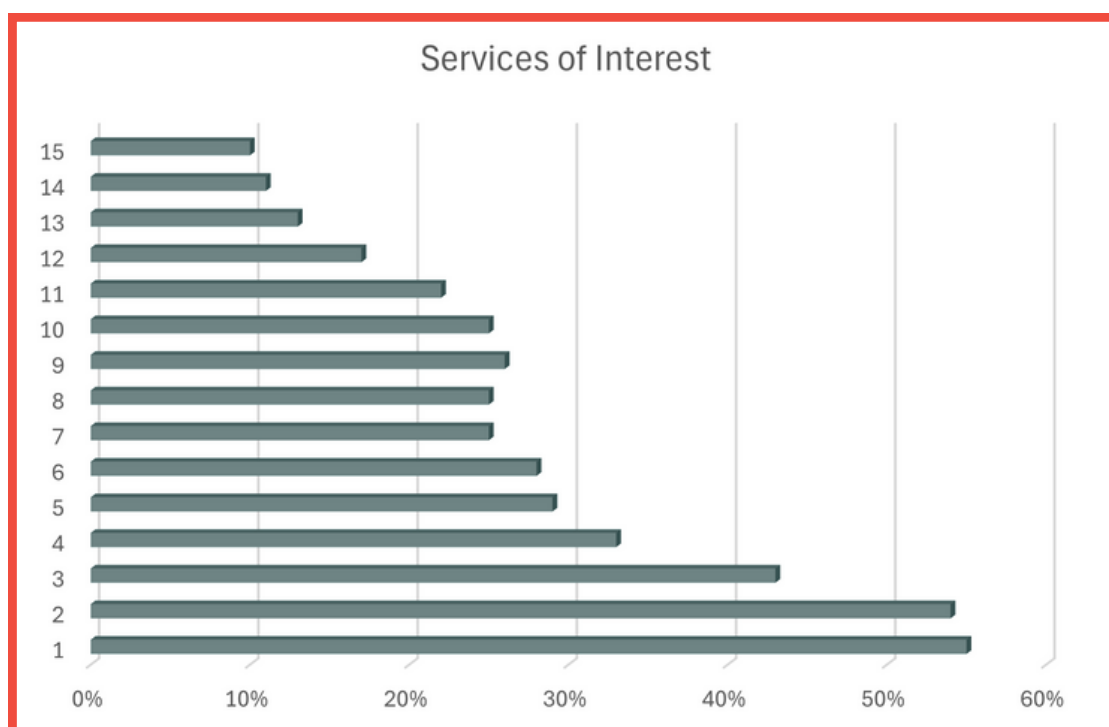


'Other' reasons for not using libraries...



Interest in Services

Respondents were asked which services would be of interest to them if they were to use libraries in the future. Preferences here were similar to people already using the library service, with **e-book/e-audio book provision (55%)**, **book/magazine borrowing (54%)** and **digital newspaper/magazine provision (43%)** being the main services of interest to them. Other services of significant interest to non-users included **accessing computers and printing facilities (29%)**, **accessing wi-fi (25%)** and **attending events (26%)**.



1. E-books & E-Audio books
2. Borrowing books & Magazines
3. Digital Magazines & Newspaper
4. Online Learning & Online Local History
5. Access to Computers & Printing Facilities
6. Accessing Hot Drinks
7. Learning Languages Online
8. Accessing Wi-Fi

9. Attending Activities such as Book Groups, Craft Groups or Digital Learning
10. Using Comfortable Seating for Relaxation or Socialising
11. Study Spaces
12. Attending Family Activities such as Bookbug/Lego Club
13. Attending Summer Activities
14. Accessing Online Comics or Graphic Novels
15. None of the Above - do not intend to use libraries in the future.

Other High Life Services Used

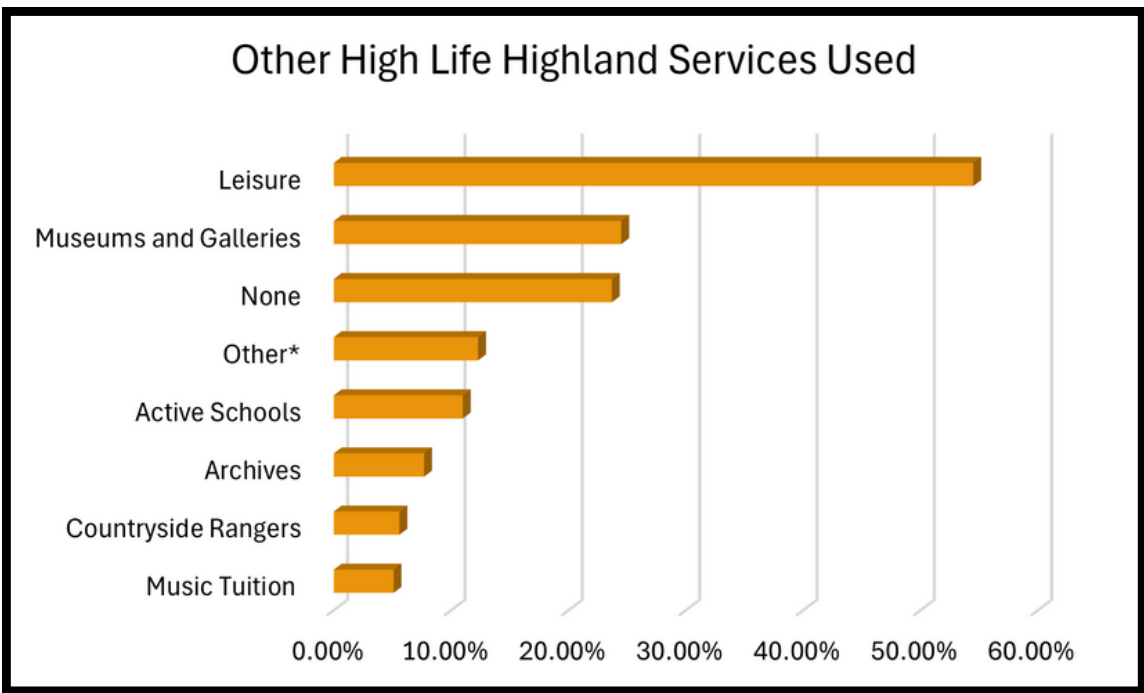
Respondents were asked which other HLH services they accessed, the two most used were HLH Leisure facilities at over 54% and Museums and Galleries at over 24%.



