

Agenda Item	5
Report No	JMC/11/26

Committee: Joint Monitoring Committee

Date: 24 September 2026

Report Title: Integrated Children's Services Update

Report By: Chair Children's Services Partnership Board

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress in delivering the priorities and outcomes set out within the Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026-2029 [here](#). It highlights key developments across partnership delivery groups, including work to reduce child poverty, improve support for children and families affected by substance use, and advance Highland's commitment to The Promise. It also outlines progress in strengthening partnership governance and performance arrangements.
- 1.2 The report provides an update on the review and development of the Children's Services Partnership Performance Management Framework, which will support improved oversight of delivery, outcomes measurement, and evidence-based decision-making across the Partnership.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note progress made in delivering the priorities contained within the Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026-2029.
 - ii. Note developments across the Children's Services Partnership Delivery Groups.
 - iii. Endorse the planned review and redevelopment of the Partnership's Performance Management Framework.
 - iv. Comment on emerging priorities, opportunities and risks associated with delivery of the Partnership Plan.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - Delivery of the Children's Services Partnership Plan will continue to be supported primarily through existing partner resources and collaborative service delivery arrangements. Additional external funding has been secured to support a number of improvement activities, including work to reduce child poverty and strengthen lived experience engagement. The review of the Performance

Management Framework may identify future resource requirements to support enhanced performance reporting and evaluation.

- 3.2 **Legal** - The Children's Services Partnership Plan supports the statutory duties placed on local authorities and relevant partners under Part 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Delivery of the Plan also contributes to implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and broader national policy commitments relating to children's rights, wellbeing and outcomes.
- 3.3 **Risk** - Failure to deliver the priorities and outcomes contained within the Children's Services Partnership Plan could negatively impact outcomes for children, young people and families and reduce the Partnership's ability to meet statutory responsibilities. Risks are mitigated through established governance arrangements, performance monitoring, delivery group oversight, and alignment with Community Planning Partnership priorities and improvement activity.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - None

3.5 **Gaelic** - None

4 Impacts

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

5 Vision 29 – Family Fun Day – Launch of Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026-2029

- 5.1 Vision 29 took place on 11th August 26 at The Northern Meeting Park. The event was a huge success, attracting an estimated 2,000 children, young people, parents and carers.
- 5.2 Supported by 30 organisations and services from across Highland, the event also marked the launch of the Children's Services Plan 2026-2029, highlighting the shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and families.
- 5.3 With glorious weather, free activities, refreshments and opportunities to connect with local services, families enjoyed a fun filled day of play and community spirit. Children were actively participating in activities across every area of the park. Families also received goodie bags packed with play ideas, resources, activity suggestions and contact details for participating organisations, helping them access support and opportunities after the event.

- 5.4 The success of the day reflects the strength of partnership working and the dedication of the many staff and organisations who contributed to making Vision 29 such a successful day.
- 5.5 The event provided an important opportunity to engage directly with children, young people and families, and to raise awareness of the support available through partner organisations. Early feedback from participants and partners was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the value of accessible community-based events that promote participation, inclusion and positive relationships between families and services. The event also provided a high-profile platform for the launch of the Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026-2029 and reinforced the Partnership's shared commitment to improving outcomes across Highland.

6 Performance Management Framework

- 6.1 The Children's Services Partnership Board has identified and agreed the need to review its Performance Management Framework. This aligns with the development of the new Children's Services Plan 2026-2029 and will be undertaken during its first year of implementation.
- 6.2 The review will support the Children's Services Planning Partnership to strengthen the consistent use of data across delivery groups, improve strategic oversight, and ensure that information is used effectively to monitor progress, identify areas requiring improvement, and demonstrate the impact of partnership activity on outcomes for children, young people and families.
- 6.3 The review will be informed by the priorities identified for each delivery group and will consider both existing and emerging data sources. It will also take account of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Health Inequalities Dashboard and the Population Health Framework.
- 6.4 The revised Performance Management Framework will incorporate both quantitative and qualitative information to provide a more comprehensive assessment of performance. This will include the perspectives and lived experiences of children, young people and families to ensure that their voices contribute meaningfully to performance assessment, service improvement and strategic decision-making.
- 6.5 The review will be supported by input and advice from data specialist colleagues across the partnership including NHS Highland and The Highland Council.
- 6.6 A revised framework and associated reporting arrangements will be developed during 2026/27 and presented to the Children's Services Partnership Board for approval. This will establish a clearer evidence base for evaluating progress against the outcomes and priorities set out within the Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026-2029.

7 Alcohol and Drugs

- 7.1 The Voice and Choice Independent Advocacy Service. Partners in Advocacy has received funding from the CORRA foundation and the Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership (HADP) to provide an independent advocacy service for children/ young people up to 16 years of age in Highland, who have lived/ living experience of

substance use (drugs and/ or alcohol). The experience can be either their own, or those who are close to them.

