

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	5
Report No	SR/26/25

Committee: Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee

Date: 01 December 2025

Report Title: High Life Highland Service Delivery

Report By: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the committee with information on High Life Highland (HLH) service delivery in the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee area.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to comment on and note the report.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - there are no new resource implications for The Highland Council (THC) arising from this report.
- 3.2 Legal - there are no new legal implications for THC arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 3.3 Risk - there are no new risks arising from this report.
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) There are no new health and safety implications for THC arising from this report.
- 3.5 Gaelic – All HLH services promote Gaelic language and culture:

The archive centre supports Gaelic language and culture by preserving and providing access to historical documents, recordings, and materials relating to the region's Gaelic heritage at Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre. Through community projects, educational and exhibition programmes, and collaborations, the centre actively promotes the use and understanding of Gaelic, fostering cultural continuity and engagement across generations. The centre is deeply embedded in the local community, offering a range of engagement activities for school pupils, community groups, researchers, artists, and musicians. Regular exhibitions, talks, and events help strengthen community identity and promote cultural heritage, ensuring the collections remain accessible and relevant.

In terms of Leisure, The Fingal Centre facilitates weekly Gaelic language lessons for both children and adults and hosts Fèis an Earraich for a week every summer holidays already booked for 2026. In addition the team has the ability to deliver swim lessons in Gaelic should the demand be there.

The libraries support Gaelic language and culture by providing access to a wide range of Gaelic and local history related publications, at Broadford and Portree Libraries. These resources are also available on the Skye and Lochalsh Mobile Library, serving the most remote of communities on the island. 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 & 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 HLH Instructors lead a number of extra-curricular groups and activities, including the highly successful Skye Youth Pipe Band. As an enhancement to the direct HLH music tuition, there is long-established additional provision to what we are able to deliver in Portree High School where an arrangement with local private teachers allows wider access to music skills including piano & woodwind – this has worked successfully for many years with the support of the school. In all of the area's Primary schools, the Youth Music Initiative delivers sessions in a trad music project in which is delivered by partner organisation Feisen nan Gaidheal. A growing number of young people from the area are participating in: HLH Pipe Band; Beira; 'Snas.

The Sport Development Team at High Life Highland (HLH) 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, HLH's Sports Team, in collaboration with the Highland Council Gaelic Team, hosted a Sports Fèis for over 200 local school children across Skye and Lochalsh. The two-day event, led by HLH's Active Schools Coordinators and supported by Young Leaders, offered a wide range of activities – including football, shinty, multi-sports, and traditional games – all delivered entirely through Gaelic. Pupils from P1 to P4 took part, highlighting the growing enthusiasm for Gaelic in sport at the primary level. This event builds on HLH's broader Gaelic development work, particularly the Choose to Lead award, which is now being delivered through the medium of Gaelic to secondary pupils across the Highlands. This year's programme will be hosted in Staffin, further strengthening Gaelic provision in the region. In a national first, the initiative is expanding to include Junior Leaders training in Gaelic for primary-aged pupils, ensuring a sustainable leadership pathway from a young age. To complement leadership development, holiday sports camps delivered in Gaelic are also being developed and will, in time, become regular extra-curricular sessions. These camps will be facilitated by young leaders who have progressed through the Gaelic Choose to Lead programme, establishing a sustainable pathway for Gaelic-speaking youth to grow as leaders and role models within their communities. Notably, HLH has seen pupils from Gaelic education in Skye advance into further education and return as paid coaches – a testament to the long-term impact and value of this integrated approach to sport development.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 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. This is an information report on High Life Highland services so an impact assessment by the Council is not required.

5. Background

- 5.1 HLH's purpose is Making Life Better. It was established as a charity by THC in October 2011 to deliver the Council's Public Services Obligations (PSOs) in: archives; community venues and engagement; countryside rangers; leisure; libraries; museums and galleries; music tuition and sports development. THC has a Contract in place to ensure that HLH delivers the specified Council PSOs.
- 5.2 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. through non-domestic rates relief.
- 5.3 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. Customer Numbers

- 6.1 The services which THC has contracted HLH to deliver on its behalf in Skye and Raasay are listed in the table below along with customer numbers for the two most recent full financial years. Customer numbers increased year on year by 23%.

