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| HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS3 September 2025 | AGENDA ITEM 14 REPORT No HLH/ 19 /25 |

## **MARKETING AND ENGAGEMENT UPDATE - Report by Chief Executive**

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| **Summary**This report provides a six-month update to Directors on the Marketing and Engagement (M&E) activities and performance of High Life Highland. It is recommended that Directors note: 1. the M&E performance information for January to June 2025; and
2. the website development timeline now aims to conclude with launch in January 2026.

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| **1.** | **Strategy 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 income to reinvest across services.**
3. **Ensure a consistent high value of delivery across HLH services.**
4. Commit to the net zero and sustainability agenda.
5. **Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes.**
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| **2.** | **Background** |
| 2.1 | The Marketing and Engagement (M&E) Delivery Plan was approved by the HLH Board at its meeting held on 19 March 2025. Its goal is to support the delivery of HLH’s 5-year strategic objectives and outcomes through a digital-first approach to marketing and engagement activities. To achieve this, the Marketing and Engagement Delivery Plan has been built around three key objectives:1. **Data** - We will implement a routine of research and data analysis to guide our understanding around customers’ needs and wants, to drive decisions around service improvements and the development of high impact promotional content.
2. **Brand** - We will protect and enhance the organisation’s reputation and build brand sentiment by demonstrating how High Life Highland is Making Life Better across the region.
3. **Personalisation** - We will prioritise actions around personalised content to support the retention and growth of our customers and the generation of income for the charity.
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| **3.** | **M&E Objective 1: Data** |
| 3.1 | A vacancy in the Marketing Data Officer post during May and June created a gap of around two months in this area of focus. However, this presented an opportunity to review the role for recruitment and ensure strategic alignment with the Delivery Plan objectives. On 30 June 2025, a new post holder joined the team as Digital Marketing and Analytics Officer. They have settled in well, bringing a strong skillset and experience and is demonstrating great enthusiasm for the role. |
| 3.2 | The M&E team has played a supporting role in building and promoting several surveys for HLH services, including Libraries, Leisure, and School’s Out. |
| 3.3 | As part of the research and development work being carried out for the new website, customer personas and some high-level customer profiling were completed during May. This work is now helping to shape promotional content. |
| 3.4 | With new resource in place, attention is now turning to developing one marketing dashboard with the aim of analysing ROI from marketing activities. A plan is also being developed to support a more strategic approach to customer profiling and segmentation on Mailchimp, and the team is preparing for making use of a new Audience Builder tool as part of the LMS upgrade roll-out which will enable a more targeted focus on customer groups, both for membership growth and customer retention. |
| **4.**  | **M&E Objective 2: Brand** |
| 4.1 | **Website*** The development of the new HLH website began in April, following a successful procurement process and the appointment of web development agency Whereverly as the preferred partner.
* At the outset, a comprehensive project plan and formal communication structure—including weekly meetings—were agreed upon with Whereverly. To date, they have demonstrated exceptional proactivity and commitment to the project, taking the lead, offering guidance and actively engaging in all aspects, particularly during the crucial early stages of research and consultation with service users and colleagues.
* The research phase involved the creation of ‘user journeys’ and the testing of proposed navigation and sitemaps. A diverse focus group of approximately 12 individuals was assembled to test the initial sitemap through a series of agency-led workshops. This was followed by a broader round of testing with a wider user group to further validate the sitemap and navigation approach. The process was detailed but highly beneficial at this early stage and is now informing the agency’s work on wireframing, design, and user experience.
* Colleagues from across services are being consulted throughout the website’s development to ensure their needs are accurately captured.
* Content gathering began in late June. As the project has progressed, it has become clear that the complexity and scale of content gathering and development are significant, with approximately 1,300 webpages to be migrated. As a result, both parties have agreed to a revised and more realistic launch timeline of mid-January 2026, moving from the originally planned October 2025 launch. A comprehensive testing schedule will be implemented in the lead-up to launch to mitigate any potential downtime.
* The project remains a top priority for the Marketing and Engagement Team. It continues to be well-resourced, though close monitoring will be maintained as it enters this critical phase.
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| 4.2 | **Press and Media**Press and Media activity data can be seen in **Appendix A**. This section of the report highlights key observations between January and June 2025.* Press releases distributed = 61
* Re-issues / coverage generated by press releases = 87
* Occasions HLH were covered in press = 132
* Interview bids from journalists = 16
* Overall tone of coverage was 90.2% positive, 9% neutral and 0.8% negative. The negative coverage relates to the Tain Royal Academy Community Complex consultation. While the coverage did not show HLH in a negative light, the tone of the article was negative.
* Maintaining strong and positive relationships with media partners is important to ensure the Charity is provided the best opportunity for fair and proportionate press coverage. The team continues to do this by providing clear information in a timely and positive manner to journalists.
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| 4.3 | **Social Media**Social media remains a key communication avenue for HLH. The table below demonstrates increasing engagement with the main HLH social media accounts.* On Facebook, there has been a 119% increase in engagements year-on-year, and a 41% increase compared to the previous six-month period. Instagram, while much lower in overall numbers, has seen a significant year-on-year increase in engagements. The platform presents a strong opportunity to engage with a younger demographic, and the M&E team is exploring this as part of the Delivery Plan.
* LinkedIn has seen a decrease in engagements compared to the previous period. The M&E team acknowledges that a more tailored approach to content is required for this platform, with a greater focus on Employee Wellbeing, Corporate Membership, and recruitment-related content. Progress on engagement and impressions is being monitored, and the Head of M&E is currently exploring options for specific LinkedIn best practice training.

