

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	EDU/11/24

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Education Committee

**Date:** 30 May 2024

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

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

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report is in three parts:

**Part one** - presents information on the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 31 March 2024, including information on HLH's contributions to the Highland Council Corporate Plan 2022-27.

**Part two** - provides general updates since the last report to the Highland Council's Education Committee in November 2023.

**Part three** – provides information on an aspect of the work of HLH. This time, it presents High Life Highland's income growth and development in partnership with the Highland Council.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 31 March 2024, including HLH's contributions to the implementation of the Highland Council Corporate Plan in **Appendix A**;
- ii. general updates provided in section 2 of this report;
- iii. that HLH continues to deliver Public Service Obligations on behalf of the Highland Council as set out in the Service Delivery Contract;
- iv. progress on the Service Delivery Contract Review; and
- v. information in section ten, income growth and development in partnership with the Highland Council.

## 3. Implications

3.1 Resource – please see section 6, financial position, below.

3.2 Legal – there are no legal implications for the Highland Council arising from the recommendations in this report. However, the HLH zero reserve position continues to have implications in respect of HLH's going concern status: in mitigation, a letter of comfort will

be issued from the Highland Council. Legal advice on the SDC review will be required as it progresses.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) - there are no community implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - there are no climate change/carbon clever implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 3.5 Risk - there are no risk implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The HLH Board has its own Corporate Risk Register and associated risk management plans.
- 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – there are no health and safety risks associated with the recommendations in this report.
- 3.7 Gaelic - there are no Gaelic implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1 HLH's purpose is ***Making Life Better***. It was established as a charity by the Highland Council (THC) in October 2011. The Council has contracted with HLH to deliver its Public Services Obligations (PSO) through a Service Delivery Contract (SDC). The following areas of work are delivered by HLH on behalf of THC: Adult Learning; Archives; Countryside Rangers; Leisure; Libraries; Museums and Galleries; Music Tuition; Sports Development; and Youth Work.
- 4.2 HLH was set up to deliver services on behalf of THC and at the same time deliver savings and protect, improve and develop services. Each year, Arm's Length External Organisation (ALEO) status saves THC c. £2m p.a. through non-domestic rates relief.
- 4.3 HLH has consistently returned revenue savings for THC with recent (5 year) savings averaging £3.6m p.a. (19% of 2023/24 Services Fee). Savings have been achieved through income and efficiencies, whilst minimising service reductions. The partnership has been hallmarked by HLH assuming responsibility for additional services at the request of THC, with 43 new services and facilities having been added to HLH since it was established in 2011.

#### **5. HLH Governance**

- 5.1 HLH Directors are appointed by THC (8 independent Directors and 4 Councillor Directors). The HLH Directors can be found on the HLH web site: <https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/board-directors/>.
- 5.2 The HLH Trading Board Directors are appointed by the HLH Board (5 independent directors and 4 HLH Board Directors). The trading company Directors can be found on the HLH web site: <https://www.highlifehighland.com/about/trading-company-directors/>

#### **6. Financial Position**

- 6.1 The funding provided by THC to HLH as a Services Fee is £16.6m (2024/25). The post-pandemic operating environment (particularly staff pay inflation) has meant that the Council has had to provide additional funding to HLH from Council reserves to help protect services. HLH has mitigated a forecast £4.046m budget gap in 2024/25 by £1.282m

through a combination of income and efficiencies. As part of a 3-year plan to return to a surplus position, the remaining £2.764m has been funded in 2024/25 from Council reserves. This was included in the budget when it was agreed at the Highland Council meeting held on 29 February 2024. HLH has always had a focus on income, however, the funding gap has made this all the more important and there is information on income growth at section 10 of this report.

6.2 Property rationalisation: HLH has moved out of 7 properties and is in the process of looking at others in collaboration with THC Asset Management as part of THC's Operational Delivery Plan.

## 7. Service Delivery Contract Review

7.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2022-27, Our Future Highland, which was approved by the Highland Council at its meeting held on 8 December 2022, includes an action to review the Service Delivery Contract with HLH.

The purpose of the review is as follows:

- **Affordability** (the services delivered need to be affordable to the Council – the budget pressure caused by inflation has to be addressed).
- **Sustainability** (HLH needs to be on sustainable financial footing to operate effectively).
- **Joint working** (there needs to be continued joint working between the Council and HLH, particularly around service development and capital investments).

7.2 An officer project board has been established to review the Service Delivery Contract, co-chaired by THC's Assistant Chief Executive – People; and the HLH Chief Executive. With HLH having mitigated the budget gap by £1.282m in the current financial year, the focus of the group is on planning for long-term sustainability. In progressing the review it is anticipated that there will be an interim update report to the Council and HLH Board in June with a view to a report which concludes the review and identifies future steps at the September 2024 Council and HLH Board meetings.

## 8. Part One - Service Delivery Contract Monitoring

### 8.1 Our Future Highland - Highland Council Corporate Plan 2022-2027

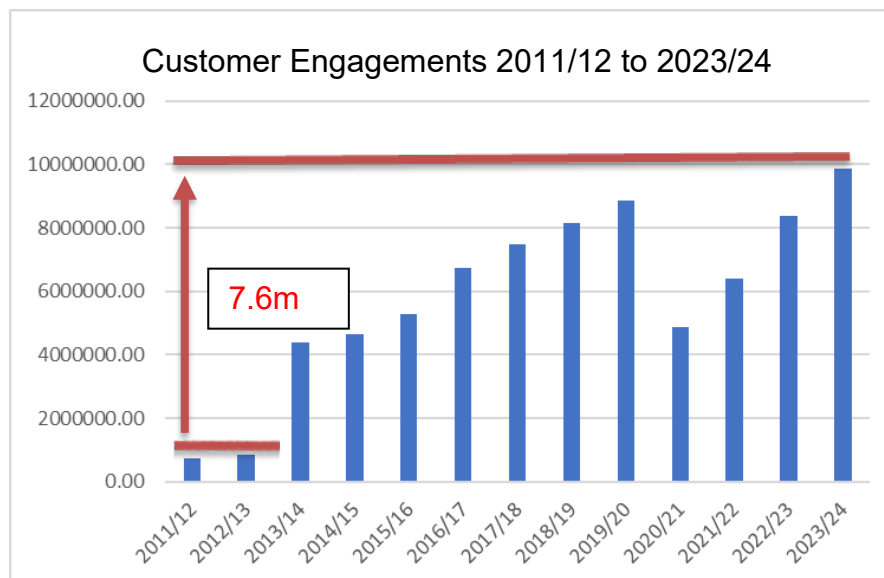
8.1.1 The Service Delivery Contract with HLH was originally made up of objectives from the Council's Education Service Plan. Subsequently, reporting has evolved to reflect Council Corporate Plans. A summary of HLH's contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-27 can be found at **Appendix A**.

