

The Highland Council

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| Agenda Item | 9 |
| Report No | HCW-12-26 |

Committee: Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Date: 27 May 2026

Report Title: Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029

Report By: Chair Children's Services Planning Partnership Board

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the Draft Community Planning Partnership's, Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 – 2029.
- 1.2 The report provides (**Appendix 1**) the Draft Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 – 2029 for noting by this committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Note the work undertaken by the Children's Services Planning Partnership Board in producing the Draft - Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029. This plan will be formally signed off by the Community Planning Partnership Board;
 - ii. Note and provide comment on the plan which has been approved by the Children's Services Planning Partnership Board.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – The intention is to deliver the Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026-2029 within existing partner resources. Delivery will be supported through effective collaboration, alignment of current service activity, and use of established partnership governance arrangements. Any additional resource implications emerging during implementation—such as those arising from changes in demand, national policy, or inspection findings—will be identified and considered through normal planning and decision-making processes.
- 3.2 **Legal** – There is a statutory requirement for Community Planning Partnerships to prepare and publish a Children's Services Partnership Plan on a three-yearly basis. This Plan fulfils this requirement. The plan has been developed to support compliance with relevant legislation and statutory guidance, including duties arising from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act, with a

focus on embedding children's rights within strategic planning, service delivery, and partnership decision-making.

Members will be aware that there is a review of the Integration Scheme between NHS Highland and the Highland Council currently underway. A range of children's services are included within the Lead Agency Model and any change from the current the model of integration to a Body Corporate would impact on the way in which children's services are governed within the scheme. The implications of this are a key consideration within the Review and will be reported back to this committee as the review progresses.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – The next iteration of the plan will be delivered through the Community Planning Partnership infrastructure and will be aligned to the aspirations of the Highland outcome improvement plan with a focus on community resilience and participation.
- 3.4 **Risk** – No new or significant risks arise directly from approval of the plan. Risks associated with delivery—such as capacity pressures, partnership dependency, or changes to demand—will continue to be managed through existing partnership governance, performance management, and risk management arrangements.
- 3.5 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no direct health and safety implications associated with the plan. Health and safety risks at service level will continue to be managed through established organisational policies, procedures, and professional standards.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - The plan does not introduce specific new implications for Gaelic. However, delivery of the plan will take account of statutory Gaelic language duties where applicable, and services will continue to be provided in line with existing Gaelic Language Plans and commitments across partner organisations.

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**
An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 12th May 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

The Screening process has concluded that there are positive impacts as outlined in the table below and there is no requirement for a full Integrated Impact assessment.

| Impact Assessment Area | Conclusion of Screening |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Equality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and Young People – <i>Positive</i> Children affected by disability – <i>Positive</i> |
| Socio-economic | <i>Positive</i> |
| Human Rights | <i>Positive</i> |
| Children’s Rights and Well-being | <i>Positive</i> |
| Island and Mainland Rural | <i>No impact</i> |
| Climate Change | <i>No impact</i> |
| Data Rights | <i>No impact</i> |

5. Developing the Plan

- 5.1 In December 2019, Scottish Government wrote to each of the strategic leads for children’s services planning issuing new guidance to support the development of Children’s Services Partnership plans across Scotland. This guidance determined that children’s services plans should be embedded within Community Planning Partnerships. This guidance also provides the structure and framework for our 2026-2029 plan.
- 5.2 Over the last 18 months considerable work has been undertaken to draft this iteration of the Children’s Services Partnership plan. The well-established Children’s Services Planning Partnership Board has met frequently during the last 12 months and has worked effectively in determining the themes and priorities. In addition, during this period the board have hosted a series of workshops to agree the change ideas articulated within the plan and developed the Children and young People’s needs assessment ([here](#)) alongside the Children and Young People’s Voice report ([here](#)).
- 5.3 The board membership comprises:
- Integrated Children’s Services - lead officer THC (Chair)
 - Chief Officer – Housing and Communities Engagement – The Highland Council
 - Principal Educational Psychologist – The Highland Council
 - Head of Health Improvement, Public Health - NHS Highland
 - Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
 - Chief officer - Education
 - Lead Officer – Child Protection Committee
 - Independent Chair – Child Protection Committee
 - Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer (Health and Social Care) –The Highland Council
 - Child Health Lead – The Highland Council
 - Superintendent, Partnerships – Police Scotland
 - Director of Public Health – NHS Highland
 - Head of Operations Women and Children’s Directorate – NHS Highland
 - Nurse Director – NHS Highland
 - Programme Manager – Family Wellbeing Programme
 - Child Health Commissioner, Public Health
 - Director of Children & Families (Aberlour) – Third sector
 - Officer representative HTSI – Third Sector (x2)
 - Director – Highlife Highland

6. The Draft Plan

- 6.1 The draft plan sets out our shared priorities for improvement, ensuring that services are effectively integrated for children, young people and their families. It is focused on making best use of available resources while delivering our core aims of safeguarding, supporting and promoting wellbeing through early intervention and prevention.
- 6.2 The plan has been developed in alignment with the National Performance Framework Outcomes and is underpinned by a comprehensive, evidence-based Children and Young People's needs assessment. This draws together robust quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to service performance, outcomes and the wellbeing of children and young people across Highland.
- 6.3 A supporting performance management framework establishes clear indicators and measures to monitor progress, evaluate impact and support continuous improvement in meeting children's wellbeing needs.
- 6.4 The draft plan has been developed through a children's rights lens, embedding the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and reflecting the values of Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC). It also reaffirms partners' collective commitment to Keeping the Promise, ensuring that care experienced children and young people are supported to thrive.
- 6.5 To strengthen coherence and reduce duplication, existing partnership structures have been aligned within the children's services planning framework where appropriate. This includes the Highland Child Protection Committee, The Promise Board and the Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership. In addition, relevant Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) delivery groups include discrete sub-groups focused on integrated children's services, particularly in relation to poverty and mental health.
- 6.6 The draft plan is closely aligned with the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, sharing a strong focus on collaborative action to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes. Together, both plans aim to address the underlying causes of inequality, supporting a fairer Highland where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from living, working and growing up in the region. Central to this approach is listening to communities and working with them to deliver meaningful, place-based change.
- 6.7 The draft plan is informed by the Highland Children and Young People's Needs Assessment (CYPNA) 2026, with particular emphasis on the Children and Young People's Voice Report. The views and lived experiences of over 8,000 children and young people were central to shaping the plan's priorities and ambitions.

7. A Life Course Approach

- 7.1 Our objective is to improve outcomes for Highland's Infants, Children and Young People through local delivery of services and provide support by considering the needs of their families across a life course from pre-birth to young adulthood. In taking a life course approach, we can more readily identify opportunities to minimise risk and enhance the protective factors through evidence-based interventions.

7.2 A significant feature of this plan is our aspiration to further develop community scaffolding for our supports through our community-based whole family wellbeing approach. This programme aims to reduce inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of the Highland Population through improving cohesion, co-ordination and collaboration of whole family support within Highland's Communities. Working to the founding principles of this plan, communities will be supported by a partnership programme team lead by a programme manager and supported by locality coordinators.

