

QUARTER ONE 2025/26 - PERFORMANCE REPORT - HLH STRATEGY 2025-2030

Recommendation

The purpose of this report is to present performance information for the outcomes identified in the High Life Highland Strategy 2025-2030.

It is recommended that Directors:

- i. note and comment on the quarter one performance information;
- ii. note the library non-user survey in **Appendix A**;
- iii. approve the archives and museums and galleries delivery plans in **Appendices B1 and B2**;
- iv. note the archives and the museums and galleries annual reviews in **Appendices C1 and C2**; and
- v. approve the Integrated Impact Assessment Policy in **Appendix D** and agree that an associated Impact Assessment paragraph be included in all future board reports.

1. High Life Highland Strategy 2025-2030 Contribution

- 1.1 High Life Highland's (HLH) purpose is **Making Life Better**. The HLH Strategy 2025-2030 contains five Strategic Objectives which support the delivery of this purpose, and this report supports the following highlighted objectives:

1. **Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region.**
2. **Maximise and grow our income to re-invest across our services.**
3. **Ensure a consistent high value of delivery across HLH services.**
4. **Commit to the net zero sustainability agenda.**
5. **Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The High Life Highland Strategy 2025-2030 was agreed by the HLH Board at its meeting held on 11 December 2024. The Board defined the strategy outcomes by identifying what success will look like through eight performance areas, listed below.
- 2.2 Previous reports have provided standard performance information in an appendix which included system generated calculations, with exception and other contextual reporting provided in the body of the report. The ongoing transition to the new leisure management system has meant that some information has not been able to be provided which has affected the normal system generated content. This time round the performance information is, therefore, provided in the body of the report with the supporting information provided alongside it.
- 2.3 This report provides information on performance areas:
- 1 - Increase Member Numbers
 - 2 - Increase Service Users
 - 3 – Improving User/Service Satisfaction Levels
 - 6 – Capital Investment Levels

Information on performance areas 4 – Improving staff satisfaction levels; and 5 - Improving Financial Sustainability; are in the finance and HR reports elsewhere on this agenda.

3. Summary of Performance, Further Information, Exception Reporting and Corrective Action

3.1 Performance Area 1 – Increase member numbers:

3.1.1 There are four services where customers can enrol or sign up to receive services: Leisure; Libraries; Music Tuition and Sports Development. Services aim to increase member numbers year-on-year and the table below shows member numbers as they were at the end of financial year 2024/25 with the change and percentage change columns calculated for the year to date (end July). As can be seen in the table below, at the end of July 2025 all services which have members saw reductions compared with the numbers they had at the end of financial year 2024/25.

Service	No at end of 2024/25	Current No [to end Jul 2025]	Change	%age Change
Leisure	62,050.00	61,476.00	- 574.00	-0.93%
Libraries	27,536.00	24,070.00	- 3,466.00	-12.59%
Music Tuition	4,090.00	3,862.00	- 228.00	-5.57%
Sport	9,719.00	8,518.00	- 1,201.00	-12.36%

3.1.2 There is information on actions being taken to increase member numbers below.

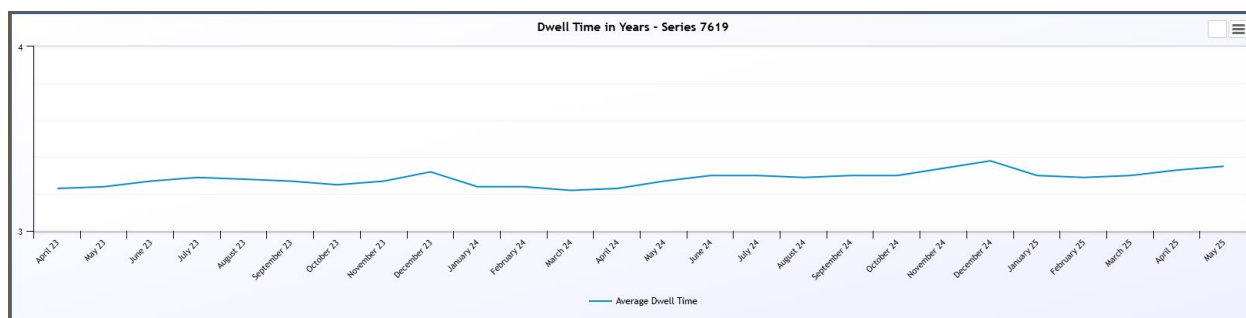
3.1.3 Library members reduced by 12%. This reflects the seasonal nature of library membership which tends to increase with the new school term. The libraries team have several actions underway to improve customer numbers:

- Work is underway with nurseries, primary and secondary schools to sign up children at the earliest possible stage.
- Reoptimising of mobile library routes to better serve rural schools, care homes and general customers and attract new members and promoting the service more widely.
- Increasing promotion of the digital suite of library resources - most recent promotional activity was to all council employees.
- Improving social media presence to encourage new members - most recent activity was furthering our Instagram presence.
- Increasing presence at community events and offer of sign up campaigns - most recent presence was at Belladrum where we engaged with over 1000 people.

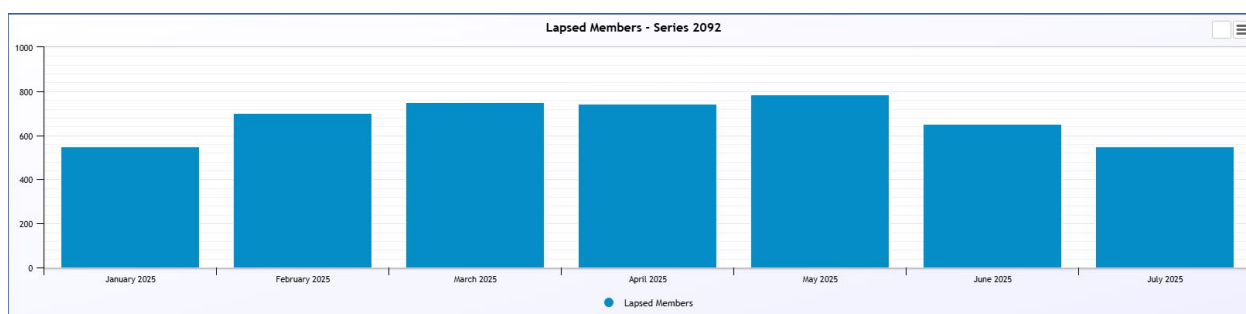
3.1.4 The reduction in music tuition pupils is small (228 pupils) and is a seasonal variation with senior pupils leaving school during term three. This should be addressed as the team focuses on new pupil enrolment in the new school year in August/September 2025.

3.1.5 The sports team (similar to music above) normally sees a reduction at this time of year and should be addressed in the new school term. The team has been actively recruiting and developing volunteer deliverers which will support an increase in members in the new school year.

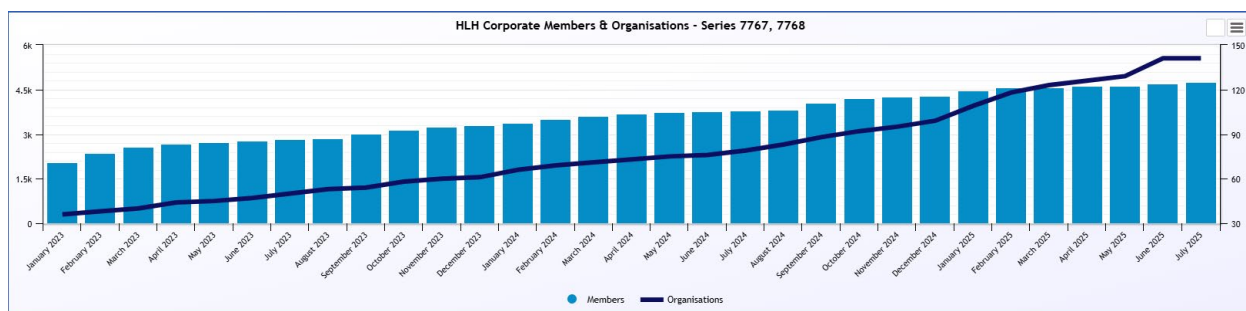
3.1.6 Leisure member retention levels are holding steady. The graph below shows the average life of a subscription, in years. At the end of financial year 2025 the average duration of a subscription was 3.3 years and in May it was 3.35 years. Going further back, the April 2023 figure was 3.23 years and this data indicates a stable membership base. This is one of the data series which has been affected by the move to the new leisure management system with data being up to the end of May. The figures will be refreshed when the new Leisure Management System is implemented.



3.1.7 The retention measure for library memberships is lapsed members (membership card not having been used in the past year) This graph shows lapsed members each month. The aim is to reduce the number of lapsed members year-on-year. Up to the end of March 2024/25 the number of lapsed members was 749. This year, up to the end of July 2025/26 the number of lapsed memberships was 549. That is a change of -200, a percentage change of -26.7%.



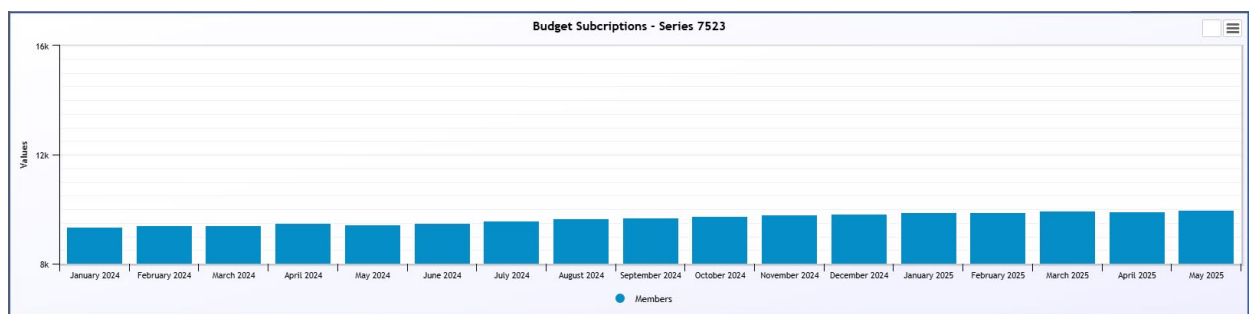
3.1.8 In seeking to increase member numbers the Leisure Team has developed a corporate membership referred to as the “Employee Wellbeing Membership” which offers a staff wellbeing discount/subsidised subscription scheme for the Highland business community.



