

Highland Licensing Report 2025-2026



**POLICE
SCOTLAND**
Keeping people safe

Foreword

I am pleased to present the Annual Licensing Report for the 2025/26 period, prepared in line with Section 12(A) of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005.

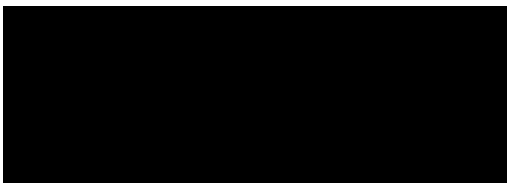
Over the last twelve months, our core focus has been on strengthening public trust and safety across Scotland's communities. By prioritising preventative action and early intervention, we continue to make meaningful progress toward our 2030 vision of safer communities, less crime, supported victims, and a thriving workforce.

Effective licensing regulation is built on collaboration. Our close working relationships with Scotland's 32 local authorities, Licensing Boards, the licensed trade and a wide range of stakeholders remain fundamental to our success. Together we have balanced the needs within the licensing sector with our shared responsibility to address alcohol related harm, tackle disorder and anti-social behaviour. As well as safeguarding children and young people.

A significant focus during the year was our preparation for and delivery throughout the Fifa World Cup 2026. Extended licensing hours and increased demand across the hospitality sector required careful planning, strong partnership working and a co-ordinated policing response. Thanks to the professionalism of our officers, staff and partners, these challenges were met successfully while maintaining public safety and supporting communities across Scotland.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to delivering a fair, consistent and effective licensing service. By continuing to work closely with our partners and engaging positively with the licensed trade we will ensure our approach remains balanced, proportionate and responsive to emerging trends.

I would like to thank our partners for their continued commitment, professionalism and support throughout the year. The achievements highlighted in this report are testament to our collaborative efforts and shared ambition to make Scotland's communities safer places to live, work and visit.



Chief Constable Jo Farrell KPM

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Police Scotland Licensing Overview –

The Violence Prevention and Licensing Co-ordination Unit (VPLCU) sits within the National Policing Together Division, with personnel located throughout the organisation. The Department leads the development and implementation of national licensing strategy and policy, providing direction, advice and support to divisional licensing departments, while delivering specialist functions as a national level.

The VPLCU is a dedicated team of specialist officers who work closely with divisional licensing colleagues and partner organisations to inform and influence policing policy and strategy in relation to licensing. The unit provides professional guidance to licensing practitioners, frontline officers, supervisory staff and senior policing leaders.

The VPLCU promotes consistent application of legislation governing the sale and supply of alcohol across Scotland. It seeks to ensure all available measures are utilised to prevent unlawful or irresponsible sale, supply or consumption of alcohol, with the overarching objective of reducing crime, disorder and associated harm.

During 2025/2026, from a licensing perspective, our particular focus was on the following.

- Reviewing serious incidents of violence, disorder and antisocial behaviour associated with licensed premises.
- Delivering and supporting initiatives designed to tackle issues linked to alcohol consumption, particularly where this impacts young people and the night-time economy.
- Overseeing the governance and continued enhancement of the national ICT licensing system, known as Innkeeper, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of liquor and civic licensing processes. Police Scotland has continued work to upgrade the system to ensure ongoing compliance with GDPR requirements.

Each of the 13 Local Policing Divisions has a dedicated licensing team responsible for overseeing the day-to-day administration of licensing matters. These teams ensure compliance with statutory obligations and respond to any issues arising within licensed premises in their respective local areas.

LICENSING BOARD AREA

The Licensing Board area is policed by the Highland and Islands Police Division. Chief Superintendent Robert Shepherd is the Local Police Commander who has the responsibility for all day-to-day policing functions.

Highlands and Islands Division is divided into four Local Authority areas: namely Highland, Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles. The content of this report relates to the Highland area.

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The communities across Highland face unique challenges, particularly due to the geography of the region. With a mixture of both rural and urban communities, Highland experience overall low crime levels, however, this does not imply immunity from such occurrences.