Leisure 54%



Museums & Galleries 24%

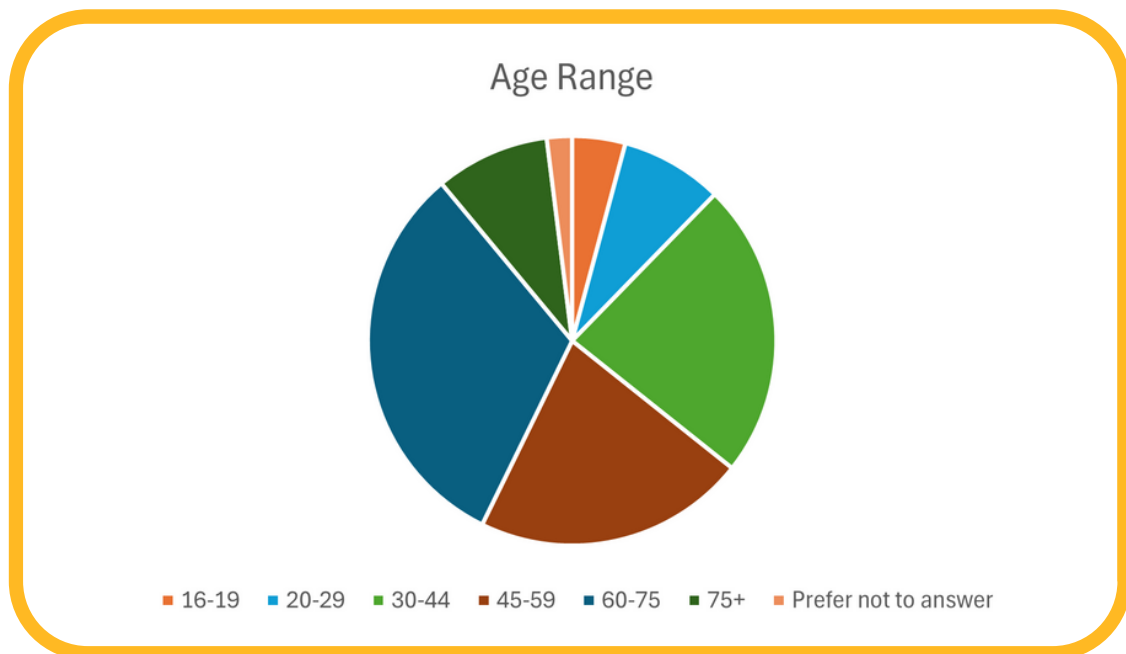


*Community Centres, Botanic Gardens and free bus journeys.

Non-user Characteristics

The 16–19 age group had the fewest respondents, whereas individuals aged 60–75 made up approximately one-third of the total participants.

Age



Difficulties



- Hearing
- Mental Health / Depression
- Memory Loss
- Other*
- Eyesight
- Learning Difficulties
- None

*Including Autism, Dyslexia and Epilepsy

Employment Status



- Working full-time
- Retired
- Working part-time
- Self-employed/Student/Carer/Unable to work due to disability
- Other*

*On maternity leave, Travelling, Volunteering, Recovering from Illness

Action Plan

Accessibility

It was clear from the findings that accessibility issues remain a barrier to some customers accessing services. The following key actions will be implemented:



01. Promote widely the new housebound service offered by libraries.



02. Promote the revised mobile library service widely to rural communities.



03. Promote widely the 24-hour access to digital services offered by libraries.

Financial Concerns

It was clear from the findings that for some customers there were concerns around accumulating overdue charges on late book returns. In line with national policy and to reduce inequalities, High Life Highland Libraries no longer implement overdue charges for the late return of items. Customers are encouraged instead to make a small donation but this is not obligatory. The following action will be implemented:



04. Promote widely the benefits of library membership with the key message that the service no longer implements fines for the late return of items.

Action Plan

Community Engagement

Feedback from the library staff that surveyed non-users suggests that the consultation was of significant value in engaging with those not currently using the service, raising awareness of the services provided by High Life Highland, and signing up new customers. The following action will be implemented:



- 05. Use community events and other HLH buildings to initiate sign-up campaigns, with library staff present to promote the service and engage with potential customers.**

The non-user survey only captured a small number of people aged between 16-19. Further work will be required to engage more effectively with this age group:



- 06. Use alternative methods to consult with young adults on how libraries can cater for their needs e.g. using focus groups or forums.**

**To find out more about High Life
Highland Libraries visit:**

www.highlifehighland.com/libraries

or



Find us on Facebook

High Life Highland Libraries

High Life Highland Libraries
Library Support Unit
31A Harbour Road
Inverness
IV1 1UA

Telephone: 01349 781340

Email: libraries@highlifehighland.com

General Updates/Good News Stories – May 2025 to September 2025

As part of HLH's reporting general updates and good news stories are provided since the previous reporting to the Education Committee.

Digital drive ensures Highland Archive Service remains top of its game

The Highland Archive Service continue to meet the high standards required by the national governing body for archives. The Highland Archive Service has achieved reaccreditation from the National Records of Scotland and the Scottish Council on Archives.

The Archive Service Accreditation panel particularly praised the progress being made by the Highland Archive Service around digital preservation, making records more accessible to a wider audience and therefore preserved for the longer term.

Am Baile and all four Highland Archive Centres continue to expand their virtual reach by sharing accessible and engaging content across websites and social media platforms. A particular highlight has been the increased use of interactive features, such as 'mystery' photographs. Since April, Am Baile has experienced a marked rise in usage, culminating in its highest-ever visitor numbers for June and July and with over 1.1 million engagements year to date. This sustained growth reflects the Archive Service's commitment to widening access to Highland history and heritage through innovative digital storytelling and online participation.

Since its establishment in 1990, the Highland Archive Service has played a vital role in preserving and sharing the rich history of the Highlands. There are four sites: the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness; Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre in Portree; Lochaber Archive Centre in Fort William and Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives at Wick Airport, the latter holding its own separate Accreditation.

Heritage Interpretation and Community Collaboration at Nucleus

Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archive. The Following the Fish project, developed in partnership with Suffolk Archives, Norfolk Record Office, and Tasglann nan Eilean, launched with two touring exhibitions and an online showcase capturing the stories of the herring girls - women who travelled the British coastline gutting and packing fish. Following a six-week residency at Nucleus, the exhibition began its two-year tour of the Highlands and Islands while the online version ensures wider public access to this important social history.

Creative Learning Partnership with HMP Inverness

Highland Archive Service continues its partnership with HMP Inverness, engaging prison learners in creative educational activities inspired by archival collections. This year, the collaboration resulted in the production of a series of display banners showcasing artwork created by participants. The project used historical documents and imagery from the archive to spark reflection and artistic expression, encouraging learners to explore themes of identity, heritage, and personal growth. This initiative not only supports rehabilitation through education but also demonstrates the archive's capacity to contribute meaningfully to inclusive learning across diverse communities.