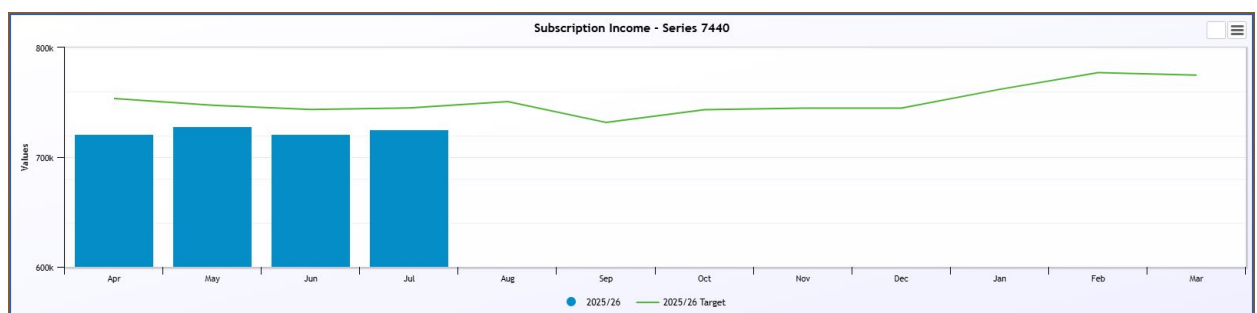
This graph shows the number of businesses which have signed up to the scheme and the number of subscriptions taken out by employees of those businesses:

- i. for the number of businesses involved, at the end of financial year, March 2025 there were 123 and at this point in the year, July 2025 there are 141. That is a change of 18 which is a percentage change of 14.63%;
- ii. for the number of subscriptions, at the end of financial year, March 2025 there were 4577 and at this point in the year, July 2025 there were 4760. That is a change of 183 which is a percentage change of 4%; and
- iii. retention in this section is very positive with little movement, most likely down to our Employee Wellbeing partner businesses contributing in part or in full to their respective staff subscriptions. Recent feedback from a client highlighted the seamless way for its employees to participate in the scheme to support their wellbeing.

3.1.9 HLH seeks to make life better for those in our communities who need our support the most and one way of doing this is by supporting families and individuals who experience financial disadvantage. This graph shows the number of people (9,940) who have subscribed to our concession scheme for people experiencing financial disadvantage. The new High Life Active Card is in the process of being finalised to be rolled out later this year and this data series will be changed in future (towards the end of the calendar year) as people enrol on the new scheme.



3.1.10 The graph below shows the income from subscriptions and the income target. The annual income target from subscriptions for financial year 2025/26 is £9,018,396. The income target year to date (to end July 2025) for this financial year is £2,989,220. The actual amount of income generated so far this year is £2,895,864. That is a variance of £-93,356 which is a percentage variance of -3.12%. As can be seen in the finance report elsewhere on this agenda, the forecast year end deficit is £270k. Directors will recall that the targets set for the *highlife* card sales in 2025/26 were further stretched than in previous years. Despite the current projected year end deficit, the team is working hard to bring new subscriptions into the scheme, whilst retaining existing members.



3.1.11 There will be a presentation on actions being taken to increase member numbers and subscriptions income at the HLH Board meeting with the actions being taken to address the income shortfall and leisure member numbers are as follows:

- Focussed training programmes for staff are underway. These are designed to strengthen product knowledge, customer engagement, sales understanding and improving the onboarding for new team members.
- Introduction of mystery customer visits to assist with training development and understanding service delivery quality.
- Significant work continues around growth and retention. The introduction of the new HYROX programme, along with the return of the Learn to Swim classes (after school summer recess) are expected to support recovery levels.
- Campaigns and promotions
 - Bring a buddy: June & July 2025 – despite the challenges presented in running this promotion (due to the implementation of the new LMS) the campaign still attracted:
 - Registrations = 259
 - Redemptions = 100
 - Conversions = 28 (28%)
 - UHI Welcome Week: August & September
 - HLH Wellness Month – Find Your Feel Good: September
 - UK Active's National Fitness Day: 24 September – will include fitness celebrations, highlighting new and existing classes, gym challenges. Will also include a Flash Offer One-Day promotion with nothing to pay until October.

3.2 Performance Area 2 - Increase service users:

3.2.1 Customer numbers are on track this year to exceed what was achieved last year as can be seen in the table below.

In Person Visits by Service	2024/25	YTD 2024/25	YTD 2025/26	Change	% Change
Archives	12,810	4,813	5,402	589	11%
Community Venues & Engagement	117,674	38,725	39,067	342	1%
Countryside Rangers	15,794	7,142	7,386	244.00	3%
Leisure ¹	2,474,203	763,629	903,300	139,671	15%
Libraries	1,865,927	466,248	479,878	13,630	3%
Museums & Galleries	155,463	81,626	81,820	194	0%
Music Tuition	102,647	26,693	38,272	11,579	30%
Sport	325,748	82,840	81,218	-1,622	-2%
	5,070,266	1,471,716	1,636,343	164,627	11%

As with in-person visits, the target for digital engagements is to exceed what was achieved in the previous year.

Digital Engagements by Service	2024/25	YTD 2024/25	YTD 2025/26	Change	% Change
Archives	2,418,215	693,763	1,023,823	330,060	47.58%
Countryside Rangers	95,045	28,659	24,583	-4,076	-14.22%
Libraries	879,340	228,310	196,688	-31,622	-13.85%

¹ Leisure numbers for June and July have been estimated based on customer numbers over the past two years and achieving the same level of increase as seen by the team in the months April to June. This is due to the historical data transition to the new Leisure Management System. They will be corrected when the customer data can be obtained from the new system.

Museums & Galleries	83,595	23,270	23,220	-50	-0.21%
Total	3,476,195	974,002	1,268,314	294,312	30.22%

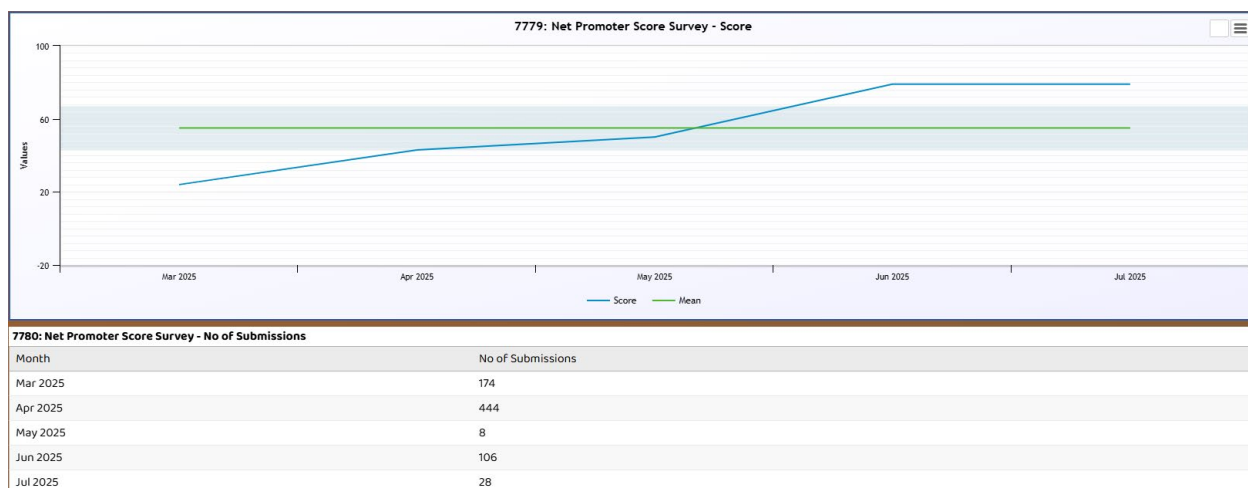
3.2.2 Overall digital customer engagements have achieved target because of the performance of the Archives team. All four archive centres are continuing to create new, engaging digital content which retains their existing audiences and attracts new followers. Digital engagements are also growing because of the ever-increasing reach of [Am Baile's](#) offering. Since April this has been boosted by a weekly feature proving particularly popular and by posting more, interactive 'mystery' photos.

3.2.3 Countryside Rangers' digital engagements decreased by 14% compared with the same period last year, this was owing to the serious illness of the main content manager/developer. The staff member has returned to work and is producing/publishing additional content to get engagements back on track.

3.2.4 Libraries' digital engagements decreased by 13.9% compared with the same period last year because of the decision taken by the Press Reader Newspaper service to embargo access to the latest editions of local newspapers for 24 hours. The libraries team continue to promote Press Reader and other online library services as widely as possible to help compensate and rebuild engagements.

3.3 Performance Area 3 - Improving user/service satisfaction levels:

3.3.1 The net promoter score² survey rating is high (79 in June and July and has increased since it was introduced in March 2025). The thinking in introducing the survey was to seek a high volume of responses because the survey is short (two questions), however, this is not materialising. The Heads of Service will review the approach to surveys at the next Performance Board meeting in October.



3.3.2 Services also carry out individual customer surveys with the most recent of these being a libraries non-user survey which can be seen in **Appendix A**. The following actions are being taken following the survey:

- Promotion of the new housebound service.
- Promotion of the newly revised mobile library service.
- Increase promotion of the digital suite of library resources.
- Increase libraries presence at community events to offer sign up campaigns.

² NPS score above 0 is regarded as being good, with a score above 20 being regarded as being very good. Scores above 50 are regarded as being excellent and above 80 being sector leading.

3.4 **Performance Area 5 - Improving financial sustainability:**

3.4.1 This indicator is reported in the Finance report elsewhere on this agenda.

3.5 **Performance Area 6 - Capital investment levels:**

3.5.1 HLH has been included in the work of the Highland Council on its Highland Investment Programme and an update was included in the Chief Executive's update at the previous HLH Board meeting. A report is due to go to The Highland Council in October 2025 which will outline the level of investment, locations and timelines.

3.6 **Performance Area 7 – Health and Safety Performance:**

3.6.1 The Health and Safety and Environmental Compliance Committee considered health and safety performance reporting at its meeting held on 7 August 2025 and the chair will provide a verbal update to the HLH Board on this when it is asked to approve the minute of the Committee meeting. The areas which the Committee agreed be reported to the HLH Board were as follows:

- The actions taken following a ³RIDDOR reported chemical spill incident. This has been investigated internally with improvement actions having been undertaken by the leisure team along with the actions on cleaning chemicals (below). There has been no contact from Environmental Health on the incident. Should the matter be investigated by Environmental Health, the investigation and actions taken following it could help to mitigate any enforcement actions or the need for recommendations for improvement.
- Work on improving handling of undiluted cleaning chemicals and their dilution.
- The external health and safety audit which includes a review of Merkinch Community Centre because of the Council request that HLH operate it directly and a review of the central leisure processes/procedures/guidance for cleaning chemical handling and dilution with a sample check at Inverness Leisure and checks during audits of other leisure sites where HLH staff carry out cleaning duties.
- Development of Health and Safety Delivery Plan (see Delivery Plan section below) with a focus on keeping everyone safe
- Creation of a Health and Safety compliance post with a target to have in place Q3 25/26.

3.7 **Performance Area 8 - Sustainability results:**

3.7.1 Reporting in this area will be developed over the coming year, to reflect the Highland Council's delivery plan.

4. **Delivery Plans**

4.1 Two service teams: archives; and museums and galleries, have developed delivery plans and these are in **Appendices B1 and B2** for the consideration and approval of the HLH Board.

4.2 The Health and Safety and Environmental Compliance Committee has started work on the development of a delivery plan and considered a draft at its meeting held on 7 August 2025, and agreed that it focus on:

³ Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) place a requirement on organisations to report certain types of accidents and incidents to the Government, Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE works with Local Authority Environmental Health Officers and they may investigate accidents and incidents reported under the regulations.

- i. keeping everyone safe;
- ii. further developing a learning culture; and
- iii. strengthening internal review.

4.3 The plan includes the creation of an internal health and safety compliance post, paid for this year from reserves, and built into future years budgets as a permanent post.

4.4 The detail of the action plan will be considered by the Committee at its November meeting with a view to it being considered at the December 2025 HLH Board meeting.

