Agenda Item	5
Report No	HC/32/26

The Highland Council

Committee: **Highland Council**

Date: **29 October 2026**

Report Title: **Highland Community Planning Partnership 2025 – 2026 Annual Report**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive – Place**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) is the strategic plan for the Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP). The 2024–2027 HOIP was agreed in June 2024. The updated HOIP includes three new strategic priorities: People, Place, and Prosperity, and a series of supporting principles and outcomes aimed at tackling inequalities and improving the lives and experiences of everyone across the Highland area. The actions to deliver against the revised HOIP are set out within its Delivery Plan 2024-2027.

1.2 This report introduces the annual HOIP report for 2025-26; setting out progress against the HOIP Delivery Plan. The report demonstrates measurable progress across all three HOIP strategic priorities of People, Place and Prosperity. Examples include:

People

- 10,862 individuals, 1,195 families and 5,989 children supported through the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme.
- 9,012 children and young people benefiting from mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- 370 parents supported into employment.
- 2,260 young people engaged through Planet Youth.

Place

- 11 Area Place Plans adopted.
- Community Partnerships strengthened place-based delivery and local influence.
- Fuel Poverty Action Group established June 2026.
- Community resilience strengthened through response activity.

Prosperity

- 499 affordable homes delivered by Highland Council.
- £209.7 million Affordable Housing Programme confirmed.
- Housing Challenge Action Plan developed.
- Community Wealth Building strengthened through the Highland Wealth Fund, Social Value Charter and Employer Charter.
- Workforce North established to support future workforce capacity.

1.3 The 2025-2026 Annual Report has been developed taking account of feedback received from Members during consideration of the 2024-2025 Annual Report and subsequent update reports. In particular, the report places greater emphasis on evidence of impact, provides enhanced reporting on housing, health inequalities, and population sustainability, and demonstrates more clearly the contribution Community Planning partners are making towards addressing poverty, depopulation, workforce challenges and community resilience across Highland.

1.4 The report demonstrates the growing maturity and influence of partnership working across Highland, with stronger links between local priorities, strategic investment, local Partnerships and delivery activity. It highlights not only what partners have done during the year, but how collective action is increasingly shaping outcomes for communities across Highland. The progress outlined has been delivered through collaboration between public services, third sector organisations, businesses, communities and partner agencies working collectively around shared priorities and outcomes. The scale and complexity of many of the challenges facing Highland communities means that measurable change may take several years to become evident; however, the report demonstrates increasing alignment of partner activity around shared priorities and outcomes.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- **Note** the 2025-2026 Annual Report of the 2024-2027 HOIP which can be found at Appendix 1

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource -** There are no new resource implications arising from the report. The revised HOIP is aligned to the strategic priorities of partner agencies, including the Council's Delivery Plan and, therefore, enables more effective alignment of partnership resources in order to deliver against the priorities and actions identified.

3.2 **Legal** - Community Planning Partnerships have a duty under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to develop a Local Outcome Improvement Plan that must focus on tackling inequalities.

3.3 **Risk** - The Annual Report highlights a number of strategic challenges affecting Highland, including poverty and inequality, housing shortages, workforce pressures, demographic change, and access to services in rural and remote communities. Continued partnership working, resource alignment and collective action will be required to address these challenges and deliver the outcomes set out within the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.5 **Gaelic** – The revised HOIP includes an additional outcome to support communities to maximise opportunities from Gaelic culture and heritage.

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 an update report and therefore no impact assessment screening is required.

5. Background

5.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires Community Planning Partnerships to produce a Local Outcome Improvement Plan that focuses on tackling inequalities. A revised Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) agreed in June 2024, has a shared vision to maximise opportunities and tackle inequalities in order to build a thriving Highland for all. It is built around three strategic priorities:

- People – enabling individuals to live independently, safely, and well within their communities.
- Place – developing sustainable and resilient local communities through integrated, place-based approaches.
- Prosperity – creating inclusive economic opportunities that allow all people and places to thrive.

5.2 The 2024–2027 HOIP demonstrates the partnership's commitment to tackling inequalities through delivering services that are proportionate to need, while focusing on prevention to address the root causes of inequality and help avoid them arising in the first place. The HOIP is underpinned by a Delivery Plan, which outlines seven cross-cutting themes and targeted actions across areas including Housing, Employability, Community Wealth Building, and Whole Family and Community-Based Approaches.

5.3 Highland faces unique demographic and geographic challenges, including population decline in working-age groups, rising demand for care, and barriers to population sustainability in rural areas. The HOIP responds to these challenges by aligning resources, fostering innovation, and empowering communities to shape local solutions. Many of these challenges, particularly housing, poverty, workforce availability, health inequalities and population sustainability, remain central themes throughout this Annual Report.

5.4 As the strategic framework for community planning in Highland, the 2024–2027 HOIP also supports and connects a range of partner strategies and plans, ensuring coherence and shared ambition across sectors. This Annual Report reflects the second year of delivery under the refreshed HOIP and demonstrates continued progress toward a fairer, healthier, and more prosperous Highland.

5.5 The report also highlights the growing role of the Community Planning Partnership as a strategic co-ordinator, bringing together organisations, communities and stakeholders around complex issues such as poverty, health inequalities, housing, fuel poverty, workforce challenges and community resilience. This collaborative approach is helping create shared solutions to issues that extend beyond the remit of any single organisation.

5.6 Given the close alignment between the HOIP and the Council's Delivery Plan, progress against a number of activities and outcomes continues to be reported through Strategic Committees throughout the year. The 2025-2026 Annual Report demonstrates increasing maturity in Community Planning across Highland, with greater emphasis on outcomes, evidence, partnership impact and measurable progress against the outcomes set out in the HOIP.

6. 2025 – 2026 Annual Report Overview

6.1 The 2025-2026 Annual Report demonstrates the contribution Community Planning continues to make towards addressing some of Highland's most significant challenges and inequalities. The report highlights progress against the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity and evidences how partners have worked collectively to improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities across Highland.

6.2 The report places a greater emphasis on outcomes, evidence and performance than previous reports, with an overview of performance found on page 13-15 of the report. The adoption of the Highland Health Inequalities Framework as the HOIP performance framework has significantly strengthened the Partnership's evidence base and ability to understand long-term outcomes and inequalities.

6.3 Together, the Health Inequalities Framework, Population Indicators and increased use of outcome-focused evidence provide a stronger basis for assessing partnership performance, monitoring progress and informing future development of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan. This strengthened approach directly responds to feedback received from Members regarding the need for clearer evidence of outcomes, stronger performance reporting and improved visibility of partnership impact.

6.4 The report also demonstrates progress in strengthening community sustainability and place-based delivery. Community Partnerships, Area Place Plans and local delivery structures are increasingly influencing investment decisions and coordinating action around local priorities. The development of the Highland Housing Challenge, Highland Investment Plan, Community Wealth Building initiatives and the Highland Wealth Fund reflects a growing alignment between community priorities, public investment and economic opportunity.

6.5 At the same time, the report highlights a number of continuing challenges. Poverty, housing availability, health inequalities, fuel poverty, workforce shortages, population change, depopulation and access to services continue to affect communities across Highland. The areas for actions contained within the Delivery Plan therefore continue to be the right ones, prioritising collective action to address these continuing challenges. By presenting both areas of progress and areas requiring further action, the report provides a clearer assessment of partnership performance and the contribution Community Planning is making towards achieving the outcomes set out within the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

6.6 A consistent theme throughout the report is the increasing emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Across health, wellbeing, poverty reduction, children's services, employability and community resilience activity, partners are increasingly focusing on addressing the root causes of inequality and preventing issues from escalating into crisis.

6.7 While many of the challenges highlighted within the report remain significant, it is important to recognise that tackling inequalities, improving population outcomes and strengthening community sustainability are long-term ambitions that require sustained collective action over many years. The report demonstrates growing maturity in the Partnership across Highland, with stronger partnership working, improved use of evidence and data, increased engagement with communities and a clearer alignment between local priorities, strategic investment and service delivery. Community Planning is not a standalone organisation but a network of partners working together to address complex challenges that no single organisation can resolve alone. Increasingly, the report demonstrates how this partnership approach is being translated into coordinated action, strengthened local engagement and improved outcomes for communities across Highland.

7. Progress Against 2024-2027 HOIP Outcomes

7.1 *Improved Access to Services and Support*
The Annual Report updates on progress towards improved access to support through whole-family approaches, Community Learning and Development, Community Outreach Hubs, Work. Life. Highland, Family Links, integrated health and social care services and community mental health initiatives. During 2025-26, more than 10,862 individuals, 1,195 families and 5,989 children benefited from Whole Family Wellbeing activity, while 9,012 children and young people accessed mental health and wellbeing support. These initiatives demonstrate the partnership's continued focus on prevention, early intervention and integrated delivery. A continuing priority is access to services in rural communities.

7.2 *Tackling Depopulation and Barriers to Community Sustainability*
The report demonstrates an increasing partnership response to depopulation through the Highland Housing Challenge, Workforce North, flexible childcare models, the Single Care Model, Invest Highland, Community Wealth Building initiatives and local Transport Forums. Progress has been made in addressing barriers to population retention; however, housing shortages, workforce challenges and access to services continue to affect community sustainability.

7.3 *Embedding Community Wealth Building and Maximising Natural Capital*
Progress has been made through implementation of the Highland Social Value Charter and Highland Wealth Fund, Highland Employer Charter, and wider Community Wealth Building activity. The report recognises the growing recognition of natural capital, climate resilience and nature-based approaches through Green Health, NatureScot activity and Natural Capital Tool pilots. These initiatives are helping create the conditions for more inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

7.4 *Supporting Young People with Education, Employment and Training Opportunities*
The report contains evidence of partnership activity supporting children and young people through Planet Youth, Community Learning and Development, Skills Development Scotland programmes, apprenticeships, employability support and youth

participation activity. During the year, 2,260 young people participated in Planet Youth activity and 1,493 Modern Apprenticeship starts were recorded, supporting progression into education, employment and training.

7.5 *Strengthening Local Decision-Making and Resilience*
The Annual Report highlights stronger Community Partnerships, Area Place Plans, local transport forums, community resilience initiatives and increasing community influence over decision-making. All 11 Area Place Plans have now been adopted and Community Partnerships are increasingly influencing investment decisions, service delivery and local priorities. The establishment of the Fuel Poverty Action Group and continued resilience activity demonstrate the Partnership's growing ability to respond collectively to emerging challenges.

6. Next Steps

6.1 The current Highland Outcome Improvement Plan runs until 2027, and work has already commenced on the development of the new HOIP for 2027-2037. The new HOIP will be informed by evidence gathered from local partnerships and partner organisations, data on partnership performance, such as the Health Inequalities Framework and through community engagement. A series of engagement events will be held across Highland, first in November 2026 to align with engagement on Models of Integration as agreed at Council in September, and further sessions held into 2027.

6.2 The work of the Partnership into 2027 and beyond will also be informed by the findings from the Poverty and Equality Commission. As reported to Council in September, the calls to action from the Commission are being considered within partnership groups across Highland, both local and strategic. It will be important to ensure that the Commission's findings are embedded within the new Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 25 September 2026

Author: Alison Clark, Chief Officer Housing and Communities
Gail Prince, Partnership Development Manager

Appendices:
Appendix 1 – Highland Community Planning Partnership 2025 – 2026 Annual Report

APPENDIX 1

HIGHLAND COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

ANNUAL REPORT 2025 - 2026

DRAFT

Highland Community Planning Partnership

Com-pàirteachas Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhealtachd

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2025-2026, the Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP) continued to work collectively towards its shared vision of maximising opportunities and tackling inequality to build a thriving Highland for all. This second year of the 2024-2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) demonstrates both encouraging progress and continuing challenges across the Partnership's three priorities of People, Place and Prosperity. The report reflects a growing maturity in partnership working, with stronger alignment between local delivery, strategic planning, investment and community priorities.

The adoption of the Highland Health Inequalities Indicator Framework has strengthened the Partnership's understanding of the factors driving inequality and reinforced the importance of prevention, early intervention and tackling the social determinants of health. Poverty, housing, employment and access to services continue to shape outcomes across Highland.

Positive Progress

A number of areas demonstrate clear evidence of progress.

The Partnership has strengthened its focus on tackling poverty through enhanced employability support, financial inclusion initiatives, whole-family approaches and continued investment in mental health and wellbeing. More parents have been supported into employment, children and young people have accessed preventative wellbeing support, and community-based projects have continued to reduce isolation and improve resilience. Work. Life. Highland, Family Links, the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme and community mental health initiatives all demonstrate the value of early intervention and partnership-led approaches.

Significant progress has also been made in creating the foundations for future prosperity. Community Wealth Building has become increasingly embedded within partnership activity through the Highland Employer Charter, Social Value Charter and development of the Highland Wealth Fund. These initiatives seek to ensure that the benefits arising from unprecedented levels of investment in renewable energy, infrastructure and housing are retained within Highland communities and used to tackle inequalities.

Community Partnerships, Area Place Plans and locality networks continue to strengthen local engagement and ensure that community priorities increasingly influence investment and service delivery.

Housing remains one of the most significant challenges facing Highland, but the response has accelerated considerably. The Highland Housing Challenge, Affordable Housing Programme, Empty Homes Challenge Fund and innovative approaches to housing finance represent important steps towards increasing housing supply and addressing a key barrier to both economic growth and community sustainability.

Tackling Key Inequalities

Across the report there is clear evidence that partnership activity is increasingly focused on tackling the underlying causes of inequality.

Poverty remains a major driver of poorer outcomes throughout Highland. The Poverty and Equality Commission report, Essential Elements, sets out the direction of future work. The work of the Partnership as a whole, including the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme and employability partnerships demonstrates a shared commitment to increasing household incomes, improving access to support and reducing the impact of poverty on children and families. This includes practical action around childcare, employability, mental wellbeing, financial inclusion and access to advice and support services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONT.

Responding to depopulation continues to be central to partnership priorities. Many of the actions being delivered through the HOIP are designed to address the factors contributing to population loss and community fragility, including housing shortages, workforce challenges, childcare availability, transport connectivity and access to services. Programmes such as Workforce North, the Single Care Model, Community Wealth Building and the Highland Housing Challenge are helping create conditions that support population retention and attract people to live and work in Highland communities.

Improving wellbeing remains a consistent thread throughout the work of the CPP. Investment in mental health, suicide prevention, children and young people's wellbeing, green health initiatives and community resilience demonstrates a growing recognition that wellbeing is influenced by community, environment, relationships and opportunity, as well as by health services. The commitment to prevention and early intervention reflects a shift towards supporting long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.

Areas Of Concern

While progress has been made, the evidence also highlights a number of persistent inequalities.

Child poverty remains a significant challenge, with thousands of children living in low-income households. Health inequalities continue to be evident, with differences in outcomes between communities and between those experiencing deprivation and those who are not.

Accessing services remains a structural challenge in many rural and remote communities. Geography continues to shape opportunities and outcomes and impacts access to healthcare, employment, education, childcare and transport for example, programmes such as the Council's Highland Investment Plan and Future Operating Model aim to address this through integrated service approaches at a local level. These challenges require long-term collaboration and cannot be addressed by individual organisations working alone.

Fuel poverty is one of the most significant inequalities facing Highland communities. Rising energy costs, reliance on off-grid heating systems and the higher costs associated with rural living are placing growing pressure on households. The establishment of the Fuel Poverty Action Group reflects increasing concern about the impact of fuel poverty on health, wellbeing and community sustainability.

Population change, including falling populations in some areas, workforce shortages and demand for public services remain long-term risks. Although Highland has significant opportunities associated with future investment and economic growth, ensuring that local people and communities benefit fully from these opportunities will require sustained effort.

Looking Ahead

The Highlands are seeing an unprecedented number of economic opportunities deriving from an investment pipeline of over £100 billion across existing and emerging industry sectors. Sustainable, Place based development with private sector investment supported by community ambition and public sector delivery on key infrastructure and services to address de population and to support re population through workforce development, housing and thriving businesses in turn supporting well paid local career opportunities for people of all ages.

The progress highlighted throughout this report demonstrates the value of Community Planning in tackling inequalities through collective action. While significant challenges remain, partners are increasingly aligned around shared evidence and priorities. As work begins on the next Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, the CPP is well placed to build on this progress and continue working towards a healthier, fairer, more resilient and prosperous Highland.

Highland Community Planning Partnership | Com-pàirteachas Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhealtachd

Annual Report 2025 – 2026
Plan on a Page

• Maximising Opportunities • Tackling Inequality • Building a Thriving Highland

WHAT WE ACHIEVED TOGETHER

PEOPLE

- **10,862** individuals, **1,195** families & **5,989** children supported through the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme.
- **9,012** children & young people benefited from community mental health & wellbeing projects.
- **370** parents supported into employment helping improve household income & financial security.

PLACE

- **499** affordable homes delivered.
- **£209.7m** Affordable Housing Programme confirmed.
- All Community Partnerships now supported by Local Partnership Network Groups & Area Place Plans.
- Community resilience demonstrated during severe winter weather:
  - **2,650** vulnerable residents supported
  - **8,600** hours of assistance delivered

PROSPERITY

- **80.5%** employment rate remaining above the Scottish average.
- **1,493** Modern Apprenticeship starts & **94.8%** participation of 16–19-year-olds in education, employment or training supporting workforce growth.
- Community Wealth Building strengthened through the Highland Wealth Fund, Social Value Charter & Employer Charter.

