

HIGHLAND THIRD SECTOR INTERFACE

ANNUAL REPORT



Message from the Chair

For the final time as Chair and a member of the HTSI Board, it is my pleasure to introduce the annual report for the Highland Third Sector Interface.

I wish to start by acknowledging the hard work and dedication of our Chief Officer Mhairi Wylie, the entire HTSI team, our Partners, members and my fellow Board members past and present, for their continued dedication to the third sector and ability to adapt and respond to the everchanging landscape we operate within. It has been an absolute pleasure to work alongside them and witness their achievements over the years.

More so than ever this year our voices have needed to be loud and honest and as ever, our sector has witnessed increasing demands placed upon resources, services and finances. The dedication and tireless hard work in response to these challenges and creation of opportunities has shone through. Within this year's report you will see the vital work delivered by our partners. These include in Badenoch and Strathspey where VABS have supported a local business to become a social enterprise, delivering services and events within the local community and providing an inclusive safe space; VGS have helped to increase empowerment within Sutherland's communities to ensure they thrive through better conversations and collaborative efforts; the launch of a community larder in



Lochaber has provided not just a use for surplus

and short-dated items but also the opportunity for cookery workshops and knowledge sharing; we have seen the second year of the Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care collaboration in Skye and Lochalsh; within Caithness assistance was provided to a vital SCIO providing support to local children and ensuring they can enter 2026 confident in their operation and in the Moray Firth area, HTSI are assisting a community hall association to make the required changes to enable them to pursue funding and become and SCIO.

In 2020 HTSI inherited Cafe 1668 during changes to structure and this has again grown over the past 12 months, in both paying customers and those visiting for free meals and drinks. It has continued to provide a non-judgemental space for those requiring their services. This may be people who require a hot meal, a warm space or place to learn and train to enable them to secure future employment. It continues to be an incredibly important part of many peoples lives within Inverness and demonstrates the power of safe, social spaces.

I look forward to seeing the Highland Third Sector Interface evolve over the coming years and wish my successor as Chair, Kenny Steele along with the Board well for the future

Cath Wright
HTSI Chair

Chief Officer Overview



As we present this Annual Report, we do so during a period of significant challenge and ongoing change for the Third Sector in Scotland and across the Highland region.

Over the past year, our organisations, volunteers, and communities have faced mounting pressures—rising difficulties for households, increased demand for services, and persistent resource constraints have truly tested our resilience. Yet within this adversity, we have continued to witness inspiring dedication, adaptability, and collaboration throughout our sector.

This year, HTSI and its partners have worked to strengthen the sector's voice in both local and national arenas, build capacity within diverse communities, and foster meaningful partnership and innovation. This year it has been out pleasure to distribute over £852,000 in grant funding to support a range of initiatives, enabling progress in areas such as community justice, crisis intervention, and support for vulnerable individuals. However, the volume of ask against the available funds is a clear demonstration of the appetite for more investment.

We are also pleased to have achieved SQA Centre Registration this year—a milestone that enables us to offer accredited training in the future. This accomplishment strengthens our ability to support our sector with recognised qualifications, and we look forward to empowering even more individuals and organisations with these new opportunities.

Beyond the TSI Services, our other activities this year have included the continuation of and further community engagement through initiatives such as Café 1668, reflecting our ongoing commitment to meeting evolving

the Custody Link Services

needs and providing spaces for support and connection.

These collective achievements highlight the creativity and determination that define our sector. In uncertain times, new opportunities continue to arise—reminding us to remain curious, to welcome change, and to seek the

possibilities that come with it, all while remaining true to our core mission of making a positive social impact.

On behalf of HTSI, I extend heartfelt thanks to our members for your ongoing engagement and support; to our representatives, who generously give their time and energy; and to the staff teams within HTSI and our partners across the region, whose dedication ensures sustained delivery despite rising demand, fewer resources, and increasingly diverse needs. Special appreciation is due to our Board, and especially to Cath Wright, who will be stepping down as Chair at the coming AGM. Cath's leadership and guidance have been deeply valued, and her contribution will continue to shape our shared work.

Thank you all for your commitment to another year of progress and partnership. Together, we move forward with hope, collaboration, and a sense of shared purpose.