## 8.2 Performance Indicators

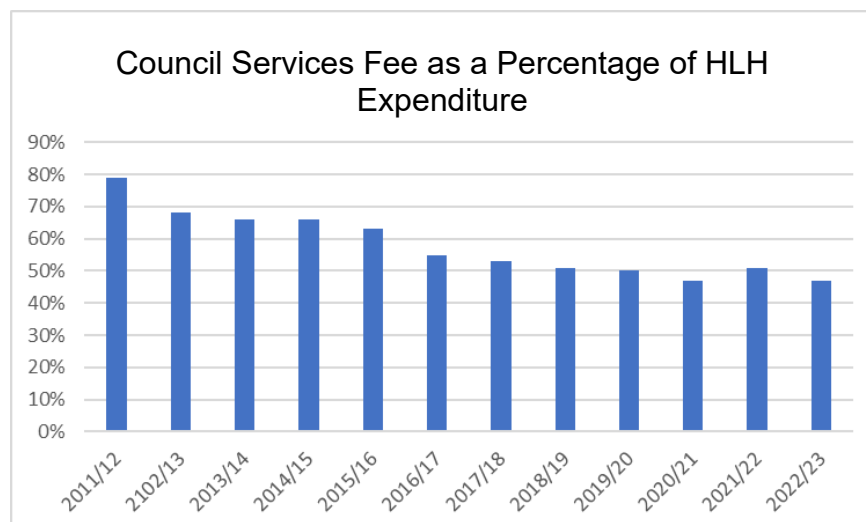
8.2.1 There are three indicators agreed with THC which are used to provide a balanced assessment of HLH's performance in terms of: effectiveness; reach into the Highland population; and efficiency. These are:

- effectiveness (total customer engagements);
- efficiency (Council services fee as percentage of expenditure); and
- reach into the Highland population (percentage of the population with an HLH card).

8.2.2 **Effectiveness** - in financial year 2023/24 customer engagements were higher than they have ever been at 9,996,318<sup>1</sup>. The graph below shows annual customer engagements since HLH was established.



8.2.3 **Efficiency** – The Highland Council tracks the percentage of the services fee it provides to HLH to deliver services on its behalf as a percentage of its overall budget as an efficiency measure. HLH has delivered year on year efficiency as can be seen in the graph below.



<sup>1</sup> Figure as at 15 May 2024.

When it was established, **79%** of HLH’s budget came from THC’s services fee. Increases in income (see section ten below) has reduced this figure and at the end of financial year 2023/24, **47%** of the budget came from customer and other grant income<sup>2</sup>.

**8.2.4 Reach into the Highland population** – the percentage of the Highland population with an HLH card is used as a measure of reach into the Highland population because leisure and library membership data allows that analysis. It is an indicator rather than an absolute count because it only captures two of the nine services HLH delivers and cannot record customers who access those two services without having a card. The table below shows the data used to calculate the reach into the population figure. It shows that:

- The number of people with a leisure card increased by 1,838 (4%).
- The number of people with a library card increased by 1,801 (6%).
- A large percentage of the people who took out a new leisure or library membership were already customers of the other service.
- 69,315 citizens out of The Highland Council population using a leisure or library card or both would be regarded as a good reach into the population for any organisation (29.4%).

Year	Population (NRS mid-year 2022)	People with a Leisure Card	People with a Library Card	Combined (Leis/Lib/Both) with THC postcode	Percentage of Highland Population with an HLH Card
2023	235,710	42,579	29,352	68,911	29.24%
2024	235,710	44,417	31,153	69,315	29.41%
Increase		1,838 (4%)	1,801 (6%)	404 (1%)	

**8.2.5** Since this indicator was introduced other customer databases have been developed by HLH and it is recognised that the calculation could be improved to more accurately reflect HLH’s reach into the population by including them. This will be taken account of in the reporting section of the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) review referred to above.

**8.2.6** When taken over time the performance indicators show that HLH continues to deliver services effectively for the THC and indicates that the wider benefits (in addition to the rates saving) envisaged by the THC when it made the decision to establish HLH as a delivery mechanism for its services have been achieved.

### **8.3 Our Future Highland 2024-2027 Delivery Plan**

**8.3.1** In the same way that it is important that HLH aligns its service delivery with THC’s corporate plan, it is also important that it is engaged with THC’s Operational Delivery Plan. This section summarises how HLH can be involved in the work being undertaken by THC, thereby further strengthening the partnership and maximising efficiency opportunities for both organisations, but particularly for HLH. Developing this partnership is in the long-term interest of service delivery.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this figure is a measure which the Council uses to assess HLH’s performance and it does not include Council expenditure on property and other costs relating to service level agreements between THC and HLH.

- 8.3.2 **Person centred solutions** – This portfolio covers a wide range of activity and as can be seen in the appendix to this report, there is a range of work delivered by HLH which support this including:
- The leisure/social work service social work subscriptions partnership for young people in care/foster care (av. 40 subscriptions at any one time).
  - The leisure health and wellbeing programme which targets older adults and people with health conditions (2,500 participants).
  - The contributions the youth work team makes in partnership with THC in supporting young people to achieve positive destinations.
- 8.3.3 **Workforce for the future** – The main HLH contribution to this portfolio is the Youth Work team’s contributions which support young people to achieve positive destinations and the **sportscotland** funded HLH leadership programme which had 657 young people achieving leadership awards last financial year. HLH also delivers THC’s “My Future My Success” programme through HLH and Leisure centres deliver modern apprenticeships for its young workforce.
- 8.3.4 **Reconfiguring our asset base** – This is the most significant area for service development and the area which will support the long-term sustainability of services the most. As was seen at the November 2023 Education Committee meeting it is also an area which **sportscotland** is interested in in terms of investment. HLH is fully committed to engaging positively with this work and all of HLH operated properties will be included in the delivery plan.
- 8.3.5 **Corporate solutions** – HLH is engaged with THC’s corporate solutions work through projects such as the finance, HR and payroll project and developing its approach to digital solutions in partnership with THC’s digital team. The structure of the partnership between THC and HLH makes it important for HLH to be involved so that it can maximise future efficiencies in step with THC.
- 8.3.6 **Income generation** – Income generation has always been a focus for HLH and the pandemic and cost of living crisis had severe impacts on HLH’s budget. Income growth has been re-established to the extent where HLH income is approaching 20% above pre-pandemic levels. There are areas where THC and HLH can work together to improve income generation and there are existing partnerships through the corporate leisure subscriptions scheme and car parking as detailed in section ten below.
- 8.3.7 **Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation** – there is a strong partnership between the THC’s property and energy teams and HLH. Over the years there has been significant investment through the SALIX and other property funds for investment in energy efficiency, biomass, LED lighting, solar, etc. These have all returned savings to THC budgets and along with asset rationalisation will continue to be an important part of future work between the two organisations.