Designation: Chair of the Children's Services Planning Partnership Board

Date: May 2026

Author: Ian Kyle

Background Papers: N/A

Appendices: Appendix 1 Draft - Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029

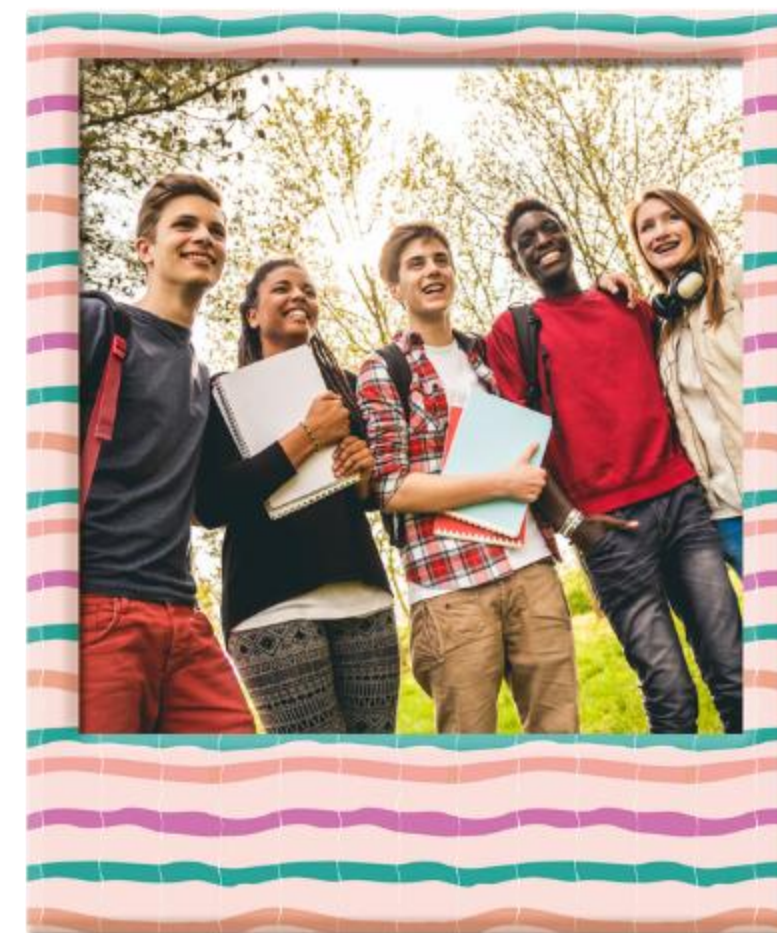


Highland
Community
Planning
Partnership

Com-pàirteachas
Dealbhadh
Coimhearsnachd
na Gàidhealtachd

HIGHLAND CHILDREN'S SERVICES PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2026-2029

“All Highland’s Children to have the best possible start in life, to enjoy being young, are loved, confident and resilient and can achieve their potential”



PURPOSE OF PLAN

Purpose of the plan

Children's services partnership provides the mechanism through which national ambitions for children, young people and families are translated into coordinated, outcome-focused action at a local level. The Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan (2026–2029) sets out how partners across Highland will work collectively to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The plan establishes a shared strategic framework for:

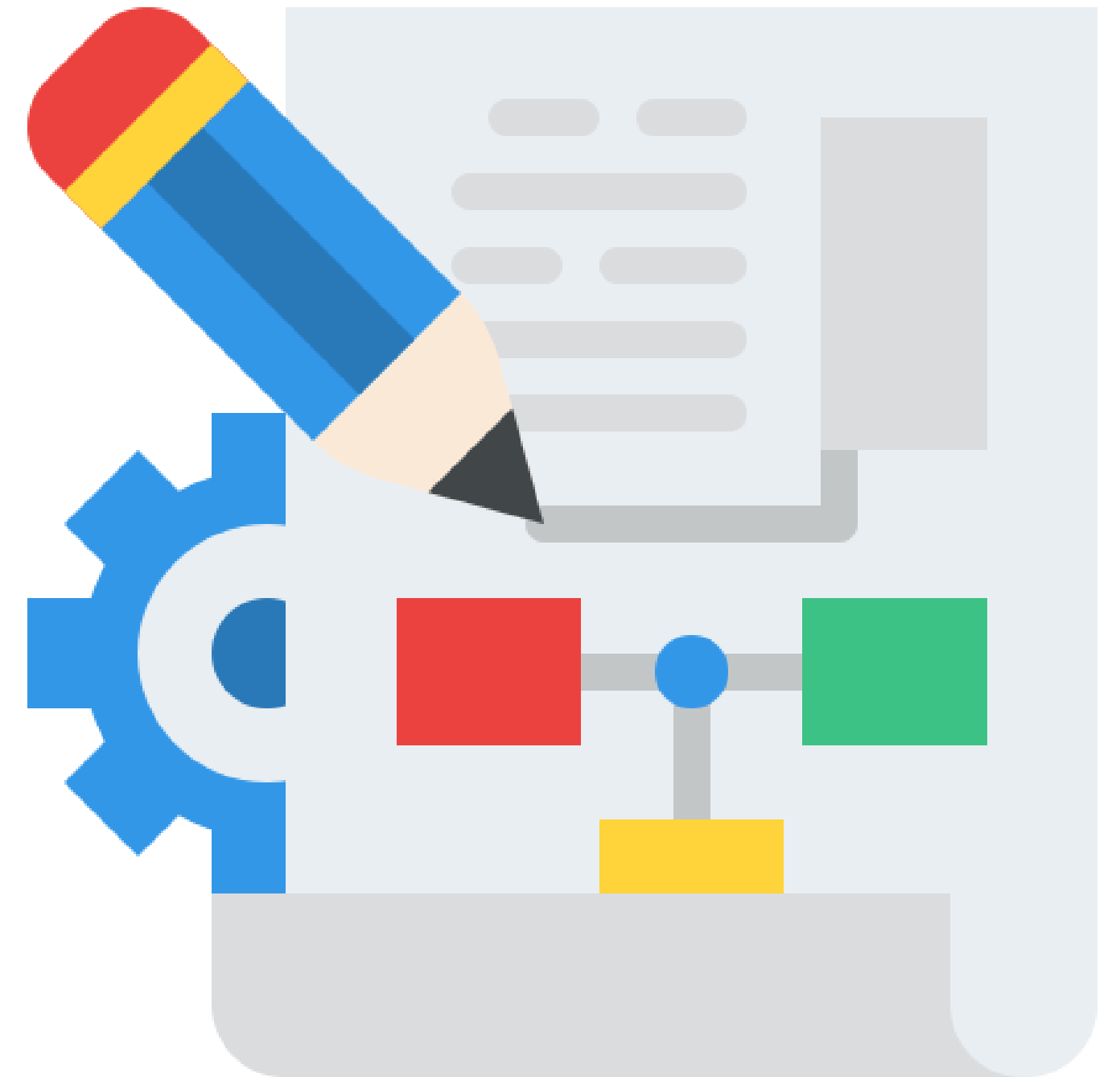
- understanding need
- agreeing joint priorities
- aligning services and resources
- monitoring progress and impact

It places a strong emphasis on prevention, early intervention, children's rights and whole-family approaches, recognising that children's wellbeing is shaped by a complex interaction of services, communities and wider social and economic conditions.

How We Work Together

Children's services in Highland are delivered through a long-established partnership spanning health, education, social work, the third sector, communities and wider community planning partners. This partnership approach enables coordinated, place-based responses that reflect Highland's geography, rurality and diverse local contexts.

Across all partners, planning, delivery and evaluation are underpinned by a set of shared foundations that provide a common basis for action, accountability and continuous improvement.



UNDERSTANDING LOCAL NEED: WHAT THE EVIDENCE TELLS US



This plan is informed by a combination of quantitative evidence and lived experience, primarily drawn from the Children and Young People's Needs Assessment and the Children's Voice Report. Together, these illustrate that while Highland benefits from strong universal services, it also faces increasing complexity, inequality and system pressure.

