Agenda Item	11
Report No	EDU/36/26

The Highland Council

Committee: **Education**

Date: **18 November 2026**

Report Title: **High Life Highland Progress Report**

Report By: **Chief Executive, High Life Highland**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The Contract between THC and HLH was reviewed by the Education Committee in December 2024 and it set out reporting requirements, with HLH reporting twice per year to the Education Committee. For reference, the Inverness Castle Experience is reported separately to the Corporate Resources Committee and does not form part of this report. At the November Education Committee, the specified reporting comprises:

i. provision of the HLH annual report (statutory reporting requirement);
ii. customer satisfaction levels;
iii. general updates; and
iv. information on an area of work or focus topic.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) as detailed in its annual report in **Appendix A**;
ii. the net promoter score of 79.3 indicating high levels of customer satisfaction with HLH services;
iii. the general updates in **Appendix B**; and
iv. the sport and physical activity annual review in **Appendix C**.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - there are no resource implications associated with Elected Members noting this report. The HLH services fee is part of THC's budget as considered at its meeting when it agreed it budget for 2026/27. HLH's Annual Report has been provided, as required as part of the new contract monitoring arrangements, in **Appendix A**.

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

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

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

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

- The archive service supports Gaelic language and culture by preserving and providing access to historical documents, recordings, and materials relating to the region's Gaelic heritage. Through community projects, educational and exhibition programmes, and collaborations, the team actively promote the use and understanding of Gaelic, fostering cultural continuity and engagement across generations.
- The libraries team supports Gaelic language and culture by providing access to a wide range of Gaelic and local history related publications. In close collaboration with local partners, schools and communities, libraries also play host to a wide range of Gaelic related exhibitions, as well as activities and events for all ages, including storytelling, Gaelic bookbug, author talks and writing workshops.
- Music tuition has direct provision in as many of the areas schools as possible for strings (including fiddle), piping and pipe band drumming. In addition to the free weekly lessons (some of which are delivered using a combination of face to face and online delivery which allows the team to reach more schools), the instructors lead a number of extra-curricular groups and activities, including successful youth pipe bands. In primary schools, the Youth Music Initiative provision delivers sessions in Kodaly music skills and also a trad music project which is delivered on our behalf by partner organisation Feisen nan Gàidheal.
- This year the sports team strengthened its commitment to support the delivery of the Highland Gaelic Language Plan, using sporting events to promote the use of Gaelic. More than 150 pupils participated in a Gaelic Sport Fèis delivered in partnership with THC's Gaelic team. Activities included curling, boccia, basketball, rugby, football, fitness and golf, which, as well as being delivered through Gaelic also promoted physical activity, leadership, confidence and cultural identity. This was followed by a Gaelic Shinty Festival celebrating 40 years of Gaelic Medium Education, also delivered in partnership with THC's Gaelic team and also the Camanachd Association. Nearly 160 P3 & P4 pupils from 11 Gaelic Medium schools participated, supported by 19 Young Gaelic Leaders. The event highlighted the strong connections between sport, leadership, culture and language, with participating schools praising the inclusive format, focus on skills development and the opportunity for pupils from Gaelic Medium schools across Highland to come together through shinty and learn about the history and culture of the sport in the new Sgeul na Camanachd Museum with Gaelic signage and tour guide.

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. Due regard must be given to the findings of any assessment when taking any decision.

4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background

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

5.2 The HLH reporting to the Education Committee is specified in the Contract as detailed in the table below:

May/June Meeting	**November/December Meeting**
• Contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan. • Annual Performance Indicators: customer engagements (split into in person and digital engagements); services fee as percentage of HLH expenditure; and number of members for the following services: leisure; libraries; music; sports development. • General updates. • Information on an area of work or focus topic.	• The HLH Annual Report. • Customer satisfaction levels. • General updates. • Information on an area of work or focus topic.

5.3 HLH was established to deliver services on behalf of THC and at the same time deliver savings and protect, improve, and develop services. Each year, Arm's Length External Organisation (ALEO) status saves THC c. £2.5m p.a. non-domestic rates relief.

5.4 HLH has consistently returned revenue savings for THC. Savings have been achieved through income and efficiencies, whilst minimising service reductions. The partnership has been hallmarked by HLH assuming responsibility for additional services at the request of THC, with 43 new services and facilities having been added to HLH since it was established in 2011.

6. HLH Governance

6.1 HLH Directors are appointed by THC (8 independent Directors and 4 Councillor Directors). The HLH Directors can be found on the HLH web site: https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/board-directors/.

6.2 The HLH Trading Board Directors are appointed by the HLH Board (a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 HLH Board Directors with the remaining independent). The trading company Directors can be found on the HLH web site: https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/trading-company-directors/

7. HLH Annual Report 2025-26

7.1 HLH's Annual Report is a statutory requirement. The 2025-26 Annual Report was approved by the HLH Board at its 3 September 2026 meeting pending consideration of a letter of comfort from THC because of The Inverness Castle Experience budget (separately reported to THC's Corporate Resources Committee) and HLH's zero reserves position. The Annual Report can be seen in **Appendix A**.

8. Customer Satisfaction Levels

8.1 HLH gauges customer satisfaction levels using the net promoter score (NPS). The net promoter score is a widely used market research metric that is based on a question asking respondents to rate the likelihood that they would recommend a service. Scores can range from 100 to -100. The most frequently cited scale is: below zero – poor (more detractors than promoters); 0 to 30 – good/healthy; 30 to 50 – favourable; 50 to 70 excellent; 70+ world class.

8.2 For the current financial year to date, HLH's net promoter score is 79.3. This is an improvement on the previous year when the score was 70.9.

9. General Updates

9.1 As part of HLH's reporting, general updates since the previous report to the Education Committee are provided and **Appendix B** provides updates and good news stories since the June 2026 meeting.

9.2 CLUK is the national representative body for organisations like HLH and the Seriously Social Awards represent best practice across the United Kingdom. HLH has had four shortlisted projects/programmes, and these can be seen on the CLUK web site (links below):

- People Above Profit - Jon and Archie's Story
- Inclusion – Inverness Botanic Garden
- Environment – Inverness Botanic Garden
- Volunteer Spotlight Award - Bryan Stevens

9.3 The short listings demonstrate the quality of the work delivered by HLH's teams and helps to maintain the profile of the Highland Council nationally.

10. Sport and Physical Activity

10.1 The focus topic in this report is HLH's sport and physical activity work, and the sport and physical activity annual review can be seen in **Appendix C.**

Designation: Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Date: 14 October 2026
Author: Douglas Wilby, Steve Walsh

Appendices:

i. Appendix A – High Life Highland Annual Report and Accounts.
ii. Appendix B – General Updates.
iii. Appendix C – Sport and Physical Activity Annual Review.

Appendix A.

highlife
highland
na gàidhealtachd

MAKING LIFE BETTER

Report and Financial Statements

Aithisg agus Aithrisean Ionmhasail

31 March 2026 I 31 Màrt 2026

COMPANY INFORMATION
FIOSRACHADH COMPANAIDH

DIRECTORS
M Golding (resigned 17 June 2026)
T Ligema
A Jarvie
D Finlayson
I Campbell
N Finnigan
M Hutchison
R Henry
K Ross (resigned 12 May 2026)
M Boylan
A Vass
A Millar

COMPANY SECRETARY
S Fraser

AUDITORS
Saffery LLP
Torridon House
Beechwood Park
Inverness
IV2 3BW

BANKERS
Virgin Money
15 Academy Street
Inverness
IV1 1JN

REGISTERED OFFICE
Highland Archive Centre
Bught Road
Inverness
IV3 5SS

Our purpose is to **Make Life Better** by providing affordable access to opportunities in sport, leisure and culture across the length and breadth of the Highlands.

High Life Highland
A company limited by guarantee
Company Number SC407011
Charity Number SC042593

High Life na Gàidhealtachd
Companaidh cuibhrichte le barrantas

Contents
Clàr-innse

The Story So Far 2
An Sgeul gu Ruige Seo

Report of the Chair 4
Aithisg a' Chathraiche

Report of the Chief Executive 6
Aithisg an Àrd-Oifigeir

Trustees' and Directors' Report – including the Strategic Report 8
Aithisg nan Urrasairean is nan Stiùirichean – a' gabhail a-steach na h-Aithisg Ro-innleachdail

Report of the Independent Auditors 58
Aithisg an Luchd-sgrùdaidh Neo-eisimeileach

Group Statement of Financial Activities 63
Aithris Buidhne air Gnìomhachd Ionmhasail

Company Statement of Financial Activities 64
Aithris Companaidh air Gnìomhachd Ionmhasail

Group Balance Sheet 65
Cunntas Cothromachaidh Buidhne

Company Balance Sheet 66
Cunntas Cothromachaidh Companaidh

Notes to the Financial Statements 67
Notaichean do na h-Aithrisean Ionmhasail



The Story So Far
An Sgeul gu Ruige Seo

Effectiveness

Since it was set up High Life Highland has proven to be both efficient and effective in delivery of public services on behalf of The Highland Council. In 2011-12 it had 2.3 million customer visits across its service areas. By 2025/26 this has reached 9.2m and the services it delivers have become significantly more important to the people of the Highlands than they have ever been.

Efficiency

As the growth in customer numbers was being achieved, the charity was becoming more efficient – when it was set up in 2011/12 79% of its funding came from The Highland Council and by 2025/26 this had reduced to 48%. This balance of efficiency and effectiveness has enabled High Life Highland to deliver £43.2m in savings to The Highland Council over 14 years.

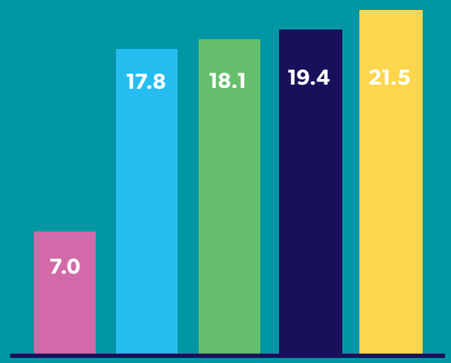
Adaptability

Part of the growth has been due to High Life Highland's willingness to adapt, take risks and deliver new services. High Life Highland delivers 9 service areas and has taken on a total of 43 new buildings and services in the 14 years of its existence.

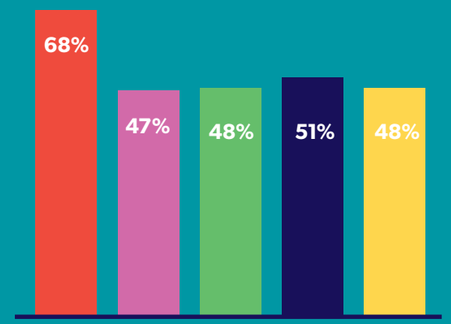
Enabled savings to The Highland Council since formation

£43,276,654

Income generated (£ Millions)



Reliance on Council Funding



Customer Engagements

In person visits by service	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Archives	12,711	12,810	14,561
Community Venues & Engagement	295,280	315,278	373,324
Countryside Services	266,884	186,161	323,761
Inverness Castle Experience			28,609
Leisure	1,820,375	1,995,196	1,898,069
Libraries	1,595,401	1,865,929	1,905,754
Museums & Visitor Attractions	264,270	270,326	280,775
Music Development	100,744	148,931	208,998
Sport & Physical Activity	277,706	325,748	348,908
Total	**4,633,371**	**5,120,379**	**5,390,768**

Digital Engagement by service	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Archives	2,319,500	2,418,215	2,917,430
Countryside Services	23,875	95,045	91,575
Libraries	929,186	879,340	813,914
Museums & Visitor Attractions	73,342	83,595	85,271
Total	**3,345,903**	**3,476,195**	**3,908,190**

Report of the Chair
Aithisg a' Chathraiche



As incoming Chair, it is my privilege to present High Life Highland's Annual Report for 2025/26 on behalf of the Board. The Highlands are experiencing significant change and transformation, creating opportunities to enhance sustainability, prosperity and inclusion across our communities.

As the Highlands continue to attract investment and create new opportunities for growth, the role of health and wellbeing, learning, and culture services has never been more important. These services help to create places where people can thrive, supporting stronger communities, improving quality of life, and contributing to a more sustainable and prosperous future for the region.

The second year of our five-year strategy has seen us build momentum across a wide range of priorities, guided by a clear commitment to delivering services that respond to the evolving needs and aspirations of the people and communities we serve. Through collaboration, innovation, and a focus on long-term impact, we continue to strengthen our contribution to life across the Highlands.

The Board has benefited greatly from the advice, leadership, and support provided by our Chief Executive and his Executive Leadership Team. We thank them for their continued commitment to translating strategic ambition into meaningful outcomes while fostering a culture that reflects our i-care values. Most importantly, however, our sincere appreciation goes to our employees and volunteers. Their professionalism, dedication, and unwavering commitment to public service are at the heart of everything we achieve and remain our greatest strength as an organisation.

This Annual Report highlights the breadth and impact of our work in communities across the Highlands. Whether enabling people to participate in learning, engage with culture and heritage, improve their physical and mental wellbeing, or access vital support through health and community programmes, our purpose remains clear: to make a positive and lasting difference in people's lives.

Our partnership with The Highland Council continues to be the foundation of our success. During 2025/26, we were proud to work alongside the Council to bring several landmark projects to fruition, including the opening of The Inverness Castle Experience, the Bught Park Pavilion, and the revitalised Northern Meeting Park. These investments will deliver lasting benefits for residents, communities, and visitors alike, demonstrating the value of shared ambition and collaborative working in achieving outcomes that matter.

As you read this report, I hope you gain a greater understanding of both the scale of High Life Highland's activities and the difference they make every day. You will see an organisation that continues to evolve, embrace opportunity, and invest in the future while remaining firmly focused on its vision of ***Making Life Better*** for the people of the Highlands.

Michael Boylan
Chair
High Life Highland

Report of the Chief Executive
Aithisg an Àrd-Oifigeir



Serving communities across an area that covers one-third of Scotland, High Life Highland is one of the nation's largest leisure and culture trusts. Over the past year, we have embraced change with purpose, celebrated significant successes, and maintained strong momentum in our mission of Making Life Better for the people and communities of the Highlands.

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The past year has been one of achievement, investment, and opportunity for High Life Highland. As one of Scotland's largest leisure and culture trusts, we continue to deliver services that touch the lives of people in communities across the Highlands, guided by a clear purpose: Making Life Better.

At the heart of our organisation is a commitment to public value. Everything we do is driven by the belief that access to culture, learning, physical activity, and community services can have a transformative impact on people's lives. Through our facilities, programmes, and partnerships, we support healthier lifestyles, lifelong learning, stronger social connections, and more resilient communities. We also remain committed to providing welcoming and inclusive spaces and contributing to a more sustainable future for the Highlands.

Our achievements would not have been possible without the continued support of The Highland Council, whose partnership and shared commitment to improving outcomes for Highland communities remain fundamental to our success. I would also like to thank our customers, members, funders, donors, volunteers, and partners for their ongoing support and trust in our organisation.

One of the most significant milestones of the year was the opening of the Inverness Castle Experience. This landmark development represents a major investment in Highland culture, heritage, and tourism, creating a world-class attraction that will inspire both residents and visitors for generations to come. The project demonstrates what can be achieved through strong partnership working and a shared ambition to showcase the very best of the Highlands on a national and international stage.

Across our leisure services, we have continued to invest in enhancing the customer experience and responding to changing trends and expectations. Our *high**life*** membership remains one of the most valuable and accessible leisure offers in the region, providing members with access to facilities across the Highlands while supporting local businesses through a range of exclusive benefits and discounts.

We have also responded positively to growing demand for new fitness experiences through the introduction of HYROX training and events at a number of our facilities. The popularity of these programmes has demonstrated a growing appetite for innovative health and fitness opportunities, helping us to engage existing customers while attracting new participants to our services.

Digital innovation has been a key priority throughout the year. The launch of our new website and mobile app marked an important step forward in improving accessibility, convenience, and customer engagement. As digital expectations continue to evolve, we are committed to investing in modern technology that enhances the user experience and enables customers to access our services in ways that best meet their needs.

Most importantly, I would like to recognise the remarkable contribution of our employees and volunteers. Their dedication, professionalism, and passion underpin everything we achieve. Every day, they make a positive difference in the lives of others and embody the values that define High Life Highland.

As we look ahead, we do so with confidence and ambition. While challenges remain, so too do the opportunities to strengthen communities, improve wellbeing, celebrate culture, and create positive experiences for people across the Highlands. Together, we will continue to build on our successes and remain focused on our vision of Making Life Better.

Steve Walsh, OBE
Chief Executive
High Life Highland



Trustees' and Directors' Report – including the Strategic Report at 31 March 2026

Aithisg nan Urrasairean is nan Stiùirichean – a' gabhail a-steach na h-Aithisg Ro-innleachdail aig 31 Màrt 2026

The Trustees, who are also the Directors of the Company for the purposes of Company law, present their report and the group financial statements for the year to 31 March 2026.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the Company's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, the Charities Accounts (Scotland). Regulations 2006 (as amended), the Companies Act 2006, and the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

Formation of High Life Highland
Cruthachadh High Life na Gàidhealtachd



High Life Highland is a charitable Company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland. Its registered office address is Highland Archive Centre, Bught Road, Inverness, IV3 5SS (Company number SC407011, Charity number SC042593). It is a subsidiary of The Highland Council, by virtue of it being the sole member of the company and having the power to appoint its Directors. The Company was formed on 8 September 2011 to deliver a range of community learning and leisure services on behalf of The Highland Council and was registered as a charity on 15 September 2011.

It has one subsidiary Company: High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C. (Community Interest Company) (Company number SC408067) whose principal aim is to generate funds which will be utilised by the charity in pursuit of its charitable objectives.

Principal activities and objectives
Prìomh ghnìomhachd agus mhion-amasan

The purpose of the Company is to make life better through developing and promoting opportunities in culture, learning, sport, leisure and health and wellbeing

The Company's aim is to be acknowledged and respected as the leading organisation for developing and promoting opportunities in these areas and to grow the business in a sustainable way by providing services that the public value and by being viewed as a trusted partner making the Highlands a better place to live, work and visit.

HLH operates across the Highlands of Scotland, currently within the geographical boundary of The Highland Council's administrative area.

The main business of the Company is the delivery of a Service Delivery Contract for The Highland Council across 9 areas of work;

- **Archives**
- **Community Venues and Engagement**
- **Countryside Services**
- **The Inverness Castle Experience**
- **Leisure**
- **Libraries**
- **Museums and Visitor Attractions**
- **Music Development**
- **Sport and Physical Activity**

Directors
Stiùirichean

The trustees, who are also the Directors for the purposes of Company law, who served the charity during the year, and up to the date of signing the financial statements were:

M Boylan
T Ligema
A Jarvie
D Finlayson
I Campbell
N Finnigan
M Hutchison
R Henry
A Vass
A Millar
M Golding (resigned 17 June 2026)
K Ross (resigned 12 May 2026)

There are no Directors' interests requiring disclosure under the Companies Act 2006.

The Board consists of 8 independent Directors and 4 Highland Council nominated Directors. The retiral and replacement of the Directors is also governed by the Articles of Association.

The Company has a nominations committee, the purpose of which is to oversee the selection of Directors to the Board and to make recommendations for appointment to the Council. In carrying out its function the committee set an appropriate skills matrix to guide it through the selection and evaluation process. Nominations are sought from a range of appropriate sources. Once appointed, Directors undergo induction and training in line with the established recruitment process for Directors.

