HIGHLAND THIRD SECTOR INTERFACE

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ANNUAL REPORT

2026

Message from the Chair

This is my first Annual Report as Chair of HTSI. I would like to start by offering my gratitude to Cath Wright, the previous Chair for delivering great governance and leadership over the previous years.

Soon after my appointment as Chair (and I am assured there is no causal link !?), Mhairi Wylie who had held the Chief Officer position since the inception of HTSI, left to take up her position as Chair of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Congratulations to Mhairi and thanks from the wider voluntary sector in Highland for an amazing 15 years of service- but big boots to fill.

However, I'm delighted that after a very competitive recruitment exercise, we were delighted to appoint Janet Miles who took up post in May 2026.
It is a year that has had significant leadership changes, but not one which has been defined by them. That is where the staff of HTSI deserve extra recognition for continuing to deliver exceptional performance on behalf of the sector and is testament to their professionalism and commitment.

Looking forward, one of the biggest risks but also greatest opportunity for the sector is the Public Service Reform proposed by the Scottish Government..
Scottish Government recognises that the Third Sector provides "the very local, very in-depth and relationship-based support that we aspire to."
However, it also acknowledges that many of the current ways of working by public institutions continue to be a barrier to supporting the sector to thrive.

It is not just about the ability of the Third Sector to deliver best value public services but the recognition that Third Sector organisations and those connected with them are the beating hearts of our communities and are key to a healthier and happier Scotland.

So in conclusion I would like to thank all those connected with HTSI for helping us to provide the support to a sector that has weathered significant challenges over the last year but I look forward with optimism to a future where the sector will be a more significant player in making Highland an even better place to live.



Kenny Steele
HTSI Chair

Chief Officer Overview

This annual report represents the activities undertaken by HTSI for the financial year April 2025 – March 2026. During this period Mhairi Wylie led the organisation as Chief Officer, before I took up the role in May 2026. I would like to note my thanks to Mhairi for all she achieved for HTSI during her 13 years at the helm.

During the year HTSI has continued to invest in growing the capacity of the Third Sector with a specific focus on supporting good governance and effective volunteering.
The establishment of a new Volunteer Academy represented significant and much needed investment in volunteering infrastructure across Highland.
A digital resource library, comprehensive training programme and peer support forums form the backbone of this work alongside the opportunity to pilot new ideas in volunteer management and support.

As well as building the capacity of the third sector, HTSI is committed to raising its profile and amplifying its voice. Throughout the year we have done this through celebrating best practice and successes, responding to public consultations, hosting forums and events and representing the sector in a range of settings.

In addition to these core TSI activities, HTSI continued to directly deliver a number of frontline services such as Café 1668 in Inverness has been run by HTSI since 2020. The 2025-26 period saw a welcome increase in paying customers at the café which in turn enabled the café to provide more people with free meals and products from its food larder. Since 2020 the cafe has grown in scale and popularity and is now ready to become an independent charity in its own right.

Preparations for this transition have been ongoing throughout the year and whilst we will be sad to say goodbye to Café 1668 and its fantastic team, we are proud to send it on this next step in its journey to maturity.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to the work of HTSI in 2025/26. The amazing staff team, dedicated Delivery Partners across the region, our volunteer Board of Directors, volunteer representatives and our members who make it all possible.



Janet Miles
HTSI 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 31/3/26

HIGHLAND THIRD SECTOR INTERFACE

Organisations worked with: **545**

Member organisations: **492**

Grant Funding distributed: **£1,267,404**

48 Organisations Funded

83 People supported into volunteering

VIOs* supported in their role working with Volunteers:

334

*Volunteer Involving Organisation

Number of volunteering opportunities posted on our wesbite:

96

226 Member Jobs Advertised

182 Forum Attendees

14 Forums Held





6895 Free meals & **8085** Hot drinks

Served at Cafe 1668.

