

Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee – 27 May 2026

Service Achievements

1. Thor House – Caithness

Caithness Short Break service, we are delighted that the Short Break Service for children with disabilities, complex health needs, and neurodiversity resumed on 10 April 2026 at Thor House, Caithness. The service will provide vital short break care up to 3 nights per week, giving parents and carers respite and the children a nurturing and safe care provision full of fun activities.

A short video of the new facility is below

<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dropbox.com%2Fscf%2Ffi%2Fimtrhiji2akyt4rksk6qs%2FWelcome.mp4%3Frlkey%3Dpgy3y63tsgqqz5x4ft76mdws1%26e%3D1%26st%3Degq2h7hc%26bmus%3D1%26dl%3D0&data=05%7C02%7Cdianne.henderson%40highland.gov.uk%7Ca8bc51e6fd8846e1acb808de8f3ddb5b%7C89f0b56e6d164fe89dba176fa940f7c9%7C0%7C0%7C639105692995682438%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOilwLjAuMDAwMCIslAIoiJXaW4zMilslkFOljoiTWFpbCIsIldUljoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=F4g2mB1CGWlQAXiTrxqd4hlwOyclHjxmkhnl7K0e%2FWI%3D&reserved=0>

2. Magic Notes Making a Real Difference

A recent staff feedback survey has highlighted the growing impact of Magic Notes across services, with strong usage and overwhelmingly positive feedback from practitioners.

Thank you to the 154 of you who responded.

Staff report that the system is helping to **reduce administrative burden and improve turnaround times**, with time-saving benefits referenced in a significant proportion of feedback comments. However, what stands out most is the **improvement in the quality of engagement with the people being supported**. Practitioners describe being able to focus more fully on conversations, listen actively, and build stronger relationships, rather than dividing attention between the person and note-taking.

As one respondent shared:

"I've been a social worker for nearly 30 years. In all that time, this is singularly, after the invention of the computer and the floppy disk, the best thing we have been given as a profession... It's about the way in which I can now sit and have meaningful active listening conversations without having to constantly write."

The survey also reflects areas where staff are continuing to build confidence, including editing output, prompt use and integration with existing systems.

Overall, the findings suggest that Magic Notes is not just saving time but supporting a shift towards more person-centred practice.

3. Successful bid for the Local Learning Partnership (LLP) grant funding.

Background:

The idea of Local Learning Partnerships emerged from national work to strengthen social work education and workforce development in Scotland. Engagement led by the Social Work Education Partnership highlighted the need for stronger collaboration between employers and universities, more consistent student placement experiences, and better alignment between education and workforce needs. LLPs were developed as a locally led, test-and-learn model to respond to these findings while remaining connected to national reform and standards.

Scottish Government grant funding:

The Scottish Government agreed funding of three Local Learning Partnerships as part of a national test-and-learn programme. Each partnership could receive up to £200,000 for one year, with at least one LLP required to operate partly or fully in a remote or island area.

Bid:

A joint bid was made end March 2026 from The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles), the Open University and the Multicultural Family Base (Edinburgh) to work together to test and develop a Local Learning Partnership across Highland and the Western Isles. The proposal included shared challenges across these organisations, including high vacancy rates, workforce pressures, geographical remoteness, limited availability of student placements, and difficulties supporting learners and staff in rural and island settings. The partnership also recognised increasing workforce diversity and the need for more structured support for international and minority ethnic students and newly qualified social workers.

The proposal included the establishment a shared virtual practice learning hub, supported by a dedicated Practice Learning Development Officer, to coordinate placements and learning across partner organisations. This will help increase placement capacity, improve consistency and quality of learning experiences, support and re-engage practice educators, and strengthen third-sector involvement. Drawing on the specialist expertise of the Multicultural Family Base, the bid placed strong emphasis on inclusion, cultural support and lived experience in learning design. A test-and-learn approach will be used to evaluate impact and sustainability, with the aim of reducing workforce fragility and building a more resilient, locally-grown social work workforce across health and social care services.

Outcome:

On 12th May 2026 we were advised that the bid was successful. Scottish Government feedback was very positive, highlighting innovation in understanding and supporting the multicultural needs of students and staff. They felt we had a strong, established approach already in Highland and are interested to see how this could be replicated across the region.

