

Highland Community Health and Social Care Working Group: Review of Consultation Findings and Future Opportunities



Together We Care

Review and evaluation of the potential for the establishment of a Highland Community-Led Health and Social Care Network

August 2026



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Commissioned by: Highland Hospice on behalf of the Working Group for the Highland Community-Led Health and Social Care Network

The Highland Community Health and Social Care Network Working Group was established following the Highland Hospice "Together We Care" Conference in November 2025

Need for a stronger collective voice for communities and third sector organisations involved in health and social care.

- Working Group brings together community organisations from across Highland with experience of delivering and supporting local health and social care services.
- Has led extensive consultation with the third and statutory sectors to understand the need, role and structure of a future network.

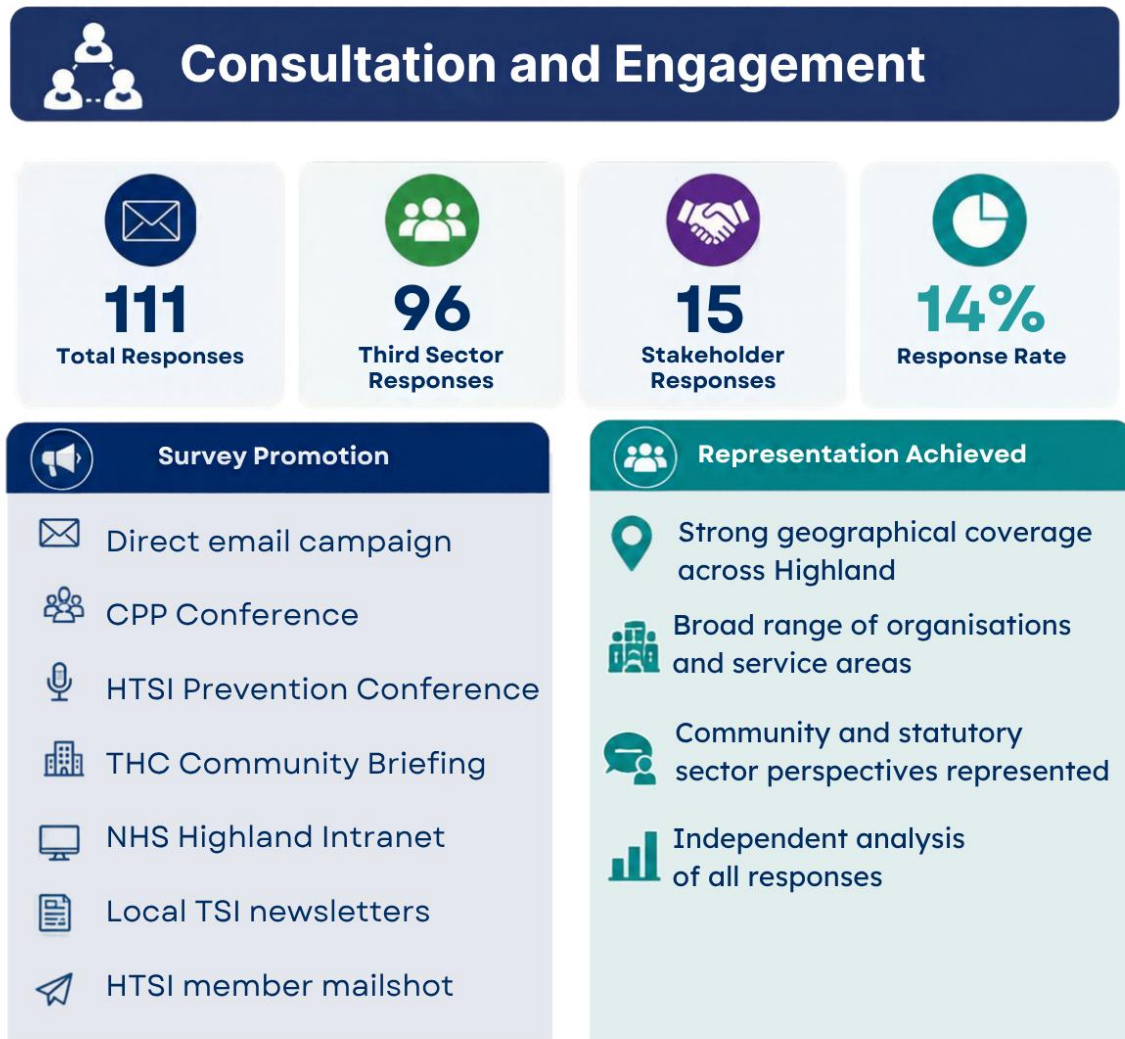


Sutherland and Dunbeath Hubs United Group

Consultation took place between May to July 2026

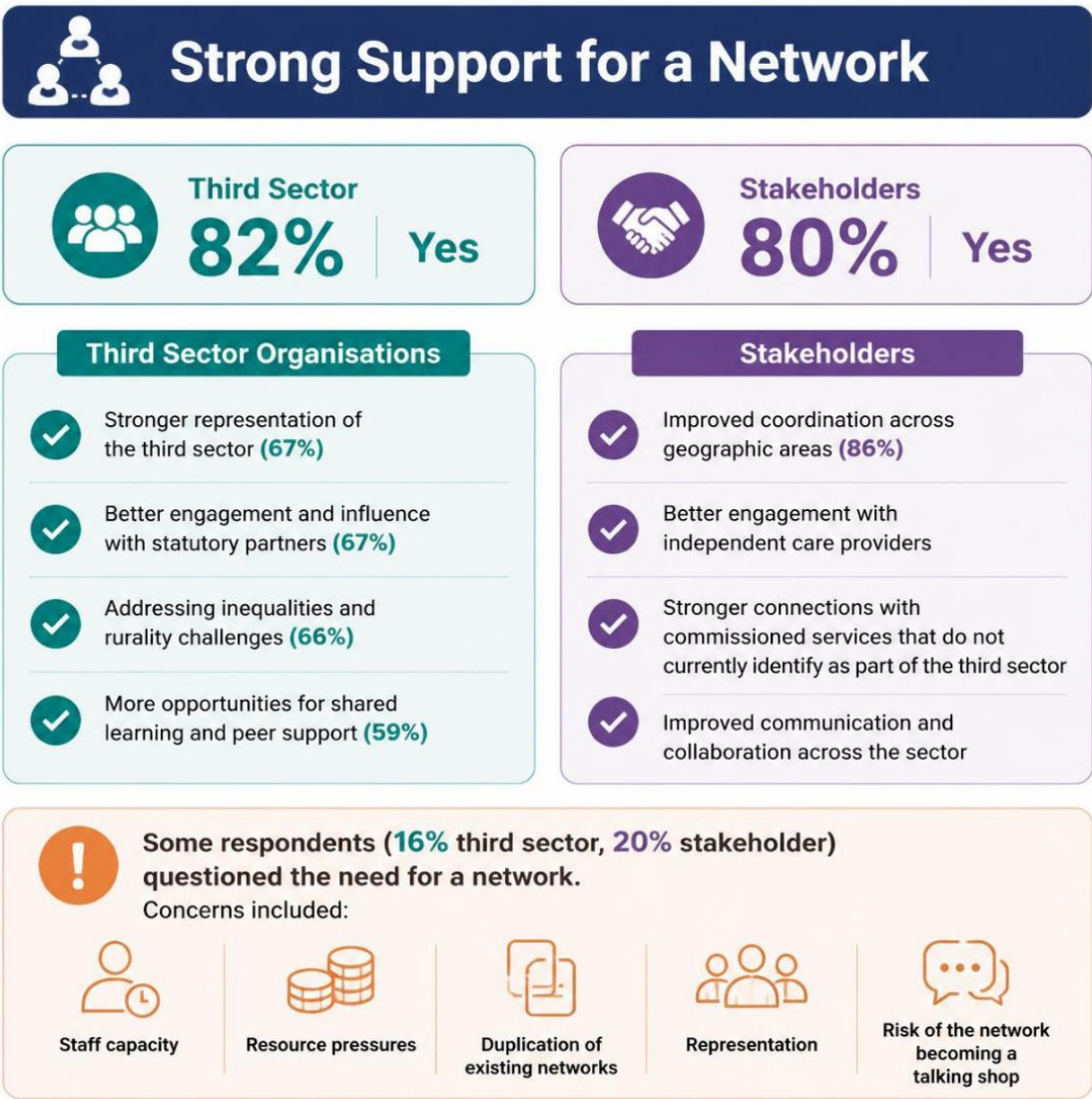
Two surveys were developed and distributed to gather views on the need, purpose, governance and future structure of a Highland Community-Led Health and Social Care Network.

