

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CP/10/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 21 May 2026

Report Title: Environmental Health Performance and Strategic Plan 2026-2029

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Environmental Health team within Highland Council delivers a wide range of statutory and advisory functions to protect public health, support safe communities, and regulate business and environmental standards.
- 1.2 This report sets out key information on the work of the Environmental Health team including the objectives for the team for the next three years. It is published to provide Members, members of the public and businesses with information on the services provided by the team.

The report covers:-

- A Strategic plan, covering 2026-2029.
- A review of activity undertaken by Environmental Health in 2025/26.
- A food safety plan to for 2026/27.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Consider** and **approve** the Environmental Health Strategic Plan 2026-2029 as detailed in Appendix 3;
- ii. **Note** the Environmental Health performance in 2025/26 as detailed in Appendix 4 including delivering statutory duties to over 6000 properties on private water supplies, over 5000 food businesses, and receiving over 13,500 service requests on a wide range of public health, nuisance, licensing, safety, dog control, animal health and incivility issues; and
- iii. **Consider** and **approve** the Food Safety Plan to 31 March 2027 as detailed in Appendix 5.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - As reported previously to Committee, the resources available to Environmental Health have to be prioritised, focusing on areas of greatest public health significance. The team continually explores ways to delivering services more efficiently and within budget including reviewing associated income streams, working with COSLA regarding resource allocation and seeking efficiencies in working practice and team structure.

3.2 **Legal** - As a regulatory service the Environmental Health team have a wide range of statutory duties. The team have an Enforcement Policy in place and officers follow the five principles of better regulation: Regulation should be transparent, accountable, consistent, proportionate and targeted.

Please note that for purposes of this report no reference is made to individuals or businesses to ensure compliance with Data Protection and not to impact on any ongoing investigations or court proceedings.

3.3 **Risk** - The pressures on the environmental health profession and challenges in workforce planning have been noted by COSLA and the Scottish Government. Work is ongoing with the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) and the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland (SoCOEHS) to increase resilience of the service and a sustainable workforce.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - There are no Health and Safety risk implications arising from this report.

3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

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 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 28 April 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there are:-

- Positive socio-economic impacts as the implementation of this plan will contribute to safer workplaces, food premises and homes by ensuring they meet legal requirements. This in turn contributes to protecting people's health.
- Positive impact on human rights as work delivered through the implementation of this plan will contribute to protecting people's peaceful enjoyment of their property through statutory nuisance investigations.

Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	No impact
Socio-economic	Positive
Human Rights	Positive
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	No impact
Island and Mainland Rural	No impact
Climate Change	Positive
Data Rights	No impact

5. Background

- 5.1 Environmental Health provides a wide range of statutory services on behalf of the Council, with a core focus on protecting public health, and the safety and wellbeing of residents, visitors and communities. The service plays a key role in preventing harm, responding to public health risks, improving living conditions, and supporting businesses and communities to comply with legal standards.

Key Service Areas:-

Public Health Protection

The service protects communities from health hazards by:-

- Regulating private water supplies.
- Investigating statutory nuisances such as foul odours, smoke, noise and premises in poor condition.
- Delivering port health functions.
- Investigating communicable diseases, including food-borne and water-borne illness and Legionnaires' disease.
- Responding to environmental health incidents such as blue-green algae.
- Providing radon advice.
- Arranging National Assistance funerals where no other provision exists
- Enforcing smoke-free legislation.

Food Safety

Environmental Health ensures food produced and sold locally is safe by:-

- Inspecting food businesses.
- Enforcing food hygiene and food standards legislation, including labelling.
- Providing advice and support to businesses.
- Issuing food export certification.

Health and Safety at Work

The service promotes safe working environments by:-

- Enforcing health and safety law in Local Authority-regulated premises.
- Providing advice to employers and employees.
- Investigating workplace accidents and dangerous occurrences.

Private Sector Housing

Environmental Health works to improve housing conditions by:-

- Enforcing standards in sub-standard housing.
- Taking action through closing or demolition orders where required.
- Regulating Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's).
- Investigating housing defects and hazards.
- Delivering and administering the Council's Scheme of Assistance, including advice and grant funding for disabled adaptations, improvements and repairs.
- Supporting the Ukrainian resettlement programme through property inspections.

Pollution Control

The service protects residents from pollution by:-

- Investigating and controlling noise nuisance (domestic and commercial).
- Delivering local air quality management duties.
- Advising on pollution prevention and mitigation.

Contaminated Land

Environmental Health safeguards land and development by:-

- Regulating contaminated land through the planning and development control process.
- Preventing risks to human health and the environment.
- Providing specialist advice to other Council services, including asset transfer and development projects.

Animal Health and Welfare

The service protects animal welfare and public safety by:-

- Enforcing animal health and welfare legislation.
- Dealing with the disposal of animal carcasses on farms.
- Taking farm animals into possession in serious welfare cases.

Licensing

Environmental Health supports safe and well-regulated activities by:-

- Advising on and enforcing activities licensed under Civic Government legislation, including short-term lets.
- Administering and enforcing licences for caravan sites, venison dealers, animal boarding establishments, pet shops, zoos, cinemas, riding establishments, sports grounds and dangerous wild animals.

Dog Control

The service promotes responsible dog ownership by:-

- Investigating and issuing dog control notices where dogs are out of control.
- Dealing with stray dogs.
- Enforcing dog fouling legislation.
- Promoting and enforcing microchipping requirements.

Pest Control, Waste and Environmental Enforcement

Environmental Health helps maintain clean and safe communities by:-

- Enforcing littering and fly-tipping legislation.
- Enforcing waste Duty of Care requirements.
- Dealing with abandoned vehicles.
- Working closely with the Council's waste services and SEPA on waste-related issues.
- Investigating pest control issues.

5.2 **Prevention** - Scotland's Public Service Reform agenda, as set out by the Christie Commission (2011) and reaffirmed through the Public Service Reform Strategy (2025) and Population Health Framework (2025), places prevention and early intervention at the heart of sustainable service delivery. Environmental Health has a key role in delivery, by addressing environmental issues through statutory action on housing conditions, food safety, environmental protection, licensing, communicable disease control and animal health and welfare.

This work is vital in ensuring that the Highlands maintains its reputation as a safe and healthy place to live, work, and visit. We aim to support local businesses by providing clear advice on regulatory requirements and by ensuring that our regulatory activity adheres to the five principles of better regulation: **Proportionate, consistent, accountable, transparent, and targeted.**

We have also adopted a successful '**4Es**' approach - **Engage, Explain, Encourage, and Enforce** - which underpins how we respond to most cases and helps to promote compliance in a constructive and collaborative manner.

5.3 **Workforce planning** - The Environmental Health team has recently undergone a management re-structure as part of ongoing workforce planning and in response to increasing demands on the service.

Two new Area Environmental Health Managers were appointed in October 2025 to cover the North and South operational areas. These roles are designed to support both the Strategic Lead for Environmental Health & Bereavement Services and the Senior Environmental Health Officers (SEHO's) who manage the operational teams in each local office.

There are eight Senior Environmental Health Officers across Highland, each responsible for managing local teams delivering the full range of Environmental Health functions. The SEHO's are based in the following area offices: Fort William, Inverness, Dingwall, Portree, Golspie and Wick.

In addition to their local management responsibilities, SEHO's hold Highland-wide functional lead roles for key statutory areas of work. These roles include developing policy and operational guidance and supporting officers in managing significant or complex cases.

Several members of the Environmental Health team also participate in local, regional, and national working or steering groups. Their involvement helps share best practice and contributes to the development of new legislation and statutory guidance.

Appendix 2 provides the latest Environmental Health team structure, including a map of the operational areas, the area office locations and relevant points of contact.

5.4 **Environmental Crime** - Environmental Health will place a renewed focus on tackling Environmental Crime in 2026/27 and beyond, with particular emphasis on issues such as abandoned vehicles, fly-tipping, and other forms of antisocial environmental behaviour. The Service recognises that these matters are a priority for many Local Members, as they have a direct impact on community wellbeing, local amenity, and the wider environment. Addressing them often requires coordinated, multi-agency action. By prioritising this area of work, Environmental Health aims to take a more proactive approach, strengthen enforcement activity, and ensure that incidents are managed promptly, consistently, and effectively across Highland.

6 Environmental Health Strategic Plan 2026 to 2029

6.1 The Environmental Health Strategic Plan 2026 to 2029 sets out a clear three-year framework for delivering the Council's statutory environmental health functions while strengthening prevention, resilience and service sustainability. The move from a previous annual planning cycle to a three-year plan provides improved alignment with national and partnership planning frameworks, supports more effective workforce and resource planning, and enables a more strategic response to increasing regulatory, environmental and climate-related pressures.

6.2 The Plan identifies five strategic priorities focused on protecting public health, delivering high-quality regulatory services, improving environmental quality, supporting safe and sustainable communities, and strengthening workforce and digital capacity. It is supported by a phased programme of operational objectives, refreshed performance measures and annual review arrangements to ensure effective governance, accountability and continuous improvement in protecting the health and wellbeing of communities across the Highlands.

6.3 The priorities reflect both statutory obligations and wider council objectives, with a strong emphasis on partnership working, proportionate risk-based regulation and prevention-focused interventions. The plan also recognises the importance of addressing everyday environmental issues such as noise, littering, dog fouling, fly-tipping and housing conditions alongside higher-profile health protection work, as these factors strongly influence community wellbeing and public confidence in services.