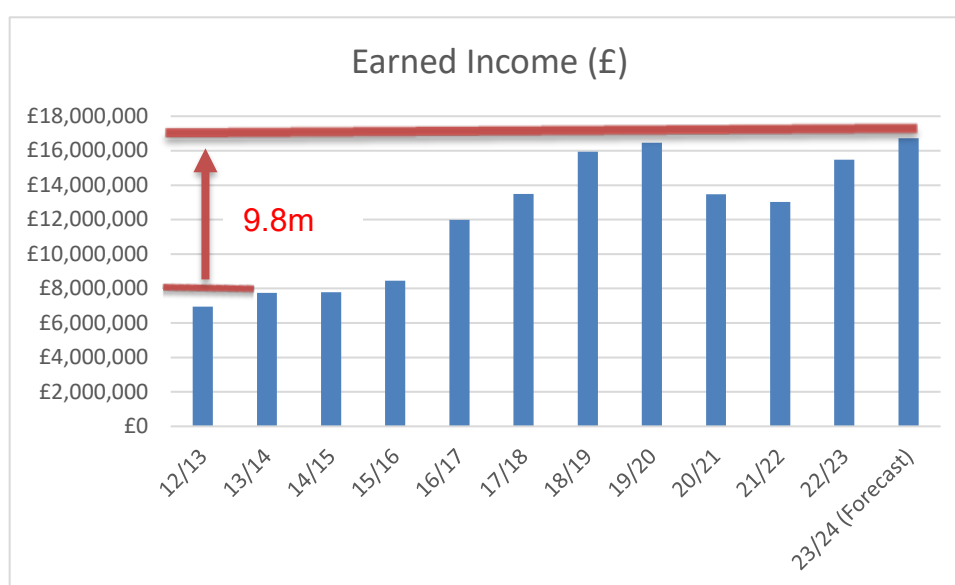
## 9. Part 2 – General Updates

- 9.1 As part of HLH’s reporting, general updates since the previous report to the Education Committee are provided and **Appendix B** provides updates and good news stories since the November 2023 meeting.

## 10. Part 3 – Income Growth and Development

10.1 As noted above, HLH is still experiencing challenges relating to costs with inflation, particularly that relating to staff pay creating a budget gap with the need for additional support to help protect THC services while HLH continues to increase income, make efficiency savings and work with THC on its savings measures, particularly in relation to asset/property savings.

10.2 One of HLH's key priorities which supports the sustainability of the services it delivers is increasing income. It does this through earned income through the charity, grants, donations and commercial activity via its Trading C.I.C (all Trading Company margin is donated back to the main Charity via Gift Aid). This section covers income growth, and the graph below shows income from all sources other than the services fee. This started at £6.9m in HLH's first full year of operation in 2012/13 and in 2023/24 is projected to reach its highest ever level at £16.7m<sup>3</sup>.



10.3 The table below shows a breakdown of some of HLH's main income sources for the first full year of operation and over the past five years.

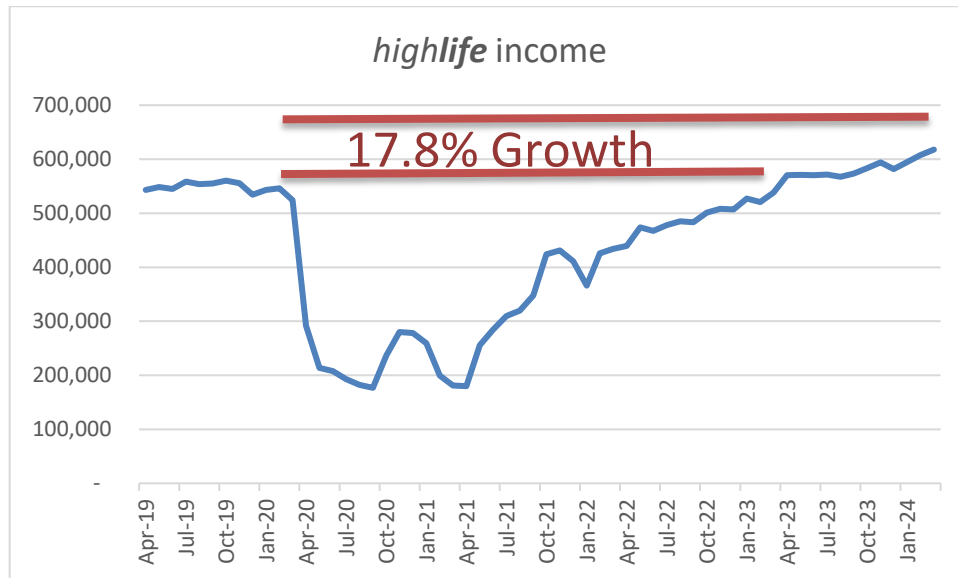
Income (£,000)	12/13	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24 (Forecast)	% Increase From 12/13
<i>highlife</i> leisure subscriptions	2,786	6,764	2,698	4,196	5,922	7,019	152%
Other leisure income	1,095	2,501	173	1,355	2,284	2,403	119%
Grants	2,002	2,971	2,862	3,439	3,904	3,952	97%
Donations	73	333	61	197	341	448	512%
Trading Income	364	1,922	526	1,416	2,130	2,143	489%

10.4 *highlife* leisure subscriptions income has grown from £2.8m when HLH started and now exceeds £7m p.a. There has been a considerable focus on increasing subscriptions since

<sup>3</sup> Final position subject to year-end audit.

the pandemic and the graph below shows the pace of this over the past two years. Of note, HLH has developed a subscriptions package for businesses where they are offered a 10% discount for their staff and there are currently 70 businesses in the scheme with 3,401 individuals and families having signed up. To further support staff health and wellbeing, most employers make a contribution to the subscriptions for their staff, thereby further reducing the cost for them. In supporting HLH to increase its income levels and protect THC services, THC has signed up as a corporate partner and 907 Council staff are part of the scheme. The growth in subscriptions income can be seen in the graph below and when calculated over a year, income is 17% higher now compared with the previous high which immediately preceded the pandemic.

10.5



- 10.6 At the time that it was introduced in 2001, the *highlife* leisure subscription scheme was innovative in its value for money and all-inclusive nature. It resulted in a 90% increase in income and participation levels. This has been continued and developed by HLH and has been critical in increasing income over the years. It is now a valued part of Highland life for many people with a reciprocal arrangement in place with other local authority areas in Scotland (Aberdeen, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Moray, Orkney, the Scottish Borders, Shetland and the Western Isles). To add value to the card, HLH has set up a benefits scheme with businesses in Highland where discounts are provided for customers who present a card. The list of benefits can be seen at this link on HLH's web site: <https://www.highlifehighland.com/benefits/category/displayasimagecardonfeed/latest-offers/>
- 10.7 **Other leisure income** is mainly from lets by sports clubs and pay as you go (non- *highlife* subscription) income. This has more than doubled since HLH was established to £2.4m this year. It continues to be important in funding services delivered by HLH for THC.
- 10.8 **Grants** were £2m when HLH was established and are now almost £4m. The two main grants are from **sportscotland** for the sports development team and the Youth Music Initiative which is Scottish Government funding distributed by Creative Scotland. Between them they total c. £1.5m. The remaining £2.5m in grants are obtained through all of HLH's services and include youth work programmes, adult learning programmes, environmental projects and equipment such as sports equipment.
- 10.9 In percentage terms, **donations** income has grown the most with it having started, unsurprisingly, from a low base at the point which HLH was established as a charity. Of the (current) £448k donations income the majority, £310k, is from Museums. The £100k



growth over financial year 2023/24 has been achieved through a focus by all HLH services (including Museums) on increasing donations.