		2023/24	2024/25	Change	% Change
Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre	In-Person	3,954	3,737	-217	-5%
	Digital	142,924	216,809	73,885	51%
Fingal Centre, Portree		41,830	41,383	-447	-1%
Broadford Library		2,465	2,889	424	17%
Portree Library		148,748	160,298	11,550	8%
Music Tuition - Portree ASG		6,723	7,760	1,037	15%
Sports Development - Portree ASG		9,798	6,623	-3,175	-32%
Total		357,151	439,867	82,716	23%

- 6.2 The services which saw reductions between the two years have been listed below along with explanations and corrective action.
- 6.3 The Fingal centre performance held steady between 2023/24 and 2024/25. Recent recruitment of new staff is expected to support the work of the team increase footfall and membership over the next few months.
- 6.4 Absence resulted in a temporary reduction in programme delivery and limited data submission during the national reporting window to sportscotland. This was partially mitigated by others in the team supporting the volunteer deliverers. Operational capacity has now been restored and as a result an improvement in engagement levels is expected.
- 6.5 Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre - the 5% decrease in in-person engagements can be attributed to the fact that in-person activities were boosted for the 2 years prior to November 2024 by a specific project post engaging communities with the Angus Ogg collection (including a post funded by the Scottish Government's National Island Plan). The 51% increase in digital engagement is primarily attributed to a spike in Facebook activity during August and September last year, with two very successful posts featuring digital content. Aside from these short-term fluctuations, customer engagement and in-person visits have been steady with an overall positive trend.

7. Service Developments and Highlights

- 7.1 Recent service delivery highlights and a selection of these have been included in **Appendix A**.

8. Future Developments

- 8.1 This section provides a summary of future service developments which were under development.
- 8.2 The archives team is undertaking a preservation assessment of its archival holdings, aiming to enhance collections care as part of the ongoing service review aligned with Archives Accreditation standards. In addition, the Skye and Lochalsh archive collections are being incorporated into a consortium of Scottish cultural institutions proposing Gaelic Art as the central theme for a cataloguing grant. This initiative seeks to uncover and share uncatalogued materials connected to Gaelic-speaking communities. If successful, the project will support the preservation and promotion of Gaelic heritage through diverse artistic expressions across multiple institutions.
- 8.3 The leisure service is looking forward to developing the overall program within the Fingal Centre with more classes to suit the needs of the less well served, such as wellbeing for the elderly, infirm and special needs groups. It is working with the NHS to offer a Physio Referral 7 Session Pass. This allows GPs to refer patients to the centre for supervised exercise to promote recovery after surgery and or injury.
- 8.4 The music tuition service is currently working at full capacity but where demand is identified and an Instructor can create an opportunity to make a positive change to their weekly timetable, these opportunities are investigated and implemented where possible. This also applies to opportunities to reduce travel time/costs and increase/rationalise teaching time.

- 8.5 A key priority for the libraries team will be to increase customer engagement within the local area. Working closely with school pupils and the wider community it aims to consult on new book selections for Gaelic related material. The libraries team will also seek views on any additions to the activity and events programmes.
- 8.6 The developments for sport development on Skye in the 2025–26 term will be shaped by four key strands: Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), Community & Collaboration, Partnerships & Transitions, and Progression. These strands will guide efforts to enhance participation, strengthen local networks, and create sustainable opportunities for young people and the wider community.
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) - A new survey will be launched across Portree High School and its associated cluster primaries to identify barriers to participation and gather pupil voice on preferred activities. This insight will inform the development of inclusive programmes tailored to each school and extended into the wider community.
 - In alignment with sportscotland's Active Girls Week (6–12 October), a targeted initiative will be delivered to increase girls' participation in sport. Activities will include football, shinty, Zumba, teen fitness circuits, and cheerleading for S1–S6 pupils. The programme aims to spark interest and establish ongoing opportunities where there is identified demand.
 - Community & Collaboration – the team will work in partnership with the HLH Community Sport Hub Officer to establish a Skye & Lochalsh Sport and Physical Activity Network Group. This network will bring together key stakeholders including community clubs, PE staff, leisure centre teams, coaches, Active Schools Coordinators, and youth development workers. The group will collaborate to share resources, align efforts, and drive participation across the region.
 - Partnerships & Transition - Leadership development will be a priority, with plans to collaborate with Portree High School and Youth Work teams to deliver assemblies promoting High Life Highland Leadership Awards, Saltire Awards, and Youth Achievement Awards. These sessions will raise awareness of pathways for young people to engage in volunteering and leadership roles within sport and physical activity.
 - Progression - In partnership with the HLH Coaching & Volunteering Officer, a coaching calendar will be developed for senior pupils and parent volunteers. This will include a dedicated Coaching Week, offering free access to national qualifications in at least three sports. Proposed courses include hockey, football, shinty, basketball, and netball. This initiative will build capacity to support extracurricular and community-based activities.

Designation: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Date: Draft 9 October 2025

Author: Steve Walsh

Appendices: Appendix A – Recent service highlights

Appendix A

Recent Service Highlights

Skye & Raasay

To provide some detail of service developments over the past year, this appendix provides summaries of media releases with links to them on the High Life Highland web site.