6.4 Members are asked to consider and approve the Environmental Health Strategic Plan 2026-2029 as detailed in **Appendix 3**.

7 Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2025/26

7.1 This section of the report provides an update to members on the Environmental Health activity during 2025/26. The full details are provided in **Appendix 4**.

7.2 As shown in **Appendix 3**, the activities completed by Environmental Health have been split into three principal areas. These are summarised below:-

- **Reactive work** (i.e. service requests)
 - The team responded to **13,624** service requests.
 - There was an overall reduction of around 3000 total service requests primarily attributable to a reduction of 3029 Short Term Let (STL) applications between 2024/25 and 2025/26 as part of the expected cycle of applications & renewals.
 - Significant increases were noted in:-
 - Reports of abandoned vehicles - although a proportion of the increase in 25/26 may be down to a change in database recording.
 - Increase in reports related to animal health & welfare
 - Increase in reports related to dog control. In particular, reports of aggressive dogs and dog bite incidents went from 204 reports in 24/25 to 276 reports in 25/26.
 - Increase in planning application consultations.
 - In addition to the above Service Requests, **3542** planning applications were screened by our Contaminated Land Officers.
 - 348 Housing grant applications were approved and processed with a value of £1,776,846.
 - 38 Private Water supply grants were approved and processed with a value of £112,718.
 - 129 Miscellaneous licence applications processed.
- **Pro-active/scheduled work** (i.e. programmed inspections/visits)
 - The team undertook over 2200 programmed inspections and patrols in 2025/26. This covered a wide range of statutory duties including food safety, licensing, Animal Health and welfare private water supplies, air quality and local environmental patrols for dog fouling and litter.
- **Formal Enforcement Activity** (i.e. Formal enforcement notices and reports to Procurator Fiscal)
 - Whilst the vast majority of service requests and issues identified by the Environmental Health team are satisfactory resolved without the need to pursue formal enforcement action (i.e. by following the 4 Es approach), there is always a number of cases due to their seriousness or failure of the duty holder to comply, where formal enforcement action is required.
 - In 2025/26 period officers served **83 formal notices**. This included prohibition and improvement notices under Health & Safety at Work and Food Safety legislation.
 - Following investigations in 2025/26, officers are liaising with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) for 11 separate prosecution cases. These relate to:-
 - 6 cases for offences under Health and Safety at Work legislation.
 - 4 cases for offences under Animal Health and Welfare legislation.
 - 1 case for offences under Food Safety legislation.

All cases are subject to consideration by COPFS and so no further details can be provided. Significant incidents that result in prosecution cases can take considerable resources to investigate and conclude.

7.3 Members are asked to note the wide range of activities to protect and improve public health undertaken by the Environmental Health team throughout the Highlands in 2025/26.

8 Food Safety Team Plan to 31 March 2027

8.1 The Highland Council is the statutory Food Authority for the Highland Council area. The Council is required to maintain a Food Safety team plan that sets out how the Council will deliver its statutory food law enforcement responsibilities. The plan for 2026/27 is provided in **Appendix 5**.

8.2 The plan is prepared in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland) and the Interventions - Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland). It describes the Council's approach to service delivery, interventions and enforcement, and provides assurance that official food controls are planned, prioritised and delivered in a risk-based and proportionate manner, having regard to available resources.

The plan provides:-

- Information on team demands including over 7000 registered food business and 69 approved establishments.
- Information on the team's role in providing inspection services at the Scrabster Border Control Point (BCP) and on providing export health certificates to businesses throughout the Highlands with over 1300 issues in 2025.
- Feedback on 2025/26 activity with officers undertook 629 interventions/inspections at food businesses, undertook 69 OCV interventions/inspections at approved establishments and processed 54 samples as part of targeted food sampling surveys.
- Planned work in 2026/27 including 765 proactive inspections of food businesses and targeted projects to focus on fishing vessels, low-risk businesses, and updating the food register.

8.3 Members are asked to note and approve the food safety team plan for 2026/27.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 30 April 2026

Author: Alan Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health & Bereavement Services

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 Integrated Impact Assessment Screening
Appendix 2 Current Environmental Health Team Structure & Operational Areas
Appendix 3 Environmental Health Strategic Plan 2026 to 2029
Appendix 4 Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2025/26
Appendix 5 Food Safety Team Plan to 31 March 2027

Appendix 1 Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

High level summary of the proposal: This report sets out key information on the work of the Environmental Health team including the objectives for the team for the next three years. The report covers:

- A Strategic plan, covering 2026-2029
- A review of activity undertaken by Environmental Health in 2025/26
- A food safety plan to for 2026/27

Who may be affected by the proposal? Highland Council residents, visitors and businesses.

1. Equality - Protected characteristics - No impact

2. Poverty and socio-economic

Prospects and opportunities: Positive

Places: Positive

Financial: Positive

Poverty and socio-economic impact details: The implementation of this plan will contribute to safe workplaces, food premises and homes by ensuring that they meet legal requirements. This contributes to protecting people's health, which in turn means they are required to take fewer days off work due to sickness.

3. Human rights – Positive

Human rights impact details: The implementation of the plan will contribute to protecting people's peaceful enjoyment of their property as part of the work delivered includes investigating and resolving noise and other nuisance complaints.

4. Children's rights and wellbeing - no impact

5. Data protection – no impact

6. Island and mainland rural communities – no impact

7. Climate change

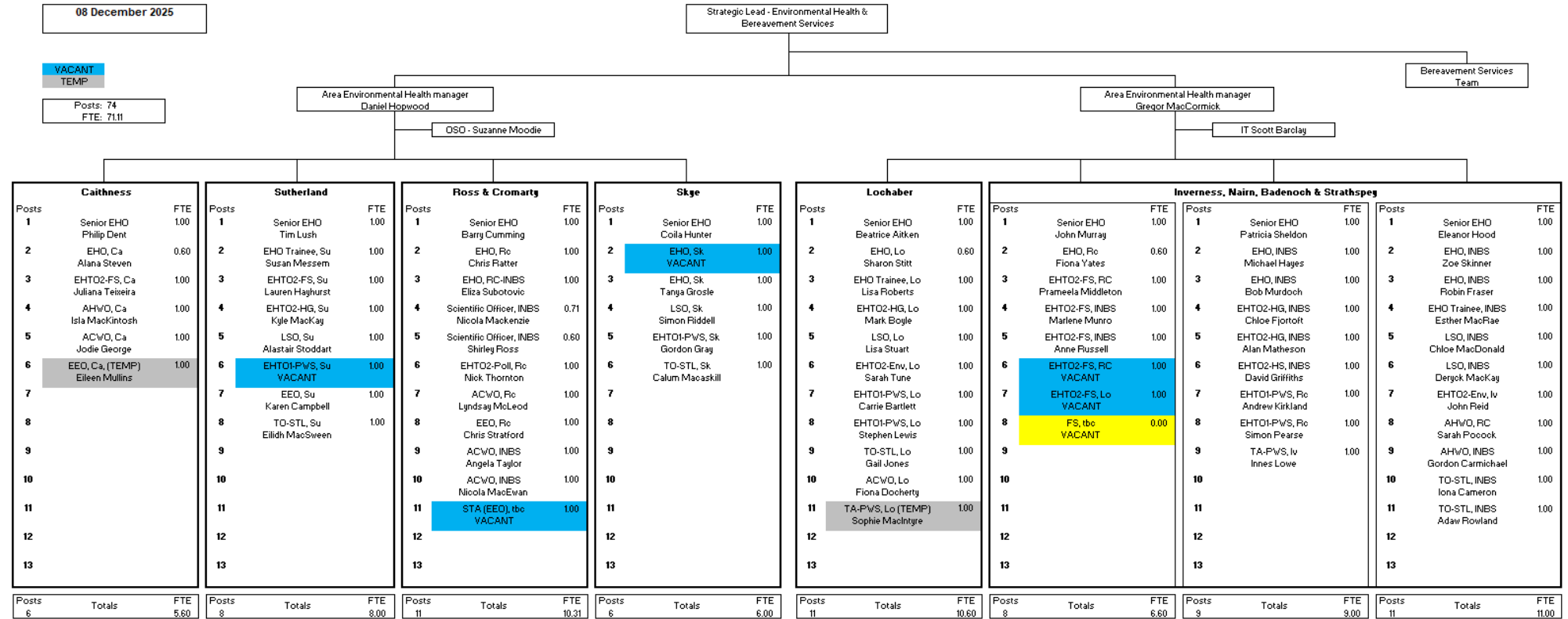
Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂e)? No

Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? Yes (positive)

