

QUARTER TWO 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.

ii.

iii.

iv.

note and comment on the quarter two performance information;

note the Digital Delivery Plan update in **Appendix A**;

consider and approve the Countryside Rangers and Health and Safety delivery plans in **Appendices B1** and **B2**; and

note the Archives and Countryside Rangers annual reviews in **Appendices C1** and **C2**.

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.

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5.

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 sustainability agenda.

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. The table below shows how each of the performance areas are reported.

No.	Performance Area	Reporting
1	Increase Member Numbers (leisure, libraries, music and sport)	Leisure subscriptions are reported elsewhere on this agenda, information on the other services which have members in this report.
2	Increase Service Users	This report.
3	Improving User/Service Satisfaction Levels	This report.
4	Improving Staff Satisfaction Levels	HR report elsewhere on this agenda.
5	Improving Financial Sustainability	Finance report elsewhere on this agenda.
6	Capital Investment Levels	Chief Executive’s update report elsewhere on this agenda.

7	Health & Safety Performance	Annual health and safety report to the HLH Board and quarterly to the HSEC Committee.
8	Sustainability Results	This report.

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 Oct). As can be seen in the table below, at the end of October 2025 two services which have members saw small 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 Oct 2025)	Change	%age Change
Leisure	62,050	59,854	-2,196	-3.54%
Libraries	27,536	26,851	- 685	-2.49%
Music Tuition	4,090	4,203	113	2.76%

School term three (April to June)	April to June ¹ 2024/25	April to June 2025/26	Change	%age Change
Sport	8,501	8,518	17	0.2%

3.1.2 The leisure figure shown is for context as there is a separate report elsewhere on this agenda which covers leisure memberships and subscriptions in more detail. The figure in this report includes all members, individuals, family members and budget subscriptions and gives an indication of reach into the population.

3.1.3 Library members reduced by 2.49%. For the second quarter running, libraries membership is showing a slight reduction in comparison to March 2025. The data reflects the seasonal nature of library membership and a clear comparison will not be possible until 12 months of data has been collected. The libraries team are continuing to take action to improve customer numbers:

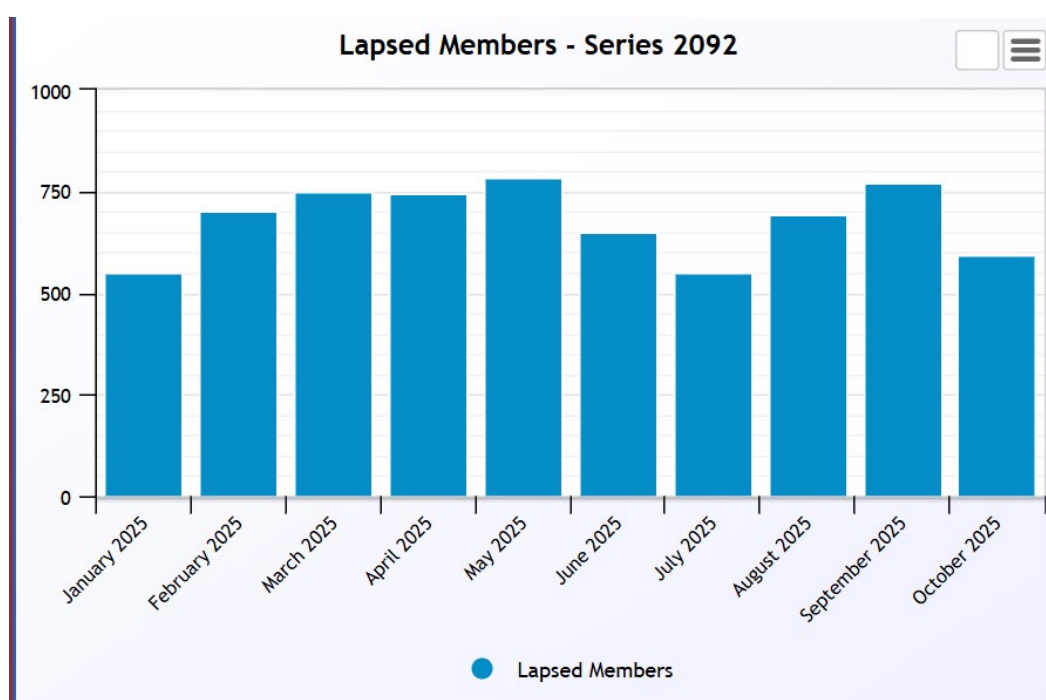
- Work continues with nurseries, primary and secondary schools to sign up children at the earliest possible stage.
- Mobile library routes have been re-optimised to take in more rural schools and care homes, as well as to increase opportunities for attracting new members. These new routes will take effect once the new vehicles arrive (expected February) at which point we would hope to see an increase in membership.
- The service continues to increase its presence at community events and offer sign up campaigns – in Q2 the service attended a number of family events at Eden Court

¹ Sports figures are reported by school term as a requirement of the grant funding from sportscotland.

Theatre as well as offering a monthly presence at The Victorian Market in Inverness to deliver Bookbug Sessions and sign-up new members.

- There is a continued focus on increasing the promotion of libraries' digital suite of library resources - including through press releases and in newsletters.
- The libraries team are continuing to improve their social media presence to encourage new members and have widened their engagement to include Instagram.

3.1.4 The retention measure for library memberships is lapsed members (membership card not having been used in the past year). The graph below shows lapsed members each month. The aim is to reduce the number of lapsed members which the libraries team has been successful in achieving with the October figure having been 549 and there being two months (May and September) higher than the March² figure. The libraries team have been focused on increasing awareness of its services to give customers as many reasons to visit as possible. Press coverage increased during Q2, as well as social media presence. At many library locations, the number and range of events offered has improved. Due to seasonal fluctuations in library use, however, a clear comparison with March 2025 will not be possible until 12 months of data has been captured.



3.2 Performance Area 2 - Increase service users:

3.2.1 Customer numbers are on track 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	8,622	9,566	944	11%
Community Venues & Engagement	117,674	64,693	92,388	27,695	43%
Countryside Rangers	15,794	11,577	10,890	-687	-6%

² This was a new PI introduced following the development of the strategy and full year on year comparison will be possible as of January 2026

Leisure	2,478,030	1,180,153	1,314,594	134,441	11%
Libraries	1,865,924	1,901,209	887,239	35,285	4%
Museums & Galleries	155,463	138,417	138,436	19	0%
Music Tuition	102,641	49,243	117,167	67,924	138%
Sport	325,748	82,840	81,240	-1,600	-2%
	5,074,084	2,704,541	2,800,399	95,858	4%

- 3.2.2 Countryside Rangers saw a 6% reduction in in-person customer numbers. This was because the team has been operating with one FTE ranger absent, creating a pro rata shortfall of around 641 engagements, which aligns closely with the actual variance of - 687. Full staffing is expected to be restored in January 2026, with performance monitored closely to ensure engagements realign with targets.
- 3.2.3 The increase in Leisure is due to the introduction of new programmes such as Hyrox and a range of initiatives designed to increase and retain members.
- 3.2.4 The slight reduction for the sports service is attributed to a staff vacancy which has subsequently being filled. Monthly data gathered around activity sessions being delivered and volunteers involved in the service for the new academic year shows growth in comparison to last year, the service is confident in exceeding last years in person visits numbers.
- 3.2.5 Community venues and engagement figures have increased significantly comparing 2024/25 and 2025/26. This was due to the opening of the Bught Park Pavillion and reporting on large sporting events like the Loch Ness Marathon and the Camanachd Cup final at Bught park.
- 3.2.6 Music Tuition figures have increased owing to groups performing in more events and festivals, including those with and higher profile and larger audiences.
- 3.2.7 As with in-person visits, the target for digital engagements is expected 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	1,317,420	1,761,957	444,537	34%
Countryside Rangers	95,045	50,026	45,787	-4,239	-8%
Libraries	879,340	446,281	405,673	-40,608	-9%
Museums & Galleries	83,595	45,127	53,100	7,933	18%
Total	3,476,195	1,858,854	2,266,517	407,663	22%

- 3.2.8 Overall digital customer engagements have achieved target because of the performance of the archives and museums and galleries teams. All four archive centres continue to publish new, engaging digital content and each has a steadily growing established following. The ever-increasing reach and popularity of [Am Baile's](#) offering is another driver

in the growth in digital engagements. Since April, its social media engagement has been significantly boosted by a new, weekly feature of interactive 'mystery' photos. An improvement to the customer interface of the main Am Baile website has also resulted in an increase in visitors.

3.2.9 Digital Countryside Ranger engagements show an 8% reduction, with a variance of 4,239 engagements against target. This was owing to a lack of management capacity to support the digital service from May to August due to illness, resulting in a drop in digital content output during June and July, which aligns with the shortfall now seen. The following actions are being implemented to address this: digital content production has increased this quarter, and a new social media campaign is being launched to promote *Nature Unveiled* and grow this online service audience.

3.2.10 Libraries' digital engagements decreased by 14% compared with the same period last year. As previously reported, this reflects 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 At the June 2025 HLH Board meeting, Directors were provided with information on the net promoter score survey which had been introduced. It was reported that the scores were good, however, the numbers of responses were low so could not be relied on as an accurate reflection of customer satisfaction.