Educational Engagement with Schools Across the Highlands

Highland Archive Service continues to deliver meaningful learning experiences for pupils across the region, using archival collections to support curriculum topics and creative exploration. Recent highlights include workshops at Fortrose Academy, where pupils engaged with the history of the Atlantic slave trade and its Highland connections through creative writing; a session in Balloch marking the 80th anniversary of VE Day; and visits from Edinbane Primary School to the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre to explore exhibitions and learn about archival work. At Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archive, pupils from Noss Primary and Canisbay Primary visited to engage with the Following the Fish exhibition and related archival activities. These sessions demonstrate the service's commitment to supporting education and fostering curiosity and connection to local heritage among young learners across the Highlands.

Explore the culture of the shieling at new Skye exhibition ùir-sgeul | earth story is a new exhibition by artist Eilidh MacKenzie, exploring oral traditions, maps, landscapes, archaeology and written materials related to Skye's shieling culture – and it can be explored at the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre. Shieling, or àirigh in Gaelic, is the name given to both a summer pasture and to the small turf and stone bothies constructed on it, which were historically used as shelter or dwellings during the summer months. By way of song, stories, written and recorded memory, the exhibition brings together various accounts of shieling life in Skye, examining the relationship shieling culture has to land use, biodiversity, community and tourism today.

Eilidh MacKenzie is a musician, visual artist and educator from North Skye. She has a deep-rooted interest in Gaelic culture and local tradition, and her work explores aspects of the island's physical and cultural landscape through printmaking and mixed media. Her work for the exhibition includes paintings, earth pigments, sound, historical objects and sculpture, as well as artwork made with children at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh.

High Life Highland's Wellness Month

September was declared Wellness Month by High Life Highland, with the aim of shining a light on how everyone can improve their physical, mental and social wellbeing across all of the charity's services, and not just leisure.

Wellness is defined as the act of practicing healthy habits in all areas of life, including health, fitness, mindfulness, mental health and social well-being. From leisure centres to libraries, from archives to arts and from sporting moments to music – High Life Highland is well placed to offer Highlanders multiple opportunities to enhance their wellbeing.

Throughout September and all across Highland there were activities to suit all ages and abilities from baby massage in the Badenoch Library to Alzheimer's storytelling in Fort William Library. Other library activities include mindful colouring, poetry evenings, crafting sessions and traditional music performances.

Several leisure centres hosted special taster classes for people who want to give something new a try, such as free strength club sessions for beginners at Aviemore Community Centre and wellness yoga at Black Isle Leisure. Free 7 days passes were on offer during the whole of September so that as many people as possible can find out what makes them feel good!

There were Doors Open Days at the Highland Archive and Registration Centre and the Highland Folk Museum were throwing open the doors of their Am Fasgadh special collections store.

A special literary event was also held at Dingwall Community Library. Suzanne Parsons, author and Library Assistant based in Lochcarron, visited the library to discuss her debut novel, 'Secrets in the Sky'. Set during the First World War, 'Secrets in the Sky' is a thrilling aviation adventure that blends historical detail with romance, offering a unique perspective on wartime experiences – not from the trenches, but from the skies above.

Spending time in nature is well proven to enhance a person wellbeing and there was a series of wellbeing walks, activities and volunteering sessions with the Countryside Rangers as well as within the Inverness Botanic Gardens & Café.

BBC Radio Scotland Feature

One of the High Life Ranger Service's popular evening Bat Walks was featured on BBC Radio Scotland's *Out of Doors* programme this year. The broadcast highlighted the growing public interest in nocturnal wildlife, with presenters joining participants to experience bats in flight using detectors and guided commentary from the Rangers. The segment generated positive feedback and next year's 'theme of the year' for the service will be a focus on nocturnal creatures.

Nature Clubs in Libraries

In partnership with High Life Highland Libraries, Rangers have helped to establish a series of *After School Nature Clubs*. These monthly sessions have proven popular with children and families, offering hands-on opportunities to explore local wildlife, create nature crafts, and learn about seasonal changes. The clubs continue to go from strength to strength, strengthening the link between libraries, nature, and learning. Further grant funding has been sought to continue the work.

Culloden Library hosts colourful Blas Festival event

Stories of highland folklore have inspired a colourful, collaborative work of art that will be on permanent display at Culloden Library, due to a special workshop held as part of the Blas Festival. The joint story telling and art workshop was a fringe event for the Blas Festival – a collaboration between Fèisean nan Gàidheal and The Highland Council to celebrate the music, song, culture and language of the Highlands.

Hosted by High Life Highland and made possible with funding from the Scottish Book Trust Live Literature Fund, textile artist and traditional story teller Lizzie McDougall was invited to share her wonderful tales with library goers of all ages. Participants were then encouraged to create a piece of artwork to illustrate the stories. The finished piece will now hang in Culloden Library as a permanent celebration of traditional Highland stories.

Burghead Bull tapestry goes on display at Nairn Library

A striking panel from the acclaimed *Tapestry of the Highlands and Islands* project went on display at Nairn Library, celebrating the rich culture and heritage of the region. The tapestry panel, titled *The Burghead Bull*, created by the stitchers group - Threads of Nairn, is one of over 50 panels brought to life by the hands of more than 600 stitchers from communities across the Highlands and Islands. Each panel tells a unique story, reflecting the area's spirit, traditions and contemporary life. Twenty-nine panels will be

included in the first exhibition in the North Tower Gallery at The Inverness Castle Experience.

The *Burghead Bull* design, inspired by ancient Pictish carvings, is embroidered in vivid shades of red, amber and yellow on a moss green tweed background. This design draws inspiration from a group of carved Pictish stones discovered in the 19th century during demolition works in Burghead, Moray.

Although most were lost, six original carvings survive in museums across Scotland and London. The tapestry panel now hanging in Nairn Library invites residents and visitors to appreciate the extraordinary craftsmanship and storytelling behind it, celebrating both artistry and cultural significance. The *Tapestry of the Highlands and Islands* was part of the Spirit of the Highlands and Islands project, which has now concluded, aimed to inspire exploration of the region through contemporary stories and creative expression.

The Tapestry of the Highlands and Islands project was supported by a grant from the Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund (NCHF), led by NatureScot and part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Signing, singing and bedtime stories for Bookbug Week

To mark Bookbug Week High Life Highland libraries celebrated with the introduction of new Makaton sessions as well as a new bedtime Bookbug session! Makaton uses signs and symbols to help people communicate and is designed to support the development of spoken language. Makaton is the UK's leading language programme, with over 100,000 children and adults using Makaton symbols and signs, either as their main method of communication, or as a way to support speech and speech development.

Fort William and Inverness Libraries are also introducing Makaton to their Bookbug sessions and Bookbug at the Victorian Market in Inverness also features Makaton. Bookbug is an early years literacy programme for children age 0-5 years.

High Life Highland joined forces with museums on UK-wide collaborative exhibition programme

High Life Highland was one of twenty organisations across the UK which took part in Going Places – a landmark £5.36m exhibition programme from Art Fund, the national charity for museums and galleries, that saw museums and galleries from all four nations share collections in the largest collaborative touring project of its kind.