THE INEQUALITIES WE MUST CONTINUE TO TACKLE

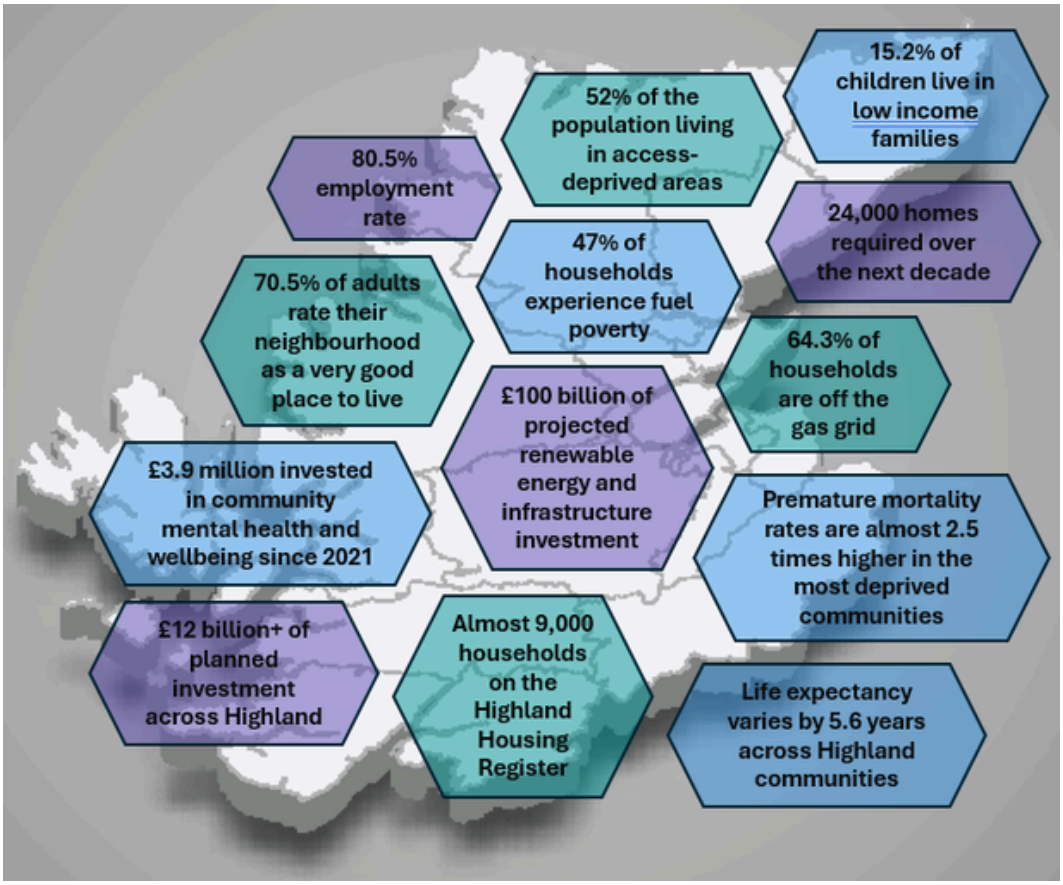
- **5,602** children living in low-income households across Highland.
- **8,826** households on the Housing Register.
- Up to **24,000** homes needed over the next decade.
- Fuel poverty concerns, particularly in rural & off-grid communities where energy costs are significantly higher.
- Significant health inequalities differences remain between communities experiencing deprivation & those that do not.
- **52%** of Highland's population live in the most access-deprived areas, affecting access to services, employment, healthcare & transport.

LOOKING AHEAD: BUILDING A THRIVING HIGHLAND

£100 billion+ potential investment anticipated over the next 10-15 years.

- Reduce poverty & tackle inequalities
- Continue to address depopulation
- Increase housing supply
- Improve health & wellbeing
- Strengthen community resilience
- Increase evidence-led place-based delivery
- Ensure growth & investment deliver lasting benefits for communities

SNAPSHOT OF OUR COMMUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



The evidence presented in this report highlights a Highland of strengths and challenges. While employment remains high, communities report strong levels of satisfaction with where they live and unprecedented levels of investment are planned across the region, many individuals and families continue to experience the impacts of poverty, poor access to services, housing shortages and health inequalities. Fuel poverty, child poverty and barriers created by Highland's geography continue to affect outcomes for many communities.

At the same time, Highland is entering a period of transformational opportunity. Major investment in housing, infrastructure, renewable energy, workforce development and community wealth building has the potential to support population sustainability, strengthen local economies and improve wellbeing. The challenge for partners is ensuring that these opportunities benefit all communities and contribute to reducing the inequalities that persist across Highland.

The CPP must work collectively to address these challenges and opportunities, with a focus on tackling inequalities including poverty and issues surrounding challenges such as depopulation to support sustainable communities, improving wellbeing and ensuring that future growth delivers lasting benefits for people and places across Highland.

INTRODUCTION

The Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP) is pleased to present its Annual Report for 2025-2026, outlining progress against the 2024-2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP). This report reflects collective progress in delivering on the shared vision **to maximise opportunities and tackle inequality to build a thriving Highlands for all**.

As the overarching strategic framework for Community Planning in Highland, the HOIP sets out partners' commitment to improving outcomes for individuals, families and communities across the region. It is built around three strategic priorities, **People**, **Place** and **Prosperity**, which guide collective efforts to address the challenges facing Highland and unlock opportunities for our communities and economy.

The CPP provides strategic leadership for Community Planning across Highland, bringing together public sector organisations, the third sector, businesses and other partners to identify shared priorities, coordinate action and improve outcomes. Community Planning recognises that many of the challenges facing Highland, including poverty, health inequalities, housing pressures, depopulation and community sustainability, cannot be addressed by any single organisation acting alone. Through the CPP partners provide leadership, align resources, share intelligence and take collective responsibility for tackling inequalities and improving outcomes across Highland.

This second year of delivery under the 2024-2027 HOIP has taken place against a backdrop of continued cost of living pressures, increasing poverty associated with volatile energy prices and wider geopolitical instability, and ongoing financial pressures across public and third sector services. These challenges have reinforced the importance of strong collaborative partnership working and the need for innovative, integrated and preventative approaches to service delivery.

This report highlights progress made across a range of workstreams and partnerships at both regional and local levels. While it is not possible to capture every example of partnership activity taking place across Highland, it provides a strategic overview of collective achievements, showcasing examples of collaboration and highlighting measures of success that help demonstrate impact and inform future planning.

The CPP and its partners remain committed to the shared values of accountability, inclusivity, fairness, respect, integrity and openness, and to the behaviours that underpin effective partnership working. By listening to communities, aligning resources and working collaboratively, the CPP aims to ensure that all people and places across Highland can thrive.

This report is both a reflection of joint achievements and a reaffirmation of our commitment to continuous improvement. It provides a foundation for the next phase of delivery ahead of the publication of the new ten-year Highland Outcome Improvement Plan in 2027 and invites ongoing engagement from all partners and communities as we continue working together to build a fairer, more resilient and prosperous Highland for current and future generations.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND FUTURE GROWTH

Community Planning partners continue to strengthen collaboration around some of the most significant long-term opportunities and challenges facing Highland. Presentations and discussions between partners highlighted the scale of collective influence across the public, community and economic development sectors, with partner organisations collectively contributing to services, infrastructure and investment worth an estimated £2.5 billion annually across Highland. This demonstrates the importance of Community Planning as a mechanism for aligning resources, priorities and investment around shared outcomes.

A key theme throughout the year has been responding to the interrelated challenges of population change, housing demand, workforce shortages, infrastructure requirements and economic growth. Partners have increasingly recognised that these challenges cannot be addressed by individual organisations acting alone and require coordinated action across the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity.

Investing in Highland's Future

The scale of planned investment across Highland remains unprecedented. Partnership programmes including the Highland Investment Plan, Housing Challenge Action Plan, Workforce North, Invest Highland, transport improvements and renewable energy investment are collectively creating opportunities to reshape communities, strengthen infrastructure and support sustainable economic growth.

Key developments include:

- Continued delivery of the £2.1 billion Highland Investment Plan, supporting new schools, community facilities, transport infrastructure and housing.
- Progression of plans to deliver up to 24,000 homes over the next 10 years through the Highland Housing Challenge Action Plan.
- Continued delivery of Area Place Plans, helping communities identify priorities and shape future investment.

Community Wealth Building and Legacy Investment

Partners have continued to develop approaches that ensure the benefits of major renewable energy and infrastructure investment are retained within Highland communities. The Highland Social Value Charter establishes a framework for investment in housing, community funds, skills development, workforce planning, community infrastructure and long-term legacy projects. This work is helping maximise the social and economic benefits arising from renewable energy developments while supporting Community Wealth Building objectives across Highland.

The Highland Wealth Fund is a key initiative designed to ensure that the benefits of major renewable energy and infrastructure investment are shared across Highland communities. This partnership-led model aims to create a long-term mechanism for directing investment towards community priorities and supporting the delivery of the HOIP with lasting community benefit and supports more inclusive and sustainable growth across the region.

Workforce and Skills for Future Growth

Workforce and Skills for Future Growth Responding to workforce challenges remains a priority. Through Workforce North and the new Co-Investment Fund, partners are working collaboratively with employers to ensure local people can benefit from emerging opportunities within renewable energy, infrastructure, construction, and other growth sectors.

Over the next 10 to 15 years, the region is expected to experience more than £100 billion of investment, creating significant demand for skilled workers. To support this, partners have established the Workforce North Co-Investment Fund developed with £2million of seed funding from Skills Development Scotland and £1.2million from Highland Council for delivering co invested, Employer-led approaches to talent development, retention and workforce planning across the Highland Region.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND FUTURE GROWTH CONT.

Community Resilience and Partnership Response

The year also demonstrated the strength of partnership resilience during periods of disruption. During the significant snow events experienced across Highland in January 2026, public sector partners, communities and voluntary organisations worked together to maintain essential services and support vulnerable residents. This included:

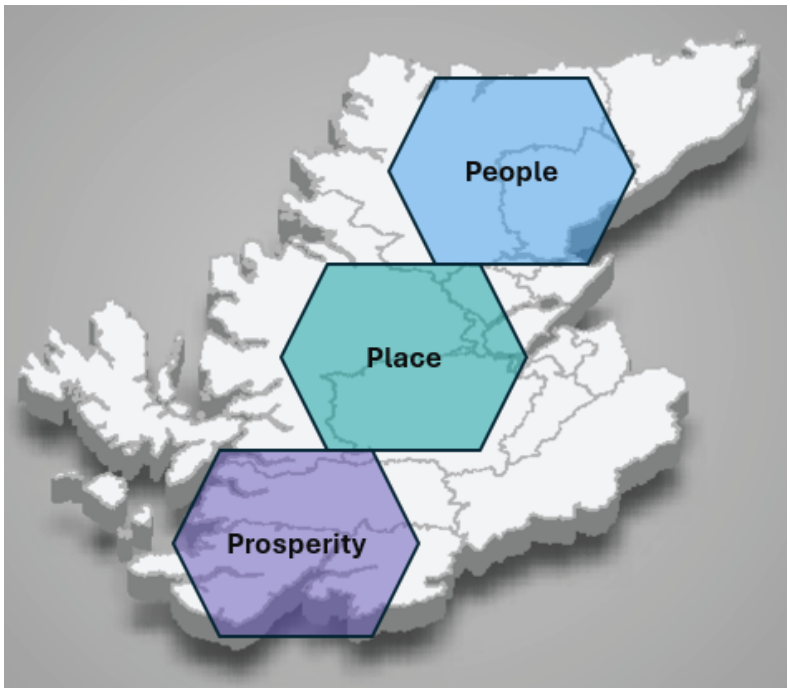
- Contact with approximately 2,650 vulnerable people across Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross.
- More than 8,600 hours of support delivered.
- Support for over 100 care visits through community and voluntary sector assistance.
- 25,221 hours spent delivering gritting services.
- 3,850 kilometres of roads treated and 17,766 tonnes of salt laid across the transport network.

This collaborative response demonstrated the value of strong partnerships, community resilience and coordinated service delivery in supporting communities during challenging circumstances. Community Pallning in it's truest form.

Contribution to the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan

Collectively, these activities demonstrate how Community Planning partners are aligning investment, infrastructure, workforce development, housing, community resilience and economic growth around the shared ambitions of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

The work demonstrates the critical role of Community Planning in bringing partners together to address long-term challenges, coordinate investment and ensure that future growth delivers lasting benefits for communities across Highland.



2024 - 2027
HIGHLAND OUTCOME IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Now in its second year of delivery, the 2024-2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) continues to provide the strategic direction for Community Planning in Highland. It sets out the shared vision, priorities and outcomes that guide collective action across the Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP) and provides the framework through which partners work together to tackle inequalities, respond to emerging challenges and create opportunities for people, places and communities to thrive.

The HOIP does not replace the individual responsibilities or strategies of partner organisations. While delivery is led by organisations and partnerships, it provides a shared framework for coordinating activity, aligning resources and maximising collective impact on issues that cannot be effectively addressed by any single organisation working alone.

The HOIP aligns with key national policy developments introduced during 2025-2026, including Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025-2035, Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy, the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Act 2026 and the priorities set out within the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2025-2026. Together, these policies reinforce the importance of prevention, collaboration, community empowerment and inclusive economic growth in improving outcomes for people and communities.

The HOIP is built around three interconnected strategic priorities. As a Partnership, partners are committed to:

People
Enabling people to live independently, safely and well within their communities. Through prevention, early intervention and person-centred services, partners work together to improve health and wellbeing, tackle inequalities and ensure support reaches those who need it most.

Place
Recognising the important role that communities and places play in shaping outcomes. By taking a place-based approach, partners support resilient, sustainable and climate-conscious communities, empowering local people to influence decisions and shape the future of their area.

Prosperity
Creating the conditions for sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Through investment, innovation, skills development and community wealth building, partners work collaboratively to ensure opportunities are accessible and that prosperity is shared across Highland.

The HOIP identifies a number of long-term outcomes that partners seek to achieve through collaboration:
- Improved access to services and support.
- Tackling depopulation and barriers to community sustainability.
- Embedding community wealth building and maximising investment.
- Supporting with education, employment and training opportunities.
- Strengthening local decision-making and resilience.

Delivery of these outcomes is supported through the 2024-2027 HOIP Delivery Plan, which translates strategic ambitions into action across the CPP. Through the cross-cutting themes, partners are aligning resources, leadership and activity around shared priorities.

2024 - 2027 HIGHLAND OUTCOME IMPROVEMENT PLAN CONT.

As this report demonstrates, progress continues across all three strategic priorities. Together, the HOIP and Delivery Plan provide a framework for collaborative action, helping partners improve outcomes, reduce inequalities and build a stronger, more resilient Highland.

Fuel Poverty in Highland

During 2026, growing concern about the impact of fuel poverty on households and communities across Highland led partners to strengthen their focus on affordable warmth, energy resilience and targeted support for vulnerable households. Evidence presented to the CPP Board highlighted the particular challenges faced by rural and remote communities, where higher energy costs, reliance on off-grid heating systems, poorer energy infrastructure and a higher cost of living combine to create disproportionate levels of fuel poverty.

A significant contribution to this work was provided through A Perfect Storm: 2026 Update on Fuel Poverty in Rural Scotland, published by Changeworks. The report highlighted that fuel poverty remains substantially higher in rural Scotland than national levels, with 38% of households in remote rural areas estimated to be living in fuel poverty and 24% in extreme fuel poverty, compared with 29% and 14% nationally. The report also identified that 57% of rural households remain off the gas grid, leaving many communities dependent on more expensive and volatile heating fuels including electricity and heating oil.

The evidence reinforced concerns already emerging through CPP partners, housing organisations, advice services and community groups. Fuel poverty was shown to impact not only household finances but also health, wellbeing, educational attainment and community resilience. National survey findings highlighted that 51% of respondents reported health problems associated with cold or poorly insulated homes, while 49% reported impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. Many households reported reducing heating use, restricting the rooms they heated or limiting daily activities in order to manage rising energy costs.

The report also highlighted the wider structural challenges affecting rural communities, including higher transport costs, housing shortages, limited access to affordable housing, delays in smart meter rollout, supply chain pressures and the additional costs of improving the energy efficiency of rural homes. These findings closely aligned with issues being raised through the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission, Health Inequalities work and Community Partnerships across Highland.

In response to growing evidence of need, the CPP established the new Fuel Poverty Action Group in June 2026. Bringing together partners from housing, health, advice services, the third sector, and energy-related services, the Group has been established to improve coordination, share intelligence, strengthen prevention activity and identify opportunities where partnership working can add value to existing support services.

The work contributes directly to the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity, recognising that tackling fuel poverty is critical to improving health outcomes, reducing inequalities, supporting community resilience and enabling sustainable communities to thrive across Highland.

2024 - 2027 HOIP DELIVERY PLAN

The Delivery Plan is the primary mechanism through which the Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP) coordinates collective action to deliver the shared vision of the 2024-2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP).

While delivery is led by organisations and partnerships, the Delivery Plan provides the shared framework that aligns resources and activity around cross-cutting themes. It enables partners to work together on issues that require collective action, helping to maximise impact and improve outcomes across Highland.

The Delivery Plan is structured around seven cross-cutting themes that reflect the interconnected nature of the opportunities, challenges and inequalities facing Highland communities:

- **Connecting People and Places**
- **Whole Family and Community-Based Approaches**
- **Employment and Employability**
- **Community Wealth Building**
- **Housing**
- **Shared Approaches to Commissioning**
- **Aligning Partnership Practices:**

1. Funding Alignment and Joint Opportunities
2. Data and Intelligence
3. Workforce Development

Each theme is supported by outcomes and actions, supported by partnership-led delivery arrangements and together they provide a focus for collaborative working and help ensure that activity is aligned to the strategic priorities of **People**, **Place** and **Prosperity**.

Through the Delivery Plan, partners:

- Strengthen collaboration across organisations, sectors and communities.
- Align resources and reduce duplication.
- Respond collectively to complex challenges including poverty, depopulation and access to services.
- Support preventative and place-based approaches.
- Build capacity for long-term transformational change.

As this report demonstrates, the Delivery Plan continues to evolve in response to emerging needs, opportunities and national policy developments. It provides a route for translating the ambitions of the HOIP into coordinated action and impact across Highland.

PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK POPULATION INDICATORS

The Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP) strengthened its approach to measuring outcomes and understanding inequalities this year through the adoption of the Indicator Report on Health Inequalities as the performance framework for the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP).

Developed by the NHS Highland Public Health Intelligence Team in collaboration with CPP partners, the framework provides the CPP with its most comprehensive shared evidence base to date for understanding population need, monitoring outcomes and informing action across Highland. Clicking the image below links to the report.