Key issues identified include:

- a declining child population and associated workforce challenges
- the impact of rurality on access to services, transport and digital connectivity
- persistent child poverty linked to low wages and higher living costs
- increasing family complexity, including kinship and blended families
- ongoing pressures in early child development, particularly speech and language
- perinatal vulnerability associated with mental health, domestic abuse and housing insecurity
- variation in immunisation uptake
- rising mental health and wellbeing concerns, particularly for vulnerable groups
- changing patterns of substance use, reinforcing the importance of prevention

Taken together, this evidence reinforces the need for early, rights-based, whole-family support that is responsive to place and informed by lived experience.

STRENGTHENING THE EVIDENCE BASE: NEEDS AND VOICES AS DETERMINING FACTORS

The development of this Children's Services Plan is informed by two core sources:

- [The Highland Children and Young People's Needs Assessment \(CYPNA\)](#)
- [The Children's Voice Report](#) and wider participation activity

Together, these foundations provide a robust understanding of what matters most to children and young people in Highland, where inequalities persist, and where partnership action can have the greatest impact.

The Children and Young People's Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment provides a comprehensive, data-driven overview of children's health, wellbeing and wider circumstances, drawing on national and local data across the life course from pre-birth through to young adulthood.

It confirms that outcomes are shaped by the combined influence of health, education, family support, housing, income, transport and community connection, rather than by individual services alone. This evidence directly informs the plan's strategic priorities and its emphasis on prevention, early intervention and whole-system responses.

Children's Voices

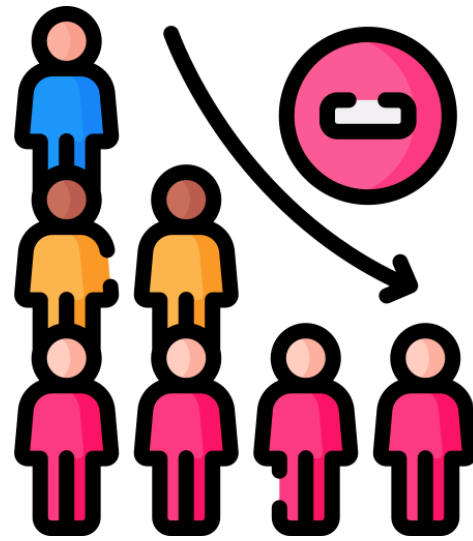
Alongside data, the plan is shaped by what children and young people have told us about their lives and experiences. Consistent themes include:

- The importance of being listened to and taken seriously
- Barriers created by distance, transport and cost
- Concerns around mental health, wellbeing and stigma
- The need for joined up, accessible and non judgemental services
- The value of trusted relationships

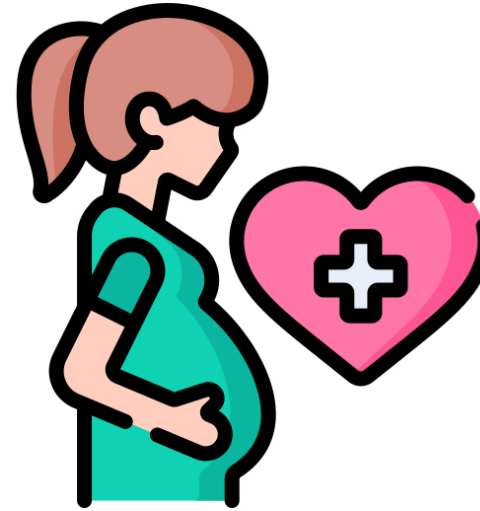
Children's voices inform the direction and focus of the plan, particularly in relation to rights-based practice, participation, mental wellbeing, early help and reducing inequalities.



WHAT THE DATA TELLS US...



Population of children and young people has declined Highland by - 7.7%



Of 32 Pre-Birth Child Protection Planning Meetings - 56% percent involved concerns raised parental substance use.

Data provided from [the Children and Young People Needs Assessment](#) and [Children and Young peoples Voice Report](#) when sharing the issues that affect them.

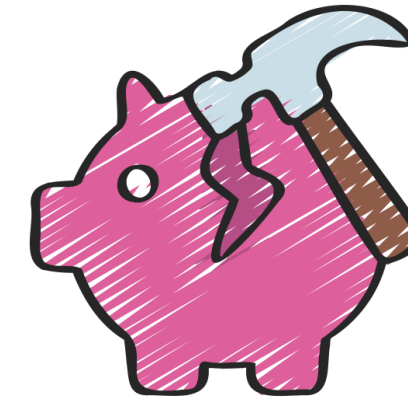
“CHILDREN BEING SAFE, HAVING PLENTY TO DO AND HAVING PEOPLE TO TALK TO”



45% of children of most deprived children showed signs of tooth delay at Primary 1

“MAKING FRIENDS WHEN YOU HAVE HEALTH ISSUES OR DISABILITIES”

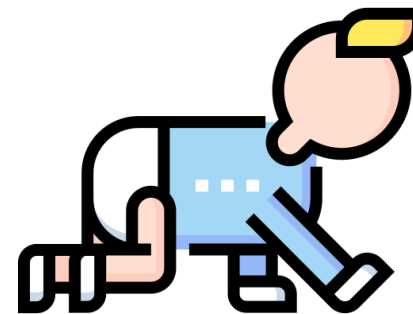
“DIRECT AND INDIRECT DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE”



Around 22% of children live in relative poverty after housing costs

“NOT ENOUGH MONEY FOR US AND OUR FAMILY”

“PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND OTHER PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH”



Children living in the most deprived neighbourhoods remain significantly more likely to have developmental concerns recorded.

“DECISION MAKERS UNWILLING TO SHARE POWER WITH THE YOUNGER GENERATION”

“WE NEED BETTER TRANSPORT LINKS”