The strategic management and policy decisions of the Company are the responsibility of the Board of Directors who are elected under the terms of the Company's Articles of Association. The day to day management of the Company is the responsibility of the Chief Executive, Steve Walsh in consultation with the appointed Service Directors; Director of Strategy & Performance, Douglas Wilby; Director of Culture & Learning, John West and Director of Community, Leisure & Sport, James Martin. The pay of key management personnel is part of the Highland Council Payscale, subject to NJC national agreement.

The Company has an established Finance and Audit committee, the purpose of which is to assist the Board of Directors in fulfilling its responsibilities with regard to the Company's financial reporting, Audit and the company's internal control procedures including risk management. The Company has a Chief Executive Performance Review Committee whose remit is to agree the annual performance objectives and targets of the Chief Executive.

Our advisors
An luchd-comhairleachaidh againn

Our advisors are listed on the Company Information page.

Disabled employees
Luchd-obrach ciorramach



The Company give full consideration to applications for employment from disabled persons where the candidate's particular aptitudes and abilities are consistent with adequately meeting the requirements of the job.

Opportunities are available to disabled employees for training, career development and promotion.

Where existing employees become disabled, it is the Company's policy to provide continuing employment wherever practicable in the same or an alternative position and to provide appropriate training to achieve this aim.

Reserves policy
Poileasaidh chùl-stòran

The purpose of the reserves policy is to support the charitable objectives of the company and to ensure that sufficient resources are available to protect services and operations from unforeseen financial pressures. The Directors have agreed a long-term target of maintaining unrestricted reserves (excluding designated funds) at 3% of the annual revenue budget, recognising the need to maintain an appropriate level of financial resilience.

As at 31 March 2026, the total reserves held by the Group amounted to £1,728,290 (2025 – £2,047,696), comprising unrestricted reserves of £899,993 (2025 – £1,339,880) and restricted reserves of £828,297 (2025 – £707,816).

Included within unrestricted reserves is a designated reserve of £139,715 (2025 – £139,715) which has been set aside for capital works at Inverness Leisure following the transfer of business from Inverness Leisure to High Life Highland on 1 April 2016.

After deducting designated funds of £139,715, the uncommitted unrestricted reserve balance at 31 March 2026 was £760,278 (2025 – £1,200,165). . This represents 2.1% of the 2026/27 budgeted turnover of £35.7 million and remains below the Board's long-term target level of 3%. The reduction in unrestricted reserves during the year reflects the planned utilisation of reserves to support operations and service delivery in line with the charity's objectives.

The Directors will continue to monitor reserve levels closely and, whilst recognising the challenging financial environment facing the public and third sectors, remain committed to rebuilding unrestricted reserves towards the long-term target over the medium term in order to maintain financial resilience and support the continued delivery of the charity's objectives.

Unrestricted	£760,278
Unrestricted - Designated	£139,715
Restricted	£828,297
Total	£1,728,290





Results and Performance
Toraidhean agus Coileanadh

Full details of the results are included in the Strategic Report.

High Life Highland

Strategy 2025-2030
Ro-innleachd 2025-2030

A 5-year strategy covering the period to March 2030 has been prepared, setting out the Company's objectives and plans for the future.

The strategy includes priorities for growth, supported by individual Service Plans to guide activity across the company in a co-ordinated, measurable way.



Investment policy
Poileasaidh cur an seilbh

The Directors are governed by the Memorandum and Articles which permit funds to be invested as the Directors see fit.

High Life Highland Strategy 2025-2030

Strategic Ambition

Purpose

MAKING LIFE BETTER

\+ So that we can reach our **vision** of affordable access to health and wellbeing, learning and culture for everyone in the Highlands.

\+ By being/having **values**
- Integrity
- Community
- Accountability
- Respect
- Example

Contributing to our **High Level Outcome**
Making a positive impact across the Highlands by improving physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.

Strategic Objectives

Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region.	Maximise and grow our income to re-invest across our services.	Ensure a consistent high value of delivery across HLH services.	Commit to the net zero and sustainability agenda.	Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes.
Key Actions	**Key Actions**	**Key Actions**	**Key Actions**	**Key Actions**
1) Optimise service delivery to meet community needs.	1) Increase income from highlife memberships.	1) Monitor and improve the customer experience.	1) Develop an action plan for net zero and sustainability for each service.	1) Continuous staff deployment to meet customer requirements efficiently.
2) Ensure the affordability and accessibility of services to the community.	2) Maximise all income streams.	2) Demonstrate how each service brings value to our customers.	2) Reduce energy consumption across our services.	2) Develop training needs analysis to support delivery of our strategic objectives at service level.
3) Flexibly adapt services to align with local opportunity.			3) Implement findings of energy surveys.	3) Develop a digital plan for service delivery and efficiency.
				4) Improve services by using the customer journey mechanism.

Critical Audiences

- The Highland Council
- Customers (residents, visitors, business community)
- Staff and Volunteers
- Funding Partners
- Community Planning Partners
- Regulatory & Compliance Bodies
- Media
- Political

Outcomes - What will success look like?

Increase Member Numbers
- Member retention levels
- Corporate memberships
- Under-represented client groups

Increase Service Users
- By individual service & by geography
- By penetration levels & reach

Improving User/Service Satisfaction Levels

Improving Staff Satisfaction Levels
- Staff turnover and absences

Improving Financial Sustainability
- Hold appropriate reserves
- Meet short-to-long term commitments whilst maximising affordable access

Capital Investment Levels
- Increasing capital investment
- Individual facility improvement

Health & Safety Performance

Sustainability Results
- Local supply chain benefits
- Narratives and case studies

Review of the Business
Ath-sgrùdadh dhen Ghnothachas

2025/26 was a year of significant development and achievement for High Life Highland as the organisation continued to deliver on its purpose of making life better through culture, learning, sport, leisure and wellbeing services across the Highlands.

The year saw the continued implementation of the organisation's 2025-2030 Strategy, which sets out High Life Highland's ambitions to deliver affordable, accessible and inclusive services, maximise and grow income, improve operational efficiency and support the transition to net zero. The strategy provides a clear framework for the organisation's future development and places communities, customers and employees at the heart of decision making.

A major milestone during the year was the opening of the Inverness Castle Experience in December 2025. This landmark attraction represents a significant investment in Highland culture, heritage and tourism, creating a new visitor experience in the heart of Inverness and providing opportunities to celebrate and share the stories of the Highlands with local residents and visitors.

The opening of the Castle has expanded High Life Highland's operating portfolio and is expected to contribute to future growth in visitor numbers, income generation and wider economic benefit for the region.

Throughout the year, High Life Highland continued to work closely with The Highland Council and a wide range of funding partners, community groups and stakeholders to deliver services that contribute to improved health, wellbeing, learning opportunities and cultural experiences across the Highlands. The organisation also maintained its commitment to environmental sustainability and community wellbeing through a wide range of projects and initiatives across its services.

The Board remains committed to ensuring that High Life Highland continues to operate in a financially sustainable manner while maximising community benefit and delivering positive outcomes for the people of the Highlands.





Five Ways to Wellbeing
Còig dòighean gu sunnd

'Five Ways to Wellbeing', outlining a series of simple steps that people can take:

Connect – good relationships with family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and people with similar interests are important for mental wellbeing.

Learn – there are lots of different ways to bring learning into our lives. Try something new, rediscover an old interest, sign up for a course.

Be active – discovering a physical activity which we enjoy and that suits our level of mobility and fitness is vital. Movement usually makes you feel good.

Take notice – being aware of the world around us and what we are feeling (some people call this awareness "mindfulness").

Give – acts of kindness. Doing something nice for another person, thanking someone, volunteering our time.

A Year of Accolades
Bliadhna nan Duaisean



Best Café in Inverness Award

During 2025/26, Café Botanics was recognised as one of the leading cafés in the Highlands, receiving the Best Café in Inverness award at the Scotland's Business Awards.

The award recognised the café's commitment to customer service, sustainability, locally sourced produce and its strong connection with the wider work of Inverness Botanic Gardens and the Grow Project. The café plays a key role in supporting the Gardens, providing a welcoming space for visitors while showcasing produce grown on site and helping to generate income that supports community activities.

The recognition reflects the dedication and hard work of the catering, horticultural and volunteer teams, who work together to create a unique visitor experience combining high-quality food and drink with one of Scotland's most distinctive garden settings.

Inverness Botanic Gardens & Cafe 25/26 awards and recognition

Scotland's Business Awards

- Best Café regional winner
- Reached national final
- Finished in the top 3 nationally

Scotland Food & Drink Excellence Awards 2025

- Highly Commended for Sustainability

Highland Business Awards 2025

- 2nd equal for Positive Environmental Impact
- 2nd equal for Outstanding Community Engagement

ASVA 2025

- Pamela Sutherland nominated for Climate/Sustainability Champion

Highlands & Islands Thistle Awards

- Best Visitor Attraction
- Climate Action / Sustainability

Puddles to Ponds project wins environmental award

A freshwater conservation project that has delivered both habitat and heritage benefits has been recognised with a national Green Apple Award.

Representatives from High Life Highland's Countryside Rangers and Museum teams were in Edinburgh in January 2026 to pick up the National Green Apple Gold Award, celebrating the project's outstanding contribution to environmental education, biodiversity enhancement, and community engagement.

The Green Apple Awards ceremony took place at the Scotsman Hotel in Edinburgh, marking national recognition for a project that has inspired communities, schools and young people to connect with freshwater habitats and take practical action for nature.

Imogen Furlong, High Life Highland's Head of Countryside Services explained:

"Puddles to Ponds focused on creating, restoring and learning from ponds and small freshwater habitats. The project combined hands-on outdoor learning with wider conversations about nature recovery, climate resilience and environmental stewardship. And we were delighted to have the project featured in the International Pond Conference in 2024 and BBC Scotland's Landward TV programme.

"The Puddles to Ponds project was delivered by the Ranger team but we also worked closely with High Life Highland's Museums & Visitor Attractions service with the nature restoration of the old curling pond at the Highland Folk Museum being a highlight of the initiative. This restoration has enhanced biodiversity while sensitively preserving the cultural and historic significance of the site, demonstrating how heritage spaces can play an active role in nature recovery."

Through the Puddles to Ponds project, over 1,400 children and young people have taken part in pond creation, pond dipping, freshwater ecology sessions and long-term monitoring, helping them to understand the value of ponds as wildlife-rich habitats and accessible spaces for learning and wellbeing.

Judges praised the project for its strong educational impact, inclusive approach, and measurable biodiversity benefits, as well as its ability to empower communities and partners to make lasting environmental improvements.

The National Green Apple Gold Award is one of the UK's leading environmental awards, recognising excellence in sustainability, climate action and environmental best practice across the public, private and voluntary sectors.



Gold award for sporty Caithness primary pupils

Noss Primary School in Wick has achieved the highest accolade from sportscotland for their commitment to ensuring that all pupils are fully participating in sport and physical activity.

The far north school with 300 pupils has been awarded a sportscotland Gold School Sport Award for 2025-2027, recognising the school's efforts at putting sport at the heart of their planning, practice and ethos.

The Gold Award highlights that the school has shown excellent practice across the core areas of the Award and demonstrated an on-going commitment to increase young people's opportunities and engagement in physical education, school sport and leadership and provide clear pathways to life-long participation in sport.

Steve Hughes, High Life Highland's Active Schools Coordinator for the Wick cluster said: "We are absolutely delighted to see Noss Primary School receive their Gold Award – their attitude to sports and being physically active is so positive so this is very well deserved."

Noss Primary School Head Teacher, Fraser Thomson commented: "The programme has helped Noss to support and evidence continued improvement in physical education and school sport. Our staff team have taken part in training to improve skills in delivering PE using Education Scotland's Better Movers Thinkers approach. We have also developed lower and upper school sports committees allowing pupils to be at the forefront of decision making and planning of PE and sport in school.

"As a result we have started school house table tennis, basketball and football competitions, held our first Santa Dash and recognised the immense dedication of our volunteers who lead our clubs and activities. Our netball and football teams have played in competitive matches across the county and we look forward to developing these opportunities in the coming session.

"We are incredibly well-supported by our volunteers in the form of parents, carers and staff and Tina Gibson was a huge support in her role as Active Schools Coordinator and we look forward to continuing that partnership with Steven Hughes

Highland Council Education Committee Chair, Cllr John Finlayson said: "Congratulations to Noss Primary School on their recent sportscotland Gold School Sport Award 2025-2027 accreditation.

"This Gold Award is a real testament to their hard work and commitment to improve physical education practices across the school. Well done to all the pupils, staff and the wider community for their dedication and I hope they celebrate and feel proud of their achievements."



Double Gold Success for Ardnamurchan High School

A Lochaber school is celebrating after receiving two prestigious gold awards recognising its commitment to sport, physical activity and shinty development.

Ardnamurchan High School achieved sportscotland's Gold School Sport Award, the highest level of recognition available, and was also named a Gold Shinty School by the Camanachd Association. The awards acknowledge the school's dedication to providing sporting opportunities, developing leadership skills and promoting active lifestyles.

The sportscotland award recognises schools that place sport and physical activity at the heart of school life. To achieve gold status, schools must demonstrate excellence in areas including physical education, leadership opportunities, community links, competitive sport and celebrating achievement.

The award highlights Ardnamurchan High School's commitment to increasing participation in physical activity and creating pathways for lifelong involvement in sport. Pupils played a key role through the school's Sports Ambassadors programme, helping drive participation and promote a positive sporting culture.

The school was also recognised for its commitment to shinty. Through close partnership working with Ardnamurchan Camanachd, participation has increased, standards have improved and links between the school and community have been strengthened.

Shinty is embedded within the school's PE curriculum, giving pupils regular opportunities to develop their skills. The school's growing reputation also led to it hosting the Donella Crawford Shinty Tournament.

High Life Highland Active Schools Coordinator Alan Gray said:

"We are absolutely delighted to see Ardnamurchan High School recognised in this way. Achieving two gold awards reflects years of hard work and commitment from our pupils, staff, volunteers and community partners. Our Sports Ambassadors have played a key role in helping us meet the requirements for the Gold School Sport Award, while the Gold Shinty School Award is the result of many years of dedication from our shinty ambassadors, PE staff and local club supporters.

The awards were presented during the school's two-day Health and Wellbeing Festival, which featured sporting activities, health initiatives and community partnerships. Pupils took part in rugby, football and shinty sessions delivered by coaches and development staff from local and national organisations.

The festival also welcomed a range of employers, charities and organisations including NHS services, High Life Highland, Mikeysline, Lochaber Pride, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Scottish Ambulance Service, UHI and Lochaber Women's Aid.



‘i-care’ Awards
Duaisean ‘i-care’

Inspiring i-care awards evening for High Life Highland staff and volunteers

The historic Strathpeffer Pavilion was the venue in October for the 2025 High Life Highland i-care Awards, with more than 80 people attending to celebrate the many ways in which staff and volunteers are Making Life Better for residents and visitors across the Highlands. Hosted by STV’s Nicola McAlley and featuring musical entertainment from High Life Highland’s music tuition service, including performances by young musicians Innes Wilson and Finlay James from Skye, the evening recognised outstanding employees, high-performing teams, inspiring young people and dedicated volunteers.

The annual awards showcased the exceptional contribution of individuals and teams across the organisation, with honours presented in categories including Outstanding Employee of the Year, High Performing Team of the Year, Star Volunteer of the Year, People’s Choice Award and the High Life Highland Charity Chair Award.

Chair of the High Life Highland Board in 2025, Michael Golding, said:

> ***This annual event is a wonderful way to celebrate our staff and volunteers and all the fantastic work they do day in day out. The response to our plea for nominations across the different categories was quite overwhelming and all very well deserved. It was extremely difficult to narrow the nominations down to a shortlist, so as well as congratulating all our 2025 winners, I would also like to congratulate and thank everyone who received a nomination.***



The winners of the 2025 High Life Highland i-care awards

High Life Highland Charity Chair Award, sponsored by McCallum Bagpipes – **Bryan Stevens** (Inverness) for nearly 20 years of volunteering with Active Schools, including delivering basketball sessions and promoting inclusive sport.

Outstanding Employee of the Year, sponsored by Aqua Leisure – **Alan Gray** (Ardnamurchan Active Schools).

High Performing Team of the Year, sponsored by Zoggs – **Schools Out Programme Launch Team**, which successfully launched the programme and sold more than 13,000 tickets in the first 24 hours.

Star Volunteer of the Year, sponsored by Askews & Holts Library Services – **Kevin Williamson** (Inverness).

Inspiring Young Leader of the Year, sponsored by Stagecoach – **Scott MacKay** (Smithton, Inverness).

People’s Choice Award, sponsored by Stagecoach – **Steve Jones** (Tain and Golspie Leisure Centres).

The Highland Council Collaboration Award, sponsored by Haydock Music – **Anna Holda**, Adult Learning Team, The Highland Council.

High Life Highland Trading Company Chair Award, sponsored by Dynam – **Pam Allan** (Torrin Bunkhouse, Skye).







With thanks to our Award Sponsors

Archives
Tasglannan

Educational Engagement with Schools Across the Highlands

Highland Archive Service continues to provide engaging learning opportunities for pupils across the region, using archival collections to support curriculum topics and inspire creativity. Recent activities included workshops at Fortrose Academy exploring the Atlantic slave trade and its Highland connections through creative writing, and a session in Balloch marking the 80th anniversary of VE Day. Pupils from Edinbane Primary visited the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre to explore exhibitions and discover archival work, while Noss Primary and Canisbay Primary pupils visited Nucleus to engage with the Following the Fish exhibition. These initiatives foster curiosity, learning and connections to local heritage.



Heritage Interpretation and Community Collaboration at Nucleus

Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archive. The Following the Fish project, developed in partnership with Suffolk Archives, Norfolk Record Office, and Tasglann nan Eilean, launched with two touring exhibitions and an online showcase capturing the stories of the herring girls - women who travelled the British coastline gutting and packing fish. Following a six-week residency at Nucleus, the exhibition began its two-year tour of the Highlands and Islands while the online version ensures wider public access to this important social history.

Digital drive ensures Highland Archive Service remains top of its game

The Highland Archive Service continues to meet the high standards required by the national governing body for archives. The Highland Archive Service has achieved reaccreditation from the National Records of Scotland and the Scottish Council on Archives.

The Archive Service Accreditation panel particularly praised the progress being made by the Highland Archive Service around digital preservation, making records more accessible to a wider audience and therefore preserved for the longer term.

Am Baile and all four Highland Archive Centres continue to expand their virtual reach by sharing accessible and engaging content across websites and social media platforms.

A particular highlight has been the increased use of interactive features, such as 'mystery' photographs. Since April, Am Baile has experienced a marked rise in usage, culminating in its highest-ever visitor numbers for June and July and with over 1.1 million engagements year to date. This sustained growth reflects the Archive Service's commitment to widening access to Highland history and heritage through innovative digital storytelling and online participation.

Since its establishment in 1990, the Highland Archive Service has played a vital role in preserving and sharing the rich history of the Highlands. There are four sites: the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness; Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre in Portree; Lochaber Archive Centre in Fort William and Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives at Wick Airport, the latter holding its own separate Accreditation.



Angus Òg exhibition launch during Book Week Scotland

For the first time, Scotland's much-loved Highland hero and mischievous rogue Angus Òg appeared on screen in a new documentary broadcast on BBC Alba in January 2026. Produced with Caledonia TV, the programme celebrates the life, legacy and enduring humour of cartoonist Ewen Bain and his iconic creation.

Combining original cartoons, dramatic voice performances, archive footage and expert interviews, the documentary brings the fictional island of Drambeg vividly to life. Viewers are invited to revisit Angus Òg's memorable adventures and rediscover Bain's sharp satire, which entertained readers of the Daily Record and Sunday Mail for almost three decades. Central to the production is the Ewen Bain Angus Òg Cartoon Collection, held at High Life Highland's Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre in Portree.