5. Service Annual Reviews

5.1 As part of the annual planning and review cycle services complete annual reviews which are used with staff, customers, and other stakeholders. The archives, and museums and galleries annual reviews can be seen in **Appendices C1 and C2**. The service reviews form part of the teams' service planning; performance management/monitoring; and reporting cycle.

6. Policy Review

6.1 The Services Equality Policy was first approved by the HLH Board in 2013 in compliance with the Equalities Act. Legislation and duties on public organisations have developed since then and THC included, in the updated the Service Delivery Contract, a requirement that HLH comply with the same legislation it has to in relation to Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection legislation.

6.2 THC has developed on-line learning resources, guidance and an Integrated Impact Assessment tool to support compliance. THC has given HLH staff direct access to its guidance, training and the impact assessment tool. The tool is comprehensive and will support HLH to meet its legal and contractual requirements.

6.3 A new HLH Integrated Impact Assessment Policy has been developed to replace the Services Equality Policy. This is in **Appendix D** and it is recommended that the HLH Board approves the new policy.

6.4 To support compliance with the new policy it is recommended that an Impact Assessment section be included in all board reports (removing the current Equality Implications paragraph) as follows:

"Impact Assessment

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."

This will be followed by a paragraph detailing whether an impact assessment is required, the reason(s) for this, and if an impact assessment is required it will be provided.

7. Implications

- 7.1 Resource implications – while this report discusses resources and financial implications, there are no resource implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 7.2 Equality implications - there are no new equality implications arising from this report.
- 7.3 Legal implications - there are no new legal implications arising from this report.
- 7.4 Risk implications - there are no new risk implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Directors:

- i. note and comment on the quarter one performance information;
- ii. note the library non-user survey in **Appendix A**;
- iii. approve the archives and museums and galleries delivery plans in **Appendices B1** and **B2**;
- iv. note the archives and the museums and galleries annual reviews in **Appendices C1** and **C2**; and
- v. approve the Integrated Impact Assessment Policy in **Appendix D** and agree that an associated Impact Assessment paragraph be included in all future board reports.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 21 August 2025

Author: Douglas Wilby, Director of Corporate Performance



MAKING
LIFE
BETTER

HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND
LIBRARIES

NON-USER SURVEY REPORT

2025



Summary

High Life Highland operates 40 public libraries, 4 mobile libraries and 1 housebound service on behalf of the Highland Council.

The service conducted a survey with those not currently using libraries during March 2025. The aim of the survey was to identify the reasons why some people are not using their local library and to determine what the service can do to encourage future use.

Surveys were carried out online, at local leisure centres, visitor attractions, community centres, and at community events.

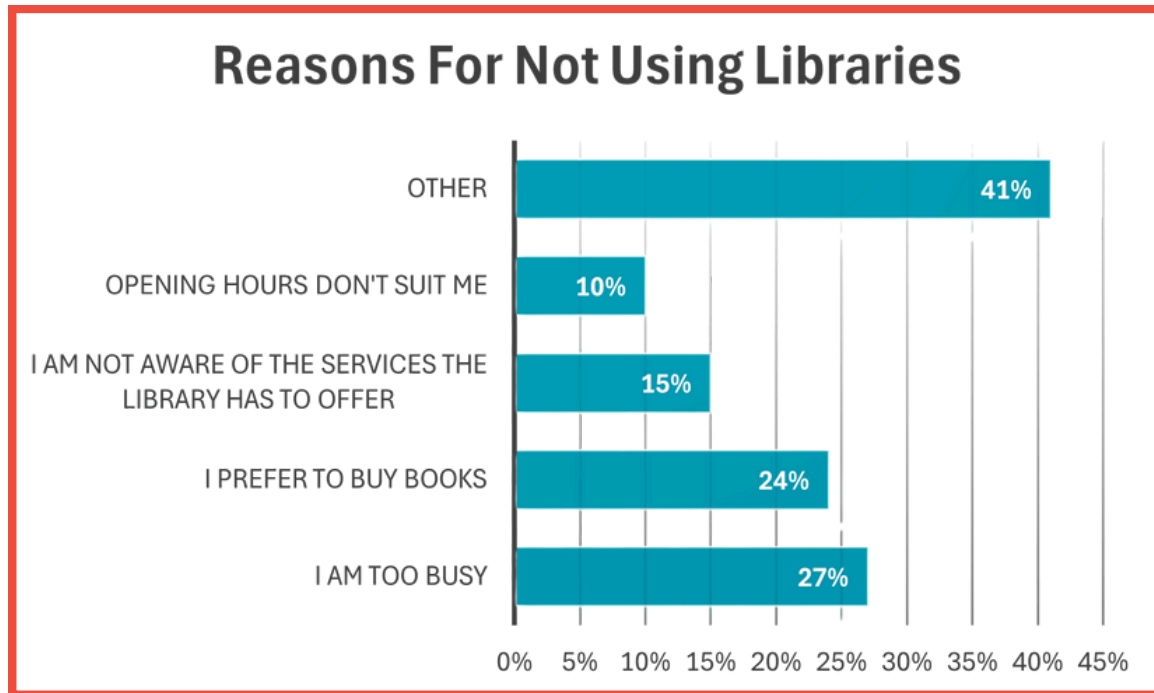
A total of 755 people responded to the survey, 184 of which said that they had used their library within the past 12 months. Those that had not (571 respondents) formed the basis for the survey.



Key Findings

- ❶ Only 10% of non-users said they were unlikely to use their local library in the future.
- ❷ Nearly half of respondents indicated that if they were to use libraries in the future, they would visit the library in-person and also use online resources. 28% expressed interest solely in services within library buildings, while 24% were only interested in online resources.
- ❸ The main reasons cited by respondents for not using their local library were being too busy (27%) or preferring to buy their own books (24%).
- ❹ 41% of respondents selected 'other' as their reason for not using their local library. Some of the reasons given included- lack of parking or having to pay for parking, no longer having a mobile library visiting, not living near a library, currently reading on a kindle or online, their library having a poor selection of books, not being a reader, ill health, and having a disability such as sight impairments, arthritis, and dyslexia.
- ❺ Some respondents believed that the service still charged fines for overdue books and cited this as a barrier to using the service.
- ❻ Some respondents did not class themselves as a library user even though they stated that they make use of the library's online services such as e-books, e-audiobooks and digital newspapers.
- ❼ 23% respondents said that they did not use other services provided by High Life Highland.

Reasons for not using Libraries

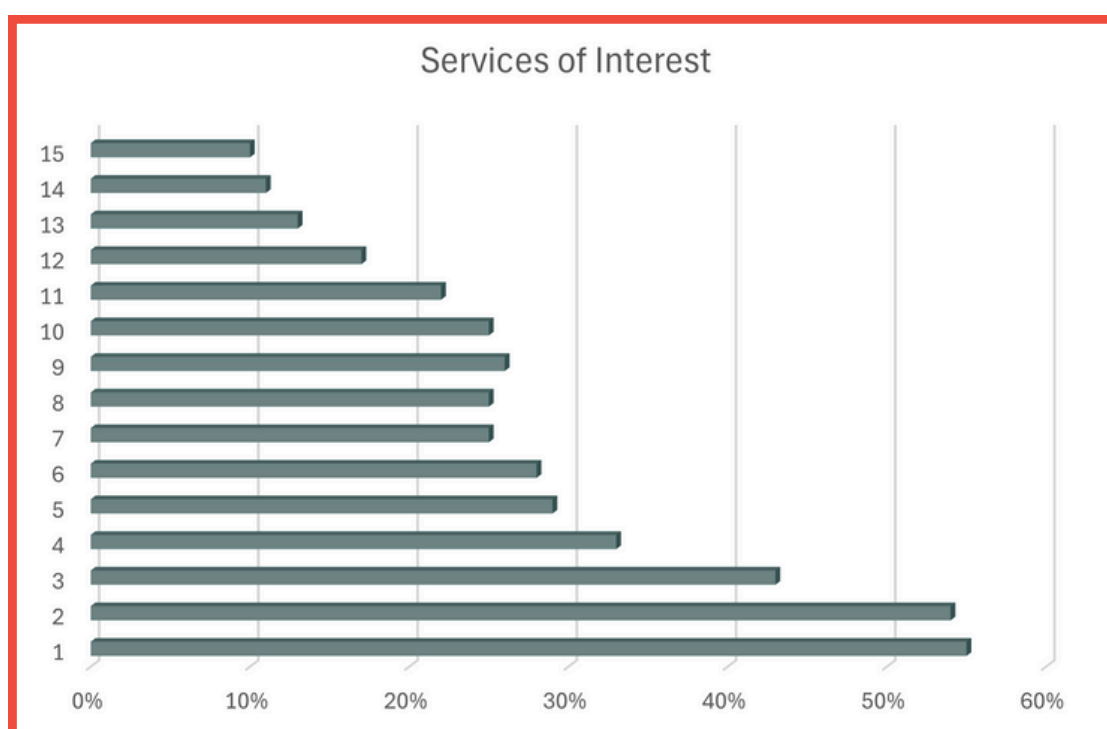


'Other' reasons for not using libraries...



Interest in Services

Respondents were asked which services would be of interest to them if they were to use libraries in the future. Preferences here were similar to people already using the library service, with **e-book/e-audio book provision (55%)**, **book/magazine borrowing (54%)** and **digital newspaper/magazine provision (43%)** being the main services of interest to them. Other services of significant interest to non-users included **accessing computers and printing facilities (29%)**, **accessing wi-fi (25%)** and **attending events (26%)**.



1. E-books & E-Audio books
2. Borrowing books & Magazines
3. Digital Magazines & Newspaper
4. Online Learning & Online Local History
5. Access to Computers & Printing Facilities
6. Accessing Hot Drinks
7. Learning Languages Online
8. Accessing Wi-Fi

9. Attending Activities such as Book Groups, Craft Groups or Digital Learning
10. Using Comfortable Seating for Relaxation or Socialising
11. Study Spaces
12. Attending Family Activities such as Bookbug/Lego Club
13. Attending Summer Activities
14. Accessing Online Comics or Graphic Novels
15. None of the Above - do not intend to use libraries in the future.