- 10.10 **Trading income** has grown by the largest amount after *highlife* subscriptions, increasing from £364k during HLH's first year of operation to £2.1m in the last financial year. Over the past year this has been achieved by HLH (Trading) C.I.C. maximising income, particularly through catering and retail. The main trading income sources are:
- retail in leisure centres, museums and visitor attractions (£660k); and
  - cafes in leisure centres and museums (£660k).

Other income sources include car parking, vending and the two bunk houses.

More recently THC and HLH have been working together to increase car-parking income with a range of agreements in place between the two parties. Income from car parking was £172k in 2023/24. Last year parking charges were introduced at the Highland Folk Museum which generated an additional £21k.

## 11. Summary

- 11.1 The main motivation for THC establishing HLH was the rates saving and being able to use that saving to avoid cuts to services during a time when THC was facing financial challenges. The rates saving is currently £2m per year. In comparison, earned and grant income is now £10m p.a. more than it was during HLH's first full year of operation. While this has been achieved over a twelve-year period, it is now much more significant than the rates saving.
- 11.2 When HLH was established, there were other hoped for advantages of delivering Council services through an ALEO relating to: service development; efficiency; charitable status benefits; business agility; focus and the expertise that an independent Board of Directors would bring in delivering these improvements. The increased income is an indication that the hoped-for advantages of THC's decision to set up HLH have been achieved beyond what was envisaged at the time. This, coupled with the significant increase in customer numbers and the reach the organisation has into the Highland population confirms that HLH:
- is effectively delivering Council services;
  - is improving them; and
  - that the services which it delivers have become an important part of Highland life for many people.
- 11.3 The service improvements described above could not have been delivered as effectively without the partnership between THC and HLH. THC provides vital services which allows HLH to function, for example: estates/property; utilities; payroll; banking and finance system arrangements. This allows:
- HLH to focus on its areas of expertise in developing services, growing income and service efficiency and at the same time;
  - the maximisation of the efficiency brought about through THC's specialist teams, including the economies of scale which are important for sustaining and developing services to make life better for the people of the Highlands.

Designation: Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Date: 7 May 2024

Author: Douglas Wilby, Steve Walsh

Background Papers: None

## Appendix A

### HLH Contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan

<b>1. Fair and Caring Highland</b> <b>Gàidhealtachd Chothromach agus Choibhneil</b>	
Work together to improve quality of life and opportunities for Highland people	
1.1 Improve outcomes including attainment, achievement, positive destinations for all children and young people with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy, and our most vulnerable learners.	<p>HLH delivers a programme of adult literacy and numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Classes and 1:1 support. Recent years have seen an increase in need among refugee communities and through close working with other HLH services and THC. HLH Adult Learning team provides language learning and related culture and leisure experiences for Ukrainian, Syrian and Afghan families and individuals and also many young men who have arrived in Highland as unaccompanied minors. HLH supports over 200 individuals per week as part of this work and maintains a cross service focus group to specifically address the needs of refugees as they relate to all HLH services and opportunities.</p> <p>The HLH Adult Learning team has supported and delivered family learning approaches to improving numeracy levels as a delivery partner on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund work in Highland. A CLD family learning STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) initiative is being developed as a legacy and mainstreaming work from this additional project work. Highland Council have asked HLH to deliver a similar programme in the coming year due to the success of the previous programme and this in turn will support the ambitions to mainstream the work finally.</p> <p>HLH runs a Young Persons' Leadership Programme and is now developing leadership opportunities across other parts of the organisation in addition to sports development. There were 657 leadership awards gained during 2023/24 compared to 372 in 2022/23.</p> <p>Youth work staff provide opportunities for young people to gain achievement awards (Saltire Awards, DofE etc.) which are of significant benefit for young people in gaining employment or higher and further education places. A 72% increase in awards gained through youth work over the last 2 academic years has taken place with over 1500 awards achieved in 2023/24.</p>

HLH operates a range of activity programmes for children and young people across its leisure facilities. These include both primary school swimming lessons and learn to swim programmes across Highland ensuring that children and young people learn this essential life skill.

The active schools and youth work programmes provide a wide range of activities. A key focus of the Active Schools Programme is equality, diversity and inclusion and targeted programmes are being developed to reduce barriers to participation. The Tennis Serves project in areas of deprivation, links with ASN units in schools with a focus on delivering women and girls activities and the partnership development with the Home to Highland Care Experienced Education Team are all ways the active schools programme has been developed to be more inclusive over the past year.

HLH library staff deliver an extensive programme of activities to support early years literacy and numeracy, including Bookbug sessions and early years/family STEM activities. Book collections to support reading for learning and recreation are provided in both hard copy and digital format. Libraries also support learning and teaching through the provision of the school library service.

HLH Libraries enjoyed 4.4m visits in 2023/24. This included 1.8m visits to library buildings, with footfall rising to 85% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year as customers returned to their libraries and library events and activities were reintroduced. Virtual footfall resulted in 2.6m visits with levels similar to those achieved in 2022/23.

High Life Highland delivers weekly Instrumental Music Tuition to more than 4,200 young learners across Highland. Music tuition adds to each pupil's development in a broad range of ways, including increasing personal responsibility, focus and concentration in addition to the broader numeracy & literacy benefits. Young people also have access to a wide range of music ensembles led by HLH Instructors, at school, area and regional levels (Highland Young Musicians) affording them an insight into the cooperation, discipline and focus required to make a valuable contribution to these kind of groups – and the bearing these

	<p>experiences will have on life skills beyond school age.</p>
<p>1.2 Tackle child poverty including promoting access to welfare support.</p>	<p>HLH participates in the work of the CHAMPS board and CEYP are provided with free memberships to leisure facilities. HLH continues to provide both specific youth work opportunities for looked after children and to encourage engagement in its wider youth work offer.</p> <p>HLH Youth Work maintains a free food offer in many of its community-based youth clubs, drop-ins and youth forums which also serve as warm and safe spaces as well as supporting their personal and social development.</p> <p>HLH provides access to its leisure centres for fifty pence per visit for adults and children of families who are in receipt of income related benefits. There are currently almost 13,000 card holders accessing this scheme.</p> <p>Access to HLH libraries' wide range of resources and services remains free of charge to all, including children and families.</p>
<p>1.3 Secure positive destinations including Modern Apprenticeships.</p>	<p>HLH provides modern apprenticeships through its leisure facilities which support young people who wish to remain in Highland and develop their careers at home.</p> <p>The HLH Youth work team is hosting and supporting a team of Development Officers on the My Future My Success project in partnership with THC working together to increase the number of positive destinations in Highland for school leavers.</p> <p>Inverness Museum and Art Gallery hosts an annual placement of a UHI Fine Art student and Highland Folk Museum hosts a twelve-month Historic Environment Scotland Fellowship trainee.</p>
<p>1.4 Work with partners on suicide prevention.</p>	<p>HLH is supporting the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) work to deliver the Suicide Intervention and Prevention Programme (SIPP) training. SIPP is led by the Health Improvement Team within Public Health in NHS Highland and supported by all community planning partners. HLH colleagues, from a range of HLH services, have been trained as trainers to deliver the SIPP programme and are co-delivering, with colleagues from various Community Planning Partners, as part of the Highland wide training roll out across Highland. SIPP training aims to improve awareness of suicidal thinking, increase</p>