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES AND PARTICIPATION



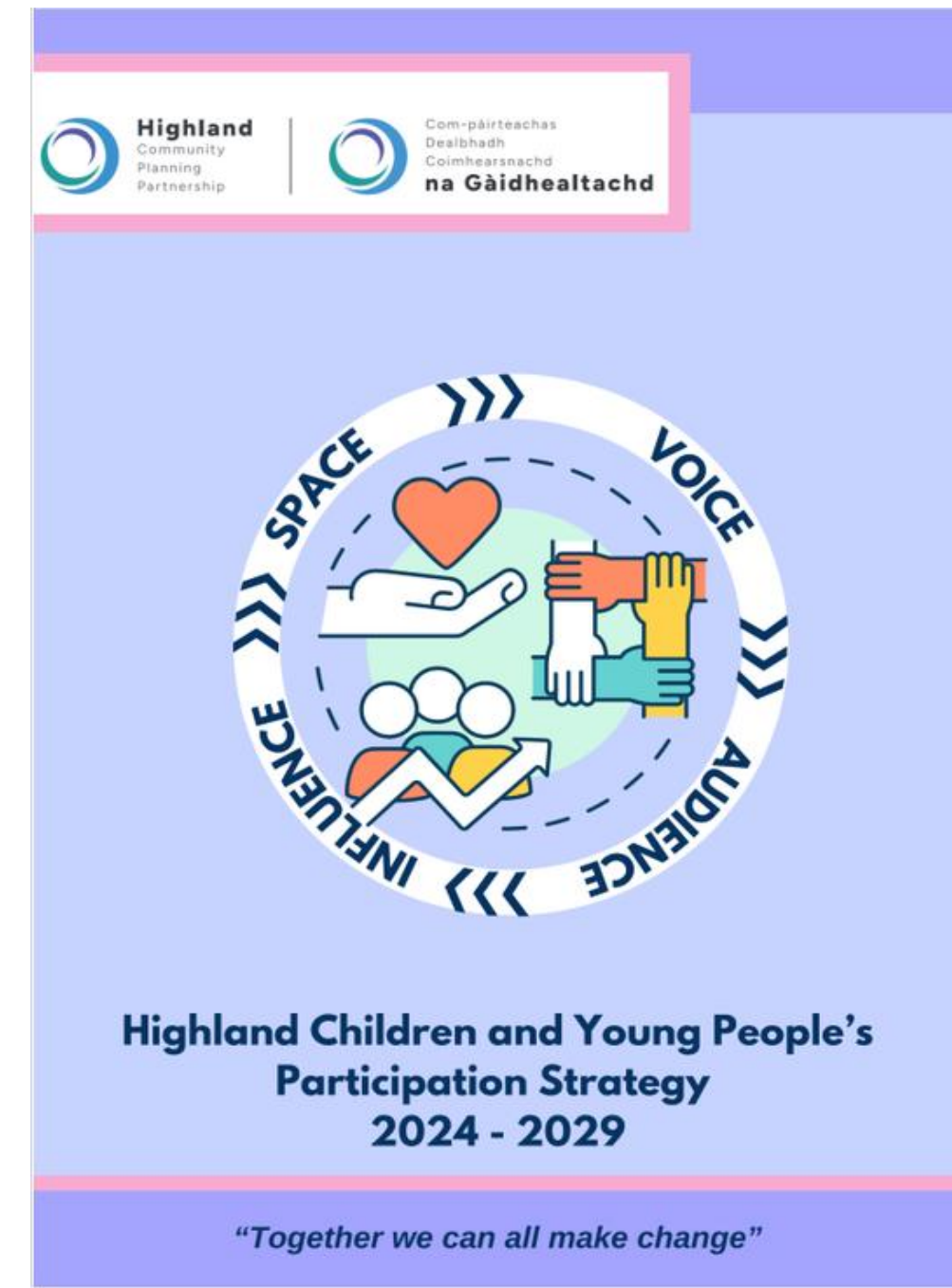
Children and young people's participation is a core foundation of this plan.

Participation by children and young people is central to the development, delivery and evaluation of this plan. [Highland's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy](#) was co-designed with children and young people and informed by contributions from over 800 participants. This was complemented by wider engagement activity, including the Children's Voice Report, the [Library of Voices](#) and the Highland Lifestyle Survey.

The Children's Services Planning Partnership is committed to:

- Implementing the Participation Strategy in full.
- Using a wide range of approaches to involve children and young people.
- Establishing participation as an ongoing partnership rather than a single, isolated activity.

Throughout the lifetime of the plan, children's voices will shape decision-making, improvement activity and evaluation via the Children's Services Partnership Planning Board's Voice and Influence Process and Library of Voices supporting continued participation and co-design.



THE SHARED FOUNDATIONS

Delivery of the Children's Services Partnership Plan is underpinned by a set of shared national and local frameworks that guide partnership working.

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

GIRFEC provides the national framework for how services work together to support children, young people and families. It promotes early intervention, shared understanding of wellbeing, proportionate responses and effective multi-agency practice.

Children's Rights (UNCRC)/ Children Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, reinforced through the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, establishes a shared responsibility across all partners to consider children's rights, voices and best interests in decision-making and service design.

The Promise

The Promise sets out Scotland's commitment to ensuring children grow up loved, safe and respected, with families supported to stay together wherever possible. The plan aligns with Highland's Promise work and the national direction of travel to 2030.

Tackling Child Poverty - Bringing Hope, Building Futures

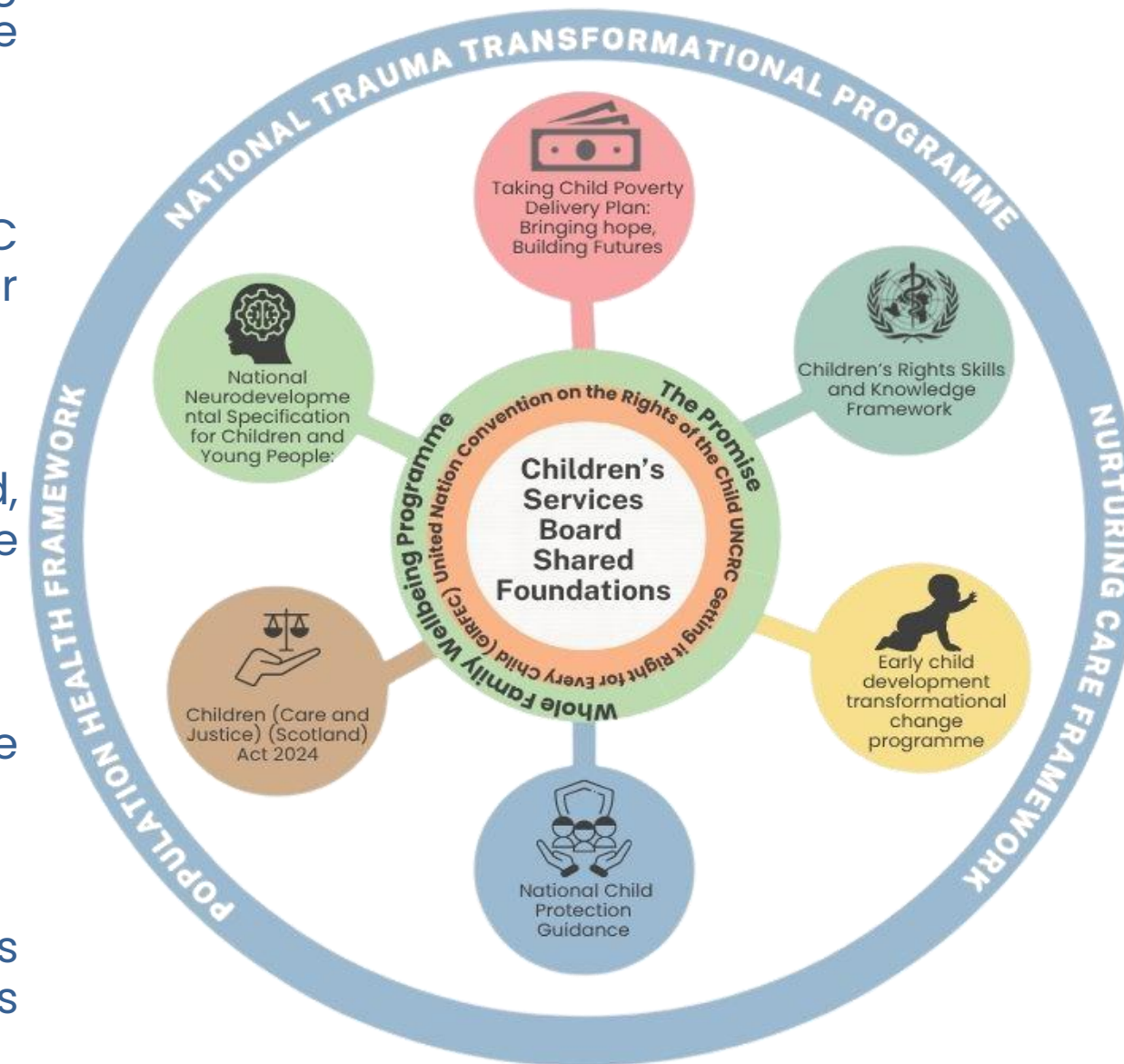
Child poverty is a key driver of inequality in outcomes. The plan supports coordinated, preventative and trauma-informed partnership action to reduce poverty and improve family wellbeing.

Trauma-Informed and Whole-Family Approaches

Partners are committed to working in trauma-informed ways and supporting whole families. This includes recognising the impact of adversity, inequality and structural barriers such as rurality, access to services and the cost of living.