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

170

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

11 Highland Third Sector Annual Awards

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

19 Saltire Summit Awards

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

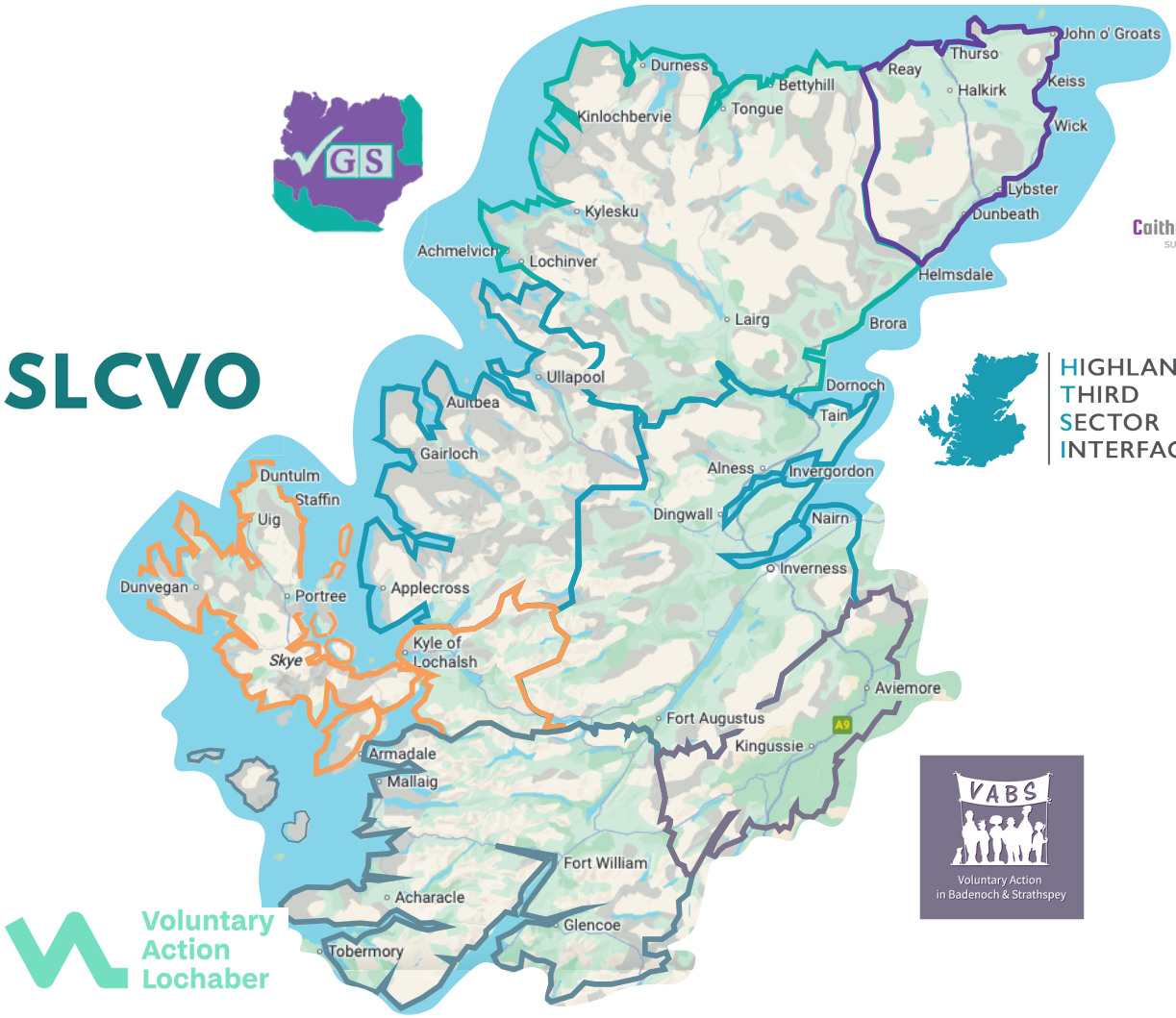
Highland TSI Services:

HIGHLAND THIRD SECTOR INTERFACE

Highland TSI provides free and low-cost support to help community groups and third sector organisations start, develop, and sustain their work across the Highlands.
Our support is:

- Free at the point of access for core services
- Proportionate to need and capacity
- Designed to build long-term resilience, not dependency
- Delivered as a “critical friend” — supportive, constructive, and independent

This support is provided to organisations within the Inner Moray Firth and Wester Ross. Outside of these areas, support is provided by our 5 partner organisations based across Highland as shown in the map below:



Highland TSI Services Impact :

Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Badenoch and Strathspey. This is a case study example of their work through 2025/26.

VABS has provided sustained development support to Laggan Community Development Trust (LCDT) from the earliest discussions about its creation through to its current work as an emerging community anchor organisation. The year of 2025-6 was pivotal for the formation of LCDT and has provided the foundation for important, emerging community development activity. VABS' support has combined organisational development and governance with community engagement, partnership-building and strategic planning.

Background on Laggan Community

The village of Laggan lies at the heart of the Parish of Laggan on the upper reaches of the River Spey, It is located in the south west of the Cairngorms National Park and falls within the Highland Council local authority area. It has a population of just over 320 people, living in approximately 100 households. These households are spread across multiple small hamlets including Laggan Bridge, Kinloch Laggan, Balgowan and Strathmashie.

Over the years Laggan has always been a very active and engaged community, delivering a substantial community benefit for its residents through a considerable number of activities and initiatives. This is clearly demonstrated through the existence of a successful community broadband scheme, 6 community-owned houses, its fine village hall, the community forestry trust, a well-equipped children's play park, accessible paths and trails, numerous interpretation boards, regular community newsletter and socially-supporting helping hands scheme.

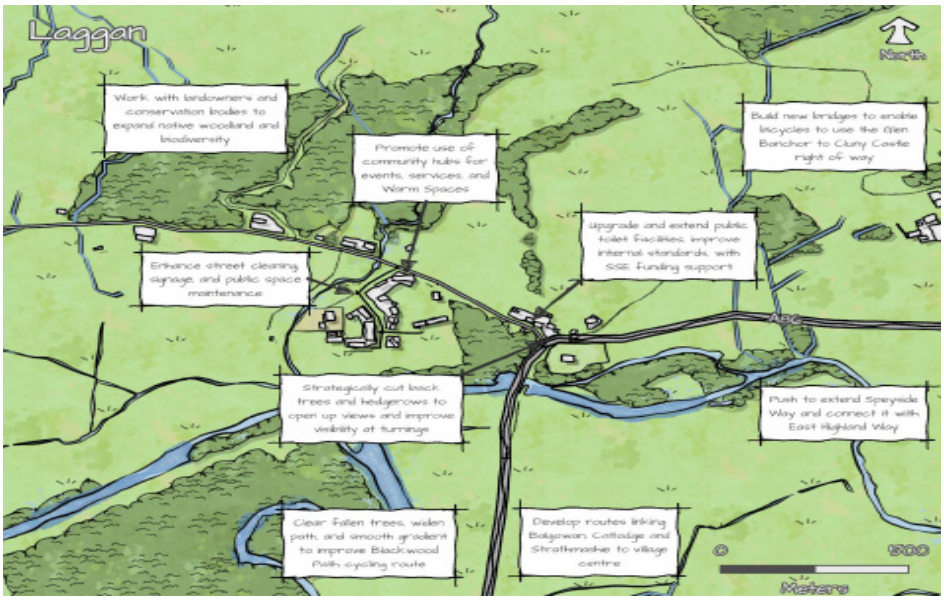
There are a considerable number of community organisations/groups which work for the benefit of the community and are almost entirely run by volunteers. These include:

