

Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee – 04 February 2026

Service Achievements

1. Third Sector Service Achievement: Hubs United Group (HUG) (*Unregistered Social Care Preventative Services*)

The Health and Wellbeing Hubs in Sutherland and Dunbeath came together in 2023 to form the Hubs United Group with the aim of working together for both organisational and community benefit.

Hubs United Group (HUG) has continued to demonstrate the strength and value of collaborative working between small, place-based third sector organisations operating in remote and rural Highland communities.

Through HUG, member organisations have developed a strong collective voice, enabling them to engage more effectively with statutory partners and contribute meaningfully to strategic discussions relating to health, social care and wellbeing. This collaborative approach has helped ensure that the needs and realities of remote communities are better understood and reflected in local and regional planning.

A key achievement has been the sharing of operational knowledge, governance support and strategic insight across the network. By working together, the individual hubs have strengthened organisational resilience, improved governance practice, and supported more sustainable service delivery models at a time of increasing pressure on the third sector.

HUG is underpinned by honesty, transparency and trust, creating a supportive environment where organisations can openly share challenges and solutions. This has enabled joint problem-solving, peer support and forward-looking strategic planning, including future service modelling that responds to changing community needs.

It is this collaborative forward thinking that has led to the development of the HUG Development Plan. This places the Hubs as key to the change programme as the anchor organisations for the delivery of the Highland Care Model in Sutherland and progressively for Caithness. The members of HUG, like many other community organisations, are facing critical financial challenges, with the lack of multi-year contracts creating organisational risk. The future is wider partnership with NHS Highland and Highland Council, with links to key statutory service delivery, to secure the essential core funding that enables the Hubs to even further enhance community benefit through external funding sources.

Overall, HUG demonstrates how partnership working within the third sector – alongside engagement with statutory partners – can enhance service quality, strengthen local organisations and maximise collective impact for communities across Highland.

2. Heather Allan

You may recall Heather Allan, from our last committee, who achieved the remarkable feat of the fifty year milestone of her nursing career. Heather continues to embody the very best of the profession and we have just heard that she has been shortlisted by the Royal College of Nursing for the 2026 Nurse of the Year Award for Scotland. Being shortlisted for this national award is an achievement in itself and a fitting tribute to Heather's decades of service, leadership and heartfelt commitment to improving the lives of children, young people and families across Highland. We will know more in April 2026 and wish Heather the very best of luck.

3. Service Achievements - Hubs United Group (HUG) – Unregistered Social Care Preventative Services

Highland Sober Collective & SOBER-NESS Festival

Highland Well-Ness Collective has successfully delivered Phase One of the *Highland Sober Collective*, a preventative, community-led programme supporting sober social connection, wellbeing, and mental health across the Highlands.

Funded through the Local Improvement Fund, the pilot programme delivered six structured creative, reflective, and outdoor workshops between April and August 2025. All 20 places were fully booked, with a waiting list, and a committed core group emerged to co-design the next phase of activity. Participants reported increased confidence, wellbeing, and social connection, alongside reduced isolation.

A key outcome of this work is phase 2, the development of *SOBER-NESS*, a day-into-night sober social festival taking place in Inverness. The event has already seen over 100 bookings across workshops, talks, and social activities, demonstrating strong public appetite for inclusive, sober social spaces. The festival brings together extensive partnership working with third sector organisations, creative practitioners, wellbeing providers, and local venues.

This work highlights strong preventative impact through partnership-led delivery, participant co-production, and the creation of non-clinical spaces that support mental wellbeing, connection, and positive cultural change around substance / alcohol use. The Highland Sober Collective will also be continuing beyond the funded period, with ongoing monthly meetings, new partnerships, and plans for sustainable community-led activity.

Organisations & Partners Involved

Lead Organisation

Highland Well-Ness Collective: project leadership, coordination, safeguarding, delivery and evaluation

Core Delivery & Facilitation Partners (Phase One)

Circus Artspace: creative space and facilitation support

Arts in Nature: outdoor and nature-based creative session

Blue Space Highlands: water-based wellbeing activities (kayaking and paddleboarding)

Highland Zine Bothy: DIY creative expression through zine-making and storytelling

Tilly & Roo: pottery painting workshop

Studio Constella: facilitated group reflection, trust-building and collective visioning

Event & Venue Partners

WASPS Inverness Creative Academy

The Treehouse (Scottish Canals)

Cafe 1668

Inverness Botanic Garden

SOBER-NESS Delivery & Programme Partners

Headspace Highlands: mental health storytelling and community engagement

SOBR (Kate Kenyon): sector leadership and advocacy around sober culture

The Yoga Mat: yoga and somatic wellbeing session

DJ Butterscotch: introduction to DJing workshop and silent disco

Tartan Paint: ceilidh musicians

Flowers in Focus (Kay Haspell): floral creativity and expression workshop

Highland Zine Bothy: vision board and creative workshops

Sugar Browne / Coach Collesso: movement dance workshop.

4. CareFirst Replacement

The service has carried out a procurement exercise to select a supplier to replace the current Health and Social Care Case Management System.

With the assistance of the Commercial & Procurement Shared Service a mini competition has been carried out, with professionals from both the Council and NHS Highland involved in the extensive bid assessment process.

I am delighted to confirm that the Access Group were the successful bidder and work to plan the implementation of the Mosaic Case Management System is now under way.

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