The framework is structured around the internationally recognised Eight Marmot Principles, reflecting the growing understanding that health and wellbeing are shaped by more than access to healthcare services. Factors such as income, employment, housing, education, transport, community safety, environmental quality, access to services and discrimination all influence outcomes and contribute to health inequalities. By adopting this broader population health approach, the CPP is better equipped to identify the root causes of inequality and target collective action where it can have the greatest impact.

The dashboard contains a wide range of indicators covering every stage of life and all three HOIP priorities of **People**, **Place** and **Prosperity**. Rather than reproducing the full dashboard within this report, a smaller number of strategic indicators have been selected to provide insight into three of Highland's significant challenges: poverty, depopulation and wellbeing. These challenges influence multiple outcomes and remain central to partnership activity across the Highlands.

The evidence highlights both Highland's strengths and the inequalities that continue to exist. Highland continues to experience higher employment rates than the Scottish average (80.5% compared with 74.5%) and a higher proportion of adults rating their neighbourhood as a very good place to live (70.5% compared with 54.8% nationally). Highland also benefits from lower overall crime rates than Scotland and higher participation rates among young people aged 16-19 in education, training or employment.

However, the evidence also demonstrates persistent inequalities. Around 15.2% of Highland children live in low-income families, equivalent to 5,602 children, while fuel poverty remains significantly higher than the Scottish average. Significant differences in life expectancy and premature mortality continue to exist between communities and deprivation levels, demonstrating the ongoing impact of poverty and disadvantage on long-term health outcomes.

The indicator framework aligns strongly with Scotland's Population Health Framework and Public Service Reform agenda, both of which emphasise prevention, partnership working, tackling inequalities and collective accountability for outcomes. By providing a shared evidence base across the CPP, the framework will support more informed decision-making, improved targeting of resources and a stronger focus on prevention and long-term outcomes. It will continue to underpin delivery of the current HOIP and provide critical evidence for the development of the next ten-year Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

POPULATION INDICATORS

The indicators below provide a snapshot of key challenges and opportunities across Highland. Most are drawn from the Highland Health Inequalities Indicator Report and Dashboard, adopted as the performance framework for the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, with additional measures sourced from partner organisations, thematic partnerships and national datasets.

Together, these indicators provide a shared evidence base for understanding inequalities, monitoring progress and identifying where collective action by Community Planning partners can make the greatest difference for people, places and communities across Highland.

🟢 Improving 🟡 Stable / Mixed 🔴 Worsening 🔵 Long-term Structural Challenge

PEOPLE

Indicator	Latest Position	Trend	What This Means and How the CPP Are Responding
Children in Low Income Families	2023-2024 15.2% (5,602 children)	🔴	Child poverty remains a significant driver of inequality, affecting health, wellbeing and future opportunities. Partners are responding through the Child Poverty Action Report, Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, childcare initiatives and employability support.
Developmental Concerns at 27-30 Months	2023-2024 20.0% in most deprived areas vs 13.0% in least deprived areas	🟡	Developmental concerns are more common in deprived communities, highlighting inequalities from the earliest years. Partners are focusing on early intervention through family support, Whole Family Wellbeing and The Promise.
Premature Mortality (Under 75)	2021-2023 388 per 100,000 population	🟡	Premature mortality remains higher in deprived communities, reflecting persistent health inequalities. Partners are using the Health Inequalities Framework to strengthen prevention, wellbeing and poverty reduction activity.
Life Expectancy	2021-2023 77.4 years (Male) / 81.9 years (Female)	🟡	Life expectancy remains relatively high, but significant variation exists between communities. Partners are targeting action and investment to reduce health inequalities and improve outcomes.
Probable Suicide Deaths	2020-2024 20.2 per 100,000	🟡	Suicide remains a significant public health concern and an important indicator of wellbeing. Partners continue to invest in suicide prevention, mental health support and community wellbeing initiatives.
Fuel Poverty	2017-2019 32.9%	🔵	Fuel poverty continues to affect many households, particularly in rural and off-grid communities. Partners have established a Fuel Poverty Action Group to improve coordination and strengthen support.

POPULATION INDICATORS

PLACE

Indicator	Latest Position	Trend	What This Means and How the CPP Are Responding
Temporary Accommodation	2025 479 households (130 children)	🟢	The number of households in temporary accommodation has reduced, but housing pressures remain significant. Partners are increasing housing supply and strengthening homelessness prevention activity.
Net Migration	2023-2024 +1,790 people	🟢	Net migration remains positive, helping offset population decline and workforce pressures. Partners are investing in housing, jobs, childcare and community sustainability to support population growth.
Access Deprivation	2020 52% of population in most access-deprived areas	🔵	Geography remains a major barrier to accessing services, employment and opportunities. Partners are investing in place-based solutions, transport, digital connectivity and local service delivery.
Housing Need	2026 8,826 on Housing Register	🔴	Housing demand continues to exceed supply, with 8,826 households registered for housing. Partners are responding through the Housing Challenge, affordable housing delivery and innovative housing solutions.
Serious Road Traffic Collisions / Fatalities	2025-2026 112/21	🔴	Road safety remains a significant challenge across Highland's rural road network. Partners continue to work together on education, enforcement and infrastructure improvements.
Dwelling Fires / Fire Fatalities	2025-2026 135/6	🔴	Home fires continue to present risks to vulnerable households and communities. Partners are focusing on prevention, home safety visits and targeted community safety activity.

PROSPERITY

Indicator	Latest Position	Trend	What This Means and How the CPP Are Responding
Employment Rate (16-64)	2024 80.5%	🟢	Employment remains high and above the Scottish average, although workforce shortages are increasing. Partners are investing in employability, skills development and Workforce North.
Median Weekly Pay	2024 £590.50	🟢	Earnings continue to improve but remain below the Scottish average. Partners are promoting fair work, skills development and community wealth building.
Modern Apprenticeship Starts	2024-2025 1,493 starts	🟢	Strong apprenticeship participation supports workforce development and future economic growth. Partners continue to expand opportunities linked to key growth sectors.
Participation in Education, Employment or Training (16-19)	2025 94.8% overall	🟢	Participation remains high, demonstrating strong engagement in learning and employment opportunities. Partners continue to support young people through education, employability and youth development programmes.

HIGHLAND POVERTY AND EQUALITY COMMISSION

The CPP supported the work of the independent Highland Poverty and Equality Commission this year, established to identify the causes, consequences and potential solutions to poverty and inequality across Highland. Through extensive engagement with communities, partners and people with lived experience, the Commission provided one of the most comprehensive examinations of poverty undertaken in Highland in recent years and established a framework for future action for the partnership and individual partners.

The Commission's work was informed by community engagement, evidence sessions with public, private and third sector partners, thematic Sounding Board events and a dedicated Lived Experience Panel. People with direct experience of financial insecurity helped shape discussion around access to services, housing, fair work, education, financial security and public service delivery. Their experiences highlighted the importance of joined-up services, community-based support, affordable housing, transport, employability and financial inclusion.

Recognising the importance of involving younger voices, the Commission also worked closely with Youth Highland. Young people identified housing affordability, transport, access to opportunities, financial security and participation in decision-making as key concerns. While ambitious about their futures, many expressed concern that current social and economic conditions may limit their ability to realise their potential within Highland.

Alongside engagement activity, the Commission partnered with DataKind UK to explore how better use of data could strengthen poverty prevention and reduction activity. This work identified opportunities to improve data sharing, strengthen partnership intelligence and develop more effective approaches to identifying and supporting people experiencing poverty, particularly within rural communities where traditional measures of deprivation do not always reflect lived experience.

The Commission's final report, Essential Elements, identified a series of Calls to Action organised around People, Place and Prospects, covering financial security, housing, access, education, fair work and partnership working. Central to the findings was the need for stronger collaboration across sectors, greater involvement of people with lived experience in decision-making and a continued focus on tackling the structural causes of poverty and inequality. The recommendations have now been passed to the CPP and partner organisations, with progress reporting arrangements being developed to support implementation and accountability.

Click the image to go to the Commission’s webpage.

Next Steps:

Partners are actively reviewing and considering the calls to action presented by the Commission both individually and collectively. Workshops are being held in the later half of 2026 to enable the partnership and others to collectively consider and agree actions moving forward.

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 OVERVIEW

During the second year of delivery of the 2024-2027 HOIP, partners have continued to work collaboratively to progress the strategic priorities of **People**, **Place** and **Prosperity**. The Delivery Plan provides a framework through which partners work together across seven cross-cutting themes. Together, these themes support collective action on some of Highland's most significant challenges, including poverty, depopulation, health inequalities, access to services and community sustainability. Throughout 2025-2026, partners have continued to develop integrated, preventative and place-based approaches that improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

The impact highlights that follow demonstrate how partners are translating shared priorities into action. They provide examples of the collective contributions being made across the Delivery Plan to tackle inequalities, support population sustainability, improve wellbeing and create opportunities for people and places to thrive.

Connecting People and Places

Strengthening Place-Based Investment and Service Delivery - The Highland Property Partnership and Highland Investment Plan continued to align public assets, infrastructure and services, supporting more accessible, efficient and integrated delivery across Highland communities.

Whole Family and Community-Based Approaches

Investing in Prevention and Reducing Inequalities - Partners expanded family support, mental health and wellbeing initiatives, developed innovative childcare models and adopted the Highland Health Inequalities Framework to strengthen prevention and early intervention.

Employment and Employability

Creating Pathways to Opportunity - Work. Life. Highland, Workforce North and employability partnerships continued to support people into work, strengthen skills development and help prepare Highland for future workforce demands.

Community Wealth Building

Retaining More Wealth Within Highland Communities - Progress continued through the Highland Wealth Fund, Social Value Charter and Employer Charter, helping ensure that major investment opportunities deliver long-term benefits for local people and communities.

Housing

Responding to Highland's Housing Challenge - Partners continued to increase housing supply through delivery of affordable homes, development of new investment models and collaborative action to address housing pressures affecting communities across Highland.

Aligning Partnership Practices: Funding and Joint Opportunities

Strengthening Collaboration, Evidence and Capacity - Partners continued to strengthen how they work together through improved access to funding opportunities, the development of shared tools such as BeConnected Highland and the Highland Project Bank, adoption of the Highland Health Inequalities Indicator Framework, and investment in workforce development. Together, these initiatives are improving collaboration, strengthening the evidence base for decision-making, building workforce capacity and helping ensure that collective action is targeted towards tackling inequalities and improving outcomes across Highland.

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 HOUSING: HIGHLAND HOUSING CHALLENGE

Access to suitable, affordable housing remains one of the most significant challenges facing communities across Highland and is critical to delivering the ambitions of the HOIP. Housing influences health and wellbeing, workforce availability, economic growth, population retention, educational attainment and community sustainability. It is also a key determinant of inequality, affecting people's ability to access employment, services and opportunities.

Recognising the scale of the challenge, the CPP continued to support the Highland Housing Challenge, a partnership approach established to address both existing housing pressures and anticipated future demand associated with population change and significant economic investment across Highland. The Challenge reflects the understanding that housing shortages cannot be addressed by any single organisation and require coordinated action across the public, private and third sectors.

During 2025-26, partners continued to develop and implement the Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action Plan, focusing on three interconnected priorities:

- Increasing land and property availability.
- Increasing investment and finance for housing development.
- Increasing developer capacity and delivery.

Progress has been made across each of these areas. Work to identify and bring forward new housing land continued through the Local Development Plan process, with more than 250 potential development sites submitted for consideration. The Council also expanded its landbank and acquired sites capable of delivering approximately 500 additional homes, alongside direct property acquisitions and initiatives to bring long-term empty homes back into use. The new Empty Homes Challenge Fund was launched in 2026 to help increase housing supply and encourage reoccupation of vacant properties, particularly within rural communities.

Partners have also focused on developing approaches to increasing investment in housing delivery. This includes inclusion of housing as a key priority within the Inverness and Cromarty Firther Green Freeport Non Domestic Rate Strategy, delivering legacy housing through Social Value Charter Commitments, in particular through SSEN's commitment to 500 legacy houses and exploring new investment models with the Scottish National Investment Bank. Confirmation of a £209.7 million four-year Affordable Housing Programme from the Scottish Government will support the delivery of around 600 affordable homes annually across Highland.

Housing supply remains under significant pressure across all tenures. The Highland Housing Register recorded 8,826 applications at March 2026, despite almost 1,600 housing allocations during the year. A new Housing Need and Demand Assessment, nearing completion during the reporting period, highlights the scale of existing and future housing requirements. Partners recognise that delivery must continue to accelerate across all tenures if future community and economic needs are to be met.

The year also saw continued work to improve housing options for key workers, support community-led housing solutions and develop new models of delivery for remote and rural communities. Initiatives include exploration of a Highland Council mid-market rent model, community housing projects, and development of accommodation solutions linked to health and social care transformation in Lochaber.

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 HIGHLAND HOUSING CHALLENGE CONT.

The Highland Housing Challenge also continues to recognise the close relationship between housing, workforce development and economic growth. Through collaboration with Workforce North, developers, registered social landlords, investors and public sector partners, work has continued to address skills shortages, increase construction capacity and remove barriers to development. Initiatives including Masterplan Consent Areas, integrated developer support services and collaborative planning approaches are helping to accelerate housing delivery and create greater certainty for investors and developers.

While significant challenges remain, the progress achieved during 2025-26 demonstrates a growing commitment across Highland partners to work collectively on one of the region's most pressing inequalities. By increasing housing supply, supporting affordable housing delivery, bringing empty homes back into use and developing innovative financing and delivery models, partners are helping to create the conditions for healthier people, stronger communities and sustainable economic growth across Highland.

Key Highlights:

- 8,826 households registered for housing.
- 1,592 housing allocations made during 2025-26.
- 499 affordable homes completed in 2025-26.
- 250+ development sites submitted through the Local Development Plan process.
- Land acquired with capacity for approximately 500 additional homes.
- £209.7 million committed through the four-year Affordable Housing Programme.
- Up to 24,000 homes required over the next decade to meet projected need and demand.
- Empty Homes Challenge Fund launched to increase housing supply and reduce long-term vacancy.

Clicking the image to go to the Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action Plan.

Highland Housing Challenge

DELIVERY PLANPROGRESS 2025 -2026 CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES: HIGHLAND PROPERTY PARTNERSHIP

The Highland Property Partnership (HPP) brings together public sector partners including The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, High Life Highland, University of the Highlands and Islands and others to improve collaboration around public assets, infrastructure investment and service delivery across Highland. The HPP provides a strategic forum for aligning property, capital investment and service transformation plans to maximise community benefit, support place-based delivery and make more effective use of public resources.

During 2025-2026 HPP strengthened its focus on supporting delivery of the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), the Council's Future Operating Model, the emerging Single Scottish Estate agenda and the identification of asset opportunities through Area Asset Masterplans. Partners worked collectively to identify opportunities for co-location, estate rationalisation, service integration and joint investment, ensuring that future public sector investment delivers improved outcomes for communities while making best use of available resources.

A key area of activity has been the development of place-based locality reviews to align partner investments and future service requirements. Detailed reviews were completed in Dingwall and Thurso, with further work progressing in Alness and Invergordon, Brora, Dornoch and Golspie. These reviews bring together partners, communities and local stakeholders to identify opportunities for shared facilities, integrated services and coordinated investment that reflects local priorities.

The Partnership has supported the development of a network of Community, Office and Depot Points of Delivery (PoDs) through the HIP. Engagement with partners has helped identify opportunities for co-location of education, health, community, leisure, library, office and public services within future developments, helping to create more accessible and sustainable community infrastructure. Over the year, stakeholder engagement activities were undertaken to inform these projects.

Recognising the links between public assets and wider community outcomes, the HPP has increasingly focused on supporting strategic priorities including housing delivery, workforce accommodation, economic development, climate resilience, energy infrastructure and community wealth building. The alignment of these work areas is likely to inform the ongoing work of partners through the HPP.

Click the image below to find out more about the Highland Investment Plan.

The Highland Council
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DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 WHOLE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES: HEALTH INEQUALITIES

During 2025-2026, the Health Inequalities Short Life Working Group made a significant contribution to strengthening Highland's understanding of inequalities and improving the evidence available to support partnership decision-making. Led by the NHS Highland Public Health Intelligence Team and supported by Community Planning partners, the Group developed a shared approach to measuring inequality and monitoring progress against the HOIP.

The Group's principal achievement was the development of the Highland Health Inequalities Indicator Report and Dashboard, which has been adopted as the HOIP's performance framework. Based on the Eight Marmot Principles, the framework brings together evidence on the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, including poverty, education, employment, housing, access to services, community wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

Extensive engagement with partners, subject matter experts and stakeholders helped ensure the framework reflects both local priorities and national policy direction. The process also highlighted the importance of supporting partners to interpret and apply evidence, leading to a growing focus on data literacy and evidence-informed decision-making.

The framework has now been endorsed by the CPP Board and will support partners to identify emerging issues, monitor progress and target action to reduce inequalities across Highland. It will also provide an important evidence base for the development of the next Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

Key Highlights:

- Developed and launched the Highland Health Inequalities Indicator Report and Dashboard.
- Adopted a shared set of indicators organised around the Eight Marmot Principles.
- Brought together evidence covering poverty, housing, education, employment, wellbeing, discrimination and environmental sustainability.
- Engaged partners and stakeholders through surveys, presentations and collaborative review processes.
- Established a shared evidence base to support planning, priority setting and performance reporting.
- Began work to strengthen data literacy and support evidence-informed decision-making across the CPP.
- Created a framework that will inform future action on poverty, wellbeing and health inequalities.

Click the image above to access the full Report.

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 WHOLE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES: MULTI-GENERATIONAL CHILDCARE MODEL(S)

Single Care Model Pilot: Innovating Rural Care in Highland Communities

The Single Care Model (SCM) pilot is exploring an innovative approach to addressing childcare and adult social care challenges in remote and rural Highland communities. Developed through a partnership involving Care and Learning Alliance (CALA), Lochbroom and Ullapool Community Trust, Urram, The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Government, the pilot is being tested in Ullapool and Strontian/Ardnamurchan.