- Laggan Community Council
- Laggan Village Hall
- Laggan Forest Trust
- Laggan Community Housing Ltd
- Laggan Heritage
- Laggan Church Partnership
- Laggan Matters (newsletter)
- Laggan Helping Hands

Gergask Primary School which serves the whole of Laggan community, has recently closed its doors and been mothballed by Highland Council until further notice and the Church of Scotland has also sought.

Community Assets

- Village Hall
- Community Housing
- Wolftrax Centre and café
- Picnic Site
- Play Park
- War Memorial
- Public Toilets
- Interpretation Panels



Gap and need for Development Trust

Through 2022 Community Action Planning development, facilitated by VABS, key challenges around capacity, coordination and future potential community asset acquisition projects arose:

- Need for appropriate organisation for community asset acquisitions/management - particularly with the closing of Gergask School and the parish church. Laggan has no community organisations with appropriate purposes or powers to take on community assets through Community Asset Transfer (CAT) or Community Right to Buy (CRtB).

- Capacity and administrative burden of existing and new projects and groups - it was also noted that given the number of smaller initiatives and groups in Laggan, a Development Trust could house some of these projects, reducing administrative and capacity burden across the community by reducing the number of boards and constituted organisations, as well as facilitating new projects more easily.

- Use and potential distribution of community benefit funding – multiple energy projects had been established or were in the pipeline. Laggan has a funding panel for SSE funding from Stronelairg windfarm, distributing £80k annually, and there is a large hydro scheme at Loch Earba as well as SSEN Transmission funding for the Melgarve Cluster in the pipeline. Laggan community recognised the need for an organisation that could take on community projects to make best use of the funding available.

Initial discussions about charity setup (2024-5)

Representatives of Laggan Community Council began initial discussions about establishing a new Development Trust as a SCIO with VABS in November 2024.

The purpose was both to create a vehicle capable of delivering community projects and to ensure Laggan had an appropriate legal structure through which future community benefit funding could potentially be received and managed. At that point, discussions included existing benefit from Stronelairg Wind Farm and anticipated benefit associated with proposed major energy infrastructure.

Highland TSI Services Impact :

Support from VABS for LCDT 2025-6
Charity setup and governance support (April – Dec 2025)
This initial work developed into practical support to establish the new Trust in April 2025. VABS staff drafted and supported the redrafting of a SCIO constitution and supported the formation of an interim board and OSCR application. VABS also supported a lot of capacity, confidence and knowledge-building work with the interim board as this was identified as a key area for improvement. The organisation subsequently achieved charitable SCIO status on 5 December 2025.
September 2025 reporting records that it had VABS identified the Trust as an important mechanism through which the community could take forward more ambitious community-led projects

Collaboration (Dec 2025 -)
VABS' involvement continued well beyond establishment. In late 2025 and early 2026, VABS was asked to support the developing relationship between LCDT and Laggan Community Council, particularly around their respective roles and future community benefit arrangements. A Memorandum of Understanding was developed and subsequently worked through with VABS. By April, VABS had amended the MoU following discussions with LCDT. The emerging document clarified a broad role for the Trust including developing and delivering community projects, acting as an incubator for projects, fundraising and grant support, holding and distributing funds, supporting delivery of the Laggan Community Action Plan and supporting other community organisations.

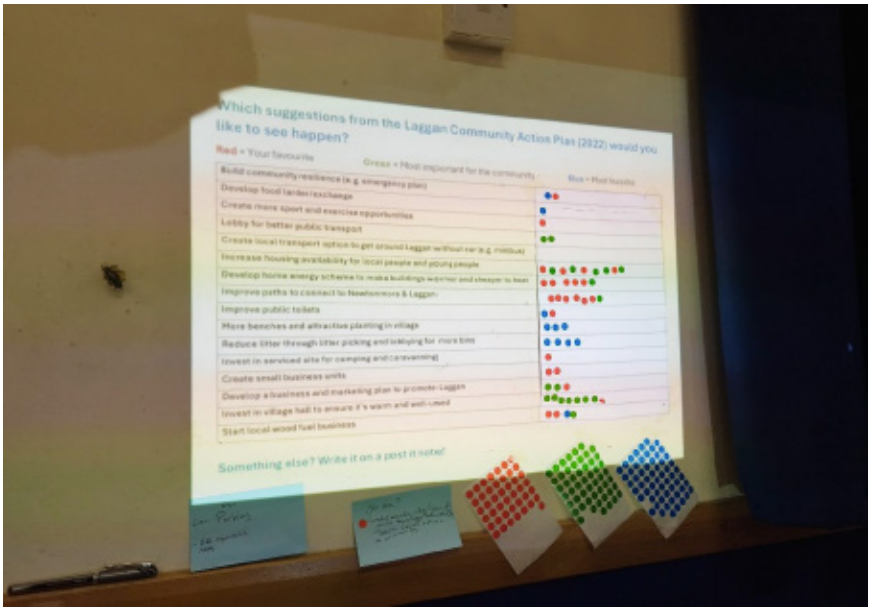
Peer learning and connection (Jan 2026 -)
A particularly important strand of support has been helping the new trustees learn from established community development organisations rather than developing the organisation in isolation. In February 2026, VABS introduced LCDT trustee to Carrbridge Ahead, an established local development company, so that the new Trust could learn directly about the realities of operating a development trust, including governance, finance and project management.