3.3.2 The management team has considered options for surveying customers and consider the best approach being to build on the net promoter survey approach because:

- it is simple for customers; and
- responses to why they chose to score as they did, have been helpful.

3.3.3 This has been developed to a system which gives a net promoter score for each site/service and teams will promote it amongst customers over the coming months. Board reporting will recommence when teams have gathered sufficient data.

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

3.4.1 The Health and Safety and Environmental Compliance Committee considered health and safety performance reporting at its meeting held on 10 November 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. At the meeting the Committee “agreed to recommend the Health and Safety Delivery Plan in Appendix A of the report for consideration and approval by the HLH Board at its 8 December 2025 meeting” and this is in **Appendix B2**.

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

3.5.1 HLH has been working with THC to create a programme of net zero works focussed on the HLH portfolio, within a wider pan highland HC programme. There are 5 approved net zero projects ongoing with a further 5 in the pipeline.

Description of work/development	Next steps	Estimated savings
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HFM – Installation of solar PV onto the central office roof	Project to be tendered by THC with a view to completion of the works in Dec 25/ Jan 26	Circa £12k / 3.7 tCO2e pa
Description of work/development	Next steps	Estimated savings
Botanic Gardens – Removal of small PV array and replace with new more efficient PV cells	Project to be tendered by THC with a view to completion of the works in Dec 25/ Jan 26	Circa £3.2k / 1 tCO2e pa
Inverness Rugby Pavillion – Installation of solar PV	Project to be tendered by THC with a view to completion of the works in Dec 25/ Jan 26	Circa £10.6k / 3 tCO2e
Inverness Leisure – Dry side PV installation	Project to feature in phase 2 of the programme likely to start in 26	Circa £12.4k / 3.5 tCO2e
Inverness LC – Recommissioning of Combined heat and power plant	Contract let – Programme dates awaited	Circa £250k pa
Inverness LC – Installation of low energy water and heating pumps	Report issued – awaiting funding decisions (£230k)	Circa £35.6k / 27.64 tCO2e pa
Nairn LC - PV Installation	Project to feature in phase 2 of the programme likely to start in 26	Circa £6,400k / 1.8 tCO2e pa
Thurso LC – Solar PV	Project to be tendered by THC with a view to completion of the works in Mar 26	Circa £1.4k / .3 tCO2e pa
NCVC – Various energy savings works	THC / HLH to seek funding	Circa £32k / 35 tCO2e pa
Botanic Gardens – Installation of solar glazing to green houses	In development – No date for commencement	TBC

4. Delivery Plans

4.1 Delivery plan progress is reviewed by teams at team meetings, and the table below provides an overview.

Delivery Plan RAG Status	Red Actions	Amber Actions	Green Actions	Completed Actions	Actions no longer Required
Archives	0	3	44	4	0
Countryside Rangers	0	20	42	17	1
Digital & Technology	0	0	14	6	2
Libraries	0	2	47	19	0
Marketing & Engagement	2	15	38	7	0
Museums & Galleries	0	0	26	6	0

Sport, Leisure and Safeguarding	0	3	24	0	2
Totals	2	43	235	59	5

4.2 The two red RAG ratings are being addressed as below.

Programme/ Channel	Action	Progress
Personalisation	15. Develop, implement and promote a new policy and pricing structure for attracting local businesses to advertise within our locations and on our digital spaces.	New policy and pricing structure under development. Inverness Leisure competition pool video wall is being actively used to promote other local charities, and we are actively advertising that we are open to local business advertising.
Brand	27. Develop an incentivised approach to engaging with social media micro influencers and influential members of the public who can help champion and promote High Life Highland via digital media channels. This will also involve targeting people who run local Facebook groups, 'mums' groups, fitness groups, travel bloggers.	No progress on this action as yet, however, aiming to complete by end Q3.

4.3 An update has been requested by board members on progress relating to the digital delivery plan. Since its approval in March 2025, the HLH Digital and Technology Delivery Plan has remained the central focus of the Digital and Technology Team. As of early November, implementation is progressing well across all workstreams, of the 22 actions outlined in the plan:

14 are on track (Green)	2 are no longer required
6 are completed	0 are rated amber or red

4.4 The key highlights to note are:

- Artificial Intelligence & Automation: Staff training on Copilot and Power Automate is complete. AI is now actively used for survey analysis and software development, with further chatbot deployment planned for 2026.
- Inverness Castle Experience: All digital infrastructure and systems are installed and ready for launch, including AI-monitored networks and ticketing platforms.
- Leisure Management System: The member app, digital card, and recurring payment features are launching in December. Integration and digital swim lesson platforms are progressing well.
- Website & Public Access Services: The new HLH website is on track for early 2026. Cloud migration of library PC access and museum systems is underway or complete.
- Team Capacity: A Software Developer was appointed in September, strengthening in-house capability.
- Two actions relating to workforce planning have been retired following confirmation of a new HR system being procured by THC for 2027.

- The team remains focused on delivering the remaining actions and preparing for key launches in early 2026. Overall, the programme is delivering confidently against its ambitions and full detail is available in **Appendix A**.

4.5 Two service teams: Countryside Rangers and Health and Safety, have developed delivery plans and these are in **Appendices B1 and B2** for the consideration and approval of the HLH Board.

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 Countryside Rangers 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. Implications

6.1 Resource implications – while this report discusses resources and financial implications, there are no resource implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

6.2 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 is a monitoring report, and an impact assessment is therefore not required.

6.3 Legal implications - there are no new legal implications arising from this report.

6.4 Risk implications - there are no new risk implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Directors:

- note and comment on the quarter two performance information;
- note the Digital Delivery Plan update in **Appendix A**;
- consider and approve the Countryside Rangers and Health and Safety delivery plans in **Appendices B1 and B2**; and
- note the Archives and Countryside Rangers annual reviews in **Appendices C1 and C2**.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 24 November 2025

Authors: Douglas Wilby, Director of Corporate Performance
 John West, Director of Culture and Learning
 James Martin, Director of Community, Leisure and Sport
 Simon Swanson, Head of Investment and Programme Management
 Marc Wilson, Head of Marketing and Engagement
 Alan Hoseason, Head of Digital and Technology

Digital & Technology Delivery Plan Actions Progress

Programme	Ambition	Progress	RAG STATUS
Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Automation	Train staff on Copilot & Power Automate to cut manual tasks.	Webinars held for all staff and recordings hosted on staff website.	Complete
	Use AI for automated survey data analysis.	HLH Staff Survey and NPS surveys (test and development phase) are now reported on using AI data analysis models.	Green
	Deploy AI for chatbots, membership queries, reporting, and office tasks.	Chatbot due on HLH website launch in 2026. AI successfully used for new software builds at Inverness Castle. Funding application submitted to HIE for advanced AI platform licence.	Green
Develop existing in-house People Management System	Automate staff database for recruitment, rotas, payroll, and leave.	THC procuring new HR system for 2027 launch meaning that HLH investment could be overtaken by THC system development. This action has been marked “no longer required” but will be kept under review as THC develops the new HR/Payroll system.	No Longer Required
	Create workforce planning dataset for staffing analysis.	THC procuring new HR system for 2027 launch – action has been marked “no longer required” as above but will be kept under review.	No Longer Required
Digital & Technology Resource and Resilience	Expand digital team for in-house development and system resilience.	Software Developer appointed September 2025. Actions for software developer will be built into next year’s Digital Delivery plan.	Complete
HLH Website	Procure new website and integrate with leisure systems for bookings and chatbot.	Website due to launch early 2026. Leisure integration in place.	Green
Inverness Castle Experience	Install data and Wi-Fi network for exhibition and public access.	AI monitored network installed ready for castle opening.	Complete

(ICE) Opening	Launch ticketing and till systems for bookings and retail.	Ticketing and tills system installed and ready for Castle opening.	Green
	Standardise ticketing/till systems across HLH.	Castle ticketing unlikely to suit wider HLH rollout. New tills system (supplied by "Squareup") rolling out to other HLH retail/catering sites.	Green
Upgrade Archives Management System	Upgrade archives database and public catalogue.	Consultation started with vendor for a Q3 2026 completion date.	Green
Upgrade Leisure Management System (LMS)	Launch member app and digital card.	App and digital card launching December 2025.	Green
	Integrate chip & pin with LMS.	Final stage of integration works being completed for rollout early 2026.	Green
	Roll out digital swim lesson platform and parent portal.	iPads procured and configured for digital management of swim lessons. New swim programme rolling out to all pool sites in Q4 2025/26.	Green
	Enable recurring card payments for memberships.	Launching December as primary payment method for <i>highlife</i> membership.	Green
	Launch cloud-based reporting dashboards.	New platform rolled out along with leisure staff training and access in July.	Complete
	Develop self-check-in for leisure classes.	New kiosks were installed at Inverness Leisure in October. No other sites required self-check in.	Complete
Upgrade Museums Management System	Upgrade museums database to cloud service.	New cloud hosted platform for museum collections launched after successful data migration.	Complete
	Launch online museum exhibit catalogue.	Museums Team working on content for a late 2026 launch.	Green
Upgrade Public Computer Access Service (PCAS) within Libraries	Migrate PCAS to cloud for better automation.	First of two cloud systems migration has commenced successfully. Completion expected by March 2026.	Green
	Upgrade Windows and software.	Work has begun with an early 2026 completion date expected.	Green

	Upgrade printers and enable wireless printing.	Currently working with vendor and THC on two options and cost models.	Green
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Countryside Rangers 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 purpose is Making Life Better by delivering affordable access to health and wellbeing, learning, and culture for everyone in the Highlands. The Countryside Ranger Service, as part of High Life Highland's public service delivery on behalf of The Highland Council, plays a key role in achieving this through nature-based engagement.