Over 800 contacts were invited, covering third sector organisations, community groups, social enterprises, and public sector partners.



Strong Support for a Highland Community Health & Social Care Network

A successful network would have a strong voice in health and social care planning while remaining flexible, responsive and open to new ideas. It should encourage innovation, support collaboration and help identify and scale approaches that deliver real outcomes for people and communities, rather than creating additional bureaucracy.”



Role of Network

“Ensuring the third sector has a strong, collective voice at regional and national levels, particularly in influencing policy, funding, and strategic decisions.”

“It should strengthen collaboration across the region and ensure that every organisation — whether a charity, SCIO, community group or volunteer-led project — has an equal voice.”



Role of a Highland Network



Third Sector Priorities



Representation and collective voice

67%



Being heard by statutory partners

67%



Tackling inequalities and rurality challenges

66%



Shared learning and peer support

59%



Stakeholder Priorities



Co-design, co-production & co-committing

92%



Strategic engagement & communication

85%



Capacity and sustainability of local services

85%



Collective voice and representation

77%

What the Network Should Be



A strong, representative voice for communities and the third sector.



A trusted link between local insight and strategic decision-making.



A champion for unmet need, emerging issues and local priorities.



A platform for collaboration, partnership and co-production.



A space for peer support, learning and capacity building.



A platform that strengthens third sector resilience.



An inclusive, accessible, accountable network with equal voice.

What the Network Should Not Be

“It is also essential to avoid assuming that the organisation currently administering this questionnaire is automatically the right host or lead body. Delivering a survey does not demonstrate the level of inclusiveness, neutrality or sector-wide trust required to host a Highland-wide network. Any hosting arrangement should be based on clear, transparent criteria and must demonstrate genuine inclusivity across all areas and organisation sizes, including rural and grassroots groups. The host must support the network without dominating it.”

