



HIGHLAND
THIRD
SECTOR
INTERFACE

Poverty in Highland

Experiences of the Third Sector



January 2026

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This report has been developed following three exploratory focus and discussion groups with members of HTSI, held throughout November and December 2025. After its initial drafting, the report was circulated to those participating individuals for confirmation of accuracy, and subsequently shared with the wider HTSI membership for further comment.

Reflections and suggested amendments from the broader membership have been incorporated where appropriate. The finalised report was published on the HTSI website and distributed among stakeholders in early 2026. Sincere thanks are extended to all who generously gave their time and contributed to the groups, ensuring that a diverse range of perspectives was captured.

Summary:

This report summarises findings from three focus groups with HTSI members conducted in late 2025, exploring poverty in the Highlands from third sector perspectives. The process involved participant feedback and wider consultation, ensuring diverse input to inform policy and practice.

Key challenges identified include persistent barriers to affordable, flexible childcare—especially for shift and seasonal workers—which limit workforce participation, particularly among women, and reinforce under-employment. Childcare issues are worsened by staff shortages, overregulation, and poor alignment with rural needs.

Transport and geographical isolation were highlighted as critical concerns, with high costs, unreliable public transport, and long distances restricting access to jobs, education, and services. In some cases, it is easier to travel outside the region than reach local services, deepening inequalities.

Housing affordability and availability remain major issues. Competition from tourism and short-term lets, limited social or community-owned housing, and high prices contribute to depopulation, recruitment problems for key workers, and hidden homelessness—both reflecting and driving wider poverty.

Rising living costs—especially for energy and essentials—disproportionately affect those with low or fixed incomes. Many face fuel poverty and cold homes, worsened by inefficient heating and complex benefit systems. Stigma, hidden poverty, and under-claiming of benefits persist, with support not always accessible.

Systemic barriers, including risk-averse, centralised, and inflexible service design, hinder support. Fragmented provision and failure to harness community strengths add further obstacles.

Third sector organisations face uncertainty from short-term funding, hindering planning, staff retention, and innovation. Administrative demands divert resources from frontline delivery, and smaller groups struggle with complex bureaucracy and accessing funds. Competition for limited funds undermines partnership, causing duplication of efforts. Recruiting staff and volunteers is challenging, especially in remote areas with poor digital infrastructure.

Despite their expertise, third sector organisations struggle to influence policy. Overregulation and risk aversion constrain flexibility and slow service development. Addressing these barriers needs longer-term, flexible funding, streamlined processes, stronger partnerships, and greater recognition of the sector's role in reducing poverty across the Highlands.

Experiences Of Poverty, Perspectives From The Third Sector

The three Poverty Focus Group sessions revealed a complex, interconnected set of challenges impacting individuals, families, and communities across the Highlands. The discussions highlight both the immediate and systemic barriers faced by those experiencing poverty, with recurring themes emerging in all groups.

Key Poverty-Related Challenges Identified

Access to Childcare and Employment: A persistent barrier for many is the lack of affordable, flexible childcare, especially for shift workers and those in seasonal employment. This limits parents', particularly women's, ability to engage in stable employment, reinforces under-employment, and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Childcare provision is further hampered by excessive regulation, workforce shortages, and misalignment with local needs, notably in rural and remote areas.

Transport and Geographical Isolation: High transport costs, unreliable public transport, and the sheer distances involved in rural and remote Highland communities severely restrict access to employment, education, healthcare, and cultural opportunities. In some areas, it is easier to travel to major cities outside the Highlands than to reach local services, creating significant inequalities and isolation.

Housing Access and Affordability: The lack of affordable and appropriate housing was consistently highlighted. High costs, competition from tourism and short-term lets, and limited social or community-owned housing options have led to depopulation, difficulties in recruitment for key workers, and hidden homelessness. The housing market's dysfunction is seen as both a cause and consequence of wider poverty issues.