Funded through the Child Poverty Accelerator Fund, the project seeks to overcome workforce shortages and service sustainability challenges by developing a model where multi-skilled practitioners can support both childcare and adult care provision. In rural areas where demand can be too low to sustain separate services, the approach aims to create more resilient, flexible and sustainable care provision that better meets the needs of local communities.

During 2025-2026, significant progress was made, including the establishment of a dedicated steering group, recruitment of two Development Workers and extensive community engagement across both pilot areas. The project has attracted strong interest from local communities, policymakers and sector leaders, reflecting growing recognition of the need for new approaches to delivering care services in rural Scotland.

A central objective of the pilot is to reduce barriers that prevent people from participating fully in employment and community life. Access to affordable and flexible childcare remains a significant challenge for many rural families and can limit opportunities to enter work, increase working hours or undertake training. By improving access to care services, the model has the potential to support household incomes, reduce child poverty and improve economic participation, particularly for women who often carry a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities.

The project also seeks to strengthen community sustainability by creating secure, locally based employment opportunities within the care sector. Early engagement has highlighted strong demand for more flexible childcare provision, particularly for children aged 0-2 years and school-age children, alongside growing pressures within adult social care services. The learning generated is helping inform discussion around future policy development, regulatory reform and sustainable service delivery in rural areas.

By bringing together partners from community, public and economic development sectors, the Single Care Model demonstrates how innovation and collaboration can help address some of the most significant challenges facing rural communities. The pilot contributes directly to the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity through its focus on reducing poverty, improving access to care, supporting population retention and creating stronger, more resilient communities.

HIE
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

Care and Learning Alliance

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 WHOLE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

Highland Children's Rights and Participation Group

During 2025-2026, the Highland Children's Rights and Participation Group, supported by Highland Council Psychological Services and partners across the CPP, continued to strengthen Highland's approach to children's rights and meaningful participation. Through a range of innovative tools, resources and collaborative initiatives, the group has worked to ensure that children and young people are not only listened to, but are able to influence the decisions, policies and services that affect their lives.

A significant focus of the year's work was the development of the infrastructure required to embed participation consistently across organisations and services. This included:

- Expansion of the Library of Voices, which brings together existing participation findings to help organisations make better use of children's views and reduce consultation fatigue;
- Voice and Influence Process, which creates a clear route for children's perspectives to inform strategic decision-making;
- Community of Practice, which supports practitioners across sectors to develop and share effective participation approaches.

The partnership has also strengthened workforce confidence and capability through the development of participation guidance, training and self-evaluation tools, helping organisations move beyond consultation towards genuine co-production. By embedding participation within GIRFEC training, governance arrangements and service improvement activity, the work is supporting more responsive, inclusive and trauma-informed services shaped by the lived experiences of children and young people.

Importantly, the initiative seeks to address inequalities in whose voices are heard. Particular emphasis has been placed on creating opportunities for children and young people who are less frequently represented in decision-making processes, ensuring that services and policies are informed by a broader range of experiences and perspectives. Everything developed through the programme has been undertaken collaboratively or co-designed with children and young people themselves.

The work aligns closely with the principles of the UNCRC, GIRFEC and The Promise, while supporting the HOIP through improved participation, wellbeing and outcomes for children and young people. A key lesson emerging from the programme is that meaningful co-production leads to better decisions and stronger services, although it requires organisations to invest time, commitment and patience. Through sustained partnership working, Highland is building a stronger rights-based culture in which children's voices help shape both local services and strategic priorities.

The Highland Council
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DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 WHOLE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES CONT.

Natural Capital Short Life Working Group

Chaired by NatureScot the group was established to explore how a Natural Capital approach could strengthen evidence-based decision-making across the CPP. Through the development and pilot testing of the Natural Capital Tool, the Group examined how the value of Highland's natural assets can be better understood and incorporated into planning and partnership activity.

During 2025-2026, the Group delivered pilots in Merkinch (Inverness) and Thurso, working with local communities and partners to demonstrate how the tool can support place-based planning and identify opportunities that deliver multiple benefits. The pilots are showing that a Natural Capital approach can help communities and organisations understand the relationship between nature, health, wellbeing, biodiversity, climate resilience, education, regeneration and economic development. Rather than focusing solely on environmental outcomes, the tool provides a shared evidence base that helps partners identify priorities, target investment and demonstrate wider community benefit.

The contrasting pilot locations demonstrated the flexibility of the approach. In Merkinch, discussions are focussing on opportunities to strengthen community wellbeing through greenspace, volunteering, habitat enhancement and green prescribing. In Thurso, the tool is helping inform conversations around regeneration, green infrastructure, woodland expansion, pollinator networks and long-term place planning, highlighting its potential to support coordinated investment across multiple organisations and initiatives.

A significant outcome of the work has been the recognition that Natural Capital provides a common language for collaboration across organisations with different priorities and responsibilities. The pilots demonstrated that when nature is considered as a foundation for wider social, economic and environmental outcomes, it can help break down silos and support a more integrated approach to delivering the HOIP.

The Group concluded that the greatest value lies not in the technology itself, but in the conversations, partnerships and decisions it enables. The work of the group is leaving a legacy for the Partnership by providing a practical approach to embedding natural capital considerations within decision-making and supporting more sustainable, resilient and prosperous communities across Highland.

NatureScot
NàdarAlba
Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 COMMUNMITY WEALTH BUILDING

Community Wealth Building (CWB) continued to develop as a key strategic approach to ensuring that the benefits of economic growth, investment and development are retained within Highland communities. CWB seeks to create a fairer and more inclusive economy by increasing local ownership, supporting fair employment, strengthening local supply chains, promoting social value and ensuring that wealth generated in Highland contributes directly to improved outcomes for people and places.

During 2025-2026, partners made significant progress in embedding CWB across Highland. Activity focused on creating the foundations needed to maximise the social, economic and environmental benefits arising from both current economic activity and the substantial investment anticipated across the region in the years ahead.

Key Milestones:

- Continued delivery of the Social Value Charter.
- Second cohort of organisations signed up to the Employer Charter.
- Development of the Highland Wealth Fund.

At the same time, partners continued to explore investment approaches capable of supporting housing delivery, infrastructure improvements and wider community benefit.

The scale of planned investment across Highland reinforces the importance of CWB. Opportunities associated with renewable energy, housing, infrastructure, ports, transport and supply chain development have the potential to create significant benefits for communities. CWB provides a framework for ensuring that local people, businesses and communities are well placed to benefit from these opportunities.

Alongside this, partners continued to support workforce development, local businesses and fair work through initiatives such as Workforce North, apprenticeship programmes and employability pathways. Activity has focused on strengthening workforce capacity, supporting local supply chains and helping residents access emerging employment opportunities.

CWB is increasingly important in addressing some of Highland's most significant challenges, including poverty, depopulation and inequality. By retaining more wealth within local communities and ensuring that investment delivers long-term social and economic value, partners are helping to create a stronger, fairer and more resilient Highland economy.

Highland Wealth Fund

This is a key CWB initiative designed to ensure that the benefits of major renewable energy and infrastructure investment are shared across Highland communities. In June 2026 partners agreed a partnership-led model, creating a long-term mechanism for directing investment towards community priorities and supporting the delivery of the HOIP.

The Fund represents a significant step towards ensuring that wealth generated in Highland delivers lasting community benefit and supports more inclusive and sustainable growth across the region.

Click the image below to read more about the Highland Wealth Fund.

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING CONT.

Highland Social Value Charter | Cairt Luach Sòisealta na Gàidhealtachd

The **Social Value Charter** provides a framework for ensuring that major investment projects deliver lasting benefits for Highland communities.

Originally developed for the renewable energy sector, the Charter was reviewed during 2025-2026 to support community benefit, fair work, skills development, housing, local supply chains and environmental sustainability across a wider range of investments.

Key Highlights:

- Social Value Charter expanded beyond the renewable energy sector.
- Highland Wealth Fund approved to support community benefit and tackle inequalities.
- SSEN Transmission became the first Charter signatory.
- Glen Earrach Energy became the first renewable energy developer to sign the Charter.
- Renewable energy resource pack and community engagement programme delivered.

The Charter strengthens collaboration between communities, businesses, developers and public bodies, helping ensure that future investment delivers long-term economic, social and environmental benefits for Highland.

Click the image above to go to the Social Value Charter webpage.

Highland Employer Charter | Cairt Luchd-fastaidh na Gàidhealtachd

The **Highland Employer Charter** promotes fair work, workforce development and inclusive economic growth across Highland. Led by The Highland Council, it recognises employers that demonstrate a commitment to fair pay, employee wellbeing, skills development, local employment and responsible business practices.

Key Highlights:

- 21 businesses signed up to the Highland Employer Charter.
- Continued promotion of fair work, workforce wellbeing and career development.
- Strengthened links between employers, communities and education providers.
- Encouraged local procurement and supply chain development through Employ Highland and Procure Highland commitments.
- Launched a dedicated Employer Charter website to increase awareness and engagement.
- Received recognition in the UK Parliament for promoting fair work and responsible business practices.

The Charter continues to bring together employers and partners around a shared commitment to developing local talent, supporting workforce wellbeing and creating opportunities for people and communities across Highland. As participation grows, it will play an increasingly important role in supporting a resilient workforce, sustainable communities and long-term prosperity.

Click the image above to go to the Employer Charter website.

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 EMPLOYMENT / EMPLOYABILITY

Highland Employability Partnership: Work. Life. Highland

The Highland Employability Partnership (HEP) brings together public, private and third sector partners to improve access to employment opportunities and tackle labour market inequalities across Highland. Through a coordinated approach, HEP works to create clearer pathways into employment, helping individuals overcome barriers to work while supporting employers to access the workforce they need.

A key focus during 2025-2026 was the continued development of Work. Life. Highland, the HEP's public-facing employability service. Acting as a single point of access for individuals and employers, the service helps connect people with employment support, training opportunities and advice. Over the year, the website attracted more than **12,400** visitors, supported by a programme of digital marketing, local media promotion and community-based engagement activities delivered across Highland.

Recognising that employability support must be accessible and locally delivered, HEP funded the creation of the **All In Highlands** consortium, led by Enable Works and involving a range of third sector organisations including Barnardo's Works, Calman Trust, Lochaber Hope, Merkinch Partnership, New Start Highland, Pulteneytown People's Project and Street League. Delivering support through trusted community venues, the consortium provides tailored employability services for people facing additional barriers to work, including parents, people with disabilities and those living with long-term health conditions. Sector-based training pathways have also been developed to support employment opportunities in areas such as retail, logistics and hospitality.

Partnership working remains central to delivery. The HEP is supported by three Local Employability Partnerships covering North, West and Inner Moray Firth, enabling local partners to identify priorities, share learning and coordinate support around local labour market needs. The involvement of the third sector has been particularly important in reaching individuals who may not otherwise engage with employability services, helping ensure support is delivered in trusted, accessible community settings.

A key learning from the year has been the continuing importance of personal engagement. While digital services provide an important access route, community events, local networks and trusted relationships remain vital in building confidence and encouraging people to seek support. By helping more people progress into sustainable and fair work, HEP contributes directly to tackling poverty, improving life chances and supporting the HOIP priorities across Highland.

Click the image above to access the website.

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 EMPLOYMENT / EMPLOYABILITY CONT.

Skills Development Scotland - Workforce North

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) this year worked with partners across the Highlands and Islands through the Workforce North initiative to ensure that emerging economic opportunities translate into lasting benefits for local people, businesses and communities. With significant investment taking place across sectors such as renewable energy, infrastructure and construction, Workforce North focuses on helping the region respond to workforce shortages, skills gaps and population challenges while ensuring local communities are equipped to participate in future growth.

A major milestone this year was the transition of Workforce North from strategic planning into delivery. Working jointly with The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, University of the Highlands and Islands, Developing the Young Workforce, employers and community partners, a Highland-specific Workforce North Operational Roadmap was developed to coordinate planning and activity around shared priorities.

Workforce North has focused on strengthening pathways into employment, particularly for young people. The new Workforce Response Team pilots have brought together SDS, schools, employers, employability services and community partners to provide earlier, more coordinated support during key transition points. This collaborative approach aims to improve awareness of career opportunities, strengthen connections between education and employment, and ensure support is shaped around the needs of young people.

Employers have played a central role in shaping the programme, helping partners understand future labour market demand, critical skills shortages and workforce requirements. Alongside work to expand apprenticeships, strengthen workforce intelligence and improve employer engagement, the development of a Workforce North Co-Investment Fund represents an important step towards aligning resources around shared workforce priorities and delivering practical solutions at scale.

A defining feature of Workforce North is its place-based partnership model. By bringing together economic development, education, employability and skills partners around a shared evidence base, the initiative is helping to connect workforce development with wider community sustainability, talent retention and inclusive growth objectives. The programme demonstrates how collaborative workforce planning can support the HOIP priorities ensuring that Highland communities are well positioned to benefit from future investment and economic transformation.

Click the image below to access the website.

Skills Development Scotland

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 ALIGNING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

BeConnected Highland (click the image above toaccess the website) is a digital platform developed by The Highland Council to improve how communities access funding, support and partnership opportunities. The platform provides a single location where community groups can showcase projects, identify development opportunities and connect with funders, businesses and support organisations.

Through an interactive mapping system, communities can highlight projects that support local priorities identified through lpcal plans, helping funders and partners better understand needs and opportunities across Highland. The platform is designed to reduce duplication, improve coordination and create a more transparent and accessible funding landscape.

BeConnected supports a shift from traditional competitive funding approaches towards a more collaborative model, helping to:

- Connect community projects with potential funding and support opportunities.
- Improve awareness of projects being developed across Highland.
- Align investment with local priorities and Area Place Plans.
- Reduce barriers for community organisations seeking support.
- Encourage collaboration, learning and knowledge sharing between communities.
- Support more coordinated decision-making across funding streams and community benefit initiatives.

Together, BeConnected and the Project Bank provide important tools for strengthening community-led development, improving access to support and ensuring resources are directed towards projects that deliver the greatest benefit for Highland communities.

The **Project Bank** is being developed to help community groups, charities, social enterprises and third sector organisations connect with businesses and organisations operating across Highland. Hosted on the BeConnected platform, it provides a place-based mechanism for communities to identify projects requiring support and enables businesses to contribute through volunteering, professional expertise, sponsorship, donations, community benefit commitments and Social Value Charter pledges.

The Project Bank helps align community priorities with available resources, making it easier for organisations to access support while creating opportunities for businesses to contribute directly to local outcomes. By bringing together community need, investment opportunities and community benefit activity in one place, the Project Bank supports partnership working and helps maximise the impact of resources across Highland.

Workforce Development. Partners continued to invest in workforce development during 2025-2026, delivering training focused on mental health, wellbeing, suicide prevention, trauma-informed practice and gender-based violence. Collectively, these programmes supported workforce skills, resilience and the delivery of more informed and responsive services across Highland.

- Managing Mental Health in the workplace: 18
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Representative Training: 7
- Supporting a colleague with anxiety: 16
- Decider Life Skills: 23
- Wellbeing Workshop: 48
- Impact Aware: 39
- Suicide Prevention: 192
- Mental Health Courses: 297

New for 2025-2026

- Trauma Informed Training for Frontline staff: 63
- Transforming Connections - Trauma
- Skilled Level Training: 15
- Gender Based Violence: 12

DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS 2025 -2026 ALIGNING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES CONT.

The **2026 Highland Community Planning Partnership Annual Conference** was the most successful to date, bringing together more than 120 representatives from public, third sector and private sector organisations from across Highland. Centred on the theme of"**Community Planning in Practice**", the event provided an important opportunity for partners to reflect on shared challenges, showcase innovative practice and shape future priorities.

A particular strength of the conference was the increased involvement of the third sector partners, ensuring a wider range of perspectives informed discussions on poverty, inequality, housing, workforce development, health inequalities and community-led solutions. Through keynote presentations, panel discussions, local case studies and interactive workshops, participants explored how collective action can help address some of Highland's most significant challenges.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with the conference widely described as inspiring, engaging, informative and collaborative. Participants highlighted the quality of speakers, the relevance of the content, the opportunity to connect with partners and the strong focus on practical action and shared solutions.

Importantly, the conference was seen as more than a networking event. Feedback demonstrated that it strengthened relationships, reinforced shared priorities and generated momentum for future partnership activity. Attendees described the conference as a catalyst for future action and collaboration, highlighting the value of bringing partners together around a shared evidence base and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for Highland communities.

The success of the 2026 Conference has reinforced its role as a key annual opportunity for partners to connect, learn, challenge and collaborate, supporting the development of a stronger, more aligned and more ambitious CPP for the future.

Engage Highland (use this link to access the website: https://engage.highland.gov.uk/en-GB/) is The Highland Council's new online participation and engagement platform, designed to give people who live in, work in or visit Highland opportunities to influence decisions that affect their communities. The platform supports a wide range of engagement activities, including consultations, surveys, voting, discussions, events and community conversations, helping to strengthen local democracy and increase participation in decision-making.

By providing a single, accessible space for engagement, Engage Highland helps communities stay informed, contribute ideas and track the progress of projects and consultations that matter to them. The platform supports a more inclusive approach to participation, ensuring local voices can help shape policies, plans and investment decisions.

Engage Highland supports the CPP's commitment to community empowerment, place-based working and local decision-making by:

- Increasing opportunities for people to participate in decisions that affect their communities.
- Supporting more inclusive and accessible engagement across Highland.
- Improving communication and feedback between organisations and communities.
- Strengthening links between community priorities, service planning and decision-making.
- Providing a transparent way for people to follow consultations, view results and stay informed about local issues.

Together with initiatives such as BeConnected and the Project Bank, the platform helps create stronger connections between communities, partners and decision-makers, supporting a more collaborative approach to shaping Highland's future.