Mhairi Wylie

Chief Officer

The 2021–2025 Strategic Outcomes

Following the development and publication of the TSI Outcome Framework in 2018 the HTSI Board have adopted the set of outcomes presented in this Framework as their strategic aims until 2025.

The planned review of Strategic Outcomes is now likely to be undertaken following the planned change of Chair in 2025. The current TSI Outcome Framework does however, continue to provided the structure for exploring the current and future work of the TSI and is likely to remain a key focus for the strategic direction of HTSI.

Capacity Building: Developing the capacity of volunteering, community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprises to achieve positive change

Voice: Ensure a strong voice for the Sector at a strategic level within local planning and into national policy

Connect: Provide leadership and vision around the communication, partnership and collaboration within and between the Sector and others

Knowledge: act as a central source of knowledge about the Third Sector Locally



Year in Numbers

Up to 31/3/25

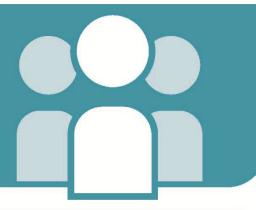


Organisations worked with:

871

Member organisations:

395





Grant Funding Funding distributed: £852,009 46 Organisations Funded

163 People supported into volunteering

VIOs* supported in their role working with Volunteers:

*Volunteer Involving Organisation

Number of volunteers working with us: 110

Total number of volunteer hours across HTSI and TSI Partners:

(across all reported TSI organisations)

5400



125
Forum
Attendees

14 Forums Held



Served at Cafe 1668.

Number of vulnerable people supported on a 1-1 basis (Custody Link (Clink), Refugee Resettlement):

200

47

Individuals working with the Custody Link service confident of living a crime free life.

Highland Third
Sector Annual
Awards

Annual Awards to celebrate and showcase the best of the Third Sector in Highland.

10



Saltire Summit Awards

Summit Awards are for ages 11 - 25 who have made an outstanding contribution to volunteering.

Highland TSI Services Impact:



Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Badenoch and Strathspey. This is a case study example of their work through 2024/25.

'We could never have done it without you'.

In 2024–5, the VABS team worked closely with the founders of Fiona's Wholefoods and Refills to support them in converting into becoming a social enterprise.

Over the last 5 years of business, Fiona and Becci Osgood, have built a thriving refill shop in Grantown on Spey, supporting the local community to live sustainable lifestyles. They have developed a deep social and environmental mission, becoming a community

hub and safe space. They have piloted a programme of community events including LGBTQ+ social sessions, climate book group, cloth nappy natters, supper clubs, food tables and more. Fiona's has become a hub for anti-poverty action, climate action, and inclusivity.

By becoming a Community Interest Company, they can work to sustainably grow the community aspect of their organisation, through funding an community coordinator, extending their programme of events and eventually looking to start a training and employability programme for young people with neurodivergence.

VABS has supported Fiona's with setting up as a social enterprise, writing Articles of Association, business planning, recruiting directors, networking, finding funding and start-up support, upskilling directors and volunteers with writing funding applications, and risk assessment and management planning, equalling around 15 hours of support. This initial intensive support has set the organisation up to achieve their aims by increasing skill and capacity. Moreover, VABS is helping to leverage a potential of £37k in funding to support their initial goals, with their longer-term aim to become economically independent over the next 2-5 years.



Voluntary Group Sutherland are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Sutherland. This is a case study example of their work through 2024/25.

<u>Supporting Better Community Outcomes in Sutherland</u>

Purpose of the Sessions: The initiative aimed to empower local people, community groups, development trusts, and organisations across Sutherland with tools to:

- Facilitate constructive discussions on local issues.
- Strengthen relationships and collaborative working.
- Address difficult matters with a focus on finding common ground.
- Enhance understanding of community dynamics.

Facilitators: John Sturrock KC and Charlie Woods collaborated with Voluntary Groups Sutherland (VGS) to deliver the sessions. Both brought exceptional expertise: John, an

experienced mediator with ties to the area, and Charlie, an economist with a passion for rural development. Their pro bono work was funded by VGS, SSE, the North Highland Initiative, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Sessions and Participation: Held from 17–21 March 2025 in Lairg, Golspie, Armadale, and Kinlochbervie, the initiative comprised four regional sessions and 11 one-to-one meetings. Participants received practical guidance and tools for fostering collaboration.