They are also very keen to see us explore the learning needs of the workforce, highlighting Dr Gillian Ferguson's work in this area. They felt the proposal was highly collaborative and praised the involvement of lived-experience experts and students as key team members going forward.

3rd Sector Service Achievements

1. Inverness Openarts

Inverness Openarts is a community art-for-wellbeing organisation delivering inclusive creative sessions designed to support mental health and wellbeing. Through a combination of open-access and partnership-based activity, we create welcoming, non-clinical spaces where people can connect, build confidence, and engage in creative expression.

One of our key achievements has been the success of our '**stepping-stone**' **partnership model**, developed in collaboration with both third sector and statutory partners, including:

- SNAP (Special Needs Action Project)
- Gateway (Highland Homeless Trust)
- Highland Senior Citizens Network
- NHS Highland (Aonach Mòr / New Craigs Hospital)

This model supported individuals to move from targeted sessions within partner settings into open community sessions, helping to reduce isolation and build confidence over time.

A particularly strong outcome has been our **partnership with NHS Highland**, which has now developed into an ongoing programme of fortnightly creative sessions for inpatients at New Craigs Hospital, alongside supported access into community-based sessions where appropriate.

Between March 25 - March 26, the project supported **over 1,000 attendances**, with strong evidence of improved wellbeing, confidence and social connection among participants.

2. Successful Piloting of Mikeysline's Mental Fitness Workshops

Mikeysline piloted using the term Mental Fitness, (akin to Physical Fitness) and chose a two-pronged approach to engage both pupils and parents on this:

1. offering 3 Mental Fitness workshops to P6 pupils across 16 primaries in the area.
2. providing 3 8-week Parenting Workshops in selected schools, specifically aimed at improving the emotional regulation of the parents so they can better support their child: Mikeysline for Parents was aimed at breaking generational cycles.

The Pilot programme was welcomed in 13 schools, including St Clements and St Duthus where we tailored the material to senior pupils. The schools varied from small, rural primaries where we might deliver to 8 P5-P7 in one morning ("3-2-1"

sessions = 3 workshops in 2 hours in 1 morning), to a large Primary with 2 P6 classes and a P6/7. In these large classes we delivered 3x 45-minute workshops to each class spread over consecutive weeks. Overall, we felt this allowed for better connections with the school, both with pupils and staff.

In total we delivered to 246 pupils via 42 workshops

The Mikeysline for Parents sessions were held in 3 locations: 2 aimed at P3 parents and held in the respective Primary school and 1 held in a secondary school, at the school's request.

We have subsequently run an early evening group in a room in Dingwall Library which we advertised as Mental Fitness for Families. This attracted Mums and Dads who formed a very supportive peer group, their main take away being that improving their personal emotional regulation brought about significant changes in their home life.

Beyond the Easter Ross project

We also delivered workshops to Teanassie and Ben Wyvis Primaries and adapted material for the Cauldeen P7s before transitioning to high school. Vicki Clark and Lindsay Broomfield from Planet Youth came to shadow a couple of the workshops.

Based on our results, Mikeysline was able to secure funding for the delivery of a similar programme in both Caithness/Sutherland and Skye/Lochaber for the 2025/26 school year. Planet Youth have partnered with us to help deliver in these new locations.

3. Tykes Young Carers tackle food insecurity across Sutherland

Tykes Young Carers has been developing a collaboration with CFine by becoming a Community Food Member with Fareshare, which has enabled the regular distribution of food support directly to Young Carers' families across Sutherland. This initiative has been further extended into local schools, where supplies are contributing to school food larders as well as supporting Home Economics departments to enhance practical classroom learning. Alongside this, the resource is strengthening TYKES' after-school and holiday provision as well as drop-in sessions, ensuring young carers attending groups have access to nutritious snacks and meals. During these sessions, young people are actively encouraged to engage in cooking experiences, using a variety of ingredients while building skills in food hygiene, menu planning and budgeting. In addition, TYKES has supported other youth groups in the community by providing food resources to benefit a wider range of young people and families. This joined-up, collaborative approach is enhancing wellbeing, reducing food insecurity, and creating meaningful opportunities for young people to engage, learn and thrive.

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