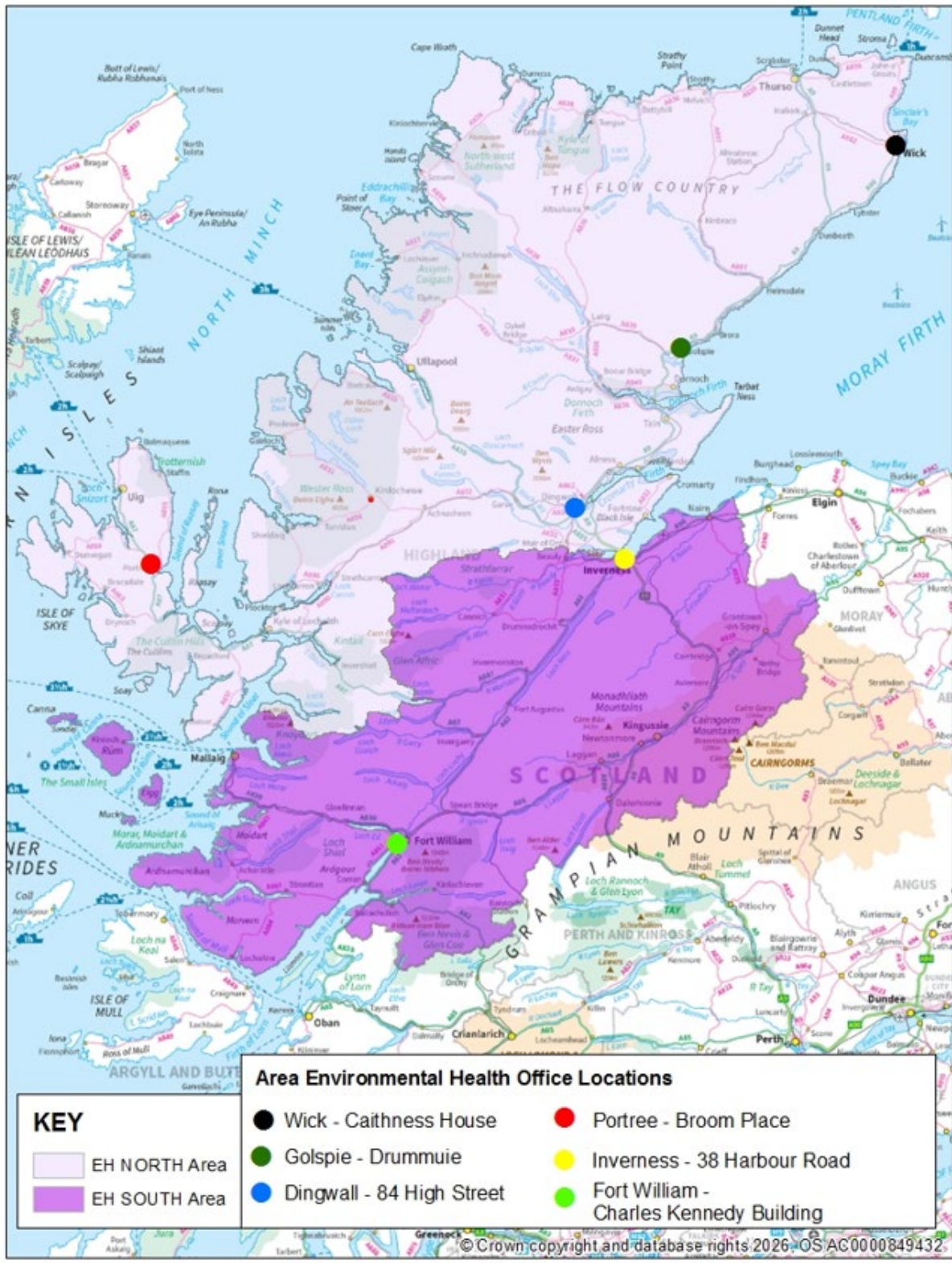
Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate? No

Provide information regarding your selection above: The implementation of the plan will ensure that regulated businesses are disposing of waste correctly. Additionally the work Environmental Health do in relation to the removal of abandoned vehicles will prevent potential damage to the environment from leaks of fluids and fuels into the surrounding area

Appendix 2 - Current Environmental Health Team Structure & Operational Areas



EH Operational Areas and Area Offices



Environmental Health Management Areas and Area Office Locations

0 25 50 Kilometers

1:1,200,000

Contact Details for Environmental Health Teams

The preferred and best method to contact Environmental Health Teams is via our generic mailbox - envhealth@highland.gov.uk

This mailbox is monitored by our Business Support Admin and so ensures any matters can be picked up timeously and responded to by relevant SEHO or investigating officer.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT – STRATEGIC & HIGHLAND WIDE ISSUES

Alan Yates	Strategic lead Environmental Health & Bereavement Services	Highland Wide	alan.yates@highland.gov.uk
Gregor MacCormick	Area Environmental Health Manager (South)	Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Lochaber Areas	gregor.maccormick@highland.gov.uk
Daniel Hopwood	Area Environmental Health Manager (North)	Ross & Cromarty; Skye; Sutherland & Caithness	daniel.hopwood@highland.gov.uk

LOCAL AREA MANAGERS - ALL OPERATIONAL MATTERS

Beatrice Aitken	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Lochaber Area Main contact for all operational Environmental Health matters	beatrice.aitken@highland.gov.uk
Eleanor Hood	Senior Environmental Health Officer	INBS Area Licensing, Animal health, Noise, Statutory Nuisance and Inverness Trade Waste Policy issues	eleanor.hood@highland.gov.uk
Patricia Sheldon	Senior Environmental Health Officer	INBS Area Housing Grants; Private Water Supplies; Statutory Nuisance and Health & Safety	patricia.sheldon@highland.gov.uk
John Murray	Senior Environmental Health Officer	INBS Area Food safety; Food Standards; Approved premises; Export Certification	john.murray@highland.gov.uk
Barry Cumming	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Ross & Cromarty Main contact for all operational Environmental Health matters	barry.cumming@highland.gov.uk
Tim Lush	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Sutherland Main contact for all operational Environmental Health matters	timothy.lush@highland.gov.uk
Philip Dent	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Caithness Main contact for all operational Environmental Health matters	philip.dent@highland.gov.uk
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Appendix 3

Environmental Health

Strategic Plan 2026 to 2029

Version: 0.1 (Draft)

Issued: 28th April 2026

Review Dates: April 2027, April 2028, April 2029

Prepared by:

Strategic Lead – Environmental Health & Bereavement Services
Area Environmental Health Managers

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8. Operational Objectives (Year 1 / Year 2 / Year 3)
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1. Background & Context

Environmental Health (EH) within Highland Council delivers a broad portfolio of statutory and advisory functions to protect public health, support safe communities, and regulate business and environmental standards across one of the largest and most geographically challenging local authority areas in the UK.

National Prevention Strategies

The **Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (2011)** established prevention as a key principle of public service reform in Scotland, arguing that sustainable services require a shift from responding to crisis toward early intervention and the reduction of avoidable harm. This principle has been reaffirmed and operationalised through **Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy: *Delivering for Scotland (2025)***, which places prevention as one of its three core pillars alongside joined-up working and efficiency. The Strategy defines prevention as stopping the establishment or escalation of problems that lead to negative outcomes for people, explicitly recognising that upstream action reduces future demand, protects public finances and improves outcomes.

These national strategies position Environmental Health as a frontline prevention service, given its statutory role in identifying, managing and mitigating risks before they result in serious harm or pressures on health, social care and other services.

The **Population Health Framework (2025)** further strengthens this position by confirming that the majority of health outcomes are shaped by social and environmental conditions rather than clinical care alone, requiring all public services to focus on prevention and the wider determinants of health.

Environmental Health's core statutory remit directly addresses these determinants through practical, place-based action:

- **promoting healthy homes** to prevent respiratory illness, injury and poor mental health;
- **ensuring safe food systems** to prevent foodborne disease and outbreaks;
- **delivering environmental protection** to reduce exposure to noise, pollution and environmental hazards including contaminated land, fly-tipping, litter and dog control;
- **exercising licensing, health & safety at work and other public protection** functions to address unsafe environments;
- acting as a key delivery partner in **communicable disease control and outbreak prevention**;
- **regulating animal health and welfare** to prevent zoonotic disease, protect public health, safeguard food standards and promote responsible animal management.

Collectively, these functions demonstrate that Environmental Health is central to translating national prevention policy into tangible, preventative outcomes for communities.

Between 2024 and 2026, the Service:

- Processed >13,000 service requests annually across public health, noise, licensing, private water supplies, housing defects, animal health, dog control and environmental nuisance.
- Responded to over 8,500 short term let licensing consultations and ongoing compliance assessments.
- Managed over 6,000 private water supplies, including 1,100 regulated supplies requiring mandatory risk assessments and monitoring.
- Supported food businesses with export health certification, import controls and delivery of >800 programmed food safety interventions.
- Delivered significant public health protection work in partnership with NHS Highland including communicable disease investigation, blue green algae responses, zoonoses, respiratory illness clusters, and water quality incidents.

The period 2026–2029 will see:

- Rising regulatory demand (non-surgical cosmetic procedures, new animal welfare licensing, environmental hazards).
- Increasing environmental pressures (climate change, water scarcity, wildfire risk, vector borne disease).

- Continued workforce shortages at national level.
- Ongoing requirements for joint planning with NHS Highland under the Joint Health Protection Plan 2025–27 (JHPP).
- Substantial development pressures linked to renewables, BESS, grid expansion, and the Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport.
- Need for continued engagement with potentially significant national reviews including Food Standards Scotland’s (FSS) SAFER programme on food law delivery in Scotland, and the Public Analyst Scientific Services Laboratory (PASSL) review.

This plan provides the team’s three-year roadmap for delivering statutory duties while advancing strategic priorities.

2. Purpose, Timeframe & Monitoring

Purpose

This Strategic & Operational Plan sets out how Environmental Health will deliver statutory duties, respond to emerging risks, and contribute to the Council’s vision of an ambitious, sustainable and connected Highlands from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029.