This delivery plan outlines how the Ranger Service will continue to provide inclusive, inspiring, and accessible outdoor learning and environmental opportunities that support wellbeing, strengthen community connection, and encourage care for the natural world across Highland communities.

Executive Summary

In 2024/25, the High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service delivered 13,031 in-person engagements—a 10% increase from the previous year—and recorded 91,653 digital interactions. We engaged 3,775 school pupils in environmental education, facilitated 8,109 community learning engagements (up over 50%), and supported 737 volunteer interactions through 78 events. These outcomes reflect the team's growing reach, relevance, and role in improving lives through meaningful nature-based experiences. These efforts were recognised with a Gold award for Education and Training in Conservation and Wildlife at the 2024 Green Apple Environment Awards.

The 2025/26 delivery plan builds on this strong foundation, aligning with High Life Highland's purpose of Making Life Better by offering inclusive, affordable access to nature, learning, and wellbeing across the region. The plan focuses on optimising community-informed service delivery, responding to local needs, and tailoring activities and workshops to reach underrepresented and rural groups. As delivery partners in the Green Health Action Plan, Rangers will continue promoting Green Health Week and offering a blend of short and long guided nature walks. Cross-service partnerships with Adult Learning and health initiatives aim to support mental wellbeing and social inclusion.

Accessibility and flexibility remain central. The plan includes developing remote learning options (e.g. Google Classroom for schools), enhancing digital interpretation and online articles, and improving onsite accessibility through signage and volunteer support. Financial sustainability will be strengthened through increased promotion of High Life memberships, expanded use of donation QR codes, strategic grant applications, and efforts to maximise bunkhouse occupancy.

The service also commits to monitoring and enhancing customer experience through regular feedback, service evaluation, and the planned launch of a Ranger Service Customer Charter. Continued investment in staff training, health and safety, and digital tools will ensure professional and efficient delivery of the service. Finally, the Rangers will advance biodiversity and climate awareness by supporting nature restoration work, promoting sustainable practices, and contributing to Scotland's net zero and 30x30 goals.

This plan sets out a clear, responsive framework for 2025/26, ensuring the Countryside Ranger Service continues to support people, places, and the planet.

Our Service

The High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service delivers countryside-based services that support environmental education, outdoor access, biodiversity, community wellbeing, and responsible behaviour in the outdoors. Operating across the Highlands, the Ranger Service provides a wide range of inclusive, place-based learning experiences, both in person and online. These include guided walks, citizen science projects, nature clubs, workshops, school visits, and volunteer days—all designed to increase awareness, understanding, and care for the natural, cultural, and built heritage of the region.

Rangers deliver an annual environmental education programme to schools, supporting Learning for Sustainability and the Curriculum for Excellence through outdoor learning. We also contribute to The Highland Council's Community Learning and Development (CLD) Plan by providing heritage and nature-based learning opportunities for people of all ages and stages.

The service plays a key role in supporting the Council's biodiversity and outdoor access duties by monitoring paths and countryside sites, promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and helping protect habitats through community action and site management. Rangers also manage two bunkhouse accommodations, generating income and providing facilities for group visits and nature-based tourism.

Our events and programmes promote health and wellbeing, offering opportunities for people to connect with nature, enjoy gentle physical activity, and build social connections. From pond creation and tree planting to cultural heritage walks and family nature trails, our work helps develop a lifelong relationship with the Highland environment. By engaging directly with communities, schools, and visitors, the Ranger Service empowers people to become stewards of their local landscapes while helping to deliver on Scotland's wider environmental, educational, and wellbeing goals.

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.

Countryside Ranger Service

Protecting nature, celebrating heritage and strengthening communities



Inclusion, Access and Affordability

- Regularly review and adjust any charges
- Provide online ranger learning resources to improve accessibility
- Promote Gaelic in service delivery
- Improve access to countryside sites
- Ensure a proportion of work is targeted for inclusion

Community & Belonging

- Increase number of local community partners
- Consult with community partners regularly
- Build community environmental volunteering capacity
- Develop an online nature interest community
- Gather local feedback and suggestions
- Share community impact stories
- Enhance local nature and heritage interpretation

Income for Investment

- Upsell benefits of HLH Memberships
- Increase visibility of donation QR codes
- Explore new retail income streams
- Boost bunkhouse occupancy and profitability
- Apply for external grant funding
- Encourage support through Nature Unveiled paid subscriptions

Customer Excellence

- Deliver quality events and interpretation
- Develop a ranger customer service charter
- Run annual customer surveys and respond publicly
- Ensure rangers are knowledgeable and safe in delivery
- Publish annual review and project reports
- Improve bunkhouse guest experiences

Physical, Social and Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Partner on 'green' health improvement projects
- Promote physical activity through walking
- Promote nature connection for wellbeing
- Promote social wellbeing through ranger activities and volunteering

Life Long Learning

- Develop opportunities for HLH Youth Leadership
- Promote and partner on the delivery of the SQA Biodiversity course
- Develop educational and interpretation materials online
- Undertake a skills audit for staff to ensure CPD is identified
- Provide nature and heritage interpretation in the bunkhouses
- Training volunteers for citizen science projects

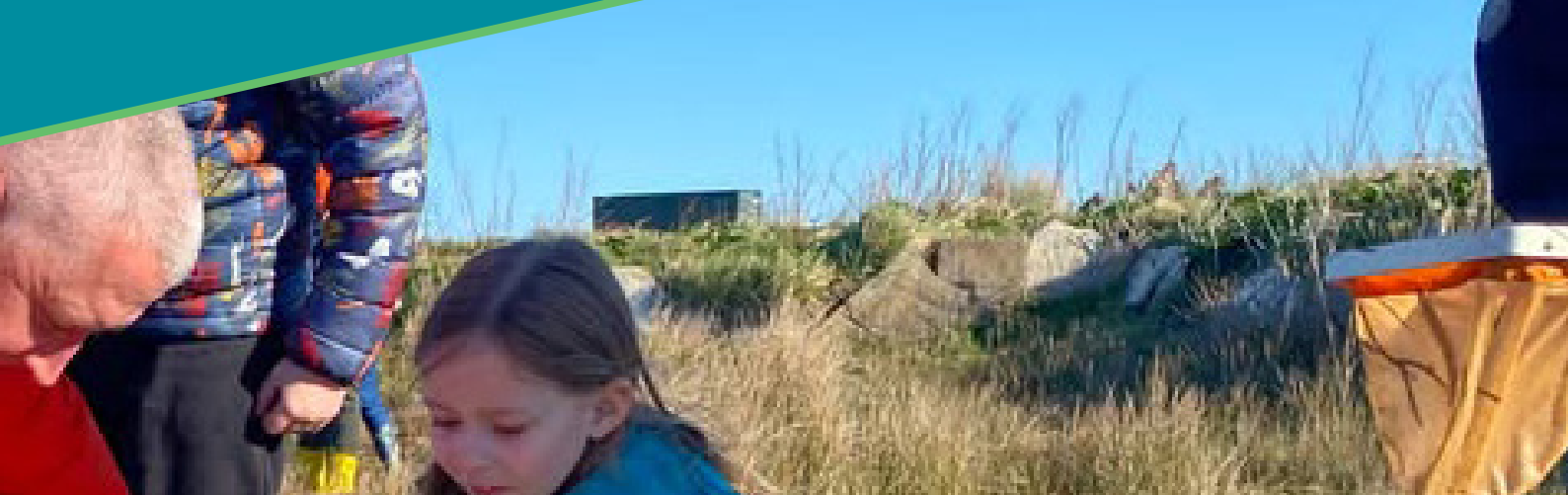
Sustainability and Net-Zero

- Support Eco-Schools programme delivery
- Ensure a proportion of events are accessible by public transport
- Minimise waste and use eco-friendly materials
- Build climate themes into activity delivery
- Implement any HC energy survey actions
- Schedule efficiently and use MS teams to cut travel

Biodiversity

- Drive and support habitat restoration projects for 2030 targets
- Collaborate on local nature conservation sites
- Partner with conservation trusts on projects
- Produce management plans for biodiversity on sites we care for
- Monitoring and recording of species for nationwide surveys
- Promoting and encouraging citizen science contributions

Strategy and Actions 2025-2026



KEY	
Director of Culture and Learning – DCL Head of Service – HoS HoS – Imogen Furlong SR - Eilidh-Ann Phillips/Andy Summers Rangers (individual responsibility)	RQ - REVIEW AND REVISE QUARTERLY RM - REVIEW AND REVISE MONTHLY RBA - REVIEW BI-ANNUALLY RA - REVIEW AND REVISE ANNUALLY

Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams	Date	Lead
Strategic Objective 1: Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region.	1.1 Optimise service delivery to meet community needs.	1. Liaise with community groups through meetings and CPP reps to identify local needs and respond to enquiries. 2. Collaborate with local groups to deliver on those needs. 3. Design flexible, nature-based activities, events and resources to meet community needs. 4. Respond to customer surveys. 5. Work with colleagues in Adult Learning to offer opportunities for refugee families and other target groups. 6. Work with colleagues in the Green Health Partnership to offer opportunities to those with health challenges.	1. ONGOING - RQ 2. ONGOING - RQ 3. ONGOING - RQ 4. ONGOING - ANNUAL 5. July 2025 6. ONGOING - RQ	1. HoS/SR 2. SR 3. SR 4. HoS 5. HoS/Ranger John Orr 6. HoS
	1.2 Ensure the affordability and accessibility of services to the community.	1. Tailor events and programmes to include underrepresented groups, ensuring affordability and accessibility for diverse audiences. 2. Work with colleagues to raise the profile of and provide service using Gaelic language and culture. 3. Provide high-quality digitally accessed interpretation materials to supplement in-person delivery 4. Work with volunteer groups and HC partners on countryside sites to enhance accessibility and signage 5. Work to develop free green health offerings ensuring maximum inclusion for those with reduced physical health or mental health. 6. Provide alternative methods (e.g: via Google classroom) of service delivery to schools who cannot easily access a ranger visit (due to location) and promote those free educational opportunities. 7. Ensure that charges for services are sense checked for affordability at Ranger level managers meeting	1. April 2025 2. April 2025 3. ONGOING - RM 4. ONGOING - RBA 5. December 2025 6. May 2025 7. ONGOING - RM	1. Rangers 2. Rangers 3. All 4. All 5. SR 6. SR 7. HoS/SR
	1.3 Adopt a flexible approach to align with local opportunity	1. Follow up and seek new opportunities to collaborate with third, public and private sector to enhance affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region 2. Look for ways to deliver the SDC in a more flexible cost effective way with grant funding applications and partner support 3. Ensure service keeps some flexibility in schedule to respond to opportunities	1. ONGOING - RM 2. ONGOING - RM 3. ONGOING - RM	1. HoS 2. SR 3. SR

Delivery Plan

Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams	Date	Lead
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. Support staff to promote High Life membership. 2. Promote High Life memberships at Ranger events to encourage participation and support revenue growth. 3. Promote High Life Membership and Leisure campaigns on Ranger social media platforms. 4. Provide quality HLH "Schools Out" holiday provision to High Life members. 5. Ensure that HLH product training forms part of standard training for ranger and bunkhouse staff. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ONGOING - RQ 2. ONGOING -RQ 3. ONGOING -RM 4. April 2025, August 2025; October 2025 5. February 2026 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HoS/ Membership team 2. HoS/ Membership team 3. SR/ Membership team 4. SR/Rangers 5. SR
	2.2 Maximise income from all other income streams.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set target number of visitor touch points for the ranger service poster with donation QR code 2. Develop and implement a strategy for donations and philanthropic support 3. Instruct Rangers to use the donation QR code at every opportunity 4. Seek support from local café and visitor businesses to host our QR code poster in windows and counters. 5. Link QR codes to interpretation material and walking routes to encourage donation and start a new customer journey 6. Explore opportunities for retail sales and other innovations within the ranger service that will generate income through trade. 7. Work to promote and ensure maximum occupancy of the bunkhouses to increase profitability of the asset. 8. Apply for grants and external funding for projects run by core staff – enhancing value and reducing cost 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. April 2025 2. July 2025 3. March 2025, June 2025, Sept 2025 (RQ) 4. July 2025 5. Project initiation - Sept 2025 6. Initiate May 2025 7. April 2025 8. ONGOING - RM 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HoS 2. HoS/SR 3. HoS/SR 4. Rangers 5. HoS, then Rangers 6. HoS; Heritage ranger 7. HoS / Bunkhouse team 8. HoS / Rangers
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. Undertake an annual customer survey 2. Undertake an annual reader customer survey and publish the results. 3. Regularly evaluate programmes and activities for community impact through feedback 4. Explore and develop a range of other customer feedback mechanisms (eg: visitor reviews/ranger guest books/video testimonials). 5. Deliver CPD training for rangers to maintain expertise and be cutting edge in the field 6. Ensure all staff are aware of importance of and responsibility for H&S. 7. Ensure that risk assessments are completed and reviewed 8. Ensure RPO duties undertaken 9. Implement findings from the trading consultant to improve experience for bunkhouse guests 10. Implement improvement to the service, and let customers know what we have done ("You said we did") 11. Undertake a staff survey/workshops to understand how CRS can improve services, and implement ideas. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. April 2025 2. April 2025 3. March 2026 4. December 2025 5. February 2026 6. ONGOING - RQ 7. ONGOING - RA 8. ONGOING - RQ 9. March 2026 10. November 2025 11. November 2025 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HoS/Rangers 2. HoS 3. HoS/SR 4. SR/Rangers 5. HoS/SR 6. HoS/SR 7. SR/Rangers 8. HoS/SR/RPOs 9. HoS/ Bunkohouse 10. HoS 11. HoS



Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams	Date	Lead
Strategic Objective 3: Demonstrate the unique customer value that HLH offers.	3.2 Demonstrate how each service brings value to our customers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create HLH Ranger Customer Charter to demonstrate to our customers the standards that they can expect from our service. 2. Develop a charter checklist to ensure we are on track with on our charter (eg website up to date and accurate). 3. Ensure our own communication channels (social media, website, PR & Blog) with the general public are used to highlight the value of the service and the work we undertake outside of events. 4. Highlight the work of the ranger service within the main High Life Highland main social media pages, and newsletters. 5. Write reports on project work undertaken to publish on our webpages 6. Publish a Countryside Ranger annual report to highlight areas of work and demonstrate impact. 7. Apply for awards for the work we have undertaken in communities 8. Report on Biodiversity work HLH Rangers undertake as part of THC statutory duties. 9. Report on work of HLH Rangers to Nature Scot. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. October 2025 2. December 2025 3. ONGOING - RQ 4. ONGOING - RM 5. ONGOING - RA 6. July 2025 7. ONGOING - RBA 8. January 2026 9. February 2025 February 2026 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HoS 2. SR 3. HoS/SR/ Ranger 4. All 5. HoS/SR/ Ranger 6. HoS 7. HoS 8. HoS/SR 9. HoS/SR
	4.1 Develop an Action Plan for Net Zero Sustainability for each service.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support habitat restoration projects on both community and HC owned land such as pond creation, woodland recovery, or wildflower planting. 2. Support the establishment of Local Nature Conservation Sites in collaboration with THC and Nature.Scot as part of the 30x30 Scottish Government commitment. 3. Work collaboratively with other services & THC Climate Change Team to educate communities and colleagues about climate & sustainability 4. Create opportunities within activity delivery to bring focus to biodiversity and climate actions. 5. Adopt sustainable practices in ranger operations, such as minimising waste at events and using eco-friendly materials. 6. Maximise opportunities available from external organisations (THC) and bodies to improve sustainability. 7. Minimise waste by reusing and up-cycling physical resources as far as possible 8. Work with HC schools to achieve Eco-Schools status (in 2024-25) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ONGOING Next Project Completes May 2025 2. Dec 2025 3. ONGOING - RQ 4. ONGOING - RM 5. December 2025 6. ONGOING - RQ 7. December 2025 8. January 2026 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rangers/ SR/HoS 2. HoS/SR/ Rangers 3. HoS/ Rangers 4. Rangers 5. Rangers 6. HoS/ Rangers 7. Rangers 8. Rangers
	4.2 Reduce energy consumption across our services.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduce carbon emissions by using energy-efficient vehicles when council upgrades are available. 2. Work with schools to become more carbon aware and energy. efficient, promoting the Eco-School status and the delivery of the Climate Change module. 3. Encourage active travel and public transport for participants to our local events. 4. Apply for grant funding where possible to support bunkhouse visitors using active travel (cycle racks). 5. Include energy (distance travelled) and sustainability considerations in criteria for the selection of goods, services and contractors – wherever procurement processes allow. 6. Timetable tasks and activities to minimise travelling time. 7. Use Teams meetings to reduce travel to meetings. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unknown 2. December 2025 3. December 2025 4. August 2025 5. ONGOING - RM 6. ONGOING - RQ 7. ONGOING - RQ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HoS/All 2. Rangers 3. HoS/SR/ Rangers 4. HoS 5. Rangers/SR 6. SR 7. SR/HoS