The largest investment of its kind in the UK, Going Places has been supported with £2.86 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and £1.5 million from the Julia Rausing Trust, with further fundraising ongoing. Six museum networks spanning the breadth of the country developed 12 major touring exhibitions to take place over the next five years, taking the UK's collections on an epic journey that will result in 40 unique exhibitions made with and for local communities.

High Life Highland is working in partnership with CofGâr – Carmarthenshire Museums & Arts Service in Wales and the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum in Northern Ireland, as part of a network called 'Communities of Making'.

'Communities of Making' will be exploring how local heritage and traditions of making have evolved in these regions through objects from their collections including textiles,

costume, craft objects, heritage machinery, paintings and various other items. All three partners collections are rooted in local and regional craft traditions and the skills associated with them, including on the Red List of [Endangered Heritage Skills](#), which for High Life Highland collections at the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, this includes coiled straw basket making, thatching, spinning wheel making, sporran and kilt making, bee skep making and coracle making.

Working in collaboration with hard to reach 16–24-year-olds the partner museums will bring together objects and artworks from their collections to explore how these craft practices relate to young people and their communities today. There will also be opportunities for these young people to get ‘hands on’ and be part of a new Young Curators Panel that will meet quarterly to co-create some exhibition content.

McLean’s shop stores a shed load of memories

A tiny shop that served a Strathspey farming community for almost 80 years before closing its doors in the early 1970s has been given a new lease of life at the Highland Folk Museum. Jessie McLean opened the shop at Balnain, near Dulnain Bridge in the late 1800s, with her husband Lachlan taking over the till in 1909 after Jessie passed away. Following Lachlan’s death in 1925, the shop then passed to their son Donald and his wife Elsie with the final McLean shopkeeper being their son Sandy, who lived at Balnain most of his adult life.

Not much more than a shed added on to the end of the family cottage, McLean’s Shop served the local farming community in the days when farm labourers were plentiful and large supermarkets unheard of. With the little shop no longer sustainable, Sandy flipped the closed sign over for the last time in the early 1970’s.

The official ‘re-opening’ of McLean’s Shop took place in May, with Jessie’s Great Granddaughter Ruth Black there to do the honours. Since opening in May, the building has been appreciated by over 47,000 visitors. The Highland Folk Museum at Newtonmore offers visitors a unique perspective on Highland history from the 1700s to the 1950s. There are over 35 historical buildings onsite to explore and discover how people lived, worked, went to school and enjoyed their leisure time.

Inverness Museum & Art Gallery

The museum hosted William Gillies Exhibition *Modernism and Nation* featured paintings, drawings and associated photographs, archives and objects from Gillies’ entire career. This popular tour was organised by the Royal Scottish Academy with support from Museums Galleries Scotland and attracted 13, 300 visitors including 160 school pupils.

Pictish stone is standing tall in new home at North Coast Visitor Centre

A long forgotten Pictish stone, which was likely being used as a grave marker in a remote Christian burial ground in Caithness, has been recovered and restored, and is now on display at the North Coast Visitor Centre thanks to the local landowner and heritage volunteers.

The Ulbster 2 Pictish Stone joins the original Ulbster Stone – which was discovered 250 years earlier – in the visitor centre’s Stone Room giving an insight into the Pictish period, which was around 1,700 years ago from AD 300 to AD 900.

Having been carefully rescued, the decorated pillar was unveiled within the Stone Room of the North Coast Visitor Centre in June by Lord Thurso who has kindly loaned

the artefact to High Life Highland who run the centre and museum. Since installation over 27,000 visitors have had the opportunity to view this exceptional addition to the museum.

From brochs and standing stones to cairns and castle ruins, the Caithness landscape offers an insight into the past lives of the people who lived there thousands of years ago.

Dingwall Leisure Centre hosting classes particularly for Parkinson's

Anyone living with Parkinson's in the area was encouraged to attend a special exercise class at Dingwall Leisure Centre, designed to help keep people active and manage symptoms. High Life Highland delivers several Parkinson's exercise classes across the area, with this recently introduced class at Dingwall Leisure Centre adding to the offering.

NHS Highland estimates that there are around 600 people in the Highland area living with Parkinson's and there are thought to be around 13,000 across the whole of Scotland.

Parkinson's is the fastest growing neurological condition in the world and happens when the brain cells that make dopamine start to die. There are more than 40 different symptoms associated with Parkinson's including a tremor, pain, issues with balance, difficulty sleeping and anxiety.

High Life Highland has been providing ongoing support for participants of Parkinson's exercise programmes across the Highlands for several years, working closely with NHS Highland to ensure that people affected by Parkinson's have a choice of ways to keep active.

It is well understood that if people can keep active it can significantly improve functional capacity, fitness and quality of life as well as reducing the risk of ill health, disease recurrence, deterioration of condition, risk of falling and even acute hospital admissions whilst also helping to manage symptoms.

Gym goes on a high after first highlife Hyrox Sim event!

High Life Highland has fully embraced the fitness phenomenon that is Hyrox with training classes now taking place in *highlife* leisure centres in Aviemore, Grantown, Inverness and Fort William – with Lochaber Leisure also hosting its first ever Hyrox Simulation (Sim) event.

High Life Highland is aiming to increase the number of its leisure centres offering Hyrox training, which takes Hyrox fundamentals and turns them into a comprehensive approach to performance fitness that caters for anyone. It resembles traditional circuit training with the objective being to build baseline fitness in participants covering strength, endurance, aerobic capacity, agility and skill work.

In September, 49 dedicated *highlife* Hyrox training regulars took part in High Life Highland's first ever Hyrox Sim event, which took place at Lochaber High School. The event was a great opportunity, not only for participants to put all their Hyrox training into practice but also give leisure staff valuable experience in hosting a Hyrox Sim – which the charity intends to host more of in the future.

Inverness Leisure has recently expanded its Hyrox training programme, with a special fit out of its largest Studio to accommodate more people and more classes. There are

now 10 Hyrox training classes per week, with 40 spaces in each class. So popular has Hyrox been in Badenoch and Strathspey that High Life Highland now has both Aviemore Community Centre and the Craig Maclean Leisure Centre in Grantown as official Hyrox training clubs. More Hyrox centres and Sim events are planned into the New Year.

Cancer Rehab Promotional Video

The Leisure team has been working with the Marketing Team, Cancer Rehab Instructor and participants to create a Cancer Rehab promotional video. This is a great video featuring participant testimonials describing their cancer journey and how the Cancer Rehab classes have assisted and supporting them in returning to exercise in a comfortable and safe environment.