	<p>confidence to ask someone if they are feeling suicidal, and to support them to seek further help, the training is open to anyone to attend participate. Local partners, including the Samaritans and James Support Group promote and deliver services through libraries.</p>
<p>1.5 Encourage a diverse range of traditional and emerging sporting activities and active lifestyles.</p>	<p>Through the partnership with <b>sportscotland</b>, the Active Schools and Community Sports Hubs programmes supports local volunteers and clubs to deliver a diverse range of sporting and physical activity opportunities.</p> <p>In the 2022/23 Academic Year there were 273,735 visits to Active Schools sessions, an increase of 2,734 visits from the previous year. 41% of the school roll access the Active Schools programme (the national average is 38%). One of the key objectives for the team over the previous academic year was the recovery of the volunteer network, gaining 279 delivers to return to a similar level compared with 2019, 1,266 deliverers. Volunteer recovery is at 80% of pre-covid levels with the biggest gains in volunteers coming from Secondary School pupils who support the delivery of activities while developing their own skills and confidence through the HLH Leadership Programme. The Community Sport Hub Programme continues to provide support for community based sports clubs and activity groups. The 13 active community sport hub projects supported 162 community organisations in the 23/24 financial year, an increase of 50 organisations from the previous year. These community based groups provide vital sustainable opportunities for people to take part in sport and physical activity opportunities in their local communities.</p>
<p>1.6 Promote fair access through co-located services across the Highlands.</p>	<p>There are a number of joint school and community leisure centres and libraries across the Highlands and the experience of them is that the co-location increases footfall to all of the services delivered. Larger examples include Portree, Wick, Aviemore and Alness with there being similar but smaller scale provision in smaller communities such as Ardnamurchan and Kinlochleven. THC and HLH are currently working together to identify future opportunities through the process of the service delivery contract review.</p> <p>The Music  Tuition team has pioneered the use of online tuition delivery in order to offer instrumental tuition access to more remote schools.</p>

1.7 Work with partners to improve the levels of mental health and wellbeing experienced by people in our communities.

All of the services delivered by HLH contribute towards positive mental health and wellbeing. The evidence based “5 ways to wellbeing” highlights there are steps people can take to improve their mental health: connect; get active; mindfulness; learn; give. HLH provides opportunities for people to take each of the steps outlined in the 5 ways to wellbeing from engaging in arts and cultural activities, which can help to manage mental health and support recovery, to participating in learning opportunities facilitated by the adult and youth services such as SQA qualifications in health and wellbeing and mental health.

The links between mental health and wellbeing and physical activity are well established and it is widely recognised that activities which engage people and reduce social isolation and loneliness make a positive contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The *highlife* leisure membership scheme is premised upon accessibility at an affordable price; the budget membership scheme provides a safety net for hard-pressed families to enjoy access to facilities at an affordable price.

Targeted projects which HLH is delivering which contribute to improving mental health and wellbeing include: falls prevention; cardiac rehabilitation; cancer rehabilitation; older adults health and wellbeing; type II diabetes and physical activity; physiotherapy in leisure centres; pain management; the GP movement and activity programme and dementia friendly initiatives including the museums’ service led “House of Memories”. Inverness Museum and Art Gallery has a long-standing relationship with the mental health charity Keltic Care, whereby some of its service users are supported to therapeutically engage with the visual arts. There are over 1800 highlife members taking part in HLH’s targeted health and wellbeing programmes.

In collaboration THC and HLH have developed an initiative called Mental Health Reps to promote positive mental health in the workplace, support and comfort any employee experiencing mental health difficulties, encourage conversations on mental health, support employees through a mental health crisis, and signpost to appropriate support.

	<p>HLH also supports the work of the CPP Mental Health Delivery Group through being an active member of the group and supporting the various workstreams of the group including developing and delivering training, promoting resources and making information accessible for people across Highland communities.</p>
<p>1.8 Develop whole family support approach to ensure families stay together and thrive in their local communities.</p>	<p>HLH seeks to support families by offering an all-inclusive leisure subscription which is one of the best value in the country and covers a whole household (two adults and children under 18). Children’s activities, gym, swim group fitness single court activities (such as badminton) and swimming lessons are included in the subscription. There are currently 19,402 member subscriptions. In addition, there is a specific scheme for families in receipt of income related benefits whereby the adults and children can access activities for fifty pence per visit.</p> <p>Family friendly sessions are being delivered and developed through Active Schools with an emphasis on recruiting and supporting parent volunteers to deliver activities to young people.</p> <p>HLH operated museums offer no-cost family leisure and learning opportunities both day-to-day and through structured activity programmes.</p> <p>HLH Libraries offer no-cost family activity programmes that support literacy, STEM learning, digital and social inclusion.</p>
<p>1.9 Work with partners to develop early intervention for drug and alcohol reduction.</p>	<p>HLH Youth, Sport and Leisure services are working jointly with NHS Highland and the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership on the Planet Youth Initiative. The pilot project based around Tain, Dornoch, Golspie and Caithness will focus on early intervention and using sport and physical activity as a preventative measure.</p>
<p>1.10 Facilitate strategic sports and cultural planning across the Highlands.</p>	<p>A new four-year partnership agreement with <b>sportscotland</b> commenced in April 2023 which secured over £1m investment per annum in the Highlands and delivers an active schools programme in every Associated School Group (ASG) in Highland as well as a community sports hub programme. As considered by Elected Members at the November 2023 Education Committee meeting, the Council, HLH and <b>sportscotland</b> are working together on a facilities strategy for Highland which is a key aspect of the Active Highland Strategy, a</p>



	<p>community planning partnership initiative led by NHS Highland.</p> <p>An Active Highland Strategy Group has been established, made up of representatives from the CPP plus <b>sportscotland</b> and with input from Public Health Scotland. The aim of the Active Highland Strategy Group is to create a framework that enables people to be active through, movement, play, physical activity and sport in Highland with full commitment from all key partners and reporting to the Highland CPP Board. HLH is fully engaged and supporting the work of the Active Highland Strategy Group.</p>
<p>1.11 Continue to promote Gaelic language and cultural development.</p>	<p>HLH collaborates with THC's Gaelic Team to deliver specific targets within GLP3 and supports the promotion of Gaelic language and culture primarily through its Archives, Museums and Music Tuition services.</p> <p>Am Baile, a bi-lingual cultural heritage website managed by the HLH Highland Archive Service has seen increasing customer engagement and in 2023/24 had more than 150k visits. The site has bilingual descriptions of content and new Gaelic content is added on a regular basis using skilled Gaelic translators. In addition, its social media content attracted more than 1.5m engagements. A third of all social media posts are now bi-lingual and customer feedback illustrates that these posts are proving useful for Gaelic learners to improve their language skills. Community heritage groups are increasingly seeking to use Am Baile as a digital place of deposit for their digital heritage collections and they are supported to create Gaelic content as part of their projects.</p> <p>Within museums, all interpretation at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery is bilingual and the museum offers two permanent display sections explaining and promoting Gaelic, including an interactive exhibit that gives visitors the opportunity to learn Gaelic words and try out the Gaelic language. At Highland Folk Museum visitors can experience Gaelic language and traditions in a variety of living history settings, including Gaelic psalms singing in the church and regular waulking the cloth demonstrations.</p> <p>Skye and Lochaber Archive Centres regularly support and work in partnership with Gaelic medium schools in their areas and are also in ongoing collaboration with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and several community groups undertaking</p>