Other High Life Services Used

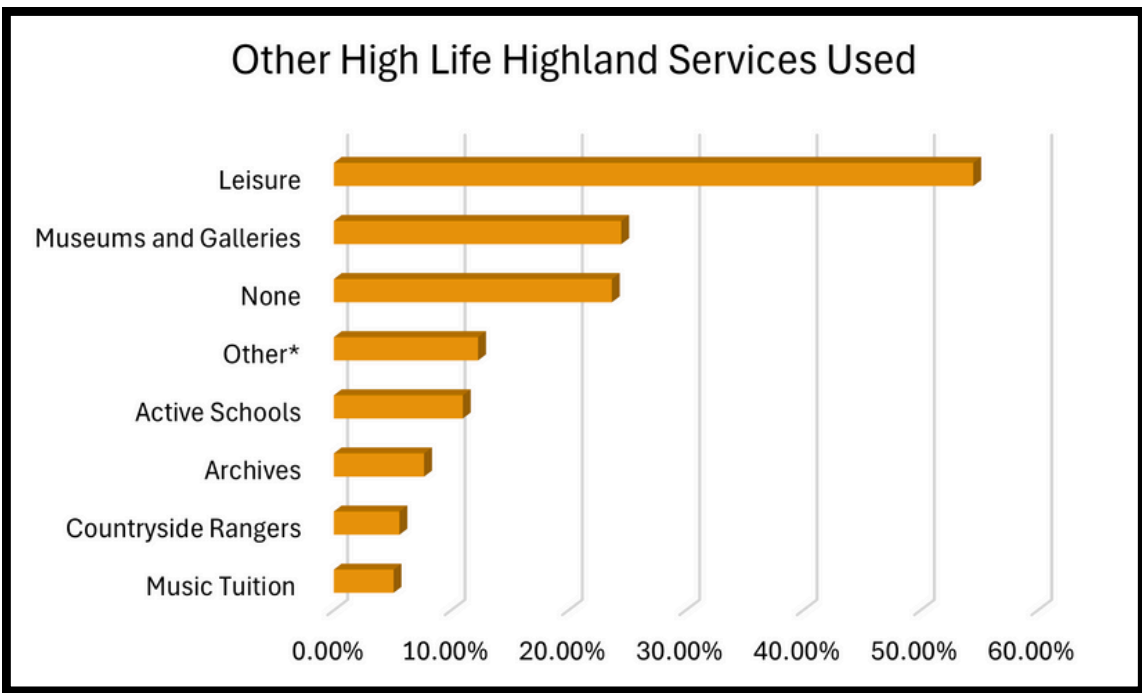
Respondents were asked which other HLH services they accessed, the two most used were HLH Leisure facilities at over 54% and Museums and Galleries at over 24%.



Leisure
54%



Museums & Galleries
24%

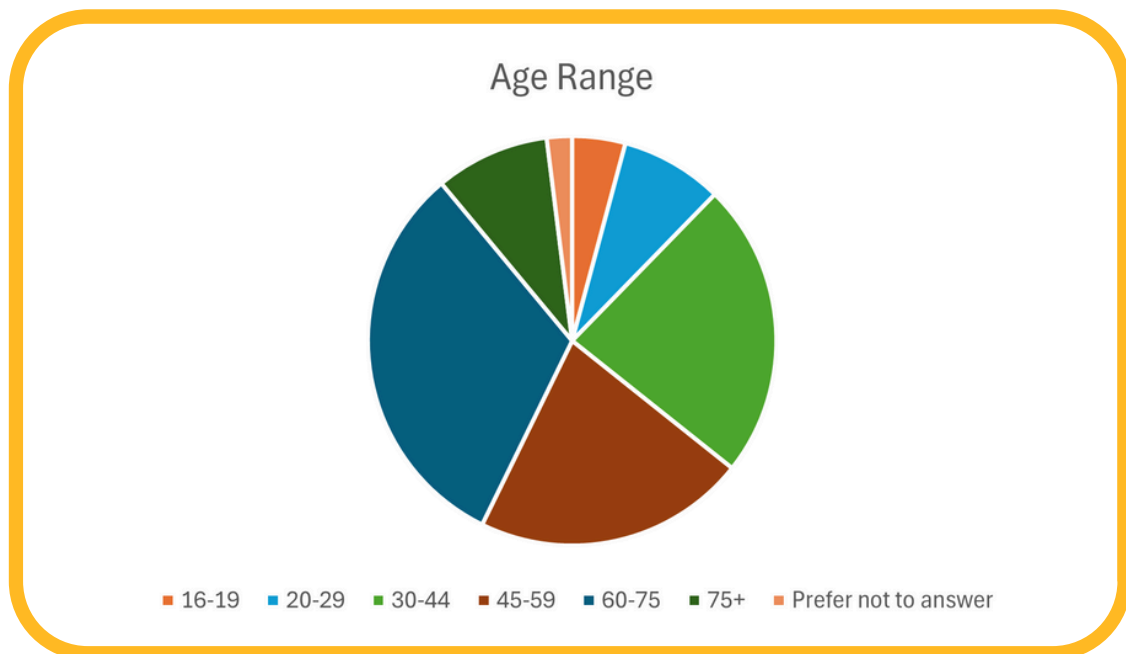


*Community Centres, Botanic Gardens and free bus journeys.

Non-user Characteristics

The 16–19 age group had the fewest respondents, whereas individuals aged 60–75 made up approximately one-third of the total participants.

Age



Difficulties



- Hearing
- Mental Health / Depression
- Memory Loss
- Other*
- Eyesight
- Learning Difficulties
- None

*Including Autism, Dyslexia and Epilepsy

Employment Status



- Working full-time
- Retired
- Working part-time
- Self-employed/Student/Carer/Unable to work due to disability
- Other*

*On maternity leave, Travelling, Volunteering, Recovering from Illness

Action Plan

Accessibility

It was clear from the findings that accessibility issues remain a barrier to some customers accessing services. The following key actions will be implemented:



01. Promote widely the new housebound service offered by libraries.



02. Promote the revised mobile library service widely to rural communities.



03. Promote widely the 24-hour access to digital services offered by libraries.

Financial Concerns

It was clear from the findings that for some customers there were concerns around accumulating overdue charges on late book returns. In line with national policy and to reduce inequalities, High Life Highland Libraries no longer implement overdue charges for the late return of items. Customers are encouraged instead to make a small donation but this is not obligatory. The following action will be implemented:



04. Promote widely the benefits of library membership with the key message that the service no longer implements fines for the late return of items.

Action Plan

Community Engagement

Feedback from the library staff that surveyed non-users suggests that the consultation was of significant value in engaging with those not currently using the service, raising awareness of the services provided by High Life Highland, and signing up new customers. The following action will be implemented:



- 05. Use community events and other HLH buildings to initiate sign-up campaigns, with library staff present to promote the service and engage with potential customers.**

The non-user survey only captured a small number of people aged between 16-19. Further work will be required to engage more effectively with this age group:



- 06. Use alternative methods to consult with young adults on how libraries can cater for their needs e.g. using focus groups or forums.**

**To find out more about High Life
Highland Libraries visit:**

www.highlifehighland.com/libraries

or



Find us on Facebook

High Life Highland Libraries

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Archives Delivery Plan 2025/26

**MAKING
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MAKING LIFE BETTER

"Our purpose is ***making life better*** and our vision is affordable access to health and wellbeing, learning and culture for everyone in the Highlands."

Introduction

High Life Highland's (HLH) purpose is Making Life Better, by achieving our vision of providing affordable access to health and wellbeing, learning and culture for everyone in the Highlands. HLH is contracted by The Highland Council (THC) to deliver its Public Services Obligations through a Service Delivery Contract and Archives is one of the areas of work thus delivered on THC's behalf.

With respect to an Archives Delivery Plan, this translates to ensuring 'back-office' systems and processes adequately support effective and efficient records management and that 'front-office' ones provide excellent and innovative services to our diverse customer base.

Executive Summary

This twelve-month Plan supports the delivery of High Life Highland's overall 5-year strategy and the Service Delivery Contract with THC. Its objectives have been developed to achieve three, overarching outcomes. These are delivering excellence in- collections management, the customer offer and the overall customer experience.

Progress will be reviewed and reported on a monthly basis at HLH Management Team, quarterly to the Boards and bi-annually to THC. Within each Archive Centre, operational planning and review will take on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

Our Service

The Archive Service's role is to manage, preserve and make accessible the records and archive collections held by the THC. In addition to providing a Records Management to all of THC's Services, it operates four Archive Centres which are open to the public. These are the regional, Highland Archive Centre in Inverness and three local Archive Centres in Lochaber, Skye and Caithness.

The Service also runs the Am Baile online photographic archive. Each centre provides a wide range of opportunities for individuals, groups and institutions to engage with the collections. These include events, exhibitions, classes and assistance with personal research and family history. Services are delivered by 21 members of staff, assisted by 20+ volunteers.

Delivery Plan

HLH 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.

Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams
Strategic Objective 1: Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region.	1.1 Optimise service delivery to meet community needs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain established relationships with community groups and organisations and seek further insights by establishing new relationships. 2. Deliver a diverse programme of bespoke events and activities in community settings. 3. In consultation with educators and teachers, deliver a schools outreach programme that addresses specific educational needs. 4. Conduct user/non-user surveys, engaging with community planning partnerships, and consulting with community link workers. 5. Support and promote local and national events and initiatives aimed at increasing diverse community participation. 6. Support and add value to the work of local archives and heritage groups. 7. Provide an efficient and reliable Records Management service to THC, assessed by Records Management survey.
	1.2 Ensure the affordability and accessibility of services to the community.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cross-promote opportunities across archives, museums, and galleries, and where possible through other HLH facilities. 2. Provide core, basic services and services to schools at no charge and regularly review pricing of charged for services by benchmarking. 3. Provide the availability of the remote enquiry service as being accessible to all, whatever their location. 4. Offer digital access to resources through the Am Baile website and development of the online catalogue. 5. Deliver online classes, events and exhibitions. 6. Seek and learn from specialist advice and peer review to maximize physical accessibility and to enable staff to deliver services effectively to customers with particular conditions and needs. 7. Contribute to the delivery of the Highland Gaelic Language Plan 4 by supporting and promoting the Gaelic language and heritage.
	1.3 Flexibly adapt services to align with local opportunity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain partnerships and collaborations and develop new ones with appropriate organisations and institutions, nationally and locally that will maximise service reach and impact in localities. 2. Work in partnership with other HLH services to create a broad and popular School's Out offering – delivery of at least two sessions per Archive Centre.



Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams
Strategic Objective 2: Maximise and grow our income to re-invest in our services.	2.1 Increase income from High Life Memberships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Display provided Highlife promotional material in facilities in e-newsletters and at events. 2. Request display material for timebound promotions and promote during timeframe. 3. Request a 'stock' advert featuring older adults, for use in promotion within Archives.
	2.2 Maximise income from all other income streams.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Roll out a range of new promotional materials and strategies to encourage and increase philanthropic giving. 2. Increase the range and availability of charged-for activities and services and proactively promote those as adding value to the basic service offering. 3. Introduce mandatory charging for talks requested by groups, tour guides and organisations. 4. Develop and implement strategies to grow Family History business. Including all centres striving to convert FH enquiry approaches into paid consultations / remote research. 5. Review and refresh all front-facing aspects of the commercial Conservation Service, in preparation for a relaunch in Spring '26, when the team is at full capacity again.
Strategic Objective 3: Demonstrate the unique customer value that HLH offers.	3.1 Monitor and Improve the customer experience.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Via multiple means, gather customer feedback, act on it where appropriate and inform customers of action taken. 2. Maximise opportunities to participate in quality assurance schemes, peer review and benchmarking and undertake topic-specific customer surveys. 3. Retain Archives Accreditation at Three Year Review. 4. Conduct RM annual survey to THC service users and inform of any improvement actions. 5. Create a 'Feedback Wall' in each Centre, inviting people to leave comments and suggestions.
	3.2 Demonstrate how each service brings value to our customers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote widely the range, reach and quality of services delivered, particularly through the e-newsletter and production of an annual report in Q1. 2. Gather and promote customer case studies and testimonials on HAS/HLH social media. 3. Present the Records Management Annual Report to THC's Information Governance Board.