- 7.2 Successful recruitment has been completed for both a Service Co-ordinator and Advocacy Worker. Development of the service is being informed and shaped by the views and experiences of children and young people to ensure that it is accessible, responsive, and aligned to their needs. The service is expected to strengthen children's rights, improve access to independent advocacy, and ensure that the voices of affected children and young people are better represented in decisions that impact on them.
- 7.3 Action for Children Family First Service supported 26 families and 48 children in 25/26. Support is delivered using the PUP framework, with regular reviews with referring agencies at 6 and 12 weeks. The programme works in partnership with statutory and third sector organisations to support families, including through PUP café events and family consultations. A multi-agency learning and reflection workshop will be held later in the year to review outcomes from the programme, identify emerging learning and share examples of effective practice. The findings will inform future service development and partnership approaches to supporting families affected by substance use.
- 7.4 There is an event on 14th September at Wasps Inverness Creative Academy 13:00-16:00 to celebrate 10th anniversary of the Highland Substance Awareness Toolkit (H-SAT). The harms associated with alcohol, tobacco and other drugs remain significant across Scotland. This is why prevention and early intervention work is so important. There is still much to do to support individuals, families and communities affected by substance use, it is equally important to recognise and celebrate the progress we have made and the partnerships that have helped make that possible.
- 7.5 Over the past ten years, the Highland Substance Awareness Toolkit has become a valuable resource for people across Highland, providing information, support and practical tools for parents and carers, professionals, and young people.
<https://www.highlandsubstanceawareness.scot.nhs.uk/>
- 7.6 Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate the Partnership's ongoing commitment to prevention, early intervention and recovery-informed approaches. They contribute to reducing the impact of substance use on children, young people and families and strengthen collaborative efforts to improve wellbeing and resilience across communities.

8 Poverty Reduction Delivery Group

- 8.1 The Poverty Reduction Group worked collaboratively on two applications to the Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund. These applications were successful: Development of new rural childcare models, and A lived experience engagement project. Both will run over two years.

8.2 Lived Experience Panel

The Lived Experience Project, which is being funded through the Child Poverty Accelerator Fund with £100,000 over two years to explore how lived experience can better influence decision-making across Highland. Rocket Science consultants have been commissioned to undertake the feasibility work and progress to date includes a desktop review of existing approaches, a mapping exercise of current lived experience activity across Highland, and stakeholder engagement with around 25

individuals from various sectors and geographical areas. Feedback from these activities is being used to develop options and recommendations for how a lived experience model could operate in Highland in the future.

8.3 The final report is expected to be presented to the Community Planning Partnership Board on 11 September 2026, alongside consideration of the Poverty and Equality Commission findings. Members discussed the importance of ensuring that any future model is sustainable, appropriately resourced and embedded within partnership structures, noting that any long-term approach will require commitment and investment from partners if it is to have a meaningful impact. Funding is available to support implementation until March 2028 should partners agree to take the work forward.

8.4 If implemented successfully, this approach has the potential to strengthen partnership understanding of poverty and inequality, improve the responsiveness of services, and support more effective targeting of resources to those most in need.

8.5 **New Models of Childcare**

The New Models of Childcare project, which is exploring more flexible childcare arrangements by integrating childcare and adult care services. The project aims to improve access to childcare, support parents to enter or remain in employment, and develop more sustainable service models, particularly in rural communities. A pilot "Work Club" in Strontian has shown positive early results, enabling parents to work while their children take part in supervised play and learning activities nearby. Feedback from both parents and children has been positive, with benefits including increased work opportunities, improved wellbeing, and valuable social experiences for families. The project directly supports efforts to reduce child poverty by addressing childcare barriers that can prevent parents from entering, remaining in or progressing within employment. It also seeks to strengthen community resilience through the development of sustainable, locally informed service models. Learning from pilot areas will be used to inform consideration of wider implementation opportunities across Highland. The project also provides a valuable opportunity to influence national thinking regarding innovative approaches to childcare delivery within rural and remote communities.

8.6 Since April, dedicated project officers have been appointed through Lochbroom and Ullapool Community Trust and have been engaging with childcare providers, adult social care services, third sector organisations and community partners to help shape the model. The project has attracted significant interest from the Scottish Government and national partners, with work continuing to address regulatory barriers and explore innovative approaches to childcare delivery.

9 **The Promise – Fiona Duncan, Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise, Visit to Highland**

Fiona Duncan, Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise, visited Highland on 26 August 2026. The visit provided an opportunity to showcase progress made across Highland in implementing The Promise, share examples of innovative practice, and reflect on ongoing areas for development. Discussions with partners focused on strengthening collaborative approaches, embedding The Promise

across services, and ensuring that the voices of care experienced children and young people continue to inform service design, planning and improvement activity.

The visit also provided an opportunity to reflect on Highland's progress against its Promise commitments and to identify priorities for the next phase of implementation. Learning and feedback from the visit will be used to inform future improvement activity and support continued partnership efforts to ensure that care experienced children and young people grow up loved, safe and respected.

10 Conclusion

- 10.1 The first phase of delivery of the Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026-2029 has demonstrated positive progress across a number of priority areas. Strong partnership working, successful external funding bids, continued commitment to The Promise, and a focus on prevention and early intervention provide a solid foundation for future delivery.
- 10.2 The planned review of the Performance Management Framework will further strengthen the Partnership's ability to measure impact, monitor outcomes and evidence the difference that collective action is making for children, young people and families across Highland. Continued collaboration between partners will be essential to maintaining momentum and delivering the ambitions set out within the Children's Services Partnership Plan.

Designation: Chair, Integrated Children's Service Board

Date: August 26

Author: Ian Kyle, Integrated Children's Services

Background Papers: None

Appendices: N/A