Cost of Living and Fuel Poverty: Rising energy prices, particularly electricity costs for inefficient heating systems such as storage heaters, are forcing many to live in cold, damp homes. The cost of essentials (including food and fuel) far outpaces income growth, disproportionately impacting those on low or fixed incomes, especially in off-grid and remote communities.

"One of the biggest challenges facing us in Highland is the hidden nature of poverty in some areas... we may not always be aware of the scale of the problem, the nature of the problem and those who are actually needing support."

Hidden Poverty, Stigma, and Inequality: Participants emphasised the "hidden" nature of poverty in the Highlands, particularly in areas perceived as affluent or where deprivation is less visible. Stigma, lack of benchmarking, and societal assumptions about what poverty looks like contribute to under-reporting and under-claiming of essential benefits and support.

Complex Benefits System: The benefits system is widely regarded as overly complicated and difficult to navigate, resulting in significant under-claiming of entitlements and increased

anxiety among vulnerable groups. Many are unaware of their rights or lack the support to access what they are due.

Systemic Barriers and Service Fragmentation: The system as a whole is seen as disjointed, risk-averse, and often overregulated, with a lack of collaboration between agencies. Centralised decision-making and inflexible service design fail to reflect local needs or harness community assets, creating additional hurdles for those seeking support.

Third Sector and Service Pressures: As public sector services retreat due to funding cuts, third sector organisations are under pressure to fill gaps while facing short-term, insecure funding and rising demand. This shift increases stress on staff and volunteers, risks the sustainability of essential services (such as food banks), and often leaves vulnerable people without sufficient support.

Mental Health, Caring Responsibilities, and Health Inequality: Mental health issues both cause and result from poverty, with insufficient services to address the complex relationship between poor health, caring responsibilities (especially unpaid carers), and poverty. Gaps in respite, support for carers, and access to healthcare are acute, especially in rural settings.

Education, Training, and Opportunity: Limited alternatives to mainstream education, lack of alignment between local training opportunities and emerging employment sectors, and barriers to further education or apprenticeships restrict attainment and future prospects for young people. Underemployment and "poverty of opportunity" drive youth migration from the region.

Food Insecurity and Reliance on Food Banks: Demand for food banks continues to rise, with donations not keeping pace. The sustainability of the food bank model is in question, and there is a clear need for more upstream interventions, such as income maximisation and financial inclusion support.

Community Well-being and Volunteering: The voluntary sector is increasingly relied upon to fill gaps in statutory provision, but growing complexity, stress, and funding insecurity threaten its ability to respond. Opportunities for community-led solutions and decision-making are limited by systemic opacity and a lack of local empowerment.

"People are having to take whatever job they can rather than a job they want to do or something that their skill set is in because they have no other choice. They have no other options."

Changes Around The Experience Of Poverty In Recent Years

In recent years, participants across all three focus groups have observed significant changes in the experience and visibility of poverty in Highland communities. There is widespread agreement that poverty has become more acute and multifaceted, driven by a combination of rising living costs—particularly fuel and food—stagnant or insufficient incomes, and the increasing complexity of the benefits system. Electricity prices for inefficient heating systems, such as storage heaters common in off-grid homes, have soared, forcing many households to live in cold, damp conditions. This intensification of fuel poverty was consistently highlighted as a recent and growing concern, especially in

rural and remote areas where alternatives are limited and transport costs compound financial strain.

Another notable shift is the emergence and recognition of "hidden poverty." Even in areas typically perceived as affluent, participants report growing pockets of deprivation that are less visible and harder to address due to stigma and a lack of reliable benchmarking. This hidden nature makes it challenging to identify those in need and ensure they access available support, with under-claiming of benefits remaining a persistent problem due to the convoluted and daunting nature of the welfare system.

"We've got this real slip in the way that the job market is made-up locally and it's leaving a lot of people without work at certain times of the year for very unpredictable work."

The experience of poverty is also increasingly shaped by structural and systemic barriers. The retreat of public sector services, coupled with funding cuts, has led to greater reliance on the third sector and community organisations, which are themselves under growing financial and operational pressure. This shift has resulted in service fragmentation, short-termism, and a sense of instability for both service users and providers. Participants also note that the system's centralised, risk-averse, and inflexible decision-making does not reflect local realities or needs, further exacerbating challenges for those experiencing poverty.