The archive contains thousands of original drawings, sketchbooks, storyboards and newspaper cuttings. Through Angus Òg, Bain explored community, culture, identity, tourism, inequality and the environment, themes that continue to resonate strongly with audiences today.

Community Venues & Events
Ionadan Coimhearsnachd & Tachartasan

Soft Play opened in March 2026 at Hilton Community Centre, with a fantastic launch day that included a Bookbug session and play activities for local families. The opening was well attended and provided a welcoming space for children to learn, play and socialise. A vending and coffee machine were installed, offering convenient refreshments for parents, carers and children attending the sessions. The new upgrade has quickly become a valued community resource, supporting family engagement and creating opportunities for social connection within the local area.

James Cameron Community Centre and Hilton Community Centre successfully hosted Halloween Discos in October 2025, attracting an impressive turnout of approximately 60 to 70 children.

The events were a huge success, providing a fun, safe and inclusive environment for local families to celebrate Halloween together.

The strong attendance demonstrated the demand for family-focused community events and highlighted the important role both centres play in reducing social isolation, encouraging community participation and providing positive experiences for local children and families.

This increase has been driven by a rise in lets, parties, and community events throughout the year, alongside a noticeable increase in booking enquiries since April 2025. The popularity of children's birthday parties in particular has continued to grow, generating significant additional income for the centre.

Continued efforts have been made to promote the centre more effectively by ensuring all information is current, accessible and up to date. Clear photographs of room layouts, set-ups and spaces have been uploaded to the Raigmore Community Centre web page and Google Profile to improve visibility and accessibility. Refreshed noticeboards and décor have also helped create a more welcoming feel for visitors and community groups as they enter the building.





*Raigmore Community Centre experienced significant growth in customer numbers during 2025 - 2026, increasing from 8,590 customers in 2024 - 2025 to **12,433** customers - an increase of **3,843** customers and almost*

45% year-on-year growth.



Levelling Up
Ìre suas

August 2025 saw the official opening of both the Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park, complete with new state of the art events venues in both, by the Rt. Hon. Kirsty McNeill. Both sites had been subject to major revitalisation projects to the tune of £15.5 million, supported by the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF).

Since then, the new Bught Park Pavilion has hosted several hospitality events for some prestigious sporting events, such as the Camanachd Cup Final and The McTavish Cup. There are also 10 newly refurbished changing rooms and designated referee rooms available in the Grandstand, which, of course, are utilised to the maximum during the large-scale sporting events, and by those using the Bught for their fixture bookings.

The event space is proving very popular, and bookings have been coming in thick and fast for all sorts of private events, including weddings, birthday parties and baby showers. The space is also ideal for corporate events, such as workshops, meetings and networking.

The Bught Park Pavilion is also the location of both SportScotland and the Camanachd Association's regional offices, and the wonderful new "Shinty's Story" Exhibition takes visitors on an interactive journey exploring all things Shinty related.networking.

Meanwhile, at Northern Meeting Park, The Victorian Grandstand looks stunning with its fresh new paint – Historic Environment Scotland were able to identify the colour of the building's original paintwork, so it could be restored as closely as possible to what it would have looked like when it was first erected in 1864.

We were delighted to welcome back Groove Festival LLP with two large scale events – The Gathering in May, and the Northern Star Music Festival in September 2025. Northern Star was a new venture for Groove, and the music was mostly of the Country genre – both were well received and attended. In March 2026, The Highland Council hosted the Inverness International Blues Festival at Northern Meeting Park, with many of the acts travelling from the US especially for the event – which was held in a large heated tent!

The new Pavilion event space is proving popular, not just as the back stage area for large scale concerts and festivals, but as an ideal venue for corporate events, such as training courses, meetings, workshops and forums.



Images by Sven Weatherspoon and Paul Campbell

Countryside Rangers
Maoir-dhùthcha

The Countryside Service has delivered a strong year of impact, with headline figures demonstrating both reach and collaboration. A total of 12,786 participants engaged in ranger-led activity, including 1,292 volunteer engagements (approximately 10% of overall participation). The team delivered 1,176 sessions, of which 214 (18%) were in partnership, highlighting a strong emphasis on collaborative working. The service also played a key role in organising the Highland Biodiversity Conference in partnership with Highland Council and the Highland Environment Forum, bringing together stakeholders to strengthen coordinated action on nature recovery. In February 2026, the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre transferred into the service, marking a milestone, alongside the renaming of the team as The Countryside Service to better reflect its expanded scope and role.

In 25/26 The team progressed a wide range of impactful projects, including the Highland Resettlement Green Health Project, Growing Greener Libraries, the Highland Big Pollinator Count 2025, Animal Homes, Northern Pilgrims Way and the Starling Project, alongside ongoing green health and environmental education programmes. Individual project reports can be downloaded here. The service also raised it's profile through appearances on BBC radio and television and delivered free public activities during Mòd week in Lochaber. Partnership working with Keep Scotland Beautiful provided a boost to the Eco-Schools programme across Highland schools. The award-winning Puddles to Ponds project received national recognition for environmental impact, while Pam Allan of Torrin Bunkhouse was honoured with the HLH Trading Company Staff Award for outstanding contribution. Customer feedback remains exceptionally strong, with over 90% rating delivery as excellent and high repeat participation alongside digital engagement that is actively inspiring environmental action Together, these achievements demonstrate a dynamic service connecting people with nature, delivering measurable environmental outcomes, and contributing strongly to High Life Highland's strategic priorities.

Families were invited to step into the shadows at Halloween as High Life Highland's Spooky Trail.

Now in its third year, the trail has quickly become one of Fort William's most anticipated Halloween highlights. Brave visitors can wander through the woods after dusk, where ghostly apparitions, pumpkin ghouls, and even zombie hands awaited.

The event is set up and managed by the High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service, with the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre providing a warm welcome. Inside teas, coffees and squash were available, alongside craft activities, spooky story telling suitable for smaller children and sweet treats for those arriving in their spookiest costumes.

Past trails have attracted over 100 family participants, making it a firm favourite with the local community.

Nature Clubs in Libraries

In partnership with High Life Highland Libraries, Rangers have helped to establish a series of After School Nature Clubs. These monthly sessions have proven popular with children and families, offering hands-on opportunities to explore local wildlife, create nature crafts, and learn about seasonal changes. The clubs continue to go from strength to strength, strengthening the link between libraries, nature, and learning.

Further grant funding has been sought to continue the work.



High Life Highland

Gaelic Inclusion
In-ghabhail Ghàidhlig

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

The archive service supports Gaelic language and culture by preserving and providing access to historical documents, recordings, and materials relating to the region's Gaelic heritage. Through community projects, educational and exhibition programmes, and collaborations, the team actively promote the use and understanding of Gaelic, fostering cultural continuity and engagement across generations.

The libraries team supports Gaelic language and culture by providing access to a wide range of Gaelic and local history related publications. In close collaboration with local partners, schools and communities, libraries also play host to a wide range of Gaelic related exhibitions, as well as activities and events for all ages, including storytelling, Gaelic bookbug, author talks and writing workshops.

In primary schools, the Youth Music Initiative provision delivers sessions in Kodaly music skills and also a trad music project which is delivered on our behalf by partner organisation Feisen nan Gàidheal.

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

Countryside Services continue to promote the use of the Gaelic language, incorporating it into their programmes and educational materials. This ensures they maintain links with cultural heritage and language preservation.

A group of Highland school pupils have shown that they have what it takes to lead – in Gaelic – at a special course run recently on the Isle of Skye.

The Gaelic Choose to Lead Level 4 SCQF Award is delivered by High Life Highland in partnership with The Highland Council, providing young people with the skills required to deliver activities in their schools or local communities.

Run over two days in Staffin, a total of nine young leaders from Skye and Ross-Shire took part in the Gaelic Choose to Lead training and received their new qualification as a result. There is another training event planned for next year which will allow those pupils to progress to a Level 5 Award and give others the chance to take part.

The immersive Gaelic setting was welcomed by the pupils, helping them to build confidence in delivering activities through the language.



Inverness Castle Project
Pròiseact Caisteal Inbhir Nis



The completion and official opening of The Inverness Castle Experience marked a significant milestone for the Highlands, transforming one of the region's most iconic landmarks into a world-class visitor attraction and cultural gateway.

Delivered through the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, the project has reimagined the historic castle as an immersive experience celebrating the people, places, stories, and heritage of the Highlands. Following a successful preview period for local residents, the attraction officially opened in February 2026, welcoming visitors from across Scotland and beyond.

Designed to generate lasting economic, cultural, and social benefits, The Inverness Castle Experience is expected to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, supporting jobs, increasing visitor spend, and encouraging longer stays across the region. The development has also created opportunities for local businesses, with many Highland-based food, drink, retail, and creative suppliers contributing to the visitor experience, strengthening local supply chains and supporting sustainable economic growth.

Environmental sustainability has been at the heart of the project. Careful restoration and modernisation have transformed the historic building into a low-carbon, future-ready attraction while preserving its architectural heritage. Major energy-efficiency improvements have significantly enhanced building performance, with heating now provided by air-source heat pumps and all fossil fuels removed from the site. Smart energy systems, LED lighting, active travel facilities, and a commitment to local sourcing further support the attraction's sustainability ambitions.

The project has also delivered substantial environmental enhancements, including new wildlife habitats, native planting schemes, and biodiversity initiatives designed to support pollinators and urban wildlife. These measures demonstrate how heritage-led regeneration can successfully combine cultural preservation with environmental responsibility.

Operated by High Life Highland on behalf of The Highland Council, The Inverness Castle Experience represents a landmark investment in the future of the Highlands. By celebrating Highland culture, supporting local communities and businesses, and championing sustainable practice, it is already playing an important role in strengthening the region's visitor economy and showcasing the Highlands to a global audience.

Leisure
Cur-seachad

Leadership to Leisure

The Leisure team has recently piloted a scheme called "Leadership to Leisure" which takes senior school pupils and offers them vocational training and qualifications with a guarantee of paid work at the completion of the scheme. The pilot ran successfully in Nairn and will be rolled out into a wider trial over this year. The Council's Employability Team has been kept apprised of the scheme and has been supportive in working with High Life Highland to develop it further.

Mobile App

High Life Highland was excited to introduce its brand-new leisure management system, designed to make joining highlife and booking highlife classes as simple as possible!

Customers can now download the HLH leisure mobile app, which offers several simple tools at their fingertips to keep health and wellbeing goals on track.

Its introduction by High Life Highland represents a major investment for the charity, providing a smoother, more reliable customer management and booking experience. If people prefer – cards are no longer a necessity with customers being able to use the smartphone app or purchase wristbands or fobs that can be scanned on entry.

The new system will make life easier for both customers and the organisation. There are live timetables giving members access to real-time schedules and classes – activities and courts can be booked in a matter of seconds across all highlife sites and the use of QR codes means secure, contactless entry.

The modern reception interface not only speeds up transactions it will also save the highlife Central Team a considerable amount of time with customers now able to update payment details on their profile.

The system is now fully up and running since December, and with it, comes the requirement for customers to have their photo taken when they next check in at their local leisure centre (certain exemptions apply). The use of images is designed to help prevent fraudulent use of High Life Highland facilities and will not be used for any other purpose.



5k Everyday

Thurso Leisure Centre staff pledged to walk 5k every day in April to raise money for MFR's Cash For Kids as part of the radio station's Step Around Scotland challenge.

The 14-strong team of High Life Highland employees were a regular sight out and about in Caithness and beyond in their colourful t-shirts, provided by Highland Workwear.

MFR and its sister radio stations asked the public to come together to walk as many steps as they can, to achieve the equivalent of all the way around Scotland, on Cash for Kids Day (1 May). That works out at approximately 16 million steps, with the MFR area aim of hitting 1 million steps.

However, not content with just walking on Cash For Kids Day, the Thurso Leisure Centre Team committed to walking every day in April – and in doing so set to achieve around 3 million steps!

Funds raised by MFR's Step Around Scotland Challenge stays local and will go towards helping to provide food and fun for disadvantaged children so that no-one misses out during the school holidays.



13,000 people affected across Scotland. Parkinson's is the world's fastest growing neurological condition.

Free Parkinson's taster classes

High Life Highland invited people affected by Parkinson's to take part in a series of free taster exercise classes in the lead up to World Parkinson's Day, which is officially marked on Saturday 11 April.

Free 'come and try' sessions were available in Inverness, Nairn, Wick, Grantown on Spey and Dingwall.

NHS Highland estimates that around 600 people in the Highlands are living with Parkinson's, with approximately 13,000 people affected across Scotland. Parkinson's is the world's fastest growing neurological condition and occurs when the brain cells responsible for producing dopamine begin to die. Symptoms can vary widely, with more than 40 recognised signs including tremors, pain, balance issues, sleep difficulties and anxiety.

Exercise is well recognised as a key factor in helping people live well with Parkinson's – specially designed exercise sessions support people to manage their symptoms, maintain independence, and stay socially connected.

High Life Highland has offered tailored Parkinson's exercise programmes across the region for several years, working closely with NHS Highland to provide inclusive opportunities for people to stay active.

In between classes, participants enjoy memory games, refreshments, relaxed conversation, and a chance to meet representatives from the Parkinson's Table Tennis Club.

Nairn Leisure Centre staff organised a Parkinson's-Friendly Dynamic Wellbeing Session on at the Seamans Hall.

The Wick Assembly Rooms held a friendly coffee afternoon with the local Parkinson's Exercise Instructor, optional taster sessions and social time. Organised by the team at the East Caithness Community Facility.

The Craig MacLean Leisure Centre in Grantown-on-Spey hosted a Parkinson's-Friendly Dynamic Wellbeing Session at the sports centre.

Dingwall and Averon Leisure Centres joined forces to deliver an afternoon of group exercise classes, table tennis and refreshments at Dingwall Leisure Centre.

HYROX

HYROX simulation events

Inverness Leisure

The inaugural event, held in November 2025, attracted more than 70 competitors. Building on this early success, the second event in February 2026 was expanded to accommodate additional waves and sold out with 117 competitors. This progression highlights how quickly the programme has evolved from a new fitness class into an established, repeat event offering.

This growth has been supported by a strong weekly participation base, with 17 HYROX classes delivered each week as part of our wider 150 class programme. Each class offers capacity for up to 40 participants, further complemented by access to the dedicated HYROX Studio 3 and Queens Park facilities.

Looking ahead, the completion of the outdoor running track at Queens Park will further strengthen event infrastructure and delivery capacity by providing eight sled tracks. In addition, a funding application is currently underway to secure new timing technology, which would enhance the overall customer experience while reducing reliance on multiple staff touchpoints during event operations.

Lochaber Leisure Centre

Lochaber launched HYROX classes in July 2025 and started with 4 classes with 12 spaces in each. Due to demand, this increased in August to six classes with 16 spaces in each and we have also added pop up weekend classes when possible.

The Centre hosted the first Highlife Highland HYROX SIM in September 2025 and had 11 individuals and 20 doubles competing. Following the success of this event and the other SIMs hosted by HLH, we had a group of twenty HLH customers and staff attend the official Glasgow HYROX event in the SECC in March 2026, which was a testament to the ongoing popularity of HYROX and the programme that is offered in Lochaber.

In addition, we now have 12 trained HYROX instructors and two Level 1 qualified HYROX coaches.

Black Isle Leisure Centre

Hyrox at Black Isle Leisure Centre was launched on 28 February 2026, with over 100 attendees at the open day, and has developed into a strong and growing part of the centre.

The programme now runs three classes per week, with two classes increasing capacity from 16 to 24 participants due to demand and regularly operating with waiting lists. A highlight of the programme has been the exceptional level of coach engagement, with the team fully embracing Hyrox—not only delivering sessions but actively participating in them—creating a motivated and supportive environment that is clear to our valued members.

Regular customers provide consistently positive feedback, and the programme continues to attract new participants. The open Hyrox session is currently being actively marketed, and alternative delivery options are being explored to improve engagement. Looking ahead, there are plans to continue developing our classes through further growth in participation, maintaining our current valued members, and exploring opportunities to offer Hyrox Sim style events to our members.

Aviemore Community Centre

The Community Centre was the first within the organisation to adopt the HYROX class model indoors using a two-court sports hall setup. Early reports highlighted strong success, with 18 new memberships gained within the first two months of the launch.

The programme initially started with:

- **2 classes per week**
- **Capacity of 16 per class (32 total participants)**

Demand was immediate, with waiting lists forming quickly and clear appetite for expansion. The programme has since grown significantly:

- **4 classes per week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday AM and Thursday PM**
- **Average attendance of 20–25 per class**
- **80–100 participants engaging weekly**
- **Participant split: 60% female / 40% male**

The inclusivity and appeal of the programme are evident, with participants ranging across age groups. Notably, one of the oldest participating couples—both in their late 60s—recently won a HYROX event in Scandinavia, a remarkable achievement and a testament to the community impact of the programme.

Craig MacLean Leisure Centre (CMLC)

To complement Aviemore's growing programme, Craig MacLean Leisure Centre introduced HYROX classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, quickly attracting strong participation with 24–28 attendees per session.

Due to high demand and the development of waiting lists, a Saturday morning class was added, further increasing accessibility and programme capacity. As a result:

- Weekly participation has grown to 70–80 members
- Demand remains consistently high across all sessions

The expansion at CMLC contributes to a wider HYROX presence across Badenoch & Strathspey, with the community now active six days per week across multiple sites.

Feedback from staff has been extremely positive, highlighting:

- High enjoyment in delivering the sessions
- Strong engagement levels from participants
- A noticeable improvement in community atmosphere and member retention

Future Development

CMLC is now planning to build on this momentum by hosting its first outdoor HYROX Simulation event in August 2026.

Collectively, these developments place us in a strong position to invest further in our gym/studio developments to enhance our programme offer, providing a modern, engaging and sustainable physical activity experience



Health & Wellbeing
Slàinte & Sunnd

The HLH Active Health Programme offers people with a range of long-term health conditions access to exercise classes in leisure facilities which support their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.

Targeted projects which HLH is delivering which contribute to improving mental health and wellbeing include: falls prevention; cardiac rehabilitation; parkinsons' exercise; cancer rehabilitation; older adults health and wellbeing; type II diabetes and physical activity; physiotherapy in leisure centres; pain management; the GP movement and activity programme and dementia friendly initiatives including the museums' service led "House of Memories". The "You Time" programme is delivered across Highland and includes activities delivered by archives; leisure facilities; libraries; countryside rangers; and is supporting older people to sustain and improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing and reduces social isolation and loneliness.

Inverness Museum and Art Gallery has a long-standing relationship with the mental health charity Keltic Care, whereby some of its service users are supported to therapeutically engage with the visual arts.

September was declared Wellness Month by High Life Highland, with the aim of shining a light on how everyone can improve their physical, mental and social wellbeing across all of the charity's services, and not just leisure.

Wellness is defined as the act of practicing healthy habits in all areas of life, including health, fitness, mindfulness, mental health and social well-being. From leisure centres to libraries, from archives to arts and from sporting moments to music – High Life Highland is well placed to offer Highlanders multiple opportunities to enhance their wellbeing.

Throughout September and all across Highland there were activities to suit all ages and abilities from baby massage in the Badenoch Library to Alzheimer's storytelling in Fort William Library. Other library activities include mindful colouring, poetry evenings, crafting sessions and traditional music performances.

Several leisure centres hosted special taster classes for people who want to give something new a try, such as free strength club sessions for beginners at Aviemore Community Centre and wellness yoga at Black Isle Leisure. Free 7 days passes were on offer during the whole of September so that as many people as possible could find out what makes them feel good!

There were Doors Open Days at the Highland Archive and Registration Centre and the Highland Folk Museum were throwing open the doors of their Am Fasgadh special collections store.