Pressing News – Turning Local Apples into Fresh Juice

Inverness Botanic Gardens' community apple pressing sessions have proved a huge success, inviting local residents to bring in their garden apples to be juiced using the modern electric press. Over three sessions, the team transformed around 500 kilograms of apples into roughly 300 litres of delicious local juice, bursting with flavour and completely free from additives or food miles.

The sessions have been a fun and sustainable way to use up surplus fruit, promote healthy living, and bring people together. Even the leftover pulp is composted on-site, feeding the next generation of plants at the Inverness Botanic Gardens.

Following the success of September's events, more apple pressing sessions are planned for October.

Cooking Up Community at The Grow Project

The team at Inverness Botanic Gardens was delighted to welcome *The Cooking Club* back to The Grow Project for another friendly, hands-on session. The Cooking Club runs inclusive cooking groups for people keen to learn new skills, share ideas, or simply enjoy cooking in good company.

September's visit celebrated the very best of The Grow Project's harvest. The Grow Gardeners gathered a beautiful mix of home-grown produce: leeks, fennel, tomatoes, aubergines, courgettes, onions, and garlic, which were turned into a hearty *One-Pot Pasta*. To finish, freshly picked apples became the star ingredient in some delicious *Apple Flapjacks*.

It was a wonderful afternoon of creativity, conversation, and shared learning, thanks to everyone at *The Grow Project* and *The Cooking Club* for making it such a success.

New Art Exhibition in the Café – Sheelagh Petrie

Inverness Botanic Garden launched a brand-new collection of artwork in the Inverness Botanic Gardens Café, this time featuring the dramatic and expressive works of Sheelagh Petrie. Sheelagh is a visual artist based in the north-east Highlands, inspired by the ever-changing weather, huge skies, and shifting landscapes that surround her. Working in oils and watercolours, she creates textured, bold pieces that capture the movement and mood of the natural environment through colour, layering, and expressive mark-making. This stunning new collection was on display until the end of October.

Highland schools demonstrate their spirit for sport with awards

Highland schools showed their passion for sport and physical activity, with over 60 of them proud recipients of [sportscotland](#) School Sport Awards. In just a year, Highland has more than doubled the number of schools that have successfully achieved bronze, silver or gold status going from 30 schools in July 2024 to 66 now!

Within Highland, 13 schools have the highest accolade – gold – with a further 11 gold awards pending. This includes recent gold recipients Reay and Halkirk Primary Schools in Caithness and Dingwall Primary School in Ross-shire.

Millburn Academy in Inverness is also a very recent recipient of the top award, recognising the school's achievements in putting sport at the heart of their planning, practice and ethos.

Many of the Highland's most rural schools are also doing a great job of achieving **sportscotland** School Sport Awards with geography being no barrier to striking gold – such as Raasay Primary School with just four pupils. Ardnamurchan High School, with over 120 pupils, at Strontian in Lochaber services the rural communities of Ardnamurchan, Morven, Ardgour, Sunart and Moidart and just last week had their gold status confirmed.

Generous local businesses get behind young leaders

If the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, then the High Life Highland Leadership Programme is smashing it! So successful is the initiative that local business leaders are showing the lead too – by generously sponsoring the coveted hoodies that young participants are awarded for their volunteering hours. [The Leadership Programme](#) began life in Nairn Academy in 2004, around the same time that [sportscotland](#) launched [Active Schools](#). The High Life Highland Leadership Programme is an inclusive and transformative initiative equipping young people with practical leadership, life skills, and confidence with participants awarded coloured hoodies in recognition of their volunteering efforts. They can volunteer in a huge variety of ways – not just in sports – but also in libraries, museums, music, conservation, community projects and so on.

With more and more Young Leaders there's more and more hoodies required and to help meet those costs, a quartet of businesses have come on board as the Leadership Programme's first ever sponsors. Those sponsors – Stagecoach Group Ltd, Highland Learning Academy, MacKenzie & Cormack Tain and My Primary & Secondary Tutor – were invited to the [Inverness Botanic Gardens & Café](#) to meet some Young Leaders and hear directly from them about the impact on their own personal development. It was also a chance for High Life Highland to thank the generous benefactors that are leading the way in taking up these sponsorship opportunities.

High Life Highland Leadership Programme in numbers:

- This academic year (24/25), 798 hoodies and 262 t-shirts were awarded which accounts for at least 21,260 leadership hours.
- 7,700 young people have registered to take part in the programme since electronic records began in 2020.
- 1,028 young people registered in this academic year, which equates to 85 a month or three people signing up per day.
- To support one Young Leader through the whole programme costs around £370.

The Highland Young Leaders programme is celebrated across the country and has been used as a template by other Scottish local authorities to support young people in their communities.

Dance = Diamond for Ella

A passion for dance has helped a young Alness woman secure her diamond hoodie with over 1,000 volunteering hours in the bag! Ella Howie, a senior pupil at Alness Academy started volunteering at DNA Dance in the town in 2021, where she spent her time choreographing routines and leading dance sessions for younger children at the club. She has also spent time volunteering with Alness Active Schools and has helped with playschemes in the school holidays. More recently she has been delivering dancing sessions for all the Alness Academy cluster primaries.

Ella has received her platinum hoodie, which as well as achieving 750 volunteering hours, also involved a fundraising event for a charity of her choice. Ella organised a bake sale at the Capstone Centre back in February with all proceeds (£170) going to the Scottish Charity Air Ambulance (SCAA).

Being rural is no barrier for active pupils thanks to High Life Highland

Being an Active Schools Coordinator in the Highlands can be very different here compared with more urban locations across other parts of Scotland. While barriers of all descriptions can exist right across Scotland, in rural areas there are many challenges when delivering sports and physical activity sessions to young people. Transport, access to suitable venues, fewer volunteers, and lower participant numbers all dictate what can and cannot be done. Active schools continue make a fabulous contribution to our young people in the Highlands.

High Life Highland's Active Schools Coordinators, supported by a team of volunteers and [Young Leaders](#), are experts in 'thinking outside of the box'! They go above and beyond to make sure that, however rural the school – pupils have every opportunity to take part in sport and physical activity.

The Active Schools Programme in Highland had a hugely successful year with 48% of the school roll in taking part in the 15,615 sessions delivered through the Programme. The Programme's success is not possible without the support of over 1,200 volunteer deliverers, with Secondary Pupils, Parents and Teachers all contributing to getting more young people active within their local communities. A focus of the Programme remains around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and this has been evident through this period with the establishment of new disability specific and adaptive sessions. This included a new Para-Sport Club in Alness being led by Young Leaders and a series of adaptive sports sessions in the Invergordon Cluster with Goalball, Boccia and New Age Kurling on offer. In the Wick Cluster a trial of disability specific family swim sessions has been a such a success it is now a permanent activity in the area and Fortrose hosted a Para Olympics morning which has led to a regular club being established.