Mental health issues, caring responsibilities, and health inequalities are more prominent, with many reporting that poor mental health both leads to and results from poverty. The lack of accessible, coordinated support—especially in rural settings—has become more acute, as has the strain on unpaid carers and the difficulties in accessing respite or adequate care services.

Finally, there is a clear sense that opportunities for young people are narrowing. Underemployment, lack of alignment between education and local employment opportunities, and barriers to further training or apprenticeships are driving youth migration and a pervasive "poverty of opportunity." The rising demand for food banks, alongside concerns about the sustainability of this model and insufficient upstream interventions, further illustrates the deepening nature of poverty in the region. Collectively, these changes point to a more complex, entrenched, and less visible experience of poverty, requiring both systemic reform and greater local empowerment to address effectively.

"The cost of electricity has risen again... People just cannot afford to heat their houses. They're rationing and switching everything off. They're living in cold, damp houses."

Barriers To Service Development And Delivery

Across all three Poverty Focus Groups, participants consistently identified a range of barriers hindering effective service development and delivery for both the Third Sector and, where relevant, the public sector. These barriers span funding, governance, system design, workforce challenges, and geographic realities, and reflect both longstanding

issues and recent shifts exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis and public sector retrenchment.

"The benefits system is so overly complicated... Most of our guys were underclaiming and actually they were entitled to a lot more than what they were getting, but they didn't have any clue that some of this money existed."

Third Sector Barriers

Short-Term and Insecure Funding: Organisations face instability due to reliance on short-term project grants rather than core funding, making it difficult to plan, retain staff, and deliver consistent support. The constant cycle of seeking new funding streams undermines sustainability and increases operational stress.

Governance and Capacity Challenges: The growing complexity of services—many of which now mirror previous statutory responsibilities—demands robust governance, legal compliance, and professional management. However, limited resources and a shortage of suitably skilled local staff make it difficult to meet these requirements. This is especially acute in rural areas, where recruiting and retaining capable personnel is a persistent issue.

Fragmentation and Competition: A funding model that encourages competition rather than collaboration between organisations has led to siloed working, duplication, and gaps in service coverage. Participants highlighted the need for genuine partnership approaches and better mapping of local needs to avoid leaving communities underserved.

Increasing Complexity and Demand: As public services retreat, the Third Sector is left to fill gaps, often without sufficient investment or support. The rise in complexity of voluntary roles and the stress this places on volunteers and staff was repeatedly mentioned, with concerns that growing responsibilities are off-putting and threaten the sector's ability to respond effectively.

Geographical Challenges: Rurality compounds service delivery difficulties, including transport costs, digital connectivity issues, and housing shortages. These factors hinder access to services and recruitment, and often lead to depopulation or hidden deprivation.

Systemic Opacity and Centralised Decision-Making: Centralised, risk-averse systems and inflexible service design do not reflect local realities, making it difficult for organisations to respond to specific community needs. Participants called for greater local empowerment and decision-making to overcome these barriers.

Stigma and Hidden Poverty: The hidden nature of poverty, particularly in more affluent or rural communities, makes it challenging to identify those in need and ensure they access available support. Stigma and lack of reliable benchmarking further hinder service effectiveness.

"Food bank donations are not meeting the demand in the same way they certainly did 10-15 years ago... the voluntary sector and charities cannot afford to spend millions and millions of pounds on food."

Public Sector Barriers

Retrenchment and Resource Cuts: Widespread funding reductions have led to the withdrawal of statutory services, creating gaps that the Third Sector is expected to fill, often without adequate support or investment.

Inflexible and Centralised Systems: Decision-making is often removed from the local level, resulting in service models that do not match the diverse needs or realities of Highland communities. Impact assessments and equality evaluations tend to be perfunctory and do not fully address interdependencies or unintended consequences.

