

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	EDU/18/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Education

Date: 3 June 2026

Report Title: High Life Highland Progress Report

Report By: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 High Life Highland (HLH) progress reporting to THC is specified in the Contract between THC and HLH. The contract was reviewed by the Education Committee in December 2024, and it requires HLH reporting twice per year to the Education Committee. At the June Education Committee, the specified reporting comprises:

- i. contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan;
- ii. annual performance indicators;
- iii. general updates; and
- iv. information on an area of work or focus topic.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- i. the contributions made by High Life Highland (HLH) to THC's Corporate Plan in **Appendix A**;
- ii. the information on the annual performance indicators;
- iii. the information on the externally funded summer of sport programme;
- iv. the general updates provided in **Appendix B**; and
- v. the information on the libraries service in **Appendix C**.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - there are no resource implications associated with Elected Members noting this report. The HLH services fee is part of THC's budget as considered at the Highland Council meeting held on 5 March 2026. HLH finance reports, including updates on the Inverness Castle Experience, will be taken to Corporate Resources Committee.

3.2 Legal - there are no legal implications for the Council arising from the recommendations in this report.

3.3 Risk - there are no risk implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The HLH Board has a Corporate Risk Register and associated risk management plans.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - there are no health and safety risks associated with the recommendations in this report.

3.5 Gaelic – All HLH services promote Gaelic language and culture. The following provides a summary:

- The archive service supports Gaelic language and culture by preserving and providing access to historical documents, recordings, and materials relating to the region's Gaelic heritage. Through community projects, educational and exhibition programmes, and collaborations, the team actively promotes the use and understanding of Gaelic, fostering cultural continuity and engagement across generations.
- The HLH Countryside Ranger Service supports Gaelic Plan outcomes by making Gaelic visible and audible through nature interpretation, community events, and education. This is done by featuring Gaelic place-names, folklore, and vocabulary in the online blog, delivering bilingual storytelling and traditional craft sessions, and bringing Gaelic song and poetry into outdoor activities that connect generations. Rangers work directly with Gaelic Medium schools, co-creating resources such as the Ullapool *Slighe Nàdair Gàidhlig* Sound Map and providing Gaelic-translated projects to support outdoor learning. Looking ahead, the Service Delivery Plan commits to expanding bilingual interpretation across Ranger programmes, strengthening Gaelic's cultural, social, and wellbeing value for both residents and visitors to the Highlands.
- Museums present and promote Gaelic as the cultural unique selling point that is central to the material culture on display and the stories told within them. At Highland Folk Museum, a living history museum, this includes giving visitors the opportunity to learn and use some Gaelic language and to take part in Gaelic traditions, such as waulking the cloth.
- Gaelic has been embedded as a core element of The Inverness Castle Experience as an integral part of the new attraction. Gaelic is presented throughout as a living language, encouraging curiosity and engagement from all visitors, whether fluent speakers, learners, or first-time hearers of the language. Through bilingual audio guides and interpretation, and narratives that specifically centre Gaelic voices and perspectives, the Experience promotes its use, visibility, and status among both local residents and visitors from across the world.
- The Camanachd Association's Shinty's Story exhibition at Bught Park Pavilion continues to attract increasing visitor numbers. A substantial proportion of the interpretation is presented in Gaelic, enhancing both the cultural depth and accessibility of the exhibition. The exhibition is supported by the Association's Development Worker, a fluent Gaelic speaker who delivers guided tours and engages directly with visitors. This interaction deepens understanding of Shinty's history and cultural significance, strengthening the connection between Bught Park and the sport. The facility hosts, on a rotational basis with other locations, the Camanachd Cup Final and The McTavish Cup Final.
- The Libraries team supports Gaelic language and culture by providing access to a wide range of Gaelic and local history related publications. In close collaboration with local partners, schools and communities, libraries also play host to a wide range of Gaelic related exhibitions, as well as activities and events for all ages, including storytelling, Gaelic bookbug, author talks and writing workshops.
- Music tuition has direct provision in as many of the areas schools as possible for strings (including fiddle), piping and pipe band drumming. In addition to the free

weekly lessons (some of which are delivered using a combination of face to face and online delivery which allows the team to reach more schools), the instructors lead a number of extra-curricular groups and activities, including successful youth pipe bands. In primary schools, the Youth Music Initiative provision delivers sessions in Kodaly music skills and also a trad music project in which is delivered on our behalf by partner organisation Feisen nan Gàidheal.

- The sports development team continues to place a strong emphasis on embedding the Gaelic language within its programmes, creating meaningful opportunities for young people to engage with Gaelic through sport. In a celebration of World Gaelic Week, the team, in collaboration with the Highland Council Gaelic Team, hosted a Sports Feis for over 200 local school children in Skye. The two-day event, led by the team and supported by young leaders, offered a wide range of activities including football, shinty, multi-sports, and traditional games all delivered entirely through Gaelic.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 All policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. Due regard must be given to the findings of any assessment when taking any decision.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background

- 5.1 HLH’s purpose is **Making Life Better**. It was established as a charity by the Highland Council (THC) in October 2011 to deliver its Public Services Obligations (PSOs) in archives; community venues and engagement; countryside rangers; leisure; libraries; museums and galleries; music tuition and sports and physical activity. The Council has a Contract in place to ensure that HLH delivers the specified Council PSOs. The contract was reviewed and updated by the Education Committee at its meeting held on 21 November 2024.
- 5.2 The HLH reporting to the Education Committee is specified in the Contract as detailed in the table below:

May/June Meeting	November/December Meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributions to the Council’s Corporate Plan. • Annual Performance Indicators: customer engagements (split into in person and digital engagements); services fee as percentage of HLH expenditure; and number of members for the following services: leisure; libraries; music; sports development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HLH Annual Report. • Customer satisfaction levels. • General updates. • Information on an area of work or focus topic.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General updates. • Information on an area of work or focus topic. 	
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6. HLH Governance

- 6.1 HLH Directors are appointed by THC (8 independent Directors and 4 Councillor Directors). The HLH Directors can be found on the HLH web site: <https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/board-directors/>.
- 6.2 The nine HLH (Trading) CIC Board Directors are appointed by the HLH Board (a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 HLH Board Directors with the remaining independent). The trading company Directors can be found on the HLH web site: <https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/trading-company-directors/>
- 6.3 The contract between THC and HLH which specifies the services which HLH is required to deliver on behalf of THC was updated in November 2024. Since then, there have been changes: the operation of The Inverness Castle Experience; and changes in management and operational arrangements at community centres in Inverness as a result of the cessation of respective management committees. Financial matters relating to the Castle Experience are within the remit of the Corporate Resources Committee and contract changes to reflect operating requirements were agreed by it at its 20 November 2025 meeting. The Contract has been updated to reflect these matters.

7. Our Future Highland - Highland Council Corporate Plan 2022-2027

- 7.1 A summary of HLH's contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-27 can be found in **Appendix A**.

8. Performance Indicators

- 8.1 HLH reporting was changed as part of the contract review. Reporting on customer numbers has been split into in-person and digital engagements and reporting member numbers is now broken down by service.
- 8.2 The tables below show customer engagements for all of HLH's services:
- In-person customer visits to HLH services in 2025/26 were 5.4m, a 6% increase on the previous financial year.
 - Digital engagements were 3.9m, a 12% increase on the previous financial year.
- 8.3 The increases in physical visits have been in:
- Community venues and engagement where participation in sporting events made a significant contribution to the increase.
 - Leisure and Libraries both sustained increases in customer visits through programming and increased activity.
 - Music development pupil numbers in the regular provision during the school day was sustained and numbers attending after school concerts by area and regional groups increased significantly.
 - The reduction in Countryside Rangers engagements is attributable to reduced staffing, and this has been remedied and customer numbers should increase in the coming year. This also accounts for the reduction in digital engagements.

- The museums and visitor attractions reduction in in-person visits is because the North Coast Visitor Centre (NCVC) moved to seasonal opening in 2025, closing to the general public at the end of October. Therefore, the comparative figures, for 2023/24 and 2024/25 are not like for like' as NCVC was open year-round then.

8.4 The increases in digital engagements have been in:

- The increase in archives digital engagements was sustained by the team taking a proactive approach to on-line service delivery (Archives was the focus topic in the HLH progress report at the 19 November 2025 Education Committee Meeting).
- The reduction in libraries digital engagements is due to a change in the Press Reader service which has made it less popular amongst customers as local newspapers are published a day behind physical publication dates, the service, however, remains popular with 362,042 customer sessions during 2024/25.

8.5 HLH continues to prioritise in-person customer engagements with those being most relevant to highland communities and making the greatest contributions to making life better for people in the Highlands.