Population Health Framework

A prevention-focused approach to improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities. Emphasises early intervention, tackling the wider social and economic causes of poor health, and working in partnership across services and communities, reflecting the Marmot principle of giving every child the best start in life and supporting those who need it most.



GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD (GIRFEC)

In Highland, Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) continues to provide the foundation for how services work together to support children, young people and families. Through the ongoing Refresh and Reset of the GIRFEC approach, partners are strengthening consistent use of the practice model, to ensure these are used effectively to promote wellbeing.



The GIRFEC Strategic Group plays a central role in driving this improvement work, bringing together multi-agency partners to review practice, identify barriers, and develop shared solutions. This collaborative leadership ensures that children and young people across Highland are supported through a coordinated, proportionate and timely response that reflects their individual needs.

Improvement Priorities include;

- Continue to strengthen shared understanding and professional confidence in GIRFEC across the partnership
- Improve multi-agency planning through consistent, collaborative tools and guidance
- Embed strong multi-agency pathways and relationships across the GIRFEC continuum
- Strengthen communication, learning and quality assurance through partnership working

By strengthening multi-agency working, reaffirming shared accountability, and embedding the refreshed practice model across services, Highland's GIRFEC partnership continues to strive for a whole system where every child's wellbeing is understood, supported and improved ensuring they have the best possible opportunities to thrive.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 provides a shared framework for all partners working with and for children and families, extending beyond children's services alone.

The Children's Services Planning Partnership Board is committed to using the UNCRC to guide partnership working across health, education, social care, the third sector and wider community planning. The Act reinforces a collective responsibility to embed children's rights, voices and best interests in strategic decision-making, service design and everyday practice.

This supports consistent, rights-based and joined-up approaches that promote fairness, inclusion and long-term wellbeing.

The Children's Services Planning Partnership Board commits to collectively developing, delivering and regularly reviewing an ongoing Children's Rights Action Plan, in line with the statutory duties of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, to ensure children's rights are embedded across all partnership decision-making, planning and service delivery.

THE PROMISE

The Children's Services Planning Partnership Board, Partners, are committed to Keeping the Promise, ensuring that children, young people and families including those who are care experienced grow up loved, safe and respected, and with their rights upheld.

This commitment will be realised locally through delivery of the Highland Promise Plan, led by The Promise Board and structured around three interconnected delivery sub-groups: Care, Family, and Doing Data Differently. Together, these strands provide a coherent and outcomes focused approach that aligns with the Promise Progress Framework and strengthens collective accountability for change.

Across all three sub-groups, the Highland Promise Plan is underpinned by shared principles: participation and co-production, trauma-informed practice, equality and inclusion, and partnership working. Progress will be tracked through the Promise Progress Framework, providing a consistent structure for understanding impact, identifying gaps and adapting activity where needed.

The Plan affirms Highland's long-term commitment to delivering on the Promise by 2030. Through focused leadership, collaboration, action and impact, the Highland Promise Plan will continue to drive meaningful and lasting change for children, young people and families across Highland.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026-2029



Informed by a combination of quantitative evidence and lived experience, this plan sets out six strategic priorities, drawing primarily on the Children and Young People's Needs Assessment and the Children's Voice Report

Poverty

We will mitigate the impact of poverty by supporting families to maximise income, reduce costs and access timely help.

Child Protection

We will protect children from harm by strengthening early identification, timely intervention and effective multi-agency working.

The Promise

We will keep the Promise by ensuring children and young people grow up loved, safe and respected, with families supported to stay together wherever possible.

Rights and Participation

We will uphold children's rights and ensure they are meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Health and Wellbeing

We will improve children and young people's physical, emotional and mental wellbeing so they can thrive, learn and develop.

Alcohol and Drugs

We will reduce the impact of alcohol and drug harm on children and families through whole-family, trauma-informed approaches.

DELIVERING THE PRIORITIES

To deliver on the Strategic Priorities, several oversight groups and committees are accountable for delivery of the priorities and plans using the life course approach.

These are:

Highland's Poverty Group

Highland's Child Protection Committee

The Promise Board

Highland's Rights and Participation Group

Highland's Health and Wellbeing Group

Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Group

Highland Mental Health Delivery Group

The GIRFEC Strategic Group and the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme team will be key partners in delivering the plan.



DELIVERY, MONITORING AND GOVERNANCE

Delivery of the plan is supported through themed partnership groups operating within clear governance and accountability arrangements.

Improvement activity will be informed by data, lived experience and continuous learning, underpinned by a shared, outcomes-focused and rights-based framework aligned with UNCRC, GIRFEC and national population health measures.

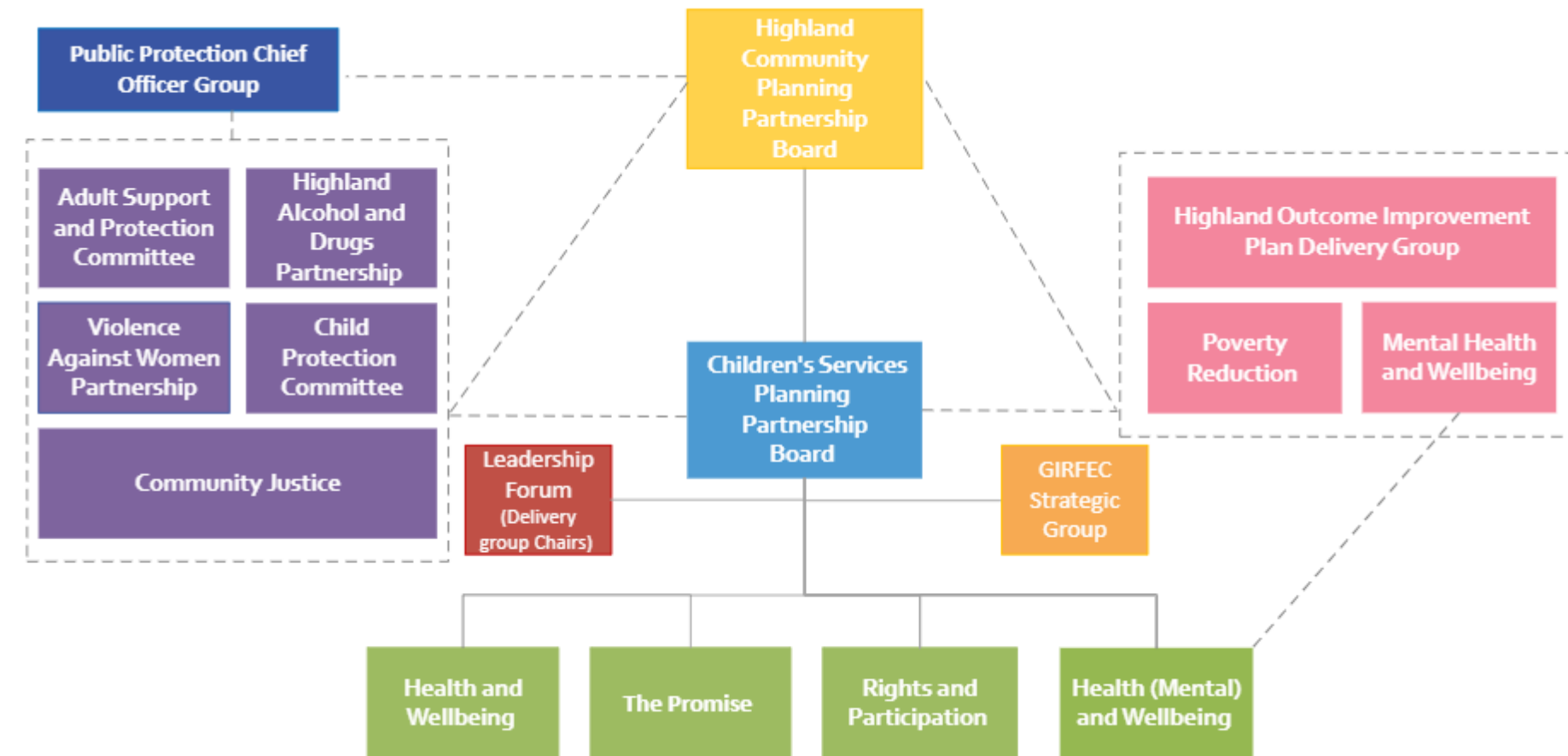
Clear reporting arrangements ensure accountability through the Children's Services Planning Partnership Board and wider community planning and statutory assurance structures.