That peer-learning approach was expanded further as VABS approached established development organisations outwith Badenoch and Strathspey about arranging a community learning exchange for LCDT, recognising that Laggan was likely to receive significant community benefit and could benefit from the experience of organisations operating in comparable circumstances. This resulted in Strathdearn Community Developments offering a visit involving its hub/shop/café, community woodland, housing, play parks and paths, followed by discussion with experienced local representatives.

Strategic planning and initial projects (March 2026 -)
VABS also supported LCDT to establish a visible relationship with the wider Laggan community. At the Trust's launch on 20 March 2026, VABS contributed to the event and helped communicate the role of development trusts. Importantly, the event was also used as an opportunity to reconnect the new Trust with priorities already identified through the Laggan Community Action Plan. VABS facilitated an engagement exercise where residents considered existing CAP actions and voted on those they regarded as their favourite, most important and most feasible. The exercise generated substantial discussion and helped stimulate further Team Laggan activity. VABS' subsequent reporting records that this process had resparked conversations around the CAP and generated plans for further community planning discussions into 2026/7 year.

Strategic planning and initial projects (March 2026 -) (cont. from previous page)
During 2026, support increasingly moved from organisational establishment towards helping LCDT turn community priorities into deliverable activity. One tangible example is community growing. VABS' support for Laggan Community Council and LCDT to secure private land for allotments and community growing, demonstrating how the newer Trust structure was beginning to connect with practical community projects.

At the same time, VABS continued using the Community Action Plan as a mechanism for strengthening collaboration The community recognises that circumstances in Laggan had changed significantly since the earlier Community Action Plan, including changes associated with community benefit and major infrastructure development, and identified a new CAP for Laggan as a potential next stage in 2026/7.



Overall impact
The relationship therefore represents more than support to establish a new charity. From 2024 onwards, VABS has helped Laggan:

- explore and establish an appropriate community development structure;
- connect the emerging organisation with statutory partners and advice;
- develop governance arrangements and clarify relationships with Laggan Community Council;
- connect trustees with established Development Trusts for peer learning;
- engage the wider community through the LCDT launch and Community Action Plan exercise;
- reconnect the new organisation with priorities identified through the existing CAP;
- support practical collaborative activity, including allotments and community growing;
- consider how future community benefit can translate into increased community delivery capacity; and
- begin developing a longer-term approach encompassing governance, organisational capacity, community engagement and a refreshed Community Action Plan.

The value of VABS' involvement has been continuity. Rather than providing a single intervention to create LCDT and then stepping back, VABS has remained alongside the organisation as its needs have evolved from formation and governance, to relationships and community engagement, and increasingly towards strategic planning and delivery. This provides LCDT with locally based support

Highland TSI Services Impact :

Voluntary Action Lochaber are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Lochaber. This is a case study example of their work through 2025/26.

Case Study: Cow Hill Hall - Space for All

An intensive 12-month engagement campaign was co-designed and co-delivered to promote and progress ambitions for a community hall for the 3000 residents of Upper Achintore and the Plantation, where there is no community facility.

Launched with a Geo Treasure Hunt at the Lundavra Primary school summer fayre, a varied programme of activities ran alongside a digital campaign, with opportunities for connection, learning and progression into volunteering and/or leadership: International Food Event, Guided Walks, Litter Picks, Art Competition & Exhibition, History of Cow Hill Talk,

The range of activities helped reach a broad demographic including underrepresented groups while also establishing pathways into leadership for those interested in being trustees of a new incorporated organisation suitable for a community asset transfer.

A multilingual website and social media campaign (using the 6 most common first languages at Lundavra Primary School languages) helped maximise accessibility and reach, generating over 6,000 views and strong interaction.

Digital outreach was supplemented with a volunteer door-to-door campaign and a hybrid resident survey to promote ambitions and gather feedback.

Suitable trustees emerged and with support & training the Cow Hill Hall SCIO was formalised and registered March 2026.



Highland TSI Services Impact :

Caithness Voluntary Group are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Caithness. This is a case study example of their work through 2025/26.

The Laidhay Preservation Trust is a charity that has been in operation since 1971, with the sole purpose of running and a crofting museum, with a thatched roofed long house and barn as well as a cart shed and other out buildings.

After the co-founder and long-term caretaker of the charity sadly passed away in 2022, there was little drive or enthusiasm locally to keep the museum open. Several management committees came and went, but internal squabbling meant that the museum and charity was completely dysfunctional.

In early 2024 the remaining trustees asked CVG to step in to try save Laidhay, as the remaining trustees wanted to resign. We worked with the charity for 6 months trying to stablise their finances and trying to find a new organisation to take on the museum, with the intention of winding up the charity and absorbing the assets into an existing local SCIO. We tried first the local Heritage Trust and then the local development Trust but neither ultimately were interested in taking over the museum.