Outcomes and Feedback: Over 90% of evaluation responses were positive. Key takeaways included improved conflict resolution and collaboration strategies. Groups have since applied these tools, sparking partnerships and advancing community goals. VGS is now exploring follow-up activity to address shared challenges and sustain momentum.

The initiative marked a pivotal step in empowering Sutherland's communities to thrive through better conversations and collaborative efforts.

"The session was fantastic thank you for providing this opportunity to have our voices heard."

"We sat next to another group that works with children whilst we both knew of each other and the work we did, we never spoke about things we have in common and now we are sharing access to training."



Voluntary Action Lochaber are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Lochaber. This is a case study example of their work through 2024/25.

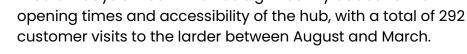
Community Larder

The Plantation Community Larder was launched in August 2024. A small group of residents collaborated with Voluntary Action Lochaber and partners for the provision of a larder in a small, underused community hub in the Plantation.

Start-up funding was from HUBBUB with a match donation from Fort William Food Bank and Fort William Community Action Group. The Project involves redistribution of short-dated/surplus foods from local supermarkets and FareShare - reducing food waste and helping those experiencing food insecurity.

The Community Larder is serviced by 11 wonderful volunteers, including 5 people with additional support needs for whom the volunteering counts toward both the Saltire Awards and Adult Achievement Awards.

The larder is now open for 1-2 hours 5 days a week. This has significantly added to the



This increased activity led to interest in cookery workshops at the hub, including sessions on creative use of short-dated/surplus food – 'who knew you could do so much with a pumpkin!' A programme of similarly fun and educational workshops is planned for 2025/2026 funded by Ward Discretionary Budget.

Volunteers were amazed to discover that so far they have redistributed 1076kg of short-dated/surplus food to fellow residents, at no cost, which would otherwise have gone to waste. 'It's going so well. We want to do more now. Next thing is a fridge and freezer!'.





Skye and Lochalsh CVO are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Skye and Lochalsh. This is a case study example of their work through 2024/25.

Skye and Lochalsh Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care (HWWS) Collaboration

In 2025/26, the Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care (HWWS) Collaboration will enter its second year with a focus on turning insight into action—delivering priorities identified through community engagement and service mapping, strengthening cross-sector partnerships, and supporting more coordinated, community-led planning.

The launch of the Skye and Lochalsh Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care (HWWS) Collaboration in 2024 marked a significant step in uniting third sector and statutory partners. The initiative focused on mapping local services, identifying community needs, and creating space for joint planning and stronger community leadership.

A major milestone was the 2025 Skye and Lochalsh Third Sector Conference, hosted by SLCVO and attended by over 70 participants (76% third sector, 24% public sector). The event offered a valuable platform to explore challenges, share solutions, and build momentum for greater collaboration. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with strong interest in continued engagement and the creation of a third sector-led HWWS Forum.

"I felt very upbeat at the end, understanding that our challenges are shared and we are not alone."

"All your messaging was absolutely spot on in terms of what we need to do as a third sector to succeed (collaborate collaborate collaborate!) and it was an inspiring day."



The insights and energy from the conference laid the groundwork for new engagement structures and strengthened third sector influence in service design.

In 2025/26, the HWWS

Collaboration will move into its second year with a focus on turning insight into action, deepening partnerships, and supporting coordinated, community-led planning.



Caithness Voluntary Group are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Caithness. This is a case study example of their work through 2024/25.

Crisis Intervention

A local SCIO that was doing excellent work with children from an area that ranks within quintile 1 of the SIMD had run out of funding and had not been operating within their governance or charities law since starting in 2019. The charity had not had an AGM or Trustees meeting since forming nor had they ever filed any accounts with OSCR.