What the Network Should Not Be



✗ Information sharing without action



✗ Dominated by a few voices



✗ Closed or restrictive membership



✗ Lacking transparency and feedback



✗ Bureaucratic or duplicative



✗ Excluding smaller or rural groups

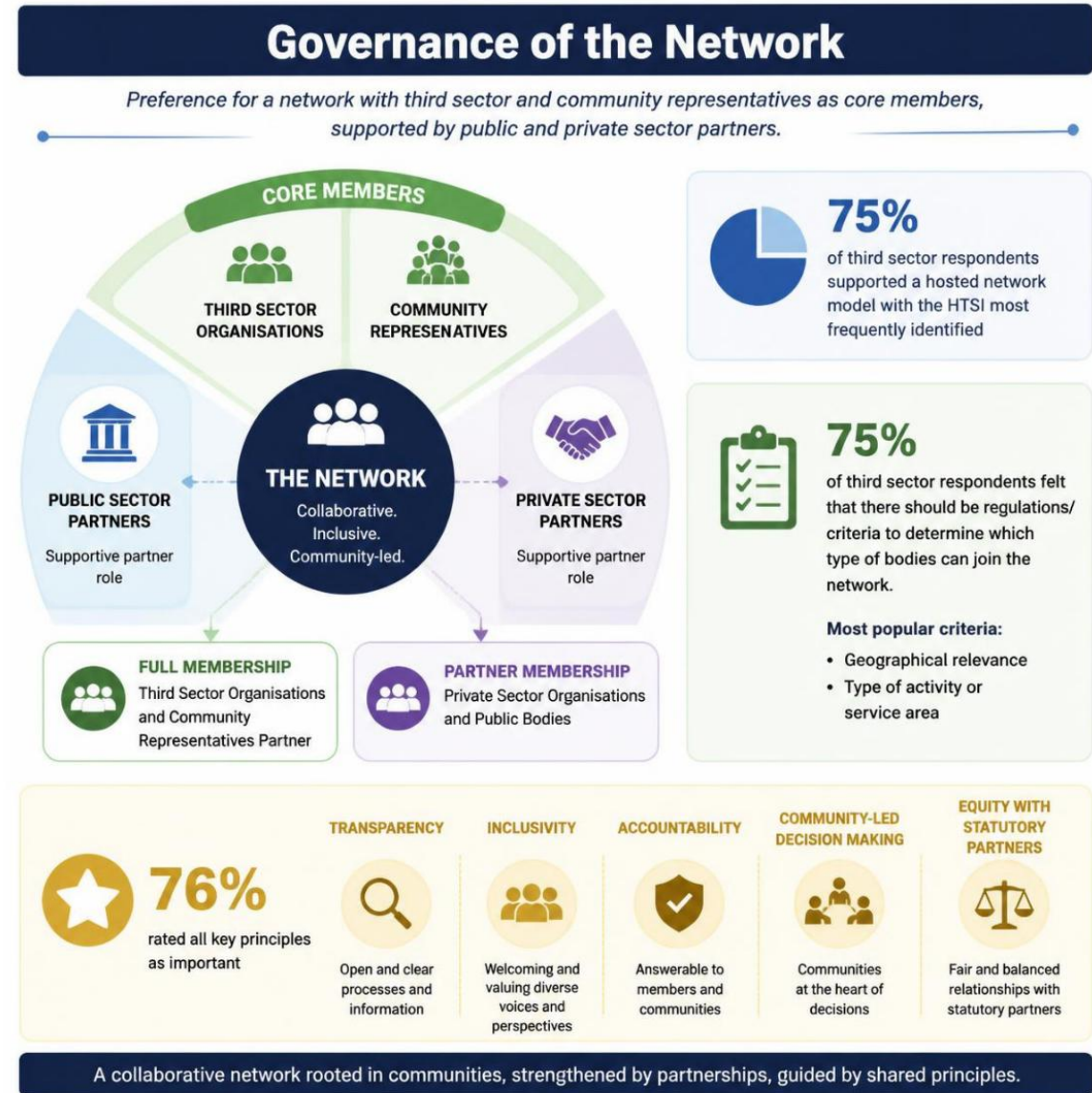


✗ A service delivery organisation

Governance of Network

Strong support emerged for a third sector and community-led network, hosted by a trusted organisation, with clear membership criteria and public and private sector partners. Respondents emphasised transparency, inclusivity, accountability, community-led decision-making, and equitable partnership working.

“I think it shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all approach. It should have a flexible approach and should be adapted to local needs.”



Further Consultation

The working group has engaged with third sector and public sector partners beyond the survey process. A key theme emerging from these discussions and survey responses is the importance of building on what already exists.



Possible Model

A structure of local forums feeding into a Highland-wide group, reflecting approaches used by District Planning Groups and Community Partnerships

How the forums would be different to DPG and CP?

- Have a much wider reach into communities
- A mechanism for community representation and participation
- Connect organisations and share learning
- Support community capacity development
- Facilitate co-production and partnership working
- Knowledge hub for and about the communities they serve
- A Bridge Between Communities and Decision-Makers

They would work alongside the local DPGs and CPs and feed into existing Highland and strategic representation pathways.

Programme for Government

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026-2031 places a strong emphasis on prevention, community-based support, public service reform and stronger partnership working.

The Network will help deliver these ambitions by connecting communities, third sector organisations and public agencies.

How the Network Supports the Programme for Government 2026-2031

Programme for Government Priority	How the Network Contributes
 Stronger Third Sector Partnership	 Provides a collective Highland voice and creates structured opportunities for engagement, co-design and collaboration.
 Health & Social Care Reform	 Ensures communities, people with lived experience and local organisations help shape future models of care.
 Prevention & Early Intervention	 Supports community-led solutions that help people stay well, connected and independent in their own communities.
 Community-Based Support	 Strengthens local partnerships and shares learning between communities delivering health and social care support.
 Public Service Reform	 Creates direct links between communities and strategic decision-makers, supporting evidence-based service redesign.
 Fairer Funding & Sustainability	 Builds a stronger case for investment in communities, supporting long-term sustainability of local services and the third sector.

Next Steps

There is strong support across all sectors for more effective community voice and engagement in health and social care reform.

The proposed Network will be developed in partnership with communities, the third sector and public sector stakeholders to complement existing arrangements, strengthen collaboration, and help shape future service transformation across Highland.

NEXT STEPS

01



The Working Group Development Officer will lead a review current landscape

- Existing structures and forums
- Strategic plans and reform programmes
- Community engagement arrangements



02



Establish a stakeholder partner group to Co-Design Network with Key Partners

- Highland Council
- NHS Highland
- Health & Social Care Committee
- Engagement and participation bodies



03



Develop Network Project Plan which will include

- Resourcing requirements
- Pilot and implementation plan



04



2027 – Pilot Network

Thank You



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