Active Schools was set up by **sportscotland** more than 20 years ago with the mission of making more children more active more often. The Highlands of Scotland covers an area the size of Belgium, with some very remote schools and island communities, so delivering this national initiative was always going to take some creativity. High Life Highland, in partnership with **sportscotland** also delivers funding to talented athletes from across the region through the Highland Athlete Travel Award Scheme (ATAS). This scheme is designed to help performance level athletes living within the Highland area who face considerable travel costs for training and competitions, which are often

located out with the region. Recent recipients include gymnast Miguel Alexander Reis-Forrester from Lochaber who has represented Scotland at national competitions and five times Scottish Women's Surfing Champion Pheobe Strachan from Caithness.

A toe tapping afternoon of traditional music at Inverness Leisure

Around 200 young musicians from across the Highlands entertained folks in the Highland capital with some jigs, reels and marches. The event is High Life Highland's first ever Fiddlers Rally, organised by the charity's instrumental music tuition service and featuring performances from fiddle students as well as the Highland Young Musicians flagship groups – 'Snas, Beira and the High Life Highland Pipe Band.

Highland Schools Wind Ensemble tour to Germany

Basing themselves in Augsburg, Highland Schools Wind Ensemble (a joint group of players/staff from Inverness Schools Wind Band & East Highland Concert Band) were made very welcome by communities around the Augsburg area where they performed in both formal and informal events. Great ambassadors for Highland!

Two further foreign tours

City of Inverness Youth Pipe Band travelled to Malag & Teba in Spain to take part in a local Festival. Skye Youth Pipe Band travelled to Barga, Italy for Festival performances. Both of these groups are led by HLH Instructors and were enthusiastically welcomed in both countries.

Beira

Beira is one of the newest groups in the Highland young Musicians family and were delighted to accept the invitation to support Shooglenifty at the closing gig of Eden Court's Under Canvas Festival. The 12-piece band blew the audience away with their polished performance sets.

Beira & HLH Pipe Band

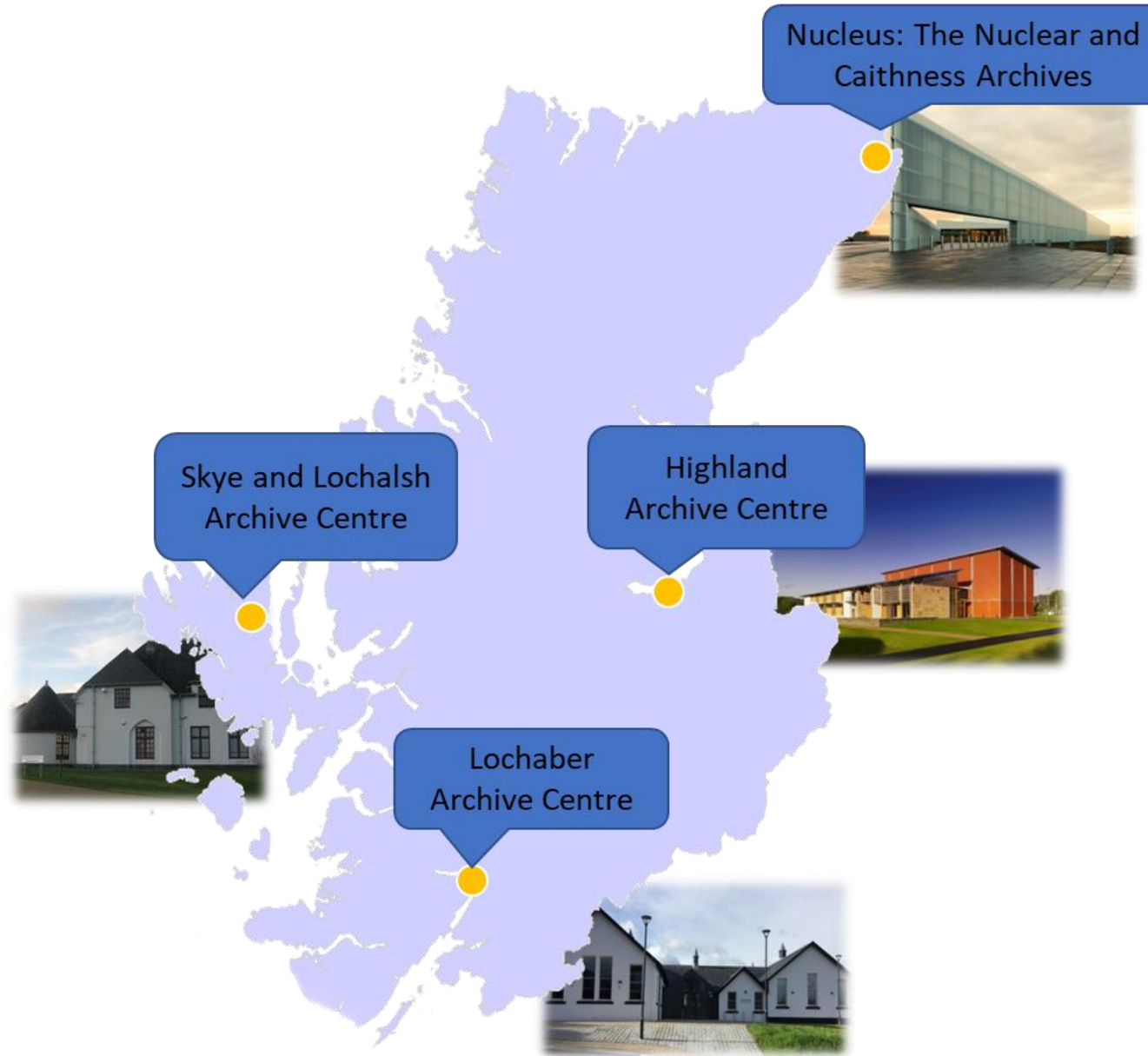
A total of 41 young musicians travelled with HLH staff to Belgium to fulfil an invitation extended by Schots Weekend Festival organisers during the group's first visit in 2024. HLH Pipe Band competed in the official Belgian Pipe Band Championships, gaining a 2nd, a 3rd and also being recipients of the 'People's Choice' Award. Beira were this year invited to open the main stage performances on the Saturday, attracting a capacity crowd who couldn't get enough of the exciting and skilled sets – some of them with the addition of Pipe Band. The following day, both groups were involved independently, with Pipe Band invited to perform at the special sponsors & guests' lunch in adjacent Alden Beisen Castle, then throughout the festival site in the afternoon. Beira gave another stunning performance in the acoustic tent, proving just how good they are. The team is already working on the logistics of a trip in September 2026 – an invitation which couldn't be refused, given the organiser's description of the main stage performances as 'one of the best of the weekend'!

Appendix D.