A special literary event was also held at Dingwall Community Library. Suzanne Parsons, author and Library Assistant based in Lochcarron, visited the library to discuss her debut novel, 'Secrets in the Sky'. Set during the First World War, 'Secrets in the Sky' is a thrilling aviation adventure that blends historical detail with romance, offering a unique perspective on wartime experiences – not from the trenches, but from the skies above.

Spending time in nature is well proven to enhance a person's wellbeing and there was a series of wellbeing walks, activities and volunteering sessions with the Countryside Rangers as well as within the Inverness Botanic Gardens & Café.



High Life Highland Website
Làrach-lìn High Life na Gàidhealtachd

High Life Highland completed a significant digital transformation programme with the launch of a new website, plus a new mobile app, making it easier than ever for customers to access information, services, and activities across the Highlands.

Designed around customer feedback, the new website offers a more intuitive and accessible experience, with improved navigation and streamlined service categories, including Fitness & Activities, Health & Wellbeing, Libraries & Archives, and Culture. This enables customers to quickly discover the full range of opportunities available through High Life Highland and access the information they need with greater ease.

The launch of the *high**life*** mobile app represents another major step forward in enhancing the customer journey. The app allows customers to browse and book fitness classes and activities, manage their accounts, and conveniently access their digital highlife membership card directly from their mobile device.

By providing a simple, user-friendly platform for engaging with our services, the app supports greater accessibility, convenience, and customer engagement.

These digital improvements also contribute to the organisation's long-term financial sustainability. A simplified membership sign-up process, clearer promotion of highlife membership benefits, and more efficient booking systems help to improve customer conversion and retention. Enhanced event promotion and a streamlined venue hire journey create additional opportunities to grow income and increase participation across our services.

Together, these achievements demonstrate our commitment to continuous improvement, innovation, and delivering high-quality services that support our vision of Making Life Better for the people of the Highlands.



Libraries
Leabharlannan

The year of 2025/26 marked a period of growth and achievement for High Life Highland Libraries, with an increase in footfall to our buildings. Engagement with children and families was a particular strength this year, with over 210,000 participants attending family events at libraries, a 5% increase in comparison to 2024/25.

NHS Near-Me hubs

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

800K digital engagements across the financial year.

Culloden Library Blas Festival

Stories of highland folklore have inspired a colourful, collaborative work of art that will be on permanent display at Culloden Library, due to a special workshop held as part of the Blas Festival. The joint story telling and art workshop was a fringe event for the Blas Festival – a collaboration between Fèisean nan Gàidheal and The Highland Council to celebrate the music, song, culture and language of the Highlands.

Hosted by High Life Highland and made possible with funding from the Scottish Book Trust Live Literature Fund, textile artist and traditional story teller Lizzie McDougall was invited to share her wonderful tales with library goers of all ages. Participants were then encouraged to create a piece of artwork to illustrate the stories. The finished piece will now hang in Culloden Library as a permanent celebration of traditional Highland stories.



Libraries on the move

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

Burghead Bull tapestry goes on display at Nairn Library

A striking panel from the acclaimed Tapestry of the Highlands and Islands project went on display at Nairn Library, celebrating the rich culture and heritage of the region. The tapestry panel, titled The Burghead Bull, created by the stitchers group - Threads of Nairn, is one of over 50 panels brought to life by the hands of more than 600 stitchers from communities across the Highlands and Islands. Each panel tells a unique story, reflecting the area's spirit, traditions and contemporary life. Twenty-nine panels are included in the first exhibition in the North Tower Gallery at The Inverness Castle Experience.

The Burghead Bull design, inspired by ancient Pictish carvings, is embroidered in vivid shades of red, amber and yellow on a moss green tweed background. This design draws inspiration from a group of carved Pictish stones discovered in the 19th century during demolition works in Burghead, Moray.

Although most were lost, six original carvings survive in museums across Scotland and London. The tapestry panel now hanging in Nairn Library invites residents and visitors to appreciate the extraordinary craftsmanship and storytelling behind it, celebrating both artistry and cultural significance. The Tapestry of the Highlands and Islands was part of the Spirit of the Highlands and Islands project, which has now concluded, aimed to inspire exploration of the region through contemporary stories and creative expression.

The Tapestry of the Highlands and Islands project was supported by a grant from the Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund (NCHF), led by NatureScot and part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Signing, singing and bedtime stories for Bookbug Week

To mark Bookbug Week High Life Highland libraries celebrated with the introduction of new Makaton sessions as well as a new bedtime Bookbug session! Makaton uses signs and symbols to help people communicate and is designed to support the development of spoken language. Makaton is the UK's leading language programme, with over 100,000 children and adults using Makaton symbols and signs, either as their main method of communication, or as a way to support speech and speech development.

Fort William and Inverness Libraries are also introducing Makaton to their Bookbug sessions and Bookbug at the Victorian Market in Inverness also features Makaton. Bookbug is an early years literacy programme for children age 0-5 years.

In-person visits rose to over 1.9 m (2% increase), demonstrating continuing demand for the service from Highland communities.

A total of 370,000 participants attended events across libraries during this period.



Inverness Botanic Gardens
Gàrraidhean Luibh-eòlais Inbhir Nis

Inverness Botanic Gardens and Café continued to thrive throughout 2025/26. The Gardens remain one of the region's most popular free visitor attractions, providing an accessible space for recreation, learning, wellbeing and community engagement.

A major highlight during the year was the continued success and growth of the Grow Project, which supports adults with additional support needs through horticulture, food growing and life skills activities. Participant numbers have increased significantly in recent years, with the project continuing to deliver positive outcomes in confidence, wellbeing, employability and social inclusion.

The Gardens strengthened their environmental credentials through a range of sustainability initiatives. These included expanding peat-free growing practices, composting green waste on site, growing produce for use within the café and Grow Project, and continuing to utilise renewable energy technologies including biomass heating and new solar generation.

Community engagement remained at the heart of the organisation. Activities included plant sales, apple pressing events, educational workshops, school visits, volunteer programmes and the highly successful Botanic Eco Explorers (BEEs) children's nature club. The Gardens also continued to provide a welcoming environment for local community groups, visitors and volunteers of all ages.

Investment in visitor experience continued, with the café and glasshouse seating areas proving increasingly popular with visitors. The combination of beautiful gardens, high-quality catering and community-focused activities helped maintain the Gardens' reputation as one of the Highlands' leading visitor attractions.



130,000 visitors

from across the Highlands and beyond.

High Life Highland



Museums and Galleries
Taighean-tasgaidh agus Gailearaidhean

Pictish Stone joins the original Ulbster Stone

A long forgotten Pictish stone, which was likely being used as a grave marker in a remote Christian burial ground in Caithness, has been recovered and restored, and is now on display at the North Coast Visitor Centre thanks to the local landowner and heritage volunteers.

The Ulbster 2 Pictish Stone joins the original Ulbster Stone – which was discovered 250 years earlier – in the visitor centre's Stone Room giving an insight into the Pictish period, which was around 1,700 years ago from AD 300 to AD 900.

Having been carefully rescued, the decorated pillar was unveiled within the Stone Room of the North Coast Visitor Centre in June, by Lord Thurso who has kindly loaned the artefact to High Life Highland who run the centre and museum.

Gathered guests included Yarrows Heritage SCIO who have been instrumental in the research and recovery of the stone from St Martin's Burial Ground at Ulbster, just south of Wick, and Fiona Begg Wade who alerted archaeologists in 2022 when she was clearing up the burial ground, where some of her relatives are buried.

The stone was found lying horizontally on the ground, in a line with other plain stones, probably being used as a grave marker in more recent times. The stone is decorated on one face only, in contrast to the other Ulbster Stone on display which has two decorated faces. The surface of this more recent find is much weathered but several typical Pictish symbols – the double disc and z-rod, the mirror, and the comb – can all be made out.

Funding to ensure the conservation of the Ulbster 2 Pictish Stone has come from a variety of sources including Historic Environment Scotland, The Highland Council, Nuclear Restoration Services at Dounreay, Caithness and North Sutherland Fund, Lybster and Tannach Fund and the Pictish Arts Society. The stone was conserved by Graciela Ainsworth of Edinburgh and mounted within the North Coast Visitor Centre Stone Room by Norbloc Construction Ltd, Halkirk.

From brochs and standing stones to cairns and castle ruins, the Caithness landscape offers an insight into the past lives of the people who lived there thousands of years ago

£5.36m exhibition programme from Art Fund

High Life Highland is one of twenty organisations across the UK taking part in Going Places – a landmark £5.36m exhibition programme from Art Fund, the national charity for museums and galleries, that will see museums and galleries from all four nations share their collections in the largest collaborative touring project of its kind.

The largest investment of its kind in the UK, Going Places has been supported with £2.86 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and £1.5 million from the Julia Rausing Trust, with further fundraising ongoing. Six museum networks spanning the breadth of the country will co-create 12 major touring exhibitions over the next five years, taking the UK's collections on an epic journey that will result in 40 unique exhibitions made with and for local communities.

High Life Highland is working in partnership with CofGâr – Carmarthenshire Museums & Arts Service in Wales and the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum in Northern Ireland, as part of a network called 'Communities of Making'.

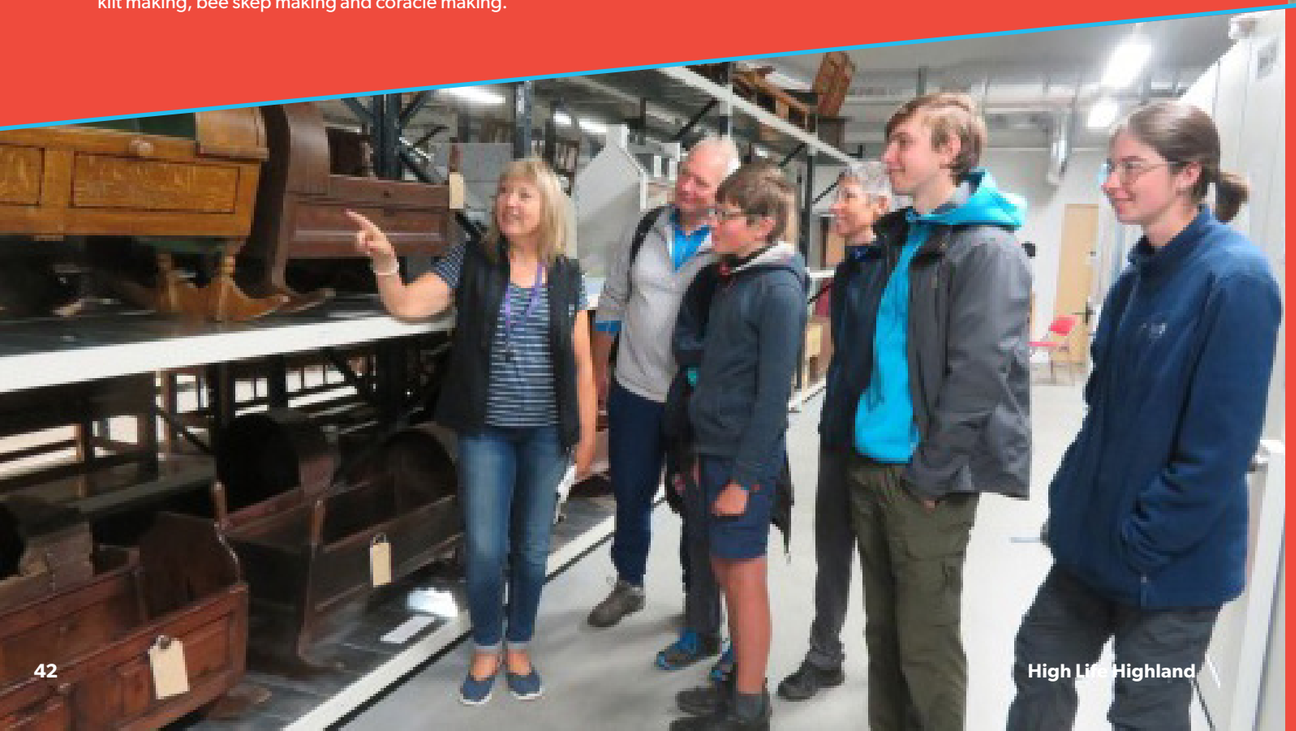
'Communities of Making' will be exploring how local heritage and traditions of making have evolved in these regions through objects from their collections including textiles, costume, craft objects, heritage machinery, paintings and various other items. All three partners collections are rooted in local and regional craft traditions and the skills associated with them, including on the Red List of Endangered Heritage Skills, which for High Life Highland collections at the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, this includes coiled straw basket making, thatching, spinning wheel making, sporran and kilt making, bee skep making and coracle making.

Working in collaboration with hard to reach 16–24-year-olds the partner museums will bring together objects and artworks from their collections to explore how these craft practices relate to young people and their communities today. There will also be opportunities for these young people to get 'hands on' and be part of a new Young Curators Panel that will meet quarterly to co-create some exhibition content.

The first exhibition as a result of the 'Communities of Making' collaboration is scheduled to take place at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery in the spring of 2027, then key items from the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum & Art Gallery will tour to the other venues in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Judi Menabney, High Life Highland's Head of Archives and Museums and Galleries commented:

> ***We are very much looking forward to developing a touring exhibition that celebrates the skills and crafts that our regions are famous for. Many of these traditional skills and crafts are in danger of being lost if we don't inspire and educate future generations so it is crucial that we have the input of young people into the development of these exhibitions and hopefully inspire them to keep these skills and crafts alive.***





63% of museums are looking to work in partnership with other museums on exhibition making.

Jenny Waldman, Director, Art Fund, said: "Going Places is a celebration of UK collections and the people who bring them to life. By pooling resources, sharing expertise and working together, museums are championing a sustainable and collaborative approach to touring exhibitions – while making their collections accessible and exciting for communities across the country. As we continue our fundraising towards this programme to make the biggest impact for museums, we are immensely grateful to The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Julia Rausing Trust for their very generous support for this programme, which will pave the way for a more open and resourceful future for exhibition making."

Going Places responds directly to museums' needs for more sustainable and collaborative ways of exhibiting, supporting them to share their collections with one another. Art Fund's 2024 Museum Directors survey found that 63% of museums are looking to work in partnership with other museums on exhibition making.

The programme builds on recommendations from the 2022 research report Going places: Touring and shared exhibitions in the UK, commissioned by Art Fund and Creative Scotland, which identified shared touring models as key to increasing access to high-quality, accessible exhibitions, and building the long-term sustainability of museums across the UK.

Simon Fourmy, Director of the Julia Rausing Trust, said: "We are delighted to support Art Fund in launching the Going Places programme. This represents an innovative collaborative approach in the creation of touring exhibitions, and one that puts local communities at its heart. It provides meaningful cultural engagement that will broaden audiences and increase access to collections. Supporting cultural institutions was an important part of Julia Rausing's giving and this programme will allow our funds to reach museums and communities across the UK."

Going Places, an Art Fund programme made possible with generous support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Julia Rausing Trust.

Music Development
Leasachadh Ciùil

Drakies Primary Pupils Impress At Highland Council

Super-star string pupils from Drakies Primary performed at the start of the Highland Council Education Committee in Council HQ at the start of June. Not only did they perform for their live audience but they were live streamed to many more people across Highland.

Bands Wow Belgium

In September, High Life Highland's Young Musicians were belting out the tunes in Belgium at the Schots Weekend Festival and the Belgian Pipe Band Championships, in Alden Beisen. Everywhere they went, everywhere they played, there was nothing but high praise for the High Life Highland Pipe Band and folk group Beira who are proving wonderful ambassadors. The Pipe Band picked up a 3rd place in the Grade 4 competition and 4th place in the Open (the only youth band to feature in the championships) and were also awarded The People's choice Award. Meanwhile, performing alongside Beira, their performance was described as "the best of the festival" by organisers. Well done to all involved and for making the trip such a huge success.

Lochaber High School Wind Band's Senior Band were awarded Gold by the visiting adjudicator John Mabon recently and now qualify for the national finals of the Scottish Concert Band Festival in Perth Concert Hall next year. An amazing achievement indeed and testament to the loyalty of pupils and dedication of HLH Instructors Mark Reynolds (band director) and Karen Thomson

Members of High Life Highland Pipe Band were delighted to be asked to perform at the Red Hot Chilli Pipers gig in Inverness Leisure. Those who were able to commit to the performance had a great experience. HLH Head of Music Development, Norman Bolton, commented: "quite honestly, this is the most patient and professional team any Educator could ever wish to be around. Looking after each other through the daytime waiting game of tech & rehearsal; making sure the pre & post-performance experience was enjoyed by all … and an impeccable performance on stage. The tuition and preparation by HLH Music Instructors means that our band members are confident & well prepared, allowing them to be wonderful ambassadors for High Life Highland and our Highland Young Musicians groups. We are also grateful to the continuing support of parents".





Commercial Partnership and Growth
Com-pàirteachas Malairteach agus Fàs

High Life Subscriptions increased by 482 from April 2025 to March 2026

Memberships, Campaigns, Promotions and Employee Wellbeing

The Commercial Growth and Partnership team actively engage with local and national businesses and organisations to provide an employee wellbeing solution through the Employee Wellbeing Membership scheme.

The employee wellbeing membership increased by 493 subscriptions from April 2025 to March 2026 with a total of 157 corporate clients.

Through its Active Scheme, HLH provides access to its leisure centres at reduction of 70% on standard pricing. The Active Scheme is open to individuals and families living in Highland households and in receipt of full Council Tax Reduction.
In addition to a 70% discount on highlife subscriptions, those who qualify for entry into the scheme are also able to access swimming, gym, group fitness, court activities, and swimming lessons.

Membership Campaigns

HLH continues to deliver an extensive range of membership campaigns designed to attract new audience to our leisure facilities and retain our existing members:

- Refer a Friend
- 7 Day Pass
- Happy 18th Birthday
- UHI Welcome Week
- National Fitness Week
- 24hr Flash Offers throughout the year
- Bring a Buddy
- HLH Wellness Month
- Wellness Your Way – Well Women, Well Life
- School's Out Summer Giveaway
- Ten Days for £10.00

Sport and Physical Activity
Spòrs agus Gnìomhachd Chorporra

The past year has seen growth, innovation, and strengthened partnerships, ensuring more people across Highland are more active, more often, and better supported to lead healthier lives.

Participation has increased significantly, particularly among previously inactive groups, reflecting the organisation's commitment to accessible and inclusive opportunities for all.

Being an Active Schools Coordinator in the Highlands can be very different here compared with more urban locations across other parts of Scotland. While barriers of all descriptions can exist right across Scotland, in rural areas there are many challenges when delivering sports and physical activity sessions to young people. Transport, access to suitable venues, fewer volunteers, and lower participant numbers all dictate what can and cannot be done. Active schools continue to make a fabulous contribution to our young people in the Highlands.

High Life Highland's Active Schools Co-ordinators, supported by a team of volunteers and Young Leaders, are experts in 'thinking outside of the box'! They go above and beyond to make sure that, however rural the school – pupils have every opportunity to take part in sport and physical activity.

Over 324,000 visits and 14,229 participants engaged through Active Schools programmes is an amazing achievement, 48% of the school roll is now active, exceeding the national average this is 35,000 visits and 1,182 participants more compared to the previous year.

These opportunities for young people across Highland are only made possible through a network of over 1200 volunteers who are supported by the local Active Schools team, the majority of these volunteers are young people themselves who are part of our highly successful Leadership Programme.

Targeted programmes significantly increased engagement among underrepresented groups, more young people with ASN, from minority ethnic groups and with a disability were involved in sport and physical activity this year compared to last.

The expansion of disability sport provision included school and community sessions, new clubs, and workforce training initiatives.