Delivery Plan

Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams
Strategic Objective 4: Demonstrate the HLH contribution to the sustainability agenda.	4.1 Develop an Action Plan for Net Zero Sustainability for each service.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maximise opportunities available from THC and any other relevant sources to improve sustainability. 2. Reuse/ up-cycle physical resources as far as possible. 3. RM to use Cargo Bike for short-journey service journeys. 4. Monitor solar panel usage and support HC Energy Unit training. 5. Provide services to schools via digital classroom.
	4.2 Reduce energy consumption across our services.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participate in HC led passive building and other plant related developments. 2. Support the implementation of Nucleus plant switch off at Nucleus. 3. Use enterprise cars wherever possible to minimise travel
	4.3 Implement findings of energy surveys.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitor energy consumption across all centres. 2. Share data with NDA's subcontractor at Nucleus, to enable benchmarking and benchmarking between the two, purpose built archive facilities in Highland.
Strategic Objective 5: Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes	5.1 Continuous staff deployment to meet customer requirements efficiently.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manage TOIL scheme to enable evening/ weekend service provision as required. 2. Manage RM work-scheduling to ensure staff can meet HC's time-bound needs, including elections, input to the Information Governance Board and the Asset Rationalisation programme.
	5.2 Develop TNA to support delivery of our strategic objectives at service level.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop training needs through staff appraisals identifying staff needs, from staff feedback, customer surveys.
	5.3 Develop a Digital Plan for service delivery and efficiency.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake the collections management work necessary to prepare for the installation of a new, functionally improved 'back office' collections database. 2. Plan for the introduction of a new 'front-facing' collections database that will enable the public to access the collections online. 3. Implement new working practices across the service to future-proof records management in an increasingly digital world.
	5.4 Improve services by using the customer journey mechanism.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proactively gather and act upon customer feedback through reviews, surveys, comment books and feedback walls. 2. Improve services through use of the customer journey through peer reviews, benchmarking, comments, and reviews feedback. 3. Arrange 'mystery shops' to provide insight into the customer journey and address gaps/ findings following review.



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Museums and Galleries Delivery Plan 2025/26

**MAKING
LIFE
BETTER**





MAKING LIFE BETTER

“Our purpose is ***making life better*** and our vision is affordable access to health and wellbeing, learning and culture for everyone in the Highlands.”

Introduction

High Life Highland's (HLH) purpose is Making Life Better, by achieving our vision of providing affordable access to health and wellbeing, learning and culture for everyone in the Highlands. HLH is contracted by The Highland Council (THC) to deliver its Public Services Obligations through a Service Delivery Contract and Museums & Galleries is one of the areas of work thus delivered on THC's behalf.

With respect to a Museums & Galleries Delivery Plan, this translates to ensuring that collections management is compliant with professional standards and enables and supports people who live in and visit the Highlands to enjoy and benefit from visits to and engaging with museums and art exhibitions.

Executive Summary

This twelve-month Plan supports the delivery of High Life Highland's overall 5-year strategy and the Service Delivery Contract with THC. Its objectives have been developed to achieve three, overarching outcomes. These are delivering excellence in- collections management, the customer offer and customer the overall experience.

Progress will be reviewed and reported on a monthly basis at HLH Management Team, quarterly to the Boards and bi-annually to THC. Within each Museum, operational planning and review will take on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

Our Service

The Museums & Galleries Service's purpose is to conserve, interpret and promote the heritage of the Highlands and provide access to high-quality visual art, thereby creating excellent visitor experiences. The service operates three public museums, one of which contains three art gallery spaces. These are Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, North Coast Visitor Centre in Caithness and Highland Folk Museum in Badenoch. In addition to displaying the collections,

museums provide a range of opportunities for individuals, groups and families to further engage with the collections. These include events, classes and activities. There are 25 staff across the museums who are assisted by 20+ volunteers. In spring and summer, the outdoor Highland Folk Museum employs additional, seasonal staff.

Delivery Plan

HLH 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.

Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams	Date
Strategic Objective 1: Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region.	1.1 Optimise service delivery to meet community needs.	1. Identify and respond to community needs through ongoing contact, via regular meetings, with community groups and organisations with whom the service has established relationships and seek to gain further insights by establishing new relationships . 2. Monitor the effect of Inverness Castle Experience being open on business at IMAG, with a view to service adjustments to complement the offer	Ongoing
	1.2 Ensure the affordability and accessibility of services to the community.	1. Cross promote opportunities across archives, museums & galleries and seek to further promote through other HLH facilities. 2. Provide core, basic services at no charge and regularly review by benchmarking pricing of charged-for services . 3. Support and assist the ICT team to establish digital readiness to provide public access to the collections online. 4. To maximise physical accessibility, seek and learn from specialist advice and peer review, accessibility reports and access reports on museum websites. 5. Contribute to delivery of Highland Gaelic Language 4 by supporting and promoting Gaelic language and heritage .	Ongoing Ongoing Q4 Q3 Ongoing
	1.3 Flexibly adapt services to align with local opportunity	1. Annually assess the opening hours of each museum, individually, to best align with visitor requirements and expectations. 2. Seek and maximise local opportunities to augment and enhance the offering and programming.	Q3 Ongoing



Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams	Date
Strategic Objective 2: Maximise and grow our income to re-invest in our services.	2.1 Increase income from High Life Memberships	1. Display provided Highlife promotional material in facilities and in e-newsletters, at events. 2. Request display material for timebound promotions be sent to venues, for in-facility promotion.	Ongoing Q1
	2.2 Maximise income from all other income streams.	1. Create and implement a plan to increase footfall to increase donations and secondary spend. 2. Utilise the opportunity of the new website to increase the capability to grow philanthropic giving and legacies. 3. Increase the range and availability of the charged-for activities offer and proactively promote those as additional and an enhancement to the basic service offering. 4. Seek commercial sponsorship and grant funding. 5. Monthly monitor and analyse income and act as appropriate on outcomes.	Q1 Q2 Q3 Ongoing Monthly
Strategic Objective 3: Demonstrate the unique customer value that HLH offers.	3.1 Monitor and Improve the customer experience.	1. Via multiple means, including monitoring review websites, customer surveys, comment cards and visitor books, gather customer feedback, review it, act on it where appropriate and inform customers of action taken 2. Maximise opportunities to participate in quality assurance schemes, peer review and benchmarking and undertake topic-specific customer surveys. 3. Arrange 'mystery shops' to provide insight into the customer experience and act of the outcomes. 4. Request ASVA QA visit to 3 x museums when scheme launches. 5. Deliver Exceeding Expectations training to all front-line staff	Monthly Q3 Q2 Q1 Q1
	3.2 Demonstrate how each service brings value to our customers.	1. Promote widely the range, reach and quality of services delivered e.g. through the use of testimonials/ newsletters and the production of an annual report in Q1. 2. Regularly issue media releases and articles	Ongoing Ongoing

Delivery Plan

Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams	
Strategic Objective 4: Demonstrate the HLH contribution to the sustainability agenda.	4.1 Develop an Action Plan for Net Zero Sustainability for each service.	1. Maximise opportunities available from external organisations, schemes and bodies to improve sustainability and demonstrate that. 2. Include sustainability considerations in criteria for the selection of goods, services and contractors 3. Via peer review identify 'quick wins' that would be replicable in-service. 4. Reuse/ up-cycle physical resources as far as possible 5. Use Enterprise cars wherever possible for travel.	Ongoing Ongoing Q4 Ongoing Ongoing
	4.2 Reduce energy consumption across our services.	1. Explore moving to a seasonal operating model at NCVC, enabling stand-down of supplementary electric heating 2. Engage with THC to seek to achieve more sustainable heating throughout IMAG 3. Engage with THC to progress the achievement a new, energy efficient workshop at HFM.	Q2 Q3 Q2
	4.3 Implement findings of energy surveys.	1. Maximise opportunities available from external organisations (inc. THC) and bodies to improve sustainability.	Ongoing
	5.1 Continuous staff deployment to meet customer requirements efficiently.	1. Implement Café & FOH multi-tasking at IMAG & NCVC 2. Where possible train HFM staff in more than one section duties 3. Use TOIL scheme to enable evening and weekend service provision 4. Regularly review FOH staffing provision/ rotas.	Q1 Q1 Ongoing Quarterly
	5.2 Develop TNA to support delivery of our strategic objectives at service level.	1. Develop training needs through staff appraisals identifying staff needs and from customer feedback from review, customer surveys and 'mystery shopper' insights.	Ongoing
	5.3 Develop a Digital Plan for service delivery and efficiency.	1. Complete migration of Museums Collections Systems from Adlib to Axiell , future-proofing the back-office collections management system 2. Support and assist the ICT team to establish digital readiness to create online public access to the collections through Axiell . 3. Identify and establish a suitable digital platform to enable events and activities to be booked online.	Q3 Q4 Q1
Strategic Objective 5: Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes	5.4 Improve services by using the customer journey mechanism.	1. Map and review the customer journey, both in-person and digital. 2. Request ASVA Quality Assurance visits and review the assessment. 3. Proactively gather feedback from customers, through reviews, surveys, comment books and customer/ staff engagement. 4. Review feedback from Quality Assurance, peer and customer reviews, benchmarking and comments cards and books and, from that, plan customer service improvements.	Q2 Q1 Ongoing Monthly



Ulbster 2 Pictish Stone

This stone comes from St Martin's burial ground at Ulbster, just south of Wick. The Ulbster Stone, also display here, was discovered in the same Christian burial ground about 250 years earlier. Only a few incised symbol stones have been found in Caithness.

Ulbster 2 was first identified in 2016, but was brought to the notice of archaeologists in September 2022 when it was re-discovered by Fiona Begg Wade. The stone lay horizontally, in a line with other plain stones, perhaps being reused as a grave marker. It was lifted from the burial ground in November 2022, to ensure no further damage or erosion occurred. An unmarked stone of similar size was laid in its place.

Although the decorated face is heavily weathered, three Pictish symbols are visible. At the top is a **double disc and Z-rod**, although the lower part is missing. The upper terminal is in the form of a leaf-shaped spear tip with spiral ends. Lower down is a **mirror** symbol – the handle is deeply incised and well-preserved, but the face of the mirror is harder to see. To the right of the handle is part of a symbol, probably a single-sided **comb** with a spiral terminal.



The symbols seen here are among the most common and widespread of the Pictish symbols. It is possible a further symbol was trimmed off when the stone was reused as a grave marker. Originally the stone may have stood upright, whether in the burial ground or somewhere else in the vicinity then moved to the burial ground at a later date.

The stone has no apparent Christian markings but that does not conclusively mean it is pre-Christian. It could be contemporary with the Ulbster Stone, which does feature two crosses, or even earlier. Although there is no previous historical mention of this stone, there is an interesting story recorded as a footnote in the first Statistical Account of Scotland, 1794, compiled by local landowner, Sir John Sinclair: Could this have been the Ulbster 2 stone?

"...Gun, of Clyth, a gentleman of Caithness, going over to Denmark, prevailed upon a Danish Princess to marry him...the vessel, with the [Princess and] expected guests, was wrecked upon [a] rock, and every soul perished...The body of the Princess was thrown ashore and interred in the neighbouring burying ground at Ulbster where Sir John Sinclair's family tomb is situated. The stone, which is said to cover her grave, is still extant and has some Hieroglyphick characters inscribed, though now much obliterated by time."