By this time the Trustees had had enough and wanted to walk away so a MoU was drawn up and we took over the running of the charity in November 2024 and formed an interim board of Trustees. We set about the process of attracting Trustees from across Scotland with an interest in heritage buildings and traditional crofting and formed a new SCIO in July 2025.

In the meantime, we found a tenant for the museum's tearoom which is a popular stop on the busy NC500 route, as this would help with income for the charity, but closed the museum itself until the new SCIO could take over. We secured funding to pay for the legal costs for the transfer of the assets to the new SCIO once the existing charity was ready to wind up. Getting access to the bank account throughout the process proved extremely difficult, so CVG had to pay all bills until we were able to access the charities funds and then invoice the charity for reimbursement.

The thatched roof barn had been badly damaged in a storm a few years before CVg took over the charity, but it had been massively under insured so although it would cost over £100,000 to repair the historically significant grade A listed building, they had only received £20,000 worth of insurance money. CVG entered into a deal with Scottish Heritage Buildings Trust to manage the repair and restoration of the barn, and the £20,000 was transferred to them. They have since secured all of the funding required for the restoration and archaeologists have started the dismantling and cataloguing of the roof structure in August 2026.

Dealing with Laidhay has been fraught with problems, including damage to the longhouse thatched roof over the 2025/2026 winter and then issues trying to get the insurance to pay out for the repair; difficulty in the new SCIO obtaining a bank account; unable to find the title deeds for the property etc., but I am pleased to say that we have now finally had approval from OSCR to wind up Laidhay Preservation Trust and our solicitors are in the process of locating the title deeds to allow the transfer of all property to the new Lappan & Laidhay Trust SCIO, but this has taken over 2 years to get to this stage.

Highland TSI Services Impact:

Voluntary Group Sutherland are our TSI partner providing support to organisations across Sutherland. This is a case study example of their work through 2025/26.

Bettyhill Village Hall is a vital community asset located in the rural village of Bettyhill, in the north of Sutherland. The hall provides an essential space for social, cultural and community activities, helping to reduce isolation and sustain community life in a remote area. However, the building required significant refurbishment to remain fit for purpose and continue meeting the evolving needs of local residents. In order to secure funding for these much-needed improvements, the hall's management committee needed to ensure that the organisation had an appropriate legal structure and governance arrangements in place.

This work supported the volunteer committee of Bettyhill Village Hall, all of whom give their time to manage and sustain an important local facility. Indirectly, it benefits the wider Bettyhill community, including individuals and groups who rely on the hall for meetings, events, services and social connection. Many of the committee members had limited prior experience of charity law, property ownership, or organisational restructuring, making the process both complex and daunting.

VGS provided intensive, step-by-step support to the committee to help them navigate a complicated and unfamiliar process. Initially, VGS assisted the group to establish whether they were the recognised owners of the property, a fundamental requirement for progressing any redevelopment plans. As a registered charity, the committee then needed to scrutinise their existing constitution to understand their powers and limitations. This revealed that the constitution did not allow for the transfer of property to another organisation.

VGS advised that, in line with OSCR guidance, the most appropriate route forward was to apply to become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). Once this was achieved the committee then had to request a formal "reorganisation" of the original charity, enabling it to wind up and transfer its assets to the newly formed SCIO. Throughout this process, VGS supported the committee in preparing documentation, understanding OSCR requirements, and maintaining momentum during what became a lengthy and challenging journey.

During the reorganisation process, governance issues were identified, including accounting practices that did not meet required standards. VGS provided guidance and practical assistance to help the committee resolve these issues, strengthening their governance and compliance. Once OSCR approval was granted to proceed with the wind-up and transfer, VGS also advised the committee on the need for legal support and successfully signposted them to a solicitor willing to provide pro-bono assistance with the transfer of the property title.

Before VGS involvement, the committee lacked clarity around property ownership, legal structures, and regulatory requirements. The scale and complexity of the process risked stalling the refurbishment plans entirely and could have undermined volunteer confidence. Through sustained support, the committee gained the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to make informed decisions, resolve governance challenges, and engage constructively with OSCR and legal professionals.

As a result of this intervention, Bettyhill Village Hall is now incorporated as a SCIO, with robust governance and a clear legal framework that enables it to access funding for refurbishment. The committee is better equipped to manage the hall sustainably and take on future community projects with confidence. Crucially, this work has preserved an essential community asset and strengthened local capacity, ensuring that the hall can continue to provide an appropriate, welcoming space that meets the needs of the Bettyhill community both now and into the future.

Highland TSI Services Impact:

SLCVO

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 2025/26.

Background
In October 2025, SLCVO facilitated a Reduce, Reuse and Recycle event at Kyleakin Community Hall, bringing together community groups, social enterprises, environmental organisations, public sector representatives and local residents. The event showcased a wide range of local activity, from food redistribution and beach cleans to repair, reuse and recycling projects. And discussions highlighted that many organisations were working towards similar goals but often in isolation. Participants agreed to explore options for more collaborative work.

SLCVO's Role
Following the event, SLCVO acted as a neutral convener, facilitating discussions and supporting partners to explore shared priorities. Over the following eight months, this work led to the formation of the Skye and Raasay Reduce, Reuse and Recycle (RRR) Collaboration in early 2026.

SLCVO coordinated meetings, encouraged knowledge sharing and helped create the conditions for organisations to work together effectively, reflecting its commitment to community-led development, sustainability and partnership working.