Delivery Plan



Business Outcome	Operational Plan Action	Workstreams	Date	Lead
Strategic Objective 4: Demonstrate the HLH contribution to the sustainability agenda.	4.3 Implement findings of energy surveys	1.... further actions to come when surveys completed		1. HoS
Strategic Objective 5: Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes	5.1 Continuous staff deployment to meet customer requirements efficiently.	1. Ensure ranger deployment aligns with peak customer times and key community needs for optimal coverage. 2. Develop opportunities in ranger service for HLH Leadership programme 3. Build capacity within communities to undertake environmental stewardship 4. Investigate opportunities to expand ranger coverage of the region in areas with no provision	1. May 2025 / Ongoing RQ 2. May 2025 3. March 2025 4. March 2026	1. SR 2. SR/Rangers 3. Rangers 4. HoS
	5.2 Develop TNA to support delivery of our strategic objectives at service level.	1. Conduct regular skills audits to identify and address training needs for delivering strategic objectives. 2. Encourage staff participation in HLH employee surveys and implement a change programme based on the survey results and recommendations 3. Deliver CPD training for rangers following needs analysis (eg: Customer Journey Mechanics and Digital Literacy, Corporate HLH processes training).	1. June 2025 2. ONGOING - RBA 3. October 2025	1. HoS 2. HoS/SR 3. HoS
	5.3 Develop a Digital Plan for service delivery and efficiency.	1. Leverage digital tools to streamline bookings and customer feedback & online review mechanisms. 2. Complete an analysis to help hone in on where ROI is best placed to increase digital footfall. 3. Continue to develop HLH rangers webpages to provide resources to customers and promote the service. 4. Use up to date Ai tools to reduce administrative burdens where possible. 5. Explore further development of online visitor experiences by improving interpretation linked to signage, and digital content at countryside sites.	1. December 2025 2. March 2026 3. September 2025 4. September 2025 5. Initiate October 2025	1. HoS/Rangers 2. HoS 3. SR/Marketing team 4. HoS – Rangers 5. HoS/project group
	5.4 Improve services by using the customer journey mechanism.	1. Create a ranger service customer journey map – including current touch points and write a plan of how the journey could be improved 2. Regularly review the customer journey both online and at in person events to continually improve satisfaction and retention levels 3. Utilise regular and direct communication (social media and newsletters) to bring customers to a place of action and advocacy within the customer journey.	1. August 2025 2. ONGOING - RBA 3. May 2025	1. HoS/Project group 2. Rangers/HoS 3. HoS/SR



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Delivery Plan v1 - July 2025

Health & Safety 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.”

Keeping Everyone Safe

Within the context of a Health and Safety Delivery Plan, this means keeping all our people, whether they be customers, staff, contractors, or other people that we come into contact with, safe.

The primary focus of this plan is therefore to develop and improve how we keep everyone safe.

Executive Summary

HLH has a Health and Safety and Environmental Compliance Committee "to assist the board of Directors in fulfilling its responsibilities with regard to annual and exception reporting on health and safety performance." This Delivery plan has been developed by the Committee and was

approved by the HLH Board on 8 December 2025 and focuses on the key improvement areas which will make the greatest contributions to the Committee's aim of keeping everyone safe.

Partnership with The Highland Council

The Highland Council (THC) has contracted with HLH to deliver its Public Services Obligations through a Service Delivery Contract. The following areas of work are delivered by HLH on behalf of THC: Archives; Community Venues and Engagement; Countryside Services; Leisure; Libraries; Museums and Galleries; Music Tuition; and Sport and Physical Activity. This will extend to include the Inverness Castle Experience.

THC owns the buildings which HLH operates from. At inception in 2011 it was agreed that THC would provide HLH with a property service to ensure that it can deliver its services from buildings which are safe and fit for purpose.

The governing document for this is the Property Agreement and HLH could not operate effectively and safely without this. This arrangement was developed in part due to the benefits of joint cost savings, economies of scale and efficiency through avoiding the duplication which would be associated with HLH having its own property team and associated servicing and maintenance contracts.

While the Property Agreement details responsibilities which THC has towards HLH, as a separate legal entity HLH has to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place and this necessitates having mechanisms in place to ensure that buildings meet legal requirements.



Health & Safety Team

Keeping our people safe is everybody's responsibility. To support all HLH's workforce to do this we have a specialist team focussing on maintaining and developing the organisation's policy and procedures which allows this to happen, as well as monitoring performance to learn and make improvements.

The team is made up of the following staff and their collective responsibilities can be seen in the Health and Safety Policy.

- Head of Estates
- Estates Officer – admin support

Specialist Health and Safety Adviser

HLH appoints an external specialist health and safety adviser, currently QLM, to support and advise on health and safety compliance and associated policy, guidance and procedures. The adviser provides specialist advice and support, attends Health and Safety and Environmental Compliance Committee meetings and staff/trade union health and safety meetings. It also audits health and safety arrangements, activities and premises and may be used to support HLH with accident investigations, criminal or civil proceedings, and liaising with enforcing authorities.

Our Services

The principal activities of the organisation are to develop and promote opportunities in culture, learning, sport, leisure, health, and well-being. The charity's high-level outcome is: Making a positive impact across the Highlands by improving physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing.

HLH operates across the Highlands of Scotland, within the geographical boundary of The Highland Council's administrative area. The main business of HLH is the delivery of a Service Delivery Contract for The Highland Council across the following areas of work:

- Archives
- Community Venues and Engagement
- Countryside Services
- Leisure Facilities
- Libraries
- Museums and Galleries
- Music Development
- Sport & Physical Activity
- The Inverness Castle Experience

HLH Strategic Objectives

The High Life Highland Strategy 2025-30 lists the following strategic objectives to which this Digital Action Plan will contribute as part of a Charity-wide drive for growth and sustainability:

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.

Health & Safety Goals

Our goal is for all staff to see health and safety as the vehicle for Making Life Better by keeping everyone safe, whether they be customers, staff, contractors, or other people that HLH comes into contact in the course of its activities. To achieve this the Delivery Plan has three key themes at its core:

An organisational understanding that the focus of health and safety is **keeping everyone safe** with everyone having a role in keeping customers, each other, and themselves safe.

Keeping everyone safe through creating a **learning culture** where accidents and incident reporting is reviewed at site, service, and organisational level to ensure that we learn from them.

Keeping everyone safe through supporting service teams through active internal **monitoring**.

Action Plan



KEY: HLH 5-Year Strategic Objectives	Frequency or Completion date
Services - Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region Income - Maximise and grow our income to re-invest across our services Delivery - Ensure a consistent high value of delivery across HLH services Sustainability - Commit to the net zero and sustainability agenda People/Process - Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q1 - April - June Q2 - July - September Q3 - October - December Q4 - January - March

Programme / Channel	Action(s)	Services	Timeline	Contribution to Strategic Objective
Keeping Everyone Safe	Accident analysis and key H&S themes posters issued to all staff every 3 months.	All services	Ongoing	People/Process
	Review of the charity's H&S Policy, Arrangements and Guidance along with the creation of guidance as required.	All services	Ongoing	People/Process Services Delivery
	Development of the Accident and Incident database reporting tools to support individual site, management, and administration reporting across the charity.	All services	Q2 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	Updated guidance for off-site excursions and adventurous activity for both HLH and THC.	All services	Q1 2026/27	People/Process
	Templated risk assessment review of the adventurous activities generic risk assessments.	All services	Q3 2026/27	People/Process
	Equipment database to have all HLH and THC adventurous activity equipment entered onto the new system.	All services	HLH - Q2 2026/27 THC - Q1 2027/28	People/Process Services Delivery
	Work with all services in the preparation and implementation of the new Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 in line with guidance when this becomes available.	All services	Q4 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
Learning Culture	Monitoring and review of Accident and Incidents, including trends and individual incidents to highlight lessons learnt and communicate this through the charity.	All services	Ongoing	People/Process Services Delivery
	Responsible Premises Officers training available for new or refresher training each quarter.	All services	Ongoing	People/Process
	Annual calendar of training for the off-site excursions and adventures activities system for both HLH and THC staff to attend.	All services	Q4 2025/26	People/Process
	Online training system (iHASCO). Monitoring and Reporting of services, sites, users, and individual completion of mandatory courses.	All services	Q2 2026/27	People/Process
	Support the new training officer in the development of training relating to H&S.	All services	Ongoing	People/Process