	<p>initiatives that aim to sustain and transmit Gaelic language and culture.</p> <p>The Inverness Gaelic Society Library is housed within Inverness Public Library and Gaelic book collections are also available throughout all Highland Libraries. Regular Gaelic Bookbug sessions (0-4 age rhyme, song and storytelling sessions with parents/carers) and storytelling sessions are delivered from multiple library locations–</p> <p>Gaelic Sports Leadership Course took place over the Easter holidays 10 young people from Tain, Skye &amp; Nairn took part in the two-day course delivered in Gaelic by Active Schools Coordinators.</p>
<p>1.12 Promote and enhance the Highland’s rich heritage and culture.</p>	<p>HLH operates the two regional museums, the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum and Art Gallery and one county museum, the North Coast Visitor Centre. They offer the opportunity to experience and understand the uniqueness of the Highlands and to be part of carrying forward its traditions and heritage.</p> <p>HLH’s four Archive Centres, in Inverness, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh and Caithness, similarly enable people to explore and understand Highland’s heritage.</p> <p>The digital archive Am Baile gives access to thousands of items from archives, libraries, museums and private collections spanning the history and culture of the Highlands. In 2023-24, there were 1.5m engagements with Am Baile’s on-line archive and social media platforms. Countryside ranger programmes and activities also contribute to this outcome.</p> <p>The Music Tuition team has positive national reputation for delivering high quality piping, pipe band drumming lessons and promoting fiddle as part of our string instrument delivery. It provides many opportunities for involvement in school and community ensembles which focus on traditional music.</p> <p>Local history collections are available at all High Life Highland Libraries. Rare book collections related to the Highland’s rich heritage and culture are housed within Inverness Library. In collaboration with UHI, a series of interactive workshops called ‘Meet The Books’ are delivered at Inverness Library to raise</p>

	awareness of these rich and diverse local heritage collections.
<b>2. Resilient and Sustainable Communities</b> <b>Coimhearsnachdan Fulangach agus Seasmhach</b>	
<b>Help our communities to be prosperous, sustainable and resilient, making a positive difference to the lives of people.</b>	
2.1 Develop affordable and reliable public transport.	HLH has played a supporting role with the Council and other partners in providing locations at its facilities for sustainable transport including cycle racks, e-bike storage/charging and car charging points.
2.2 Continue to work with partners to develop and promote Road Safety and Water Safety.	Support for Bikeability training is provided through Active Schools programmes, upskilling local volunteers to deliver and developing afterschool and club cycling opportunities.  High Life Highland runs a learn to swim programme which had an average of 3,208 individual participants per month during 2022/23. This number increased to 4,700 in 2023/24.
2.4 Develop place-based plans that focus on quality neighbourhoods and direct local funding opportunities towards local priorities.	High Life Highland contributes to local community planning and other partnerships with partnership development areas in youth work, literacy and numeracy, access to services, refugee resettlement, health and wellbeing and mental health and wellbeing.  HLH staff, learners and partners have worked together with THC staff to increase the range of voices and influences contributing to the current development of the East Ross Place Plan. This has been with particular emphasis on marginalised and vulnerable groups and has benefitted from community engagement due to the wide partner use of HLH facilities in the area including Joss Street Hall Invergordon and the Alness Youth Centre.
2.5 Support communities to help each other live well and independently.	HLH provides: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a falls prevention, strength and balance exercise programme developed in partnership with NHS Highland which is available in most HLH leisure centres and online to support older people to remain active and independent in their communities</li> <li>• Specialist exercise classes for people affected by Parkinson's disease are being offered in a range of leisure centres and online. These classes have been developed in partnership with Parkinson's UK and NHS Highland</li> <li>• "Dynamic Wellbeing" which is a programme targeting people with a range of long-term health conditions including arthritis,</li> </ul>

	<p>respiratory illnesses and neurological conditions to safely get active and stay active both online and face-to-face in leisure centres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People experiencing pain from osteoarthritis are able to access pain management classes delivered in HLH leisure centres to help manage pain and improve quality of life</li> <li>• the “You Time” programme is delivered across Highland and includes activities delivered by archives; leisure facilities; libraries; countryside rangers; and is supporting older people to sustain and improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing and reduces social isolation and loneliness.</li> <li>• The GP Movement and Activity Programme is testing how collaborating with primary care in NHS Highland can help people to experience everything <i>highlife</i> offers to benefit their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. As part of the initiative participants can be signposted to High Life Highland leisure services and offered a free 7 session pass to a leisure centre to help improve all aspects of participants health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• HLH, working with third sector partners, embedded in communities created the “House of Memories’, an App based resource which benefits people living with dementia and their carers to access museum collections.</li> <li>• The museums Service regularly collaborates with Alzheimers Scotland and the Badenoch Shinty Memories project to offer a range of enjoyable and beneficial opportunities to people living with dementia and their carers.</li> <li>• HLH offers supported and personally rewarding volunteering opportunities throughout the Highlands.</li> </ul>
<p>2.6 Work with partners to promote visitor management.</p>	<p>HLH operates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70 libraries on behalf of THC.</li> <li>• the two regional Museums, the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, and their associated engagement programmes and is supporting the ongoing work of the Council to develop the Inverness Castle/Spirit of the Highlands programme.</li> <li>• The former Caithness Horizons facility has been re-launched as the North Coast Visitor Centre, operated by HLH on behalf of THC.</li> <li>• four Archive Centres, in Caithness, Skye, Lochaber and Inverness and provides Am Baile, the extensive, web-based heritage resource.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 stand-alone and joint school/community leisure centres.</li> <li>• HLH operates the following visitor centres, Broch Centre, Ferrycroft, Ben Nevis and Inverness Botanics.</li> <li>• HLH leads on the LeisureLink partnership which mutually provides free leisure access for members while visiting Aberdeen, Angus, Argyll &amp; Bute, the Borders, Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland and The Western Isles.</li> </ul>
2.7 Work with communities and partners to keep public spaces clean and safe.	The Countryside Ranger team continues to carry out site checks on behalf of the Council and facilitate safe and responsible access to the outdoors through its schools and community programme of activities.
2.8 Support Scottish and UK Government initiatives to ensure maximum digital connectivity across the area.	<p>Libraries provide free public access computers in sixty locations across the Highlands which is a significant contribution to social inclusion. In addition there is free Wi-Fi in all libraries and the majority of leisure/community centres.</p> <p>In partnership with NHS Highland, iPads are available for free loan to Diabetes patients across the Highlands via Library loans.</p> <p>The Google Workspace platform and Chromebooks have been introduced to benefit Adult &amp; Youth learners including Syrian refugee support and ESOL.</p>
2.9 Work with the Scottish Government on the delivery of improved transport infrastructure throughout the Highlands.	Some of the HLH Community Centres, Leisure Centres and Libraries in Inverness and Fort William are partner facilities in the HI-BIKE electric bike share system in Inverness and Fort William. This contributes to the Council and its partners objectives relating to travel carbon reduction.
2.10 Encourage private sector and public sector economic development partners in ensuring that Highland remains a top destination for inward investment.	HLH has recently engaged with a number of Highland businesses to offer them a corporate <i>highlife</i> subscription package for their staff. 70 businesses have taken up the programme.
2.11 Work with partners to develop a community wealth building strategy.	HLH actively promotes volunteering and has a volunteering policy which includes recruitment, induction, training and review for volunteers (annual volunteer figure over 1400).
<b>3 Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes Dachaighean Gàidhealach So-ruigsinn agus Seasmhach</b>	
<b>Build houses to support communities and economic growth</b>	
3.4 Support the needs of veterans through the Armed Forces Covenant.	HLH has achieved the Armed Forces Covenant, Employer Recognition Scheme, Gold Award and offers a discount on its leisure subscriptions and advertises posts to armed forces leavers as part of it support under the covenant. There are 231 Armed Forces subscriptions.