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| Platform | Period | No. Of Engagements | No. Of Impressions |
| Facebook | Jan-Jun ‘25 | 99,168 | 1,219,863 |
| Jul-Dec ‘24 | 69,919 | 1,031,267 |
| Jan-Jun ‘24 | 45,268 | 863,134 |
| Instagram | Jan-Jun ‘25 | 1,149 | 38,959 |
| Jul-Dec ‘24 | 548 | 16,286 |
| Jan-Jun ‘24 | 254 | 9,572 |
| LinkedIn | Jan-Jun ‘25 | 5,593 | 51,658 |
| Jul-Dec ‘24 | 5,908 | 61,952 |
| Jan-Jun ‘24 | 3,218 | 45,421 |

* In line with the delivery plan there has been an increase in the development and promotion of engaging video content across social media, with an increasing focus on demonstrating value, telling personal stories, sharing knowledge and creating excitement around services. Future improvement is required in the adoption of a more personal approach to social media – aiming to directly engage with customers and interact regularly to users.
* Furthermore, development on understanding the value and ROI of social media (like other marketing channels) has been an ongoing task for the M&E team. With the new Digital Marketing and Analytics Officer in post, it is expected that this action will materialise over the coming few months to ensure the Charity is getting best value from its social media activity.
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| 4.4 | **Internal Communications*** Supporting open communication with HLH colleagues and volunteers is important to ensure that all employees are informed about charity updates, strategic priorities, policy changes, and upcoming events. This is especially valuable given HLH’s wide geographical coverage. HLH’s i-care staff e-newsletter is distributed monthly and consistently attracts an open rate of around 65%.
* In June, the M&E Team supported the launch of this year’s i-care Employee Awards with internal and external communications aimed at encouraging nominations. As a result, over 300 nominations have been received across five categories—a strong response.
* HLH colleagues were invited to take part in two marketing-focused online training workshops: Social Media training (January – 80 attendees) and Canva training (May – 50 attendees). The workshops aimed to provide up-to-date best practices and guidance on using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Canva. These sessions are beneficial for upskilling colleagues and are intended to support improved consistency in brand tone across channels.
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| 4.5 | **Stakeholder Engagement and Communications*** As part of the ongoing LMS (Gladstone) upgrade, the M&E Team provided communications support in May and June to inform customers of a planned three-day loss of online booking service ahead of the downtime. Carefully managed communications were distributed to members via multiple touchpoints—including a series of emails and reminders, social media posts across all leisure centre accounts, and on-site posters. Members were provided with guidance to help ensure they could still book activities with minimal disruption. Anecdotally, we understand the communications were well received, with several customers reporting that they found the messaging clear and useful.
* In March, the 20th McRobert Cup Primary School cross-country event was held at Torvean Park, Inverness. As part of the media coverage for the event, the M&E Team engaged the HLH Leadership Programme Manager to bring enthusiastic Young Leaders on board as ‘Media Leaders’ for the day. The Media Leaders received pre-event training in photography and video interview skills, followed by a mini remit for the event: to capture a series of video interviews with young participants. The project gave the Leaders real-life experience within a marketing team, resulting in the production of a short post-event social media video reel that achieved 12,472 views and 209 likes.
* In May and June, the Head of M&E led two marketing-focused work experience sessions as part of the Inverness Castle Experience work experience week, in partnership with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). Similar to the McRobert Cup Media Leaders project, secondary school students were tasked with creating a promotional video reel centred around recruitment and the opening of Inverness Castle.
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| 5. | **M&E Objective 3: Personalisation****Campaigns and Promotions*** **Refer-a-friend (January/February):** Refer a friend campaign aims to reward existing members when they refer a friend to join High Life by entering them into the monthly prize draw to win a *high****life*** Membership. The M&E team supported with full promotion across social media plus targeted email campaigns. The campaign resulted in over 70 referrals.
* **Employee Wellbeing Membership Re-launch (January):** Re-launch of the former Corporate Membership scheme as the newly named Employee Wellbeing Membership. M&E developed a brand-new print brochure complete with new focused messaging, aimed at helping businesses understand the full benefit of including *high****life*** as part of their employee offering.