DELIVERY GROUPS
POVERTY REDUCTION

The Poverty Reduction Delivery Group (PRDG) continues to provide coordination for partnership activity aimed at reducing poverty across Highland. Working across the public and third sector, the Group supports delivery of the Local Child Poverty Action Report and wider actions that help improve family incomes, reduce the cost of living and strengthen support for those experiencing disadvantage.

During 2025-26, partners continued to support approaches including flexible childcare models in rural communities, whole family support, financial inclusion initiatives and targeted employability support. New childcare models, including community-based and family hub approaches, have been developed to help families access employment and training opportunities while responding to the additional challenges faced by rural communities.

A significant focus during the year has been supporting children, young people and families through preventative and early intervention approaches. Community mental health and wellbeing funding, Whole Family Wellbeing funding and local family support initiatives have helped reduce isolation, improve wellbeing and strengthen resilience within families and communities. Partners have also continued to support parents into employment and improve access to financial advice and income maximisation support.

The Group has contributed to the development of the Health Inequalities Indicators, strengthening the evidence available to understand need and target action. The work of the PRDG aligns closely with the recommendations of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission and contributes directly to the HOIP priorities by tackling inequalities, improving opportunities and supporting children, families and communities to thrive.

Key Highlights:

- 9,012 children and young people supported through Children and Young People's Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund projects.
- 46 community projects funded to support mental health, wellbeing, resilience and early intervention for children, young people and families.
- £334,000+ secured through Scottish Government funding to develop innovative childcare solutions and strengthen lived experience approaches to tackling poverty.
- 370 parents supported through employability services, helping families increase income and improve financial security.
- 74 families supported by Family Link Workers, with 65% of children showing improved school attendance.
- Local partnership networks established across all 9 Community Partnership areas, strengthening place-based responses to poverty and inequality.

Looking forward, the Group has developed a new Child and Family Poverty Action Plan for 2026-29, setting out a coordinated programme of partnership activity to address child and family poverty across Highland. The plan has been informed by a self-assessment process supported by the Improvement Service, which highlighted the need to take a broader view of child and family poverty, strengthen the use of data and evidence, and ensure that the voices of people with lived experience help shape future action. In response, the plan seeks to address the challenges identified in the 2026 Highland Children and Young People's Needs Assessment and PRDG has secured funding through the Child Poverty Accelerator Fund to explore effective approaches to engaging people with lived experience. The plan is also aligned with the Scottish Government's child poverty strategy, Best Start, Bright Futures, enabling partners not only to focus on the six priority family groups most at risk of poverty, but also to address the wider factors that contribute to child and family poverty, including housing, transport and access to services.

DELIVERY GROUPS
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Group (MHDG) plays a central role in delivering the HOIP by coordinating multi-agency action to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes across Highland. Bringing together partners from the public and third sector, the MHDG provides strategic leadership across a broad range of preventative, early intervention and recovery-focused activity through nine steering groups and programmes.

A significant milestone during 2025-2026 was the Action for All in Highland event, which brought together partners from across Highland to review progress, identify priorities and strengthen collaboration in support of the Scottish Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The event highlighted a number of key priorities, including strengthening support for those who support others, building community resilience, supporting rural communities, improving use of data, strengthening partnership working and ensuring that lived and living experience informs future activity. These priorities are now shaping the ongoing development of the MHDG work programme and structure.

Training and Workforce Development

Strengthening workforce capacity remains a key priority. During 2025-2026:

- 23 Suicide Prevention training courses were delivered to 192 participants.
- 32 Mental Health and Wellbeing courses were delivered to 297 participants.
- The After a Suicide Community Impact Film Resource was embedded within relevant training programmes to strengthen understanding of suicide bereavement and community support.

Communications and Engagement

Improving access to information and support remains an important element of the Group's work. Key developments included:

- Review and redevelopment of the Highland Mental Health and Wellbeing website to improve accessibility and navigation. Click the image to access the website.
- Distribution of quarterly newsletters to partners and communities across Highland.
- Development of printed crisis support resources to help individuals access support where digital access may be limited.

Suicide Prevention

The Suicide Prevention Steering Group continued to strengthen Highland's approach to suicide prevention, postvention and community recovery. Key achievements included:

- Delivery of the After a Suicide Project, funded through the Highland Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults.
- Production of printed resources for first responders supporting people affected by suicide.
- Development of public awareness resources, films and online materials addressing suicide bereavement, stigma and community impact.
- Delivery of Continuing the Conversation events across Highland.
- Recognition as a finalist in the Police Constables Excellence Awards 2026.
- Further development of the Highland Communities Impacted by Suicide Framework, which was activated on four occasions during 2025-2026, supporting coordinated, trauma-informed responses to communities affected by suicide.

DELIVERY GROUPS
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING CONT.

Children and Young People's Mental Health

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Steering Group continued to strengthen collaboration and investment in prevention and early intervention. Key achievements included:

- Development of the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan 2026-2027.
- Alignment with the Integrated Children's Services Plan 2026-2029 and the Scottish Government's Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework.
- Oversight of the Children and Young People's Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund, through which:
  - 46 projects received investment totalling £390,022.
  - 9,012 children and young people were supported.
  - More than 3,000 self-referrals were made.
  - High levels of improved wellbeing outcomes were reported.
  - Escalation to specialist services remained low.

Community Engagement and Funding

Partners within the MHDG also supported delivery of the Adult Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund administered through Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI). During the year:

- 147 applications were assessed.
- 47 community-led projects received funding.
- Total investment amounted to £851,520.

The fund supports activity designed to reduce social isolation, tackle loneliness and address mental health inequalities across Highland communities.

Highland Green Health Partnership

The Highland Green Health Partnership continued to demonstrate the positive links between nature, wellbeing and mental health. Key achievements included:

- Expansion of Nature Prescriptions, with over 100 healthcare staff completing training.
- Piloting of a trauma-informed learning programme for green health practitioners.
- Development of Enabling Connections through Green and Creative Spaces, supporting young people in Inverness and Lochaber.
- Contribution to national guidance on nature-based recovery and substance use.
- Delivery of Stepping Stones pilot projects in Kinlochleven and Ullapool.
- More than 90 participants engaged through the Kinlochleven pilot, with evidence of improved wellbeing, resilience and community connection.
- Delivery of Green Health Week, involving over 70 activities across Highland and contributing to more than 19,000 annual website visits.

Trauma-Informed Practice Case Study

A partnership initiative developed through the Badenoch and Strathspey Green Health Network brought together health professionals, third sector organisations and nature-based practitioners to explore how trauma-informed practice can be combined with nature connection activities.

Using outdoor learning activities in Boat of Garten, participants explored emotional regulation, self-care and trauma-informed approaches through practical, nature-based experiences. Feedback was highly positive, with participants highlighting the value of undertaking learning in an outdoor environment rather than a traditional classroom setting.

DELIVERY GROUPS
COMMUNITY SAFETY & RESILIENCE

The Community Safety and Resilience Delivery Group (CSRDG) continues to play an important role in supporting safer, stronger and more resilient communities across Highland. Bringing together public services, emergency responders, third sector organisations and community representatives, the Group provides a forum for partnership activity focused on prevention, preparedness, community safety and resilience.

During 2025-26, community resilience became an increasingly important focus for both local and strategic partners. Significant winter weather events, rising concerns around fuel poverty, climate-related risks and more recent wildfire incidents highlighted the importance of coordinated planning, effective communication and strong local partnerships. Community Partnerships across Highland increasingly prioritised local resilience activity, bringing together new partners and strengthening links between local communities and strategic organisations.

The Group continued to support a wide range of preventative and community safety initiatives throughout the year. This included work relating to community resilience planning, flood preparedness, wildfire awareness, suicide prevention, community justice, road safety and support for vulnerable individuals and families. Partners also worked collaboratively to strengthen local resilience arrangements through engagement events, awareness campaigns and information sharing.

The Group has helped strengthen links between emergency services, health services, the local authority, voluntary organisations and community groups, ensuring that communities are better connected to sources of support and advice before, during and after emergencies.

The work of the Group also contributes to wider CPP priorities around tackling inequalities and supporting vulnerable communities. Evidence from partners has highlighted that emergencies and community safety risks can have disproportionate impacts on those already experiencing disadvantage, including older people, people on low incomes and those living in remote and rural areas. As a result, resilience planning increasingly incorporates prevention, wellbeing and community capacity-building approaches alongside traditional emergency preparedness activity.

Looking ahead, the Group will continue to support the development of community resilience arrangements, strengthen partnership working and partners will work with Community Partnerships to build local capacity and preparedness. This work will become increasingly important as communities adapt to changing environmental, social and economic challenges across Highland.

Key Highlights:

- Community resilience identified as a priority across Community Partnerships.
- Strengthened collaboration between emergency services, public sector, third sector and community organisations.
- Increased focus on severe weather preparedness, wildfire resilience and fuel poverty impacts.
- Continued support for suicide prevention, community justice and wider community safety initiatives.
- Growing emphasis on prevention, community capacity building and local resilience planning.
- New partners engaged in resilience activity at both local and strategic levels.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026

During 2025-26, the nine Community Partnerships continued to strengthen their role as the local delivery mechanism of the CPP, bringing together communities, public services, voluntary organisations and elected members amongst others to identify priorities, influence decision-making and coordinate local action.

Strengthening Community Resilience

Community resilience emerged as a key priority during the year. Severe winter weather, increasing climate-related risks, fuel poverty concerns and significant wildfire incidents reinforced the importance of local preparedness and strong partnership working. Community Partnerships are broadening participation, engaging new partners and strengthening links between community groups and strategic resilience organisations to improve local preparedness and response.

Supporting Place-Based Planning

Community Partnerships continued to play a key role in supporting Area Place Plans and identifying local priorities for investment and action. Housing, transport, community facilities, health and wellbeing, climate adaptation and community resilience remained common themes across localities, helping inform wider partnership programmes including the Highland Investment Plan, Housing Challenge and Highland Wealth Fund.

Influencing Strategic Decision-Making

A growing strength of Community Partnerships has been their ability to provide local intelligence and community insight to inform strategic planning. Partnerships contributed to discussions relating to poverty reduction, health inequalities, community resilience, fuel poverty, children's services and the work of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission, helping ensure that local experiences are reflected in partnership priorities and decision-making.

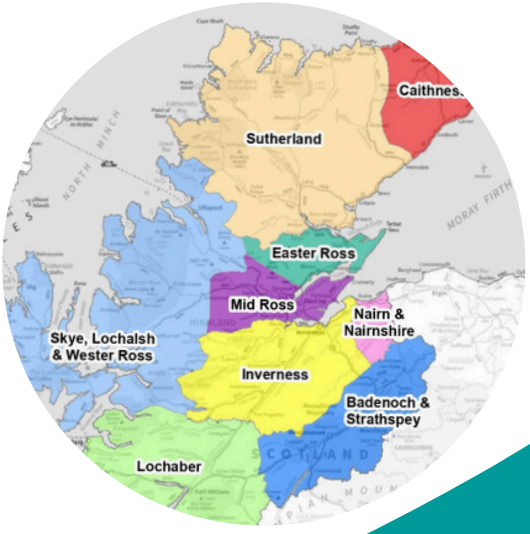
Strengthening Community Voice

Community engagement continued to be at the heart of Community Partnership activity. Through community events, local projects and partnership meetings, residents and community organisations have been supported to identify local priorities, shape services and influence future investment. This has strengthened community ownership of local priorities and reinforced the importance of place-based approaches.

Building Stronger Partnerships

Throughout the year, Community Partnerships continued to bring together a diverse range of local and strategic partners, creating stronger links between communities and public services. This collaborative approach has improved coordination, reduced duplication and enabled partners to respond more effectively to local challenges and opportunities.

Click the image to go to the Community Partnerships webpage.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Caithness Community Partnership

During 2025-26, Caithness focused on improving access to support for individuals and families experiencing financial hardship and strengthening community resilience across the area. Working with partners including Police Scotland, Caithness Citizens Advice Bureau, Community Councils and The Highland Council, the Partnership helped identify local needs, coordinate support and improve awareness of services available to residents.

A key achievement during the year was the mapping of food, fuel and energy support services across Caithness, including warm spaces, food-sharing facilities, food banks and emergency assistance. This work helped identify gaps in provision and improve access to information for individuals and families affected by poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. An information resource was produced and distributed locally to increase awareness of available support.

The Partnership also supported community resilience activity, working with Community Councils, SSEN, emergency planning partners and local communities to strengthen preparedness for severe weather, power outages and other emergencies. This work reinforced the importance of local networks, community-led planning and effective information sharing in supporting rural communities during periods of disruption.

Building on this work, Caithness is progressing plans to establish a local Poverty Forum, bringing together community organisations, public services, housing providers and people with lived experience.

Thurso has been selected as one of the pilot locations for the new Natural Capital Tool, and aims to support the Thurso Transformation Delivery Group, communities and partners with the provide social, environmental and economic benefits as HIP plans progress.

Case Study: Home-Start Caithness

Home-Start Caithness provides early intervention and family support to families with young children across Caithness, helping address some of the inequalities experienced by families living in remote and rural communities. Through home-visiting, group activities, volunteer support and partnership working, the organisation supports families experiencing poverty, social isolation, poor mental health, domestic abuse, disability and other complex challenges.

During 2025-26, the service demonstrated significant impact on family wellbeing. Evaluation showed that 98% of parents reported improved mental health, 99% felt less isolated, and 98% felt more confident managing their children's behaviour. The organisation worked closely with Health Visitors, Midwives, Family Teams, Social Work, Mental Health Services and a range of community partners to ensure families received coordinated, person-centred support.

The service plays an important role in reducing rural isolation and overcoming barriers to support by combining home visits, local groups and flexible digital contact. In addition, 31 trained volunteers contributed to supporting families while also developing their own skills, confidence and employability opportunities.

One parent described the support as having "undoubtedly prevented an escalation of issues", highlighting the value of early, relationship-based intervention in improving outcomes for children and families. The work of Home-Start Caithness contributes to the HOIP priorities of reducing inequalities, improving mental wellbeing, strengthening communities and supporting children and families to thrive.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross Community Partnership

During 2025-26, the Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross Community Partnership (SLWR) focused on ensuring that the significant economic opportunities arising from the Kishorn Port development deliver lasting benefits for local communities. Bringing together public, private and community sector partners, SWLR worked toorganise an event aimed at supporting the coorindation of planning and maximising opportunities relating to housing, infrastructure, employment and community sustainability.

A key achievement during the year was the development of a collaborative approach to responding to the scale of investment and growth anticipated in the area. Through the partnership event and stakeholder engagement, partners identified shared priorities and explored how future development can support local communities, address population challenges and strengthen long-term resilience.

SLWR has also played an important role in strengthening collaboration between community organisations, development trusts, local communities and public sector partners. More than 40 representatives attended initial partnership discussions, with follow-up engagement helping shape proposals for a multi-sector delivery group to coordinate future activity and investment.

Looking ahead, SLWR will continue to support local partners through thematic meetings, with an increased awareness of involving partners from across the wide geographic area covered by this Partnership.

Skye, Lochalsh & Wester Ross Community Partnership

Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations (SLCVO)

SLCVO are a key partner in the SLWR, they have continued to lead a significant programme of community-led collaboration through the Skye and Lochalsh Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care (HWWS) Collaboration. Working with communities, third sector organisations, NHS Highland and The Highland Council, the programme has focused on improving access to health, wellbeing, welfare and social care support while ensuring services are shaped by local need and lived experience.

A key achievement during the year was the development of the Skye and Lochalsh Caring Communities Plan 2025–2030, created through community engagement, service mapping, needs assessments and partnership working. The Plan provides a shared framework for addressing local priorities and strengthening prevention, early intervention and community-led approaches to support.

They also secured more than £220,000 to establish a network of Community Outreach Hubs, bringing together services including welfare advice, mental health support, carers support, family services and community organisations within accessible community locations. In addition, £147,014 was distributed to ten local third sector organisations to strengthen local support services and community capacity.

The work demonstrates the value of community-led partnership approaches, strengthening relationships between organisations, improving coordination between services and ensuring communities play a central role in shaping local solutions. It also highlights the important contribution of the third sector in reducing inequalities, building community resilience and supporting the delivery of the HOIP priorities.

Click the image to access the website.

SLCVO
Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations
Tigh Lisigarry, Bridge Road, Portree, IV51 9UP

Email: info@slcvo.org.uk

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Lochaber Community Partnership

Lochaber Community Partnership has focused activity this year on strengthening community engagement and partnership working through the delivery of the Partnering for Progress event in Fort William in November 2025. Bringing together residents, community groups, public services, businesses and third sector organisations, the event created opportunities for communities to engage directly with decision-makers, influence local priorities and improve awareness of services, support and future developments across Lochaber.

A key achievement during the year was the successful coordination of more than 30 organisations and over 40 exhibition stands at the event, covering topics including health and social care, transport, community development, mental health, education, employability, sustainability and economic development. The event strengthened relationships between organisations, improved visibility of local services and created opportunities for future collaborative working.

The Partnership event, delivered by Lochaber Community Partnership, The Highland Council and Fort William 2024, also provided a valuable platform for engagement on major developments affecting the area, including health and social care redesign, the new Belford Hospital and the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan. By bringing together partners from the public, private and third sectors, the event helped ensure local people could contribute to discussions that will shape the future of Lochaber.

Learning from the year highlighted the importance of place-based engagement in a large rural area. While the Partnering for Progress event demonstrated the value of bringing partners together, future activity will place greater emphasis on smaller, community-based engagement opportunities across Lochaber to ensure that engagement with local communities to participate and influence priorities.

Voluntary Action Lochaber

Voluntary Action Lochaber (VAL) are a key delivery partner in Lochaber, they have continued to strengthen the capacity, sustainability and voice of the third sector across Lochaber. As the local Third Sector Interface, VAL provides advice, guidance, training and practical support to charities, voluntary organisations and community groups, helping them deliver services, secure funding and respond to growing community need.

A key achievement during the year was the scale of support provided to local organisations. VAL supported 164 organisations, delivered 1,120 instances of one-to-one support, and provided assistance across governance, funding, organisational development and community planning. The organisation also delivered specialist payroll, bookkeeping and independent examination services, helping strengthen the resilience and sustainability of the local third sector.