Some other highlights from the year include over 60 schools achieved sportscotland School Sport Awards, more than doubling from the previous year, strong school-to-club pathways that supported ongoing participation and strengthened community links and innovative delivery methods ensured rurality is not a barrier, including online provision and locally led activities.

Strong partnerships with schools, governing bodies, NHS Highland, and community organisations enhanced delivery and reach. Programmes such as Planet Youth and the Active Highland Strategy demonstrate a coordinated, system-wide approach to improving health outcomes.

Over the year people have been developed as coaches and volunteers with 381 learners gaining qualifications and 41 groups and individuals supported to go through sports specific coach education.

Dynamic dozen awarded athlete travel support funds

Talented athletes from across the Highlands are continuing to be supported through the latest round of the Highland Athlete Travel Award Scheme (ATAS), delivered through a partnership between sportscotland and High Life Highland.

Featured in the first round of funding for 2026 are 12 talented Highland athletes competing at regional, national, and international level in sports including cycling, athletics, squash, judo, cricket and badminton. As well as financial assistance to help with travel expenses, athletes gain access to High Life Highland facilities across the region, allowing them to focus on their fitness and strength and support their ongoing development.

The national scheme – which was set up in 2020 – is funded by sportscotland and administered by High Life Highland. It is designed to support performance-level athletes living within the Highland area who face considerable travel costs for training and competitions, often out with the region.

Athletics is well represented in this round of funding, including first-time recipient Billy Sutherland from Caithness. Billy recently gained automatic selection for Scotland after coming 2nd at the Scottish Hill Championships, which took place in the Scottish Borders. He was flying the flag for Scotland at the Under 18s Mountain Running Cup in July.



Commenting on his successful ATAS application, Billy said:

"I'm really grateful to receive this support. Travelling to competitions and training camps can be challenging from the north, so this funding makes a big difference. Being selected for Scotland Under 18s is a huge honour, and this support will help me focus on performing at my best."

Also featured is squash player Jessica Craig-Gould from the Inverness area, who competes regularly on the national junior circuit and travels across Scotland and the UK for training and tournaments. She's also recently been in Dublin, representing Scotland at the 5 Nations. She said: "I'm very grateful to receive this support from High Life Highland and sportscotland. It will really help with the costs of travelling to competitions and training opportunities and allow me to keep progressing in my sport."

New Get Active Highland Funding

A total of 31 Highland-based sports clubs were the first to be awarded funds from the Get Active Scotland initiative, which was launched by Olympic athlete Megan Keith in Inverness in September last year.

Get Active Scotland is a two-year funding partnership between national and local partners – including the London Marathon Foundation, sportscotland, High Life Highland and Glasgow Life. The Fund is one of Scotland's largest programmes focused on increasing participation in physical activity, particularly for the least-active children and young people, and communities living in areas affected by deprivation and rural isolation.

The variety of sports being supported in this first round of funding – which is administered by High Life Highland – is vast and includes basketball, ice hockey, shinty, football, gymnastics, athletics, golf, tennis, bowling, rugby and surfing.

Among the clubs celebrating their successful applications are Highland Disability Sport, Highland Bears Basketball, 12th Inverness Boys Brigade, Ewen's Room in Lochaber, Golspie Youth Action Project, Grantown YMCA Community Centre, South Skye and Lochalsh Kayak Club, Thurso Community Cafe and Ullapool Golf Club, to name a few.

School's Out
Sgoil a-muigh

School's Out Summer Activity Programme - 23,744 attendances throughout School's Out 2025

High Life Highland's School's Out Summer Activity Programme continued to provide a wide-ranging and engaging offer for children and young people across Highland during 2025. Running throughout the school holiday period, the programme delivered a diverse mix of sport, leisure, libraries, countryside, and cultural activities designed to keep participants active, socially connected, and inspired. The programme reflects High Life Highland's commitment to accessible and inclusive opportunities, supporting physical activity, wellbeing, creativity, and social interaction for children and families across our communities.

A key improvement to the programme in 2025 was the bookings system which made the customer experience in booking activities hugely enhanced from previous years. The Schools Out initiative continues to represent excellent value for families, particularly for High Life members, offering a balance of free and paid activities. By providing structured and enjoyable experiences, School's Out supports children and young people to maintain healthy routines, develop friendships, and explore new interests in a safe and supportive environment.

> ***Very good range of activities – we found plenty to keep our child entertained over the summer.*** *Parent of participant*





Leadership Programme

7751
young leaders have come through the programme

1187
Hoodies / Tshirts were awarded

- 6 Diamond Hoodies
- 7 Platinum Hoodies
- 30 Gold Hoodies
- 53 Silver Hoodies
- 17 red Hoodies
- 70 Green Hoodies
- 258 Purple Hoodies
- 475 Navy Hoodies

There were also 269 T-shirts awarded

This amounts to at the very least 29, 675 leadership hours

SCQF HLH Choose To Lead Awards

50 Level 4 Reg | **13 passed 37 ongoing**

17 Level 5 Reg | **2 passed 15 ongoing**

157 Young Leaders took part in various training opportunities including: First Aid

Junior Leadership – Primary schools

1145
took part in Junior Leader training.

114
junior leaders trained

Foundation refereeing course – Shinty, Leading Athletics, Dance Leaders, Play Leaders, Choose To Lead, Disability Inclusion.



Real People, Real Impact
Daoine Fìor, Buaidh Fhìor

A father's journey of strength, recovery, and gratitude

When Jon Wood learned that his young son Archie needed a liver transplant, he did not hesitate to step forward as a living donor. What followed was an extraordinary journey of determination, resilience and community support.

Archie, who was born in 2023, was diagnosed with a serious metabolic condition requiring an early transplant. To avoid a lengthy wait for a donor organ, Jon made the decision to donate part of his liver. Knowing he needed to be in the best possible condition for surgery, he turned to High Life Highland's Craig MacLean Leisure Centre for support.

At the time, Jon weighed around 99kg and had not been inside a gym since his school days. After signing up for a six-week personal training programme with personal trainer Innes Bryce, he embraced a new fitness routine and healthier lifestyle. Through dedicated training, dietary changes and ongoing encouragement, Jon reduced his weight to 77kg in just four months, helping prepare him for surgery and recovery.
The transplant was a success, and Jon says Archie's recovery has been "nothing short of a miracle". While Archie continues to face challenges, including severe cerebral palsy resulting from complications of his condition, his quality of life has improved significantly.

This August, Jon, his wife Anna and Archie will take part in the British Transplant Games in Sheffield, helping raise awareness of organ donation and supporting other families facing similar experiences.

Jon credits the staff at Craig MacLean Leisure Centre, particularly Innes, for their encouragement during a difficult period. He says the kindness shown by the leisure centre team, medical professionals and the wider community helped make their journey possible. Every smile from Archie, he says, is a reminder of that support.





Exercise and cancer: a powerful connection

When faced with a cancer diagnosis, exercise may be the last thing on a person's mind. However, research shows that staying active before, during and after treatment can bring significant physical, mental and social benefits.

In September 2025, as part of Wellness Month, High Life Highland is highlighting its cancer rehabilitation programme, which supports people at every stage of their cancer journey. Delivered at Inverness Leisure and online, the sessions are led by specially trained instructors and provide a safe, supportive environment for those returning to activity.

Many participants say the classes have helped them rebuild strength, improve mobility and regain confidence following treatment.

Fiona MacLeod joined after surgery, explaining that the sessions gave her the reassurance she needed to exercise safely and enjoy being active again. She also valued the opportunity to connect with others who understood her experience.

Cancer rehabilitation instructor Jennifer Ross said the programme is designed for people of all abilities, helping them gradually increase activity levels while rebuilding confidence.

For participants such as Fiona, the classes are an important stepping stone to returning to everyday activities, proving that exercise can play a powerful role in recovery and wellbeing.

Katherine's story: how exercise boosted her mental wellbeing

Regular exercise is widely recognised for its benefits to both physical and mental wellbeing. As part of Mental Health Awareness Month, we spoke to Katherine Paterson (61), a regular member at Nairn Leisure Centre, about how staying active has positively impacted her mental health.

Katherine attends four fitness classes each week, including Aqua Fit, Body Conditioning and Dance Fit. She has lived with poor mental health for around 15 years following difficult family circumstances and is supported by the NHS Mental Health Support Team.

"I was very nervous when I first started attending classes two years ago," says Katherine. "My anxiety made it feel daunting, but the team made me feel welcome from day one."

She credits instructor Jane MacDonald and the supportive atmosphere for helping her build confidence and stay motivated. While there are days when she struggles to attend, she says she always feels better afterwards.

"The classes give me a reason to get up in the morning and always lift my mood," Katherine explains. "I've benefited physically and mentally, and I've also made lots of new friends."

Her advice to others is simple: "Give it a try. The support is there, and it could make a real difference to your wellbeing."



Key Performance Indicators
Prìomh Chomharran Coileanaidh

The Finance and Audit Committee is responsible for developing and setting performance indicators for each of the business outcomes, which are reported to the Board.

Non-Financial KPI's reported throughout the year:

	2025/26	2024/25	2023/24
Customer Engagements	9,298,961	8,496,970	8,014,070
High Life Subscriptions (monthly average for year)	20,352	19,744	17,075
Average Monthly Staff Turnover	1.18%	0.95%	0.96%
Average Staff Absence Rate	3.98%	4.4%	5.1%
Number of Complaints Received	117	129	98
RIDDOR Accidents/Incidents	2	1	3

In addition, there are 3 other performance indicators as follows:

- **Delivery of the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) with The Highland Council (THC)** – this is assessed twice per year by THC and the Council's Education Committee noted that HLH had met or exceeded the requirements set out in the Service Delivery Contract.
- **Health and safety audit** – the annual external health and safety audit found that there were no company wide actions required.
- **Net Promoter Score**
  The net promoter score (NPS) is a widely used market research metric that is based on a question asking respondents to rate the likelihood that they would recommend a service to a friend or colleague. Scores can range from 100 to -100. The most frequently cited scale is: below zero – poor (more detractors than promoters); 0 to 30 – good/healthy; 30 to 50 – favourable; 50 to 70 excellent; 70+ world class.

For financial year 2025-26, from 2508 responses our overall NPS was 70.9.

Results and Performance
Toraidhean agus Coileanadh

The Trustees are satisfied with the level of performance achieved during the year and with the financial position of the Group at 31 March 2026.

During the year ended 31 March 2026, the Group generated total income of £42.2 million (2025 – £40.0 million) and recorded an operating surplus before actuarial pension movements of £1.59 million (2025 – £0.87 million)

The charity continued to deliver services on behalf of The Highland Council through the Service Delivery Contract, with income from charitable activities increasing to £36.2 million (2025 – £35.5 million). Revenue generated through trading activities also increased significantly to £3.7 million (2025 – £2.3 million), reflecting the continued development of commercial operations across the organisation, including activity associated with the opening of the Inverness Castle Experience.

High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C. recorded a surplus of £714,668 during the year (2025 – £614,238), demonstrating the ongoing importance of commercial activities in supporting the charitable objectives of the Group.

After recognising an actuarial loss of £1.914 million arising from pension fund valuations, total funds reduced by £319,406 during the year, resulting in closing reserves of £1.728 million at 31 March 2026 (2025 – £2.048 million). The actuarial movement reflects changes in assumptions used by the scheme actuaries and does not affect the day-to-day operational performance or cash position of the organisation.

At the year end, unrestricted reserves amounted to £899,993 (2025 – £1,339,880) and restricted reserves totalled £828,297 (2025 – £707,816). The Group remains financially stable and continues to benefit from strong support from The Highland Council and a diverse range of income streams.

The Company's revenue remains closely linked to the Service Delivery Contract with The Highland Council, under which funding is aligned to the services required by the Council. The Directors are satisfied that arrangements remain in place to support the ongoing financial sustainability of the organisation and consider the charity a going concern. Looking ahead, the first full year of operation of the Inverness Castle Experience, together with the continued implementation of the 2025-2030 Strategy, provides opportunities to further increase customer engagement, diversify income streams and strengthen the long-term financial sustainability of High Life Highland.

Risks and Uncertainties
Cunnartan agus Mì-chinntean

The Company maintains a comprehensive risk register which is reviewed monthly by Senior Managers and is reported to the Finance and Audit Committee on a quarterly basis with an annual review by the Board. The most significant risk facing The Company at present is lack of investment in facilities in addition to reducing maintenance budgets leading to facility decline, poor customer experience and lack of ability to increase customer numbers.

Statement on Business Relationships
Aithris air dàimhean gnìomhachais

Our valued relationships: strengthening the Highland community

At High Life Highland, strong and collaborative business relationships are central to achieving its purpose of "Making Life Better" for the people of the Highlands. High Life Highland recognises the vital contribution made by its partners and stakeholders in delivering its charitable mission and ensuring the sustainability of services for the communities it serves.

Key partnerships and their impact

• The Highland Council: As the sole shareholder and parent organisation of High Life Highland, the Highland Council is a key strategic partner. HLH delivers a broad range of Public Service Obligations on behalf of the Council through a formal Service Delivery Contract. A collaborative relationship with the Council is vital to achieving service efficiencies, maintaining affordability, and enabling joint decision-making around service development and capital investment.

• Local Businesses and High Life Loyalty Scheme: High Life Highland fosters relationships with local, regional, and national businesses through the High Life Loyalty scheme. This partnership offers businesses a platform to promote their services to High Life cardholders, while providing members with discounts and benefits, enhancing the value of membership and generating additional revenue for High Life Highland's charitable activities.

• Leisure Link Partnership: HLH actively participates in the Leisure Link Partnership, a reciprocal scheme with other leisure trusts across Scotland. High Life members can access facilities in participating areas at no extra cost, providing greater flexibility and convenience for individuals and families traveling within Scotland.

• Community and Voluntary Organisations: High Life Highland recognizes and values the contributions of the many vibrant social, sporting and cultural voluntary organizations in the Highlands. High Life Highland works collaboratively with these groups to ensure that services are effectively delivered and meet the diverse needs of communities.

• UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands): High Life Highland has a partnership with UHI, offering discounted leisure memberships to students and staff. This collaboration supports the well-being of the university community and promotes access to health and fitness opportunities.

• Suppliers: High Life Highland engages with suppliers to procure the goods and services necessary for delivering its wide range of services. The procurement process is governed by strict policies and standards to ensure fairness, accountability, and best value for money.

Ongoing commitment

High Life Highland remains committed to nurturing and developing its business relationships. These partnerships are instrumental in supporting its mission, enhancing its services, increasing income generation, and ultimately, ensuring that High Life Highland continues to "Make Life Better" for the people of the Highlands. By collaborating with partners, High Life Highland aims to expand its reach and maximise its positive impact on the well-being of the communities it serves.

Energy and Carbon Report
Aithisg air Lùth is Carbon

This company is a member of a group where the parent of that group, The Highland Council, prepares the disclosures required under the Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting requirements. The company has therefore taken advantage of the exemptions available under these regulations from reporting this information at an individual company level.

Statement of Engagement with Employees
Aithris Ceangail le Luchd-obrach

Our people: inspiring passion, driving purpose

At High Life Highland, employees are considered the heart of the organisation. The organisation is dedicated to improving life for people and communities across the Highlands. Its staff is key to achieving this purpose. Their commitment to delivering high-quality, accessible, and inclusive services enables High Life Highland to positively impact the physical, mental, and social well-being of the region.

Creating an environment where employees can flourish

High Life Highland aims to foster a supportive and engaging environment where all employees can thrive. The approach to employee engagement focuses on several key pillars:

• Valuing and Recognising Contribution: The organization actively celebrates staff contributions through initiatives like the i-care Awards, which recognize excellence based on core values of Integrity, Community, Accountability, Respect, and Example. Long-serving employees are also recognised, celebrating their dedication to High Life Highland and the Highlands.

• Investing in Development: High Life Highland is committed to the continuous learning and development of its workforce, providing the necessary training for their roles and utilizing a six-monthly appraisal system to focus on their development needs and future aspirations.

• Promoting Well-being: The organization prioritises the health and well-being of its employees. It strives to provide a family-friendly environment, offering flexible working arrangements and benefits that support work-life balance. Additionally, opportunities such as discounts on the highlife membership scheme are offered and promoted, encouraging employees to prioritize their physical and mental health.

• Fostering a Culture of Open Communication and Feedback: High Life Highland encourages open and honest two-way communication and provides avenues for employees to share their feedback, challenge views, and contribute their expertise and ideas. High Life Highland partners with Trade Unions - GMB, Unison, and Unite - to ensure fair representation and to address workplace issues through formal and informal meetings.

• Embracing Inclusion and Diversity: High Life Highland is dedicated to creating an inclusive workplace where every employee feels valued and respected, regardless of their background or characteristics. High Life Highland ensures that no job applicant or employee receives less favorable treatment due to factors such as age, color, disability, or gender reassignment.

The organization remains committed to its staff, which is its single largest resource. The continued focus on employee engagement allows High Life Highland to attract, retain, and motivate dedicated individuals. This enables the organization to deliver essential services and make a real difference in the lives of people throughout the Highlands. High Life Highland is proud of its team and their unwavering commitment to the mission of 'Making Life Better'.

Section 172 Statement
Aithris Earrann 172

The directors of High Life Highland are committed to fulfilling the duty under Section 172 of the Companies Act 2006. In making decisions and developing strategy, the directors have considered factors including the likely long-term consequences of decisions, employee interests, fostering business relationships, the impact of operations on the community and environment, maintaining a reputation for high standards of business conduct, and the need to act fairly.

By considering these matters, the Directors aim to ensure High Life Highland continues to make life better for the people of the Highlands and fosters a sustainable future for the organization and the communities it serves.

Statement of Trustees' and Directors' responsibilities

Aithris mu dhleastanasan nan Urrasairean is nan Stiùirichean

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Trustees' and Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulation.

Company law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law the Directors have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (United Kingdom Accounting Standards and applicable law) including FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland". Under company law the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the group and of the surplus or deficit of the group for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the Directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the group will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the group's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the group and the company hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

STRATEGIC REPORT I AITHISG RO-INNLEACHDAIL

Directors' statement as to disclosure of information to auditors

Aithris nan Stiùirichean a thaobh mar a dh'fhoillsicheadh fiosrachadh dhan luchd-sgrùdaidh

The Directors who are members of the Board at the time of approving the Directors' report are listed on the Company Information page.

- to the best of each Director's knowledge and belief, there is no information relevant to the preparation of their report of which the Company's auditors are unaware; and
- each Director has taken all the steps a Director might reasonably be expected to have taken to be aware of relevant audit information and to establish that the Company's auditors are aware of that information.

Auditors

Luchd-sgrùdaidh

The auditors, Saffery LLP, will be proposed for reappointment in accordance with section 485 of the Companies Act 2006.

In signing this report, the Trustees confirm that they have approved the strategic report in their capacity as Company Directors of High Life Highland Limited.

This report was approved by the Board and signed on its behalf.

Michael Boylan
Director

Date:

1 Accounting policies

Company information

High Life Highland is a company limited by guarantee and incorporated in Scotland. The registered office is High Life Highland, Highland Archive Centre, Bught Road, Inverness, IV3 5SS.

1.1 Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

The charity meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value.

The financial statements are prepared in sterling, which is the functional currency of the group. Monetary amounts in these financial statements are rounded to the nearest £ unless otherwise stated.

The principal accounting policies adopted in the preparation of the financial statements are as follows:

1.2 Going concern

The charity is dependent upon revenue funding provided by the Highland Council under a contract running to 2036. The level of the management fee is agreed annually. The funding for the year ended 31 March 2027 is agreed at £xxx. The funding for future years is subject to review. The Highland Council has committed to support the ongoing financial sustainability of High Life Highland, guaranteeing £xxxm of additional financial support for the year ended 31 March 2027. The directors are confident that the level of funding available through the Highland Council under the funding agreement when taken together with other anticipated revenues will be sufficient to enable the charity to continue trading and meet its obligations as they fall due for at least 12 months from the date of signing these financial statements.