Alcohol and associated behaviours can be a significant factor in incidents of violence and disorder within the region. The Police are committed to working closely with the licensing industry and our partners to share best practice and maintain robust licensing monitoring.

We recognise our role in identifying and supporting those within our communities who are particularly vulnerable and ensuring pathways to a wider level of support are created and maintained as part of a program of initiatives with a focus on prevention and public protection.

Police Scotland recognises the strong sense of community identity and resilience across the Highlands. With our partners in the Highland Council and many other organisations we will strive to build on this to make all our communities stronger, safer and more resilient.

Senior/Licensing Officers:

The officers who hold responsibility for liquor licensing within the area of Highland are as follows:

A/Superintendent Jane MacKenzie	Support and Service Delivery
A/Chief Inspector William Nimmo	Head of Licensing Department
Inspector Paul MacLaren	Licensing Inspector
Sergeant Sarah Paterson	Licensing Sergeant

In addition to a Licensing Inspector and Sergeant, the department has three Divisional Licensing Administrators.

The Highland Council area is divided into three Policing Area Commands: North Highland, South Highland, and Inverness. The senior officers with responsibility for these areas are as follows:

North Highlands (Caithness, Sutherland, and Ross-shire)	Area Commander – A/Chief Inspector David McAlpine
South Highlands (Badenoch, Strathspey, Nairn, Skye & Lochaber)	Area Commander - Chief Inspector Donna Allan
Inverness (Inverness City and Inverness Rural)	Area Commander – Chief Inspector Craig Still

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Local Policing Priorities

Following our public consultation process, the policing priorities for the Highlands and Islands Division, as set out in our Local Policing Plan are as follows;

- Road safety and road crime
- Serious organised crime
- Crimes of theft and dishonesty
- Antisocial behaviour, violence and disorder
- Protecting vulnerable people
- Terrorism and public order.

OPERATION OF THE LICENSING (SCOTLAND) ACT 2005

This section concentrates on how the Act has been applied by the licensing team and other local policing officers to support the Licensing Objectives in tandem with the local/national policing priorities.

The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 exists to control the overall availability of alcohol throughout Scotland, and to regulate the manner in which licensed premises operate. The Act is underpinned by five licensing objectives, namely;

- Preventing Crime and Disorder
- Securing Public Safety
- Preventing Public Nuisance
- Protecting and Improving Public Health
- Protecting Children and Young Persons from Harm

These five licensing objectives are pivotal to ensuring that licensed premises operate in a responsible manner. A well-run licensed premises will ensure that these objectives are at the core of to their daily operation. Failure to adhere to the objectives will undoubtedly result in poorly managed premises. Police Scotland is acutely aware of the importance of these objectives and understands the necessity to ensure that premises are always complying with them.

Of note there were 1,185 alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland in 2024, which is a decrease of 7% to the previous year. (National Records of Scotland, September 2025).

Nationally the mortality rates in the most and least deprived areas has narrowed over time, people in the most deprived areas of Scotland are more than 4.5 times as likely to die from an alcohol specific death compared to people in the least deprived areas. (National Records of Scotland, September 2025).

The Highland Licensing Board has 3 Licensing Standards Officers covering the area. Police enjoy close working relationships with the licensing standards officers and carry out joint working and sharing of information to support each other's functions and uphold the Licensing Objectives.

The Police Licensing Officer is responsible for processing all correspondence received from the Licensing Board. The officer reviews applications on behalf of the Chief

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Constable as part of the consultation process in conjunction with the Area Commander. This consultation process forms part of the Police support of the Licensing Objectives.

In the Highland area, there were 393 recorded incidents in licensed premises between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, this is a decrease on the 491 recorded incidents in the last reporting period.

The misuse of alcohol is regularly cited as a contributory factor in relation to crimes of violence, domestic abuse, disorder and antisocial behaviour occurring on our street and within our homes.

In addition, alcohol is also known to lower inhibitions which can have an impact on people's lives, both resulting in them becoming victims of crime, as well as the perpetrator, which can have serious consequences for individuals and their families.