The organisation also played an important role in ensuring the voice of the third sector was represented within local and strategic decision-making. During the year, representatives participated in 33 Community Planning meetings and 42 Health and Social Care meetings, helping ensure that community organisations and local priorities influenced partnership discussions and service planning.

Alongside capacity-building activity, VAL supported a range of community projects and initiatives, helping local organisations develop new services, secure investment and respond to local challenges. The work highlighted both the strength and the fragility of the local third sector, reinforcing the importance of collaboration, partnership working and sustainable funding in supporting community-led activity across Lochaber.

Use this link to access the website: https://www.valochaber.org/

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Fort William 2024

Fort William 2040 (FW2040) brings together public, private, third sector and community partners to deliver a shared place-based vision for the future of Fort William and Lochaber. During 2025-26, the programme focused on strengthening collaborative working, influencing major strategic developments, and ensuring local communities helped shape investment decisions affecting the area.

A key achievement during the year was FW2040's role in coordinating partnership input into major strategic projects, including the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan, the Greater Fort William Culture and Leisure Options Appraisal, town centre masterplan implementation, and future development opportunities at Blàr Mòr and the Belford Hospital site. Through its Programme Board, Transport Sub-Group and Community Stakeholder Group, FW2040 provided a mechanism for partners to work collectively, align priorities, and develop a shared understanding of future opportunities.

FW2040 also supported work aimed at tackling inequalities and improving access to services. The completion of the Culture and Leisure Options Appraisal identified opportunities to improve access to affordable, flexible and inclusive cultural, sporting and community facilities within Fort William, recognising their contribution to preventative health, wellbeing and reducing social isolation throughout the whole of Lochaber.

Public engagement and stakeholder consultation which are a cornerstone of the FW2040 approach, were undertaken specifically as part of the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan, ensuring local people, businesses, and organisations could influence transport options that will shape the area's long-term sustainability and economic growth. FW2040 also contributed to the organisation of the Partnering for Progress event held in the town in November 2025. An event which gave the opportunity for a wide range of organisations to come together with each other and the public to share information, provide feedback, and foster greater collaboration.

Looking ahead, FW2040 will continue to act as a key partnership mechanism for coordinating investment and regeneration activity within Fort William. Priorities include progressing transport and town centre improvements, supporting the next stages of culture and leisure planning, aligning with wider health and social care redesign, and continuing to champion collaborative approaches that deliver sustainable growth, improve quality of life and help reduce inequalities across the whole of Lochaber.

Click on the image to go to the website.

2020 2030 FW2040 2050

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Case Study: Stepping Stones, Kinlochleven

The Stepping Stones project demonstrates how community-led approaches can support mental health, wellbeing and prevention within rural communities. Developed through the Highland Green Health Partnership, the initiative helps people connect with nature-based activities and local community opportunities that support positive physical and mental wellbeing. The model was designed in response to the challenges faced by rural communities, where traditional health and social care services can struggle to provide preventative support and ongoing community connections.

In 2025, Kinlochleven Community Trust secured funding through the Adult Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund to appoint a dedicated Green Health Coordinator and pilot the Stepping Stones model within the community. Working alongside the Kinlochleven Community Action Group, the project identified local activities, organisations and opportunities that could act as "stepping stones" to improved wellbeing, helping connect people with community-based and nature-based support close to home.

Early findings from the pilot have been positive, demonstrating the potential of community-led, preventative approaches to improving health and wellbeing outcomes.

Building on this success, a parallel pilot is now underway in Ullapool through the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, focusing on families and young children. Subject to evaluation, guidance and support will be developed to help communities across Highland adapt and implement the model, with Community Partnerships expected to play a key role in supporting future delivery and ensuring it reflects local priorities.

Mid Ross Community Partnership

The Mid Ross Community Partnership focused on supporting the delivery of the new Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan during 2025-2026, helping ensure that community priorities are translated into practical action. Developed through extensive community engagement and formally adopted in 2025, the Area Place Plan identifies local priorities relating to community wellbeing, transport, community safety, youth provision, environmental improvement and economic opportunity.

A key achievement during the year was the delivery of a range of place-based initiatives, including community safety and CCTV reviews, traffic calming measures, environmental improvement projects, community resource mapping and youth engagement activities designed to improve opportunities and facilities for young people. These actions have helped strengthen local communities and ensure that community voices continue to influence decision-making.

The Partnership also strengthened local governance arrangements through the integration of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan Delivery Group into the wider Community Partnership structure. This has improved alignment between place planning and community planning priorities, strengthened communication between partners and created a more coordinated approach to delivering local priorities.

The work highlights the value of shared ownership, community engagement and collaborative partnership working in delivering local change. While challenges remain around transport, youth provision and securing resources, the strengthened partnership approach provides a solid foundation for future progress across the Mid Ross area.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Sutherland Community Partnership

During 2025-26, the Sutherland Community Partnership reviewed its priorities, arrangements and delivery structures to strengthen its contribution to local priorities and outcomes. Through partner engagement and evidence gathering, the Partnership identified three priorities for the area: Housing, Employment and Poverty, reflecting the key challenges facing communities across Sutherland.

A key achievement was the introduction of a refreshed partnership structure, including new thematic sub-groups focused on Poverty Reduction, Community Wealth Building, Climate Adaptation, and Transport and Resilience. This has encouraged greater partner engagement, strengthened shared ownership and improved coordination across partners working to address local priorities.

The Partnership also strengthened alignment with the Sutherland Area Place Plan and wider initiatives including the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, North Highland Employability Partnership and NorthWest2045, helping improve collaboration and promote joined-up responses to local challenges.

A further milestone was securing Community Regeneration Fund support for a part-time Community Support Officer post hosted by Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust, helping strengthen community engagement and delivery of partnership priorities across Sutherland, recruitment was underway at the time of writing.

Case Study: Sutherland Food Convention

The Sutherland Food Convention brought together community organisations, crofters, landowners, producers and public sector partners to explore food security, sustainability and climate resilience across Sutherland. The event was delivered through collaboration between the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust, the Sutherland Community Partnership Food Group and Planet Sutherland, with support from the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub.

Held as part of the 2025 Climate Festival, the Convention highlighted opportunities to strengthen local food production, improve food resilience and develop community-led solutions to future challenges. Discussions identified priorities including local food storage, community food-growing initiatives, improved infrastructure and greater collaboration between organisations.

A key outcome was a shared commitment to further action. Building on the event, Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust has initiated a food-growing project focused on underused land and locally adapted seed varieties, while partners are exploring a future"Can Sutherland Feed Sutherland?" study to assess opportunities for increasing local food production and resilience.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Nairn & Nairnshire Community Partnership

During 2025-26, the Nairn and Nairnshire Community Partnership focused on improving community wellbeing, safety and resilience by bringing partners together to respond to issues affecting local communities. A key priority during the year was addressing concerns around anti-social behaviour, which had emerged as a significant issue for residents across Nairn and Nairnshire.

The Partnership facilitated discussions with Police Scotland, housing services and other partners to improve understanding of local issues and identify opportunities for more coordinated responses. This work strengthened information sharing between agencies and supported a renewed commitment to collaborative working to address concerns impacting local quality of life.

A key outcome was the introduction of housing-led community drop-in sessions, providing accessible opportunities for residents to raise concerns, access advice and connect with support services. The Partnership continues to explore ways to expand and promote these sessions, helping to strengthen community engagement and improve access to support at a local level.

The work highlights the value of early intervention, community engagement and partnership working in addressing complex local challenges. By strengthening relationships between services and communities, the Partnership is helping to create safer, more connected and resilient communities across Nairn and Nairnshire.

Easter Ross Community Partnership

The Easter Ross Community Partnership strengthened its place-based approach significantly during this year by bringing together locality planning, district planning, Area Place Planning and other key areas of work within a single partnership structure. This streamlined approach has improved coordination between partners and supported more effective delivery of local priorities across Easter Ross.

A key achievement during the year was the continued implementation of the Easter Ross Area Place Plan (Our Place, Our Future), ensuring community priorities remain at the centre of discussions and priorities. Activity focused on community engagement, sustainable travel initiatives and improving alignment between planning processes, funding opportunities and service delivery.

The Partnership also strengthened collaboration through dedicated People, Place and Prosperity, and Transport Forum thematic sub-groups. These groups have provided a stronger focus on reducing inequalities, supporting communities and residents, improving access to services, promoting employability and addressing local transport challenges.

Partnership working remains a key strength, bringing together public sector and third sector organisations to deliver shared priorities. By improving coordination, reducing duplication and strengthening participation, the Partnership is helping to create more resilient and sustainable communities across Easter Ross. Future plans include street audits and a Community Networking Event.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Inverness Community Partnership

Inverness Community Partnership undertook a significant programme of partnership renewal, moving from geographically based Community Action Groups to a more flexible thematic approach focused on key issues affecting Inverness communities during 2025-2026. Initial priorities included youth wellbeing and opportunities, food poverty and hate crime, helping partners focus effort on areas where collaborative action could have the greatest impact and added value.

A key achievement during the year was strengthening links between community planning, Planet Youth, Whole Family Wellbeing, community safety, employability and community learning and development activity. This improved coordination between organisations, reduced duplication and supported more joined-up responses to challenges facing children, young people and families.

The Partnership promoted community-led approaches to improving neighbourhoods and strengthening community connections. Activity included support for youth engagement, employability initiatives, community safety projects and the No Place for Hate campaign, alongside efforts to improve community representation, participation and inclusion across the city.

Inverness City piloted the development of a new Safety Links App over the Festive Period of 2025, the App is available on smart devices and here using this link: https://local.safetylinks.co.uk/inverness. Information available includes: Emergency & Medical Helplines; Licensed Taxi Numbers & Marshal Information; Kessock Bridge Status & Local Bus Information.

An area of learning from the year was the value of focusing on a small number of shared priorities and coordinating existing activity rather than creating new structures. Thematic working, improved action tracking and stronger links with local partners have provided a stronger foundation for future delivery.

Inverness Community Partnership

Natural Capital Tool Case Study: Merkinch, Inverness

Merkinch, one of Highland's most deprived communities, has been selected as one of the pilot locations for the new Natural Capital Tool, an innovative approach designed to help communities better understand, value and utilise the natural assets around them to improve wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

The pilot aims to explore how access to spaces, community assets and the natural environment can contribute to improved health, wellbeing, community resilience and local opportunities. By bringing together community knowledge, local data and partnership working, the project aims to identify practical actions that can maximise the benefits of nature for residents while informing future investment and service planning.

The pilot recognises that communities experiencing the greatest inequalities do not always benefit equally from the natural assets on their doorstep. By testing the tool in Merkinch, partners hope to better understand how nature-based solutions can support healthier lifestyles, strengthen community connections, improve local environments and contribute to tackling long-term inequalities.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS UPDATE 2025 - 2026 CONT.

Badenoch and Strathspey Community Partnership

During 2025-26, the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Partnership focused on tackling inequalities, supporting community resilience, improving health and wellbeing, strengthening employability and ensuring local communities have a stronger voice in shaping future investment and service delivery.

An achievement during the year was the development of the Area Place Plan, providing a shared framework for identifying and progressing community priorities. The Partnership also strengthened collaboration around poverty reduction, financial wellbeing, employability and whole-family support, working with partners including Citizens Advice Bureau, NHS Highland, Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey, Skills Development Scotland and the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme.

Community resilience and climate adaptation are important themes. The Partnership supported engagement with the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub, Green Health initiatives, Nature Prescriptions and activities designed to improve community preparedness, wellbeing and connections to the natural environment.

A significant outcome of Partnership discussions was the re-establishment of the Badenoch and Strathspey Transport Forum. The Forum has strengthened collaboration around public transport, active travel, accessibility and connectivity, helping progress one of the area's most consistently identified priorities.

Throughout the year, partners recognised the importance of shared intelligence, community voice and collaborative working in addressing interconnected issues such as poverty, transport, employability, housing and community resilience. The Partnership will continue to build on this work through delivery of the Area Place Plan, development of the Transport Forum and continued support for community-led approaches that contribute to the HOIP.

Badenoch and Strathspey Transport Forum

Established in June 2025, the Forum was set up in response to priorities identified by the community and the Community Partnership. It brings together community representatives, transport operators, public services, accessibility groups, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and Highland Council to develop a more coordinated and integrated approach to transport across the area.

A key achievement during the year has been the creation of a dedicated mechanism for addressing transport challenges affecting residents, businesses and visitors. Priorities identified include:

- Improving integration between bus, rail and community transport services.
- Strengthening accessibility and active travel infrastructure.
- Improving access to healthcare, education and employment through better transport connections.
- Exploring demand-responsive and visitor transport solutions to support both communities and tourism.

The Forum has helped identify practical opportunities for improvement. Early work has contributed to service changes that improved bus-rail connectivity, resulting in an increase of 40 additional passengers on one revised Stagecoach route. Partners are also progressing a comprehensive transport network review and exploring innovative transport models that could be adapted for Badenoch and Strathspey.

The Forum demonstrates how place-based partnership working can help address one of the most significant challenges facing rural communities. By bringing together communities, transport providers and public sector partners, it is helping improve connectivity, accessibility and opportunities while supporting the HOIP priorities.

DELIVERY PROGAMMES

Armed Forces Families

The Military Liaison Group (Education) continued to bring together partners from education, public services and the Armed Forces community to improve outcomes for children and young people from Armed Forces families across Highland. Through collaborative planning and targeted support, the partnership helps address the challenges associated with deployment, family separation and transitions between schools and communities.

A key strength of the group's work is its commitment to co-production. Children, young people and families have been directly involved in developing resources and support materials, ensuring they are informed by lived experience and reflect the issues that matter most to Armed Forces families. Rescources can be found using this link: https://armedforcesfamilieshighland.wordpress.com/

Partnership working has enabled the group to identify emerging needs, coordinate support and take a preventative approach that promotes wellbeing and reduces the impact of transition on children's educational experiences and wider outcomes.

The work contributes to the HOIP priorities by supporting the wellbeing, inclusion and participation of children and young people while strengthening connections between services and communities. It also demonstrates the value of collaborative working and the importance of placing lived experience at the centre of service development to improve outcomes for Armed Forces families across Highland.

Planet Youth Highland

During 2025-26, Planet Youth Highland continued to strengthen its community-led approach to improving outcomes for children and young people by placing prevention, local evidence and youth voice at the centre of decision-making. Community Action Groups were established around 13 secondary school communities, bringing together schools, third sector organisations, public services and local residents to identify priorities and develop action plans based on the experiences of young people.

Using survey data from S3 and S4 pupils, local partnerships identified key risk and protective factors affecting health and wellbeing. The programme focuses on prevention, helping communities strengthen positive relationships, organised activities, community connections and supportive environments before problems become established.

Partnership working has been central to delivery. Support from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund has enabled dedicated third sector involvement in every locality, helping communities develop projects that promote wellbeing, inclusion, participation and positive opportunities for young people.

The programme has also supported workforce development through training and resources for parents, carers and professionals on topics including self-harm awareness, suicide prevention, substance use and emotional wellbeing. Emerging evidence highlights common concerns across Highland, including mental health, alcohol and substance use, excessive screen time, poor sleep, bullying, transport barriers and access to activities. By empowering communities to respond collectively to these issues, Planet Youth is helping to build healthier, safer and more resilient communities while supporting the HOIP priorities.

DELIVERY PROGAMMES

Whole Family Wellbeing Programme

The Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP) plays a significant role by strengthening prevention, early intervention and whole-family support across Highland. Aligned to national priorities including GIRFEC, The Promise, UNCRC and the Scottish Government's Whole Family Wellbeing approach, the programme is helping create a more joined-up, preventative and relationship-based system of support for children, young people and families.

An achievement during 2025-2026 has been the establishment and strengthening of Local Partnership Network Groups across all Community Partnership localities. These networks bring together public services, third sector organisations, community groups and families to identify local priorities, develop collaborative solutions and test innovative approaches to family support.

Key Achievements:

- Strengthened partnership infrastructure across all nine Community Partnership localities through Local Partnership Network Groups.
- Invested over £500,000 in community-led projects and partnership developments through Element 1 small grants and collaborative partnership activity.
- Supported the development of new Family Hub models, community-based family support approaches, inclusive childcare pilots and wellbeing initiatives across Highland.
- Enabled communities, families and practitioners to shape local priorities through place-based partnership working and co-design.
- Strengthened workforce development through Generations Working Together, Parents Under Pressure (PuP) and Family Links, increasing practitioner confidence and capability in delivering relationship-based support.
- Established a strong culture of testing, learning and improvement through Quality Improvement methodologies and collaborative partnership approaches.

Key Highlights:

- Number of Individuals Supported - 10,862
- Number of Families Supported - 1,195
- Number of Children Supported - 5,989
- Mother under 25 years Supported - 117
- Lone Parent Families Supported - 336
- Families that include Children or Adults with a Disability Supported - 255
- Larger Families Supported - 108
- Minority Ethnic Families Supported - 33
- Families with a child under 1 year Supported - 235
- Others Supported - 32

Family Links

One of the programme's most significant achievements has been the development of Family Links, a partnership between Care and Learning Alliance, Home-Start East Highland and Thriving Families. Developed in response to concerns around school attendance and family wellbeing, the model provides preventative, relationship-based support for families experiencing complex challenges.

DELIVERY PROGRAMMES

Whole Family Wellbeing Programme Cont.

During 2025-2026:

- 74 families were referred.
- 68 families actively engaged.
- 97 children and young people and 73 adults received support.
- Around 65% of families showed measurable improvements in school attendance and engagement.
- Wellbeing improvements were reported for 85-90% of children and young people and 70-75% of parents and carers.

Learning from Family Links is now informing the expansion of Family Links 2.0 and wider family support developments across Highland.

Workforce Development and System Change

The programme has invested heavily in workforce capability and leadership. Through the Parents Under Pressure (PuP) programme, 25 practitioners from statutory and third-sector organisations received accredited training to strengthen therapeutic and relationship-based practice. In addition, the partnership with Generations Working Together supported 37 practitioners through structured learning, helping to build confidence, strengthen partnerships and promote preventative approaches across communities.