Timeframe

This plan covers a three-year period (2026–2029), replacing the previous one-year cycle used for operational plans

- Year 1: April 2026 – March 2027
- Year 2: April 2027 – March 2028
- Year 3: April 2028 – March 2029

Why a Three Year Format?

Moving to a 3-year planning cycle provides several strategic advantages for Environmental Health and for the Council more broadly:

I. Better alignment with partnership planning cycles (e.g. Joint Health Protection Plan (JHPP) & HSE LAC 67/2)

Key joint planning frameworks such as the JHPP (2025–2027) and HSEs Setting Local Authority Priorities and targeting Interventions (LAC 67/2) already operate on a multi-year basis. A 3-year EH plan synchronises Council priorities with NHS Highland, HSE and other partner agencies, improving consistency, accountability and shared delivery across the region.

II. Enables medium term workforce planning in a difficult labour market

National shortages of Environmental Health Officers and specialist staff cannot be resolved annually.

A 3 year plan allows the Service to:

- plan graduate pathways and trainee development over realistic timescales
- improve forecasting of retirements and succession requirements
- justify longer term investment in training and competency building
- stabilise recruitment cycles across the three operational areas

This strengthens service resilience - a key risk identified in recent workforce reviews.

III. Supports strategic prioritisation

Environmental Health faces rising statutory requirements (STLs, non surgical cosmetics, PWS duties, animal welfare, climate related incidents). A multi-year approach:

- reduces the inefficiency of annual re-prioritisation
- allows planned phasing of projects linked to resources
- helps manage demand by spreading major transformations (e.g. SAFER implementation, PWS digitisation, enforcement redesign) across realistic milestones
- improves predictability for partners and communities

IV. Improves the team's ability to plan funding bids & budgets

Many statutory duties (e.g. air quality monitoring, IT systems, sampling programmes) require multi year budgeting.

A 3-year plan enables:

- coordinated funding bids
- better planning of asset replacement and monitoring infrastructure
- clearer justification for investment during corporate budget setting

V. Strengthens resilience planning for emergencies and climate related risks

Events such as water scarcity, flooding, blue green algae, storms, wildfires, emerging infections and zoonoses increasingly require multi-year risk mitigation.

A 3-year plan:

- embeds preparedness work into strategic programmes
- aligns risk reduction measures with regional resilience partnerships
- improves continuity of learning from incidents and exercises

Monitoring

Although the strategic plan spans three years, annual reviews will be carried out to:

- update operational milestones
- report progress annually on EH activity to Strategic and Area Committees
- respond to legislative changes
- adjust for emerging risks or incidents
- update KPIs and performance data

This ensures the plan remains agile and responsive while retaining a clear multi-year direction.

3. Structure, Workforce & Resources

Staffing

The service comprises approximately 74.5 FTE across:

- Food Safety
- Health & Safety
- Private Water Supplies
- Animal Health & Welfare
- Licensing
- Public Health
- Housing
- Pollution Control (Air, Noise, Contaminated Land)
- Dog, Litter, Pest Control
- Operational Support

Workforce Pressures

National EHO shortages continue to present challenges. Highland Council currently has:

- 3 trainee EHOs in graduate pathways (qualifications expected 2026 & 2027).
- Recent qualification of Food Safety Officers.

- Significant reliance on technical officers and career pathway posts.

Financial Position

Budget pressures require continued prioritisation of high-risk public health work and careful resource allocation.

4. Roles & Responsibilities

Environmental Health delivers statutory functions including:

- Public Health Protection
- Food Safety & Food Standards
- Health & Safety at Work (LA enforced sector)
- Private Water Supply regulation
- Private Sector Housing disrepair
- Air Quality Management
- Noise & Nuisance Control
- Contaminated Land
- Animal Health & Welfare
- Licensing (Civic, STL, animal-related establishments, caravan sites, etc.)
- Dog Control, Pest Control, Abandoned Vehicles, Litter & fly-tipping enforcement
- Emergency Planning & Civil Contingencies (Recovery Lead)
- Port Health & Airport Health readiness

Partnership working with NHS Highland, SEPA, Scottish Water, Police Scotland, HSE and others is integral.

5. Demands on the Service

Proactive (Programmed)

- ≈ 800 food hygiene and food law interventions annually.
- ≈1,100 regulated private water supply inspections and risk assessments.
- Targeted health & safety interventions in line with HSE LAC 67/2.
- Animal health inspections (≈140 annually).
- Air quality monitoring across Inverness and Fort William.
- ≈ 200 targeted local environmental patrols (litter/dog-fouling)

Reactive

- 13,000 service requests annually across nuisance, dog control, licensing, housing, disease notifications, pollution, drainage and more.

- Major investigations: includes work-related deaths, serious workplace accidents, large scale noise investigations, contamination events, water quality failures; food crime.
- Emergency responses: blue green algae, storms, flooding, water scarcity, animal disease, pollution.
- Screening of all planning applications to identify any potential contaminated land issues relevant to the proposed development.

6. Risk Management & Resilience

Key risks include:

- Waterborne and foodborne disease outbreaks.
- Climate driven risks (wildfire, heat events, flooding, water scarcity).
- Workforce shortages impacting statutory performance.
- Increased regulatory duties without increased resources.
- Telecommunications and transport limitations in remote areas.
- High demand from short term let licensing and expanding licensing regimes.
- Emerging infections (STEC, avian influenza).
- Expansion of renewable developments requiring complex noise, air and contamination assessments.
- Increased demand for Local Authority support in dealing with serious on-farm welfare issues, including seizure and detention of livestock.

Mitigations:

- Joint health protection planning with NHS Highland.
- Risk based prioritisation model.
- Workforce pipeline development.
- Enhanced mobile working and digital systems.
- Mutual aid arrangements (Local Authorities & NHS Boards).

7. Strategic Priorities 2026–2029

A. Protect Public Health

- Maintain capacity for communicable disease investigation.
- Strengthen joint arrangements with NHS Highland (JHPP).
- Improve resilience for pandemics, water incidents, zoonoses and vector borne disease.
- Enhance port and airport health plans and exercises.

B. Deliver High Quality Regulatory Services

- Meet statutory duties in food safety, private water supplies, animal health & welfare, health & safety, air quality, contaminated land and licensing.
- Implement new regulatory frameworks: non-surgical cosmetic procedures, animal related business licensing reforms.
- Respond to increasing environmental hazards and complaints.

C. Improve Environmental Quality

- Progress air quality management and education programmes.
- Enhance noise regulation and support planning controls.
- Support climate change adaptation through water scarcity responses and wildfire readiness.

D. Support Safe, Sustainable Communities

- Reduce incidences of incivilities – including fly tipping, dog fouling, litter, abandoned vehicles – by delivering focussed community education campaigns aligned with proportionate, intelligence-led enforcement activity.
- Improve outcomes in private sector housing, including HMOs, mobile homes and housing standards.
- Support short term let licensing compliance and enforcement.

E. Strengthen Workforce & Digital Capacity

- Progress EHO trainee pathways and technical officer development.
- Increase specialist capacity in noise, contaminated land and PWS.
- Complete digitisation programmes (including PWS files).
- Improve performance reporting and data intelligence.
- Review and improve the website content on the HC website for EH functions and increase the publication of key information (i.e. Notices/FPNs etc)
- Review and improve methods of customer contact/use of on-line forms to help improve customer response targets.
- Increased use of mobile digital technology and understanding of AI products to help improve efficiency and service delivery
- Review and replace the existing CIVICA case management system

8. Operational Objectives 2026-2029

Below is a summary of the multi-year objectives.

Year 1: 2026–2027 — Stabilisation & Compliance

Public Health & Health Protection

- Implement all relevant JHPP actions (joint procedures, surveillance improvements, training).
- Update airport & seaport health plans; run one joint exercise with JHPP partners
- Strengthen response to blue green algae and seasonal risks.
- Continue engagement with national work on review of Public Analyst Scientific Services Laboratory (PASSL) delivery across Scotland.

Food Safety

- Deliver risk based programme: 100% of high risk and Group 1 premises.
- Continue national work on SAFER model development.
- Maintain Approved Establishment OCV inspections.
- Extending the provision of food hygiene training.

Private Water Supplies

- Deliver prioritised sampling programme.
- Accelerate commercial PWS risk assessment completion (target $\geq 65\%$).
- Promote grant uptake and complete digitisation of PWS files.

Health & Safety

- Focus on HSE national priorities: gas safety, caravan/motorhome sites, and water-based leisure.
- Progress investigations of serious/fatal accidents.

Licensing

- Manage STL renewals and compliance visits.
- Implement proposed new regulations for canine fertility clinics and non-surgical cosmetic procedures.

Environmental Protection

- Continue to meet all statutory air quality monitoring requirements and develop a Highland wide air quality strategy.
- Strengthen noise assessment capability for renewable developments.

Housing

- Support updated Scheme of Assistance redesign.
- Increase joint work with Housing and external organisations.

Local Environmental Quality

- Deliver targeted dog fouling, littering and abandoned vehicle campaigns in pilot areas.
- Deliver joint abandoned vehicle/untaxed vehicle enforcement exercise with DVLA

- Review CCTV solutions for litter and fly-tipping

Workforce

- Progress and action the environmental health operational improvement plan for 26/27
- Support trainee EHOs progressing to final qualification.
- Implement service redesign and digital improvements.