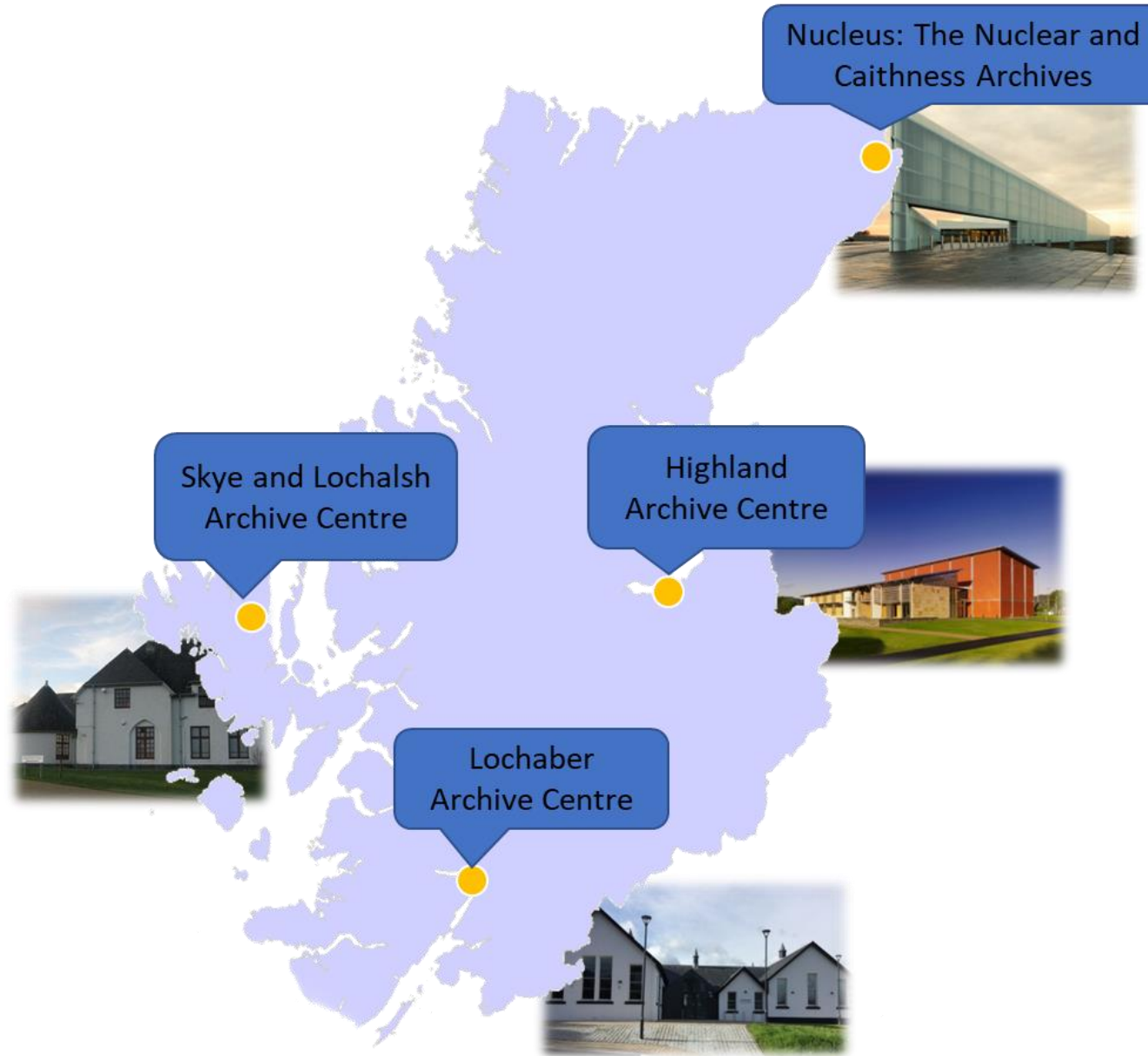


Programme / Channel	Action(s)	Services	Timeline	Contribution to Strategic Objective
Monitoring	External monitoring to be completed by QLM for 3 sites.	ICE CV&E	Q4 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	Recruitment of a Health, Safety Compliance officer to support the charities H&S compliance and increase monitoring across the charity.	All services	Q4 2025/26	People/Process Services Delivery Income
	A review of all monitoring completed by each service to create a formal register of monitoring across the charity.	All services	Q2 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery Income
	Creation of a monitoring guidance document linked to the H&S Arrangements document.	All services	Q2 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	Creation of a recording mechanism for reporting and recording ongoing monitoring in line with established time frames.	All services	Q4 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	Development of a reporting system from the charity's facility database for the monitoring of compliance with both RPO duties and certification.	All services	Q2 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	Monitoring of 24/7 contacts for both HLH and HC using desk-based process.	All services	Q4 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	Attend adventurous activities to complete monitoring and provide feedback to activity providers and service.	All services	Q4 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	Increase frequency of pool plant room audits from once every 3 years to every 2 years.	Leisure	Q4 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
	A review of COSHH arrangements and action plans in place across 29 leisure sites.	Leisure	Q4 2025/26	People/Process Services Delivery
	Development of an online database / portal to support the management of assured adventurous activity providers.	All services	Q4 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery
General	A review with THC maintenance team and contract administrators team on the best way forward for HLH to receive certification / reports.	All services	Ongoing	People/Process Services Delivery
	The use by all HLH sites of the new asset database, with sites populating all assets on each site operated by HLH.	All services	Q3 2026/27	People/Process Services Delivery

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! ♥*♥

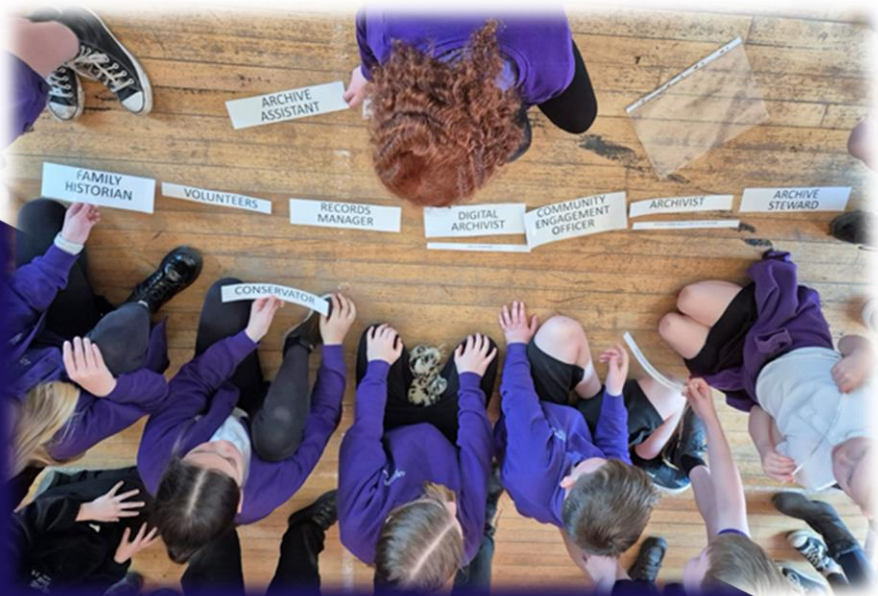


Engagement 2024/25: Global Conversations, Shared Connections

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.

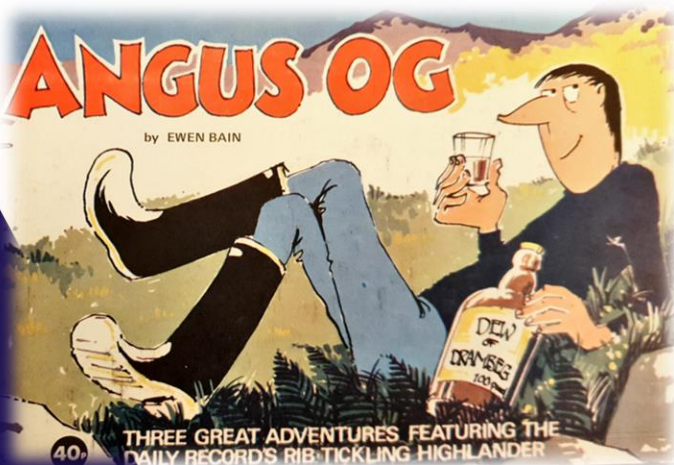


Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre: Angus Og – A National Island Plan Funded Project

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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Thank you Mòran taining

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COUNTRYSIDE RANGERS

Annual Review
2024/2025



Photo: Volunteers work
with the local Ranger to
improve footpath access



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MEET THE RANGERS



Imogen Furlong
Countryside Ranger
Service Manager



Andy Summers
Senior Ranger (North
Highland)



Eilidh-Ann Phillips
Senior Ranger (South
Highland) & Bunkhouses



Paul Castle
North Sutherland and
Caithness Countryside
Ranger



Marcia O'Hara
Easter Ross and SE
Sutherland
Countryside Ranger



Kirsty Rosie
East Caithness
Countryside Ranger



Patti Bremner
East Caithness
Countryside Ranger



Katie Grant
Wester Ross
Countryside Ranger



Jenny Grant
Wester Ross
Countryside Ranger



John Orr
Inverness Area
Countryside Ranger



Saranne Bish
Badenoch, Strathspey
and Nairnshire
Countryside Ranger



Pam Allan
Torrin Bunkhouse
Warden (Skye)



Michelle Melville
Highland Heritage
Ranger (Lochaber
based)



Donald Mitchell
NW Sutherland
Countryside Ranger



Fiona MacLean
Lochaber Countryside
Ranger /Glennfinan
Bunkhouse Supervisor



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The 2024–25 year marked a period of strong growth and achievement for the High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service, with a notable increase in both face-to-face and digital engagement across our diverse range of activities.

AWARD WINNING SERVICE



from L-R: John Orr, Countryside Ranger, Imogen Furlong, Countryside Ranger Manager, Caroline Vawdry, Highland Environment Forum, and John West, Director of Culture and Learning, with the Green Apple Gold Award.

Our Wildflower Meadow Mosaic Project won the National Gold Award for Education and Training in Conservation and Wildlife at the 2024 Green Apple Environment Awards.

Andy Summers, Senior Ranger for the North, was runner-up for Outstanding Employee of the Year at the HLH Staff and Volunteer Awards, recognised for his incredible work with communities and volunteers.



Andy Summers collects his staff award

Our in-person engagements rose by 10% to a total of 13,031, reflecting sustained public interest in the work of our Ranger Service. Engagement with schools remained a core strength, with 3,775 children participating in curricular outdoor learning and nature experiences with the ranger service.