Workforce Shortages and Housing Barriers: Recruitment and retention of staff—particularly in health, social care, and education—is undermined by unaffordable or unavailable housing, especially in rural and remote areas. Even public sector wages are often insufficient to cover high living costs.

Systemic Complexity and Lack of Coordination: Service fragmentation and poor collaboration between agencies result in confusion for service users and providers, with overlapping responsibilities and unclear points of access.

Insufficient Upstream Intervention: A lack of preventative, upstream approaches—such as income maximisation and financial inclusion—means services are often overwhelmed by crisis demand (e.g., food banks, emergency support), rather than addressing root causes.

"The third sector feels as though it's having to address what is being either in reality lived as a gap or certainly as a perceived gap, and that's the Scotland wide experience, not Highland specific."

Cross-Cutting Barriers

Mental Health and Caring Responsibilities: There is a bidirectional link between poor mental health and poverty, with inadequate support for unpaid carers and those facing health inequalities. Both sectors struggle to provide coordinated, accessible support, particularly in rural areas.

Poverty of Opportunity: Underemployment, lack of local training and education pathways, and youth migration are driven by the limited alignment between local opportunities and emerging employment sectors, affecting both service providers and users.

Overall, both the Third Sector and public sector face significant and interconnected barriers to developing and delivering effective services in Highland. These challenges demand systemic reform, more collaborative approaches, and genuine empowerment of local communities to ensure services can meet the complex, evolving needs of those experiencing poverty.

"Digital exclusion has been exacerbated, especially for those who aren't so digitally savvy. For many, going to an in-person group was respite, and that's just not the same online."

Other Reflections

Additional points from the Poverty Focus Groups that supplement the above include:

Hidden Nature of Poverty: Several participants emphasised the difficulty in defining and identifying poverty in Highland, noting that it often remains hidden within communities. Stigma and lack of benchmarking mean many affected individuals do not self-identify, and support needs can go unrecognised.

Transport and Access Barriers: The cost, reliability, and integration of public transport are significant barriers, especially for those in rural and remote areas. Poor transport links impact access to employment, training, healthcare, and cultural opportunities, with some residents finding it easier to travel long distances to major cities than to local centres.

Childcare Challenges: Shortages of flexible and affordable childcare, particularly for shift workers and those in hospitality, limit employment opportunities and disproportionately affect women. Regulatory changes have reduced the number of local childminders, exacerbating the problem.

Seasonal and Underemployment: Employment in Highland is often seasonal and insecure, leading to income shocks and limited prospects for career progression. Young people increasingly feel compelled to leave the area for better opportunities, which contributes to depopulation and skills shortages.

Animal Relinquishment: The cost-of-living crisis has forced some households to give up pets, impacting mental health and social well-being. Charities are shifting towards community-based support to prevent animal relinquishment.

Complexity of the Benefits System: The benefits system is seen as confusing and daunting, resulting in significant underclaiming of entitlements. Many individuals are unaware of what support is available, and expert advice is difficult to access.

"We need to be working from a place-based perspective with local data and local input and local solutions... you can't roll one thing out across Highland and expect everyone to have an equal experience of it."

Tourist Tax and Housing Controls: There are mixed views on the proposed tourist tax and short-term let controls. While generally positive if revenue is reinvested locally, concerns remain about unintended impacts on residents who travel for essential services and the effectiveness of housing policies without broader system change.

Digital Exclusion: The shift to online service delivery has exacerbated digital exclusion for those lacking skills, access, or reliable internet, particularly in rural settings.

Third Sector Volunteering Pressures: Voluntary organisations are facing increased expectations and complexity as they backfill gaps left by public sector retrenchment. Volunteers are taking on more responsibility, which can be off-putting and lead to burnout.

Food Bank Sustainability: There is growing concern about the sustainability of food banks, with donations failing to meet rising demand. Upstream interventions, such as financial inclusion work, are critical to reducing crisis dependency.