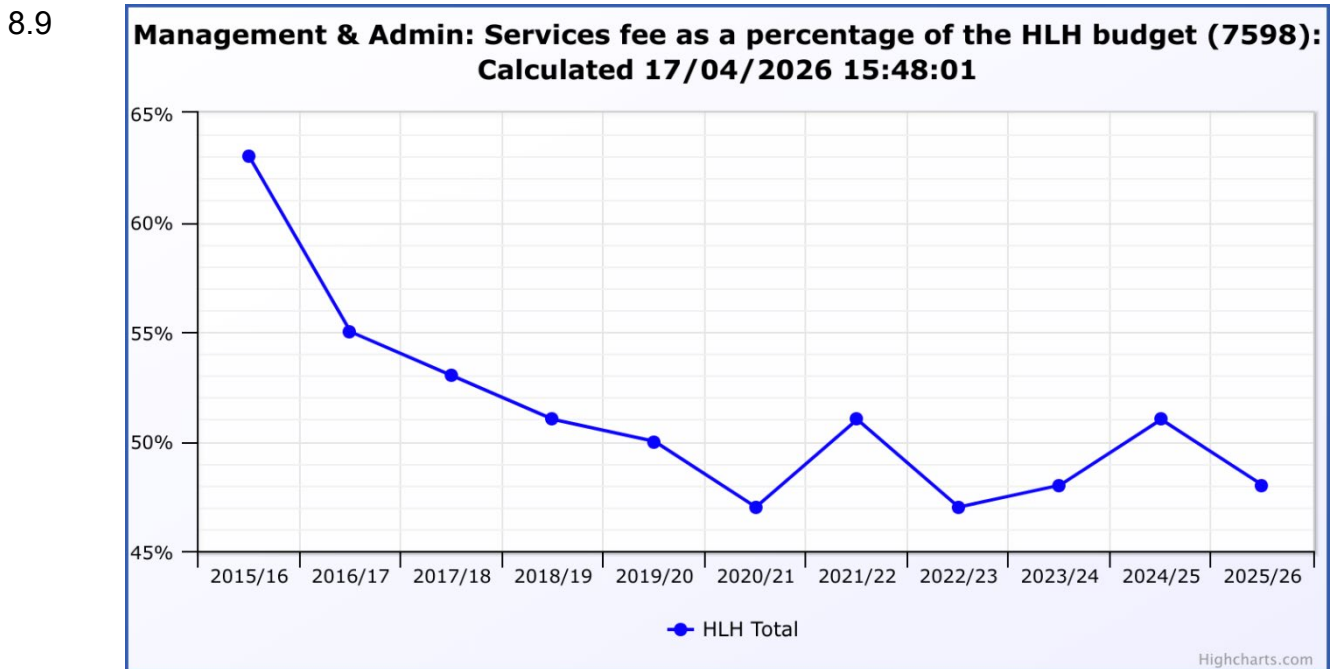
8.6

In Person Visits by Service	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Change	Percentage Change
Archives	12,711	12,810	14,561	1,751	13.7%
Community Venues & Engagement	94,302	117,674	171,327	53,653	45.6%
Countryside Rangers	14,401	15,794	15,654	-140	-0.9%
Inverness Castle Experience	-	-	28,609	28,609	-
Leisure	2,329,255	2,478,030	2,533,286	55,256	2.2%
Libraries	1,595,401	1,865,924	1,905,754	39,830	2.1%
Museums & Galleries	150,830	155,463	148,843	-6,620	-4.3%
Music Tuition	100,744	102,641	204,401	101,760	99.1%
Sport	277,706	325,748	348,908	23,160	7.1%
Total	4,575,350	5,074,084	5,371,343	297,259	5.9%

8.7

Digital Engagements by Service	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Change	Percentage Change
Archives	2,319,500	2,418,215	2,917,430	499,215	20.6%
Countryside Rangers	23,875	95,045	91,575	-3,470	-3.7%
Libraries	929,186	879,340	813,717	-65,623	-7.5%
Museums & Galleries	73,342	83,595	85,146	1,551	1.9%
Total	3,345,903	3,476,195	3,907,868	431,673	12.4%

8.8 The services fee as a percentage of the HLH budget is used by the Council as a measure of the efficiency of HLH. Note that this does not include property and other costs which are paid by THC as it was more efficient for THC to retain responsibility for some support services, avoiding duplication that would be needed if HLH was to, for example, establish its own property function. The following graph tracks progress over time.



8.10 The improvement over time has been achieved largely through HLH increasing income through the leisure service. The 2025/26 figure is subject to HLH's accounts being prepared/audited with the draft figure being 48%, a 3% improvement on the previous year.

8.11 The number of members gives an indication of HLH's reach into the Highland population. These are provided by individual service where customers register to receive the service. For leisure and libraries, customers can choose to participate without joining as members, so these figures are a conservative estimate of reach into the population.

8.12 The number of members is a count of individual people who have used the service in the past year. The leisure members count all people who use the service including people who are on low incomes and participate using the budget and new active schemes. The figure for libraries active membership is a count of unique users who have borrowed a book or accessed a computer or Wi-Fi using their library card. The reach figures for leisure and libraries are for the whole highland population and into the school roll for music tuition and sports development as those services are for school aged children and young people. As all services can be accessed without customers subscribing the membership figure is an under-estimate of the people reached.

8.13 The reach figures in the table below are calculated for leisure and libraries as a percentage of the Highland population. Together the reach of those services is 30%

(counting customers who have both cards only once). The reach figure for the two school-based services, music and sport, is as a percentage of the school population.

8.14

Service	No at end 2024/25	No at end 2025/26	Change	%age Change	Reach
Leisure	62,050	59,631	-2,419	-3.90%	25%
Libraries	27,536	26,608	-928	-3.37%	11%
Music Development	4,090	4,122	32	0.78%	14%

8.15 The Sport and Physical Activity team collects data by school term, and its equivalent member numbers are presented in the table below.

	No at end academic year 2023/24	No at end academic year 2024/25	Change	%age Change	Reach
Sport & Physical Activity	13,047	14,229	1,182	9.06%	36%

9. Summer of Sport Funding

- 9.1 The Scottish Government announced additional £40M funding for sport in its 2026/27 budget. The fund will be managed by **sportscotland**, with a £15M of the overall funding being allocated to Scottish Local Authorities to deliver the “Summer of Sport”. £527K has been allocated to THC.
- 9.2 The initiative aims to provide free, inclusive and accessible activities for children and young people between June 2026 through to March 2027. The programming will be child-focused and include a “universal learn-to-swim” offer for primary school children ensuring that children at primary school learn the basic skills of swimming and build water confidence.
- 9.3 The initiative will also offer synergy with major events taking place in 2026, including the World Cup in June and the Commonwealth Games in July. It is hoped that these worldwide events will inspire individuals, groups, clubs and communities to participate in the programmes offered through the “Summer of Sport”.
- 9.4 Further, the funding will be used to deliver a legacy around people-development and training across the Highlands. This is whereby individuals will be upskilled and trained to assist with the delivery of sport and leisure to support the growth and potential of children and young people in communities.

10. General Updates

- 10.1 As part of HLH's reporting, general updates since the previous report to the Education Committee are provided, and **Appendix B** provides updates and good news stories since the November 2025 meeting. Highlighted updates are below.
- 10.2 High Life Highland held an awards evening to celebrates its staff and volunteers. The 2025 High Life Highland event awards took place in October, with over 80 people attending to celebrate the many ways in which staff and volunteers are Making Life Better for residents and visitors across the Highlands. The evening saw awards presented to outstanding employees, inspiring young people and inspirational volunteers and further information can be seen on HLH's web site:
<https://www.highlifehighland.com/blog/posts/high-life-highland-celebrates-incredible-staff-and-volunteers> .
- 10.3.1 Detailed reports on the Inverness Castle Experience will be taken to the Corporate Resources Committee. The following provides a high level summary of progress to date.
- 10.3.2 Following a soft launch for locals in December 2025, Inverness Castle was officially opened on 9 February 2026 by Kate Forbes, Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Kirsty McNeill, UK Government Minister for Scotland. The December soft launch allowed for a period of test and adjust prior to official opening in February which received very positive opening coverage in local and national press. Despite opening during the quietest period of the year for visitor attractions, visitor numbers have been healthy and customer feedback has been positive.
- 10.3.3 An extensive marketing and promotional campaign is underway, and the Castle has been promoted at several domestic and international events including The Britain & Ireland Marketplace and the International Tourism Fair in Berlin. Extensive promotional activities and familiarisation events have been hosted with tour operators, transportation companies, online travel agencies and independent guides and liaison with VisitScotland is ongoing. As the season progresses the team is preparing for a shift from domestic to international visitors.
- 10.3.4 A detailed Community stakeholder engagement programme is also underway. 22 schools have visited the Castle since February, and a work experience programme has been introduced. Discussions are currently underway with Skills Development Scotland and The Highland Council to establish an apprenticeship programme, and the Castle now employs 107 contracted staff, 35 of whom are under the age of 25.
- 10.3.5 Community activities and events have included: a programme designed to support young people and help reduce anti-social behaviour in the Inverness city centre; visits from Nansen Highland Group, a specialist day centre supporting young adults to develop independence, life skills and work-readiness; interactive workshops for young people as part of British Science Week; visits from a Dementia Adventure Group (people living with dementia and their carers); and engagement with the Comunn na Gàidhlig Gaelic group for young people.
- 10.4.1 High Life Highland has launched a new web site that significantly improves how customers across the Highlands access services and information. Improved navigation, clear category groupings as requested by customer focus groups — such

as Fitness & Activities, Health & Wellbeing, and Libraries & Archives — allows customers to quickly understand the full breadth of services available.

- 10.4.2 These improvements support the organisation's financial sustainability. Easier membership sign-up, clearer promotion of highlife benefits, and simpler class and activity booking are all expected to increase conversion rates and support income growth. Improved event visibility and a new space hire journey offer additional revenue opportunities. Accessibility enhancements, including better colour contrast and venue-level accessibility icons, ensure these benefits are available to all customers.
- 10.5 HLH has been successful in achieving the gold level accreditation in The Highland Employer Charter. The charter is a regional initiative developed by The Highland Council to promote ethical employment, fairness, community investment, and sustainable economic growth across the Highlands.

11. Libraries Service

- 11.1 The focus topic in this report is the work of the libraries team. The team provides library and information services across 66 facilities. Core services include book lending, event programmes, computer and wi-fi access, digital collections, and research and study facilities. The libraries annual review can be seen in **Appendix C**. Highlights of what has been achieved by the team include:
- The increase in customer visits detailed above.
 - Adult user customer survey achieved a 97% satisfaction rate.
 - HLH was shortlisted for Scottish Book Trust's Bookbug Hero Award 2026.
 - Scottish Government Public Library Improvement Funding secured to deliver climate engagement activity throughout Highland communities.
 - Scottish Government School Library Improvement funding secured, in collaboration with Highland Council, to deliver 'Reading is For Everyone' project across Culloden Academy ASG.

Designation: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Date: Draft 28 April 2026

Authors: Douglas Wilby, Steve Walsh

Appendices:

- i. **Appendix A** - HLH Contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan.
- ii. **Appendix B** - General updates.
- iii. **Appendix C** - Libraries annual review.