We continue to ensure there is a concerted focus on the issues surrounding the sale and supply of alcohol within our communities and work together in partnership with Licensed Premises and other agencies to promote responsible trading practices, ultimately keeping people safe.

Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005

Section 1- Unlicensed sale of alcohol - There have been no cases of unlicensed selling of alcohol sent to the Procurator Fiscal for consideration of prosecution in this reporting year.

Section 84 (84A) – Personal Licence Reviews - Police Licensing Officers are responsible for monitoring the conduct of personal licence holders.

The amendment to legislation has widened the ability for the Chief Constable to report conduct inconsistent with the Licensing Objectives.

In this reporting period four review hearing requests were submitted by Police to the Board. One person surrendered their licence prior to a hearing. One had their licence endorsed after a hearing. One person had their licence revoked prior to a hearing. One received no action after a hearing.

Section 94 – Exclusion Orders - When a person has been charged with a violent offence within or in the immediate vicinity of any licensed premises, a request for an Exclusion Order is included in the 'remarks' section of the Police report.

Exclusion Orders are granted by the Courts, 'on conviction,' and can exclude a person from specific licensed premises for between three months and up to two years.

The Police Licensing Officer proactively drives the request for exclusion orders whenever there is an incident in or in the immediate vicinity of licensed premises.

Persistent offenders can also be dealt with under the Anti-Social Behaviour legislation.

There have been four exclusion orders applied for in this reporting year.

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Section 97 – Closure Orders - There were no closure orders within this reporting period. It is fully expected that should a premises require to cease trading, due to a serious risk to public safety, that we would receive full cooperation from the licence holder or person in charge.

Section 111 – 116 – Drunkenness and disorder offences within the Licensing legislation.

There have been thirty-nine recorded crimes within these sections of the legislation across Highland. All were detected and the culprits either received a recorded Police warning, a fixed penalty notice, reported to the Procurator Fiscal for consideration of prosecution or held in custody to attend court the next lawful day.

Section 117 – 121 – Other licensing offences.

There were no reports during this reporting period for other licensing offences.

There is a total of 1,271 licensed premises in Highland and local officers carried out a total of 3,273 recorded inspections within this area alone in that same period, an increase from last year's 3,134 recorded inspections. These inspections provide officers with an opportunity to positively engage with those involved in the trade whilst monitoring the behavior of the public attending the licensed premises.

The Police have a licensing toolkit to ensure a consistent approach throughout the force is adopted when premises become problematic. The toolkit details an incremental licensing intervention process.

An incident of a minor nature would generally be resolved through discussion with the licensee, either undertaken by local officers or the licensing department staff. The Local Authority Licensing Standards Officer (LSO) will normally be informed of issues at this stage so that they are aware. This is particularly beneficial for information sharing purposes and will allow the Police to benefit from LSO's expertise and any previous involvement that they have had with a premise.

Should problems persist or a pattern of incidents are identified, the premises will become 'monitored,' which is the first stage of the intervention process. The licensing department Sergeant will always involve the local area Inspector and Chief Inspector at this stage. In addition, the LSO will also be informed. On occasions, the Police licensing department and LSO will request a joint meeting with the licensee to discuss concerns. This can often take place at the premises to allow a full compliance check at that time. When premises are monitored, the Police are required to undertake a specific number of tasked inspections each week, which are recorded on the Police licensing database, Innkeeper. These tasked inspections would take place over a specific period which would be agreed with the licensee and Area Commander.

There was one premises elevated to 'monitored' status within the past year.

Should problems persist then the next stage of the process ordinarily is an action plan, and the premises are elevated to 'problematic' status.

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An action plan will detail concerns and will initiate a number of actions which the Police require the licensee to undertake. These actions will focus on the areas of concern; however, licensees will discover that what is being asked of them is no more than their statutory requirements under licensing legislation. An action plan can last for up to 6 months and will be reviewed at the half-way stage. The LSO will always be involved in the action plan and will be present when this is implemented. It is important that the licensee is in agreement with the actions and is willing to engage with the Police and LSO. Failure to agree on the specific actions would not be conducive to a successful outcome of this plan. Again, the action plan would be subject of the Area Commander's approval.