The collaboration provides a platform for sharing information, coordinating activity, exploring funding opportunities and collectively advocating for rural and island communities, delivering several benefits:

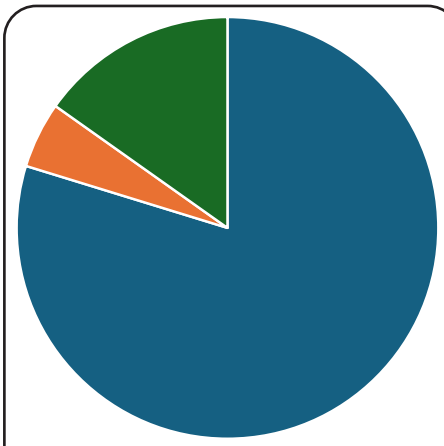
- Stronger partnerships through regular communication and joint working.
- Shared priorities and vision, reducing duplication and strengthening collective influence.
- Greater awareness of local reuse, repair and recycling services.
- Foundations for future projects, including collaborative funding bids and community initiatives.
- Alignment with national priorities, including Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy and Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024.

What began as a one-off networking event has developed into an active partnership supporting environmental sustainability and community resilience.
Supported through HTSI Third Sector Support Funding, SLCVO continues to provide coordination and development support. Future priorities include developing joint funding opportunities, expanding reuse and repair activity, raising public awareness, and strengthening rural and island representation in policy discussions.

Impact Summary
The Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Collaboration demonstrates how effective facilitation can turn networking into meaningful action. By bringing organisations together around a shared purpose, SLCVO has helped create a sustainable partnership that is strengthening local networks, encouraging collaboration and supporting a more circular and resilient future for communities across Skye, Raasay and Lochalsh.

Impact from other Activity:

Membership and Policy Team



79 new members

Full Members: 63

Partners: 12

Associates: 4

5 **Scottish Government Consultations Responded to:**

Net Zero Community Benefits
Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill
SCIO - Dissolution Regulation Amendments
Community Right to Buy - Review
Procurement Reform

Webinars & Events:

Green Freeport Information
Green Energy Transition
'Working Together: Building Partnerships for Social Impact'
Annual Assembly
Hustings

Social Media:

4265 Facebook Followers

955 LinkedIn Followers

Case Study

During the year, we identified a gap in our work around poverty and its impact on communities across Highland. In response, we ran a series of focus groups with third sector organisations, using the findings to produce a report titled Poverty in Highland: Experience of the Third Sector. This work was particularly timely, as HTSI had recently taken on responsibility for running the Highland Poverty Action Network, and the report helped to support and inform that wider area of work. This step into the Poverty sphere has created new connections with Poverty organisations across Scotland and our most recent forum had over 25 people attend. The recent publication of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission report will likely shape the direction of this work in the coming year.

Volunteer Academy



During 2025–2026, the Highland Volunteer Academy made progress in strengthening volunteering infrastructure across Highland, which supported the shift towards a more modern, flexible, hybrid approach.

This included the establishment of a small staff team (1 F/T Team Leader, 1 F/T Digital Officer & 2 P/T Engagement Officers), new website, digital resource library, training programme and local Volunteer Manager Forums which have increased access to practical support for Volunteer Involving Organisations and volunteers. There are also quarterly Bulletins, training, monthly updates and a noticeboard, alongside our volunteer opportunities page.

Key milestones, include the pilot of the Skills Bank, development of the Fellowship Programme and Lecture series, formation of the Volunteer Council, and progression of youth, intergenerational and Employer Supported Volunteering pathways. This has created new routes for individuals, organisations and employers to contribute skills, time and learning to volunteering. Recognition events such as the Saltire Summit Awards, The Outstanding Volunteer lunch day, Volunteers week Charity Fashion Show and Sutherland Celebration Day helped raise the profile, understanding and value of volunteering across communities, which we shared widely both in local press and our media channels.

Challenges have included changing volunteering patterns as a consequence of the pandemic to cost of living issues, volunteer commitment levels, depopulation & logistics in rural areas, third sector financial pressures, digital integration and as expected, covering engagement across a large rural geography. Despite these pressures, the Academy has built strong connections, widened participation opportunities and generated learning that will support more inclusive, responsive and sustainable volunteering impact in 2026–2027.

Case Study: Growing Employer Supported Volunteering with Go Flourish



In 2025, the Volunteer Academy met with Go Flourish to explore their volunteer management needs and consider whether Employer Supported Volunteering could help them build capacity for their school garden projects. Through discussion, it became clear that practical, skilled support from local businesses could make a meaningful difference to the charity's work with children, schools and communities.

The Volunteer Academy carried out an introduction and brokerage between Go Flourish and Morrison Construction, resulting in the charity's first corporate volunteer day. Staff from Morrison Construction supported the Go Flourish Garden at North Kessock Primary School, helping with a range of hands-on tasks including moving compost and woodchip, weeding, planting and preparing the garden space. The success of the day demonstrated how employer supported volunteering can offer immediate, practical help while also strengthening relationships between the third and private sectors.

Go Flourish later shared this positive story with Inverness Chamber of Commerce, helping to promote the value of corporate volunteering more widely. Later in the year, they also developed links with Balfour Beatty, who indicated they would support groundworks once the Dalneigh project was ready to begin the following year. This case study highlights the Volunteer Academy's role as a connector: supporting volunteer-involving organisations to identify their needs, engage employers and create opportunities that deliver lasting community benefit.