Appendix A

HLH Contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan

1. Fair and Caring Highland Gàidhealtachd Chothromach agus Choibhneil	
Work together to improve quality of life and opportunities for Highland people	
1.1 Improve outcomes including attainment, achievement, positive destinations for all children and young people with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy, and our most vulnerable learners.	<p>HLH runs a Young Persons' Leadership Programme for 12–25-year-olds across the whole organisation. A total of 1047 hoodies were achieved by young people in the 2024/25 Academic Year. 26,850 leadership hours were delivered in the 2024/25 academic year by young people.</p> <p>HLH operates a range of activity programmes for children and young people across its leisure facilities. These include both primary school swimming lessons and learn to swim programmes across Highland ensuring that children and young people learn this essential life skill.</p> <p>The active schools and Countryside services programmes provide a wide range of activities. A key focus of the active school's programme which reached 14,229 participants in academic year 2024/25 is equality, diversity and inclusion and targeted programmes are being developed to reduce barriers to participation.</p> <p>The Ranger Service improves outcomes for children and young people by delivering Eco-Schools and outdoor learning programmes that embed literacy and numeracy in meaningful, real-world contexts, increasing engagement, attainment and achievement. Through inclusive, place-based Learning for Sustainability (Lfs) experiences, rangers build skills, confidence and wellbeing, supporting positive destinations with a particular focus on our most vulnerable learners.</p> <p>HLH library staff deliver an extensive programme of activities to support early years literacy and numeracy, including Bookbug sessions and early years/family STEM activities. Book collections to support reading for learning and recreation are provided in both hard copy and digital format. Libraries also support learning and teaching through the provision of the school library service.</p> <p>HLH Libraries enjoyed 1,905,754 visits in 2025/26 with 813,717 on-line/digital engagement in addition to that.</p> <p>High Life Highland delivers weekly Instrumental Music Tuition to around 4,100 young learners across Highland using a combination of delivery methods which allows the team to reach many more of the remote schools it serves. Music tuition adds to each pupil's development in a broad range of ways, including increasing personal responsibility, focus and concentration in addition to the broader numeracy and literacy benefits. Young people also have access to a wide range of music ensembles led by HLH Instructors, at school, area and regional levels (Highland Young Musicians) affording them an insight into the cooperation, discipline and focus required to make a valuable contribution to these kind of groups – and the bearing these experiences will have on life skills beyond school age. In session 2025/26 HLH maintained 8 groups in the HYM family: Highland</p>

	<p>Regional Youth Orchestra; Highland Youth Wind Band; Highland Youth String Orchestra; Highland Youth Big Band; 'Snas; High Life highland Pipe Band; Beira & Highland Youth Chorus.</p> <p>The Archive Service works with schools and home-schooling groups through visits, outreach and online learning, including Google Classroom. By using original records to support topic learning, it brings a strong local dimension to the Curriculum and encourages discussion, creativity, empathy and emotional understanding among pupils of all ages. In 2025/26 the archive service delivered 85 bespoke learning sessions to schools reaching 2,403 pupils, teachers, and parents/carers and also welcomed collegiate visits from teaching staff.</p> <p>HLH supports the provision of the STEM Science Skills Academy programme (there are 4 Highland 'Newton Room' locations plus a touring Pop-Up) by centrally managing 103 iPads used for learning in P6 to S2 school engagement programmes.</p> <p>HLH Museums and Galleries run a Young Curators group, which enables young people to develop skills for workplaces and provides practical skills training and mentoring services for emerging young artists.</p>
<p>1.2 Tackle child poverty including promoting access to welfare support.</p>	<p>Through its Active Scheme, HLH provides access to its leisure centres at reduction of 70% on standard pricing. The Active Scheme is open to individuals and families living in Highland households and in receipt of full Council Tax Reduction. In addition to a 70% discount on <i>highlife</i> subscriptions, those who qualify for entry into the scheme are also able to access swimming, gym, group fitness, court activities, and swimming lessons.</p> <p>The Active Schools Programme continues to provide free physical activity sessions to school pupils in Highlands before school, during lunch time and after school delivered by a dedicated network of volunteers.</p> <p>Access to HLH libraries' wide range of resources and services remains free of charge to all. Libraries offer children and families a warm, welcoming and safe environment where they can benefit from free access to books, computers and a wide range of activities that can support learning, economic wellbeing, and social and digital inclusion.</p>
<p>1.3 Secure positive destinations including Modern Apprenticeships.</p>	<p>HLH provides modern apprenticeships through its leisure facilities including qualifications in group fitness, personal training and gym instruction which supports young people who wish to remain in the area, developing their careers at home.</p> <p>In collaboration with the Council's Employability Team the Museums and Archive Centres regularly host work placements, paid and unpaid, to help young people get into work. Inverness Museum and Art Gallery hosts an annual placement of a UHI Fine Art student.</p> <p>High Life Highland libraries support work placements and offer volunteering opportunities for young people, through the High Life Highland Leadership programme.</p> <p>The Inverness Castle Experience provides hands on work experience opportunities for Highland-based school students, promoting the tourism and hospitality sector</p>

	<p>as a positive destination for all, and working with partners including THC, DYW, UHI and HLA to develop employability pathways.</p> <p>The Leisure team has recently piloted a scheme called “Leadership to Leisure” which takes senior school pupils and offers them vocational training and qualifications with a guarantee of paid work at the completion of the scheme. The pilot ran successfully in Nairn and will be rolled out into a wider trail over this year. The Council’s Employability Team has been kept apprised of the scheme and has been supportive in working with High Life Highland to develop it further.</p>
<p>1.4 Work with partners on suicide prevention.</p>	<p>HLH’s sports team: has a relationship with SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health); has a mental health lead within the service; and all staff continue to be trained and supported in areas such as suicide prevention through the SAMH route map for mental health training, a partnership with Mikeys Line, a new yellow hoodie was launched through the Leadership Programme. Young people taking part in the Leadership Programme will be awarded the yellow hoodie when they hit the 150 hours volunteering target and on completion of a volunteering or fund-raising activity for a mental health charity of their choice.</p>
<p>1.5 Encourage a diverse range of traditional and emerging sporting activities and active lifestyles.</p>	<p>Through the partnership with sportscotland, the Active Schools and Community Sports Hubs programmes supports local volunteers and clubs to deliver a diverse range of sporting and physical activity opportunities.</p> <p>In Term 1 and 2 this academic year there have been 267,668 visits to Active Schools sessions, an increase of 24,700 visits from the same period the previous academic year. These activities and opportunities are made possible by 1,296 volunteers who support the Active Schools Programme and collectively have delivered 15,615 activity sessions over the last academic year. Secondary School pupils remain the largest group who support the delivery of activities whilst also developing their own skills and confidence through the HLH Leadership Programme. The Community Sport Hub Programme continues to provide support for community-based sports clubs and activity groups.</p> <p>The 13 active community sport hub projects supported 227 community organisations in the 2025/26 financial year 47 more clubs than the previous year. These community-based groups provide vital sustainable opportunities for people to take part in sport and physical activity opportunities in their local communities. Clubs and community organisations have also been supported through Get Active Highland Funding a new initiative between sportscotland, High Life Highland and the London Marathon Foundation. To date 65 organisations from across the Highlands have been supported with grant funding up to £5,000 to enable more club-based activity to happen within communities.</p>
<p>1.6 Promote fair access through co-located services across the Highlands.</p>	<p>There are a number of joint school and community leisure centres and libraries across the Highlands and the experience of them is that the co-location increases footfall to all the services delivered. Larger examples include Portree, Wick, Aviemore and Alness with there being similar but smaller scale provision in smaller communities such as Ardnamurchan and Kinlochleven.</p> <p>The Music Tuition team is at the forefront of the continued use of online & blended tuition delivery which means we are able to offer instrumental tuition access to more remote schools.</p>

<p>1.7 Work with partners to improve the levels of mental health and wellbeing experienced by people in our communities.</p>	<p>The links between mental health and wellbeing and physical activity are well established and it is widely recognised that activities which engage people and reduce social isolation and loneliness make a positive contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The <i>highlife</i> leisure membership scheme is premised upon accessibility at an affordable price; the Active scheme provides a safety net for those families in our communities that are most in need to be able to enjoy access to facilities at an affordable price.</p> <p>High Life Highland Libraries offer programmes of activities within libraries to support mental health and wellbeing, including Tai Chi, Chair Yoga, Meditation classes, reminiscence groups, and a range of sensory activities. There are a wide range of book titles to support people’s mental health and wellbeing included within the services collections.</p> <p>Since opening in December 2025, The Inverness Castle Experience has welcomed a diverse range of visitors, providing a new space for people to explore and connect. Highlights include involvement in the Street Scene initiative with Inverness BID, offering young people a positive, structured activity in a welcoming cultural setting, helping to build confidence, curiosity and a sense of belonging, as well as welcoming groups from Nansen Highland, a specialist day centre supporting young adults to develop independence, life skills and work readiness, and the Dementia Adventure Group, an organisation that provides carefully planned breaks that offer relief from routine, shared positive experiences and time for connection and enjoyment. These visits are carefully adapted to meet individual needs and demonstrate how TICE can offer a calm, inclusive and meaningful environment for visitors at all ages and stages of life, reinforcing its role in wellbeing focused activities.</p> <p>Working with the Highland Green Health Partnership under the <i>Think Health, Think Nature</i> branding, the HLH Ranger Service plays both a strategic and delivery role in the Green Health Action Plan, encouraging greater use of the outdoors to support physical activity, mental wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. Through shared delivery of inclusive activities and community-based ranger events, alongside extended digital engagement, we reach people who may otherwise experience isolation. This partnership approach is having clear impact, with 61% of participants reporting improved mental wellbeing as a result of engaging with the Ranger Service.</p> <p>Targeted projects which HLH is delivering which contribute to improving mental health and wellbeing include: falls prevention; cardiac rehabilitation; cancer rehabilitation; older adults health and wellbeing; type II diabetes and physical activity; physiotherapy in leisure centres; pain management; the GP movement and activity programme and dementia friendly initiatives including the museums’ service led “House of Memories” and Highland Archive Service also delivers partnership-based reminiscence and memory-sharing activities, working with heritage organisations, community groups and care providers to reduce social isolation, support cognitive health and strengthen participants’ sense of identity and belonging. Inverness Museum and Art Gallery have a long-standing relationship with the mental health charity Keltic Care, whereby some of its service users are supported to therapeutically engage with the visual arts. The Countryside Rangers deliver the healthy minds initiative and branching out programmes, which harnesses green health benefits to assist those with mental health conditions.</p>
<p>1.8 Develop whole family support approach to ensure</p>	<p>HLH seeks to support families by offering an all-inclusive leisure subscription which is one of the best value in the country and covers a whole household (two adults</p>

