

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CIA/37/25

# The Highland Council

Committee: **City of Inverness Area**

Date: **17 November 2025**

Report Title: **Yearly Annual Report on Inverness City Centre Business Improvement District**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - Place**

## **1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

1.1 This report provides a summary of the activities and proposed activities of the Inverness BID Ltd, operating as Inverness City Centre Business Improvement District (BID), for the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

## **2 Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** that a Members Briefing was held on 9 October 2025 with BID representatives;
- ii. **Consider, scrutinise** and **agree** to endorse the work detailed in this report; and
- iii. **Note** the ongoing development of partnership working in the key areas identified.

## **3 Implications**

3.1 **Resource** - Since 1 April 2017 the costs of collecting the BID Levy by the Highland Council have been charged to BID from its levy income (£17,905 +VAT for the reporting period which covers all Highland Council costs and equates to 10% of net BID income). Levy Collection and enforcement is administered by the Council as part of the collection arrangements for Non-Domestic Rates and in line with the applicable legislation and the Operation Agreement in place between the parties.

There are no additional resource implications other than those detailed in the report.

3.2 **Legal** - The roles and responsibilities of the Council and BID are managed in accordance with the Planning Etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Business Improvement Districts (Scotland) Regulations.

3.3 **Risk** - No implications.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - Inverness BID are responsible for ensuring that all health and safety requirements in relation to the delivery of projects are adhered to.

3.5 **Gaelic** - No implications.

## **4 Impacts**

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is an update report on the work of an independent, external organisation and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

## **5 Background**

5.1 A Business Improvement District (BID) is a private sector led initiative where businesses and property owners within the clearly defined geographical city/town centre area, work together and invest through payment of a BID levy to collectively identify, invest and deliver projects and activities over an agreed period that will have benefit to the trading economy, wider community and result in enhancements to the area.

5.2 Inverness BID is an independent, not-for-profit company limited by guarantee which is entirely separate from the Council. BID is run by a Board of 15 Directors, appointed via co-opt or drawn from Members of the Company in the Retail, Hospitality, Office and Property Owner sectors located within the City Centre.

The BID's current and most recent Business Plan for 2023-28 (including map of the defined area) which the organisation is working to deliver is copied below:-

### [Inverness BID Business Plan Inside Pages](#)

Please note the listed BID board directors have now changed following this publication in 2023 and an up-to-date list of BID board directors is available via Companies House and on the BID website.

5.3 Inverness BID started operations in April 2008 and was one of the first Business Improvement Districts in Scotland. The BID model acts as the primary mechanism for the business community to work collectively and collaboratively within a budget that can be used flexibly to promote overall business and local economic growth as well as to provide wider community benefit.

5.4 BIDs are supported by the Scottish Government as part of its economic strategy and are supported by Scotland Towns Partnership as the Government's agent for BIDs. Scotland's Improvement Districts further provides guidance and support to all BIDs nationally.

5.5 Inverness BID was successful in their renewal ballot held by Highland Council on 23 March 2023, and the organisation elected to serve a fourth successive 5-year term to run from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2028. The renewal ballot confirmed the strong support of the City Centre business with over 75% of votes cast being in favour of the City Centre BID continuing for the noted 5-year term.

5.6 Part of BID's remit as agreed by BID levy payers and as set out in its Business Plan 2023-28, is to deliver a series of projects and services (subject to funding) which improve "the trading environment of Inverness City Centre to the benefit of the business levy payers, their customers, clients and visitors". BID also has a key role in "promoting the value of the City Centre" and providing advocacy and a "strong and representative voice for businesses."

5.7 The BID Business Plan 2023-28 was codesigned and collaboratively developed following consultation with the City Centre businesses via 1-1s, focus groups and surveys.

5.8 The BID Business Plan for 2023-28 was supported and approved by Council at the meeting held on 8 December 2022.

5.9 The current BID Business Plan, now in Year 3 of execution, has four themes to help deliver:-

- a welcoming and attractive City Centre;
- a safe and connected City Centre;
- an enhanced and represented City Centre; and
- promoting, marketing and celebrating the City Centre

## **6 Benefits and Partnership Working**

6.1 Governance of BID rests with its Board of Directors who are answerable and accountable to the BID levy payers. The BID AGM is held each Autumn with the next Annual General Meeting scheduled for 27 November 2025.

6.2 The Leader of the City is the designated and appointed Highland Council representative of the BID Board of Directors and attends BID Board Meetings, which are held approximately every 6-8 weeks. The primary links to the Council are through the Leader of the City and the Senior Community Development Manager, Inverness and South.

6.3 There is a focus on ways our organisations can work together in partnership to promote and support economic development and vibrancy, which is at the heart of the objectives of the Council's Programmes and BID Business Plan, and which also help to deliver elements of the Inverness City Strategy.