Impact from other Activity:

Funding

We delivered two brand new grant programmes for TSOs this year. In April 2025, we opened a new funding programme on behalf of **The Highland Council Community Regeneration team**, for CLLD - Community-led Local Development in rural areas (in partnership with Highlands & Islands Climate Hub) and we distributed **£266,314** in 35 grant awards.

Also in April 2025, we opened a new funding programme on behalf of **NHS Highland** for third sector organisations to enhance services for Community Link Worker referrals in remote and rural areas. We paid **£66,537** in eight grants.

In July 2025, we began managing four separate strands of the **Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund (CMHWF)**, to target capacity and encourage collaboration:

- **Micro Grants** up to £10,000 for one year
- **Small Grants** up to £20,000 per year for two years
- **Collaborative Grants** up to £50,000 per year for a two-year partnership approach
- **Intensive Capacity Building** £20,000 grants targeted at testing change for one year.

In November 2025, the Scottish Government allocated additional investment, which enabled us to allocate 10 more grants, helping us meet overwhelming demand. Thus, **£851,520** was distributed for Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing in 2025/26. This excludes the second year's instalment of two-year grants.

CMHWF Grants	Amount	%	Paid	Years
Micro Grants	£100,000	12%	Sep 2025	One
Small Grants	£176,575	20%	Sep 2025	Two
Collaborative Grants	£350,570	42%	Feb 2026	Two
Intensive Capacity Grants	£70,883	8%	Jan 2026	One
Added Investment	£153,492	18%	Feb 2026	One

In October, we launched a new grant programme for the Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership, awarding £83,033 in January for nine Local Improvement Fund projects.

We delivered two training sessions on Engagement, Evaluation & Funding, which provide guidance on the importance of engaging your community, defining the right outcomes and measuring success, as well as translating results for multiple audiences, ie. funders, directors, participants.

Case Study

This was the first time we have had the opportunity to allocate two-year grant awards from the CMHW Fund. The small grant programme for two-year grants was heavily oversubscribed, which meant declining a number of strong applications. When we received the additional investment in November, which was only for one year, we invited applicants to resubmit one-year proposals.

The single-year grant programmes were similar to the process in previous years, but the two-year grant programmes had to be amended to ensure the funding arrangements and reporting process were fit for purpose. We repeated the same process as the previous year for the Collaborative Grants with an expression of interest, followed by an in-person funding panel. This was hugely successful and helps build better relationships with grantees.

The intensive capacity building was targeted at four themes this year, related to evidence of need and reduced capacity. The grants awarded covered themes of digital isolation, adults awaiting ADHD assessment, and recovery and wellbeing activities for veterans.

Impact from other Activity:

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:

Revised Highland Community Justice Partnership (HCJP) structures were fully embedded during 2025 – 2026. Updated Terms of Reference were agreed, underpinning the creation of the two Delivery Groups which support the Strategic Group in delivering better justice outcomes across Highland.

Improved planning has reinforced the HCJP's ability to identify areas for development, particularly in the context of progress towards achieving national outcomes. For the first time the HCJP undertook a self-evaluation exercise which was helpful in identifying delivery priorities for 2026 - 2027.

In Highland there are good connections across a range or partnerships, with a number of partners represented in different strategic and operational bodies. Of particular note is the positive relationship with the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP) with whom the HCJP has a number of shared priorities.

Across Scotland, CJPs are generally hosted within Justice Social Work or Community Planning structures, uniquely in Highland the HCJP is hosted by the HTSI. These arrangements have been in place since the inception of the HCJP, and are proven to work well, especially in ensuring strong relationships with Third Sector partners, who contribute positively to Justice provision.

Case Study

It had been agreed by the HCJP that as part of the remit of the Senior Development Officer, time would be given to explore potential options for delivering Restorative Justice (RJ) in Highland, believing that this could bring benefit to those who had been harmed by crime, as well as those who had caused harm.

A working group was formed, bringing together interested partners. To raise awareness and gather momentum, the HCJP hosted an RJ event in September 2025 in partnership with the University of the Highlands and Islands. The 100 places were snapped up by all the right people, including representatives from victims organisations, justice social work, the prison, the courts, the police, solicitors and a range of third sector organisations. The successful event generated really positive feedback and many follow-up conversations. The centrepiece was a specially commissioned drama presentation by the excellent GEESE Theatre Company, who skilfully brought RJ processes to life through their powerful stage presence and artistry, while also engaging the audience in relevant break out group discussions.



The event was followed up by training for potential RJ practitioners, and planning has continued towards the development of a delivery model for RJ across Highland.

Café 1668

Café 1668 has continued to grow over the year, this includes an increase in paying customers which provides valuable financial support, and a steady increase in the number of people using the services of the café for free meals and food larder items. Many customers access support services which regularly used the café space as a safe and familiar environment.

The café team has undergone some changes over the past year, this has been challenging given that the team is so small, but the volunteering opportunities and the dedication of those who donate their time has ensured that the service has remained mostly unaffected. The reputation of Café 1668 is increasing, with many organisations referring their clients to the Café to access the support provided.

Case Study

Jane is in active addiction, lives in poverty in a one bedroom flat with her brother and father. Jane is in an abusive relationship with both her brother and her father for whom she provides care. As well as the problems associated with addiction, Jane has severe health issues, and very often has suicidal thoughts. Jane often talks about Cafe 1668 as a lifeline, and frequently says that it has saved her life. She comes to the cafe 3 times a week, meets with friends and socialises, she enjoys the banter, the coffees and free meals and accesses the community larder.