<p>families stay together and thrive in their local communities.</p>	<p>and all dependent children under 18). Children’s activities, gym, swim group fitness single court activities (such as badminton) and swimming lessons are included in the subscription.</p> <p>Family friendly sessions are being delivered and developed through Active Schools with an emphasis on recruiting and supporting parent volunteers to deliver activities to young people. The Countryside Rangers and Library services offer a range of family learning opportunities throughout the year.</p> <p>HLH operated museums and galleries offer no-cost family leisure and learning opportunities both day-to-day and through structured activity programmes.</p> <p>HLH Libraries offer no-cost family activity programmes that support literacy, STEM learning, digital and social inclusion.</p> <p>High Life Highland is represented on THC’s Integrated Children’s Services Board and works with the other members on this group to ensure families are supported when using the Charity’s facilities and services.</p>
<p>1.9 Work with partners to develop early intervention for drug and alcohol reduction.</p>	<p>Sport and Leisure services are working jointly with NHS Highland and the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership on the Planet Youth Initiative. The pilot project was initially based around Tain, Dornoch, Golspie and Caithness focussing on early intervention and using sport and physical activity as a preventative measure. With success over the past year, this project has been expanded to 13 schools on 2025/26, all of which will continue to be supported by HLH.</p>
<p>1.10 Facilitate strategic sports and cultural planning across the Highlands.</p>	<p>A partnership agreement with sportscotland commenced in April 2023 which secured over £1m investment per annum in the Highlands and delivers an active school’s programme in every Associated School Group (ASG) in Highland as well as a community sports hub programme.</p> <p>An Active Highland Strategy Group has been established, made up of representatives from the CPP plus sportscotland and with input from Public Health Scotland. The aim of the Active Highland Strategy Group is to create a framework that enables people to be active through, movement, play, physical activity, and sport in Highland with full commitment from all key partners and reporting to the Highland CPP Board. HLH is engaged and supportive of the strategic aims and the work of the Active Highland Strategy Group.</p> <p>Inverness Castle is an iconic listed building of national and international significance. Originally built in 1836 as the region’s courthouse, its long-term occupants, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, transferred to a new Justice Centre in 2020, providing an opportunity to create a significant cultural and tourism asset within the Highland capital. The transformation project, managed by HLH on behalf of THC, completed in December 2025, and The Inverness Castle Experienced officially opened its doors on the 9th of February 2026, under the operational management of HLH. Providing a gateway to explore the Highlands, through immersive exhibitions and interpretation, the Experience is designed to celebrate the Spirit of the Highlands - its landscapes, stories, people, and creativity – strategically signposting visitors to explore further, stay longer and connect authentically. The development of Inverness Castle plays a key role in the city and regions development plans and supports strategic bids for further investment and funding in the region, including the current bid for the UK City of Culture.</p>

1.11 Continue to promote Gaelic language and cultural development.

HLH collaborates with THC's Gaelic Team to deliver specific targets within the Gaelic language plan and supports the promotion of Gaelic language and culture primarily through its Archives, Museums, Countryside Rangers, and Music Tuition services.

Am Baile, the bi-lingual cultural heritage website managed by HLH's Archive Service has seen increasing customer engagement. The site has bilingual descriptions of content and new Gaelic content is added on a regular basis using skilled Gaelic translators. A third of all social media posts are bi-lingual and customer feedback illustrates that these posts are proving useful as a resource in Gaelic medium education and for Gaelic learners seeking to improve their language skills. Community heritage groups are increasingly seeking to use Am Baile as a digital place of deposit for their digital heritage collections and they are supported to create Gaelic content as part of their projects.

Within museums, all interpretation at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery is bilingual and the museum offers two permanent display sections explaining and promoting Gaelic. At Highland Folk Museum visitors can experience Gaelic language and traditions in a variety of living history settings, including Gaelic psalm singing in the church and regular waulking the cloth demonstrations.

Skye and Lochaber Archive Centres continue to promote Gaelic language and cultural development through partnership working with Gaelic-medium schools and community groups, alongside ongoing links with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, delivering archive-supported learning, talks and events that explore local history, place-names and cultural identity.

The Inverness Gaelic Society Library is housed within Inverness Public Library and Gaelic book collections are also available throughout all Highland Libraries. Regular Gaelic Bookbug sessions (0-4 age rhyme, song, and storytelling sessions with parents/carers) and storytelling sessions are delivered from multiple library locations.

The Countryside Ranger Service regularly engage in Gaelic medium sessions for the Gaelic medium schools within their area, as well as weaving Gaelic into events promoting both language in the landscape and through heritage workshops.

The successful Gaelic Sports Leadership Course ran over recent years is being planned again for this year.

Gaelic has been embedded as a core element of The Inverness Castle Experience as an integral part of the new attraction. Gaelic is presented throughout as a living language, encouraging curiosity and engagement from all visitors, whether fluent speakers, learners, or first-time hearers of the language. Through bilingual audio guides and interpretation, and narratives that specifically centre Gaelic voices and perspectives, the Experience promotes its use, visibility, and status among both local residents and visitors from across the world.

HLH Sports Team in collaboration with THC Gaelic Team celebrated World Gaelic Week by running a Sports Fèis for more than 200 local school children across Skye and Lochalsh. High Life Highland's Active Schools Coordinators in Skye and Lochalsh – with help from Young Leaders – hosted two days of activities and games all delivered in Gaelic. P1-P4 children who attended the Sports Fèis played football, shinty, took part in multi sports and various other games.

1.12 Promote and enhance the Highland's rich heritage and culture.

HLH operates the two regional museums, the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum and Art Gallery and one county museum, the North Coast Visitor Centre. They offer the opportunity to experience and understand the uniqueness of the Highlands and to be part of carrying forward its traditions and heritage. In addition to the core offer of visiting the museum and self-guiding through the exhibits, the museums offer an ongoing programme of classes, events, and opportunities to engage further. HLH has a heritage ranger post which teaches traditional crafts keeping heritage alive by passing on skills. In addition, HLH operates two visitor centres which display local heritage, Caithness Broch Centre and Ferrycroft visitor centre.

HLH's four Archive Centres, in Inverness, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh and Caithness, provide opportunities for people to work directly with original records through talks, workshops, school sessions, exhibitions and family history activity. Delivered in partnership with schools, community groups and care settings, this activity supports learning, cultural engagement and a deeper understanding of Highland heritage and identity.

The digital archive Am Baile gives access to thousands of items from archives, libraries, museums, and private collections spanning the history and culture of the Highlands. It enables people to explore images, documents and films, and to contribute knowledge and memories, widening participation in and access to Highland history and culture.

Countryside ranger programmes and activities also contribute to this outcome.

The Music Tuition team has a positive national reputation for delivering high quality piping and pipe band drumming lessons in addition to promoting fiddle as part of its string instrument delivery. The Service provides many opportunities for involvement in school and community ensembles which focus on traditional music including 3 flagship Highland Young Musicians groups - 'Snas and Beira (folk groups) and High Life Highland Pipe Band.

The Inverness Castle Experience, Scotland's newest visitor attraction, acts as a contemporary gateway to the rich culture and heritage of the Highlands. Developed through the voices and lived experiences of Highland communities, and delivered through engaging, immersive content, the Experience aims to foster meaningful connections between visitors and the region's distinctive cultural identity, inspiring visitors to stay longer, explore further and engage authentically. A strategic focus on high-quality visitor experience, community engagement and strong destination positioning underpin the aspirations that the Experience provides a flagship asset in advancing the Highlands' cultural visibility and appeal, promoting the region and celebrating its culture globally.

Local history collections are available at all High Life Highland Libraries. Rare book collections related to the Highland's rich heritage and culture are housed within Inverness Library. In collaboration with UHI, a series of interactive workshops called 'Meet the Books' are delivered at Inverness Library to raise awareness of these rich and diverse local heritage collections.

2. Resilient and Sustainable Communities
Coimhearsnachdan Fulangach agus Seasmhach

Help our communities to be prosperous, sustainable, and resilient, making a positive difference to the lives of people.