Need for Place-Based Decision-Making: Participants advocated for decision-making powers to be devolved closer to communities, allowing for tailored solutions that reflect local realities and need. One-size-fits-all approaches are seen as ineffective given Highland's diversity.

Involving Young People: The importance of engaging children and young people in decision-making processes was highlighted, ensuring their voices inform service design and future planning in a trauma-informed way.

Together, these points reinforce the need for systemic reform, greater collaboration, and local empowerment to address the evolving challenges of poverty in Highland communities.

"I'm becoming increasingly aware... of the importance of involving children and young people in discussions and decision making. I'm sure that children and young people could bring something important to this kind of topic."

What Could Make Things Better

Drawing on insights from all three Poverty Focus Groups, several key ideas and practical suggestions have emerged for making things better in Highland communities:

Devolving Decision-Making and Embracing Place-Based Solutions:

Many participants emphasised the need to shift power and resources closer to communities. By enabling local decision-making, solutions can be tailored to reflect the diversity and unique needs of Highland areas, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. This should include greater flexibility for local authorities, community councils, and voluntary organisations to commission and adapt services based on local priorities and lived experience.

Strengthening Collaboration and Systems Integration:

Improved collaboration between statutory bodies, third sector organisations, and community groups is vital. Breaking down silos and fostering genuine partnership working can help identify service gaps, improve referrals, and reduce duplication. Mapping local assets and services, as well as developing joined-up pathways, would ensure more coherent support for individuals and families facing poverty.

Investing in Upstream and Preventative Interventions:

Moving beyond crisis responses (such as food banks), there is a call for investment in 'upstream' services that address the root causes of poverty. This includes financial inclusion work, benefits advice, employability programmes, and mental health support. Making these services more accessible and proactive will help reduce dependency on emergency support and improve long-term outcomes.

Making the Benefits System Simpler and More Accessible:

The complexity of the benefits system is a major barrier, resulting in significant underclaiming. Suggestions include streamlining processes, increasing outreach, and providing expert, locally available advice to ensure people receive their entitlements. Addressing digital exclusion is also critical, particularly in rural areas where online access may be limited.

Supporting Third Sector Sustainability and Volunteering:

With the voluntary sector increasingly backfilling gaps left by public services, there is an urgent need for stable, core funding and better governance support. Reducing bureaucratic burdens and investing in volunteer recruitment, training, and wellbeing will help prevent burnout and ensure these organisations remain resilient.

Addressing Housing and Transport Challenges:

Affordable, attainable housing and reliable transport are fundamental to tackling poverty and preventing depopulation. Policy responses should consider local market dynamics and support a mix of social, community-owned, and shared equity models. Improving transport integration and affordability, especially for those in remote areas, will expand access to employment, education, and services.

Involving Children, Young People, and Marginalised Groups:

Decision-making processes must actively include children, young people, unpaid carers, and other marginalised groups in ways that are trauma-informed and age-appropriate. Their lived experiences should inform service design and future planning, helping to ensure that interventions genuinely meet the needs of those most affected by poverty.

Improving Data, Evidence, and Impact Assessment:

Better local data and transparent impact assessments are needed to understand the true scale and nature of poverty, hidden deprivation, and the effects of policy changes. This will support more effective targeting of resources and continuous improvement of services.

Promoting Financial Inclusion and Tackling Stigma:

Efforts should focus on increasing awareness of support options, tackling stigma associated with poverty and service use, and improving access to financial advice and education. Community outreach and trusted local partnerships are key to reaching those who may otherwise remain hidden or unsupported.

Taken together, these ideas point to a need for systemic reform, greater local empowerment, and sustained investment in Highland communities. By listening to those with lived experience and fostering collaborative, place-based approaches, it is possible to build a more resilient, inclusive, and effective support system for all.

Reflections From The Wider HTSI Membership

The initial draft of this report was circulated to the wider HTSI membership for comment and reflection. This is a summary of their response and inclusion of additional reflections based on their experience of working in communities in Highland.

Reflection on the report generally:

The wider HTSI membership responded positively to the draft report, praising its clarity and evidence base, and noting its accurate reflection of the realities faced by third sector organisations and Highland communities, especially regarding the complex nature of poverty.