MAKING LIFE BETTER



High Life Highland Archive Service 2024/25 Annual Review



High Life Highland Archive Service 2024/25 Annual Review

Table of Contents	
Highland Archive Service Summary	4-5
Archive Service Awards	6
From the Archive to the Classroom	7
Global Conversations, Shared Connections	8
Archive Centre Specific Examples	9-16
Am Baile: Highland History and Culture Highlights 2024/25	17-18
Records Management Service Highlights 2024/25	19
Conservation Service Highlights 2024/25	20-21
What our Customers are saying	22

Highland Archive Service Summary

In 2024/2025 the Highland Archive Service welcomed **12,810 in-person visits** and recorded **2.4 million digital engagements** across our social media platforms and the Am Baile heritage website

We delivered:-

- **82 talks** (in-person/online) to 3,783 attendees
- **162 events and exhibitions** to 5,106 attendees
- **75 group visits** to our Archive Centres with 1,143 participants
- **46 archive and family history classes** (in person/online) to 282 participants
- Our Learn with Lorna series broadcast **39 episodes** with 88,395 views



Highland Archive Service Summary

At our Archive Centres we -

- Provided access to **over 13,000** of our original archives for public consultation in our searchrooms.
- Took **256 new collections** into our care.
- **Catalogued 128 collections**, making them easier to discover and explore.
- **Hosted 20 volunteers** who generously gave 1,192 hours of their time to support our work.
- Received **128 new consignments** to our Records Management Service.
- Retrieved **1,639 records** for our colleagues across The Highland Council, supporting their work.



Highland Archive Service Awards 2024/25

Highland Archive Service was named as the UK & Ireland 'Recordkeeping Service of the Year 2024' in the Archive and Records Association (ARA) Excellence Awards, receiving 63% of the public vote.

The service also won the first Highland Council/High Life Highland Partnership Award at the Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards. The Archive and Records Management team works very closely with the Council's Health and Social Care Records Support team responding to requests from individuals who were formerly in care and who are seeking to find out information on their past.



Engagement 2024/25: From the Archive to the Classroom

In 2024/25, we delivered **44 tailored school sessions**, reaching **1,266** pupils, teachers, and parents/carers.

We also welcomed collegiate visits from teaching staff, helping them explore how archives can support classroom learning.

We continue to work closely with schools and home-schooling groups across the area, offering both visits to and from archive centres, and providing content via Google Classroom.

We help bring the Curriculum for Excellence to life by using local history to support learning. Archive materials spark discussion, creativity, and help build empathy and emotional awareness in pupils of all ages.

I enjoyed all of it because I learned lots of new things and it was amazing fun. BEST DAY EVER! ♥*♥



Engagement 2024/25: Global Conversations, Shared Connections

Community Engagement Officer Lorna was a keynote speaker at the national conference for school archivists, sharing examples and experiences from our education engagement work to inspire and inform the work of other archives.

In June 2024 she was part of a round table at the Shared Island Stories conference held at St. Andrews University discussing the influence of colonialism on archive and recordkeeping practices. The conference was attended by over 180 delegates from 47 nations.

In 2024, the ARA section *Archives for Learning and Education*'s focus was on public history. As part of this Lorna spoke to 46 historians and archivists about our educational work with HMP Inverness.



"A good use of time"

Archives and art in prison



The Fife College Learning Centre within H.M.P. Inverness and the Highland Archive Service have worked together since 2018, using unique local archives to enrich topic learning for those in custody.

Learners use archives to study a wide range of subjects, from the Highland connection to the slave trade and the history of mental healthcare, to both World Wars and local stories of historic crime and punishment.

I enjoyed the way things were explained and liked the debates that came out of the talk.

It was a good use of my time. I felt I learnt something.



Highland Archive Centre, Inverness: Talks, Tours and Community Connections

At Highland Archive Centre staff

- Delivered **46 talks** about the collections we care for
- Hosted **32 group visits** and behind the scenes tours
- Ran **41 classes** in family history and archives
- Supported **20 community events...**

...through these, speaking to **4381** people



Highland Archive Centre, Inverness: Family History

Anne Fraser, our Family Historian for 14 years, reduced her working week to three days, creating an opportunity to appoint a new Family Historian for the remaining two. Alasdair MacDonald, a member of the Archives team since 2017, was appointed and began his new role in January 2025.

Throughout the year, talks were delivered to groups including Crown Church Women's Guild, the Royal Naval Association (Inverness Branch), and Nairn U3A.

328 paid enquiries and consultations (in-person and online) were completed, with 924 people visiting the Highland Archive Centre to undertake their own research in the Family History Centre as well as exploring original archives in the searchroom.



Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives: The Wick Society Collection

The Wick Society Collection is vast, comprising over 100 boxes, and continues to grow with ongoing deposits made every year.

The launch of the Wick Society catalogue in 2024 was accompanied by a series of talks, an exhibition, and an online blog all celebrating the myriad stories held within the collection which offers a rich insight into Wick's maritime heritage, including records from the herring industry, harbour operations, and from local boatbuilders.

Social history is strongly represented, with records covering community events, youth groups, and cultural traditions such as the Wick Gala and Herring Queen celebrations.



Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives: Care Home Reminiscence Sessions

As part of a reminiscence programme offered to local care home facilities, Caithness Archive staff, in collaboration with Wick Voices, have been visiting Laurandy Day Care Centre, Riverside Nursing Home, Pulteney House Care Home and Seaview House Care Home in Wick.

The sessions have focused on wide variety of topics including food, shopping and transport, with residents able to engage with reproductions of historical records, photographs and newspapers, as well as oral history recordings.



Lochaber Archive Centre: Community Connections



In October 2024, Lochaber Archivist Rory and Am Baile Co-ordinator Jamie partnered with the Annat Gathering Group to help reconnect former residents and celebrate the village's unique heritage.

A well-attended event at Caol Community Centre brought together people with ties to Annat, where memories and photographs were shared, launching a growing digital photo collection curated by the community.

Rory continues to support the group by recording oral histories, capturing voices and stories that reflect the lived experience of Annat's past residents.

These recordings will form part of the Annat Gathering Group's expanding archive, preserved at Lochaber Archive Centre and made accessible to the public through the Am Baile website.

Lochaber Archive Centre: One People, Two Islands Project

In September 2024 Lochaber Archivist Rory and Community Engagement Officer Lorna welcomed a group of students and lecturers from Scotland and Canada to Lochaber Archive Centre as part of the project '*One People, Two Islands: The historic entanglement of the islands of Eigg, Scotland, and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, 1790-1830*'.

The group, who were on their way to the Isle of Eigg, spent several hours delving into our collections, looking at documents, photographs and books relating to the Small Isles.