<p>2.1 Develop affordable and reliable public transport.</p>	<p>HLH has played a supporting role with the Council and other partners in providing locations at its facilities for sustainable transport including cycle racks, e-bike storage/charging and car charging points.</p>
<p>2.2 Continue to work with partners to develop and promote Road Safety and Water Safety.</p>	<p>Support for Bikeability training is provided through Active Schools programmes, upskilling local volunteers to deliver, and developing afterschool and club cycling opportunities.</p> <p>High Life Highland runs a learn to swim programme delivering lessons to both children and adults across the Highlands. In addition, HLH offers swimming lessons to all Primary school children in P4/5 (in some locations every pupil in the school is given swimming lessons).</p>
<p>2.3 Support communities to help each other live well and independently.</p>	<p>HLH provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a falls prevention, strength and balance exercise programme developed in partnership with NHS Highland which is available in most HLH leisure centres and online to support older people to remain active and independent in their communities. • Specialist exercise classes for people affected by Parkinson’s disease are being offered in a range of leisure centres and online. These classes have been developed in partnership with Parkinson’s UK and NHS Highland • “Dynamic Wellbeing” which is a programme targeting people with a range of long-term health conditions including arthritis, respiratory illnesses, and neurological conditions to safely get active and stay active both online and face-to-face in leisure centres. • People experiencing pain from osteoarthritis are able to access pain management classes delivered in HLH leisure centres to help manage pain and improve quality of life. • the “You Time” programme is delivered across Highland and includes activities delivered by archives; leisure facilities; libraries; countryside rangers; and is supporting older people to sustain and improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing and reduces social isolation and loneliness. • The GP Movement and Activity Programme is testing how collaborating with primary care in NHS Highland can help people to experience everything <i>highlife</i> offers to benefit their physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing. As part of the initiative participants can be signposted to High Life Highland leisure services and offered a free 7 session pass to a leisure centre to help improve all aspects of participants health and wellbeing. • The library service works in collaboration with NHS Highland to offer Near Me points within buildings. Near Me allows those without access to digital devices to book a private space in libraries where they can attend online NHS health appointments. • HLH, working with third sector partners, embedded in communities Highland’s created the “House of Memories,” an App based resource which benefits people living with dementia and their carers to access museum collections. • The archive service supports people to live well and independently by delivering partnership-based reminiscence and memory-sharing activity, including Archives-led reminiscence sessions, which bring people living with dementia, carers and community members together to reduce isolation, support wellbeing and encourage social connection.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The museums and archives services regularly collaborate with Alzheimers Scotland, and the Badenoch Shinty and Inverness Football Memories projects to offer a range of enjoyable and beneficial opportunities to people living with dementia and their carers. • HLH offers supported and personally rewarding volunteering opportunities throughout the Highlands.
<p>2.4 Work with partners to promote visitor management.</p>	<p>HLH operates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inverness Castle Experience on behalf of THC. • 66 libraries on behalf of THC and 1 library support unit. • In addition to providing their own visitor experiences, the two regional Museums, the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, and the County Museum North Coast Visitor Centre provide a full information and advice services to visitors. • The four Archive Centres, in Caithness, Skye, Lochaber and Inverness and provides Am Baile, the extensive, web-based heritage resource, which attract ancestral tourists from all over the world. • 24 stand-alone and joint school/ community leisure centres. • HLH operates the following visitor centres, Broch Centre, Ferrycroft, Ben Nevis and Inverness Botanic Gardens. • HLH leads on the LeisureLink partnership which provides reciprocal free leisure access for members while visiting Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll & Bute, the Borders, Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland, and The Western Isles.
<p>2.5 Work with communities and partners to keep public spaces clean and safe.</p>	<p>The Countryside Ranger team continues to carry out site checks on behalf of the Council and facilitate safe and responsible access to the outdoors through its schools and community programme of activities. They arrange volunteering events to undertake beach cleans and community clean ups.</p> <p>The Inverness Castle Experience contributed to the Inverness Street Scene initiative in partnership with Inverness BID - a Friday afternoon programme designed to support young people and help reduce anti-social behaviour in the city centre.</p>
<p>2.6 Support Scottish and UK Government initiatives to ensure maximum digital connectivity across the area.</p>	<p>Libraries provide free public access computers in sixty locations across the highlands which is a significant contribution to social inclusion. In addition, there is free Wi-Fi in all libraries and the majority of leisure/community centres.</p>
<p>2.7 Work with the Scottish Government on the delivery of improved transport infrastructure throughout the Highlands.</p>	<p>Some of the HLH Community Centres, Leisure Centres and Libraries in Inverness and Fort William are partner facilities in the HI-BIKE electric bike share system. This contributes to the Council and its partners objectives on travel carbon reduction.</p>
<p>2.8 Encourage private sector and public sector economic development partners in ensuring that Highland remains a top destination for inward investment.</p>	<p>HLH is continually engaging with Highland businesses to offer them an employee wellbeing membership highlife subscription package for their staff. They are currently providing employee wellbeing solutions to 157 businesses in the scheme with 5116 employees as members.</p> <p>HLH is committed to acting as a key enabling partner in the delivery of a successful Inverness–Highland UK City of Culture 2029 bid. The programme is conceived as a deliberate, long-term intervention that will grow the cultural economy and its</p>

	spillovers and enhance Inverness–Highland’s attractiveness for talent, remote work and ethical investment, positioning the region as a credible place to live, create, study and build businesses in a net-zero future.
2.9 Work with partners to develop a community wealth building strategy.	HLH actively promotes volunteering and has a volunteering policy which includes recruitment, induction, training, and review for volunteers. In the past academic year there were 1,296 Active Schools volunteer deliverers involved in delivering activities throughout the school year.
3 Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes Dachaighean Gàidhealach So-ruigsinn agus Seasmhach	
Build houses to support communities and economic growth	
3.1 Support the needs of veterans through the Armed Forces Covenant.	<p>HLH has achieved the Armed Forces Covenant, Employer Recognition Scheme, Gold Award and offers a discount on its leisure subscriptions and advertises posts to armed forces leavers as part of its support under the covenant. There are 274 Armed Forces subscriptions.</p> <p>In addition, HLH has designated an officer to represent the Charity on the local Military Liaison Group (MLG), contributing updates to its quarterly newsletter. HLH’s Leadership Programme Officer has been working closely with the Army Welfare Officer to create a leadership training programme specifically for Army families.</p>
4. A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy Àrainneachd Ghàidhealach Sheasmhach agus Ionad Cruinneil airson Lùth So-ùrachaid	
Accelerate our response to the climate and ecological emergency. Make the most of the financial and environmental opportunities arising from the huge renewable energy potential in the Highlands.	
4.1 Promote active travel infrastructure across Highland.	HLH promotes active travel through the provision of cycle facilities at many of its sites. Some of the HLH Community Centres, Leisure Centres and Libraries in Inverness and Fort William are partner facilities in the HI-BIKE electric bike share system in Inverness and Fort William. This contributes to the Council and its partners objectives relating to travel carbon reduction.
4.2 Promote greener transport including low carbon public transport and the development of hydrogen hubs throughout the area.	<p>The Council has installed electric charging points for cars at several HLH facilities.</p> <p>The Inverness Castle Experience promotes use of the park and ride facility, encouraging visitors to arrive by public transport and offering discount enticements to those with valid tickets.</p>
4.3 Work with communities to find local solutions and lever funding.	The provision of local facilities minimises the requirement to travel, and HLH provides facilities in communities throughout the Highlands on behalf of the Council. HLH provides mobile libraries which operate throughout the Highland area.
4.4 Value and protect Highland’s natural environment.	<p>HLH provides a range of educational activities through museums, archives, rangers, and library services that protect and enhance the environment as well as encouraging people to enjoy environmental activities and participate in environmental education projects. Countryside ranger programmes further contribute to this outcome, through active conservation and nature restoration supporting a move in communities toward environmental stewardship.</p> <p>HLH is an active member of the Highland Green Health Partnership and contributes to the development of opportunities and building on existing resources to support</p>

	<p>individuals and communities to improve their health and wellbeing and build resilience through engaging with and appreciating the natural environment.</p>
<p>4.5 Encourage greater use of land and seas being well managed for nature and adaptation including blue economy, carbon sequestration, and peatland restoration.</p>	<p>The Countryside Rangers work with community volunteers to ensure habitats are well managed and monitored. They manage the wildflower mosaic and pollinator counts are designed to help raise awareness of the wide range of the importance of biodiversity and pollinator species within the highlands. Engagement was working with schools and the communities to find out more about the varied Highland species, their distribution both historic and at present and to teach the importance to highland ecology. The rangers were key partners in organising this year's Highland Biodiversity Conference. The rangers are delivering Nature Clubs across 10 HLH Green Libraries</p> <p>The HLH Libraries are building on the growing greener communities project, with the cultivating climate champions and expanding the green library hubs from 4 to 10. The aim is to educate the public on nature and climate impacts, as well as growing and conservation practices.</p> <p>The Highland Folk Museum is participating in the supporting infrastructure for the reintroduction of beavers and wildcats in the Cairngorm National Park, by hosting camera traps and is also participating in the invasive species defence programme.</p>
<p>4.6 Achieve our Net Zero targets.</p>	<p>Inverness Botanic Gardens is fully committed to 100% recycling and is a sector leader in terms of carbon reduction and biodiversity. Recently, it had its old solar panel installation replaced with more efficient ones, along with the Rugby Club pavilion where the HC also installed battery storage to take advantage of the new solar installation.</p> <p>The Council and HLH work in partnership to install energy efficient systems such as LED lighting, biomass, solar panels with funding available to the Council – e.g. Salix funding.</p> <p>The Highland Folk Museum has earned recognition for its commitment to sustainable tourism, holding the esteemed Green Tourism Gold Award, and the main building is programmed to have solar panels installed this year.</p> <p>Inverness Leisure has had the combined heat and power plant recommissioned and it is due to have solar panels installed above the main sports hall, along with energy saving works to isolate the reception area from the pool, energy surveys have also indicated several other areas that will be addressed as and when funding becomes available. Thurso leisure centre is also programmed for solar this year. Nairn Leisure, along with several other sites, will be included within the solar programme, as funding permits and as the energy efficiency audits are completed.</p>
<p>4.7 Identify and commit to renewable energy investments to reduce the overall energy costs for the Council.</p>	<p>THC and HLH continue to work together to seek support from THC to undertake energy efficiency audits by the Councils energy team at its high use sites to support the strategic reduction of emissions and save on energy costs.</p> <p>The Highland Archive Centre is also a participant in the Council's 'Passive Buildings' pilot.</p>
<p>4.8 Promote a "Just Transition" by moving to a more environmentally sustainable</p>	<p>HLH contributes to this outcome through the provision of its services and facilities throughout the Highland Council area. Its approach to low-cost access to leisure facilities has achieved and sustained high participation rates as well as an improved</p>