Within the past year, one premises in the Highland area has been the subject of action plan. The premises were able to rectify the issues with no further concerns noted by Police or the Licensing Standards Officer for the area.

The final stage in the intervention process is the Police requesting the review of a premises license. This would occur when matters have not been resolved and the Chief Superintendent for the division is satisfied that the premises are not operating in accordance with the licensing objectives, and that any intervention processes carried out thus far have failed to result in significant improvement.

It should be noted that the Police can bypass stages of the intervention process if necessary. For example, premises can be at 'monitored' status and if circumstances dictate then the Police will request the review of a premises licence without engaging in the action plan stage if appropriate and justified.

A review of the premises licence is always a last resort for the Police, and the focus will always be on intervention work in conjunction with the licensee, our partners and local policing.

One Premises Licence Review was submitted to the Highland Licensing Board during this reporting period. The premises received a written warning after a hearing.

Board Decisions

As of 31st March 2026, Highland Council region has 1,271 premises licences. Of these licences, 345 are 'on sales', 325 are 'off sales' and 601 are both 'on and off sales'. In addition, 3,289 people currently hold a personal licence which has been granted by the Highland Council Licensing Board (Highland Council, June 2026).

The Police licensing department is responsible for vetting and processing all liquor licensing applications which are submitted to Highland Council. As statutory consultees, the Police are required to adhere to strict statutory timescales in which to process these applications. On occasions, applications require a fast turnaround for a variety of reasons. The Police will always assist where possible and the willingness to assist our partners at Highland Council, which is equally reciprocated, has resulted in very strong and positive working relationships, which benefits both organisations.

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Any applications which are contradictory to the licensing objectives, or which highlight relevant convictions in relation to any applicants or connected persons, will require a report to the Licensing Board by way of a representation or an objection from the Chief Constable.

During this reporting period Police submitted seven letters to the Board recommending refusal to a Personal Licence which had been applied for. Two withdrew their applications, four were refused by the Board and one licence was granted.

Police submitted one representation to a premises licence variation application, and this was granted at the Board during this period.

Between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, the following applications were received from the Highland Licensing Board and processed accordingly by the Police, with the subsequent Licensing Board decisions detailed below:

HIGHLAND LICENSING BOARD: PERIOD 1 APRIL 2025 TO 31 MARCH 2026

Application Type	Submitted	Granted	Refused
Premises licence	9	7 x Premises 14 x Confirmations	0
Provisional premises licence	18	16	0
Major variations	41	38	0
Minor Variations	336	331	0
Transfers	69	67	0
Occasional Licence (including extended hours)	2664	2681	0
Personal Licence	418	469	4 x refused 1 x revoked

Figures received by Highland Council, June 2026.

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PREVENTING THE SALE OR SUPPLY OF ALCOHOL TO CHILDREN OR YOUNG PEOPLE

Where a person under 18 years of age is found to be either under the influence of alcohol, drinking alcohol in a public place or in possession of alcohol, the Police Officer involved will take all appropriate steps to ascertain the source of the alcohol.

Where information that cannot be fully evidenced is received regarding the sale of alcohol to children and young persons, in accordance with the national guidance contained within the 'Alcohol Toolkit', letters will be sent to licensed premises in the area reminding them of their responsibilities and requesting extra vigilance. If such concerns were to continue in respect of specific premises, then other operational strategies would be considered.

There was one reported case of an adult buying alcohol for a child within Highland during the reporting period. This investigation remains ongoing and is part of a wider child protection enquiry.

There was one reported case of a child buying alcohol from an off sales premises. Officers investigated and the employee who sold the alcohol was charged with the relevant offence. The premises licence holder was also charged with the relevant offence. The procurator fiscal issued both with a fiscal's warning. Police thereafter submitted a Premises Licence Review for the Premises and a Personal Licence review hearing request for the designated premises manager who was also the premises licence holder. At the Board the personal licence holder received a written warning, and no action was taken on the premises.