Impact and Learning

Across Highland, common priorities identified by families and partners include poverty, mental health and wellbeing, social isolation, childcare, rural access to services and the need for earlier support. The programme has demonstrated that the most effective solutions are locally led, relationship-based and delivered through strong partnership working.

Through investment in local partnerships, community capacity, workforce development and innovative tests of change, the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme is helping to create the conditions for long-term transformational change. It continues to strengthen collaboration, improve access to support and build a more connected, preventative and family-centred system across Highland.

Click on the image below to go to the webpage.

DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

Highland Energy Community Partnership (HECP)

The Highland Energy Community Partnership (HECP) is a community-led initiative working to tackle fuel poverty, improve home energy efficiency and support the transition to low-carbon heating across rural Highland communities. Bringing together community organisations, public sector partners and energy specialists, the partnership focuses on practical solutions to the unique challenges faced by remote and off-grid households.

The Partnership is co-ordinated by Changeworks in collaboration with six Highland Community partners: Lochbroom and Ullapool Community Trust; Coigach Community Development Company; Transition Black Isle; GALE; Garve & District; Contin, Tarvie & Jamestown Projects.

During its first year, the partnership delivered 223 one-to-one energy advice sessions and home visits and engaged almost 300 residents through 29 community events. Through personalised support, householders received advice on energy efficiency, retrofit opportunities, available funding and ways to reduce energy costs. The partnership is helping address the causes of fuel poverty while supporting longer-term housing improvement and climate objectives. Between October 2025 and January 2026, project activity contributed to estimated carbon savings of 938 tonnes and increased awareness of retrofit and low-carbon heating opportunities.

Community involvement has been central to delivery, with organisations across Ross-shire and Wester Ross working alongside Changeworks, The Highland Council, Home Energy Scotland and the University of the Highlands and Islands to develop a coordinated regional approach. The project demonstrates how community-led collaboration can reduce inequalities, improve wellbeing, strengthen resilience and support a fair transition to net zero.

In April 2026, the Highland Energy Community Partnership (HECP) published a report exploring the experiences of local installers, tradespeople and small businesses supporting the delivery of energy-efficiency improvements across the Highlands. The report highlighted both the opportunities and challenges within the rural retrofit supply chain, recognising the important role local businesses play in delivering heat pumps, solar technologies, insulation measures and other improvements that help reduce fuel poverty and support the transition to net zero. Click the image below to access the report.

DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership

The Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP) continues to bring together partners from health, social care, the third sector, community organisations and people with lived and living experience to address alcohol and drug-related harm across Highland. Recognising the links between substance use, trauma, poverty and health inequalities, the Partnership focuses on prevention, early intervention, harm reduction and recovery.

During 2025-26, the Partnership supported a range of initiatives designed to improve access to support and reduce barriers experienced by individuals and families. These included community-based projects, independent advocacy, family support services, transport-to-recovery initiatives, maternity comfort packs and preventative programmes such as Planet Youth.

A key strength of the Partnership's work has been its commitment to collaboration and participation. Investment in third sector organisations has expanded local delivery capacity, while the development of a Lived Experience Panel is helping ensure that people directly affected by alcohol and drug use play a greater role in shaping services, commissioning and strategic priorities.

Alongside direct support services, the Partnership has continued to strengthen prevention and harm reduction activity through improved partnership working, early warning systems and the promotion of rights-based, trauma-informed approaches. Through this work, HADP is helping to reduce inequalities, strengthen recovery pathways and support healthier, more resilient communities across Highland.

End of Life Care Together Partnership

The End of Life Care Together Partnership aims to improve palliative and end-of-life care across Highland through collaboration between Highland Hospice, NHS Highland, Marie Curie, Macmillan Cancer Support and a range of community and third sector partners. The partnership is helping shift the balance of care from hospital settings to homes and communities, ensuring people receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time. Find out more using this link: https://highlandhospice.org/what-we-do/end-of-life-care-together.

During 2025-26, the partnership expanded community-based services, including the Highland Hospice 24/7 Palliative Care Helpline, which handled around 1,500 calls, providing timely advice and support to people receiving care in community settings. Flexible home-based care services have also enabled more people to remain at home and reduced reliance on acute hospital care.

Evidence from the programme demonstrates significant impact. People accessing the Hospice Helpline spent an average of six fewer days in hospital at the end of life, while those supported through the Palliative Care Response Service spent around 20 fewer days in hospital. The 250 people supported through the service experienced a combined reduction of 3,718 hospital bed days, representing an estimated saving of £3.4 million while improving the experience of care for patients and families.

Working closely with GP practices and community organisations across Highland, the partnership is strengthening local support networks, improving access to palliative care and enabling more people to receive care in the setting that best meets their needs. This work demonstrates the value of person-centred, community-based care in improving outcomes for individuals and families while making more effective use of public resources.

DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

Highland Health and Social Care Partnership

The Highland Health and Social Care Partnership develops integrated, community-based approaches that support people to live independently, safely and well within their own communities. Through the Highland Care Model, adult social care, mental health services and allied health professional-led redesign programmes, the Partnership has focused on prevention, early intervention and reducing reliance on more intensive forms of care.

A key achievement during the year was the development of the Partnership's first Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy and Market Facilitation Plan, alongside emerging place-based commissioning activity in Lochaber. This work has strengthened collaboration between health, housing, social care, providers, communities and third sector organisations to ensure services are designed around local needs and community assets.

The Partnership also expanded preventative and community-based support. Mental Health and Learning Disability Services improved access to wellbeing resources, strengthened annual health checks and increased involvement of people with lived experience in service design. New resources, including the Highland Mental Wellbeing Directory, have helped improve access to information and support across Highland communities. Progress has also been made through the expansion of Discharge to Assess approaches led by Allied Health Professionals. By supporting people to recover and regain independence within their own homes, the programme has reduced dependence on formal care services and demonstrated the value of reablement and early intervention.

Partnership working with advocacy organisations, carers, housing services, providers and third sector organisations has remained central to delivery. Through co-production and lived experience groups, people are increasingly shaping service development and future commissioning priorities, helping create more responsive, sustainable and community-focused models of care across Highland.

Highland Community Justice Partnership

The Highland Community Justice Partnership (HCJP) continues to bring together partners from across the justice system, public services and the third sector to address the underlying causes of offending behaviour. Recognising the links between poverty, trauma, poor health and social exclusion, the Partnership focuses on prevention, rehabilitation and person-centred support to help create safer communities.

A key area of work during 2025-26 was strengthening support for people at risk of entering or re-entering the justice system. The nationally recognised Custody Link Worker Project, delivered in partnership with Police Scotland and Highland Third Sector Interface, provided early intervention and practical support, receiving 121 referrals from custody settings across Highland.

The Partnership also strengthened links between justice, housing, employability, health and family support services, recognising the importance of stable housing, positive relationships and employment opportunities in reducing reoffending and supporting long-term recovery.

Alongside this, HCJP progressed work to develop restorative justice approaches across Highland and increased engagement with victims, survivors and people with lived experience to help shape future services and priorities. Through collaborative, trauma-informed and community-based approaches, the Partnership is helping reduce inequalities, support rehabilitation and create safer, more resilient communities across Highland. Click the image to go to the website.

Highland Community Justice Partnership

DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

Sported Westminster Foundation Project - Connecting Communities

The Sported Westminster Foundation Project – Connecting Communities (use this link to find out more: https://sported.org.uk/scotland/) is helping strengthen the capacity and resilience of community organisations supporting children and young people across rural Highland. Through tailored support, funding opportunities, volunteer expertise and networking, the programme helps local groups build sustainability and expand impact.

During its first year, the Highland network grew to include 21 community organisations, six statutory partners and three additional partner organisations, strengthening connections between local groups, public services and the third sector. Fourteen organisations secured grants totalling £14,000, while others benefited from specialist volunteer placements and organisational development support.

The project focuses on organisations delivering sport, physical activity and community-based opportunities for children and young people. By supporting governance, funding, volunteer development and community engagement, the programme helps ensure continued access to activities that improve wellbeing, confidence, belonging and participation.

Partnership working with organisations including NHS Highland, High Life Highland, The Highland Council, Planet Youth and Scottish Rugby has strengthened local networks and improved coordination. By investing in community organisations, the project is helping build more resilient communities while expanding opportunities for young people across Highland.

Community Learning and Development Partnership

Community Learning and Development (CLD) supports people, families and communities across Highland through learning, participation and community action. Working across Adult Learning, Youth Work and Community Development, CLD helps build skills, confidence and wellbeing while reducing inequalities and increasing community participation.

During 2025-26, partners focused on three priorities: Mental Health and Wellbeing; Voice, Influence and Participation; and Employment, Training and Volunteering.

Adult Learning delivered over 330,000 learning hours, supporting more than 300 learners each month from 34 nationalities. Evidence shows that 90% of learners reported increased confidence and 87% achieved at least one learning goal within three months.

Youth Work engaged over 2,300 young people, supported 798 nationally recognised awards, and enabled more than 400 young people to participate in youth voice and democracy activities, including influencing local decision-making through the Highland Youth Parliament and Scottish Youth Parliament.

Community voice remained central to delivery, with Place Plans, learner participation projects and youth engagement initiatives helping people influence local priorities and services. Partnership working also continued to strengthen delivery, with public, third sector and community partners working together to improve outcomes and opportunities across Highland.

Progress recognised by Education Scotland highlighted stronger partnership working, improved links between schools and youth work services, and growing collaboration across the sector.

Through lifelong learning, youth work and community development, CLD continues to make a significant contribution to helping individuals and communities build skills, improve wellbeing and increase participation across Highland.

DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

Highland Integrated Children's Services Partnership

During 2025-26, the Highland Integrated Children's Services Partnership continued to strengthen collaborative approaches that support children, young people and families to thrive. Bringing together partners from health, education, social work, police, third sector organisations and communities, the Partnership focused on prevention, early intervention, children's rights and whole-family support.

A key area of progress was the continued development of children's rights and participation. During the year, 495 Integrated Impact Assessments were completed, including 118 relating to children's services, while new participation approaches helped ensure children and young people play a greater role in shaping decisions affecting their lives.

Strong progress was also made in improving multi-agency practice through Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), with 141 practitioners completing multi-agency training and new guidance, planning processes and locality forums strengthening support for children and families. Investment in quality assurance, workforce development and safeguarding also led to improvements in child protection practice, with additional funding secured for Bairns' Hoose and Contextual Safeguarding Services.

Prevention and early intervention remained central to delivery. More than 800 families attended the Vision 26 Family Fun Day and associated engagement events, helping raise awareness of support services and strengthen partnership working. Meanwhile, the continued expansion of Planet Youth saw 2,260 young people participate in the 2025 survey, supporting community-led action to improve wellbeing and address the underlying causes of inequality.

The Integrated Children’s Service Planning Board launched the new Highland Children’s Services Plan in August 2026. The Plan has been developed in collaboration with public sector bodies and third sector organisations and is informed by both the voice and testimony of children, young people and families and the needs of our communities as articulated through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2026) and The Children’s Voice Report. Click the image below to access the report.

Together, this work is helping to strengthen children's rights, improve family wellbeing and create better long-term outcomes for children, young people and families across Highland.

PARTNERS

Highland Third Sector Interface

Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults

The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults continues to be a significant example of partnership-led investment delivering positive outcomes for individuals and communities across Highland. CLick the image below to find out further information about the Year 5 Fund. Managed by Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) in partnership with the CPP, the Fund supports community organisations to tackle social isolation, loneliness, mental health inequalities and the wider impacts of poverty and disadvantage.

Since its launch in 2021, the Fund has invested more than £3.9 million in Highland, supporting 331 grants across 304 organisations and creating opportunities for communities to develop locally led solutions that improve wellbeing and strengthen resilience. During 2025-2026 alone, £851,520 was invested through 47 grants, supporting projects across Highland communities and targeting those most at risk of poor mental health and wellbeing.

The Fund is delivered through a strong partnership approach involving representatives from the Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Group, Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, local Third Sector Interfaces and community organisations. This collaborative model helps ensure investment is informed by evidence, aligns with priorities and reaches communities experiencing the greatest inequalities.

Supporting People

A key strength of the Fund is its focus on prevention, early intervention and addressing inequalities. Funded projects targeted a broad range of communities and groups facing increased risk of poor mental health and wellbeing, including:

- People experiencing social isolation and loneliness.
- Individuals affected by poverty and socio-economic disadvantage.
- People living with long-term health conditions and disability.
- Unpaid carers.
- People affected by trauma and bereavement.
- Older people.
- Young adults.
- Minority ethnic communities.
- LGBTQ+ communities.
- People living in rural and geographically isolated areas.

The largest proportion of funded activity focused on tackling social isolation and loneliness (46 projects), followed by poverty and inequality (30 projects) and suicide prevention (22 projects), demonstrating strong alignment with the HOIP priorities around health, wellbeing and tackling inequalities.

Supporting Place

The Fund helps communities develop and deliver solutions that are rooted in local needs and community assets. Investment was distributed across Highland, supporting projects in:

- Inner Moray Firth.
- Sutherland.
- Skye and Lochalsh.
- Lochaber.
- Caithness.
- Badenoch and Strathspey.
- Highland-wide initiatives.

PARTNERS

Highland Third Sector Interface Cont.

Many projects specifically addressed the challenges associated with rurality, geographic isolation and access to services, helping strengthen community resilience and ensuring support reaches people who may otherwise face barriers to accessing services.

A notable feature of the programme has been the continued investment in collaborative working. Collaborative grants represented 42% of total investment, supporting organisations to work together around shared challenges and deliver greater impact for communities. More than £526,000 (62%) of funding was committed through multi-year awards, helping provide longer-term stability and sustainability for community organisations.

Supporting Prosperity

The Fund also contributes to wider prosperity outcomes by strengthening the third sector and supporting community capacity. Successful projects predicted involvement from approximately 490 volunteers, demonstrating the significant additional value generated through community participation and volunteering activity.

The programme continues to invest in skills, organisational development and community leadership through dedicated capacity-building grants, helping organisations become more resilient and better equipped to respond to emerging needs within their communities.

Demand and Impact

Demand for the Fund highlights both the importance of the programme and the scale of unmet need across Highland. During 2025-2026:

- 147 applications were received.
- Over £3.4 million was requested.
- 47 grants were awarded.
- £851,520 was distributed.

Additional Scottish Government investment provided a further £143,000 for Highland organisations, enabling ten additional projects to receive support that would otherwise have been unable to proceed.

Community Planning Contribution

The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund demonstrates the value of community planning in practice. By bringing together public sector partners, third sector organisations, communities and funders, the programme supports innovative, community-led approaches that improve wellbeing, reduce loneliness, strengthen resilience and address inequalities. The Fund contributes directly to the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity, while evidencing how collaborative investment can create lasting benefits for individuals, families and communities across Highland.

HIGHLAND
THIRD
SECTOR
INTERFACE

PARTNERS

Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)

HITRANS plays a key role in improving connectivity, accessibility and sustainable transport across Highland and the wider Highlands and Islands. Following ministerial approval of the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy 2025-2045, the partnership progressed a major programme of investment aimed at improving access to employment, education, healthcare and essential services, while supporting inclusive economic growth, reducing inequalities and accelerating transport decarbonisation.

During 2025-2026, HITRANS delivered an expanded People and Place Programme supported by £2.479 million from Transport Scotland, alongside a further £1.054 million through the Active Travel Infrastructure Fund. Investment supported active travel infrastructure, inclusive cycling initiatives through HI-Bike, sustainable travel behaviour change programmes and community-led transport projects. Significant progress was also made in public transport improvements, electric vehicle infrastructure, integrated mobility projects, low-carbon aviation initiatives and the development of the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan.

Recognising the important relationship between transport and health outcomes, HITRANS also began work on a Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan in partnership with NHS partners. This work reflects a growing understanding of transport as a key determinant of access to healthcare, wellbeing and opportunity, particularly for rural and island communities.

Partnership working remains central to delivery, with HITRANS bringing together local authorities, Transport Scotland, NHS Boards, community organisations, transport operators, universities and industry partners to develop and deliver projects that no single organisation could achieve alone. Through regional collaboration, the partnership has secured significant external investment, shared expertise and delivered practical transport solutions that improve accessibility, support sustainable communities and strengthen economic resilience across Highland and the wider Highlands and Islands.

A key lesson from this work is the value of integrating transport planning with wider priorities including health, economic development, climate action and community planning. By combining strategic regional leadership with community-informed delivery, HITRANS continues to demonstrate how transport investment can contribute to the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity.

Click the image below to go to the website.

HI TRANS

HE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP

PARTNERS

Highland Council

Transformation and Investment

During 2025-2026, The Highland Council continued to progress a significant programme of transformation, investment and place-based delivery designed to improve outcomes for communities across Highland. Through the Highland Investment Plan, Future Operating Model and Area Place Plans, the Council has strengthened its focus on community-led services, integrated delivery and long-term investment aligned to the priorities of the HOIP.

A key achievement has been the continued development of the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), one of the most significant long-term public infrastructure programmes ever undertaken across Highland. With planned investment of £756 million over five years, the programme is supporting the renewal of schools, community facilities, transport infrastructure and public assets while helping create the foundations for sustainable and resilient communities.

Central to both the Highland Investment Plan and the Future Operating Model is the development of Community Points of Delivery (PODs). These integrated community hubs will bring together services, facilities and community activity within locally designed spaces, improving access to support while strengthening local communities and reducing barriers to services, particularly in rural and remote areas.

The Future Operating Model (FOM) is helping reshape how services are delivered by promoting greater integration, early intervention, co-production and place-based working.

Alongside this, all 11 Area Place Plans were adopted and are now helping communities, Community Partnerships and public services coordinate action around locally identified priorities. Covering themes such as housing, transport, wellbeing, community resilience, economic development and environmental sustainability, the plans provide a strong evidence base for local decision-making, investment planning and funding applications.