The stone in situ at St Martin's Burial Ground, Ulbster. © Yarrow Heritage Trust

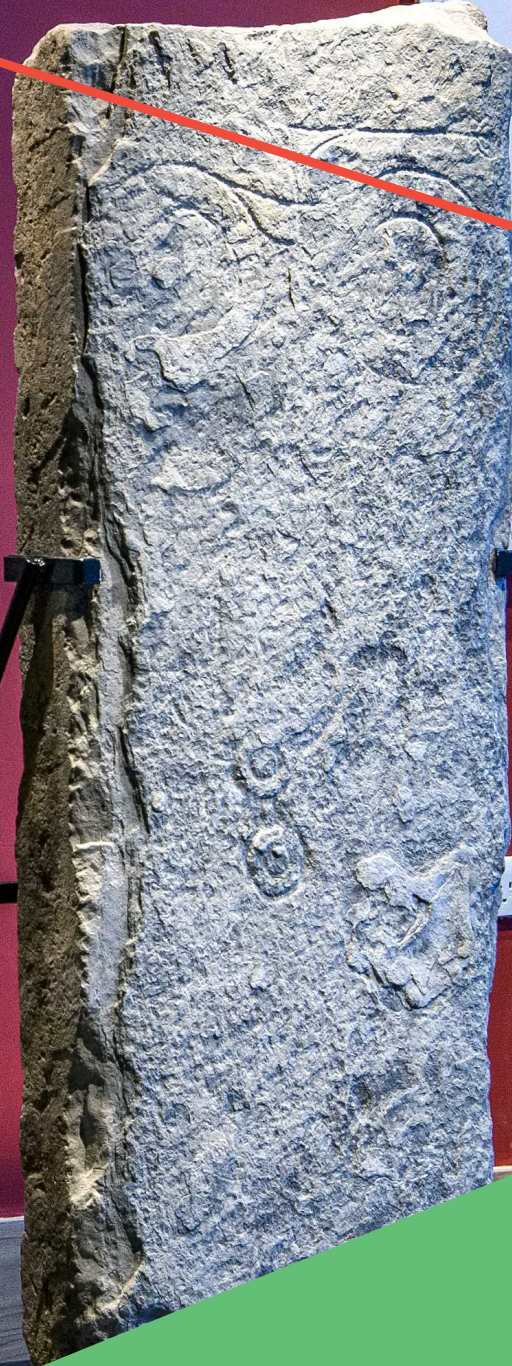
Acknowledgments

The project to conserve and install the stone in this museum was managed by Yarrow Heritage SCIO. It was funded by grants and donations from Historic Environment Scotland, Caithness & North Sutherland Fund, Ylster & Tainish Fund, the Pictish Arts Society, and many individuals, both locally and throughout the world. Thanks also to the following people who have donated time and materials: Fiona Begg Wade, David Bremner, John Burland, High Life Highland, David Dunne, and George Gunn. The stone was conserved by Graciele Almonorth of Edinburgh and mounted by Norbase Construction Ltd, Halkirk. Ulbster 2 is on loan from Lorn Thurns.



**Fort Fiom
St. Peter's Church**

Sandstone fort thought to have been the original fort used at St. Peter's Church, Thurns. The last person held in St. Peter's Church was in 1822. The basin of the fort is staked where it has been filled with water. There is a cross in the fort caused by an iron intrusion in the stone.



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Delivery Plan v1 - July 2025

MAKING LIFE BETTER



High Life Highland Archive Service 2024/25 Annual Review



High Life Highland Archive Service 2024/25 Annual Review

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Highland Archive Service Summary

In 2024/2025 the Highland Archive Service welcomed **12,810 in-person visits** and recorded **2.4 million digital engagements** across our social media platforms and the Am Baile heritage website

We delivered:-

- **82 talks** (in-person/online) to 3,783 attendees
- **162 events and exhibitions** to 5,106 attendees
- **75 group visits** to our Archive Centres with 1,143 participants
- **46 archive and family history classes** (in person/online) to 282 participants
- Our Learn with Lorna series broadcast **39 episodes** with 88,395 views



Highland Archive Service Summary

At our Archive Centres we -

- Provided access to **over 13,000** of our original archives for public consultation in our searchrooms.
- Took **256 new collections** into our care.
- **Catalogued 128 collections**, making them easier to discover and explore.
- **Hosted 20 volunteers** who generously gave 1,192 hours of their time to support our work.
- Received **128 new consignments** to our Records Management Service.
- Retrieved **1,639 records** for our colleagues across The Highland Council, supporting their work.



Highland Archive Service Awards 2024/25

Highland Archive Service was named as the UK & Ireland 'Recordkeeping Service of the Year 2024' in the Archive and Records Association (ARA) Excellence Awards, receiving 63% of the public vote.

The service also won the first Highland Council/High Life Highland Partnership Award at the Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards. The Archive and Records Management team works very closely with the Council's Health and Social Care Records Support team responding to requests from individuals who were formerly in care and who are seeking to find out information on their past.



Engagement 2024/25: From the Archive to the Classroom

In 2024/25, we delivered **44 tailored school sessions**, reaching **1,266** pupils, teachers, and parents/carers.

We also welcomed collegiate visits from teaching staff, helping them explore how archives can support classroom learning.

We continue to work closely with schools and home-schooling groups across the area, offering both visits to and from archive centres, and providing content via Google Classroom.

We help bring the Curriculum for Excellence to life by using local history to support learning. Archive materials spark discussion, creativity, and help build empathy and emotional awareness in pupils of all ages.

I enjoyed all of it because I learned lots of new things and it was amazing fun. BEST DAY EVER! ♥*♥

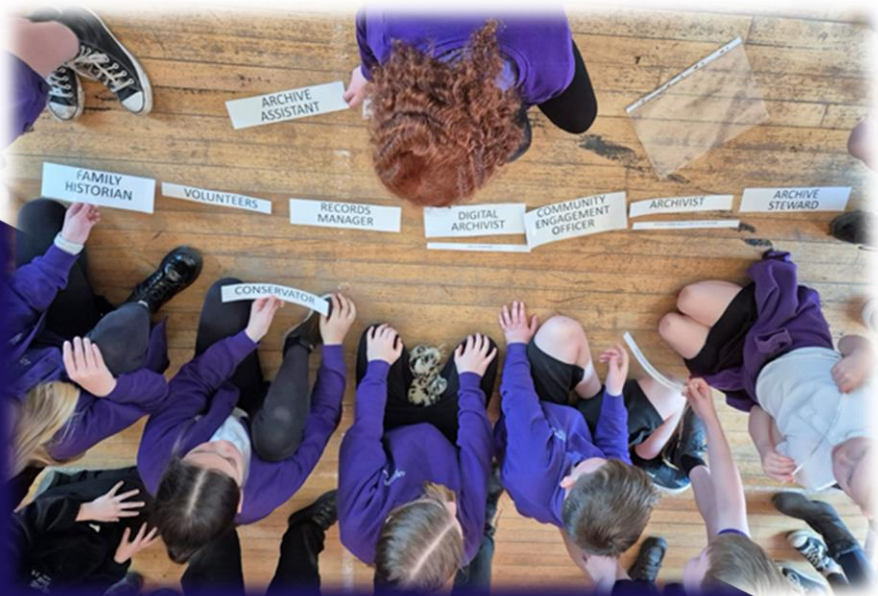


Engagement 2024/25: Global Conversations, Shared Connections


Community Engagement Officer Lorna was a keynote speaker at the national conference for school archivists, sharing examples and experiences from our education engagement work to inspire and inform the work of other archives.

In June 2024 she was part of a round table at the Shared Island Stories conference held at St. Andrews University discussing the influence of colonialism on archive and recordkeeping practices. The conference was attended by over 180 delegates from 47 nations.

In 2024, the ARA section *Archives for Learning and Education*'s focus was on public history. As part of this Lorna spoke to 46 historians and archivists about our educational work with HMP Inverness.



"A good use of time"
Archives and art in prison




The Fife College Learning Centre within H.M.P. Inverness and the Highland Archive Service have worked together since 2018, using unique local archives to enrich topic learning for those in custody.

Learners use archives to study a wide range of subjects, from the Highland connection to the slave trade and the history of mental healthcare, to both World Wars and local stories of historic crime and punishment.

I enjoyed the way things were explained and liked the debates that came out of the talk.

It was a good use of my time. I felt I learnt something.



Highland Archive Centre, Inverness: Talks, Tours and Community Connections

At Highland Archive Centre staff

- Delivered **46 talks** about the collections we care for
- Hosted **32 group visits** and behind the scenes tours
- Ran **41 classes** in family history and archives
- Supported **20 community events...**

...through these, speaking to **4381** people



Highland Archive Centre, Inverness: Family History

Anne Fraser, our Family Historian for 14 years, reduced her working week to three days, creating an opportunity to appoint a new Family Historian for the remaining two. Alasdair MacDonald, a member of the Archives team since 2017, was appointed and began his new role in January 2025.

Throughout the year, talks were delivered to groups including Crown Church Women's Guild, the Royal Naval Association (Inverness Branch), and Nairn U3A.

328 paid enquiries and consultations (in-person and online) were completed, with 924 people visiting the Highland Archive Centre to undertake their own research in the Family History Centre as well as exploring original archives in the searchroom.



Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives: The Wick Society Collection

The Wick Society Collection is vast, comprising over 100 boxes, and continues to grow with ongoing deposits made every year.

The launch of the Wick Society catalogue in 2024 was accompanied by a series of talks, an exhibition, and an online blog all celebrating the myriad stories held within the collection which offers a rich insight into Wick's maritime heritage, including records from the herring industry, harbour operations, and from local boatbuilders.

Social history is strongly represented, with records covering community events, youth groups, and cultural traditions such as the Wick Gala and Herring Queen celebrations.



Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives: Care Home Reminiscence Sessions

As part of a reminiscence programme offered to local care home facilities, Caithness Archive staff, in collaboration with Wick Voices, have been visiting Laurandy Day Care Centre, Riverside Nursing Home, Pulteney House Care Home and Seaview House Care Home in Wick.

The sessions have focused on wide variety of topics including food, shopping and transport, with residents able to engage with reproductions of historical records, photographs and newspapers, as well as oral history recordings.



Lochaber Archive Centre: Community Connections



In October 2024, Lochaber Archivist Rory and Am Baile Co-ordinator Jamie partnered with the Annat Gathering Group to help reconnect former residents and celebrate the village's unique heritage.

A well-attended event at Caol Community Centre brought together people with ties to Annat, where memories and photographs were shared, launching a growing digital photo collection curated by the community.

Rory continues to support the group by recording oral histories, capturing voices and stories that reflect the lived experience of Annat's past residents.

These recordings will form part of the Annat Gathering Group's expanding archive, preserved at Lochaber Archive Centre and made accessible to the public through the Am Baile website.

Lochaber Archive Centre: One People, Two Islands Project

In September 2024 Lochaber Archivist Rory and Community Engagement Officer Lorna welcomed a group of students and lecturers from Scotland and Canada to Lochaber Archive Centre as part of the project '*One People, Two Islands: The historic entanglement of the islands of Eigg, Scotland, and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, 1790-1830*'.