economy in a way that's fair to everyone.	financial provision. Archives, museums, and visitor attractions also form part of what the Highlands has to offer, and they improve the quality of life for residents and improve the visitor experience.
5. A Resilient and Sustainable Council Comhairle Fhulangach agus Sheasmhach	
Work with partners to address service delivery challenges with a positive approach to change.	
5.1 Grow and retain our own talent within the Council.	<p>HLH currently has modern apprenticeships in Leisure Centres, trainee archivist positions and works with UHI on student placements and training through its Memorandum of Understanding with UHI.</p> <p>The Archives Service supports a number of trainee posts, which enable staff to become professionally qualified whilst working within the service and then be retained in the promoted, professional posts.</p>
5.2 Work with public and private sector partners to coordinate employment opportunities.	<p>The Council and HLH have a redeployment agreement to protect staff and jobs in the context of both organisations being committed to exploring service delivery redesign in response to constrained budgets to ensure the sustainability of the Council. HLH attends Developing Young Workforce career fairs as part of the work which schools are doing with their pupils to support them in positive destinations and has signed up to the Young Person's Guarantee and works with THC's Employability team to host paid work placements within HLH.</p> <p>The museums and archives services regularly host work placements, fellowships, and internships.</p> <p>The library and countryside ranger services support work placement opportunities and offers volunteering opportunities to young people through the High Life Highland Leadership programme.</p> <p>The Inverness Castle Experience is working with partners including THC, DYW, UHI and HLA to develop employability pathways specific to tourism and hospitality.</p>
5.3 Actively redesign service delivery in response to constrained budgets to ensure the sustainability of the Council.	The Council and HLH worked together to review the Contract between them to ensure that HLH is sustainable, and that service delivery is affordable for the Council. Savings to THC have been detailed in the report above.
5.4 Work together with communities and partners to produce local plans which meet communities' needs	HLH staff work with local community partnerships along with Ward managers on local service and community plans. HLH colleagues also contribute to the work of the CPP subgroups relating to the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan such as the Mental Health Delivery Group.
5.5 Develop place-based partnership strategies to coordinate investment and rural repopulation	HLH delivers services right across the Highlands and employs local staff, thereby supporting local communities and their economies. HLH also participates in the review of local placed based investment plans to ensure that the local infrastructure needs are captured and planned within the THC's HIP.
5.6 Continue the Council's success in attracting rural tourism infrastructure funding to provide improvements to local infrastructure.	HLH delivers a number of services which support tourism including visitor attractions; museums; countryside rangers; libraries; and leisure centres.

<p>5.7 Accelerate the delivery of our Asset Management approach to increase efficiency and reduce overheads and carbon impact</p>	<p>HLH has vacated a total of 8 facilities generating potential for a capital receipt (c £400k), along with circa £87k revenue savings for utilities and maintenance. There are further opportunities to rationalise buildings from which services are delivered which will be explored through the sports facility strategy and THC community points of delivery model to enable services and agencies to support communities under one roof as a single point of delivery model.</p>
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Appendix B

General Updates/Good News Stories – October 2025 to March 2026

As part of HLH's reporting general updates and good news stories are provided since the previous reporting to the Education Committee.

High Life Highland inundated with nominations for i-care People's Choice Award: Over 200 nominations were received in the People's Choice category for the annual i-care awards. Nominations for the People's Choice Award were received across all of HLH's seven services: sport, leisure, archives, libraries, countryside rangers, museums and galleries and music development.

Renowned Scottish artist brings new work to Inverness: Inverness Museum & Art Gallery hosted an exhibition of recent work from internationally renowned Scottish artist Ken Currie. The exhibition, titled 'The Crossing / An Turas', featured a series of paintings inspired by the landscape, history and people of the Outer Hebrides.

Guising, Charms and Clues: Celebrate Samhainn at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery this October: Inverness Museum & Art Gallery invited families to explore the traditional celebration of Samhainn, the festival marking the end of harvest and the beginning of the darker half of the year.

Baking and banter at Aviemore Community Centre Coffee Morning for MacMillan: As part of High Life Highland's Wellness Month, staff and customers at the Aviemore Community Centre came together to raise money for MacMillan Cancer Support by hosting a coffee morning in the library. An amazing £1162.45 was raised as a result.

Impressive results at Lochaber schools cross country: Nevis Range was the location for the Lochaber Active Schools primary cross-country races with more than 80 children taking part.

Heritage in Action 'makes a splash' at the Highland Folk Museum: The final 'Heritage in Action Day' at the Highland Folk Museum before the site closes for winter had a watery theme highlighting endangered crafts relating to water! The event included the launch the unveiling of the restored water powered timber mill.

Autumn Adventures Bring Families Together in Arisaig Gardens: Families from across the Mallaig area gathered in Arisaig's Larachmhor Gardens for a Family Autumn Fun Day, organised by HLH's Mallaig Active Schools Co-ordinator Pam MacDonald and Countryside Ranger Eilidh-Ann Phillips. Set against a backdrop of autumn colours and lovely weather, the event welcomed participants of all ages for an afternoon of nature-inspired activities and outdoor exploration.

Benchball bonanza for East Sutherland pupils: Golspie High School was the location for the East Sutherland Schools Sports Association (ESSSA) Benchball tournament. With 13 teams and almost 100 children taking part.

Spooky Fun at the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre – Halloween Trail Returns: HLH's Spooky Trail returned to the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre, with families invited to step into

the shadows and wander through the woods after dusk, where ghostly apparitions, pumpkin ghouls, and even zombie hands awaited them!

Gold award for sporty Caithness primary pupils: Noss Primary School in Wick achieved the highest accolade from **sportscotland** for their commitment to ensuring that all pupils are fully participating in sport and physical activity. The far north school with 300 pupils was awarded a **sportscotland** Gold School Sport Award for 2025-2027, recognising the school's efforts at putting sport at the heart of their planning, practice and ethos.

Hyrox Sim is at smash hit at Inverness Leisure: Inverness Leisure hosted the latest Hyrox Simulation (Sim) event, with 70 competitors taking part. HLH has fully embraced the fitness phenomenon that is Hyrox with training classes taking place in *highlife* leisure centres in Aviemore, Grantown, Inverness and Fort William, with more in the pipeline.

Spelling binding night at Fortrose Library: A powerful spell was cast on Fortrose Library turning it into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry! Well for one night anyway! Almost 30 children aged 7-12 descended on Fortrose Library for Harry Potter Book Night for an evening of activities and storytelling.

High Life Highland continues to support young athletes with travel awards: Featured in the second round of ATAS funding for 2025 were 16 talented Highland athletes competing at national and international level in sports including cricket, swimming, orienteering, skiing and golf.

Libraries reach out the hand of friendship to celebrate Scottish Book Week: Libraries are important community spaces in the Highlands – they are a hive of activity with clubs and groups making them home and where connections are made. This was reflected in the 'friendship' theme for Book Week Scotland 2025, which ran from the 17 – 23 November.

Book Week Scotland Comes to Skye and Lochalsh - Celebrating Stories, Creativity, and Community: This Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre welcomed Scottish writer Alan Bissett as part of Book Week Scotland. During his visit Alan delivered a creative writing workshop for pupils at Portree High School, inspiring the next generation.

Young Leaders go for it in Gaelic! *{Press Release also issued in Gaelic}*

A special leadership course took place in Skye, entirely delivered in Gaelic. The Gaelic Choose to Lead Level 4 SCQF Award was delivered by HLH in partnership with The Highland Council, providing young people with the skills required to deliver activities in their schools or local communities.

Active Schools cross country series kicks off at Invergordon: The popular winter cross country series for primary pupils in East Ross and East Sutherland was launched at Invergordon Academy with 250 children taking part in this first race of six scheduled events.

Breaking down barriers with wheelchair basketball: During Scottish Disability Sport Week (24 - 30 November) we shone a light on one of HLH's hardest working volunteers – Bryan Stevens from Inverness, also a recent i-care award recipient.

Lochaber Leisure praises ‘star’ colleague: An inspiring member of the Lochaber Leisure Centre narrowly missed out on an award at the Scottish Leisure Network Group Awards. Leisure supervisor Kira MacDonald was nominated in the Rising Star Award category by senior colleagues for consistently going above and beyond in her role.

East Sutherland Pupils ‘score high’ at Basketball Tournament: The East Sutherland Schools Sports Association (ESSSA) basketball competition saw 7 schools and just under 100 pupils taking part. The event was supported by Young Leaders from Golspie High School and Dornoch Academy.

High Life Highland library staff mark over 200 years of service: The HLH Long Service Awards took place with 7 members of the libraries team recognised for having clocked up an incredible 210 years with the charity and The Highland Council.

Commit to kilometres for Cash for Kids: Leisure teams in Badenoch & Strathspey organised a fundraising challenging in support of MFR’s Cash For Kids, encouraging customers to do as many kilometres as possible during December.

Countdown to Christmas is on with inaugural performance of Nairn’s Bee the Change Choir: An intergenerational choir made its debut at the annual Christmas lights switch on in Nairn. The choir involves HLH’s Leadership Programme, Mikeysline and THC’s Nairn Youth Development Officer as well as residents at St Olaf’s Care Home and pupils at Auldearn Primary and Nursery. This was featured on STV news.

New exhibition showcasing Scotland’s favourite hobbies opens in Inverness: Inverness Museum and Art Gallery staged an exhibition which was dedicated to people’s hobbies.

From Minecraft Moves to Eden Court: Pupils Dance Their Way Through Winter: Primary school pupils across Badenoch and Strathspey were involved in a series of dance sessions led by young leaders from the Cairngorm School of Dance. The Aviemore-based dance school teamed up with HLH’s Active Schools team to deliver the fun dance classes right across the Strath. The initiative helped inspire pupils through movement while building confidence and leadership skills.

Funding boost for libraries throughout the Highlands: High Life Highland’s libraries announced a £32,000 investment from Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) on behalf of The Scottish Government, to help develop library services for communities and schools through innovative projects.

IT investment is making life better for *highlife* customers and staff: HLH announced its brand-new leisure management system, designed to make joining *highlife* and booking *highlife* classes as simple as possible!

Angus Òg Hits the Big Screen - New BBC Alba Documentary Brings Scotland’s Favourite Highland Rogue Back to Life This New Year’s Day: HLH supported a brand-new documentary airing on BBC Alba about Ewen Bain and his fictional character, Angus Og. At the heart of the documentary is the Ewen Bain Angus Òg Cartoon Collection, housed at the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre in Portree.