## 7 Partnership Projects

7.1 BID continues to work with the Council on several joint initiatives and projects (see below) that add value to, and which are additional to what is provided by the Public Sector in an effort to further enhance and develop the defined City Centre area. This report provides an update on the projects undertaken during 2025-26.

### 7.2 Coach Friendly Project

In 2015 at the request of the Highland Council, BID took on the role of operating the Coach Friendly project by providing Coach and Visitor Ambassadors (between the months of April and October) to welcome coach visitors on tours organised by both British and non-British coach companies as well as passengers from cruise liners visiting via Invergordon and Ullapool.

Coach and Visitor Ambassadors also act as a liaison with tour companies, guides, drivers, and local residents and businesses via the Ardross Street facility. Coach and Visitor Ambassadors further assist with coach and contingency arrangements when there is an event at the Northern Meeting Park.

For the 2025 season, the BID Coach and Visitor Ambassadors welcomed a total of 3,412 coaches equating to approximately 155,000 visitors being assisted and issued with the BID designed Inverness City Centre Map and Visitor Guide.

In comparison to 2024, this marked a decrease of 11% in number of coaches visiting with the majority being attributed to Viking Cruises opting to dock in Aberdeen for commercial reasons.

Taking account of this decrease, it is noted that visiting coach numbers still equated to a 22% increase on 2023 levels indicating aside from one cruise liner company, that Inverness remains a key destination of choice.

Visit Scotland estimate that average day coach passenger spend is £55-60 per person making estimated direct economic gain to the local economy to be between £8.5-£9.3m.

Following the City of Inverness being awarded “Coach Friendly Status” by the Confederation of Passenger Transport in 2024, BID designed and issued a new Coach Drivers’ Guide for the 2025 season and added key driver and tour guide information to the Love Inverness App to further enhance visitor experience and driver engagement.

BID also piloted a youth employability pathway, providing three local secondary school pupils with structured paid work experience as “Trainee Coach and Visitor Ambassadors”. The pilot proved extremely positive for both participants and delivery partners and, subject to future funding, it is planned to develop this community benefit initiative.

The reopening of the Northern Meeting Park created a welcome opportunity to reconnect coach servicing with a revitalised civic asset. While there was an early expectation that the Coach and Visitor Ambassadors would be able to operate from a small base at the NMP, which could further have assisted with emergency or medical situations as arise from time to time, this has not been accommodated but it is hoped subject to funding, that in 2026 coach passengers will still be able to access to on-site Northern Meeting Park, WC facilities.

7.3

### **Summer Floral Displays**

On its creation in 2008, BID agreed to take over responsibility from the Inverness Project for coordinating the floral displays in the City Centre and wider city. This role involves a partnership with HLH and a dedicated sub-contractor team, to work in partnership to coordinate the procurement, planting, installation of the brackets and displays, remedial works as required, regular watering, rust proof painting and removal and disposal of the units at the end of season.

In 2025 a total of 612 floral displays were hosted and provided in the City Centre and surrounding areas. Inverness Common Good Fund was the main funder of the displays with an additional financial contribution via match funding from BID in 2025.

BID's evaluation gathered feedback from both local residents and visitors, with the floral displays receiving very high approval ratings. Respondents consistently noted that the arrangements enhanced the city's vibrancy and attractiveness and contributed positively to place-making and overall visitor experience within the Highland Capital.

The wider community value of the floral project was positively demonstrated during the elected members' tour in May 2025, where its contribution to place-making, sustainability, wellbeing and civic pride was clearly demonstrated.

Since then, BID has continued to work collaboratively with Highland Council and delivery partners to develop a refreshed floral programme for 2026 which, subject to funding will be responsive to the current pressures on the Inverness Common Good Fund, while ensuring that the strongest elements of community benefit are retained.

7.4

### **Amenity – Gull Management**

In the original Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) report to this Committee in 2012, it was recognised that there was a need for a long-term programme to control the growth of our urban gull population which, without intervention, was projected to increase at a rate of 7% per annum.

The project run by BID up to 2023 included, as a last measure, a marked activity to remove eggs and nests (where possible) during the gull breeding season from premises in Inverness City Centre and the adjacent areas under NatureScot license. For the period 2012-2023, BID coordinated the removal of 18,344 nests and 7,780 eggs.

The 2023 Gull Programme facilitated applications via NatureScot for licenses at 99 premises following the completion of the annual survey on 27 April 2023, with 6 visits to the licensed premises from 30 April 2023 undertaken for controlled/licensed egg and nest removal. One requested license was refused.