The group, who were on their way to the Isle of Eigg, spent several hours delving into our collections, looking at documents, photographs and books relating to the Small Isles.

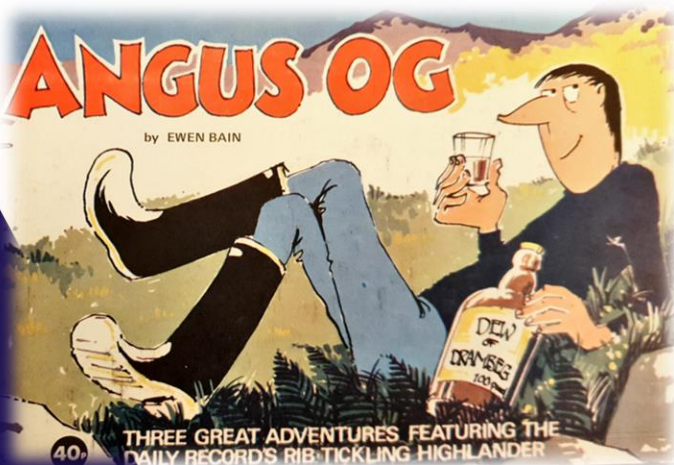


Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre: Angus Og – A National Island Plan Funded Project

In May 2024 Project Officer Katharine and Skye and Lochalsh Archivist Catherine travelled to Glasgow for a special day-long symposium, held in partnership with the University of Glasgow, celebrating the legacy of cartoonist Ewen Bain and his Angus Og cartoons. The event featured speakers including playwright Alan Bissett, Professor Laurence Grove, and Paul Bristow of Magic Torch Comics, and was accessible both in person and online.

The project concluded in November 2024 with a mini symposium and exhibition at IMAG during the Highland & Islands Climate Festival highlighted Bain's environmental themes, showcasing how Angus Og remains a vital lens on Scotland's cultural, political, and environmental issues.

There are even more plans in the pipeline for the Angus Og in 2025/26 – watch this space!



**ANGUS OG AND THE
CLIMATE CHANGE**



**ANGUS OG AND THE
WILDLIFE**



**ANGUS OG AND THE
LAND OWNERSHIP**



Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre: North Talisker Centenary Project



This community-led initiative explores the repopulation of North Talisker after the 1919 Land Settlement Act. We've been working closely with local residents to preserve and share their stories, demonstrating the value of grassroots heritage work and the power of collaboration in making history meaningful and accessible.

We've delivered 'archive ceilidhs', sparking interest in local record-keeping, provided training in oral history gathering and image scanning, alongside pop-up exhibitions and educational talks. Blending original archives with newly recorded oral histories, the project tells a powerful story of land, resilience, and cultural survival.

In 2024/25 we delivered:

- 2 public talks
- 2 external exhibitions
- 1 major in-house exhibition engaging with **1,303** attendees

Further talks and displays are planned in 2025/26.

Am Baile: Highland History and Culture Website 2024/25 Highlights

- **2,961 new pieces of content** were added to the Am Baile database, contributed by individuals, local historians, and community heritage groups, each representing the region's rich and diverse cultural memory.
- **1,473 new pieces of content** published on the website, broadening the range of historical material available on life in the Highlands and Islands.
- **214,277 pages of historical images** were viewed (website) showing the continued public interest in visual heritage and the Gaelic language.
- **1,538,243 social media engagements**, with our popular *Mystery Photo* series sparking lively discussion and drawing on local knowledge to enhance the descriptions of the collections.



Am Baile: Highland History and Culture: Football Memories Project



The Football Memories Project, in association with the Inverness Caledonian Thistle Community Trust, enjoyed a third successful year with record attendances at the monthly reminiscence sessions at the ICT Stadium.

In September 2024, a Football Memories exhibition was held at the Highland Archive Centre as part of Highland Archive Centre's annual Doors Open Day and featured displays of trophies, shirts, photos, and other memorabilia, which was gathered by the project and donated by local clubs.

The project continues with more archive events planned for the coming months.

Records Management: Highlights from 2024/25

The Records Management team assisted Highland Council colleagues during the 2024 UK General Election and several local by-elections, ensuring secure and efficient handling of election-related records.

Feedback from the November 2024 RM customer survey highlighted the team's professionalism and responsiveness:

"The RM Service is excellent. Very efficient and quick to provide Records after a retrieval request, and staff are always friendly, helpful and very knowledgeable."

"They are a pleasure to interact with, communication is always friendly and helpful, the actual service is consistently efficient."

The team supported the Council's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint and promoting environmentally responsible practices by taking part in an e-bike pilot which is being used to transport files to colleagues throughout Inverness.



Conservation Service: Supporting Community Heritage

As part of our ongoing commitment to support community heritage, the Conservation Service shares expertise through hands-on training and advice. In May 2024, Senior Conservator Richard delivered a collections care training day at Garioch Heritage Centre, Inverurie. The event was hosted by the North-East Scotland Heritage Network.

Participants learned about environmental monitoring, pest control and packaging of documents and photographs.

The day also featured a practical cleaning session, followed by assessments of items brought in by attendees, ranging from photographs albums and recipe books to architectural plans and even a framed poster adhered to Perspex glazing.

It was a fantastic, hands-on day of learning and collaboration, highlighting the importance of accessible, expert-led conservation support, empowering heritage groups to care for their collections with confidence and skill and we look forward to delivering more sessions like it!



Conservation Service: The Herbarium of Nairn Museum

In a further example of our ongoing commitment to supporting independent museums, the conservation service undertook work for Nairn Museum on their herbarium collection.

The collection arrived in the suitcases it had been housed in since the early 1900s, with items separated by botanical classification and folded in acidic brown paper folios.

The Museum, knowing that the collection was important for the local area, sourced funding to have the collection re-housed, cleaned, re-mounted (where necessary), and digitised, to safeguard the items for the future.

This project demonstrates the vital role of a dedicated conservation studio in the Highlands, enabling the specialist care and long-term preservation of culturally significant collections close to their communities.



What our customers are saying

Overall, this was a wonderful and splendidly informative session. Every single participant evaluated the event as 'Exceptionally helpful'.

University Student Group Feedback

Its community programming presents contemporary aspects of the challenges and opportunities linked to island life, and the deep knowledge and hospitality allow for intimate engagement with archives and stories from Skye.

University Researcher feedback

Delighted to receive the information requested. Staff have been most helpful.

Customer Enquiry Feedback

Very touched by the exhibition, especially the walking sticks, felt recognised/seen for what I've done with my life and time - thank you.

Exhibition feedback

Just to thank you for an amazing and inspiring presentation, I've had some really good feedback about it. It really brought home to us that you are part of a line of custodians and that connection with history.

Feedback from local community group

I thought a talk would be boring, but it was very interesting and interactive.

Feedback from learner in HMP Inverness

Enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff, made the day exceptional!

Doors Open Day Feedback

Honestly cannot thank you enough for yesterday - the children totally loved the session. Thanks so much!

Schools Out feedback



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High Life Highland Museums and Galleries 2024/25 Annual Review



North Coast Visitor Centre,
Thurso (NCVC)



Inverness Museum & Art Gallery
(IMAG)



Highland Folk Museum,
Newtonmore (HFM)

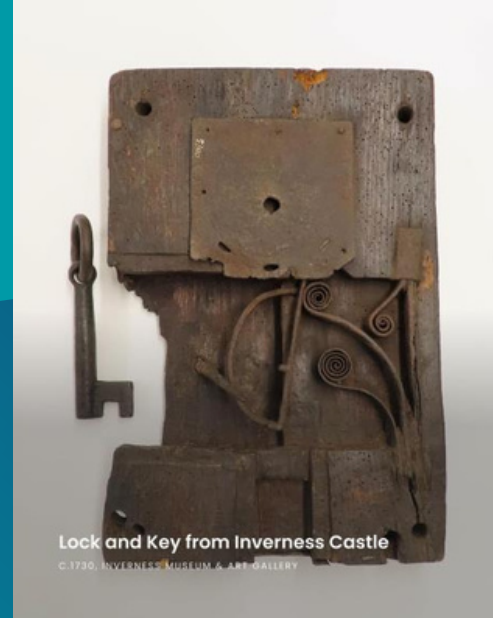
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Museums & Galleries Summary

At Museums and Galleries we:

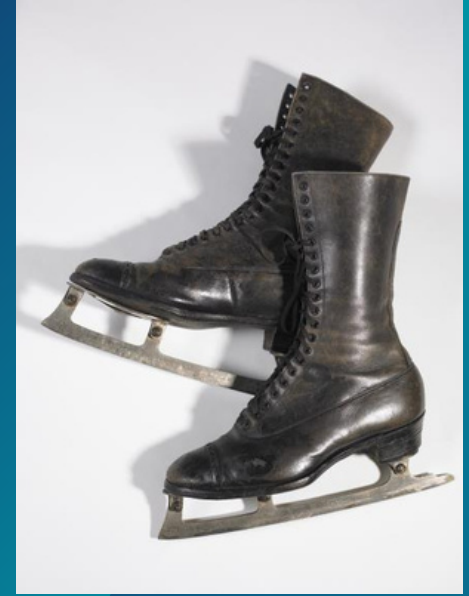
- Welcomed **157,223 in-person visits**
- **90,294 digital engagements**
- Created and presented **25 gallery exhibitions**
- Organised **63 events & activities**
- Secured funding to be one of twenty organisations taking part in **Going Places** – a £5.36m 5 year exhibition programme which will enable Highland collections to be shared in the largest collaborative touring project of its kind in the UK.
- **SMARTIFY IMAGES**



Museums & Galleries Summary

At Museums and Galleries we:

- Transferred **63, 295 records** to a new collections management system Axiell
- Hosted **16 volunteers** contributing **1531** volunteer hours
- Dealt with **1295** collection and research enquires
- Provided a museum object **Conservation Service** to **7 external organisations** including Aberdeen Museums and the West Highland Museum



National Awards and Accreditation



Museum Attendants across all 3 museums have been trained in ASVA's Exceeding Visitor Expectations which equips customer-facing staff with the specialist skills and insights which ensures every visitor enjoys an outstanding experience.



IMAG and HFM succeeded in achieving UK Museum Accreditation after a comprehensive review process. This ensures best practice across governance, collections care and visitor engagement.

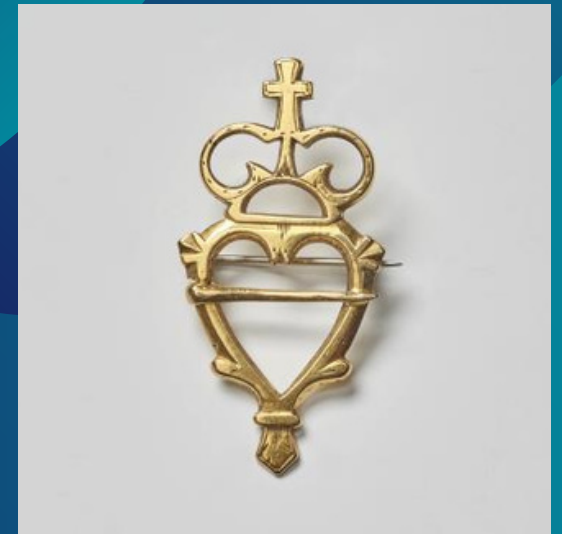
Inverness Museum & Art Gallery – What's new to the collections?