Yellow hoodies to support mental health: The HLH Leadership Programme launched a new yellow hoodie in partnership with Mikeysline. The new yellow hoodie

was launched at Nairn County's Station Park with representatives from HLH, Mikeysline, Nairn County FC and several brand-new yellow hoodie recipients.

Categories and host revealed for first World Shortbread Championships: On National Shortbread Day HLH announced the categories and host for the first ever World Shortbread Championships. Overseeing all the fun and tasting on the day will be professional chef, food writer and broadcaster Sarah Rankin.

New year, new funds for Highland clubs thanks to Get Active Scotland: A total of 31 Highland-based sports clubs were the first to be awarded funds from the Get Active Scotland initiative, which is a two-year funding partnership between national and local partners – including the London Marathon Foundation, **sportscotland**, High Life Highland and Glasgow Life. The variety of sports being supported in this first round of funding included basketball, ice hockey, shinty, football, gymnastics, athletics, golf, tennis, bowling, rugby and surfing.

High Life Highland's Puddles to Ponds project wins environmental award: The High Life Highland's Countryside Rangers and Museum teams were in Edinburgh to pick up a National Green Apple Gold Award, celebrating the Puddles to Ponds project's outstanding contribution to environmental education, biodiversity enhancement, and community engagement.

A warm welcome awaits at Averon Leisure Centre open day: The Averon Leisure Centre in Alness is the latest High Life Highland gym to undergo a makeover! As such, members of the community were invited to come and try the new kit and equipment for free at an Open Day on Saturday 21 February.

Two New Exhibitions Open at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery: Two new exhibitions got underway at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, presenting compelling contemporary work across visual art and film. The '*New Highland Graduates*' exhibition returned after a break of 10 years, meanwhile visitors could also view '*who will be remembered here*' programmed to co-inside with LGBT+ History Month.

Have a big swinging day out with the Highland Youth Big Band: HLH held a musical big day out with the Highland Youth Big Band at the Nairn Community & Arts Centre, involving daytime workshops with top tutors followed by a fabulous concert full of jazz and swing classics.

Whose history is it anyway?: To mark LGBTQ History Month, High Life Highland Archivist Catherine MacPhee shared her recent experience, appearing at the 'Out in the Hills' Festival. Her blog was a fantastic insight into her participation in 'Whose History is it Anyway?' – a special feature at the Pitlochry Festival Theatre event.

Love is all a (shortbread) round as Head Judge is revealed for World Champs!: In the run up to Valentines Day, we announced the Head Judge for the inaugural World Shortbread Championships – Jeni Iannetta of Bad Girl Bakery fame!

Eva shines bright like a Diamond hoodie: An Inverness teenager with a passion for sport – and singing – was awarded a prestigious Diamond Leadership hoodie. Eva Still received the coveted hoodie for her amazing achievement of clocking up over 1,000 volunteering hours as part of the High Life Highland Leadership programme.

Scottish Gaelic in the Landscape: A Living Map of Nature and Memory: For World Gaelic Week our ranger team developed a wonderful blog about Scottish Gaelic and how it is not simply a language spoken by people - it is a language spoken by the land itself. Across the Highlands and Islands, placenames, and descriptions of the terrain create a linguistic map that reveals how generations of Gaelic speakers understood, navigated, and treasured their environment.

Sport Fèis fun for Skye & Lochalsh Pupils: Also, as part of World Gaelic Week, more than 150 pupils from P4–7 came together across two lively days in Portree and Plockton to take part in a vibrant Sport Fèis, delivered by High Life Highland's Active Schools team. Delivered in partnership with the Highland Council Gaelic Team, the events offered pupils the chance to enjoy sport through the medium of Gaelic – promoting physical activity, confidence and cultural pride in equal measure.

Seeing double when it comes to gold awards at Ardnamurchan High School!: A Lochaber school has bagged not one, but two gold accolades for its commitment to promoting sport and physical activity. Ardnamurchan High School achieved the highest honour from **sportscotland** for their commitment to ensuring that all pupils are fully participating in sport and being active, with a Gold School Sport Award. In addition, the Camanachd Association has bestowed gold status on the school for its dedication to promoting and developing shinty.

High Life Highland Libraries put the fun into fundraising week!: Craft fairs, book sales, coffee mornings and sweet treats – along with other special events and activities took place at High Life Highland libraries for Fundraising Week. The event is designed to shine a light on the library service and boost donations to help support continued investment in this vital resource.

Young dancers shine at East Sutherland Primary Schools Ceilidh competition: From Virginia Reels to Strip the Willows, Britannia Two Steps to Canadian Barn Dances – the primary school pupils of Sutherland proved they could master them all at this year's East Sutherland Primary Schools Ceilidh Dancing Competition.

Highland Young Musicians - Concerts Festival 2026: The 2026 Highland Young Musicians Concert at Eden Court Theatre was a sell-out. Audience members were treated to music-making of the highest standards throughout the whole of the event.

From Classroom to Career - Nairn Pupils Explore the World of Sports and Leisure: A pilot project in Nairn, designed to help young people interested in pursuing a career in the sports and leisure industry, concluded with awards for those taking part. As part of this news release, we also highlighted a leisure and sports careers event 'Fit Futures', organised in partnership with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and bringing together a range of employers and organisations.

Podium finish for young pipers and drummers!: High Life Highland's Youth Pipe Band and folk band 'Beira' were successful at the Scottish Schools Pipe Band

Championships. The High Life Highland Youth Pipe Band delivered a standout performance in the Junior B category, winning 1st prize and were interviewed for BBC Alba on their return! Folk band 'Beira' received hugely positive comments from the judges around their musical performance and were awarded 3rd in this competition.

Gold hoodie alert at Highland Boccia Finals! As part of the Highland Schools Boccia Finals event, a Gold Hoodie was awarded to a hard-working disability sports volunteer. Kade Cumming (18) from Dingwall who has been volunteering for Active Schools and THC's Dingwall Youth Work team, Dingwall Soccer 7s and Dingwall Junior Football Club.

High Life Highland visitor centres and museums spring open for visitors! HLH's seasonal attractions re-opened - Ferrycroft Visitor Centre in Lairg, the North Coast Visitor Centre in Thurso and the Highland Folk Museum (HFM) in Newtonmore for the summer season. BBC Out of Doors sent a team to the HFM to speak with staff about the task of re-opening the country's largest outdoor museum.

High Life Highland offers free Parkinson's classes for World Parkinson's Day: A series of free taster exercise classes in the lead-up to World Parkinson's Day (which is officially marked on Saturday 11 April) were promoted. The Free 'come and try' sessions took place in Inverness, Nairn, Wick, Grantown-on-Spey and Dingwall. Sharon Emmerson took part in a live interview on Highland Hospital Radio to help promote the classes.

Strontian pianist wins Highland Young Musician of the Year: The 2026 Highland Young Musician of the Year competition was won by Jack Bungey from Ardnamurchan High School. He will now represent the Highland region in the Scottish Young Musician of the Year competition, which is being held in May at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow.

Helmsdale pupils dominate schools badminton competition: The annual East Sutherland Schools Sports Association badminton tournament took place recently with over 100 matches played over the course of the afternoon event at Golspie High School.



MAKING
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High Life Highland
LIBRARIES

Annual Report 2025/26

April 2026

Foreward

The year of 2025/26 year marked a period of growth and achievement for High Life Highland Libraries, with an increase in footfall to our buildings.

In-person visits across the year rose to over 1.9 m (2% increase), demonstrating continuing demand for the service from Highland communities. This was complemented by 800K digital engagements across the financial year.

A total of 370,000 participants attended events across libraries during this period. Engagement with children and families was a particular strength this year, with over 210,000 participants attending family events at libraries, a 5% increase in comparison to 2024/25.

The service secured Scottish Government funding to deliver a series of climate engagement activities (Page 15), helping to position libraries as trusted spaces for learning.

In collaboration with Culloden Academy, High Life Highland also secured funding for the 'Reading is For Everyone' project. The initiative promotes reading for pleasure and the benefits it brings, as well as supporting those struggling with reading as a result of a learning difference such as dyslexia.

Towards the end of the year an adult customer survey was undertaken, resulting in an exceptionally high customer satisfaction rate (97%) (Page 3).

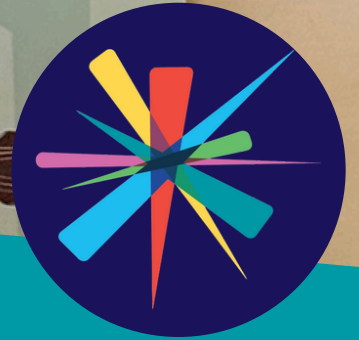
None of the mentioned achievements would have been possible without the innovation and enthusiasm of our dedicated libraries team, as well as significant input from High Life Highland colleagues, The Highland Council and other partners.

Following High Life Highland Libraries' solid performance throughout the last 12 months, I look to 2026/27 with optimism, confident in the knowledge that the service will continue to make life significantly better for the communities it serves.

Julie Corcoran

Head of Libraries and Archives





Staff recognition

The Green Libraries Team was shortlisted at High Life Highland's i-Care Awards, for High Performing Team of The Year. Library staff in collaboration with Countryside Rangers colleagues, delivered high quality climate engagement activities throughout Highland communities.

Staff member, Tom McKee was Highly Commended by The Scottish Book Trust for being shortlisted at the Bookbug Hero Awards 2026. Tom delivers Bookbug within the Inverness area and was nominated by customers for his high quality, fun and engaging sessions.