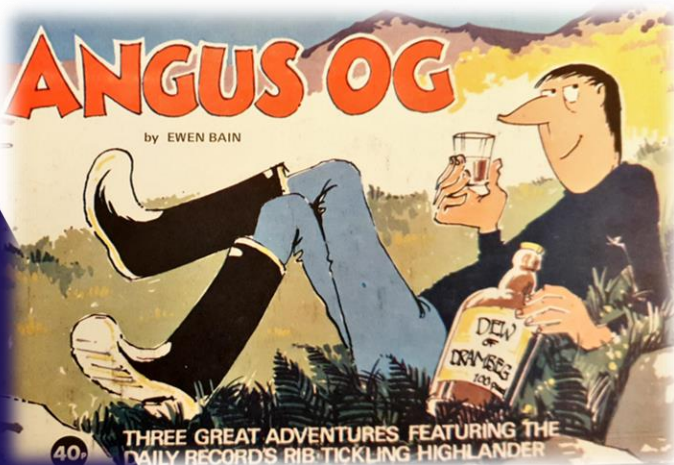


Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre: Angus Og – A National Island Plan Funded Project

In May 2024 Project Officer Katharine and Skye and Lochalsh Archivist Catherine travelled to Glasgow for a special day-long symposium, held in partnership with the University of Glasgow, celebrating the legacy of cartoonist Ewen Bain and his Angus Og cartoons. The event featured speakers including playwright Alan Bissett, Professor Laurence Grove, and Paul Bristow of Magic Torch Comics, and was accessible both in person and online.

The project concluded in November 2024 with a mini symposium and exhibition at IMAG during the Highland & Islands Climate Festival highlighted Bain's environmental themes, showcasing how Angus Og remains a vital lens on Scotland's cultural, political, and environmental issues.

There are even more plans in the pipeline for the Angus Og in 2025/26 – watch this space!



ANGUS OG AND THE CLIMATE CHANGE



ANGUS OG AND THE WILDLIFE



ANGUS OG AND THE LAND OWNERSHIP



Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre: North Talisker Centenary Project



This community-led initiative explores the repopulation of North Talisker after the 1919 Land Settlement Act. We've been working closely with local residents to preserve and share their stories, demonstrating the value of grassroots heritage work and the power of collaboration in making history meaningful and accessible.

We've delivered 'archive ceilidhs', sparking interest in local record-keeping, provided training in oral history gathering and image scanning, alongside pop-up exhibitions and educational talks. Blending original archives with newly recorded oral histories, the project tells a powerful story of land, resilience, and cultural survival.

In 2024/25 we delivered:

- 2 public talks
- 2 external exhibitions
- 1 major in-house exhibition engaging with **1,303** attendees

Further talks and displays are planned in 2025/26.

Am Baile: Highland History and Culture Website 2024/25 Highlights

- **2,961 new pieces of content** were added to the Am Baile database, contributed by individuals, local historians, and community heritage groups, each representing the region's rich and diverse cultural memory.
- **1,473 new pieces of content** published on the website, broadening the range of historical material available on life in the Highlands and Islands.
- **214,277 pages of historical images** were viewed (website) showing the continued public interest in visual heritage and the Gaelic language.
- **1,538,243 social media engagements**, with our popular *Mystery Photo* series sparking lively discussion and drawing on local knowledge to enhance the descriptions of the collections.



Am Baile: Highland History and Culture: Football Memories Project



The Football Memories Project, in association with the Inverness Caledonian Thistle Community Trust, enjoyed a third successful year with record attendances at the monthly reminiscence sessions at the ICT Stadium.

In September 2024, a Football Memories exhibition was held at the Highland Archive Centre as part of Highland Archive Centre's annual Doors Open Day and featured displays of trophies, shirts, photos, and other memorabilia, which was gathered by the project and donated by local clubs.

The project continues with more archive events planned for the coming months.

Records Management: Highlights from 2024/25

The Records Management team assisted Highland Council colleagues during the 2024 UK General Election and several local by-elections, ensuring secure and efficient handling of election-related records.

Feedback from the November 2024 RM customer survey highlighted the team's professionalism and responsiveness:

"The RM Service is excellent. Very efficient and quick to provide Records after a retrieval request, and staff are always friendly, helpful and very knowledgeable."

"They are a pleasure to interact with, communication is always friendly and helpful, the actual service is consistently efficient."

The team supported the Council's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint and promoting environmentally responsible practices by taking part in an e-bike pilot which is being used to transport files to colleagues throughout Inverness.



Conservation Service: Supporting Community Heritage

As part of our ongoing commitment to support community heritage, the Conservation Service shares expertise through hands-on training and advice. In May 2024, Senior Conservator Richard delivered a collections care training day at Garioch Heritage Centre, Inverurie. The event was hosted by the North-East Scotland Heritage Network.

Participants learned about environmental monitoring, pest control and packaging of documents and photographs.

The day also featured a practical cleaning session, followed by assessments of items brought in by attendees, ranging from photographs albums and recipe books to architectural plans and even a framed poster adhered to Perspex glazing.

It was a fantastic, hands-on day of learning and collaboration, highlighting the importance of accessible, expert-led conservation support, empowering heritage groups to care for their collections with confidence and skill and we look forward to delivering more sessions like it!



Conservation Service: The Herbarium of Nairn Museum

In a further example of our ongoing commitment to supporting independent museums, the conservation service undertook work for Nairn Museum on their herbarium collection.

The collection arrived in the suitcases it had been housed in since the early 1900s, with items separated by botanical classification and folded in acidic brown paper folios.

The Museum, knowing that the collection was important for the local area, sourced funding to have the collection rehoused, cleaned, re-mounted (where necessary), and digitised, to safeguard the items for the future.

This project demonstrates the vital role of a dedicated conservation studio in the Highlands, enabling the specialist care and long-term preservation of culturally significant collections close to their communities.



What our customers are saying

Overall, this was a wonderful and splendidly informative session. Every single participant evaluated the event as 'Exceptionally helpful'.

University Student Group Feedback

Its community programming presents contemporary aspects of the challenges and opportunities linked to island life, and the deep knowledge and hospitality allow for intimate engagement with archives and stories from Skye.

University Researcher feedback

Delighted to receive the information requested. Staff have been most helpful.

Customer Enquiry Feedback

Very touched by the exhibition, especially the walking sticks, felt recognised/seen for what I've done with my life and time - thank you.

Exhibition feedback

Just to thank you for an amazing and inspiring presentation, I've had some really good feedback about it. It really brought home to us that you are part of a line of custodians and that connection with history.

Feedback from local community group

I thought a talk would be boring, but it was very interesting and interactive.

Feedback from learner in HMP Inverness

Enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff, made the day exceptional!

Doors Open Day Feedback

Honestly cannot thank you enough for yesterday - the children totally loved the session. Thanks so much!

Schools Out feedback



**MAKING
LIFE
BETTER**

Thank you Mòran taining

www.highlifehighland.com



@HLHsocial