Year 2: 2027–2028 — Improvement & Integration

Public Health

- Implement updated joint procedures across NHS & LAs.
- Enhance surveillance with HPZone/Epi Q integration where permitted.
- Expand preparedness for vector-borne diseases.

Food Safety

- Implement elements of SAFER (if approved nationally).
- Review resource demands for the food safety function

Health & Safety

- Commence targeted proactive work aligned with LAC 67/2 priority topics, focusing on areas of highest local risk and concern.
- Review outcomes from Year 1 activity to refine priorities.

PWS

- Achieve 80% completion of commercial risk assessments.
- Develop resilience plans for vulnerable supplies (drought, contamination).

Housing

- Introduce new Mandatory Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for the Private Rented Sector (PRS) duties if enacted.
- Expand engagement with landlords and owners.

Environmental Protection

- Participate in regional renewable planning frameworks.
- Implement Highland wide Air Quality strategy

Local Environmental Quality

- Review 26/27 campaigns and rollout Highland wide dog fouling, littering and abandoned vehicle campaigns.
- Deliver targeted fly-tipping campaigns in pilot areas.
- Implement CCTV solutions for litter and fly-tipping

Licensing

- Full implementation of new national licensing regimes.
- Begin review of STL compliance impacts on communities.

Workforce

- 2 trainee EHOs qualifying → improve resilience.
- Expand specialist training in noise and contamination.

Year 3: 2028–2029 — Consolidation & Strategic Delivery

Public Health

- Full alignment with next JHPP cycle (2028–2030).
- Complete multi agency exercises for water, radiological and pandemic readiness.

Food Safety

- Consolidate SAFER implementation and performance improvements.
- Improve KPI performance across inspections, sampling and investigations.

Health & Safety

- Continue and, where possible, complete priority programmes initiated in Years 1 and 2.

Private Water Supplies

- Achieve 100% commercial risk assessment coverage.
- Review PWS staffing and long-term sustainability.

Housing

- Deliver measurable improvement in enforcement outcomes.
- Review HMO and mobile home licensing processes.

Environmental Protection

- Upgrade monitoring assets and complete Highland wide new AQ strategy.
- Provide robust input to Green Freeport developments.

Licensing

- Possible implementation of proposed new regulations for commercial dog walking, grooming, and livery services.

Local Environment

- Implement targeted campaigns for litter, dog fouling, fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles
- Review implementation of CCTV solutions for litter and fly-tipping
- Deliver annual abandoned vehicle initiative with Police Scotland.

Workforce

- Finalise 3 year workforce strategy outcomes.
- Embed digital tools in mobile inspections and case management.

9. Performance Measures & Reporting

The Environmental Health Service is currently finalising a revised suite of performance monitoring indicators designed to better reflect service priorities, statutory responsibilities and outcomes. In developing these indicators, we require to ensure alignment with information that can be reliably extracted from our Civica case management database, to support accurate and proportionate performance reporting.

The new indicators will be implemented for the 2026/27 reporting year and will be incorporated into future committee reports. They will improve and provide more consistent performance information on Environmental Health activity going forward.

Examples of the performance indicators being considered include:

Food Safety

- 95% of high risk and Group 1 premises inspected on time

Private Water Supplies

- % of regulated supplies risk assessed
- % compliance samples completed

Health & Safety

- Number of proactive interventions undertaken, as reported in LAE 1 return

Licensing

- STL compliance rate

Local Environmental Quality

- 100% of vandalised abandoned vehicles removed within 10 days of being categorised as abandoned & for destruction.

Appendix 4

Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2025/26

1. PURPOSE/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is to provide an update to members on the Environmental Health team and provide an annual report on local activity during 2025/26.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members will be aware that Environmental Health submits an annual operational plan for approval. This plan sets out the objectives for the service as a whole, including the key priorities for the year ahead. The most recent 2025/26 plan was approved by the Communities & Place Committee on [22nd May 2025](#).

- 2.2 The purpose of the annual activity report is to:

- I. increase awareness of the range of activities undertaken locally by the Environmental Health team,
- II. to seek feedback from Members on the work and performance of the service, and
- III. to identify any existing or emerging local issues that Members wish to see prioritised going forward.

3. Summary of Environmental Health Activity/Local Issues

- 3.1 For the purpose of this report, the Environmental Health activity has been split into three principal areas. These are outlined below: -

- i) **Reactive work** (i.e. service requests)
- ii) **Pro-active/scheduled work** (i.e. programmed inspections/visits)
- iii) **Formal Enforcement Activity** (i.e. Formal enforcement notices and reports to Procurator Fiscal)

For each area of activity, the relevant figures have been obtained from our case management system All data presented is for the period between **1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026**.

4. Reactive Work

4.1 Service requests

Table 1 below provides the number of Service requests (*i.e. complaints; requests for advice; consultations etc*) received by the Environmental Health team, broken down by the general type of category. A more detailed breakdown within each of the general category types is contained within **Annex 3A**.

Table 1: Number of Service Requests by General Category Type

	2024/25	2025/26	change
Water Supplies (incl. private)	1185	898	↓ -287
Food Safety	2167	2186	↑ 19
Statutory Nuisance	415	451	↑ 36
Noise	1037	824	↓ -213
Health & Safety	374	285	↓ -89
Smoking ban	4	1	↓ -3
Port Health/Ship Sanitation	271	248	↓ -23
Infectious Disease/HPT Referral	71	74	↑ 3
Public health	39	43	↑ 4
S87 Public Health Funerals	26	37	↑ 11
Animal Health	463	640	↑ 177
Air quality	26	13	↓ -13
Civic Government Licensing	449	465	↑ 16
Miscellaneous Licensing	325	302	↓ -23
HMO Licensing	126	109	↓ -17
Short Term Let Licensing	4708	1679	↓ -3029
Liquor Licensing	58	41	↓ -17
Housing	825	572	↓ -253
Planning consultation	697	809	↑ 112
Dog control	486	620	↑ 134
Abandoned Vehicle report	1291	1738	↑ 447
Pests (e.g. mice, rats, gulls etc)	231	233	↑ 2
Litter	59	42	↓ -17
Fly Tipping/Waste/Trade Waste	314	336	↑ 22
FOI/EIR Requests	240	269	↑ 29
General/Misc/Other	734	709	↓ -25
	16621	13624	↓ -2997

The overall decrease in service requests is primarily attributable to a reduction in short-term let (STL) applications between 2024/25 and 2025/26. This reflects the three-year licensing cycle for STL licences. The majority of applications were submitted during the first two years following the introduction of the licensing scheme in October 2022, and then a reduction last year with the majority of applications having been submitted. Renewal applications are now beginning to be received and processed, and it is therefore anticipated that application numbers will increase again as we begin the next 3 year licence cycle.

As can be seen, significant increases have been noted in:

- Reports of abandoned vehicles - although a proportion of the increase in 25/26 may be down to a change in database recording. In 25/26 officers ensured every case report covered only one vehicle, whereas the format in 24/25 could include multiple vehicles in one case report.
- Increase in reports related to animal health & welfare
- Increase in reports related to dog control. In particular, reports of aggressive dogs and dog bite incidents went from 204 reports in 24/25 to 276 reports in 25/26.
- Increase in planning application consultations.

- 4.2 To provide details of the **OUTCOME** for each of these Service requests, a breakdown of the outcome codes recorded for each is shown in Table 2 below. For ease of understanding, the outcomes have been consolidated under 6 main headings.

Table 2: Breakdown of the outcome for Service Requests

Outcome Descriptor	Number
Open – under investigation	933
No Breach/No Further Action Required	3960
Advice, Guidance & Informal Resolution	6819
Statutory / Formal Enforcement Action	478
Case Referred, Withdrawn or Managed Elsewhere	1619
Internal / Administrative	35

- 4.3 To provide an indication as to the different demand between the ward areas, a breakdown of the numbers within the individual ward areas is shown in Table 3 below.

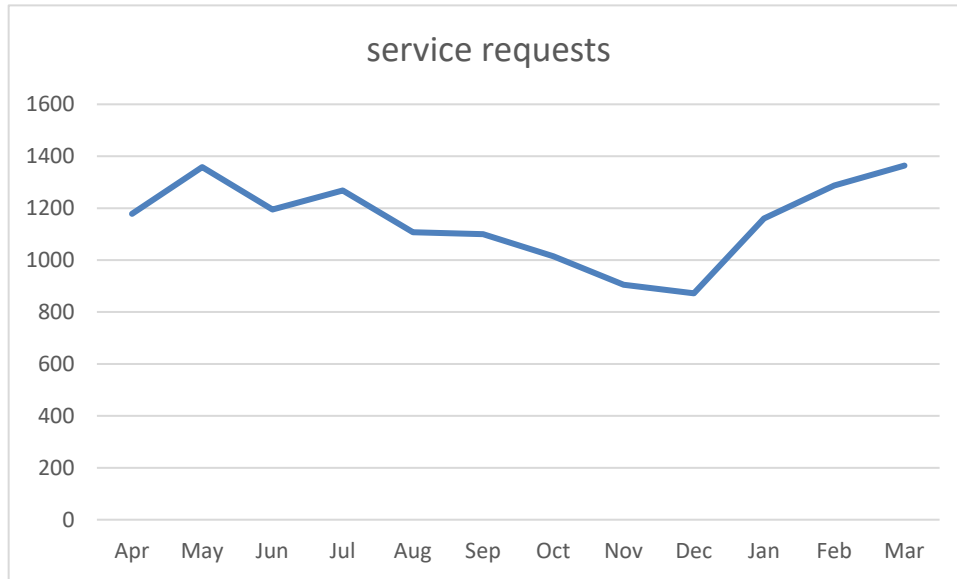
Table 3 – Service Request Numbers by Ward Area