Children's Services Planning Partnership Board provides strategic oversight of the delivery, monitoring and ongoing development of the Children's Services Plan on behalf of the Highland Community Planning Partnership and is directly accountable to the Community Planning Partnership Board.

To support robust partnership governance, assurance and performance management, the CSPP reports progress and provides assurance to The Highland Council and NHS Highland Board through the Joint Monitoring Committee, and to the Highland Council Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee.




The Public Protection Chief Officers Group also holds statutory responsibility for providing assurance on the development and delivery of the plan.

Together, these arrangements strengthen collective oversight, support clear accountability and ensure alignment across strategic, statutory and public protection responsibilities.



CHILD PROTECTION DELIVERY PLAN






| Starting Out  | Growing up  | Moving on  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Promote strong early identification and protective support across pregnancy and early childhood, enabling professionals to respond confidently and collaboratively to emerging needs.</p> | <p>Strengthen safeguarding by promoting early identification, coordinated prevention, and effective responses to emerging risks that impact the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.</p> | <p>Strengthen our systems so that young people have access to safe spaces and adults that protect them from harm and promote their wellbeing.</p> |
| Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements |
| <p>Early identification and timely support during pregnancy ensure that pre-birth assessments are completed on time, strengthening pre-birth support and supporting positive early outcomes for the child.</p> | <p>Children and young people are better protected from harm through strengthened approaches to preventing, identifying, and responding to child sexual abuse, resulting in earlier intervention, improved support, and safer outcomes.</p> | <p>Implementation of the Care and Justice Act will deliver more consistent, timely, and supportive responses for young people, demonstrated by improved multi-agency practice, increased participation of young people in decisions about their care, and better outcomes across key wellbeing and justice indicators.</p> |
| <p>Consistently use strength-based approaches to identify early signs of neglect, demonstrated by increased workforce confidence, improved practice standards, and earlier intervention in line with safeguarding expectations.</p> | <p>System-wide approach to digital safety will reduce digital harms and ensure children and young people receive timely, effective support. Success will be demonstrated through improved multi-agency practice, at least 90% of the workforce trained to recognise and respond to digital risks, and evidence of earlier intervention and reduced harm.</p> | <p>Reduce risks of child exploitation by strengthening protective approaches across services, demonstrated through improved multi-agency practice, increased workforce confidence in identifying concerns, and earlier intervention leading to safer outcomes for children and young people.</p> |
| <p>Embed early protective messaging across early years settings to develop a shared language and confident workforce.</p> | <p>Coordinated prevention and early-intervention programme will be in place across key services, with increased awareness and consistent delivery evidenced by improved workforce confidence and engagement in prevention activities</p> | <p>The partnership will have increased access to safe, trusted spaces for children and young people across local communities, demonstrated by improved multi-agency coordination, greater engagement from young people, and evidence of environments that promote safety, inclusion, and wellbeing</p> |

Children’s Rights Indicators: **Article 2** (No Discrimination), **Article 3** (Best interests of the child), **Article 5** (Family Guidance as Children Develop) **Article 6** (Life, Survival and Development) **Article 9** (Keeping Families Together) **Article 12** (Respect for Children’s Views) **Article 13** (Sharing Thoughts Freely) **Article 16**(Protection of Privacy) **Article 18** (Responsibility of Parents) **Article 19** (Protection From Violence, Abuse and Neglect) **Article 27** (Food, Clothing and a Safe Home) **Article 28** (Access to Education) **Article 33** (Protection From Harmful Drugs) **Article 34** (Protection From Sexual Abuse) **Article 35** (Prevention from Sale and Trafficking) **Article 36** (Protection from Exploitation) **Article 36** (Children in Detention) **Article 40** (Children who break the law) **Article 42** (Everyone Must Know Children’s Rights)

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS DELIVERY PLAN






| Starting Out  | Growing up  | Moving on  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Reduce the risk of harm from alcohol and drugs before birth and in early childhood by promoting healthy pregnancies, reducing stigma, and improving early identification, prevention and support for children, young people and families.</p> | <p>Promote safe, healthy and resilient childhoods by embedding evidence-based prevention, strengthening protective factors, and supporting children, young people and families affected by alcohol and drugs, particularly where there is vulnerability, poverty or risk of harm.</p> | <p>Reduce alcohol and drug related harms for young people as they transition into adulthood by strengthening youth-informed prevention, improving awareness of mental health impacts, ensuring access to high-quality, rights-based support and treatment, and supporting targeted interventions for those at increased risk of harm or exploitation.</p> |
| Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements |
| <p>People affected by alcohol and drug use experience reduced stigma and discrimination, leading to improved attitudes, increased help-seeking, and stronger community support.</p> | <p>Children and young people receive consistent, evidence-based substance education, strengthening knowledge, resilience and protective factors.</p> | <p>Young people are meaningfully engaged in shaping prevention activity and demonstrate increased awareness, confidence and capacity to reduce alcohol- and drug-related harm.</p> |
| <p>Improved understanding and earlier identification of FASD informs service planning and reduces stigma, leading to better access to timely and appropriate support.</p> | <p>Communities strengthen protective factors around children and young people, contributing to reduced substance use and improved wellbeing over time.</p> | <p>Young people, including those at highest risk, are supported to engage with services to reduce harm and improve safety, wellbeing and long-term outcomes, by experiencing improved access to timely, high-quality and rights-based prevention, treatment and support, in line with national standards.</p> |
| <p>People who are pregnant, women, children and families affected by alcohol and drug use access timely, consistent, appropriate and trauma-informed support, contributing to improved maternal, infant and family health outcomes, including increased awareness of risk, and reduced alcohol consumption during pregnancy.</p> | <p>Children and families involved in child protection experience earlier, coordinated and trauma-informed support, leading to improved safety, stability and wellbeing.</p> | <p>People better understand the relationship between alcohol and mental health, leading to informed choices, reduced harm and increased engagement with support.</p> |

Children's Rights Indicators: Article 2 (No Discrimination) **Article 3** (Best interests of the child) **Article 5** (Family Guidance as Children Develop) **Article 6** (Life, Survival and Development) **Article 9** (Keeping Families Together) **Article 12** (Respect for Children's Views) **Article 13** (Sharing Thoughts Freely) **Article 16** (Protection of Privacy) **Article 17** (Access to Information) **Article 19** (Protection From Violence, Abuse and Neglect) **Article 24** (Health, Water, Food and Environment) **Article 27** (Food, Clothing and a Safe Home) **Article 28** (Access to Education) **Article 33** (Protection From Harmful Drugs) **Article 36** (Protection from Exploitation) **Article 39** (Recovery and Reintegration) **Article 40** (Children who break the law) **Article 42** (Everyone Must Know Children's Rights)

RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION DELIVERY PLAN






| Starting Out  | Growing up  | Moving on  |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Ensure the full range of Children’s Rights are evident in practice in the early years across the Partnership, with meaningful participation and engagement being used to ensure voices and views are taken into consideration.</p> | <p>Ensure the full range of Children’s Rights are evident in practice in the primary years across the Partnership, with meaningful participation and engagement being used to ensure voices and views are taken into consideration.</p> | <p>Ensure the full range of Children’s Rights are evident in practice in the secondary years across the Partnership, with meaningful participation and engagement being used to ensure voices and views are taken into consideration.</p> |
| Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements |
| <p>Our workforce will be skilled and confident in the use of alternative methods of listening to the voice of infants and very young children.</p> | <p>Schools will engage with programme’s such as Rights Respecting Schools and Our SHANARRI School to raise awareness of children’s rights and make systemic change across the school to better support children and families.</p> | <p>Children and young people will be supported to co-design and/or create guidance to further children’s rights, including their right to make a complaint when their rights are not upheld.</p> |
| <p>Children will have their right to play safely met through a play strategy and Early Years play pedagogy.</p> | <p>Support for professional practice will ensure that children’s views are considered at each stage of support offered by services, including appropriate involvement in meetings, views recorded on Child’s Plans etc.</p> | <p>Children and young people will be more aware of the range of rights they have and be able to realise these rights.</p> |
| <p>All groups of pre-school and children in early education will access their right to education and development through appropriate supports and approaches to meeting their individual needs.</p> | <p>All children will have the opportunity to be involved and to have their say in policy decisions, individually, collectively or through a representative.</p> | <p>The gap between those children with a range of protected characteristics and those without, in terms of having rights met, will decrease. For example, reduction in racial bullying, reduction in exclusions for children with ASN, improved access to period products, increase in Care Experienced young people reporting feeling heard etc.</p> |

Children’s Rights Indicator links: Article 12 (respect for the views of the child), **Article 13** (freedom of expression), **Article 23** (children with a disability), **Article 28** (right to education), **Article 29** (goals of education) **Article 31** (leisure, play and culture), **Article 42** (knowledge of rights), **General Comment 27 on Children’s Rights to Access to Justice and Effective Remedies**

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING DELIVERY






| Starting Out  | Growing up  | Moving on  |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Partners provide coordinated, trauma-informed, and accessible support from the earliest stages of life, ensuring that children’s mental health and wellbeing are strengthened through early identification of need, resilient early years environments, and effective support for families.</p> | <p>Children, young people and families experience a coordinated mental health system where support is visible, accessible and equitable across Highland, with clear pathways and preventative approaches enabling timely help for everyone who needs it.</p> | <p>Support older young people to develop resilience and maintain good mental health through key life transitions, including moving into college, university, training and employment, by providing reduction in stigma, clear pathways, consistent relationships and preventative, developmentally informed support.</p> |
| Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements |
| <p>Babies and infants in Highland who are at risk of, or experiencing, trauma are identified early, and their families receive timely, relationship-based support that promotes safety, healthy development and positive mental wellbeing.</p> | <p>Families and practitioners experience clear, consistent and easy-to-navigate pathways for mental health support across all localities and transition points, with services working together to ensure timely access to the right help.</p> | <p>Older young people in Highland experience a supportive environment where mental health is free from stigma, resulting in more young people seek help earlier. Services will work together to increase awareness, provide consistent information.</p> |
| <p>Through consistent, resilience-building approaches including community settings, emerging needs identified early and appropriate help provided at the right time.</p> | <p>Under-represented children, young people and families can access mental health support that is inclusive and easy to reach, with services working proactively to remove barriers and ensure support is available when and where it is needed.</p> | <p>Support is delivered through clear, accessible ways and co-designed opportunities that helps engagement with services and experiences a safe, well-planned transition into adult support when needed.</p> |
| <p>Services provide clear, accessible support that increases parents’ and families’ awareness of the factors that promote positive mental health, enabling them to use preventative approaches that strengthen their children’s wellbeing.</p> | <p>Universal and preventative supports are clearly visible, well-promoted and consistently available across Highland including digital platforms, ensuring children, young people and families can access help early and when needed.</p> | <p>Access to learning and training programmes that strengthen mental health support, are provided to improve identification of contributing factors, and enable earlier, effective responses to need.</p> |

Children’s Rights Indicators: Article 2 (No Discrimination) **Article 3** (Best interests of the child) **Article 5** (Family Guidance as Children Develop) **Article 6** (Life, Survival and Development) **Article 17** (Access to Information) **Article 23** (Children with Disabilities) **Article 24** (Health, Water, Food and Environment) **Article 27** (Food, Clothing and a Safe Home) **Article 42** (Everyone Must Know Children’s Rights)

HEALTH AND WELLBEING DELIVERY PLAN



| Starting Out  | Growing up  | Moving on  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Babies, children and young people are happy, healthy and thriving in their communities supported when they need it by seamless integrated health and wellbeing services. Communities will experience a shift towards preventative, strengths-based, collaborative and meaningful support that builds local connections, shared resources and in-person opportunities, demonstrated by improvement in early intervention, more holistic use of funding and a rebalancing of resources away from crisis response towards community-led and preventative approaches that provide whole family support.</p> | | |
| Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements | Outcome Statements |
| <p>Pregnant women with mental health concerns will experience earlier support through improved collaboration and where needed, access to perinatal and infant mental health support demonstrated by an annual reduction of 10% in vulnerability reported at antenatal bookings from 890 to at least 623 by 2028/29</p> | <p>Children and families will experience a neuro-affirming, GIRFEC aligned system that delivers early, coordinated, diagnosis independent as well as targeted support and specialist diagnostic assessment demonstrated by a 30% reduction in NDAS referrals and waiting times for school age children by 2028/29</p> | <p>All children and young people with disabilities will experience early, planned and coordinated transitions through development of a multi-agency transitions strategy evidenced by improved data and measurement of transitions outcomes by 2028/29.</p> |
| <p>Families will experience the full schedule of reviews in the early years through the universal health visiting pathway demonstrated by health visitor coverage increasing annually from the 2024/25 (CYPNA) baseline to at least 95% by 2028/29.</p> | <p>By 2030, there will be an increase in support to the curriculum to ensure all children have a high standard of health education and promotion across Highland's Schools.</p> | <p>Care experienced young people will experience improved corporate parenting support and reduced inequalities through targeted pathways into health-related training, apprenticeships and employment demonstrated by increased numbers employed by the NHS and anchor institution partners by 2028/29.</p> |
| <p>Children 0-5 in poorer and in rural communities will experience improved physical health through strengthened early years pathways demonstrated by annual increases in pre-school vaccines (6-in-1) from 93% (MMR) from 88% to 95%, reduced tooth decay from 26% to 20% and reduced overweight at 5 from 25% to 20% by 2028/29.</p> | <p>School aged children will experience increased access to early mental health and wellbeing support through the refocused role of School Nurses and PMHW support demonstrated by a reduction in referrals to CAMHS and improved self-reported wellbeing by 2028/29.</p> | <p>Care experienced children and young people will experience reduced inequalities compared to peers through continued assessment of need and support with annual review health assessments demonstrated by uptake of 85% by 2028/29</p> |
| <p>Children's Rights Indicators: Article 2 (No Discrimination) Article 3 (Best interests of the child) Article 5 (Family Guidance as Children Develop) Article 6 (Life, Survival and Development) Article 17 (Access to Information) Article 23 (Children with Disabilities) Article 24 (Health, Water, Food and Environment) Article 27 (Food, Clothing and a Safe Home) Article 42 (Everyone Must Know Children's Right)</p> | | |