Some fascinating objects were added to our collections by donation, Treasure Trove and bequest including:

- A 32lb cannon ball
- Items relating to *Inverness Swimming Baths* including medals and certificates
- Wool cape by *James Pringle of Inverness* from the 1970s
- Viking iron sword and 1m long ladle
- Inverness Victorian Market sign explaining the history of the market hung for many years near Finklestein's the Jeweller
- Silver post medieval hunting whistle
- Gold poesy finger ring inscribed "I LIVIF IN HOIP" (*I love in hope*) 16th/17th century
- Gold Luckenbooth brooch by Inverness silversmith Charles Jameson c1786-1829



Kari Moodie Curator and Bob MacKay
Superintendent Victorian Market



Gold Luckenbooth brooch marked UF
for Unity Fowler the original owner

Inverness Museum & Art Gallery – Gallery Exhibitions

6 major exhibitions including:

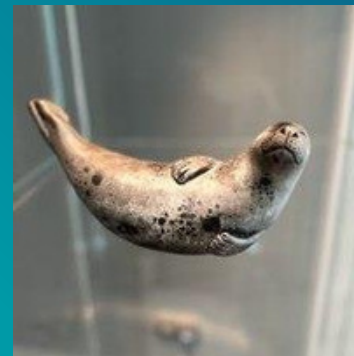
- Redpath and her Circle in collaboration with the FlemingCollection in London
- Times and Places by Barbara Rae
- Buaile delivered across Eden Court Theatre's Gallerires, and Inverness Creative Academy to coincide with Seachdain naGaidhlig (World Gaelic Week).

6 supporting exhibitions which prioritise emergent artists and makers from the Highlands.

IMAG manages 2 rounds of Creative Scotland Visual Artist and Craft Maker Awards (VACMA) for Highland, Moray and Na h-Eileanan Siar making 23 awards totalling £18,500



From *Times and Places*
Barbara Rae



From *Kiln to Coast*
Amy Louise Buttress



From *Conversations En Plein Air* Charlotte Hodes

Inverness Museum & Art Gallery – Engagement

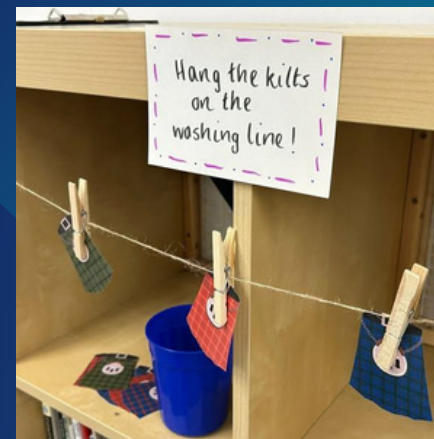
Engagement opportunities are at the heart of the museum and art gallery – from community exhibitions, School's Out Activities, toddler workshops to collaborations with UHI and Artists' talks.



The HND Visual Communication/Illustration students at UHI Inverness showed their artwork inspired by the Mary Ethel Muir (MEM) Donaldson Collection in the museum's photographic archive



Print making workshop for adults alongside Barbara Rae Exhibition.



Museum Minis a regular activity for pre-school children.



Summer Art Club workshops with artist Richard Bracken culminated in a summer picnic inspired by the Charlotte Hodes exhibition.

Inverness Museum & Art Gallery – Funded projects



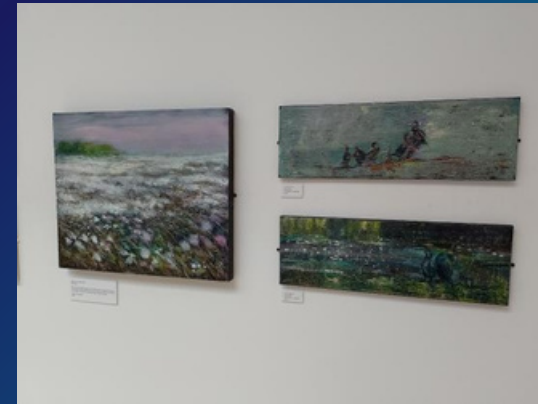
Culloden by Peel Ross beautifully conserved and framed becomes one of the highlights of an updated Jacobite display and a celebratory collections event was part of the national Jacobite Festival. The essential conservation work was supported by the Inverness Common Good Fund



New LED case lighting brighten up all museum display cases and save energy cost .
Funded by Museums Galleries Scotland
Resilience funding stream

North Coast Visitor Centre - Exhibitions

Collaborations with the Society of Caithness Artists continues to grow in strength. NCVC supported two excellent and varied exhibitions celebrating the artists of Caithness.



North Coast Visitor Centre - Collaborations



Hosted exhibition in collaboration with Caithness Listening Ear



Hosted Highland Community Waste Partnership mobile museum with tips and tricks to help reduce waste around the house



Supported the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival by hosting their exhibition and preview event



North Coast Visitor Centre - Collaborations



Hosted Schools Out activities with Thurso Library, Countryside Rangers and Nucleus,



With the support of NRS the Manipulator Arm in the Dounreay exhibition gallery was refurbished



Hosted Great Tapestry of Scotland Exhibition – captivating Scotland's rich history and heritage.



Highland Folk Museum – What's new to the site and store?



McLean's shop from Balnain Bridge was carefully dismantled and re-built at the museum by the maintenance team.

Run for three generations by the McLean family it served the local farming community. The shop building and some of its contents were kindly donated to the museum by the late Willie McLean (pictured) .

Many members of the McLean family attended the opening, including Willie's sister Elsa who had many memories of the McLean family business and was delighted to step behind the counter once again.

Highland Folk Museum – What's new on site and in store



Restoration of **Curling Pond** funded by the Cairngorms Trust and the Highland Council through the *Puddles to Pond* Project (with HLH Countryside Rangers). Before work was carried out mini beast survey work was carried out in partnership with Cairngorms National Park Junior Rangers and HLH Countryside Rangers.



The **Sawmill Pond** was emptied to repair storm damage. It was re-lined and ready to help the sawmill wheel turn once again.



Highland Folk Museum - Events

Events and engagement are key to the museum experience from the extensive Vintage day, Outlander day and Highland Rising to Woolly weekend, Am Fàsghadh shinty cup in association with the Camanachd Association, summer holiday, heritage in action days, open store visits, workshops and activities. Volunteer support and collaborative working ensures a wide range of activities and high-quality events.



Highland Folk Museum - Engagement

Collaborations focusing on the collections have led to creative workshops, traditional skills training and storytelling sessions and have allowed visitors and staff to have a fresh look and find out more about the objects and buildings at the museum.

Scottish Storytelling Centre and Badenoch Heritage Festival

– Storytelling events including Jess Smith telling Traveller tales at the bough tent, and Aila Schafer and Eileen Budd sharing their Stories of the Land in the Church.

Artist Caroline Dear concluded the project by creating replica objects, e.g. a heather mat, brushes made from different grasses, and heather pot scrubbers. The replica items are used in the museum for display, education and engagement. Caroline also ran two workshops for staff enabling them to pass on the traditional craft skills to visitors.



Storylands project with Merryn Glover led workshops to give creative responses to collection items including the Woman's Land Army uniform



Highland Folk Museum – Collections and Curator on tour

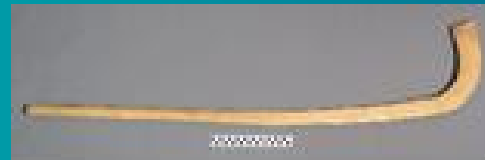
HFM curator of collections was invited by Museums Galleries Scotland to join a panel of speakers on the topic of intangible cultural heritage at the annual **Museums Association conference**. It was an opportunity to showcase HFM to a national audience highlighting the importance of the stories, traditions and craft skills to the museum's collections.



Collections held in store were loaned to the Textile exhibition at the **Iona Gallery** in Kingussie and shinty items to the **West Highland Museum** in Fort William for their exhibition to celebrate the Camanachd cup final being held in the town.



Ash Rise national touring exhibition launched at **Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh**. HFM furniture collection helped inspire a chair in the exhibition (pictured). The museum also loaned an ash shinty stick, quaich and ladle.





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Integrated Impact Assessment Policy

V1 - HLH Board September 2025

Review Date September 2027

High Life Highland's (HLH) purpose is Making Life Better. As a charity which exists to deliver services on behalf of The Highland Council (THC) it delivers this purpose within a framework of legislative duties which relate to public bodies. The Highland Council has built the requirement for HLH to carry out Integrated Impact Assessments into the Service Delivery Contract that it has with HLH.

This policy sets out how High Life Highland (HLH) will ensure that it meets its responsibilities as a service provider to carry out Integrated Impact Assessments within its contractual and legislative duties. These duties include the following.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Local Authorities should ensure that proposed new or revised policy, practice and strategic decisions relating to the delivery of Council services are considered for impacts on different groups of people within the community or workforce at an early stage. The Public Sector Equality Duty came into force in April 2011 under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which places a legal requirement on public authorities in carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- ensure that the proposal does not discriminate
- consider how the proposal might better advance equality of opportunity
- consider whether the proposal will affect relations between different groups.

Under the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) a listed authority is required to assess the impact of applying a proposed new or revised policy or practice, against the needs of the general equality duty, in so far as is needed to meet the general equality duty.

At **the earliest stage** of the development of a proposed policy or the revision of an existing policy you should:

1. Identify if, and how, the duty applies
2. Collect equality evidence
3. Assess the potential impact by considering whether the equality evidence indicates potential differential impact on [people with any of the protected characteristics](#) or provides an opportunity to improve equality in an area, by asking:

- Does the proposed policy eliminate discrimination?
- Does the proposed policy contribute to advancing equality of opportunity?
- Does the proposed policy affect good relations?

4. Take account of the results of the assessment in developing the proposal
5. Ensure decision makers have due regard to the results of the assessment when making the final decision about the policy and its implementation

6. Document decisions and how due regard formed part of that decision
7. Publish results of the assessment
8. Monitor the actual impact of the policy

Fairer Scotland Duty

The [Fairer Scotland Duty](#) places a legal responsibility on public bodies to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions. Public bodies must meet key requirements to meet their obligations under the Duty:

- to actively consider how they could reduce inequalities of outcome in any major strategic decision they make
- to publish a written assessment, showing how they've done this

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018

Island Communities face particular challenges around distance, geography, connectivity, and demography. The [Islands \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) requires Local Authorities are required to complete an Island Community Impact Assessment (ICIA) so that policy makers can:

- consider these challenges properly
- ensure islands receive fair and equitable treatment
- policy, strategy, and service outcomes are tailored to islands unique circumstance.

Other Relevant Legislation

The Highland Council has also asked HLH, through the Contract, to consider impacts on [Mainland Rural Communities](#), [Data Protection and GDPR](#), as well as new and emerging requirements under [Human Rights](#), [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#), and [Climate Change](#).

Policy Implementation

THC has provided HLH with the tools to meet the requirements of the contract that it has with HLH in the form of training materials and an impact assessment tool which records impact assessment and allows the publishing of relevant impact assessment information.

This is available to all HLH staff on the following link: [Integrated Impact Assessment Digital Tool](#)