In 2024 CVG stepped in to take action before the SCIO completely imploded. We set up a new board of Trustees in collaboration with the local foodbank, with key CVG officers holding the office-bearers positions. We held an AGM then monthly trustee meetings, and worked with local funders to secure additional funding to enable the SCIO to continue operating and providing the excellent service that they were, whilst we worked in the background to sort out 5 years worth of accounts and get these independently verified and uploaded to OSCR.

The organisation is now operating legally and has enough funding at present to sustain it into 2026 and we are now in a position to discharge them from our care to a new board of trustees at the next AGM planned for the middle of 2026. Saving this single SCIO has taken well in excess of 250 hours of work between the CVG Chief Officer, CVG Deputy Chief Officer and CVG Accounts Verification Officer.



Highland Third Sector Interface, HTSI, directly provides support to organisations across Wester Ross, and the Inner Moray Firth area. A specific team is dedicated to this within HTSI and this is a case study example of their work through 2024/25.

<u>Culcabok and Drakies Community Hall Association</u>

The Culcabok and Drakies Community Hall Association contacted us for support as their initial desire to pursue funding for some much-needed building maintenance led them to realise how their constitution limited their ability to do this.

Their constitution had not been updated since 1984, which is causing them some issues. The main issues are that the current trustees are personally liable for the building, and due to not being either a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) or a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) their ability to pursue grant funding is very limited. The antiquated wording of the constitution, as well as newer trustees not having an induction, instigated the need for outside support.

This is an occurrence we see often, and highlights the gap that organisations create when not having a proper hand-over during transitions on the board, as well as not ensuring regular review of their governing documents. We are supporting them to become a SCIO to ensure that they are no longer personally liable for the building, as well as giving them options to pursue funding for completing the much-needed maintenance of the Hall.

Impact from across other activity:

Funding

Throughout the year HTSI distributed £852k across 66 different grant agreement. The majority of this was on behalf of the Scottish Government and the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. The remaining amount was on behalf of the Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership.

This year we trialed different ways of distributing funds including a new way for a small amount of money within the Community Mental Health Fund to be distributed to areas where we have not seen as much investment as we might have expected.

Taking a different approach to distributing the CMHW Fund this year, we delivered three separate funding processes between July 2024 and March 2025.

The Small Grants application was similar to the process in previous years, requiring few changes to the information and assessment process. In September, we invited organisations to apply for more significant investment and a funding panel was arranged to assess the initial expression of interest. We subsequently invited ten organisations who fit the criteria, to develop a proposal document and prepare a presentation for a second panel. This was held in January and was a long day, but the results were a much better understanding of how these projects would deliver positive change. Panel members enjoyed the opportunity to explore project plans more thoroughly.

Finally, the intensive capacity building was targeted at three specific communities with evidence of need, low levels of capacity and lack of previous investment.

Castletown, Tain and the Plantation fit this criteria, so CVG, VAL and HTSI Services teams delivered this intensive approach between August and March, to generate a project that could deliver change. In March, we travelled to their location to hear what they planned to deliver and how it would meet the aims of the funding. This insight could lead to better support for these projects as they deliver and with their evaluation of the outcomes.

Community Justice

HTSI has the privilege to host the team linked to the Highland Community Justice Partnership. This currently includes the Partnership Manager, Independent Chair and a fixed term Senior Development Officer:

The role of Senior Development Officer has focussed on raising public awareness of community justice throughout Highland. By highlighting positive news stories of the work carried out by the different community payback teams and covering those both online and via the local newspapers, each visit whether to Fort William, Wick, Alness or Portree created a lot of positive community engagement and dialogue.

Beneficiaries were delighted to be recognised and given the chance to share their experiences, and to genuinely appreciate an otherwise unseen group of people. The CPO Officers received a lot of praise from the community as well as more offers of work/placements for their clients.

The Facebook activity spiked after every visit thanks to all the sharing of photos and quotes from the projects. The local press was delighted to cover these stories, often with full page coverage. One year ago the Facebook following was 430, now it is 750 and the demographics showed followers being only from Inverness and Dingwall, but now all the towns visited have shown up with a good-sized following and continued engagement.

Community groups and third sector organisations in remote parts of Highland were also generally positive to being contacted directly where there was an expressed need by the CPO Officers for projects and placements. From the organisations contacted, 40% resulted in offers of work for the clients, including areas like Grantown, Ullapool & Fort Augustus.