Community learning saw particularly impressive growth, with engagement numbers rising from 5,382 to 8,109, a 51% increase, as more people accessed our workshops, events and outreach programmes focused on sustainability, climate action, and learning about nature and the environment.

Volunteer involvement also rose significantly, with 861 engagements recorded, up 45% from the previous year's total of 593. Feedback gathered through our customer survey showed that 1 in 5 respondents had taken part in a volunteer event, underlining the deepening relationship between the Ranger Service and local communities, with more individuals taking environmental action.

Our digital reach continued to expand through our "Nature Unveiled" online publication, which saw 91,653 digital engagements over the course of the year. This platform has provided a powerful tool for environmental education, storytelling, and widening public access to nature-based content relevant to the region.

Two successful, grant-funded restoration projects were delivered with Highland Council support. **'Puddles to Ponds'** (p11), a freshwater ecology project, gained international recognition at the 2024 International Freshwater Pond Conference. **'Food for Nature, Food for Life'** (p12) focused on orchard tree planting and was well supported by schools and communities.

2024–25 was a year of progress and innovation keeping the service relevant. By combining local action with digital storytelling, it's clear the Ranger Service is helping more people care for, learn about, and connect with the nature around them.

Imogen Furlong

High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Manager

Impact Report

How our Countryside Ranger Service improves lives for Highland residents

In Person Engagements

13,031

Digital Engagements

91,653

In Person Engagements
Up by



10%

Customer Satisfaction Level

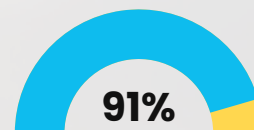


100%

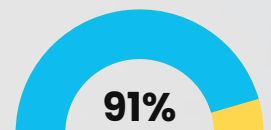
97% of customers reported our service **made life better** for them in the following ways:

- Learning new things **92%**
- Connecting with nature **77%**
- Meeting new people **73%**
- Making a positive difference for nature **63%**
- Feeling part of a community **62%**
- Improving mental wellbeing **61%**
- Encouraging physical activity **57%**

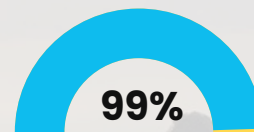
Customer Survey Results



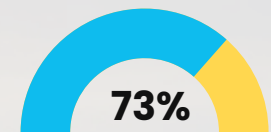
found us
accessible



said we take
excellent care



said we met or
exceeded
expectations



return visits

Customer Location

HIGHLAND
BASED

91%

REST OF
SCOTLAND

5%

REST OF
UK

4%

The 2024–25 survey highlights the outstanding impact of the High Life Highland Ranger Service regionally, with an incredible 100% overall positive rating from customers for the service. 90% of respondents rated the service as excellent, and the remaining 10% as good. 91% said they found us accessible, and 97% reported ranger events had improved their lives; enhancing wellbeing, building community, encouraging physical activity, and deepening connections with nature. Respondents praised the rangers' knowledge, enthusiasm, and inclusivity. The service is clearly cherished and widely seen as a vital part of community and outdoor life. Customer comments are featured throughout this document reflecting the depth of appreciation and the real-world impact of the service on individuals, communities and wildlife. Further write ups on case studies referenced are available through hyper-links embedded in the report.



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



EDUCATION AND COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers deliver a place-based service that supports key outcomes in the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP). We contribute to Community Learning and Development (CLD) by providing inclusive informal learning opportunities, skills development, and engagement with nature and heritage. Our programmes promote health and wellbeing through active, nature-based experiences. Rangers also support statutory duties by enhancing biodiversity on Highland Council sites and assisting with outdoor access monitoring and public engagement, including promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

This partnership also enables us to build volunteer capacity within communities for environmental stewardship, countryside management and operate bunkhouse accommodation for visiting groups. Through shared priorities and joint delivery, our work strengthens strategic outcomes for people, place, and nature across the Highlands.



HEALTH & WELLBEING

Under the branding "Think Health Think Nature" the work of the Highland Green Health Partnership, , aims to encourage more use of the outdoors to promote outdoor physical activity, mental health improvement through nature connection and tackle health inequalities. HLH Ranger Service are both a strategic and delivery partner on the Green Health Action Plan



CLIMATE ACTION

High Life Highland ranger service work strategically with both Highland Adapts, Highland Council Climate Change Team and Highlands and Islands Climate Hub to create a prosperous climate ready Highland. Rangers support community climate action to create healthy eco-systems and promote nature positive solutions to climate change.



BIODIVERSITY

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers are an active partner in the Highland Environment Forum (HEF), which is supported by The Highland Council and Forestry and Land Scotland. The Edinburgh Declaration (2021) outlines the shared commitments of the Scottish Government, local authorities, and international partners to address biodiversity loss over the coming decade. In the Highlands, these commitments are being implemented through the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan, where HLH Rangers play a key role in the shaping and delivery of the plan.

BIODIVERSITY REPORT

Photo:
Ranger Paul Castle teaches children
about freshwater ecology in
Caithness

Grants and donations continue to support the High Life Highland Ranger Service in delivering community-based conservation and wildlife support. In 2024/25, the Nature Restoration Fund enabled biodiversity enhancements, citizen science, and habitat restoration, including installation of 19 new ponds and community-led tree planting at 15 sites.

Rangers worked with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust to monitor the Highland slow worm population, and with Butterfly Conservation to protect the small blue butterfly. Other actions included coordinating the first Highland-wide pollinator counts, elm tree restoration in Assynt, rabbit-proofing the Farr Glebe bumblebee reserve, monitoring for mink and conducting gull, badger and bat surveys. This work feeds into The Highland Council's statutory biodiversity reporting and helps strengthen local ecosystems while engaging communities.

One customer summed it up: **"The local rangers provide an excellent service... kind, encouraging, supportive and knowledgeable. They go above and beyond for all ages and stages of the community."**

Short biodiversity case studies are included on the following page.



Seashore monitoring events in NW Highlands





CASE STUDIES



Elm Tree Planting

High Life Highland Ranger Service worked with local communities on the Assynt Elm Project, protecting Scotland's last Dutch elm disease-free wych elms by planting saplings grown from local seed beside ancient trees. Volunteers carried out remote planting and protection to ensure the survival of these keystone species, supporting rare lichens, invertebrates, and the remnants of the once-vast Atlantic rainforest ecosystem. [More reading.](#)

Slow Worm Monitoring

High Life Highland Rangers partnered with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust to launch 'Slow Worms Scotland'. Using Facebook and Instagram, we invited photo and location sightings from the public. An online winter talk hosted by the Rangers showcased the results. Records support national conservation and update distribution maps. Sightings could also be submitted by email or post for non-social media users. [More Reading](#)



Action for Pollinators

124 volunteers took part in a week-long survey of 39 mini wildflower meadows across the Highlands, recording over 1,300 pollinators. Despite poor weather, the count showed the value of small-scale habitats and community engagement through the growing Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic, led by High Life Highland Rangers. [More reading](#)

Farr Glebe Restoration

In 2024, rabbit grazing devastated Farr Glebe wildflower meadow in Bettyhill, threatening rare great yellow bumblebees. Led by the High Life Highland Ranger Service and funded by Species on the Edge, volunteers installed rabbit-proof fencing and one-way escape tunnels to protect this vital half-acre pollinator haven and support its recovery. [More Reading](#)



VOLUNTEERING REPORT

Increase in volunteer
engagements

↑ 45%

This year saw a continued rise in volunteer participation, with **861 volunteer engagements, up from 593 the previous year, a 45% increase.** Our annual customer survey showed that **1 in 5 respondents** had moved from being a service user to actively volunteering with the service, reflecting the growing appeal and accessibility of our volunteering opportunities.

In 2024/25, the High Life Highland Ranger Service successfully organised **78 volunteer events** across the region. From **community litter clean-ups**, **beach cleans** and **path restoration work**, local groups have played a vital role in improving their environments. We launched a monthly 'green teen' environmental group, encouraging young people to take part in outdoor action and conservation. Our citizen science work also expanded, with 124 volunteers supporting a pollinator observation event and 48 taking part in coastal Seawatch surveys for cetaceans.

One volunteer shared: **"It's great that Rangers are available to help with community events. The partnership works well as we can drum up support for events locally and the Ranger provides all the expertise."**

We extend our sincere thanks to all our volunteers, your energy and commitment are making a lasting difference across the Highlands.



Photos: **Footpath Volunteers Lochaber**,
Creating and new pond with volunteers
in Fort William; Volunteer with rubbish
after Beach Clean in Sutherland.

- ✓ Beach Cleans
- ✓ Community Clean ups
- ✓ Footpath Maintainance
- ✓ Biodiversity monitoring
- ✓ Habitat Management
- ✓ Sessional delivery



Photo:
Andy Summers delivers a marine mammal
family learning session



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COMMUNITY LEARNING REPORT

8,109

Learner engagements

↑ 51%

Increase



Pirate event at Bught Park



Clachtoll annual Sand Sculpture event



Winter Tree ID workshop

This year, the High Life Highland Ranger Service delivered 8,109 community learning engagements, up 51% from 5,382 in 2023/24. Our programmes reached all ages and stages, with a strong emphasis on inclusive, place-based learning.