As part of the relationship the cafe has with other visiting services Jane is also now able to access 1:1 medical care, and as a result of this, Jane has been admitted to hospital directly from the cafe on 3 occasions. Jane's absence from the café is noticed by the team and welfare checks can be made if necessary.

Impact from other Activity:

Custody Link Project

The Highland Custody Link Project is an innovative partnership between Police Scotland, Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) and the Highland Community Justice Partnership. Contact is made with individuals at the point in their lives when they may be facing uncertainty or anxiety, having been in Police custody. Rapport is built and an assertive and supportive approach is offered at a pace that is realistic and tailored to the person.

Using a wide range of contacts with services and community groups across Highland, the three Link Workers offer support to help individuals to identify actions, access support and assistance to reduce the risks of offending, enhance their quality of life and improve their life chances. This is done in an asset-based and flexible way. The project focuses on assisting someone to access existing services with trained professionals from across the public, private and third sectors, as well as access community groups of interest.

The project approach has been recognised by Police Scotland as a model for arrest referral interventions across Scotland. It continues to deliver reductions of instances of arrest and has helped to make a difference in individual lives as well as helping to build capacity and links between services in Highland.

Active cases from 24/25	78
New referrals from Police custody	144
Self referred back into contact	10
Cases successfully concluded	91
Unable to contact	51
Held in prison/on remand	10
Total caseload managed	221

Thanks to our Funders in 2025/26

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:

- Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership
- Highland Council
- NHS Highland
- Scottish Government
- Stirlingshire Voluntary Enterprise

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:

- Ark Estates
- Co-op
- Howden Joinery
- Morrison Construction
- Nandos
- RCCG Jesus House
- Sainsbury's
- The Wood Foundation
- Urquhart & Glenmoriston Church of Scotland

Statement Of Financial Activity 2025/2026:

	Unrestricted Funds 2026 £	Restricted Funds 2026 £	Total 2026 £	Total 2025 £
Income From:				
Charitable Activities	800,491	1,638,093	2,438,584	2,141,301
Investments	86	-	86	-
Total income	800,577	1,638,093	2,438,670	2,141,301
Expenditure on:				
Charitable activities	745,702	1,846,791	2,592,493	2,179,132
Total expenditure	745,702	1,846,791	2,592,493	2,179,132
Net income/ (expenditure)	54,875	(208,698)	(153,823)	(37,831)
Transfers between funds	(46,555)	46,555	-	-
Net movement in funds	8,320	(162,143)	(153,823)	(37,831)
Reconciliation of funds:				
Fund balances at 1 April 2025	280,180	309,381	589,561	627,392
Fund balances at 31 March 2026	288,500	147,238	435,738	589,561

Third Sector Groups we have Distributed Funding To/Purchased From in 2025/26

Able 2 Adventure
Abriachan Forest Trust
Acharacle Community Company
Addictions Counselling Inverness
Albyn Housing Society
Apex Scotland
Arisaig Community Trust
Association of Charity Independent Examiners
Assynt Leisure
Aultbea Hall SCIO
Badenoch Shinty Memories Group
Barbaraville Improvement Group
Befrienders Highland
Blooming Gardeners SCIO
Black Isle Cares
Caithness & Sutherland Womens Aid
Caithness Voluntary Group
Calman Trust
Caol Regeneration Company Limited
Care Lochaber
Cawdor Community Centre Association
Centred
Cfine
Compass Collective
Counselling Care Skye and Lochalsh
Creativity in Care
Cromarty Community Development Trust
Cruse Scotland
Dingwall Community Centre
Dunvegan Community Trust
Engaging with Activity
Evaluation Support Scotland
Feis Rois
Finding Your Feet
For You Training
Garve Public Hall SCIO
Generations Working Together
Go Golspie Development Trust
Gordon Memorial Hall Management Committee
Highland Mindfulness Group
Highland Wellness Collective
Highland Yoga Collective CIC
High Life Highland
Inspiring Young Voices
Inverness Foodstuff
Inverness Openarts
Inverness Womens Aid
Kinlochleven Community Trust
Lairg and District Learning Centre
LEAP Sports Scotland
Linnhe Leisure
Lochaber Hope
Lochview Rural Training
Lucky2BHere SCIO
MECOPP
Mhor Outdoor
Mikeysline
Milton Community Woodland Trust
Morning Call
Morvern Community Woodlands
Nether Lochaber Community Association
New Start Highland
North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust
Partnerships for Wellbeing
Portree and Braes Community Trust
Raasay Community Association
Rag Tag and Textile Ltd
Reach4Reality
Red Chair Highland
Relationships Scotland - Counselling Highland
Roots and Shoots Highland CIC
Ross-shire Womens Aid
Safe Strong and Free
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
Scottish Drugs Forum
Scottish Mentoring Network
Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations
Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association
Smithton Church
Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Scotland
Stromeferry and Achmore Community Council
Tain Gala Association
The Dornoch Area Community Interest Company
The Garve and District Development Company
The Place Youth Club
Thurso Community Café
Thurso Community Development Trust
Tongue Melness and Skerray Community Council
Toybox Children's Centre
UHI Inverness
Urram SCIO
Vector 24 Fares 4 Free
Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey
Voluntary Action Lochaber
Voluntary Groups Sutherland
Wick Community Hub
Wick Development Trust
Youth Highland

The Highland Third Sector Interface is a Scottish Registered Charity, SC043521 and a Scottish Registered Company SC425808