In support to the Protection of Children from Harm licensing objective, applications for premises licences and variations to premises licences come under close scrutiny often resulting in the submission of letters of objection, or more commonly, of representation, in which the imposition of conditions in respect of on sales, with regard to the times and terms in which children can be on such premises, will be recommended by the Chief Constable.

Police Scotland can make a positive impact on the future outcomes for children and families, by addressing the sale and supply of alcohol to young persons and working with our partners, taking the appropriate action to address both the potential and actual misuse of alcohol within the early years. Officers continue to routinely proactively visit premises licensed for 'off-sales' to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities under the 2005 Act, and in particular in the run up to and during school holidays or local events. Likewise, officers will continue to routinely proactively visit premises licensed for 'on sales' to ensure that management have taken all appropriate measures to prevent the sale or supply of alcohol to young people underage.

TACKLING SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME

Many of the processes and procedures involved in licensing applications are carried out to guard against Serious Organised Crime Groups (SOCG) infiltrating the licensed trade in any way. This scrutiny is enhanced with the nation-wide Innkeeper system.

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This database contains details of all liquor and civic licences for every Division in Scotland and enhances our information sharing in respect of premises and people in the licensed trade as they move about the country and work in multiple venues.

If such an SOCG were able to gain a foothold in licensed premises this would afford such groups with a seemingly legitimate income stream, which could be no more than a veneer for other criminal activities such as money laundering, tax evasion, drug and people trafficking and other dishonest activities.

Frequent and directed Police attendance and contact with licensed premises also increases the opportunity for irregularities to be identified or reported. The consistent high-profile approach and interaction with licensed premises in direct correlation with the aforementioned scrutiny in the application process should reinforce the work carried out.

PROPOSED ACTIVITY FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

During the next year Police Scotland will continue to work in all areas of licensing in line with the Divisional and National Policing Priorities to ensure that we continue in our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of the people and communities in the Highlands.

The Divisional Licensing Team have strong working relationships with our partners, and we will continue to build on these in the forthcoming year.

The Divisional Licensing Team will continue to work in conjunction with community and response officers, towards achieving local and national priorities.

There are plenty of events in the Highland area, including Belladrum and the Divisional Licensing Team will continue to work in partnership with event organisers and the Highland Council to scrutinise and support alcohol management plans to ensure the safe operation of these events.

We will continue to share information where appropriate and consult other agencies to assist in solving problems or concerns that arise involving licence holders. Police Scotland will continue to monitor all incidents in and around licensed premises and where shortcomings are identified, will provide support and/or plans in respect of tackling these issues. Divisional Licensing Teams will use interaction, intervention and support prior to requesting a review of a premises licence unless the matter, due to its severity, requires to come before the Licensing Board immediately.

We will continue to tackle agent purchasing of alcohol on behalf of children and young persons through intelligence led policing and community education. We will support the Licensed Trade in their efforts to prevent and deter violence in premises.

This will continue to be carried out by tasking visits to premises where violence has been identified as an issue and by ensuring that staff are well prepared for dealing with any such incidents. We will continue to seek exclusion orders for persons convicted of committing acts of violence on licensed premises

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Bystander training will be offered to Licenced Premises where a need is identified through inspections and incident reports to the Divisional Licencing Team from our officers on the front line and other partners to promote intervention and preventing in and around licenced premises, by delivering this to licence holders and other relevant staff. We want people to report if they see something suspicious, to step in if they think someone may be at risk or see someone behaving suspiciously.

In closing, we recognise the continued commitment of partners who support the effective regulation of licensed premises across Scotland. Strong partnership working between Police Scotland, Licensing Boards and local stakeholders remain essential in promoting the licensing objectives and maintaining a safe and well-regulated night-time economy.

Police Scotland will continue to prioritise prevention, early engagement with licence holders where appropriate, supported by partnership working.

The forthcoming FIFA World Cup is expected to increase footfall within the nighttime economy. We will continue to work with Licensing Boards and partners to ensure appropriate measures are in place to maintain public safety and minimise alcohol related harm.

Looking ahead to 2026/27 we remain committed to building on the progress made, maintaining a clear focus on safety and wellbeing across Scotland.