* **Flash Offers**: On three occasions during the reporting period, ‘Flash’ 24-hour Special Offers (pro-rata / pay nothing until the 8th of the following month) were promoted in line with key awareness days and events – Valentine’s Day, post-Loch Ness Etape, and School’s Out. A combination of flash email campaigns to Pay As You Go customers and previously cancelled members, along with co-ordinated social media posts from Leisure Centre accounts generated between 50 – 60 memberships from each campaign.
* **Be Active 2 Thrive (April):** A retention campaign designed to reward and incentivise High Life members (all- inclusive and budget) to participate in 2 or more High Life activities per week. M&E supported with a range of social media and print assets to amplify the campaign.
* **Bring a Buddy (June):** Existing High Life members (all- inclusive and budget) receive 3 Bring a Buddy vouchers to issue to friends (non-members). Marketing support for this promotion came in the form of targeted email campaigns, regular social media posts (organic and paid), and on-site posters. 259 registrations for Bring a Buddy were received. 100 vouchers were redeemed, 28 conversions to date.
* **School’s Out (June):** The M&E team played a key part in this year’s School’s Out launch campaign in the lead up to bookings opening on June 2nd. A combination of improvements in the booking system and pre-launch communications led to a smooth first day of bookings. By 5pm on the launch day, 11,500 tickets had been purchased, with £34,647 (Net) income from 746 payments made, 195 of which were new customers. The average spend per customer was £53.29. 24 hours into the launch 13,203 tickets were sold with a net income of £40,000.
* **Hyrox (June):** The launch of Hyrox across three HLH sites was preceded by a promotional teaser campaign running for two weeks. This was a campaign targeted locally in Lochaber, Aviemore and Inverness, focused on a series of engaging teaser videos and graphics on social media in tandem with a number of email campaigns and press coverage leading up to booking launch. The excitement generated by the campaign led to near full booking of all slots across all three sites. Overall impressions on the main HLH Facebook page for this campaign was 27,000 and engagements around 4,360.
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| 5.1 | **Examples of Sponsored Content and Advertising Campaigns*** Highland Folk Museum
	+ Sponsored digital advertorial ran on The Courier (Perthshire) website and on their social media (July).
	+ Sponsored digital advertorial on The Inverness Courier and Ross-shire Journal websites and social media (July).
	+ 15,000 Tri-fold leaflets distributed by Landmark Press to Perthshire North and Spey Valley between April and September at key tourist sites.
	+ Inclusion in Landmark Press’ ‘bedroom folders’ across the Cairngorms and Speyside, Perthshire.
	+ Advert in tear-off countertop tourist maps
	+ Meta Campaign – brand awareness (June): Paid promotion of a HFM focused video reel on Facebook attracted over 300 likes and 2,726 website landing page views.
* Inverness Botanic Gardens and Cafe
	+ 15,000 Tri-fold leaflets distributed by Landmark Press to Inverness and Loch Ness between April and September at key tourist sites.
	+ Events leaflet produced to support the IBG&C team to promote spaces within the facility.
	+ Advertising / vinyl signage installed at the foot of the Inverness Leisure ramp.
* North Coast Visitor Centre
	+ Advertising in the local Thurso countertop tourist maps.
	+ Inclusion in the Caithness Explorer – print run of 5,000 distributed locally by Landmark Press.
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| 5.2 | **Email Campaigns*** Over the six-month period, there were 1.1 million total sends to email subscribers, an increase of 21% compared to the previous six months.
* The open rate for email campaigns averages 42.8%, an increase of 8.5% compared to previous six months.

The unsubscribe rate averages 0.17%, which is better than the industry benchmark of 0.20%. The unsubscribe rate has improved by 12.7% compared to the previous six months. |
| **6.** | **Policy Review** |
| 6.1 | The Social Media Policy has been reviewed in line with the review schedule and no changes to the policy are to be reported. |
| **7.** | **Implications** |
| 7.1 | **Resource Implications** -there are no new resource implications associated with the recommendations of this report. |
| 7.2 | **Legal Implications** - there are no new legal implications arising from this report. |
| 7.3 | **Risk Implications** -There are no risk implications arising from the recommendations of this report. |
| 7.4 | **Equality Implications** - There are equality implications arising from the recommendations of this report. |

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| **Recommendation**It is recommended that Directors note: 1. the M&E performance information for Q4 2024/25 and Q1 2025/26 – January to June 2025; and
2. that the website development timeline now aims to conclude with launch in January 2026.
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Designation: Chief Executive

Date 22 August 2025

Author: Marc Wilson, Head of Marketing and Engagement

**Appendix A**