Ward	Total service requests
1 N, W and Central Sutherland	340
2 Thurso	292
3 Wick	290
4 Landward Caithness	255
5 East Sutherland and Edderton	402
6 W Ross, Stepper and Lochalsh	810
7 Cromarty Firth	544
8 Tain and Easter Ross	458
9 Dingwall and Seaforth	482
10 Black Isle	293
11 Eilean a Cheo	675
12 Caol and Mallaig	538
13 Aird and Loch Ness	554
14 Inverness West	369
15 Inverness Central	1016
16 Inverness Ness-side	336
17 Inverness Millburn	148
18 Culloden and Ardersier	380
19 Nairn	384
20 Inverness South	338
21 Badenoch and Strathspey	691
22 Ft William and Ardnamurchan	791

**This table does not include the number of Contaminated Land planning screening assessments undertaken in each ward area. These are recorded on a separate database.*

4.4 To provide an indication as to the variations in demand across the year, a breakdown by calendar month is provided in Fig 1 below.

Fig 1: Monthly breakdown of Service Request demand



The trend in 2025/26 follows the general trend experienced by environmental health with greater demands over the spring and summer and lower in November and December. The increase in January to March 2026 is linked to STL renewal applications increasing.

4.5 **Contaminated land**

In addition to the above Service Requests, **3542** planning applications were screened by our Contaminated Land Officers. Whilst the majority of actions were only advisory/informative due to the proposed developments not materially changing the risk of potential contamination, **509** applicants were required to submit detailed site histories and/or recommended to undertake further contamination site investigations, remediation or validation works. This was required for proposed development sites that had formerly been used as, for example, depots/petroleum licensed sites; electrical works; landfill/refuse sites; engineering works, railway land, sheep dips, smiddies and miscellaneous works.

4.6 **Grants**

Table 4 below provides the number of Housing Scheme of Assistance and Private Water Supply Improvement Grants that have been approved during the period.

The Housing adaptation grants provide key support to individuals by providing funding towards adaptations that allow them to remain in their own home.

Private Water Supply Grants of up to £800 per property are available for improvements to private water supplies that fail legal standards or require improvements.

Table 4 – Number and value of Approved Grants

Type	Number	Total Value of Grants
Scheme of Assistance Housing Grant – Adaptations	348	£1,776,846*

i.e. for installation of stairlifts; level access showers and access ramps etc. In some cases, discretionary repair grants are awarded for repairs needed to support the installation of an adaptation i.e. replacing rotted floor joists in bathroom and for replacing lead pipework.		
Private Water Supply Grants	38	£112,718

**-total grant expenditure in year (will have carry over from committed spend in 2024/25)*

4.7 **Miscellaneous licensing**

As well as being a statutory consultee for miscellaneous licences, Environmental Health also administer the issuing of these licences. Miscellaneous licensing includes animal boarding, breeding, and selling, riding establishments, caravan sites, cinemas, dangerous wild animals, performing animals, venison dealers & zoos. Full details [here](#).

The Miscellaneous Licences are typically issued for a calendar year. The exception is caravan site licences for touring/holiday sites – applications are only required if new site or change in licence holder.

Table 5 – Miscellaneous Licence Activity

Licence Type	2025/2026
Animal Boarding Establishment	71
Breeding of Dogs	2
Breeding of Cats	2
Cinemas Act 1985	11
Animal Welfare	3
Animal Rehoming	1
Riding Establishment	15
Animal Welfare – Selling	2
Venison Dealers	16
Holiday Caravan Site	6
Total	129

4.8 **Health and safety at work enforcement**

Environmental Health is the relevant health and safety enforcing authority for a wide range of businesses and workplaces across Highland. In fulfilling this statutory role, the service undertook **six** investigations in accordance with the Scottish Work-Related Deaths Investigation Protocol. These investigations require Environmental Health to work in conjunction with Police Scotland to investigate the circumstances of each death, assess compliance with health and safety legislation, and formally report findings to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). The information provided supports the COPFS in determining whether potential prosecutions for health and safety offences are appropriate and/or for use in Fatal Accident Inquiries. All six cases are still subject to consideration by COPFS and so no further detail can be provided.

By their nature, work-related death investigations are complex, resource-intensive, and require immediate prioritisation by the team. The relatively high number of such

investigations during the year had a significant impact on the service's capacity to deliver planned proactive health and safety interventions.

5. Pro-Active/Scheduled Work

- 5.1 The Environmental Health team conduct a range of programmed work, particularly in respect of food safety where a significant number of inspections/interventions are conducted of food businesses to check compliance. **Such work is in addition to inspections or visits related to Service Requests.**

A breakdown of the number of programmed inspections/visits/Interventions that were undertaken for the period **1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026** is detailed within Table 6 below.

For ease of understanding, the outcomes recorded against these reports have been consolidated under 8 main headings.

Table 6 - Pro-Active Inspections/Visits/Interventions by Type

Visit Type	Number
Food Safety/Hygiene/Advisory Intervention	597
Approved Food Establishment/Export Health Intervention	96
H&S Workplace Pro-active Intervention	3
Licensing Compliance Check/Intervention	790
PWS Survey	362
Animal Health	162
Air Quality – Calibration Visits	30
Local environmental patrols – dog fouling/litter	199
	2239

For the full set of outcome codes recorded on our database please refer to Appendix 3 which outlines how our database outcome codes have been consolidated into these headings.

Please note that these figures **do not** include any reactive inspections/visits conducted in response to a Service Request (i.e. complaints or licence consultation visits).

- 5.2 There are **1188 Regulated (commercial)** and **1724 Exempt (domestic)** private water supplies recorded on the Council's Private Water Supply register. All "Regulated" supplies must be annually monitored (sampled) and risk assessed (once every 5 years) by the Council.

The latest DWQR return shows for 25/26 76% of regulated supplies were sampled. This is an improvement of 24/25 where 66% of regulated supplies were sampled. Work is ongoing to continue improvements in sampling rates in 26/27.

The introduction of Short Term Licensing (STL) has meant a significant number of new PWS supplies are now considered to be regulated supplies as they are considered commercial when serving a holiday let property.

6 Formal Enforcement Activity

Whilst the vast majority of service requests and issues identified by the Environmental health team are satisfactory resolved without the need to pursue formal enforcement action (i.e. by following the 4 Es approach), there is always a number of cases due to their seriousness or failure of the duty holder to comply, where formal enforcement action is required.

A breakdown of the number and type of enforcement notices that have been served between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026 are detailed in Table 7 below.

Table 7 – Enforcement Notices Served between 1st April 2025 - 31st March 2026

Notice Type	Number Served
Health and Safety	
Improvement Notice	5
Prohibition Notice	4
Food Safety	
Hygiene Improvement	15
Remedial Action Notice	6
Shellfish area closure notice	12
Animal Health Welfare	
Animal by-products notice	2
Animal welfare notice	1
Statutory Nuisance notice	7
Housing closure order	1
Pest control notice (rodents)	3
Residential Caravan Site Improvement Notice	9
Dog Control Notice	16
Dog Fouling FPN	1
Private water supply remediation notice	1
	83

6.1

All enforcement notices were complied with by the duty holder.

Prosecutions

In addition to the 6 health and safety cases mentioned at paragraph 4.8, officers are working with the COPFS on another 4 prosecution cases related to investigations undertaken in 2025/26. 4 cases are for animal health and welfare offences and 1 for food safety offences. All cases are still subject to consideration by COPFS and so no further detail can be provided.

Significant incidents that result in prosecution cases can take considerable time to investigate and conclude. For example, these cases can take the equivalent of 4-6 weeks of one officer's time to investigate including interviewing witnesses and then to prepare a detailed case for the COPFS

Annex 3A - Detailed breakdown of service request numbers within each of the general category types

Detailed category	Service requests
A01 ABP ENQUIRY	26

A02 Animal welfare ENQUIRY	129
A03 ANIMAL - General ENQUIRY (not nuisance etc)	217
A04 Animal disease ENQUIRY	17
A05 Animal traceability ENQUIRY	23
A06 WATSR ENQUIRY	3
A08 ANIMAL - Consultations (not licensing)	13
A11 ABP COMPLAINT	23
A12 Animal welfare COMPLAINT	76
A13 ANIMAL - General COMPLAINT (not nuisance)	18
A14 Animal disease COMPLAINT	61
A15 Animal traceability COMPLAINT	27
A16 WATSR COMPLAINT	7
Abandoned Vehicle report	2
D01 DC Dog Fouling	293
D02 DC Stray Dog	55
D03 DC Dog Micro Chipping	1
D04 DC Aggressive Dog	143
D05 DC Dog Bite - Person	54
D06 DC Dog Bite - Animal	79
D07 DC Dog - Other	182
E02 Planning – General CONSULTATION	712
E06 Groundwater Consultation/Enquiry	1
E07 Building Control Consultation/Enquiry	1
E11 SEPA Consultation/Enquiry	5
E12 FOI	250
E14 Promotional & Advisory Talks/Activities	2
E15 EIR (Environmental Information Request)	17
E16 Planning – MAJOR Applications	45
E17 GENERAL EH Enquiry	305
E18 Planning – ENQUIRY	45
E19 EH Annual Returns	1
G01 Abandoned Vehicle	1736
G03 Grounds Maintenance - Litter	1
G09 Street Cleaning	8
G11 Litter	40
G16 Roadkill - removal of dead animals from verge	110
G20 Fly-tipping - URGENT (e.g. public health risk)	32
G21 Fly-tipping - Non-Urgent	144
G41 Trade waste policy enquiry	2
G42 Trade waste policy complaint	11
G43 Trade waste policy area patrol	2
G44 Trade waste policy visit to specific premises	2
H03 H & S Complaint (Non Work Related)	86
H11 H&S Request For Information	13
H19 RIDDOR Accident Notification	111
H20 H & S Complaint (Work Related/ HASAWA)	25
H23 H & S Request for Information/ Advice	33
H24 H & S Asbestos ASB5 Notification	1