1.3 Group financial statements

The consolidated accounts incorporate the accounts of the company and its subsidiary undertaking for the year ended 31 March 2026.

1.4 Incoming resources

Income is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

Donation of services is recognised in the accounts at the amount that the charity would pay in the open market for an alternative item that would provide an equivalent benefit to the charity as the donated service.

Income from government and other grants, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Income received in advance of the provision of a specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

1.5 Resources expended

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- Costs of raising funds comprise the costs of commercial trading activities, including retail and catering facilities at sites operated by High Life Highland.
- Expenditure on charitable activities includes all the costs on activities undertaken to further the purposes of the charity and their associated support costs.

Where costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings they have been allocated to activities on a basis consistent with the use of the resources. Support costs are those costs incurred directly in support of expenditure on the objects of the charity. Management and administration costs are those incurred in connection with administration of the charity and compliance with constitutional and statutory requirements.

1.6 Fund accounting

Unrestricted funds are available to spend on activities that further any of the purposes of the charity. Designated funds are unrestricted funds of the charity which the trustees have decided at their discretion to set aside to use for a specific purpose.

Restricted funds are funds which are to be used in accordance with specific restrictions imposed by the donors or which have been raised by the charity for a particular purpose. The cost of raising and administering such funds are charged against the specific fund. The aim and use of each restricted fund is set out in the notes to the financial statements.

1.7 Employee benefits

The cost of any unused holiday entitlement is recognised in the period in which the employees services are received.

Termination benefits are recognised immediately as an expense when the company is demonstrably committed to terminate the employment of an employee or to provide termination benefits.

Pension costs

The charity participates in The Highland Council Pension Fund, a defined benefit scheme. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the charity in an independently administered trust. The fund is valued every three years by a professionally qualified independent actuary and is updated at each balance sheet date with contribution payments made to the plan to ensure that the plan's assets are sufficient to cover future liabilities. Pension plan assets are measured using market values. Pension plan liabilities are measured using the projected unit method and discounted by the yield available on long-dated high quality corporate bonds. The amounts charged to the statement of financial activities in respect of the defined benefit scheme are the current service costs and gains and losses on settlements and curtailments. Past service costs are recognised immediately in the statement of financial activities if the benefits have vested. If the costs have not vested immediately, the costs are recognised over the period until vesting occurs. The interest cost and expected return on assets are charged to resources expended. Actuarial gains and losses are recognised immediately in the statement of financial activities.

1.8 Intangible fixed assets

Intangible assets acquired separately from a business are recognised at cost and subsequently measured at cost less accumulated amortisation and accumulated impairment losses. Amortisation is recognised so as to write off the cost or valuation of assets less their residual values over their useful life as follows:

Website development costs	20% per annum straight line basis

1.9 Fixed assets

The ownership of the buildings and open spaces managed by the charity is retained by The Highland Council. As part of the transfer process undertaken on 1 October 2011, the contents and equipment within these buildings was sold by The Highland Council to High Life Highland for £1. This amount was expensed in the year ended 31 March 2012.

1.9 Fixed assets (continued)

Tangible fixed assets are stated at cost less depreciation. Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its expected useful life as follows:

Plant and equipment	10% to 20% per annum straight line basis
Fixtures and fittings	10% to 20% per annum straight line basis

1.10 Investments

Fixed asset investments are stated at cost less provision for diminution in value.

1.11 Stocks

Stocks are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value with proper provision being made for obsolete and slow moving stock. Cost comprises the invoiced price of goods and materials purchased on a first in first out basis.

1.12 Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any discounts due.

1.13 Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any discounts due.

1.14 Financial instruments

The charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value.

1.15 Operating leases

Rentals payable under operating leases are charged in the profit and loss account on a straight line basis over the lease term. Lease incentives are recognised over the lease term on a straight line basis.

1.16 Taxation

Income is stated net of VAT and expenditure includes VAT where this is not recoverable.

The group's financial statements include the relevant corporation tax in respect of the subsidiary undertaking.

1.17 Cash flow statement

The financial results of the charity are consolidated into those of The Highland Council and consequently the company has taken advantage of the exemption available under FRS 102 from preparing a cash flow statement under the requirements of section 7 - Statement of Cash Flows and section 3 - Financial Statement Presentation paragraph 3.17d.

2 Legal status of the charity

The charity is a company limited by guarantee and has no share capital. The liability of each member in the event of winding-up is limited to £1.

3 Critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

In the application of the charity's accounting policies, the directors are required to make judgements, estimates and assumptions about the carrying amount of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. The estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and other factors that are considered to be relevant. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised where the revision affects only that period, or in the period of the revision and future periods where the revision affects both current and future periods.

Key sources of estimation uncertainty

The estimates and assumptions which have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amount of assets and liabilities are as follows:

Pension

The charity participates in The Highland Council Pension Fund, a defined benefit scheme. The amounts charged to the statement of financial activities in respect of the defined benefit scheme and the asset/liability at the reporting date are the result of a number of assumptions or estimates such as discount rate, inflation rate, mortality assumptions and salary growth. These assumptions are reviewed annually in consultation with the scheme's actuaries.

4 Income from donations and legacies (group and company)

	2026		2025	
	Group	Charity	Group	Charity
	£	£	£	£
Gift aid donation from subsidiary	-	-	-	614,238
Donation of services - overheads	2,242,824	2,242,824	2,242,824	2,242,824
	2,242,824	2,242,824	2,242,824	2,857,062

All income from donations and legacies in the current and prior year was unrestricted.

5 Income from charitable activities (group)

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2026 total	2025 total
	£	£	£	£
Management fee - The Highland Council	18,291,386	-	18,291,386	19,640,346
Other grants	84,503	2,681,283	2,765,786	2,886,340
Delivery of service delivery contract	14,987,030	185,048	15,172,078	12,937,963
	33,362,919	2,866,331	36,229,250	35,464,649

Income from charitable activities was £36,229,250 (2025 - £35,464,649) of which £33,362,919 (2025 - £32,320,291) was unrestricted and £2,866,331 (2025 - £3,144,358) was restricted.

5 Income from charitable activities (company)

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2026 total	2025 total
	£	£	£	£
Management fee - The Highland Council	18,291,386	-	18,291,386	19,640,346
Other grants	84,503	2,681,283	2,765,786	2,886,340
Delivery of service delivery contract	14,987,030	185,048	15,172,078	12,937,963
	33,362,919	2,866,331	36,229,250	35,464,649

Income from charitable activities was £36,229,250 (2025 - £35,464,649) of which £33,362,919 (2025 - £32,320,291) was unrestricted and £2,866,331 (2025 - £3,144,358) was restricted.

6 Income from other trading activities (group)

The wholly owned subsidiary, High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C., is a company registered in Scotland (registration number SC408067) which provides retail and catering facilities at sites operated by High Life Highland.

A summary of the trading results is shown below:

	High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C.	
	2026	**2025**
	£	**£**
Turnover	3,692,585	2,309,879
Cost of sales and administrative expenses	(2,977,917)	(1,695,641)
Other income	-	-
Profit before taxation	714,668	614,238
Taxation	-	-
Net (loss)/profit for the year	714,668	614,238

No distributions were made to the parent charity under the Gift Aid scheme in the year (2025: £614,238), as no deed of covenant was in place at the balance sheet date. A new deed of covenant was enacted with effect from 1 April 2026 and distributions are expected to resume in the following financial year. Expenditure on raising funds included in the group statement of financial activities on page 56 includes cost of sales and administrative expenses amounting to £2,977,917 (2025 - £1,695,641).

	High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C.	
	2026	**2025**
	£	**£**
The assets and liabilities of the subsidiary were:		
Current assets	720,844	109,559
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	-	(103,383)
Net assets	720,844	6,176
Capital and reserves	720,844	6,176

7 Expenditure on charitable activities (group and company)

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2026 total £	2025 total £
Wages and salaries	26,027,958	1,513,723	27,541,681	26,260,677
Property costs	1,045,654	8,575	1,054,229	818,606
Travel and transport	446,497	25,099	471,596	436,248
Supplies and services	5,245,608	546,841	5,792,449	5,591,021
Other project payments	212,668	331,446	544,114	324,595
Depreciation and amortisation	465,106	113,873	578,979	471,764
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(4,998,000)	-	(4,998,000)	(3,852,000)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	3,465,000	-	3,465,000	3,239,000
Pension scheme service cost	2,953,702	160,298	3,114,000	4,135,000
Audit and accountancy fees	28,100	-	28,100	23,000
Directors' expenses reimbursed	-	-	-	-
	34,892,293	2,699,855	37,592,148	37,447,911

Expenditure on charitable activities was £37,592,148 (2025 - £37,447,911) of which £34,892,293 (2025 - £34,390,892) was unrestricted and £2,699,855 (2025 - £3,057,019) was restricted.

8 Net income/(expenditure) for the year

	2026 £	2025 £
This is stated after charging:		
Fees payable to the group's auditor:		
Audit of High Life Highland	21,500	19,150
Audit of High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C.	2,500	2,350
Preparation of financial statements	2,100	2,350
Tax compliance	2,000	1,750
Operating lease rentals	-	-
Amortisation of intangible assets	17,680	-
Depreciation of tangible assets	561,298	471,764

9 Trustee remuneration

The trustees are not entitled to any emoluments during the year. Travel expenses totalling £335 (2025 - £934) were reimbursed to 2 trustees during the year (2025 - 3).

10 Analysis of staff costs and the cost of key management personnel

	2026 £	2025 £
Wages and salaries	24,641,388	24,095,514
Social security costs	2,672,374	1,984,247
Pension costs	3,590,145	3,464,197
	30,903,907	29,543,958

In 2025/26 the employer's contribution rate was 17.5% of pensionable pay.

The average weekly number of employees during the year was as follows:

	2026 Number	2025 Number
Management	5	5
Support services	35	31
Operations	1,235	1,273
	1,275	1,309

The number of employees remunerated at a rate of over £60,000 per annum was as follows:

	2026 Number	2025 Number
£60,001 - £70,000	15	4
£70,001 - £80,000	1	1
£80,001 - £90,000	2	3
£90,001 - £100,000	1	1
£100,001 - £110,000	-	1
£110,001 - £120,000	1	-

Key management personnel
The key management personnel of the group comprise the trustees, the Chief Executive, the Director of Community, Leisure and Sport, the Director of Strategy and Performance, the Director of Culture and Learning and the Director of Inverness Castle. The total employee benefits of the key management personnel of the group was £567,936 (2025 - £590,903).

Redundancies and terminations
The total amount charged for the year in relation to redundancies and terminations was £6,112 (2025 - £nil). All amounts were fully paid in the prior year and therefore there are no liabilities at the balance sheet date.

11 Intangible fixed assets (group and company)

	Website development costs £
Cost	
At 1 April 2025	-
Additions	88,400
Disposals	-
At 31 March 2026	88,400
Amortisation	
At 1 April 2025	-
Charge for the year	17,680
On disposals	
At 31 March 2026	17,680
Net book value	
At 31 March 2026	70,720
At 31 March 2025	-

12 Tangible fixed assets (group and company)

	Plant and equipment £	Fixtures and fittings £	Total £
Cost			
At 1 April 2025	3,384,264	10,431	3,394,695
Additions	685,210	-	685,210
Disposals	(33,926)	-	(33,926)
At 31 March 2026	4,035,548	10,431	4,045,979
Depreciation			
At 1 April 2025	2,371,327	10,431	2,381,758
Charge for the year	561,298	-	561,298
On disposals	(30,474)	-	(30,474)
At 31 March 2026	2,902,151	10,431	2,912,582
Net book value			
At 31 March 2026	1,133,397	-	1,133,397
At 31 March 2025	1,012,937	-	1,012,937

13 Fixed asset investments

	Shares in subsidiary £
Cost and net book value	
At 1 April 2025 and at 31 March 2026	100

The company holds 100% of the ordinary share capital of High Life Highland (Trading) C.I.C., a company incorporated in Scotland. The activities and results of this company are summarised in note 6.

14 Stocks

	2026		2025	
	Group £	Charity £	Group £	Charity £
Goods for resale	279,036	10,456	118,809	9,250
	279,036	10,456	118,809	9,250

15 Debtors

	2026		2025	
	Group £	Charity £	Group £	Charity £
Trade debtors	323,941	323,941	401,451	401,451
Prepayments and accrued income	566,105	566,105	678,212	678,212
Corporation tax recoverable	-	-	-	-
Amounts owed by group undertakings	254,716	254,716	1,439,186	1,542,571
	1,144,762	1,144,762	2,518,849	2,622,234

Included in amounts owed by group undertakings is £254,716 (2025 - £1,439,186) due by The Highland Council, which represents income received on behalf of High Life Highland.

The charity does not operate a bank account. All receipts and payments are made by The Highland Council on behalf of the charity and its subsidiary. High Life Highland has complete control over cash management in that all receipts and payments are accounted for and authorised independently of The Highland Council. High Life Highland is set up as a separate charity in the council's financial system with a separately identifiable intercompany account in the ledger which records all cash transactions. At each year end, a reconciliation is completed and High Life Highland receives interest on the average cash balance held throughout the year. Therefore at any point in time High Life Highland's cash balances can be separately identified from the Council through the intercompany account, with all transactions controlled and authorised by High Life Highland management.

16 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2026		2025	
	Group	Charity	Group	Charity
	£	£	£	£
Trade creditors	137,232	137,232	23,642	23,642
Other creditors and accruals	777,424	777,424	1,601,627	1,601,627
Amounts owed to group undertakings	-	452,264	-	-
	914,656	1,366,920	1,625,269	1,625,269

Deferred income

	2026	
	Group	Charity
	£	£
At 1 April 2025	-	-
Amount deferred in year	108,499	108,499
Amount released to income	-	-
At 31 March 2026	108,499	108,499

Deferred income is included within other creditors and accruals and represents grant income for which performance conditions had not been met at the year end and sales invoices raised in advance.

17 Analysis of net liabilities between funds

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total
	£	£	£
Group			
Fixed assets	1,133,397	-	1,133,397
Current assets	610,532	828,297	1,438,829
Current liabilities	(914,656)	-	(914,656)
Pension liability	-	-	-
	829,273	828,297	1,657,570
Charity			
Fixed assets	1,204,217	-	1,204,217
Current assets	341,952	828,297	1,170,249
Current liabilities	(1,366,920)	-	(1,366,920)
Pension liability	-	-	-
	179,249	828,297	1,007,546

18 Unrestricted funds

	At 1 April 2025 £	Incoming resources £	Outgoing resources £	Actuarial (loss)/gain £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2026 £
Group						
General fund	1,339,880	39,298,328	(39,784,210)	-	45,995	899,993
Pension reserve	-	-	1,914,000	(1,914,000)	-	-
	1,339,880	39,298,328	(37,870,210)	(1,914,000)	45,995	899,993
Company						
General fund	1,333,804	35,605,743	(36,806,293)	-	45,995	179,249
Pension reserve	-	-	1,914,000	(1,914,000)	-	-
	1,333,804	35,605,743	(34,892,293)	(1,914,000)	45,995	179,249

Designated funds
Of the £784,999 of reserves transferred across as part of the charity combination with Inverness Leisure in 2016, the remaining £139,715 has been designated for capital works at Inverness Leisure. These £139,715 of designated funds are included as part of the general fund.

19 Restricted funds (group and company)

	At 1 April 2025 £	Incoming resources £	Outgoing resources £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2026 £
Archives	15,459	27,666	(18,582)		24,543
Museums & Galleries	100,801	108,404	(189,782)		19,423
Leisure	81,894	360,560	(107,071)		335,383
Grow Project	71,526	152,541	(136,727)		87,340
Libraries	5,907	24,997	(16,006)		14,898
Inverness Castle	130,390		(38,018)		92,372
Health & Wellbeing	133,258		(44,915)		88,343
Inverness Common Good	11,418		(11,418)		-
Youth Music Initiative	-	487,157	(487,157)		-
Music	18,500	3,826	(5,429)		16,897
Countryside Rangers	15,347	4,610	(17,663)		2,294
Sport	115,710	379,680	(391,157)	6,000	110,233
Sportscotland - Active Sch	7,606	1,129,373	(1,100,408)		36,571
Youthwork	-	187,517	(135,522)	(51,995)	-
	707,816	2,866,331	(2,699,855)	(45,995)	828,297

19 Restricted funds (group and company) (continued)

The charity receives funding from a variety of sources for different purposes, all within the overall objectives of the company. The purposes of the above restricted funds are as follows:

- Archives - Funding received from various providers to support the Archive service in the Highlands.
- Museums & Galleries - Funding provided by Museums Galleriers Scotland and other providers to support arts and culture in the Highlands.
- Leisure - Funding received from various providers to support health and fitness in the Highlands.
- Grow Project - Funding provided by NHS Highland and The David Sutherland Trust to provide opportunities for practical horticulture for adults with a learning disability.
- Libraries - Funding received from various providers to support literacy and use of of libraries.
- Inverness Castle - Funding from The Highland Council and other providers for the project management of the development of Inverness Castle into a visitor attraction.
- Health & Wellbeing - Funding from NHS Highland and other providers to support healthy living and recovery from illness.
- Inverness Common Good Fund - Funding from the Inverness Common Good Fund to host events including The Highland Games, Bonfire Night and Halloween.
- Youth Music Initiative - Funding received from Creative Scotland to provide access to high quality music making opportunities for young people and support the development of the youth music sector.
- Music - Funding received from various providers to support music education for young people in the Highlands.
- Countryside Rangers - Funding received from various providers to encourage engagement and education of the Highland countryside.
- Sport - Funding received from various providers to promote youth sport in the Highlands.
- Sportscotland - Active Schools - Funding received from sportscotland to develop, promote and encourage sport in the Highlands.
- Youthwork - Funding received to provide targeted youthwork and services in specific areas of the Highlands

Transfers between funds

During the prior year, a transfer was made from unrestricted funds to the Youthwork fund to cover expenditure incurred on the funded project pending receipt of grant funding. The grant funding was received during the current year and, accordingly, £45,995 has been transferred from restricted funds back to unrestricted funds to reimburse the unrestricted funds for expenditure previously financed on behalf of the restricted fund.

20 Controlling interest

The company is under the ultimate control of the Highland Council (having regard to the Council's powers as sole member) but without prejudice to the directors' duties under company law and charity law to exercise independent judgement and to further what they consider to be the best interests of the company.

The largest group and the smallest group for which consolidated financial statements are prepared which include High Life Highland is that of The Highland Council. Copies of these financial statements can be obtained from www.highland.gov.uk.

21 Pension commitments

The charity is an admitted body of The Highland Council Pension Fund which provides pension benefits under the Local Government Pension Scheme to employees of High Life Highland. Contributions are made to this scheme, on the advice of an independent qualified actuary, to ensure that the plan's assets are sufficient to cover future liabilities. The assets of the scheme are held separately from the charity in an independently administered fund. Contributions are recognised in the statement of financial activities in the period in which they become payable.

The valuation used for the FRS 102 disclosures has been based on rolling forward the value of the employer's liabilities from a starting position of zero at 1 October 2011, allowing for the different financial assumptions required under FRS 102. The valuation used has been based on the most recent actuarial valuation at 31 March 2023, and was updated by the actuary to assess the liabilities of the schemes at 31 March 2026. The assumptions that have the most significant effect on the results of the valuation are those relating to price increases, the rate of increases in salaries and pensions and the discount rate. Scheme assets are stated at their bid value at the balance sheet dates.

With effect from 1 April 2015, a schedule of contributions was put in place to fund the scheme's defined benefits at the current rate of 17.5% p.a. of total payroll.