Many contributors saw the report as a strong diagnostic tool but wanted more details about how its findings would translate into practical actions and policy changes. They suggested outlining specific recommendations and clarifying which organisations should take action and at what stage.

Members highlighted the critical role of community hubs in rural areas, noting their sustainability is threatened by insecure funding and increased demand. They also emphasised the importance of tackling low literacy, improving adult learning, addressing rural transport and digital exclusion, and supporting isolated communities. Respondents appreciated the focus on local empowerment and preventative support, but called for clearer, actionable steps and stronger cooperation.

Overall, members wanted the report to drive policy and strategy, seeing it as a potential catalyst for real change in the Highlands.

Additional information, experience and reflections:

The feedback, which came in majority from rural and remote community groups, offered valuable perspectives that extend and deepen the main findings of the report, while emphasising unique local challenges. To avoid redundancy, points that reiterate themes already covered earlier—such as the importance of community hubs, tackling digital and transport exclusion, adult learning, and the call for actionable steps—have been omitted or condensed.

Commissioning behaviours

There was a specific recommendation to reform commissioning processes, lengthen funding cycles, and make reporting requirements more suitable for the preventative and relational work conducted by local organisations.

Strategic Advocacy and Use of the Report

Several respondents proposed explicitly positioning the report as an advocacy tool, supporting consultation responses, budget planning, partnership agreements, and funding applications, thereby increasing its long-term influence.

Actionable Steps for Funders and the Volunteering Sector

Additional comments urged funders to provide core funding for essential roles, encourage resource sharing, and foster cooperation among organisations as practical measures to address poverty and sustain community infrastructure.

Addressing Low Literacy and Adult Learning Needs (Additional Emphasis)

While previously noted, rural contributors placed particular emphasis on inter-generational low literacy and the need for better investment in community-based adult learning, especially to support navigation of services in isolated settings.

Housing and Fuel Poverty (Rural Dimension)

The unique challenge of heating older rural homes was highlighted, with feedback noting its direct impact on both financial hardship and health in remote areas.

In summary, the additional comments bring forward a sharper focus on the need for advocacy, more flexible funding systems, targeted investment in adult literacies, and a rural-specific lens on housing and energy poverty. These refined insights offer valuable guidance for future policy and local strategy.

Conclusion

In summary, the challenges currently facing Highland communities are deeply interconnected and require a comprehensive, forward-thinking response. The cost-of-living crisis, along with complexities in the benefits system and pressures on voluntary organisations, highlight the urgent need for systemic change and more accessible support services. Digital exclusion, literacy rates and concerns over food bank sustainability further underline the importance of tackling the root causes of poverty, rather than simply managing its symptoms.

Input from wider members underlines the need to understand unique or nuanced challenges that exist for households in rural and remote rural communities.

At the same time, the debate around tourist taxes and housing controls demonstrates the complexity of designing policies that are both locally sensitive and effective, with the need for careful consideration of unintended consequences. The case for devolving decision-making powers to the community level is clear: only by empowering local voices, especially those of young people, can tailored solutions be found that reflect the diversity and unique challenges of the Highlands.

Moving forward, collaboration between statutory bodies, the third sector, and communities themselves will be vital. Efforts must focus not only on immediate relief—such as preventing animal relinquishment and sustaining food banks—but also on long-term strategies, including financial inclusion and trauma-informed approaches to service design. By prioritising local empowerment, fostering innovation, and investing in upstream interventions, Highland communities can build a more resilient and inclusive future, better equipped to navigate ongoing and emerging challenges.

Themes around commissioning and funding are particularly significant for the Highland third sector. Inflexible, short-term commissioning and delayed or insufficient funding are placing real strain on organisations and their staff. Poor commissioning behaviours—such as last-minute tenders and lack of co-design—are directly contributing to in-work poverty and job insecurity among third sector workers. This undermines staff wellbeing and the sector's ability to deliver vital services. Addressing these challenges calls for more collaborative commissioning and multi-year funding models that recognise the third sector's essential role in building resilient Highland communities.