Events ranged from workshops on fungi, bats, and lichen safaris, to family events such as sand sculpture, rockpooling and a popular pirate day at Bught Park.

Our heritage strand featured traditional craft workshops (such as wool and stained glass) and archaeology walks to sites like Clachtoll Broch and Clava Cairns.

We launched five new after-school nature clubs and ran a winter talk series online on topics including otters and natural dyeing. Our nature themed **‘Growing Greener Communities’** workshops delivered in libraries were supported by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS).

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: **“Wide range of interesting talks/walks and, even though I've been on them again and again, there's always something fresh. Always opportunities to ask questions too.”**

92% of respondents said our sessions helped improve their lives through learning, and 91% found our sessions accessible, with participants praising our inclusive approach and staff expertise. One customer told us **“I am neurodiverse, I felt welcome and included.”**

Our growing programme is helping Highland communities learn, connect, and thrive.

Photo: Young People take part in tree planting project

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT REPORT

3,775

Pupil engagements



In 2024/25, the High Life Highland Ranger Service engaged **3,775 pupils** in hands-on environmental education, through activities such as pond creation, tree planting, and immersive outdoor learning.

This year's schools programme "Puddles to Ponds" focused on **freshwater habitats**, exploring local species and the impacts of climate change on rivers, lochs, and ponds. We delivered sessions across Highland schools and led workshops at the **Caithness Science Festival**, using creative and practical approaches to build environmental awareness. The **Curling Heritage Project** brought together STEM learning, local history, and indoor curling, linking past and present through fun, curriculum-based activities. Pupils also took part in a freshwater ecology art competition, with winning entries now featured on the interpretation board at the restored curling pond at the Highland Folk Museum. We partnered with the Youth Development Officer at Ardnamurchan High School to support ASN pupils through the Ardnamurchan Art in Nature Project, funded by the Community Regeneration Fund. In early years, 27 nurseries learnt about tadpoles and helped name a new character for the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust. We also co-designed a **Gaelic nature trail** in Ullapool with a local Gaelic medium pupils, linking place, language, and nature.

These diverse learning opportunities reflect our commitment to connecting young people with nature, climate awareness, and their local environment.





CASE STUDY

PUDDLES TO PONDS

POST-PROJECT REFLECTIONS - SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS EDUCATION THROUGH RESTORATION PROJECT

The 2024 'Puddles to Ponds' project has focused on the power of small bodies of water to become thriving habitats and outdoor classrooms. With the help of funding, we've created 19 new ponds and renovated one large pond. In various locations across the Highlands, from Lochaber to Caithness. While the importance of ponds for biodiversity is well known, this project highlights how these ponds have also served as invaluable tools for educating and inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards.



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CENTRAL POND RESTORATION at the Highland Folk Museum

PONDS CREATED in Highland Schools



PARTNERSHIP

We partnered with many organisations on this project to ensure the greatest impact. The Highland Council Nature Restoration & Cairngorm Trust for Nature Resilience Funded the Puddles to Ponds Project



NEW HABITATS INSTALLED

Pre-moulded ponds were installed at 12 school sites, and a total of 46 schools participated in freshwater education sessions. A total of 1,412 children were engaged in learning about pond health. Some schools hesitated to install ponds due to safety concerns at their particular site, but alternative education activities were provided. The enthusiastic response from both students and teachers made the project a success.

1412
Pupils engaged

NAME THE TADPOLE

27 highland nursery schools took part in a competition to name the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust's new tadpole character. The winning name was "Losgy" (a play on the Gaelic for frog) dreamt up by the children at Ullapool Gaelic Nursery. This new character joins "Newtrino" as part of ARC Trust educational resources.

amphibian and reptile
conservation



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

A RESTORED HABITAT

The restored curling pond at the Highland Folk Museum plays an important role in connecting nearby freshwater habitats like the Sawmill Pond, Loch Imrich, and the River Spey, boosting biodiversity in the Strath. The pond is located within a regenerating woodland, making it ideal for supporting species from the Cairngorm Nature Action Plan. The Cairngorm National Park Junior Rangers worked with High Life Highland Ranger Service to create a baseline species survey & featured on the BBC Landward show.

The High Life Highland Ranger Team invited students to create illustrations for the museum's restored pond interpretation panel, inspired by the wildlife in and around their own local ponds. The winning artworks have been transformed into the colourful, child-friendly interpretation board below, that now helps visitors explore and learn about the museum pond's diverse species. An exhibition at the Inverness Museum and Gallery of the original artworks is planned for 2025.

LIVING CLASSROOMS

Ponds are living classrooms, offering hands-on learning experiences. Highland students have had the opportunity to observe creatures like dragonfly nymphs and minibeasts up close, enhancing their understanding of freshwater ecosystems.

Puddles to Ponds

Ponds are small bodies of still fresh water - not salty like the sea.
The plants and creatures living in and around the pond need fresh water to thrive.
The plants growing in the pond give oxygen to the water helping to keep it healthy, and minibeasts eat these plants.
The mini-beasts become food for larger creatures, like frogs and birds.
In this way, all the creatures can live happily together in and around the pond. This is called an ecosystem.
Even a small pond will attract wildlife - why not put one in your garden?



7 PONDS CREATED In Community Settings

Seven additional mini ponds were installed by community groups, expanding the project's impact. These ponds support local biodiversity and provide hands-on learning for all ages. By working together to create these small but impactful habitats, the community groups played a key role in expanding the project's reach.





SHOWCASE

Food for Nature, Food for Life

Tree planting Project

The Food For Nature, Food For Life project, led by the High Life Highland Countryside Rangers and funded by £4,000 from the Highland Council's Nature Restoration Fund, set out to create mini community orchards that nourish both people and wildlife.

Over the winter of 2024/25, 78 fruit trees (apple, plum, cherry, and pear) were planted across 15 Highland sites, with support from local schools, volunteers, and community groups. Locations were carefully selected in partnership with Highland Council's Greenspace Officer to ensure trees were well placed, welcomed, and cared for.

In Melvich, five local young people planted trees and cleverly repurposed car tyres to protect them from strimmers. In Wick, students from Thurso UHI and the local library nature club dug in enthusiastically. Castle Heather, Hilton in Inverness saw a wonderfully diverse turnout, including members of the refugee community, all pitching in to create something lasting.

These trees are more than landscape features, they will in time become living ecosystems, supporting pollinators, birds, and mammals while providing future food and shade. Wildflower seeds were also sown to boost biodiversity. This project showcased local environmental stewardship and intergenerational community pride. Each young tree now stands as a promise of good things to come.

[Read More](#)

New community orchards can be found at Wick, Tongue, Scourie, Farr, Melvich, Golspie, Ullapool, Caol, Allness, Inverness, Spean Bridge, Claggan and Achiltibuie. With further funding we will look to expand on this project.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT

Photo:
Participants take a
leisurely stroll in
nature to learn about
nature

In 2024/25, the High Life Highland Ranger Service continued to deliver inclusive, community-based sessions that supported mental and physical wellbeing across the region. Participants reported that engagement with the Ranger Service improved wellbeing by connecting with nature, meeting new people, learning new things, and feeling part of a community. A wide range of opportunities were offered from shorter, accessible walks to longer guided walks and hill routes. In addition we provided sessions tailored to support those managing stress, anxiety, or low mood. We also engaged older and more infirm members of the community in Caithness with a residential home visit. We actively promoted Green Health Week in May, raising awareness of how nature and the outdoors can support wellbeing. Feedback we recieved from customers highlights that the wellbeing benefits of our service are felt especially strongly by those living in isolation or remoter rural areas.



“The Ranger events are such an important aspect of rural life – an increase would benefit so many who otherwise live in isolation.”

In addition to in-person delivery, our digital engagement reached 91,653 interactions, through online talks, resources, and the Nature Unveiled publication, significantly extending our reach to those unable to attend in person. One subscriber wrote: **“I think the local ranger service is a very important role within the community. The writing of Nature Unveiled supports and encourages the importance of personal interaction with nature. I believe this is invaluable in maintaining good mental health and in the wider climate challenges we face”**

The Ranger Service continues to offer welcoming, inclusive, and engaging opportunities, both outdoors and online making a meaningful difference to health and wellbeing across Highland communities.



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Ways you can support us

Join *highlife*

Joining High Life supports our charity work to improve lives and communities, membership also gives free access to gym and leisure facilities, plus numerous discount benefits. Support us and Join High Life today!



Book a break at our bunkhouse

Why not relax and book a short break at our bunkhouse in one of two iconic Highland locations: Torrin on Skye and Glenfinnan in Lochaber. Operated as a not-for-profit, any surplus benefits the charity. Enjoy a warm welcome from our wardens Pam and Fiona. Its the perfect getaway for groups or families. [Scan or click for more information.](#)

Read

Discover **Nature Unveiled** our HLH Ranger online publication filled with fascinating stories, nature and heritage articles, and news from our dedicated team of Rangers. [Scan or click to read and pledge your support.](#)



Donate

Give a one off gift to the Ranger service to support our conservation, education, and community work in the Highlands. Help us protect wildlife and sustain this unique region's natural heritage for future generations. [Scan or click to donate now.](#)



Thank you