TACKLING CHILD POVERTY



- Highland Community Planning Partnership (HCPP) partners are committed to tackling poverty and inequality. The Highland Poverty Reduction Delivery Group (PRDG), a thematic group within HCPP chaired by Highland Council, provides leadership on child poverty through the Children's Services Partnership Plan and is responsible for producing the annual Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR), a joint statutory duty of Health Boards and Local Authorities. Membership includes Highland Council, NHS Highland, community planning partners and the third sector.
- The 2026–29 Child Poverty Plan sets out how partners will work together to deliver high-quality, joined-up, trauma-informed and preventative support for children, young people and families. It is informed by PRDG's self-assessment with the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland, the Scottish Government's Bringing Hope, Building Futures Delivery Plan, and the Highland Children's Services Plan life-stages approach.
- The plan is structured around three improvement statements: being data-informed; working with people with lived experience, particularly priority groups, to identify gaps and co-design solutions; and strengthening partnership working through a shared understanding of need and action.
- It adopts the four themes and 15 priority areas of Bringing Hope, Building Futures, enabling a broader focus on the drivers of child poverty, including housing, transport and access to services, alongside the six priority family groups.
- HCPP has secured funding for a two-year pilot to develop a lived-experience partnership or network, supporting consultation, co-design and service development, with a particular focus on the voices of children, families and marginalised communities.

TACKLING CHILD POVERTY DELIVERY PLAN



| Reducing costs of living | Starting Out | Growing up | Moving on |
|--|--------------|------------|-----------|
| <i>Delivering more social and affordable homes for families</i> | | | |
| Highland Housing Challenge delivers significant increase in affordable housing for Highland | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>Ending child homelessness</i> | | | |
| Support to reduce homelessness; and where unavoidable, reduce time in temporary accommodation | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>Making homes cheaper to heat</i> | | | |
| Improve energy efficiency of Highland homes and provide support and advice to address fuel poverty | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>Tackling public sector debt</i> | | | |
| Support for indebted families to reduce debt burden | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Increasing earned incomes | Starting Out | Growing up | Moving on |
| <i>Providing aligned skills and employment support for parents and young people</i> | | | |
| Support employability clients to gain employment in childcare and childminding settings. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Support unemployed and in-work young people and parents improve income through employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Support adults and young people improve their core skills to secure and sustain employment. | | | ✓ |
| <i>Expanding the availability of flexible and affordable childcare for families</i> | | | |
| Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas | ✓ | | |
| Develop flexible models of childcare in rural areas to support parental employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>Ensuring public transport is available, affordable and accessible</i> | | | |
| Support transport initiatives that remove barriers to accessing services and employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>Driving positive change in labour market and workplace conditions</i> | | | |
| Work-based initiatives that improve access to work and provide support for disadvantaged families | | | ✓ |

TACKLING CHILD POVERTY DELIVERY PLAN



| Maximising incomes from social security and benefits in kind | Starting Out | Growing up | Moving on |
|--|--------------|------------|-----------|
| Strengthening support through social security | | | |
| Scottish child payment-> £40/week/child; removal 2 child benefit cap | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Maximising take-up of Scottish and UK Government benefits | | | |
| Develop financial inclusion pathways | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Maximise benefits/entitlement uptake | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Making money and debt advice more accessible for families | | | |
| Improve financial literacy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Raise service-provider awareness of the impact of poverty on children and young people | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Supporting children and families to thrive | Starting Out | Growing up | Moving on |
| Delivering Whole Family Support | | | |
| Implement a Whole Family Wellbeing Approach | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Establish a CLD Family Learning offer in Highland targeted to those most in need. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Supporting young families: investing in early child development | | | |
| Provide targeted support within universal (health/ early years) services | ✓ | | |
| Ensuring children and young people can reach their full potential | | | |
| Targeted support to improve food security | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Roll out cost of school day toolkit | | ✓ | |
| Strengthen the role of the third sector in reducing child poverty. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Young people have access to Youth Work opportunities | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Addressing the poverty-related attainment gap | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Making best use of data to support children and families and improve public service | | | |
| Use data to create baseline, target interventions and monitor progress | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lived Experience Partnership pilot | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

WHOLE FAMILY WELLBEING PROGRAMME

The Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP) is a key component of this Plan, reflecting its core values of prevention, early intervention, partnership working and rights-based, person-centred support. It underpins the shared ambition to ensure children, young people and families across Highland receive the right support, at the right time, in their own communities.

The Programme is driving a shift from reactive, crisis-led responses towards prevention, early help and sustained whole-family support, in line with GIRFEC, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Promise. It recognises that children's wellbeing is closely linked to family circumstances such as parental wellbeing, poverty, housing, health and community connection.

WFWP is place-based and community-led, operating across all nine Community Partnership localities. Children, young people and families are central to the design and improvement of support, ensuring local needs shape activity while contributing to wider system change.

Key Principles

The Programme focuses on:

- Whole-family approaches that address the wider factors influencing children's outcomes.
- Accessible, non-stigmatising support, helping families access help early.
- Learning and improvement, using local innovation to inform longer-term service planning.

Priorities for 2026–2029

We will:

- Strengthen prevention and early help, reducing reliance on crisis intervention.
- Develop a preventative "middle layer" of support for families experiencing ongoing stress.
- Simplify access to services, with better coordination and trusted points of contact.
- Embed whole-family practice across children's and adult services.
- Improve equity of access across Highland.
- Use evidence to inform future commissioning, embedding effective approaches into core provision.

The Whole Family Wellbeing Programme provides a strong foundation for sustainable system change, helping ensure families receive consistent, timely and effective support that prevents escalation and improves long-term outcomes.



Highland
Community
Planning
Partnership

Com-pàirteachas
Dealbhadh
Coimhearsnachd

na Gàidhealtachd

Highland Whole Family Wellbeing Programme



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A data-informed approach, grounded in lived experience and children’s voices, underpins delivery of the plan and future improvement activity. This approach aligns with the National Performance Framework, the Population Health Framework and the Children’s Services Planning Partnership Board Performance Management Framework.

Highland currently operates a range of outcomes and performance frameworks. During the first year of this plan, there is a clear opportunity to bring these together through the development of a single, coherent and rights-based shared outcomes framework aligned with the UNCRC. This framework will operate at an outcomes level, complementing existing statutory and operational reporting arrangements.

Work in the first year of the plan will focus on collaboratively refining the existing framework across partners, drawing on public data and the Children and Young People’s Needs Assessment, and combining quantitative indicators with qualitative insight to reflect the lived experiences and outcomes of children and families.



CHILDREN'S SERVICES PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Director of Public Health,
NHS Highland

Board Nurse Director, NHS Highland
Head of Health Improvement,
NHS Highland

Head of Education,
The Highland Council

Head of Children's Social work,
The Highland Council

Executive Chief Officer Health and
Social Care & Chief Social Work Officer,
The Highland Council

Child Health Lead, The Highland Council

Head of Operations, Women and
Children's Directorate, NHS Highland

Head of community support and
engagement, The Highland Council

Police Scotland, Partnership
Superintendent

Child Health Commissioner – NHS
Highland

Chief Executive, Care and Learning
Alliance (Third sector)

Director of Children and Families
(Aberlour Trust) Third sector

Principal Educational Psychologist,
The Highland Council

Lead Officer, Highland Child
Protection Committee

HADP Co-Ordinator, Highland
Alcohol and Drugs Partnership

Chief Executive, Thriving Families
(Third Sector)

Chair of the Promise Board,
Inverness UHI