Number of In-person visits

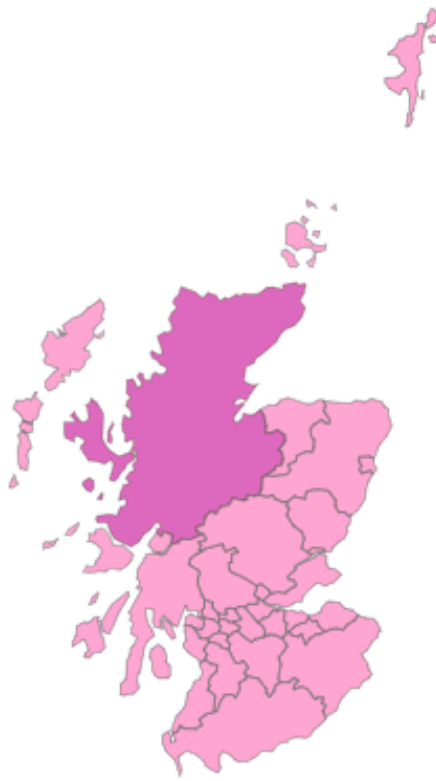
1.9m

In-person visits increase

2%

Number of virtual visits

800,000



Adult customer
survey responses

1,789

Percentage of
respondents who
rated their library as
'Good' or 'Very
Good'

97%

Performance

- **A total of 370,000 participants at events**
- **210,000 participants at family events**
- **12,000 school class visits**

Customer satisfaction

Listening to our customers



1,789

Adult survey responses received

97%

Percentage of respondents who rated their library as 'Good' or 'Very Good'

Adult customer survey

Libraries undertake surveys with adults, children and families, teenagers and non-users, over a three yearly cycle. The Adult User Survey was undertaken in March 2026. The results paint a picture of a library service that is deeply valued by its communities and staffed by people who are widely praised for their warmth, knowledge, and dedication.

The qualitative feedback makes clear that for many people in the Highlands, the library is a lifeline — for literacy, for learning, for social connection, for digital access, and for wellbeing.

“

The staff in the library are really exemplary, in their knowledge, kindness and professionalism. I really enjoy the library.

(Parent)

”

Customers said...

97.7%

Libraries improve my
quality of life

99.6%

Libraries are important to
my community

What customers said...

- Improves my quality of life: 97.7%
- Important to my community: 99.6%
- Important to me: 99.6%
- A vital resource for families: 99.3%
- A Lifeline for older people: 99.3%
- Makes me feel connected to my community: 97.0%
- Helps me to access Council/other services: 86.8%

Customer care levels

- 99% rated staff helpfulness as "very good" or "good"
- 98% rated staff knowledge as "very good" or "good"
- 98% said staff acknowledged them on entry
- 99% felt they were treated fairly

Staff development

High Life Highland Libraries employs a total of 197 people across 67 locations. Our staff are our biggest asset, clearly valued by customers for their friendliness, warmth and knowledge.

Makaton training sessions

During Spring 2025, 16 front-facing library staff attended Makaton Training. Makaton is a language that combines speech, signs and symbols to help people with learning or communication difficulties.

Training was delivered in direct response to customer feedback requesting the inclusion of signing within our Bookbug sessions. As a result, libraries are now able to incorporate Makaton signing, ensuring that our sessions for families and young children are inclusive and accessible.

**Scottish
Book Trust**
inspiring readers and writers





Literacy and attainment

A key aim of libraries is to support literacy and raise educational attainment levels. The service actively promotes reading for pleasure and the benefits it brings, including improved reading and writing skills, improved vocabulary, an increase in confidence, increased wellbeing, and better employment opportunities. Storytelling sessions, The National Bookbug campaign, reading incentive schemes, World Book Day, Book Week Scotland, author events, and book groups, are just some of the ways that libraries encourage a love of reading and books for all age groups.

Bookbug Week 2025

The theme of Book Bug Week 2025 was 'Bookbug's Big Bedtime', with a focus on celebrating bedtime stories.

Bookbug sessions remain the number one event attraction at libraries, and during 2025/26 alone, the activity attracted over 100,000 visits to library buildings.

The national program encourages book sharing, promotes literacy and helps to instil a love of reading from the earliest of ages.



Literacy and attainment

Summer Reading Challenge 2025



The theme for the Summer Reading Challenge 2026 was 'Story Garden', focusing on nature and the environment. The Reading Agency's National Reading Campaign presents an opportunity for libraries across the UK to work with nurseries, primary schools, parents and carers in encouraging children to read for pleasure. National research evidences that children's reading skills can drop during long periods away from school, and reading incentive schemes such as this can act as a positive intervention.



Literacy and attainment

Harry Potter night

The annual Harry Potter Book Night continues to be a firm favourite at Fortrose Library. The 2025 annual event attracted 50 participants to the library, providing an opportunity for the service to celebrate reading and literature alongside the community.



Literacy and attainment

Literacy and schools

The service works closely with both primary and secondary schools, to promote literacy and to raise attainment levels.

During 2025/26, 12,000 school class visits took place. School activities included library inductions, storytelling sessions, author visits, digital workshops and information skills sessions.



In November 2025, Culloden Academy and High Life Highland were successful in securing the Scottish Government's School Library Improvement funding to support the 'Reading Is For Everyone' project. The initiative brings together Culloden Academy and ASG Primary School pupils to support them in developing a reading habit. Library staff are also being upskilled to help pupils facing barriers to enjoyment of reading, such as dyslexia.

Throughout 2025, libraries across the Highlands worked in collaboration with The Highland Council to support schools that had signed up to the Scottish Book Trust's Reading Schools campaign.

Health and wellbeing

A key aim for the library service is to support the health & wellbeing of Highland communities by providing opportunities to reduce social isolation, providing trusted health information, and through signposting to specialised services. High Life Highland works closely with key partners such as NHS Highland, to support these aims.

NHS Near-Me hubs

In collaboration with NHS Highland, the service provides a confidential room within selected library buildings, where members of the public can attend virtual hospital appointments. The initiative is Scotland wide and aims to support those without digital connectivity in their homes. The initiative runs from Thurso Library, Culloden Library, Granttown Library, Fort William Library and Ardnamurchan Library.



Change, loss and bereavement collection

Working in collaboration with The Highland Council and CLB Highland, a new book collection was launched during Children's Grief Awareness Week 2025. Funded by the Scottish Government, the e-book and hard copy collections provide support for families, children and young people who have experienced change and loss.



Neurodiversity support book collection

Working in collaboration with NHS Highland, The Highland Council and The National Autistic Society a book collection has been developed, both in e-book and hard copy formats, to support those with neurodevelopmental needs.



Libraries on the move

High Life Highland's mobile libraries serve as a lifeline for rural communities across the Highlands. They support literacy and learning, reduce social isolation, and ensure equitable access to information for diverse communities, including rural schools, care homes, older people, families, and those unable to visit physical libraries. The Highland Council's recent procurement of replacement mobile library vehicles will help to safeguard this vital service for our rural communities, going into the future.



Learning in libraries

Libraries across the Highlands serve as trusted places for lifelong learning, offering free access to books, digital resources, computers, study spaces, and educational programmes. From classes supporting customers to learn a new language, digital support sessions, Lego clubs, science workshops, history clubs, and crafting workshops, there is something to suit all ages and all different types of interests.



Learning in libraries

Growing greener Highland communities



In early 2025, the service was successful in securing CILIPS (Chartered Institute for Libraries & Information in Scotland) funding to deliver climate literacy across local communities.

The project focussed on empowering local sustainability through working with High Life Highland's Countryside Ranger colleagues, partners and community groups on the development of four climate hubs at Dingwall, Caol, Wick and Ardnamurchan libraries. The initiative engaged with all different age groups in interactive and innovative ways, to teach affordable and practical ways for communities to come together and care for the planet. Programming activity included the development of nature clubs, seed libraries, climate related book collections, eco book groups, food growing workshops, plant swaps, and nature themed storytelling sessions. Over 1,000 community engagements took place over the length of project.



Further sustainability funding has now been secured from the Scottish Government. Administered by the Scottish Library and Information Council, the new initiative, *Cultivating Climate Champions*, focuses on expanding the number of Green Library Hubs across the Highlands and building on the service's climate engagement programme. A key focus of the project is engaging with young people through climate-related activities, whether by attending events or taking up volunteering opportunities in libraries via the High Life Highland Leadership Programme.

Libraries and digital inclusion

Libraries act as crucial digital enablers by bridging the digital divide, providing access to technology , and by supporting customers to build on their digital skills and confidence. They serve as community hubs for digital inclusion, by offering access to computers, wi-fi and printing facilities, as well as e-books, e-audio books, e-newspapers and e-magazines.

From coding clubs to podcasting activities and intergenerational digital support sessions, libraries offer opportunities for all age-groups to build on their digital skills in innovative and engaging ways.



Culture in libraries

Libraries are ideally placed to increase participation in cultural activities due to being used by all social groups and by having a geographic presence across all areas of the Highlands. They foster creativity, improve access to local history, and provide a platform for creativity, music and art.

From delivering Gaelic Book Bug sessions, and Gaelic conversational classes, to providing access to Gaelic publications, the service works with local organisations to celebrate, promote and improve access to the Gaelic language and culture. Participation in The Royal National Mòd and World Gaelic Week are two examples of where libraries and communities come together to celebrate Gaelic culture.

Keyboard club

High Life Highland and Fèis a' Bhaile work in partnership to bring music into the heart of the local Inverness community and develop the library as a creative and nurturing space.



In 2025, Inshes library secured Highland Council Ward Discretionary Funding to continue its work with Fèis a' Bhaile in bringing low-cost keyboard tuition to the library and its community. As well as introducing families to traditional music, the project attracted those within the community who had struggled to identify affordable options for their children to learn to play the instrument. The project will continue to be funded during 2026/27.



Employability

High Life Highland leadership programme

This year saw the service engaging with 56 young leaders across the Highlands. Libraries offer young people aged 12-25 opportunities to gain skills in customer care by assisting with and in some cases, leading library activities. Young people volunteer across a diverse range of library events, including digital workshops, Bookbug sessions, The Summer Reading Challenge, Lego Clubs, and Nature Clubs.

Highland Libraries engaged with 56 young leaders across the year enhancing their customer care and employability skills.



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High Life Highland
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