Following a change in the guidance for license approval by NatureScot published in February 2024, the 2024 egg and nest removal programme encountered challenges, including due to a new requirement to apply for a license only once nests/eggs were in situ. Gestation can be as low as 21 days, with it taking, at that time up to 28 days for a license decision to remove nests and eggs as a last resort in the hierarchy of interventions.

In addition, NatureScot applied stricter criteria in relation to the grounds for granting an application, meaning that of the 90 licenses applied for in 2024, initially only 8 were granted. Following discourse with NatureScot involving BID, Highland Council and other North BIDs on 24 May 2024, progress for completion of the programme was agreed however due to delay and issues only 178 eggs could be removed equating to less than 10% of 2023 levels.

From May 2024 to date, BID, Highland Council and Nairn BID have attended a Gull Working Group with NatureScot. In November 2024 Members were given a presentation by NatureScot which proposed that Inverness adopt a 'plan-based approach' to gull management.

In February 2025, members opted to suspend standing orders to support a co-developed and comprehensive gull management plan to be carried out by BID in 2025.

BID delivered the programme agreed across two reporting periods which included a dedicated Do NOT Feed campaign, updated guidance and 1-1 support for programme participants, removal of old nests and nesting materials, increased deterrents (and rotation, trial of 3 types), intensive AVIX lasering programme, hawking using a falcon, human disturbance, support for businesses installing netting or spikes, and waste management education with Highland Council.

Please also see summary below:-

		JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
GULL ACTIVITY GUIDE <i>low-med-high</i>		Pair up	Pair up	Nest building. Eggs laid	Nest building. Eggs laid. Eggs hatch	Eggs laid. Eggs hatch. Chicks in nests	Eggs hatch. Chicks in nests	Chicks in nests. Fledging chicks	Fledging chicks				
METHODS OF GULL CONTROL	Install deterrents opportunity	✓	✓	✓	if no nests present	LICENCE COMPULSORY FOR ANY MANAGEMENT			if no nests present	if no nests present	✓	✓	✓
	Laser work	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Fly bird of prey (Hawking)		✓	✓	if no nests present				if no nests present				
	Old nesting material removal	✓	✓	✓	only if inactive				only if inactive	only if inactive	✓	✓	✓

In May 2025, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity directed that Inverness be issued with an area-based licences for egg and nest removal, where it could be demonstrated that all other satisfactory measures had been exhausted. A total of 121 nests and 230 eggs were removed over three scheduled visits in May 2025.

In 2025, BID received positive feedback from several businesses, noting a noticeable reduction in gull activity this season which is likely attributable to the extensive additional preventative measures supported by Members meaning that whilst some egg and nest removal, as an activity of last resort will be required, that the funded activities did reduce conflict and impact. This finding was supported via the Gull Incident Reporting Portal which recorded less than half of the incidents reported in 2025.

Despite these positive developments, unfortunately displacement to and an increase in negative impact in other adjacent areas was also reported. The additional chicks from 2023 to date have also yet to enter the breeding population and so without sustained control and management, impacts are anticipated to increase in subsequent years.

To quantify baseline of breeding pairs, Highland Council and NatureScot jointly commissioned a survey to be carried out in May 2025. This was mid-way through the BID programme and so numbers recorded as is also the case in other urban areas may be an underestimate including due to one third of breeding pairs in rural settings (figure not known for urban environments) opting not to breed in any given year.

BID activity on gulls has in 2025 therefore focused on an expanded operational programme being delivered, but also extensive strategic representations with others, which led to the national Gull Summit being hosted on 23 September 2025 in Inverness.

Both BID and Highland Council have been nationally driving the issues and at the time of writing Highland Council have agreed to work with NatureScot, BID and partners to develop and deliver, subject to funding an innovative Gull Management Programme in 2026.

7.5

### **Inverness Community Safety Partnership (ICP) Safe Inverness**

BID continues to be a key delivery partner for community safety in the City Centre and plays a leading role in co-ordinating front-line responses to anti-social behaviour, business crime, and vulnerability issues. BID continue to deliver an element of City Centre management throughout its operations including in respect to Community Safety.

Through Safe Inverness and the Inverness Community Safety Partnership, under the strategy set by the Inverness Community Partnership, BID now delivers both strategic input and practical, on-the-ground activity that directly supports Highland Council, Police Scotland and partner agencies.

In 2025, BID has:-

- Chaired the City Centre Task Group monthly, bringing partners together to share intelligence, agree priorities and respond quickly to emerging safety issues ensuring real-time escalation routes for problem solving.
- Updated and maintained the Safe Inverness data recording system, improving consistency of reporting and trend analysis.
- Delivered key awareness campaigns, including the “See It, Report It” initiative and Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week, significantly increasing public and business reporting confidence.