Ultimately, the path to meaningful poverty reduction in the Highlands lies in collective action, shared responsibility, and a steadfast commitment to listening to those most affected. With a renewed emphasis on place-based decision-making and community-led solutions, there is an opportunity to create lasting positive change for all residents.

Next Steps

As this report is shared with public sector partners, including the Highland Council's Poverty Commission, the next stage will be ensuring a chance to capture their response and reaction. The Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) will facilitate later in to 2026 a member-wide discussion to collaboratively develop an action plan that addresses the key challenges identified, with a particular emphasis on shaping clear and practical asks concerning commissioning behaviours in the Highlands.

This process will prioritise strategies for reducing in-work poverty and job insecurity among third sector staff, while also seeking greater consistency and alignment in the sector's approaches to intervention and preventative work around poverty. Through ongoing dialogue with partners, HTSI will continue to advocate for commissioning that is more collaborative, stable, and supportive of the sector's role in tackling poverty, enabling effective and sustainable solutions for Highland communities.

Appendix I: Reports and Resources shared with us to share with others:

Throughout our process groups and individuals have shared reports or other evidence with us that we would like to share with you, links are included where possible:

- State of Caring: the cost of caring in Scotland 2025
 - Report outlining the significant costs to financial security, health and employment for unpaid carers. <https://www.carersuk.org/reports/state-of-caring-the-cost-of-caring-in-scotland-2025/>
- Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy
 - https://www.cosla.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/18052/thecommissiononstrengtheninglocaldemocracyfinalreportaugust2014.pdf
- The Commission on Highland Democracy
 - <https://highlanddemocracy.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/commission-on-highland-democracy-final-report-dec-17.pdf>
- Scottish Human Rights Commission; Economic, Social and cultural rights in the Highlands and Islands
 - <https://www.scottishhumanrights.com/projects-and-programmes/spotlight-projects/economic-social-and-cultural-rights-in-the-highlands-and-islands/>
- Caithness Area Place Plan (2025)
 - A strategic local plan for Caithness, focusing on place-based priorities and development.
 - All area Place plans for Highland will be available through The Highland Council website, anticipated to be through this link, as they are published: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development_plans/1043/local_place_plans
- Planet Youth - Thurso & Wick Local Reports
 - Research and evaluation reports highlighting youth perspectives and challenges in Thurso and Wick. To find out more about Planet Youth visit here, reports will be available through direct request to the team once published: <https://www.highland-adp.org.uk/planet-youth/>
- Poverty Alliance - Rural Poverty in Scotland Research
 - A comprehensive study on rural poverty conducted by Poverty Alliance. <https://www.povertyalliance.org/report-challenging-rural-poverty-in-scotland/>
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation - Poverty in Scotland
 - Insightful reports from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation focusing on rural poverty. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/poverty-in-scotland-2025>
- OECD: Skills and Socio-Economic Outcomes
 - www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/piaac.html
- Literacy Changes Lives (National Literacy Trust)
- <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/literacy-changes-lives-2014-new-perspective-health-employment-and-crime/>

- OECD (2015): Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills - Literature Review on Policy Interventions
 - International review of effective policy interventions.
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/adults-with-low-literacy-and-numeracy-skills_5jrxnjdd3r5k-en.html
- OECD (2016): The Impact of Literacy, Numeracy and Computer Skills on Earnings and Employment Outcomes
- Analysis of the economic impact of core skills.
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-impact-of-literacy-numeracy-and-computer-skills-on-earnings-and-employment-outcomes_5jm2cv4t4gzs-en.html
- Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN)
 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-survey-of-literacy-and-numeracy-background/>
- Scottish Attainment Challenge - Evaluation and School Survey Report 2025
 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/attainment-scotland-fund-evaluation-school-survey-report-2025/>
- Scottish Government's 'Place Principle' Documents
 - Policy documents relating to place-based approaches.
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/place-principle-introduction/>

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