H25 H & S LOLER Notification	3
H26 H & S Safety at Sports Ground Intervention/ Visit	7
H27 H & S Primary Authority Referral	5
H28 H & S Cooling Tower Notification	1
HSB Complaint-received direct-smoking ban	1
LAB Miscellaneous Licensing Enquiry	195
LAC Miscellaneous Licensing Consultation	83
LAD Miscellaneous Licensing complaint	24
LBB Civic Government Licensing Enquiry	59
LBC Civic Government Licensing Consultation	402
LBD Civic Government Licensing Complaint	4
LBE Short Term Let Licensing Consultation	1512
LBF Short Term Let Licensing Enquiry	60
LBG Short Term Let Licensing Complaint	107
LCB Liquor Licensing Enquiry	10
LCC Liquor Licensing Consultation	29
LCD Liquor Licensing Complaint	2
LDA HMO Application	88
LDB HMO Complaint - Licensed Premises	3
LDC HMO Complaint - Unlicensed Premises	18
N05 Noise Advice Enquiry	120
N06 Noise Non-Domestic	138
N07 Noise Domestic	548
N09 Noise Housing Referral	18
N21 Premises - Dirty Houses & Gardens	47
N30 Cooking Odours	6
N31 Foul Odours	85
N32 Dust Complaint	7
N33 Smoke Complaint	109
N34 General Nuisance - Other	82
N35 Light Nuisance	21
N36 Insect Nuisance	2
N37 Water Nuisance	15
N40 Choked/Defective Drain / Sewer	47
N41 Choked/Defective Septic Tank	18
N42 Blue Green Algae ALERT	4
N45 Radon query	1
N46 Blue Green Algae ENQUIRY	1
N48 Plant cmplt/query (injurious weeds, invasive species, ragwort etc)	7
N60 Routine Refuse Complaint	9
N61 Serious Refuse - Foul or Putrescible	4
N62 Animal waste nuisance (not dog fouling-use code D01)	20
N63 Animal/Whale etc Carcass	8
N64 Other animal complaint (not noise)	10
N75 Public Health Incidents (eg flooding, fire, pollution)	7
N88 Air quality enquiry	7
N89 Air quality complaint	3

N90 Air Quality LSO Reactive Work	3
NBB National Assistance Burial enquiry/request (s87)	37
NBD Home Burial enquiry/request	2
NBF Other burial/body enquiry	3
NGB Housing grant enquiry	251
NGC Housing grant property visit	2
NGD Housing grant application	108
NHB Housing general enquiry	26
NHC Housing complaint - dampness	30
NHD Housing complaint - structural	12
NHE Housing complaint - other	39
NHF Housing visit for immigration purposes	2
NHG Request for Housing Condition Report	81
NHZ Ukraine Refugee Property Check	21
OA1 Other	396
P02 Biting insects HIGH	4
P03 Mice large inf HIGH	1
P04 Rats aff. House HIGH	28
P05 Wasps HIGH	5
P06 Mice small inf.LOW	17
P07 Beetles LOW	2
P08 Rats NOT aff. House LOW	97
P09 Bees LOW	2
P10 Pests (Other)	7
P11 Flies LOW	7
P12 Ants LOW	1
P13 Cockroaches other LOW	1
P14 Other insect pests LOW	4
P15 Gulls	49
P16 Pigeons LOW	4
P19 Other bird pest LOW	3
P26 Other wildlife pest LOW	1
X02 Food Premises Registration	575
X05 FOOD SAFETY enquiry/consultation	424
X07 FISH/Shellfish EXPORT Certificates	664
X08 FOOD (non Fish/Shellfish) EXPORT Health Certificates	3
X10 Approval/Lic/Auth application FH	5
X11 Shellfish REGISTRATION Documents	123
X13 FSS FOOD Alert	9
X15 REQUEST for classification/fast track (shellfish)	1
X16 Fishing Vessel Registration	19
X17 FSS Food INCIDENT Report	12
X18 FSS SHELLFISH - Alert ONLY	11
X19 FSS SHELLFISH - Sample FAILURE	28
X22 FSS CLUE intelligence	1
X41 Complaint: Food (Unfit, Microbiological, foreign body)	95
X42 Complaint: Hygiene of Premises	141
X43 Complaint: Food Standards - item (composition, labelling etc.)	27

X44 Complaint: Food Standards - premises (composition, labelling etc.)	8
X45 APPROVED EST Food Complaint: Unfit, Microb, foreign body etc	1
X46 APPROVED EST Hygiene of Premises complaint	1
X49 Support Attestation	30
X50 CookSafe ONLINE ORDER (Insert Type)	8
XIB ID REPORT from public	16
XIC ID CONFIRMED Notification from NHS Highland	32
XID ID ENQUIRY	4
XIF ID ADVISORY Notification from NHS Highland	21
XIO ID Outbreak investigation	1
XPB Port Health enquiry/consultation	185
XPC Ship Sanitation Certificate Request	49
XPD Ship/aircraft request for samples	2
XPI Illness report from ship/aircraft	7
XPL Ship Inspection/visit (proactive, not requested)	5
XW1 Private supply grant enquiry	120
XWB Private supply enquiry (non grant)	487
XWC Private supply complaint/contamination report	32
XWD Private supply request for sample	112
XWF Private supply other consultation	19
XWG Private supply insufficient: enquiry or complaint	48
XWH Private supply STL Questionnaire	57
XWN Public supply enquiry/consultation	12
XWO Public supply complaint/contamination report	1
XWP Public supply request for sample	5
XWQ Lead in public supply notification requiring investigation	2
XWR Public Supply Incident	3

Appendix 5

Environmental Health: Food Safety Team Plan to 31 March 2027

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Highland Council, through its Environmental Health service within the Place Service Cluster, acts as the Food Authority for the Highland Council area. This Service Plan sets out how the Council will deliver its statutory food law enforcement responsibilities.
- 1.2 This Plan is prepared in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland) and the Interventions – Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland). It describes the Council's approach to service delivery, interventions and enforcement, and provides assurance that official food controls are planned, prioritised and delivered in a risk-based and proportionate manner, having regard to available resources.
- 1.3 The Environmental Health team's Strategic Plan 2026–2029 sets out the team's commitment to delivering its statutory food law enforcement responsibilities.

2. Background Information

2.1 Profile of the Local Authority

In geographical terms the Highland Council is the largest Council in Scotland, spanning an area of 26,000 square kilometres – one third of the landmass of Scotland, one eighth of landward Britain. 235,540²⁰¹⁸. The Highlands has the 7th highest population of the 32 authorities in Scotland (235,540) while having the lowest population density at 8 persons per square kilometre. Detailed profile information on the Highland area is available at:

[Geography - Highland profile - key facts and figures - Highland Council](#)

2.2 Organisational structure

The Council operates through three service clusters, each lead by an Assistant Chief Executive: People, Place, and Corporate. Environmental Health sits within the Place Service Cluster.

Full details are available at:

[Council structure - Highland Council](#)

2.3 The Scope of the Food Safety Service

Operational responsibility for food safety and food standards enforcement in premises subject to local authority enforcement currently lies totally with Highland Council Environmental Health. This includes programmed and reactive interventions, complaint investigation, incident response, sampling and the provision of advice to businesses. No duties are currently outsourced.

Field staff include EHOs and technical Officers (Food Safety). Many of these Officers carry out other functions in addition to food safety and food standards work, e.g. several of the EHOs involved in food safety and food standards work also carry out the full range of environmental health duties e.g. health and safety inspections and investigation of public health complaints.

This Service Plan does not address Feedstuffs as responsibility for this aspect of food legislation lies within the Trading Standards team.

3. **Demands on the Food Safety team**

3.1 **Food businesses:**

The Council has approximately 7000 food businesses registered on our database. This is across a wide range of sectors including primary producers, approved establishments, manufacturers, retailers and catering premises.

Detailed numbers as follows:-

Type of food business	No. of Business
Primary producers	588
Fishing Vessels	405
Manufacturers & packers	504
Importers/Exporters	10
Distributors/Transporters	96
Retailers	1112
Restaurants and caterers	4353
Total	7068

(Data at 18/4/26)

The team regularly receive the required registration notification for new food businesses but are also aware there are significantly less notifications received of businesses closed. A project is being undertaken in 2025/26 to review the food premises register and proactively identify and remove business no longer trading.