Community Wealth Building principles are embedded throughout these programmes. Major investment projects continue to generate employment, apprenticeship, training and volunteering opportunities while supporting local supply chains and community benefit activity. The programmes also support wider workforce priorities through links with Workforce North and the development of new skills and training opportunities connected to future investment.

Together, these programmes demonstrate how long-term investment, service transformation and place-based planning can work together to support the HOIP priorities of **People**, **Place** and **Prosperity**, ensuring that future investment and service delivery are increasingly shaped by the needs and aspirations of Highland communities.

Click the image below to go to the website.

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

PARTNERS

Invest Highland

Invest Highland was launched in December 2025 and aims to promote Highland as a location for investment, innovation and sustainable economic growth. Working with partners across the public and private sectors, the initiative supports efforts to attract investment, create employment opportunities and strengthen the region's long-term economic resilience.

A key focus during the year was the publication of the Invest Highland Investment Prospectus 2026, showcasing opportunities across renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, tourism and data innovation. The prospectus highlights Highland's significant growth potential and its role in supporting Scotland's transition to a low-carbon economy.

Through links with the Highland Housing Challenge, Workforce North, Community Wealth Building and the Highland Social Value Charter, Invest Highland is helping ensure that the benefits of future investment support local communities, workforce development and inclusive economic growth.

With a potential investment pipeline exceeding £100 billion across the North of Scotland, Invest Highland is helping position the region as a nationally significant location for investment while supporting the HOIP priorities of **People**, **Place** and **Prosperity**.

Click the image below to go to the website.

Climate Change and Energy

In March 2026, Highland Council approved a strategic Climate Change paper, setting priorities for community resilience, climate adaptation, reducing fuel poverty and adopting a place-based approach. The paper provides a framework for coordinated action to support Highland communities in responding to the impacts of climate change while promoting sustainable and equitable outcomes.

The team is developing and delivering a range of initiatives aimed at improving energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions, generating financial savings and supporting the Council in meeting its statutory climate change targets. This work involves embedding net zero across the organisation, with notable progress being achieved in several key areas, including:

Energy Efficient Homes

The Energy Efficient Homes programme, which forms part of the Council's delivery plan, leverages external grant funding to support whole house retrofit projects while helping to reduce fuel poverty. Where possible, the programme aligns improvements across both Council owned and private sector properties to maximise economies of scale and promote a place-based approach to delivery.

During 2025-2026, the Highland Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme (EES:ABS), which is available to eligible owner occupiers and private rented sector properties, secured over £4.5 million in Scottish Government grant funding and over £400,000 from SSE Renewables to deliver energy efficiency improvements to 253 homes.

PARTNERS

In addition, 224 eligible Highland households received 732 energy efficiency measures through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4 Flex) and Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS Flex), leveraging more than £5.6 million of investment. Although the Council does not directly administer these funding streams, it plays a role in assessing eligibility and signing Householder Declaration Forms. The Council also maintains a list of approved ECO4 Flex and GBIS Flex installers on its website.

The ECO4 Flex scheme ends December 2026, this is a significant concern as there is currently no direct replacement to this scheme which provide essential support for households living in energy inefficient homes, those on low incomes, vulnerable residents and households most at risk of experiencing fuel poverty. The Council also leveraged over £7 million of ECO4 funded to deliver energy efficiency improvements to Council houses.

Fuel Poverty and Partnership Working

Both The Highland Council and the Scottish Government have ambitious targets to reduce fuel poverty rates. During 2025-2026, officers engaged with the Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel, while Members established a short-term Fuel Poverty Working Group to consider local challenges and opportunities. Although the primary focus during 2025-2026 was on raising awareness and strengthening engagement, it is anticipated that during 2026-2027 the Working Group will convene to develop a clear programme of priorities, objectives, and actions to support future delivery.

Partnership working is central and the Council continues to work closely with third sector advice and support agencies to adopt a place-based approach to address fuel poverty.

Additionally, the Council works closely with Highland Adapts, a regional cross sector partnership focused on building climate resilience across Highland. Through this collaboration, the Council supports a coordinated approach to climate adaptation, helping communities, businesses and public sector organisations prepare for the impacts of a changing climate through a place-based approach. Sharing knowledge, aligning priorities and developing practical adaptation actions, the partnership strengthens the region's ability to respond to climate risks while supporting a more resilient and sustainable future.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Housing remains a key focus for Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). The HIE Board approved a housing plan focused on community-led delivery, system improvements, and solutions for long-term structural issues including policy, regulation, capacity, planning and workforce supply.

HIE
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

Community-led housing initiatives supported by HIE in Highland region during 2025/26 included the following:

- Glengarry Community Development Trust, working in partnership with Communities Housing Trust to develop woodland crofts and affordable housing at Lower Ardochy Forest.
- Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO secured £80,000 from the HIE-administered Scottish Land Fund (SLF) to acquire former Roy Bridge Primary School for affordable housing and community amenity purposes.
- Dunvegan Community Trust secured £208,000 from SLF and £85,000 from HIE, to acquire Orbost Farmhouse and amenity land to create two affordable housing units and two woodland crofts,
- The Sustainable Living in Applecross project enabled pre-construction works to be undertaken on a site which could develop up to 18 homes and four business units.

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PARTNERS

High Life Highland Libraries

High Life Highland Libraries continues to make a significant contribution to the HOIP by supporting literacy, learning, wellbeing, digital inclusion, employability and community resilience across Highland. Through a network of 67 locations and mobile library services reaching some of the region's most remote communities, libraries provide trusted, accessible spaces where people can connect with services, access support and participate in community life.

During 2025-26, libraries recorded more than 1.9 million in-person visits, 800,000 digital engagements and 370,000 participants at events. Engagement with children and families remained particularly strong, with over 210,000 attendances at family activities and 12,000 school class visits supporting literacy and educational attainment. Programmes such as Bookbug attracted more than 100,000 visits and helped promote a lifelong love of reading.

Libraries continue to play an important role in tackling inequalities and improving wellbeing. Customer surveys found that 97.7% of respondents felt libraries improved their quality of life, while 99.6% considered them important to their community. Partnership work with NHS Highland, schools and community organisations has expanded access to health information, NHS Near Me facilities, neurodiversity resources and bereavement support collections.

The service also contributes to community resilience, climate awareness, cultural participation and digital inclusion. Four Green Library Hubs established in Dingwall, Caol, Wick and Ardnamurchan generated more than 1,000 community engagements, while free access to computers, Wi-Fi, digital learning and online resources continues to help reduce digital exclusion. Libraries also supported 56 young people through the High Life Highland Leadership Programme, helping develop confidence, volunteering experience and employability skills.

Through strong partnership working and a commitment to lifelong learning, High Life Highland Libraries continues to support communities across Highland, helping people improve their wellbeing, build skills, access opportunities and remain connected to the places in which they live.

Click on the image below to go to the website.

highlife
highland
na gàidhealtachd

PARTNERS

Home Energy Scotland

Home Energy Scotland (HES) provides free, impartial and tailored energy advice to householders across Highland, helping residents reduce energy costs, improve the energy efficiency of their homes and access support available to address fuel poverty. Working across one of Scotland's most geographically diverse regions, the service plays a vital role in supporting households facing high energy costs, hard-to-heat homes and the additional challenges associated with rural and remote living.

HES made contact with 5,549 householders across Highland in 2025-2026, around 4,000 of whom identified as experiencing fuel poverty. The service provided detailed advice to more than 4,300 households by telephone, undertook 410 in-home visits and supported the installation of 2,237 energy efficiency measures through the national Warmer Homes Scotland programme. Through a combination of practical advice, personalised home assessments and assistance in accessing financial support, householders were better equipped to make informed decisions about improving the comfort, affordability and sustainability of their homes.

Partnership working is central to the Home Energy Scotland approach. The service works closely with community organisations, housing providers, health and social care services, community trusts and third sector partners to reach people who may otherwise struggle to engage with energy advice and support. This includes vulnerable households, people with additional support needs and those living in remote communities where trusted local relationships are critical to successful engagement.

The service has also supported innovative community-led initiatives designed to address local energy challenges. In Dalwhinnie, Home Energy Scotland worked alongside the Dalwhinnie Community Development Trust and research partners to explore how home retrofit, local renewable generation and energy storage could improve household energy efficiency, reduce costs and strengthen community resilience during power outages. Elsewhere, partnerships with organisations such as Cantraybridge College have helped build understanding of energy use, household budgeting and climate awareness among young adults living independently.

A key lesson from the work has been the importance of understanding local priorities and motivations. While national policy increasingly focuses on net zero ambitions, householders are often primarily concerned with affordability, warmth and quality of life. By combining trusted advice, strong partnership working and locally tailored solutions, Home Energy Scotland contributes to the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity, helping reduce fuel poverty, improve wellbeing and support more resilient communities across Highland.

Click onthe image below to go to the website.

HOME ENERGY SCOTLAND

PARTNERS

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) play a significant role in delivering prevention, education, community resilience and partnership working. Working alongside public services, community organisations and local communities, SFRS has contributed to safer, stronger and more resilient communities by targeting support towards those most at risk, improving access to safety information and helping communities prepare for emerging challenges.

A key achievement during 2025-2026 was the continued delivery of the Stay on Side FireSkills Programme, developed in partnership with Police Scotland and The Highland Council. The programme provides practical training, mentoring and positive development opportunities for young people who are care experienced or at risk of offending. Participants developed confidence, resilience, teamwork, communication and practical life skills through activities including firefighting exercises, road traffic collision scenarios, water safety awareness and CPR training. Schools reported improved concentration, engagement and participation amongst young people taking part, while some participants progressed into further education opportunities through the University of the Highlands and Islands.

The Service also demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusion through the Highland Signing to Know & Survive initiative. Delivered in partnership with Deaf communities and British Sign Language specialists, the programme engaged both Deaf and hearing children and adults in learning about wildfire awareness, flood preparedness, climate resilience and fire safety. By ensuring important community safety messages were accessible through British Sign Language, the project helped address barriers to information and participation while strengthening resilience within communities.

Supporting community resilience has remained a major priority. SFRS worked with partners to deliver the Highland Community Safety and Resilience Event, alongside community drop-in sessions, street surgeries and local engagement activities across Fort William, Inverness, Wick, Portree, Dingwall, Beauly and Drumnadrochit. These activities helped raise awareness of issues including flooding, wildfires, anti-social behaviour, County Lines exploitation, lithium-ion battery safety and home fire safety, ensuring communities had access to advice, support and practical resilience information.

Partnership working has been central to delivery. SFRS collaborated with a wide range of organisations including Police Scotland, NHS Highland, Scottish Ambulance Service, SEPA, Scottish Flood Forum, HTSI, Housing Services, educational establishments, Inverness BID, Street Pastors and local community groups. By combining expertise and resources, partners have been able to extend the reach and effectiveness of prevention, education and resilience initiatives across Highland.

A key lesson emerging from the year's work is the value of early intervention and community-led engagement. Programmes such as FireSkills have demonstrated how preventative approaches can improve outcomes for vulnerable young people, while resilience events and co-located community engagement activities have shown how partnerships can improve access to support services and strengthen local problem-solving. The experience of the Highland Signing to Know & Survive initiative further highlighted the importance of inclusive approaches that ensure safety and resilience information reaches all sections of society.

Through prevention, preparedness and partnership working, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service contributes directly to helping to reduce vulnerability, improve opportunities for young people and support safer, stronger and more resilient communities across Highland.

Click on the image above to go to the website.

PARTNERS

NHS Highland

NHS Highland Public Health: Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life

The publication of the Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025, A Strong Start: Health and Wellbeing in the Early Years provided a powerful evidence base for collective action across Highland. The report highlights the critical importance of the earliest years of life in shaping lifelong health, educational attainment, resilience, economic participation and wellbeing, while reinforcing the need for long-term investment in prevention, early intervention and reducing inequalities. It also emphasises that around 80% of the factors influencing health occur outside the healthcare system, highlighting the importance of partnership working across communities, public services and the third sector.

Understanding the Challenge

The report highlights that 21.9% of children are living in poverty after housing costs, while significant inequalities persist between Highland's most and least deprived communities. Children in the most deprived areas experience considerably higher rates of low birthweight, obesity and tooth decay, alongside lower childhood immunisation uptake. The report also identifies the impact of rurality, housing pressures, transport barriers, fuel poverty and access to childcare on children's health, wellbeing and life chances.

The findings closely align with priorities already being addressed through the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, including poverty reduction, family wellbeing, housing, community resilience and place-based working. During the year, NHS Highland continued to play a key role in supporting the Highland Health Inequalities Framework, Whole Family Wellbeing activity, community mental health initiatives and preventative approaches designed to improve outcomes before problems reach crisis point.

A particular strength of the report was its focus on lived experience. Through partnership working with the Care and Learning Alliance and community organisations, 171 children and parents/carers contributed their views on what supports wellbeing and what barriers they face. Children consistently identified the importance of safe places to play, access to nature, libraries, community facilities, family relationships and opportunities to participate in community life, reinforcing the value of creating child-friendly and connected communities.

The report concludes that lasting improvements in health and wellbeing will require coordinated action to reduce poverty, strengthen family resilience, improve access to services and ensure children's voices influence decision-making. Its findings provide an important framework for partnership working and reinforce the role of Community Planning in improving outcomes and tackling inequalities across Highland.

Click on the image below to go to the website.

NHS Highland

PARTNERS

Police Scotland

Throughout 2025-2026, Police Scotland worked alongside Community Planning partners to deliver a wide-ranging programme of prevention, safeguarding and community safety initiatives aimed at reducing harm, supporting vulnerable individuals and strengthening community resilience across Highland. Working collaboratively with public services, community organisations and local residents, the focus has increasingly been on early intervention and addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability, exploitation and antisocial behaviour.

A range of partnership-led initiatives were delivered during the year, including coordinated Days of Action targeting antisocial behaviour and environmental concerns, Operation Protector, County Lines awareness and prevention activity, safeguarding interventions, multicultural engagement events and the continuation of Operation Respect, which focuses on positive engagement with young people. Police Scotland also worked collaboratively with partner agencies to identify and support individuals at risk of criminal exploitation, while expanding community engagement through regular street surgeries and local consultation activity.

Partnership working has been at the heart of delivery. Collaboration with organisations including NHS Highland, Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership, schools, the University of the Highlands and Islands, community organisations and third sector partners has strengthened safeguarding arrangements, improved access to support services and enabled more coordinated responses to local issues. Particular emphasis has been placed on engaging with diverse communities, promoting inclusion and building trust through initiatives such as the No Place for Hate Campaign and multicultural liaison activity.

Several innovative approaches have demonstrated positive outcomes. The introduction of safeguarding packs has provided practical support to vulnerable individuals at times of need, while a shoplifting diversion initiative has focused on addressing the underlying causes of offending through referrals to appropriate support services rather than relying solely on enforcement measures. The Highlands County Lines awareness programme has also continued to build resilience amongst young people and communities and is recognised as an example of good practice.

In addition to operational activity, Police Scotland continued to provide leadership within community planning structures, including chairing two Community Partnerships, the Community Safety and Resilience Thematic Group and the Suicide Prevention Steering Group. Through this combination of leadership, prevention activity and multi-agency collaboration, Police Scotland has contributed to the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity, helping to create safer communities, reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for those most at risk of harm.

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PARTNERS

NatureScot

NatureScot, Scotland's nature agency works to restore nature, strengthen climate resilience, improve wellbeing and support sustainable economic development. Its Corporate Plan, Nature Thrives, People Flourish, recognises that healthy natural environments are fundamental to thriving communities, resilient places and a sustainable economy.

NatureScot's work aligns strongly with the HOIP priorities of People, Place and Prosperity, focusing on restoring biodiversity, reconnecting people with nature, supporting nature-positive land management and strengthening community resilience through nature-based solutions. Through Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy and programmes such as the Nature Restoration Fund, significant investment has supported nature recovery projects, environmental enhancement and community benefit across Scotland.

A major area of activity has been peatland restoration, with more than 30,000 hectares of degraded peatland put on the road to recovery since 2022 through investment of approximately £60 million. This work delivers multiple benefits, including carbon reduction, biodiversity improvement, flood resilience, water quality enhancement and economic opportunities for rural communities. The international recognition of the Flow Country UNESCO World Heritage Site further highlights the global importance of Highland's natural assets.

NatureScot also supports community wellbeing through initiatives that encourage people to connect with nature, including Green Health Partnerships, outdoor learning and community-led environmental projects. Alongside this, the organisation works with communities, public sector partners, land managers and businesses to support sustainable development, nature investment and community resilience. Through this collaborative approach, NatureScot is helping deliver environmental, social and economic benefits for communities across Highland.

Click on the image below to go to the website.

NatureScot
NàdarAlba
Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Highland Community Planning Partnership | Com-pàirteachas Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhealtachd

Highland Community Planning Partnership

The Highland Community Planning Partnership Board would like to extend its sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to the progress and achievements highlighted throughout this Annual Report.

In particular, the Board would like to recognise:

- Community Partnership members and local communities across Highland for their commitment, leadership and contribution to place-based action.
- Community Planning partners for their collaboration and shared commitment to delivering the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and improving outcomes for people, places and communities.
- Delivery Groups, Short Life Working Groups and thematic partners and partnerships for driving forward action on key priorities including health inequalities, poverty reduction, housing, community resilience and community wealth building.
- Third sector organisations, volunteers and community groups whose dedication continues to strengthen communities and support those most affected by inequality and disadvantage.
- People with lived experience who have shared their voices, experiences and insights to help shape services, priorities and partnership activity.
- Speakers, facilitators and contributors who supported partnership events, workshops and engagement activity throughout the year.
- Elected Members, Board members and senior leaders for their continued leadership, strategic guidance and support.

The achievements described in this report reflect the collective efforts of communities, partners and organisations working together to deliver the shared vision of a thriving, resilient and inclusive Highland.

Your commitment and partnership remain central to the success of Community Planning across Highland.

FINALLY

Highland Community Planning Partnership | Com-pàirteachas Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhealtachd

Alternative Formats

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Please contact the CPP for more information: **highlandcpp@highland.gov.uk**

To find out more about the Highland Community Planning Partnership, visit the website at www.highlandcpp.org.uk

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