	<p>In addition, HLH has designated an officer to represent the Charity on the local Military Liaison Group (MLG), contributing updates to its quarterly newsletter. HLH's Leadership Programme Officer has been working closely with the Army Welfare Officer to create a leadership training programme specifically for Army families.</p>
<p><b>4. A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy Àrainneachd Ghàidhealach Sheasmhach agus Ionad Cruinneil airson Lùth So-ùrachaid</b></p>	
<p><b>Accelerate our response to the climate and ecological emergency. Make the most of the financial and environmental opportunities arising from the huge renewable energy potential in the Highlands.</b></p>	
<p>4.1 Promote active travel infrastructure across Highland.</p>	<p>HLH promotes active travel through the provision of cycle facilities at many of its sites. Some of the HLH Community Centres, Leisure Centres and Libraries in Inverness and Fort William are partner facilities in the HI-BIKE electric bike share system in Inverness and Fort William. This contributes to the Council and its partners objectives relating to travel carbon reduction. HLH is supporting the emerging priorities of the Active Highland Strategy Group in relation to active travel.</p>
<p>4.2 Promote greener transport including low carbon public transport and the development of hydrogen hubs throughout the area.</p>	<p>The Council has installed electric charging points for cars at some HLH facilities. There have been tentative discussions with Highland Council colleagues about the potential to access electric vehicles for some of the Music Instructors who have teaching areas which cover large geographical areas – but these discussions have some way to go before any plan might be in place.</p>
<p>4.3 Work with communities to find local solutions and lever funding.</p>	<p>The provision of local facilities minimises the requirement to travel and HLH provides facilities in communities throughout the Highlands on behalf of the Council. HLH provides mobile libraries which operate throughout the Highland area.</p> <p>Online and virtual developments, many as a result of the need to pivot due to the pandemic, are further opening up opportunities to access services that did not previously exist for all ages pre pandemic e.g. music tuition, archives and libraries sessions. In addition to online leisure classes for all age groups, cardiac recovery, Macmillan and Parkinson exercise classes are all available online.</p> <p>The Active Schools team aims to offer volunteer led activity in all Highland Schools, this work is focused on equalities and teams are working</p>

	<p>hard re-establish this now that restrictions have ceased.</p> <p>On behalf of THC, HLH provides five community minibuses which can be hired by local groups.</p>
<p>4.4 Value and protect Highland’s natural environment.</p>	<p>HLH provides a range of activities through archives and library services that protect and enhance the environment as well as encouraging people to enjoy environmental activities and participate in environmental education projects. Countryside ranger programmes further contribute to this outcome.</p> <p>HLH is an active member of the Highland Green Health Partnership and contributes to the development of opportunities and building on existing resources to support individuals and communities to improve their health and wellbeing and build resilience through engaging with and appreciating the natural environment.</p>
<p>4.5 Encourage greater use of land and seas being well managed for nature and adaptation including blue economy, carbon sequestration, and peatland restoration.</p>	<p>The Countryside Rangers worked with over 400 community volunteers joining events in 2023/24 to ensure habitats are well managed and monitored. Some highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of 60 new wildflower sites as part of the wildflower meadow mosaic project</li> <li>• Farr Glebe Reserve - Habitat management for the Great Yellow Bumblebee</li> <li>• Ardersier Commons – Butterfly monitoring in particular small blue butterfly and habitat management</li> <li>• Sea Gull surveys as part of the WinGS project</li> <li>• Removal of invasive Rhododendron Pontica from west coast sites</li> <li>• Green Health events running through out the year</li> </ul> <p>The 2023 wildflower mosaic project was designed to help raise awareness of the wide range of the importance of biodiversity and pollinator species within the highlands. Engagement was working with schools and the public to find out more about the varied Highland species, their distribution both historic and at present and to teach the importance to highland ecology. The rangers engaged widely across Highlands on the project and further afield via online talks. <a href="#">Meadows map – Highland Environment Forum</a></p>
<p>4.7 Achieve our Net Zero targets.</p>	<p>Inverness Botanic Gardens is fully committed to 100% recycling and is a sector leader the sector in terms of carbon reduction and biodiversity.</p>

	The Council and HLH work in partnership to install energy efficient systems such as LED lighting, biomass, solar panels with funding available to the Council – e.g. Salix funding.
4.9 Identify and commit to renewable energy investments to reduce the overall energy costs for the Council.	<p>The Council has installed Hydro Ness which provides power for Inverness Leisure.</p> <p>THC and HLH continue to work together to seek support from THC to undertake energy efficiency audits by the Councils energy team at its high use sites to support the strategic reduction of emissions and save on energy costs.</p>
4.11 Promote a “Just Transition” by moving to a more environmentally sustainable economy in a way that’s fair to everyone.	HLH contributes to this outcome through the provision of its services and facilities throughout the Highland Council area. Its approach to low cost access to leisure facilities has achieved and sustained high participation rates as well as an improved financial provision. Archives, museums and visitor attractions also form part of what the Highlands has to offer and they improve the quality of life for residents and improve the visitor experience.
<b>5. A Resilient and Sustainable Council Comhairle Fhulangach agus Sheasmhach</b>	
<b>Work with partners to address service delivery challenges with a positive approach to change.</b>	
5.1 Grow and retain our own talent within the Council.	<p>HLH currently has seven modern apprenticeships in Leisure Centres, trainee archivist positions and works with UHI on student placements and training through its Memorandum of Understanding with UHI.</p> <p>The Archives Service supports a number of trainee posts, which enable staff to become professionally qualified whilst working within the service.</p>
5.2 Work with public and private sector partners to coordinate employment opportunities.	<p>The Council and HLH have a redeployment agreement to protect staff and jobs in the context of both organisations being committed to exploring service delivery redesign in response to constrained budgets to ensure the sustainability of the Council. HLH attends Developing Young Workforce career fairs as part of the work which schools are doing with their pupils to support them in positive destinations and has signed up to the Young Person’s Guarantee and works with THC’s Employability team to host paid work placements within HLH.</p> <p>HLH also provides My Future My Success mentors to support young people in work.</p>
5.4 Actively redesign service delivery in response to constrained budgets to ensure the sustainability of the Council.	The Council and HLH are working together on a review of the Service Delivery Contract to