3.2 **Approved establishments:** The numbers given in 3.1.1 include premises that have been formally approved. Food Hygiene Legislation requires premises that manufacture and wholesale products of animal origin to be approved by their local Food Authority before they start trading.

With 69 Approved establishments Highland has a significant number of approved premises when compared to other Scottish authorities. Aberdeenshire have 81, Argyll & Bute 48, Glasgow City 30 and other authorities have lower numbers. These approvals span a broad and diverse range of food industry sectors. Approved establishments include cheese producers, milk processors, ice cream producers, fish processors and smokers, shellfish dispatch centres, and manufacturing butchers.

The approach to interventions at Approved premises has changed in recent years to Official Control Verification (OCV). This is a structured, risk-based methodology for monitoring approved food establishments focusing on systematic verification of Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS). It mandates a 12-month audit cycle with at least three interventions (including unannounced visits) to ensure consistency and high safety standards across Scotland. This approach requires a greater commitment of staff resources due to the level of regulatory oversight and technical assessment involved.

- 3.3 Scrabster Border Control Point (BCP):** Environmental Health staff provide inspection services for the BCP at Scrabster. The BCP is approved for the import of fishery products. It operates on a cost recovery basis with a charge for each consignment imported. Current trade patterns mean no product is currently imported through the BCP, but it remains designated. More details available at the UK Government site [here](#).
- 3.4 Export Health certificates:** The provision of export health certificates (EHCs) for fish & fishery products is provided across the whole of Highland by Environmental Health staff. These EHCs allow for products to be exported to the EU and across the world by local businesses. Demand for EHCs remains high with 1330 EHCs issued in 2025. With the proposed Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement with the EU, expected to take effect in mid-2027, EU EHCs will no longer be required, although there is no confirmed timescale for this agreement. Continued high demand for EHCs is expected as EHC for the EU make up only about 20% of the EHCs issued in 2025, with EHCs for other destinations, including North, Central & South America, the Far & Middle East as well as Africa & China making up the balance.
- 3.5 Food Hygiene Information Scheme:** The Council have implemented the national Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS). The scheme is designed to provide further information to the public on outcomes of hygiene inspections of food business where the public have access e.g. caterers and retailers. The display of such information at the business is voluntary but all outcomes will be displayed on the web.

Ratings at April 2026:

FHIS rating	number
Pass & Eatsafe	22
Pass	2539
Improvement Required	430
Awaiting Inspection	2732
Pass & Exempt	179
Outwith scope	523
Sensitive - pass	138
Sensitive - improvement required	4
sensitive - awaiting inspection	96

The inspection results for inspected premises are listed on the internet at ratings.food.gov.uk. A searchable mobile phone app is also available.

- 3.6 Interventions**
 For food safety, the inspection programme is designed to assess compliance with food hygiene standards. Where poor standards are identified, officers will take appropriate and proportionate enforcement action, including the provision of formal advice, the service of statutory notices requiring improvements, the restriction of food processes, or, where necessary, the closure of premises.

Food law interventions are carried out in accordance with the risk-based frequencies set out in the Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland). Interventions include inspections, audits, sampling visits and alternative enforcement strategies where permitted.

The annual interventions programme is derived from the food business profile and includes programmed interventions, anticipated follow-up revisits and allowance for reactive work such as complaints, incidents and new business registrations.

Where resources do not permit the delivery of all programmed interventions, priority will be given to higher-risk and non-compliant premises, and to those associated with complaints, intelligence, incidents, or outbreaks.

The Food programme Priorities for 2026/2027 are detailed as follows:

		FOOD LAW	FOOD STANDARDS
	P01	UNRATED High (ASAP) [U1, U] All Approved (12 mths) Law All E's (1 mth) Law All D's (3 mths) All Group 1's (1-18 mths)	Standards A Standards B
	P02	UNRATED Med A (ASAP) [U2A, V] Law 2C (12 mths) Law 3C (24 mths)	
	P03	UNRATED Med B (28 dys) [U2B, W] Law 2B (18 mths) Law 3B (36 mths)	
	Alternative	UNRATED Low (U3, X) Law A (24-60 mths)	Standards C

In 2025/26 officers undertook 629 interventions/inspections at food businesses, undertook 69 OCV interventions/inspections at approved establishments and processed 54 samples as part of targeted food sampling surveys.

In 2026/27 a programme of 765 inspections of food businesses has been planned. In addition:

- a project is being planned for the remote assessment of around 370 business (mostly fishing vessels).
- officers have a separate programme for the require OCV visits to approved establishments.
- Any new premises that register through the year and are identified for inspection.
- Any reactive inspections that are required following e.g. food alerts, complaints or intelligence.

3.7 New Food Businesses

All new food businesses registering with the Council are assessed and prioritised for intervention based on risk. Higher-risk businesses are incorporated into inspection programmes at the earliest opportunity.

Lower-risk businesses may initially receive advisory contact, with inspection priorities reviewed on an ongoing basis. There are a significant number of low risk businesses such as B&Bs, childminders and deer larders.

3.8 Alternative Interventions for Low-Risk Premises

Where permitted by the Code, alternative enforcement strategies may be used for **lower-risk food businesses** in order to maintain appropriate oversight while directing officer resources towards higher-risk activity. The team will continue to use these approaches to with low-risk food businesses.

Plans are in place to re-initiate the Alternative Enforcement project for low-risk food premises, including B&Bs, home bakers, deer larders (non-processing only), and childminders. This approach was successfully piloted in 2024/25; however, progress stalled due to subsequent staff changes.

The alternative enforcement process involves the remote collection of key information from food business operators, enabling premises records to be reviewed and updated without an initial physical inspection. This includes confirmation of trading status, updated contact details, and submission of photographs of food preparation areas, along with copies of the Food Safety Management System (FSMS) in place.

Officers will undertake a structured desktop assessment of the information provided to evaluate compliance and risk. Based on this assessment, a decision will be made as to whether a follow-up physical inspection is required or whether the premises can continue to be managed through alternative enforcement arrangements.

The previous pilot demonstrated that this approach was both effective and efficient, allowing low-risk premises to be reviewed proportionately while ensuring regulatory oversight is maintained. It also significantly improved the accuracy and completeness of premises database records, enabling inspection resources to be better targeted at higher-risk businesses.

4. Enforcement Approach

4.1 The Council has adopted a corporate Enforcement Policy which applies to food law. Enforcement action is taken in a risk-based, proportionate and transparent manner, using a graduated approach ranging from advice and informal action through to formal enforcement where necessary.

4.2 The food team work closely with local food businesses are happy to offer advice on areas of food safety. Officers are encouraged to attend and provide advice to any food industry meetings in their areas, in addition to offering advice during inspections and on request at our offices.

5. Complaints, Incidents and Sampling

5.1 The Service investigates food complaints, food alerts and food incidents in line with national guidance and local procedures. Reactive work is prioritised based on risk to public health.

5.2 The following complaints were received and investigated in 2025/26:

Complaint: Food (Unfit, Microbiological, foreign body)	96
Complaint: Hygiene of Premises	142
Complaint: Food Standards (composition, labelling etc.)	35

273

5.3 Food sampling forms part of the enforcement programme and is undertaken in accordance with local priorities and national sampling initiatives using contracted Public Analyst services. Environmental Health has contracts for bacteriological examination and chemical analysis of foodstuffs with the Public Analyst, City of Edinburgh Council. In addition to locally targeted sampling, Environmental Health participates in sampling surveys organised by the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee and in UK food surveys co-ordinated by the FSA.

6. Out-of-Hours Interventions

6.1 Arrangements are in place to enable response to serious food incidents and risks to public health outwith normal working hours. These arrangements are consistent with the Council's Enforcement Policy and emergency response procedures.

7. Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

7.1 Environmental Health works closely with NHS Highland on the investigation of Foodborne and Waterborne disease. A national Public Health Incident Plan is followed with any actual or threatened major outbreak within the Highland Council area. Procedures for investigating sporadic cases of foodborne diseases are outlined in the Council's Protocol for Investigation of Enteric Disease.

8. Food Safety Incidents

8.1 Food Alerts are currently brought to the attention of Environmental Health by email. Food Standards Scotland is aware of the procedure for contacting relevant Officers outwith normal working hours via Council's emergency out-of-hours number.

9. Liaison and Partnership Working

9.1 The Service works closely with Food Standards Scotland, NHS Highland, the Animal and Plant Health Agency and other local authorities through established liaison groups to support consistency, information sharing and effective incident response.

10. Resources and Workforce

10.1 The Food Safety Service is delivered by authorised and competent officers whose training and development is maintained in line with the Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland).

10.2 Staffing and financial resources are set out within the Environmental Health Operational Plan. Resources are regularly reviewed to ensure that highest-risk activities are prioritised.

11. Priorities

11.1 Key priorities include protection of public health through risk-based interventions, improved compliance at higher-risk and non-compliant premises, delivery of national priorities issued by Food Standards Scotland and continued compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland).

11.2 SAFER Programme

The team will continue to engage with Food Standards Scotland's (FSS) strategic SAFER programme that is reviewing the food law delivery model in Scotland. SAFER supports Ministerial commitments to wider public service reform and is a programme of reform to secure improved public health outcomes through model redesign, developing and embracing new and more efficient ways of working, better use of data and digital technologies, and ensuring financial sustainability.