Café 1668

HTSI inherited the Café as part of changes to structures within the TSI funding in 2020. The Café has since under gone a rebranding and continued to attract both an increase in paying business as well as increased demand for their free hot meals and access to the food larder. The most important aspect of the Café is undoubtedly the non-judgemental social space for one and all across Inverness. This includes the opportunities for people in recovery to volunteer:

"Simon" joined the café in March 2024, HTSI colleagues in the Custody Link team had been working with him following a drug driving offence.

Simon was a regular drug user from the age of 16, taking ecstasy and legal highs, progressing to speed and latterly cocaine. Simon was also dealing to fund his own addiction.

When starting at the café Simon said he was very nervous about his past but the café team immediately made him feel comfortable, there was no judgement. Simon enjoyed working front of house dealing with customers but was equally happy working with the kitchen team.

A year after joining the café, Simon felt that he was ready to get back to work and was successful in securing a full time kitchen position starting in March 2025. He has not used drugs in the past year. Simon is very appreciative of the support, routine, focus, trust and experience he received from the café, as well as the camaraderie from being fully accepted as part of the team.

"Thanks for all the help, I really appreciate it, you have stood by me from day one Without you at the café I wouldn't be where I am today".

Custody Link Service

HTSI hosts a project in partnership with Police Scotland, placing Link Workers in custody to take referrals from individuals, meeting our criteria, who present their and may or may not be charged with offences but are likely to be released back in to the community. Individuals often present with complex backgrounds, long term trauma and can be using drugs or alcohol as a form of self medication:

Client was referred to the Custody Link Project after being arrested for threatening and abusive behaviour. Client was charged and released with bail conditions.

His Custody Link Worker took the time to build a positive relationship with him and maintained consistent contact with the client. This built up high degree of trust and

respect. Client became confident to speak openly to his link worker about his feelings and how he has struggled since the breakdown of a long term relationship and losing his job.

He explained that he felt he was being misunderstood by professionals because there was an assumption that he didn't need further medical support and this was making it difficult for him to manage. With his consent, his link worker confirmed to other professionals his historic trauma and explained how recent events had triggered these past traumatic experiences, to help them understand why he needed support. This resulted in him being able to access safety and stabilisation work and other support.

Client was also assisted to register with a new GP and referred to Distress Brief Intervention after he discussed completing suicide. An introduction was made to the Homeless nurse who arranged weekly check ins with the client. Client was also referred to two local mental health organisations and a support group.

Over a period of time the link worker liaised with housing and housing support services to help the client with his housing situation. He then progressed to support with regaining employment and building his confidence and self-belief. He has successful in finding employment and no longer requires the support of his link worker.

Refugee Resettlement

In partnership with Highland Council, HTSI has hosted a post to support Refugee Resettlement since December 2023. The post is due to conclude in 2025/26 but has worked closely with a range of organisations and established several work strands, including a project around Afghan women's swimming:

With the help of HighLife Highland (HLH) Leisure and Adult Learning teams, a women's only pool session has been created, with coaches to teach new swimmers too. Unfortunately due to timetabling, the only available slot was late at night after the last bus would be able to return the women home.

From this HLH reached out to HTSI for help and we had a brilliant response to a shoutout we ran, advertising for people who would be happy to pick up women in the Merkinch Community Transport Vehicle and drop them back again after the session. They also take part in the swimming sessions, helping out instructors, troubleshooting problems, and also getting a swim themselves!

By popular demand from the women, we have extended the program into the Summer holidays and now through the winter and into 2025

It has been a collaboration between HLH adult learning team, HLH leisure staff, Merkinch Community Centre and HTSI, but none of it could have happened without the volunteers who have showed up every week to deliver the group to the pool, and over the weeks and months have become friends with the group.

We had a ministerial visit from Maree Todd at the end of the Summer who met the women swimmers and heard about the initiative. She noted that in her work as Sports minister she had found that women of all nationalities benefit form female only sessions, which reflects what we have found too. Although the women's session was create for the Afghan community, it is open to all and is well attended by women of all nationalities. This is a great community resource which has sprung up as a result of the resettlement project, but has led to an integrated activity which benefits Afghans and locals alike.