The assets and liabilities of the schemes are:

	2026 £000's	2025 £000's
Fair value of scheme assets	93,865	84,324
Present value of scheme liabilities	(62,618)	(58,080)
Present value of unfunded liabilities	(13)	(14)
Effect of the asset ceiling	(31,247)	-
Unrecognised liability/(asset)	13	(26,230)
Liability in the scheme	-	-

The major categories of scheme assets as a percentage of total scheme assets are:

	2026	2025
Equities	58%	54%
Bonds	26%	26%
Property	13%	14%
Cash	3%	6%

21 Pension commitments (continued)

The amounts recognised in the statement of financial activities are analysed as follows:

	2026 £000's	2025 £000's
Recognised in the statement of financial activities:		
Current service cost	(3,114)	(4,135)
Past service cost	-	-
Interest on obligation	(3,465)	(3,239)
Expected return on scheme assets	4,998	3,852
	(1,581)	(3,522)

The principal assumptions at the opening and closing balance sheet date were:

	2026	2025
Rate of salary increases (over life of the scheme)	3.80%	3.55%
Rate of increases in pensions in payment	3.00%	2.75%
Discount rate	6.30%	5.80%

Post retirement mortality:

	2026	2025
Current pensions at 65 (male)	21.0 yrs	20.6 yrs
Current pensions at 65 (female)	23.9 yrs	23.7 yrs
Future pensions at 65 (male)	21.7 yrs	21.3 yrs
Future pensions at 65 (female)	25.3 yrs	25.2 yrs

Life expectancy is based on the Fund's VitaCurves with improvements in line with the CMI 2023 model, with a 15% weighting of 2023 (and 2022) data, a 0% weighting of 2021 (and 2020) data, standard smoothing (Sk7), initial adjustment of 0.25% and a long term rate of improvement of 1.5% p.a. for both males and females. Based on these assumptions, the average future life expectancies at age 65 for the Employer are summarised above. These assumptions will be reconsidered when the next triennial review of The Highland Council Pension Scheme is undertaken.

Change in assumptions at 31 March 2026:

	Approximate % increase to defined benefit obligation	Approximate monetary amount £000's
0.1% decrease in real discount rate	2%	1,320
1 year increase in member life expectancy	4%	2,505
0.1% increase in salary increase rate	0%	59
0.1% increase in pension increase rate	2%	1,261

21 Pension commitments (continued)

Changes in the present value of the defined benefit obligations are analysed as follows:

	2026 £000's	2025 £000's
Opening defined benefit obligations	58,094	64,679
Current service cost	3,114	4,135
Past service cost	-	-
Interest cost	3,465	3,239
Actuarial gain	(2,277)	(14,188)
Benefits paid	(954)	(942)
Contributions by scheme participants	1,190	1,172
Estimated unfunded benefits paid	(1)	(1)
	62,631	58,094

Changes in the fair value of the plan assets are analysed as follows:

	2026 £000's	2025 £000's
Opening fair value of scheme assets	84,324	77,672
Expected return on scheme assets	4,998	3,852
Employer contributions	3,494	3,446
Contributions in respect of unfunded benefits	1	1
Contributions by scheme members	1,190	1,172
Benefits paid	(954)	(942)
Actuarial gain/(loss)	813	(876)
Estimated unfunded benefits paid	(1)	(1)
	93,865	84,324

The amount of actuarial gains and losses recognised in the statement of financial activities was an actuarial loss of £1,914,000 (2025 - gain of £75,000).

The best estimate of contributions to be paid by the group to the scheme for the year beginning after 31 March 2026 is £3,494,000.

21 Pension commitments (continued)

Amounts for the closing and opening balance sheet are as follows:

	2026 £000's	2025 £000's	2024 £000's	2023 £000's
Fair value of scheme assets	93,865	84,324	77,672	66,032
Present value of defined benefit obligation	(62,631)	(58,094)	(64,679)	(59,407)
Effect of the asset ceiling	(31,247)			
Unrecognised liability/(asset)	13	(26,230)	(12,993)	(6,625)
Net (liability)/asset recognised	-	-	-	-

The Highland Council acts as guarantor as long as High Life Highland remains an admitted body within the Council's pension scheme.

Appendix B
General Updates/Good News Stories – April 2026 to September 2026

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

Archives

Life and work of local Caithness artist celebrated in new exhibition: A new exhibition, *The Life and Art of David Barrogill Keith*, opened at the North Coast Visitor Centre in Thurso, celebrating the life and artistic legacy of the well-known Caithness artist. The exhibition was curated by High Life Highland's Archive Service team in partnership with local collector Robert Maitland.

Musical Memories of Martyn Bennett: The Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre hosted a special evening talk by Margaret Bennett during Skye Week. The event celebrated the life and legacy of Martyn Bennett, the influential Skye-born musician, composer, piper and innovator.

New funding to celebrate Gaelic Archive collections: The Archive Service announced it has been awarded an Archives Revealed Consortium Grant for a collaborative project led by the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre. Working in partnership with the Scottish Council on Archives, Tasglann nan Eilean, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture – the initiative will help safeguard and increase access to Scotland's rich Gaelic archival heritage.

Countryside Rangers

Community garden revival in Invergordon growing more than just vegetables: Residents in and around Invergordon were invited to get involved in a revitalised community garden project with the HLH Ranger Service. This once-overlooked space is slowly being brought back to life, transforming it into a welcoming green haven that's beginning to reconnect people with nature, food, and each other.

New Countryside Ranger set to inspire exploration of North West Sutherland's wildlife and landscapes: The HLH Ranger Service welcomed a new member of the team. Jack Capener joined HLH as the new Ranger for North West Sutherland, bringing with him a passion for wildlife, nature education and Gaelic culture.

Go batty for bats with High Life Highland libraries and countryside rangers: The availability of bat detectors at HLH libraries was announced, which can be borrowed for free. As darkness falls, bats emerge to hunt insects. Their high-frequency calls are inaudible to the human ear but with a bat detector these fascinating sounds can be heard. To complement the project, the Ranger Service organised a series of guided bat walks and wildlife events during September.

Leisure

HYROX Sim hit the heights at High Life Highland Aviemore: Fitness enthusiasts from Badenoch and Strathspey and beyond were given the opportunity to experience a HYROX simulation event at Aviemore Community Centre. The centre's 4G football pitch was

transformed into a fitness arena featuring eight HYROX-style workout stations, professional timing chips, high-energy music and an authentic race-day atmosphere.

Craig MacLean Leisure Centre to host highlife Hyrox event: Fitness enthusiasts across Badenoch and Strathspey – and further afield – enjoyed the opportunity to test themselves at the Craig MacLean Leisure Centre's first Hyrox simulation.

It's a Hyrox family affair at Black Isle Leisure Centre: Three generations of the Harrison family are proof that Hyrox is for everyone with grandad, daughter and granddaughter all enjoying this global fitness phenomenon at their local High Life Leisure Centre.

Rookie lifeguards show they have what it takes: A group of young people at Culloden Swimming Pool successfully completed their lifeguard training. After three terms of dedicated training, 13 children were awarded their Gold Stage 3 Rookie Lifeguard certificates, recognising their achievement in developing essential water safety and lifesaving skills.

High Life Highland celebrates a year of Hyrox success as Aviemore couple shine on the world stage: A press release was issue to mark 1 year of Hyrox at HLH facilities with hundreds of customers embracing the global fitness phenomenon – and with one inspirational couple proving that age is no barrier to success! Carol and Charlie (both in their 70's) have progressed from local classes at Aviemore to competing on the world stage.

Libraries

High Life Highland launched moth trap lending and nocturnal nature workshops: Libraries across the Highlands invited communities to discover nocturnal wildlife through the introduction of free-to-borrow moth traps and a programme of ranger-led identification workshops. Delivered through Green Library Hubs, the initiative is a partnership between High Life Highland Libraries and the Ranger Service, supporting biodiversity recording and environmental engagement.

North Coast winners celebrated at High Life Highland Library: Bettyhill Library's annual art and literacy competition attracted 80 entries in its third year. Open to pupils from local primary schools and the wider North Coast campus area, the competition invited young people to create drawings and stories inspired by local folklore.

High Life Highland Libraries achieved Customer Service Excellence Award: High Life Highland Libraries received the prestigious Customer Service Excellence Standard. The service achieved 100% compliance across the required assessment areas and received 'Compliant Plus' recognition in 19 elements, demonstrating sector-leading customer service.

Clothes can get a new lease of life at free repair workshops at local libraries: HLH promoted a series of workshops with the Highland Clothes Doctor, taking place in various HLH libraries. The sessions formed part of HLH's Cultivating Climate Champions initiative with participants having the opportunity to learn practical mending techniques, develop sewing skills and discover creative ways to breathe new life into old or damaged garments.

Scotland's Makar to visit Bettyhill Library: A packed Bettyhill Library welcomed Scotland's national poet, Peter Mackay (Pàdraig MacAoidh) for a special evening celebrating literature, language and culture as part of the Blas Festival Fringe.

Kick off good reading habits with High Life Highland and Caley Thistle: HLH has teamed up with Inverness Caledonian Thistle Community Trust and Inverness Caledonian Football Club to encourage children to discover the joy of reading, with free football tickets available to those who complete the 4-4-2 Reading Challenge.

Museums and Galleries

Ruby anniversary for Highland Print Studio celebrated with Inverness Museum & Art Gallery exhibition: Highland Print Studio marked its 40th anniversary with an exhibition at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery that looked back over the previous four decades. The studio, founded in 1986 by a group of local artists, celebrated its legacy as a shared creative space and focal point for artistic development.

SHIMMERING brings new works by RSA artists Anne Bevan and Mary Bourne to Inverness Museum & Art Gallery: IMAG hosted *Shimmering*, an exhibition of new work by Royal Scottish Academy Academicians Anne Bevan and Mary Bourne. Developed as part of RSA200 Celebrating Together, the exhibition explored connections between people, place and the sea through contemporary sculpture, photography, moving image and archival material.

Highland landscape and wildlife artist returns to Inverness Botanic Gardens & Cafe with new coastal exhibition: Renate Jephcott returned to the Inverness Botanic Gardens & Café with her third solo exhibition, which celebrates the beauty, energy and biodiversity of Scotland's coastal environments through a collection of artworks.

Music

Youth Pipe Band prepared to march in a new tartan: The High Life Highland Youth Pipe Band entered a new era with plans to wear The Inverness Castle Experience tartan, designed and woven by Prickly Thistle. Band members and tutors visited the mill in Evanton to witness the tartan being produced.

Lochaber school pupils bring nature to life through sound in Dùthchas project: Pupils across Lochaber were given the opportunity to explore the powerful connection between nature and music through an innovative project with the HLH Ranger Service, 'Dùthchas – Exploring the Sounds of the Natural World' was funded by The Highland Council's Ward Fund and developed to celebrate the deep links between people, place, and culture.

A night to remember: Bee The Change choir takes the stage at Belladrum: The youngest and teenage members of Bee The Change Choir took to the Belladrum stage alongside Callum Beattie! Auldearn Nursery children and Nairn Academy Young Leaders, joined by pupils from Charleston Academy, who were also part of the choir on the night.

Benedetti Foundation returned to the Highlands for a week-long music residency: Hundreds of young people, teachers and music instructors across the Highlands enjoyed an exciting week of music-making and professional learning when the Benedetti Foundation. Delivered in partnership with HLH, the residency brought together a programme of high-quality music education activities helping to inspire the next generation of musicians while strengthening music education provision.

Sport and Physical Activity

Leadership Programme Hoodie Presentation:

A Nairn Academy student was among a trio of young people to receive a Platinum Hoodie through the Leadership Programme. Adam Mitchell completed an impressive 750 leadership hours, volunteering with Active Schools, the Air Cadets and Highland Martial Arts. To achieve Platinum status, Adam also organised a fundraising event for his chosen charity, Surfable Scotland. Also receiving Platinum Hoodies were two young people from Inverness and Nairn who volunteered and fundraised for Cash for Kids: Nairn Academy pupil Rylan Lawrence MacAskill and Millburn Academy pupil Harry MacLeod.

Portree High School pupils Beth Macdonald and Sadie MacIlraith were recognised for their outstanding commitment to volunteering. They were awarded their Gold and Platinum hoodies by Lord Lieutenant Joanie Whiteford.

Ella White completed more than 750 hours of volunteering and received the prestigious Platinum Hoodie. As part of her achievement, Ella organised a successful coffee morning fundraiser, raising £733.72 for Cancer Research UK, and was presented with her award during the cheque presentation in Inverness.

Dynamic dozen awarded athlete travel support funds: Twelve talented Highland athletes competing across sports including cycling, athletics, squash, judo, cricket and badminton received support through the Highland Athlete Travel Award Scheme. In addition to financial assistance, recipients gain access to High Life Highland facilities to support their ongoing development.

Teens and tots shone at Nairn's Young Leaders and Sports Awards Evening: The annual Nairn Academy Celebration of Sport & Leadership recognised pupils' dedication to sport, physical activity and leadership. Olympic sailor Fynn Sterritt and World Taekwondo Championships silver medallist Damon Samsun delivered keynote speeches, while children from Auldearn Nursery delighted attendees with a performance as part of the Nairn Bee The Change Intergenerational Choir.

Primary pupils were quick off the mark at the McRobert Cup: More than 750 primary school pupils from across the Highlands took part in the McRobert Cup at Torvean Park in Inverness with almost 40 schools taking part.

Dornoch Primary claim victory at East Sutherland Cross Country: Pupils from Dornoch Primary School claimed top honours at the East Sutherland School Sports Association Cross Country Championships, held at Bonar Bridge/Ardgay Golf Club. The annual event brought together 93 runners from schools across East Sutherland and North West Sutherland.

Gold Award for two Highland Schools:
Dornoch Primary School celebrated receiving the **sport**scotland Gold School Sport Award for 2025-2027. The award recognises the school's commitment to ensuring pupils are actively engaged in sport and physical activity and highlights the central role that sport plays within the school's planning, practice and ethos.

Ullapool High School celebrated a golden end to the school year after achieving the highest level of recognition from sportscotland for its commitment to promoting sport and physical activity. The school was awarded the prestigious sportscotland Gold School Sport Award, recognising its outstanding efforts to place sport and physical activity at the heart of school life.

Competitions inspired Caithness pupils to get active: More than 150 pupils participated in two successful sports events organised by High Life Highland's Active

Schools team. The programme included a World Cup-themed football festival and a netball tournament, encouraging participation and enjoyment in sport.

Get Active Scotland Funding:
19 Highland-based sports clubs celebrated successful applications in the latest round of funding from Get Active Scotland, administered by HLH. The Fund is one of Scotland's largest programmes focused on increasing participation in physical activity, particularly for the least-active young people and communities living in areas affected by deprivation and rural isolation. The variety of sports being supported in this latest round included bowling, sailing, American football, athletics, shinty, cricket and football.

HLH marked 1 year of Get Active Scotland funding with a round up of the types of projects supported and the level of investment made. More than £330,000 invested in Highland communities through Get Active Scotland fund with 85 clubs benefiting from the fund which is designed to increase participation in sport and physical activity.

King's Baton inspires young athletes and sports clubs during visit to the Highlands: Young people and sports enthusiasts had a unique opportunity to get up close to the Commonwealth Games King's Baton as the Baton Relay made special stops at High Life Highland venues in Aviemore and Inverness.

Basketball brings care experienced young people together in innovative pilot: More than 50 young people from across Scotland came together at Inverness Royal Academy for an innovative basketball festival designed to empower, connect and inspire care-experienced young people through the power of sport. 'Hoops Without Borders', organised by HLH in partnership with The Highland Council's Social Work Service, was delivered with support from the Scottish Government's Summer of Sport initiative.

Summer of Sport delivers active and inclusive fun for East Sutherland families: Children and families across East Sutherland enjoyed a summer packed with sporting opportunities, thanks to funding support from the Scottish Government's Summer of Sport initiative. The funding enabled HLH's Active Schools team to deliver a diverse programme of activities across the area, helping young people stay active, develop new skills, build confidence and make new friends.

Young golfers shine at Nairn Primary Schools golf competition: Young golfers from primary schools in and around Nairn showcased their skills, determination and sportsmanship at this year's Nairn Primary Schools Golf Competition.

Miles of smiles as runners gather for the start of the Winter Series in Dornoch: The popular winter cross country series for pupils in East Ross and East Sutherland got off to a flying start! The Winter Running Series encourages more pupils to enjoy running and experience some friendly competition.

Appendix C.

highlife highland
na gàidhealtachd

MAKING LIFE BETTER

High Life Highland

SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SERVICE

Annual Report 2025 / 26

sportscotland
the national agency for sport

October 2026

Foreword

2025/2026 has been an incredible year for Sport & Physical Activity within Highland. The bumper year for sport on the national stage, with a home Commonwealth Games and the Football World Cup demonstrates the power sport has to bring people together and inspire a nation. Locally we are hugely proud to see some of our Highland Athletes on the National stage and hope they can inspire young people in Highland to dream big.

One of those Athletes, Megan Keith, played a role locally this year as she helped us launch our Get Active Highland Funding in partnership with the London Marathon Foundation and sportscotland. This partnership which has happened only in Glasgow and Highland has been a milestone project and allowed us to give some much needed investment back into community clubs and grass route sports and physical activity. From concept to delivery and now seeing the impact, the partnership has been transformational and allowed us to support more than 100 community projects right across the Highlands.

Through our work with Community Groups and Active Schools Programmes we are so grateful for the volunteers that give up their time to support their local communities to be more active. We must support, nurture and recognise this volunteer workforce in the Highlands as they are the life blood of physical activity provision.

We cannot achieve anything without partnership working and we are very appreciative of the growing number of partners that we work with to create more opportunities. We strive to ensure everyone in Highland communities has access to options to be active. We remain committed to breaking down barriers to participation and I am heartened by the data and the stories that we are making a difference and more people are accessing sport and physical activities.

This year has seen growth and investment with new **sport**scotland and Scottish Government money coming into the sector. This will allow us to expand and develop our services further ensuring that we are offering better support into areas that need it most. The Summer of Sport Funding that was launched in June this year is a great example of how targeted resource and true collaboration yields innovation and makes it easier for more people to participate. With this I am excited and confident that we will continue to grow and develop, making life better in the Highlands through sport and physical activity.

Darren Reid
Head of Sport & Physical Activity



43
Members of Staff

The Sports Team

Head of Sport & Physical Activity: Darren Reid
Community Sport Hub Officers: Vicky Strange (North) & Hugo Crush (South)
Active Schools Managers: Sinclair Patience (North) & Andrea MacKenzie (South)
Activities Development Officer: Eilidh Maclean
Disability Officers: Charlie Forbes & Fiona Green
Disability Coach: Paul Davidson
Sports Development Officer: Sarah Liebnitz
Leadership Development Officer: Elizabeth McDonald
Movers & Shakers Tutor: Cheryl Heggie

North Active Schools Team	South Active Schools Team
Caithness: Alyn Gunn, Stephen Hughes	**Inverness:** Craig Carswell, Hazel Wilson, David Shaw, Matthew Allan, Dagmar Borrowman, Susan Blackwood, Fiona Green, Colin Marshall
Sutherland: Elissa Stevenson, Rachel Cumming, Mark McKenzie	**Lochaber:** Claire Delaney, Amy Disher, Alan Gray, Rebecca Maclean, Pam MacDonald
Easter-Ross: Julie Cleghorn, Jake Williams, Karla Angus, Rachel Cumming	**Nairn:** Deanna Lundie
Mid Ross: Willie McLeod, Murdoch Jamieson	**Badenoch & Strathspey:** Tori Ritchie, Finlay McBain, Kerrie Dickson
Skye, Lochalsh & Wester Ross: Ben Bruce, Steven MacDonald, Danny Steele, Sarah Ross	

Number of visits
350,829

Number of sessions
16,405



Number of participants
14,570

Number of deliverers
1,340

Percentage of school roll
50%

Percentage of which are voluntary
98%

The Year in Numbers
Active Schools

Activity Levels compared to 2025

26,643 more Visits | 790 more Sessions Delivered | 341 more Distinct Participants | 415 more Female Distinct Participants | 23 more Deliverers

50% of the School Roll in Highland is active through Active Schools; up 2% from last year and 8% above National Average.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion



Community-based disability specific opportunities now span 15 termly sessions, averaging 102 participants weekly. VIP Walking moved to Inverness Leisure, with new club links and a monthly swimming session at Culloden Leisure. Sessions across Culloden, Inverness, Dingwall, Golspie and Alness included boccia, frame running, adult fitness and multisport.