[Exhibition on Gaelic song traditions arrives in Portree](#)

An exhibition highlighting Gaelic sacred song traditions in the Hebrides took place at High Life Highland's archive centre in Portree. Seinn Spioradail is on its third leg of a two-year tour of the islands and is available to view in the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre until November before moving on to Lionacleit (Benbecula) and Ness (Lewis). Visitors can learn more about sacred song traditions of the region and explore sound recordings, film, objects, and a digital archive, soundmap and interactive virtual tour.

[Highland Archive Service are winners in the 2024 ARA Excellence Awards](#)

High Life Highland's Archive Service celebrated after winning a prestigious UK award. They triumphed in Record Keeping Service of the Year category at the Archive and Records Association (ARA) Excellence Awards, the only Scottish service to feature. 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 operating across the region: 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.

[West is best for women and girls in sport as Active Schools marks 20 years](#)

During Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Week High Life Highland revealed that female participation in sports and physical activity within its Active Schools programme is higher in the west compared with other areas. Sarah Ross, a long serving Active Schools Coordinator, based on Skye, featured in this article which explored both the challenges and opportunities.

[Angus Og Goes to Inverness!](#)

He's known to visit Glasgow but now Angus Og is in the Highland capital for a special mini symposium at the Inverness Museum and Art Gallery. Angus Og was created by Skye-inspired cartoonist Ewen Bain, and his adventures were based in the fabled Isle of Drambeg in the Utter Hebrides and were published in the Daily Record from 1960 through to 1989. There were 158 Angus Og adventures, and the collection of original strips has been donated to the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre by Ewen's daughter Rhona Flin.

[Next week is Book Week Scotland and High Life Highland libraries have a bumper issue of activities for literary lovers of all ages!](#)

This annual celebration of books and reading took place across the country and encourages people of all ages and walks of life to come together to share the joy of reading. Now in its 13th year, Book Week Scotland is an opportunity to celebrate local authors, poets, playwrights, storytellers and illustrators. Fort William Library is hosting J.D. Kirk, author of the DCI Jack Logan series while S.G. Maclean, author of 'Bookseller of Inverness' will be at Lochcarron Library. Both Plockton and Portree libraries will host special events for children.

[Fèis Spòrs a' còrdadh glan ri sgoilearan bun-sgoile / Sports Fèis is a big hit with primary pupils](#)

People normally associate a Fèis with music but in Portree and Plockton, more than 200 local school children enjoyed a Sports Fèis to celebrate World Gaelic Week! High Life Highland's Active Schools Coordinators in Skye and Lochalsh – with help from Young Leaders – hosted two days of activities and games all delivered in Gaelic. (This press release was published in both Gaelic and English).

[New libraries on wheels will be ready to roll this summer](#)

The Highland Council and High Life Highland announced the purchase of two new mobile libraries. Mobile libraries are a crucial part of community life throughout the Highlands, but an aging fleet has made mobile library provision challenging for some time. The local authority has spent £332,000 on purchasing two new vehicles – including conversion works and signwriting, etc – which will be deployed in the north and west where a temporary delivery service has been in operation.

[Portree flute player wins Highland Young Musician of the Year](#)

Megan Campbell, 15, from Portree High School, was awarded the coveted title of Highland Young Musician of the Year 2025 at the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness.

[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 – demonstrated at the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre, Portree. The work is featured as part of Buain, a Creative Scotland initiative bringing together Gaelic-speaking artists and workers from across disciplines to connect and collaborate.

[Highland schools demonstrate their spirit for sport with awards](#)

Highland schools are showing their passion for sport and physical activity, with over 60 of them now proud recipients of 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! Many of the Highland's most rural schools are 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.

[High Life Highland libraries – not just for bookworms!](#)

High Life Highland carried out a survey earlier in the year of non library users to establish why some people don't use their local library, with results showing a variety of reasons from people simply not having time to visit a library, lack of parking in some cases and people also preferring to buy their own books. High Life Highland operates 44 public libraries across the Highland region – some are stand alone libraries while others are operating as part of a community centre or school. They attract almost two million visits per year, with Portree and Dingwall libraries enjoying the largest footfall.

[Digital drive ensures Highland Archive Service remains top of its game](#)

The Highland Archive Service is no stranger to recognition for its dedication to conserving the rich history of the Highlands and they received the news that they continue to meet the high standards required by the national governing body for archives. 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 operating across the

region: 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 (Nucleus).

[Being rural is no barrier for active pupils thanks to High Life Highland](#)

Various sports clubs and extracurricular activities are in operation, providing young people with a variety of ways to get active. This means a busy period for High Life Highland's Active Schools Coordinators as they juggle activity schedules and volunteers to ensure there's opportunities for everyone. Teaming up with other High Life Highland services or independent sports clubs can help with joint events with the likes of the sailing club on Skye for pupils in the Portree High School cluster and Lochaber Rugby Club have been instrumental in helping deliver school tournaments in the area. There is also regular cross service working with the likes of the High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service and local libraries.