Thanks To Our Funders for 2024/25:

HTSI would like to thank all our funders who support various aspects of our work, including the distribution of funding to third sector groups in Highland:

- Scottish Government
- NHS Highland
- Highland Alcohol & Drug Partnership
- The Highland Council
- Police Scotland
- Inspiring Scotland, through a partnership with Glasgow CVS
- Paths for All

In addition a number of private citizens, churches, local organisations and businesses also support Café 1668 with donations of items, products and money. The café could not operate without this support and we are incredibly grateful to all, including but not limited to:

- Morisons Construction
- The Co-Op
- Lidl
- Aldi
- Nandos
- Asda
- Morrisons Supermarket
- Fareshare/CFine
- St. Stephen's Church
- Inverness City Centre BID
- Inverness Coffee Roasting Company
- The Walrus and Corkscrew

Third Sector Groups We have Distributed Funding To/Purchased From in 2024/25

- Aban Outdoor
- Acharacle Community Company
- ACI Recovery Services
- Ardgour, Morvern & Strontian Parish Church of Scotland
- Black Isle Cares
- Caithness & Sutherland Women's Aid (CASWA)
- Caithness Voluntary Group
- Calman Trust
- Care and Learning Alliance (CALA)
- Centred
- Connect Assynt Ltd
- Connecting Carers
- Creativity in Care CIC
- Cruse Scotland
 Bereavement Support
- Cycling Without Age
- Directory of Social Change
- Dornoch Firth Group SCIO
- Duthac Centre
- Easter Ross Peninsula Church of Scotland
- Eden Court Highlands
- Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council
- Enable Scotland
- Ewens Room
- Families Outside
- Finding Your Feet
- Flip of the Coin CIC
- For You Training
- Friends of Merkinch Local Nature Reserve

- Gairloch Museum
- Garve Public Hall SCIO
- Glen Urquhart Rural
 Community Association
- Held in our Hearts
- Highland Wellness Collective
- Highland Yoga Collective CIC
- High Life Highland
- Home Start Caithness
- Kilmallie Community
 Fridge and Garden
- Kings Fellowship SCIO
- Kinlochleven Community Trust
- Kyle of Sutherland Hub
- Lochaber Hope
- Lochview Rural Training Centre
- Merkinch Community
 Centre Association
- Merkinch Football Academy
- Merkinch Partnership
- Midlothian Voluntary Action
- Mikeysline
- Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP)
- Nairn River Enterprise
- Nature 4 Health
- New Start Highland
- North Coast Connection
- North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust
- Partnerships for Wellbeing
- Pulteneytown Peoples

Project

- Rag Tag & Textile Ltd
- Reach4Reality
- Roots and Shoots Highland CIC
- Rothiemurchus & Aviemore Church of Scotland
- Scottish Action for Mental
 Health
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival Highland
 - Scottish Mentoring Network
 - Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association
- Social Enterprise Academy
- Spirit Advocacy
- The Clay Studio
- The Place
- The Spectrum Centre
- Thurso Community Café
- TLC Inverness
- University of Stirling
- Upper Achintore
 Regeneration Group
- Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey
- Voluntary Action
 Lochaber
- Voluntary GroupsSutherland
- WASPS

Statement Of Financial Activity

2024/2025:

	Unrestricted Funds 2025	Restricted Funds 2025	Total 2025	Total 2024
Income From:				
Charitable Activities	849,761	1,291,540	2,141,301	2,453,694
Total Income	849,761	1,291,540	2,141,301	2,453,694
Expenditure on:				
Charitable Activities	825,755	1,353,377	2,179,132	2,435,054
Total Expenditure	825,755	1,353,377	2,179,132	2,435,054
Net income / (expenditure)	24,066	(61,837)	(37,831)	18,640
Transfer Between Funds	(807)	807		
Net movement in funds	23,199	(61,030)	(37,831)	18,640
Reconciliation of funds:				
Fund balances at 1st April 2023	256,981	370,411	627,392	608,752
Fund Balances at 31 March 2024	280,180	309,381	589,561	627,392