During term time, 304 community sessions generated 251 participant contacts. Highland Disability Swim Club Juniors continues weekly at Culloden Leisure, with participation growing.

Our commitment to inclusion was particularly evident through disability sport development. Wheelchair basketball festivals successfully broke down barriers between disabled and non-disabled participants, while boccia competitions and disability-specific activities created meaningful competitive opportunities for pupils with additional support needs and disabilities. Participation in disability-specific sessions increased by 22 sessions, while participation among assessed disabled pupils rose significantly to **42%** of all disabled pupils in Highland, an increase of 9% on the previous year.

Developing an Inclusive Workforce

During the past academic year, we delivered disability-specific training for teachers, volunteers, clubs and Young Leaders, including Cricket Leaders, Curling Leaders and an Inclusive PE Diploma from Scottish Disability Sport. In total, 10 training opportunities reached 151 participants.

We also worked with four high schools and one primary school to deliver Disability Awareness sessions for young leaders. These sessions build confidence to support disability sport events and clubs, helping create more inclusive opportunities. Two schools received boccia training to officiate at local events.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion



Over the past year, the Disability Team worked closely with schools and Active Schools Coordinators to provide targeted sports sessions during the curriculum, lunchtimes and after school. Sessions ranged from weekly programmes to one-off activities, led by volunteers, ASC volunteers, Sports Coach Paul Davidson and Development Officers. Activities were varied to suit all participants.

Schools included: Drummond, Millburn, Inverness Royal, Dingwall, Alness, Ardersier, Aviemore, Grantown, Charleston, Nairn, Ness Castle, Golspie, Central and Lochaber.

Disability Specific Leadership

Young Leaders Kade and Eve achieved outstanding milestones. Kade earned his Gold Hoodie for more than 500 volunteering hours; Steve Walsh presented it at the Junior Boccia Finals at Inverness UHI in March. Eve received her Choose to Lead Level 4 Award. Both have grown in confidence through their valued contribution to Disability Sports.

Bryan Stevens has supported Disability Sports for many years, first as a participant and later as a volunteer coach. He helped establish the Wheelchair Basketball Club, now a thriving Inverness Lions section. In November 2025, he won the High Life Highland Charity Chair Award at the High Life Highland i-Care Awards for his outstanding commitment.







Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Inclusive Clusters



2% more young people from Minority Ethnic Groups involved

9% more people with a disability involved

Multi-school parasports sessions in Inverness thrived, and our Disability Sport Officer also upskilled Young Leaders at Inverness Royal Academy to deliver boccia tournaments. One pupil, who uses a feeding tube/wheelchair, described the Inverness Boccia Heats as "the most included he has ever felt in sport". ASN staff were delighted with the positive impact it had on him and he was signposted to more sessions in the community. Inclusive opportunities continued to grow through boccia, parasport, adapted activities and disability sport programmes.

In Fort William the ASC has supported two primary schools in upskilling their Pupil Support Assistants to deliver ASN specific sessions. Using her observations of the barriers limiting pupils' engagement, targeted adaptations ensured that those pupils not only remained engaged in sessions but were able to thrive within them. She also worked with our Disability Sport Officer to bring frame running sessions back to Fort William and linked with another Lochaber ASC who's commitment to introduce swimming sessions at the local hydrotherapy pool for wheelchair users took off, especially for one child who has not been able to participate in any other activities due to his complex needs.

One pupil, who uses a feeding tube/wheelchair, described the Inverness Boccia Heats as *"the most included he has ever felt in sport".*

-Boccia Participant

Inclusive Clusters

42% of pupils from SIMD 1&2 Involved

2% more ASN pupils involved



Culloden Academy had 22 more secondary female participants after offering 20 different curriculum time sessions for S1-S6 pupils in Active Girls Week, with 242 girls taking part and supporting pathways into Clubs. Girls Rugby sessions in Great Glen Cluster have also experienced traction. TaeKwon-Do sessions in partnership with Dunbar TaeKwon-Do Club had excellent participation across cultural minorities, girls and low SIMD.

Our work with Care Experienced young people became more focused through partnership work with Highland Boxing Academy. Twelve Young Leaders from five secondary schools completed SCQF Level 4 and 5 modules through our Leadership Programme, developing skills in communication, conflict resolution, connection and goal setting while becoming positive role models within their communities.



Hoops Without Borders

More than 50 young people from across Scotland, including care-experienced young people, came together at Inverness Royal Academy for a basketball festival. The event was delivered by High Life Highland and Highland Council Social Work, with Scottish Government Summer of Sport support.

Participants represented communities across Scotland and 14 countries, building inclusion, confidence and wellbeing through basketball. Young Leaders helped run the event, supported by Basketball Scotland.

The festival celebrated diversity, friendship and cultural exchange, creating a safe, welcoming space for young people to connect, try something new and feel valued. The event showed how sport can bring people together and showcased the Highlands as a welcoming, supportive place for young people to thrive.



Sport & the Gaelic Language

Gaelic language and culture also played an important role in making sport accessible and relevant to Highland communities. The Gaelic Sport Fèis engaged 150 pupils, while the Gaelic Shinty Festival welcomed almost 160 pupils from 11 schools, supported by 19 Young Gaelic Leaders, celebrating both sporting participation and cultural identity.

"Bu mhath leam taing a thoirt seachad dhuibh uile airson an-dè. Abair latha sgoinneil airson iomain agus Gàidhlig!" - Head Teacher





Partnerships

Partnerships are vital to making things happen in Highland and we are fortunate to have fantastic working relationships and formal partnership agreements with a number of National Governing Bodies for Sport and other partners. These partners bring investment and expertise to the area that is essential for growing the number of opportunities to be active, to up-skill our staff and volunteers and allow Highland athletes to progress in their chosen sport. The new collaboration between the London Marathon Foundation and **sport**scotland and the partnership with The Highland Council that is delivering the Summer of Sport initiative are examples of successful partnership projects. Both these initiatives have brought tangible benefits and investment into our communities across Highland and ultimately will allow more people to be active across Highland Communities.

School Sport Awards

Highland schools continue to show their passion for sport and physical activity, with 44 of them now proud recipients of sportscotland's Gold School Sport Award. The 11 Gold Qualified schools are poised to apply for Gold by submitting a small amount of additional information. In just a year, Highland has more than doubled the number of schools achieving awards.

Our Gold Schools

Dornoch Primary School
Resolis Primary School
Strathpeffer Primary School
Ullapool High School
Bonar Bridge Primary School
Culloden Academy
Muirtown Primary School
Bun-Sgoil Ghaidhlig Phort Righ
Millburn Academy
Bridgend Primary School
Farr Primary School (Inverness)
Halkirk Primary School
Reay Primary School
Lochardil Primary School
Cauldeen Primary School
Holm Primary School
Ardnamurchan High School
Dingwall Primary School
Noss Primary School
Ben Wyvis Primary School

Gold Qualified

Rosehall Primary School
Tarradale Primary School
Dingwall Academy
Culbokie Primary School
Fortrose Academy
Kyleakin Primary School
Dalneigh Primary School
Miller Academy Primary School
Cannich Bridge Primary School
Glen Urquhart High School
Wick High School

Silver

Gledfield Primary School
Raigmore Primary School
Cawdor Primary School
Helmsdale Primary School
Gairloch High School
Teanassie Primary School
Kiltearn Primary School
Glenurquhart Primary School
Munlochy Primary School

Bronze

Tomnacross Primary School
Strathconon Primary School
Golspie High School
Beauly Primary School





Community

The 2025/26 academic year brought significant growth, innovation and collaboration across community sport and physical activity in the Highlands. Stronger partnerships, targeted investment and a shared commitment to local communities improved opportunities across schools, clubs and community organisations.

A more joined-up approach brought Associated School Groups (ASGs), Physical Education staff, Active Schools Coordinators, Community Sports Hub Officers, Leisure Managers, workforce and youth development teams, Young Leaders and community partners together through termly Sport and Physical Activity meetings. This improved communication, strengthened networks, reduced duplication and aligned provision with local need.

We developed 12 new Area Sport Club Networks, supported club development and school-to-club links, backed Highland athletes, delivered a Highland coaching conference with **sport**scotland, and worked with Scottish Governing Bodies to strengthen support for Highland clubs.

The Get Active Highland Fund helped clubs and community groups build capacity, develop programmes, improve facilities and provide affordable, inclusive participation. Together, these developments strengthened pathways into sport, workforce opportunities and participation, creating a strong foundation for future growth across Highland communities.





Community

12 Area Sport Club Networks

212 affiliated clubs and community organisations

45 different sports and activities represented

31,279 members engaged across Area Sport Club networks

Area Sport Club Networks

In 2025/26, High Life Highland reviewed the Community Sports Hub model with **sport**scotland support and established 12 Area Sport Club Networks. Each network meets community needs, fosters collaboration and empowers community leaders. Clubs and groups can join the network best suited to their reach.

Area Sport Club Networks:

Caithness and North Sutherland • East Sutherland and Tain • Alness and Invergordon • Dingwall and Fortrose
Gairloch and Ullapool • Skye and Lochalsh • Inverness East • Inverness West
Nairn • Badenoch and Strathspey • Great Glen • Lochaber

Community Sports Hub Officers bring clubs, groups and partners together to share resources, access training, coordinate activity and create more inclusive opportunities.





Community

MORE THAN £330,000 INVESTED IN HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES THANKS TO GET ACTIVE SCOTLAND FUNDING INITIATIVE



Launched in September 2025 by Olympic and Commonwealth Games athlete Megan Keith – Get Active Scotland is a partnership between the London Marathon Foundation, **sport**scotland, High Life Highland and Glasgow Life. Designed to increase participation in sport and physical activity, it is already helping communities across the region become more active, more often.

From bowling and tennis in Badenoch and rugby and golf in Ross-shire to sailing and shinty in Skye along with swimming and surfing in Caithness, the fund supports projects across the Highland Council Area that create new or enhanced opportunities for people of all ages to participate and have fun! Since the fund opened, 85 clubs and community groups have received grants totalling £331,036.70, helping organisations purchase equipment, improve facilities, develop programmes and remove barriers to participation.

"This fund is making a real and lasting difference to clubs and organisations right across the region and, in turn, helping improve the health and wellbeing of people living here – contributing to our mission of Making Life Better."
- Steve Walsh, HLH CEO

"The success of Get Active Scotland in Highland shows the real difference that targeted investment can make in helping people become more active, more often. These projects are creating opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to get involved in sport and physical activity in ways that work for them."
- Forbes Dunlop, Chief Executive of **sport**scotland.

The Get Active Scotland Fund is one of the country's largest programmes focused on increasing participation in physical activity, particularly among less-active children and young people and people living in communities affected by deprivation and rural isolation. With £500,000 split between Glasgow and the Highlands, this funding commitment from the London Marathon Foundation marks the first time it has awarded a grant dedicated solely to supporting communities in Scotland.

Progression

Highland Athlete Travel Award Scheme

In partnership with sportscotland, High Life Highland were again able to offer funding support to some of Highlands top athletes competing at a national or international level through the Highland Athlete Travel Award Scheme (HATAS).
The programme secured another £15,000 of investment to help talented athletes overcome the unique travel challenges associated with living and competing in the Highlands.
Across two funding rounds, the scheme received 70 applications from athletes representing a diverse range of sports. Following assessment, 18 athletes competing across 14 different sports received awards:

·Andrew Baird - Athletics
·Charlotte Rose Burton - Orienteering
·Emily Rothney - Snowboarding
·Fraser Brown - Golf
·Grace Alexander - Basketball
·Hannah McCook - Golf
·Heather Gordon - Rowing/Beach sprints
·Iona Scott - Orienteering
·Lucy Daly - Judo
·Matthew McCreadie - Swimming
·Miguel Alexander Reis-Forrester - Gymnastics
·Mollie Parker - Cricket
·Nebi Sengular - Swimming
·Oliver March - Free-style Skeir
·Olivia Poole - Cycling
·Phoebe Strachan - Surfing
·Ross Gollan - Athletics
·Zack Paton - Squash



2026 Highland Coaching Conference

The 2026 Highlands and Islands Coaching Conference brought together coaches, volunteers, community organisations, governing bodies, students, educators and sports development professionals from across the region.

The conference focused on three themes: Strength and Conditioning, Women's Health, and Nutrition. Keynote presentations, practical workshops and discussions supported cross-sector collaboration and shared learning, giving attendees practical takeaways for their coaching practice. Plans are underway to build and strengthen the coaching network.



Progression

Progressing Coaches

The Coach Education programme equips volunteers, coaches and club leaders with the skills and qualifications to support safe, effective and inclusive sport across Highland. It provides safeguarding, leadership, first aid, coach education and grant support, helping recruit, develop and retain volunteers while strengthening clubs and participation.

During 2025/26:

- 412 coaches, volunteers and club officials accessed learning opportunities.
- A record number of safeguarding courses were delivered.
- More volunteers gained sport specific coaching and leadership qualifications.
- Additional support was provided through the Coach Education Grant Scheme.

Courses Delivered	NGB	Number of Learners
Child Wellbeing & Protection in Sport Child Protection & Wellbeing Officer	HLH/ **sport**scotland	• 33 coach education courses delivered (+5 compared to 2024/25) • 412 learners trained (+32 compared to 2024/25) • 225 volunteers and coaches trained in safeguarding • 19 coach education grants awarded • Delivery across Highland communities including Portree, Kingussie, Inverness, Alness, Invergordon, Golspie, Brora, Fortrose and Wick, alongside virtual learning opportunities
Emergency First-Aid at Work Scottish Youth Football First Aid	HLH/SFA	
Netball Intro to Coaching Netball Leaders On My Whistle Tutor Developemnt	Netball Scotland	
Leading Athletics Tutor Development	Scottish Athletics	
Activity Instructor Training	Scottish Gymnastics	
Floor Curling Leaders Workshop	Scottish Curling	
Badminton Basics Tutor Development Progression towards Level 1	Badminton Scotland	
Football Level 1.1 /1.2 / 1.3	Scottish Football Association	

Leadership Programme

Hoodie & Award Milestones



847 new Young Leaders registered

At least 56,775 leadership hours recorded

1,119 Hoodies awarded

CHOOSE TO LEAD SCQF AWARD Level 4 48 Young Leaders passed

Level 5 22 Young Leaders passed

Gaelic leadership training is organised for Easter 27

982 primary school pupils completed Junior Leader Training

In 2025/26, the Green Leadership pathway expanded placements beyond sports coaching to Library Leaders and Countryside Rangers. Partnerships with Highland Hospice, Cash for Kids and Mikeysline, plus the Belladrum Intergenerational Choir with Auldearn Nursery, Nairn Academy and St Olaf Care Home, gave Young Leaders practical experience in inclusion, reducing loneliness, Early Years confidence and event logistics.

Leadership Programme

NEW YELLOW HOODIE MILESTONE FOR 2025/26 – Mental Health Awareness

The HLH Yellow Hoodie milestone requires completing 150 hours of volunteering.
To earn this specific tier, Young Leaders in the High Life Highland Leadership Programme must also support dedicated volunteering or fundraising activity for a mental health charity, such as the official partner, Mikeysline.

"Our Bee The Change Campaign is all about connecting with the community in a creative way, breaking down barriers, challenging stigma and changing the dialogue around mental health. To have this collaboration with the High Life Highland Leadership Programme and launching this hoodie in partnership with Nairn County is the perfect example of this. A real person-centred approach, within the local community right through the generations. We are excited to see how this organically grows and looking forward to young people across Nairn and the Highlands volunteering for Mikeysline and 'Bee-ing' the Change." - Allana Stables, Bee The Change Manager with Mikeysline





THE BELLADRUM MILESTONE

The year's crowning achievement was the main-stage festival performance of the Intergenerational Choir alongside headline artist Callum Beattie. Born from a community partnership between the HLH Leadership Programme and Mikeysline, this project brought together toddlers from Auldearn Nursery, teenage Young Leaders from Nairn Academy, and elderly residents from St Olaf Care Home. Co-led by local musicians and former HLH Young Leaders, the weekly rehearsals and final live performance provided current Youth Leaders with invaluable, practical experience in fostering social inclusion, reducing loneliness, boosting early-years confidence, and managing large-scale event logistics.

DANCE LEADERSHIP

A total of 168 children from 18 different schools passed through the Dance Leadership programme 2025/2026.

29 – Young Leaders (secondary schools) 139 – Junior Leaders (primary schools)

Following Dance Leadership training, various dance sessions have been implemented around Highland Council area. These include:

Breakfast boogie, extra-curricular Dance Clubs, Dance buddies for nursery dance session, P1-3, P4-7 Dance Club, Schools Out Dance Club, dance choreography sessions for Summer Fete display, Dance Platform.

The course has assisted with P.E. curriculum coursework and complemented the 'Get Girls Active' programme.

In East Sutherland 20 Junior Dance Leaders, delivered 18 dance sessions to 80 pupils (P1-5) following Junior Dance Leader training.



Leadership Spotlight



NEW RECRUIT - Golspie High School

Keen Footballer Charlie Crawford is an emerging young leader who is already standing out as a superb representative of our Leadership Programme. His willingness to travel over an hour by bus at 6:30 am and then walk 3 miles just to give back to grassroots football shows a level of character and maturity that is incredibly rare at his age. Whether supporting his local Active Schools Co-ordinator, coaching with the Inverness Caledonian Thistle Community Trust, locally at to regional camps in Brora, or upskilling himself at Young Leaders workshops, Charlie constantly puts the community first. He is a phenomenal role model for every young leader in the Highlands.

Harry MacLeod, a pupil at Millburn Academy, has demonstrated outstanding commitment to the High Life Highland Leadership Programme through his contributions to sport, volunteering and community engagement.

Harry's leadership has extended beyond the local level through his role on the sportscotland National Young Ambassador Delivery Team, representing the voice of young people in shaping school sport across Scotland. He has also made a significant contribution to the Cash for Kids Mission Christmas campaign, achieving the Platinum Hoodie Award for over 750 volunteer hours and supporting fundraising initiatives that benefited local children and schools. As a finalist in the HLH i-care Inspiring Young Leader Award, Harry exemplifies the positive impact that youth leadership pathways can have in developing confident, community-minded young people across the Highlands.



It has been lovely to see how much our daughter has grown through the leadership programme. She has become much more confident and responsible, and I have especially noticed how she has started stepping out of her comfort zone and putting herself forward for new opportunities and developing her resilience along the way. It is lovely to see her hard work and commitment being recognised. - **Parent**

"Being a Young Leader has been such a great experience and has helped me grow in confidence and become more willing to take initiative. I've developed so many skills, including resilience, communication, leadership, organisation and teamwork especially with the help of my mentor's feedback and learning points." - **Young Leader**

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MAKING LIFE BETTER

High Life Highland

SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SERVICE

Highland Archive Centre
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