- Co-ordinated the BID Seasonal Security Task Team, improving patrols, prevention and early intervention at peak times.
- Led and coordinated the 2025 Street Scene pilot, as part of the wider Operation Youth Respect, strengthening positive engagement with young people and supporting relationship-based deterrence rather than enforcement alone.
- Continued the management and servicing of the five-lifesaving city-centre public defibrillators, originally introduced through a BID, Council and business partnership.
- Chairs the Inverness Retail Security Group and provides secretariat and support to Pubwatch (42 premises) including management of the banned persons register.
- Undertakes the Best Bar None accreditation assessments with the awards ceremony due to take place in January 2026 and represents businesses at the Highlands and Islands Local Resilience Partnership.
- Coordination and provision of the Shop Safe Radio system ensuring link up between BID, businesses and Police Scotland.
- Designed the pending NPFH campaign in collaboration with Highland Council and Police Scotland.

By acting as the on-the-ground delivery organisation for a wide range of safety interventions, BID significantly reduces the resource burden on Highland Council, Police Scotland and other statutory partners, while ensuring a faster, more agile response to business and community concerns.

## 7.6 **Safety – Operation Respect and BID Security Task Team**

Jointly funded by Inverness Common Good Fund and BID – the BID managed security Task Team has provided a service which has been recognised by the businesses and Police Scotland as providing a significant contribution to reducing crime and anti-social behavior in the City Centre. Full Operation Respect 2024-5 report separately available.

## 8 **Conclusion**

8.1 The relationship between BID and the Council has developed into an important, constructive, well-established partnership with a strong mutual understanding of respective roles and priorities. To support continued effective collaboration, the existing communications protocol is scheduled for refresh, ensuring, and consistent with its original intent, that BID receives timely advance notice of matters that may impact the City Centre.

8.2 BID has successfully secured Inverness Common Good Fund support for a range of projects, enabling stronger leverage of the contributions made by City Centre businesses. This has ensured that BID funds are used more effectively, with each initiative structured to deliver co-investment and match funding, creating mutual benefit for both the business community and the wider city.

8.3 The table below provides a summary of the projects and activities funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund in the reported financial year, with decisions to be taken for additional Smart Scape activity and Operation Respect (Winter):-

<b>Project or Activity 2025-2026</b>	<b>ICGF Grant Award</b>
<b>SAFE Inverness Project</b>	£10,750
<b>City Centre Florals</b>	£54,272
<b>Wider City Florals</b>	£22,872
<b>Coach &amp; Visitor Project</b>	£23,847
<b>Gull Management</b>	£27,050
<b>Operation Respect Q1-2</b>	£14,804
<b>Task Team Pilot</b>	£3,756
<b>Street Scene</b>	£4,970
<b>Total</b>	£162,321

8.4 Inverness Common Good Fund awarded total sums for floral arrangements at £54,272 for the City Centre and £22,872 for the wider city, £77,144 in total. Of the sums received, £61,405 was paid to Highlife Highland and £15,431 to the sub-contractor during 2025, £76,836 or 99.6% of the available budget with the BID providing significant contribution in respect of coordination, invoicing and management of the project.

8.5 It is noted that the Non-Domestic Rates revaluation effective from 2023–2026 has significantly reduced BID core levy income, with a further reduction anticipated from April 2026 when the 2026-2029 NDR values are applied. This reduction in conjunction with increase in levy collection rate, levy collection percentage being at its lowest and other factors such as no funding now being received to support the Inverness City Centre Gift card has impacted on the amount of match funding the organisation can and will be able to offer going forward.

8.6 The BID Team continues to deliver projects and activities to an exceptionally high standard, delivered on time, within budget, and with strong operational effectiveness.

8.7 Important Inverness Common Good Fund assets, including the Victorian Market and the Inverness Town House, sit within the BID area and benefit directly from BID's support and place-management activity, providing a further tangible return to the Fund and the City.

8.8 The relationship between businesses and the public sector is vital to the ongoing development of the City of Inverness. BID represents and advocates in respect of a number of issues on behalf of the 750+ businesses (comprising property owners and business occupiers) in the City Centre.

8.9 Being a body incorporated under statute, Inverness BID Ltd is thus a significant and valued partner of the Council including to ensure that Inverness achieves a high profile as “the City in the Highlands” and enabling the private sector to add value to the activities of the public agencies.

8.10 Although BID's focus is on the City Centre primarily, the benefits of working with BID pro-actively, progressively, constructively and in good faith leads to marked benefit also to the wider city and regional areas.

8.11 Partnership working with Inverness BID has delivered projects that have had a positive impact on the City Centre, including promoting footfall and vibrancy.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 24 October 2025

Author: David Haas, Senior Community Development Manager  
City of Inverness & South

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None