	ensure that HLH is sustainable and that service delivery is affordable for the Council.
5.5 Work together with communities and partners to produce local plans which meet communities' needs	HLH staff work with local community partnerships along with the Council's Community Development team on local service and community plans. HLH colleagues also contribute to the work of the CPP subgroups relating to the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan such as the Mental Health Delivery Group.
5.6 Develop place-based partnership strategies to coordinate investment and rural repopulation	HLH delivers services right across the Highlands and employs local staff, thereby supporting local communities and their economies.
5.7 Continue the Council's success in attracting rural tourism infrastructure funding to provide improvements to local infrastructure.	HLH delivers a number of services which support tourism including visitor attractions; museums; countryside rangers; libraries; and leisure centres.
5.8 Accelerate the delivery of our Asset Management approach to increase efficiency and reduce overheads and carbon impact	HLH has vacated a total of 7 facilities now. Its two headquarters buildings (Dingwall and Inverness) generating potential for a capital receipt (c £400k), along with circa £87k revenue savings for utilities and maintenance. Additionally, HLH has handed back to THC the Old Library at Wick, the old leisure administrative office in Thurso and the "Jannies Hoose" at Merkinch, for use by NHS Highland, an office and youth space at Auchtertyre and a redundant equipment store in Aviemore. This office rationalisation has been possible through the new ways of working and has been done in direct support of the Council's asset rationalisation strategy. There are further opportunities to rationalise buildings from which services are delivered which will be explored through the sports facilities strategy. HLH is also carrying out a wider HLH Asset Management review linked in with the service delivery contract review. In support of the HC approach to the provision of Community Points of Delivery (PODs) to enable services and agencies to support communities under one roof.

**General Updates/Good News Stories since November 2023 Education Committee**

As part of HLH's reporting HLH provides general updates since the previous reporting to committee and appendix B provides updates and good news stories since the Education Committee meeting in November 2023.

A new approach to GP exercise referrals is being developed by HLH and NHS Highland called the GP Movement and Activity Programme (MAP). The aim of the programme is to test how collaborating with primary care in NHS Highland can help people to experience everything HLH has on offer to benefit physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. As part of the initiative, participants can be signposted to HLH leisure services such as Dingwall Leisure Centre, Tain Royal Academy Community Complex (TRACC), Gairloch, Ullapool and most recently, one of the larger Inverness practices.

HLH's Active Schools Team has been working with the Scottish Football Association (SFA) to offer a girls-only sports programme that uses Disney themes to introduce football skills. The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) 'Disney Playmakers Programme' was piloted in three locations across the Highlands, with a view to rolling this new programme out to other areas in the future. The programme is aimed at young girls, aged 5-8 years, who are not playing football. It invites them to step into the enchanting and vivid world of Disney, as they take the first step on their football journey. These themed sessions create a safe and encouraging environment where imaginations can run wild, as an iconic Disney story is told through movement and play. The idea is that the roleplay element will empower young girls to be healthy and strong, make friends, build confidence, and learn new skills for football and life.

A fifth-year pupil from Tain Royal Academy was awarded the coveted title of Highland Young Musician of the Year 2023 at an event which took place at the Highland Archive and Registration Centre in Inverness. Megan Fisher wowed both the audiences and perhaps more importantly, the judges with her varied programme on the clarinet. Her winning performance will now see her representing Highland in the Scottish Young Musician of the Year. Megan was competing in a field of other competitors that included Angela Nankivell from Dingwall Academy on piano, Jamie Karnphan from Inverness High School on viola and the competition's runner-up, Violet Matheson from Portree High School who also played piano.

HLH's adult learning team recently offered a morning of family-friendly STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics) activities at Dingwall Town Hall, in partnership with the Newton Rooms and Science Skills Academy. There were almost 70 attendees made up of over 20 families on the day, who also participated in the 'Highland Festival of Maths' project funded by MultiPLY. This event provided opportunities to learn new skills together as a family in a fun, accessible way, creating positive maths memories legacy for future generations. During the event, HLH Adult Learning Team offered a range of staff-led workshops, including how to make a catapult, origami frogs, hanging decorations, finger painting by numbers, well-loved Bookbug sessions, and early years numeracy activities. All of these were brought together alongside self-directed activities based on STEM themes. The Science Skills Academy offered Techno bots and Land Yacht workshops, challenges, and presented interactive displays and activities from the Glasgow Science Centre. Families were provided with transport, refreshments, and lunch and were encouraged to take away resources and ideas for supporting their children and themselves with learning related to numeracy.

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 and Seaview House Care Home in Wick. Sessions have focused on hobbies and school days, amongst other subjects, utilising reproductions of old records and photographs, as well as the oral history recordings of Wick Voices.

The Community Gallery at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery featured a selection of striking cyanotype prints created by participants in the GROW Project at Inverness Botanic Gardens – they worked with an artist in residence from University of the Highlands and Islands to explore the technique which creates a monochrome print by placing objects on a pre-prepared light-sensitive surface.

In recognition of National Suicide Prevention Week, HLH partnered with Samaritans to raise awareness of the importance of Samaritans services. One of the projects involved providing free bookmarks through HLH Libraries across the Highlands. The bookmarks contain the contact details for Samaritans and serve as reminders that support is available through the organisation.

HLH hosted the Highland Disability Sport's Junior Gala on Tuesday 19th September at Inverness Leisure. This event was open to swimmers aged 10 to 17 years old with a learning disability, physical disability, or a visual or hearing impairment. The event took place with support from HLH's Disability Sports Development team, whose core aim is to lead the way for sport and leisure activities in the Highlands regardless of age or ability. Participating swimmers all swam 25 metres without touching the floor or sides of the swimming pool, and without any physical assistance from people or the use of flotation aids.

HLH announced that the Leadership Programme will be headed stateside for the first time ever, courtesy of young leader, Thomas Fraser. Thomas racked up hundreds of volunteering hours since embarking on the Leadership Programme around two years ago, earning him several rewards. Most recently, Thomas was presented with a green hoodie, symbolic of passing the Level 4 SCQF accredited 'Choose to Lead' award. Ordinarily based in Culloden, Thomas has predominantly helped with Bellfield Park Tennis Club, Highland Bears Basketball Club, and the basketball sessions at Culloden Academy. A few of Thomas' achievements include taking part in a Table Tennis Leader course, and a First Aid course. Thomas completed more than 130 hours of volunteering to date and by moving 'across the pond' he'll be able to maintain his connection with the Leadership Programme. He has grown in confidence when dealing with groups of children in Highland and will use and develop those skills when he is in the USA.