



DRAFT Skye & Lochalsh Caring Communities Plan 2025–2030

Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations
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Executive Summary

The Skye & Lochalsh Caring Communities Plan 2025–2030 sets out a shared vision for transforming how we work together across the third sector, public sector, and our communities to address the growing challenges in health, wellbeing, welfare, and social care. Developed through extensive engagement, co-production, and learning from lived experience, this five-year plan outlines a strategic approach to building a sustainable, community-led third sector.

The plan focuses on three key priorities: empowering people and communities, strengthening the third sector, and fostering integrated partnerships. It serves as the primary framework for the Skye & Lochalsh Health, Wellbeing, Welfare, and Social Care (HWWS) Collaboration—established in response to calls from the third sector for a coordinated, strategic body to support high-quality, sustainable services.

With a clear delivery programme, governance structure, and success measures, the plan provides a practical roadmap for implementation and long-term impact—ensuring services are better connected, more resilient, and reflective of local needs.

About the Skye & Lochalsh HWWS Collaboration

The HWWS Collaboration was established in 2024 as part of Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations (SLCVO) wider Empower Skye and Lochalsh programme. It serves as a strategic platform to strengthen and develop third sector health, wellbeing, and social care services across the region.

The Collaboration is built around three core components that work together to deliver the Skye & Lochalsh Caring Communities Plan:

- The Steering Group provides strategic direction, governance, and oversight of the plan. It monitors progress, ensures accountability, and fosters collaboration across third sector organisations.
- The Community Wellbeing and Support Forum is an open network of local groups, public sector partners, and individuals. It facilitates engagement, encourages idea generation, and helps identify emerging needs while amplifying rural voices in service planning.
- SLCVO manages the delivery programme, coordinates operational activity, and provides shared resources to support the implementation of priority actions.

In Year 1 (2024–2025), the focus was on building strong foundations through research, engagement, and relationship-building. Supported by Community Regeneration Funding, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and SLCVO reserves, key activities included mapping existing services, updating the third sector area profile and directory, and engaging communities to understand local needs.

In Year 2 (2025–2026), the focus shifts from planning to delivery. With dedicated development resources—funded by the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund and SLCVO reserves—the Collaboration will drive forward implementation of the strategic plan. This includes strengthening cross-sector partnerships and supporting the delivery of community-led projects that respond directly to local priorities.

Vision

A sustainable third sector health and social care system, where services are needs-led, prevention-focused, and supported by strong leadership, funding, and capacity-building.

Priorities

Priority 1: People and Communities

- **Resilient Communities through Prevention and Innovation** - Individuals, families, and communities experience improved resilience and wellbeing from early intervention and investment in current good practice services and new initiatives.
- **Holistic Health and Equity** - Health, wellbeing, and social care - outcomes are improved by addressing the root causes of adversity and reducing inequalities through a joined-up, holistic approach.
- **Empowered and Informed Communities** - People have the knowledge and confidence to make informed choices and access the right support, thanks to clear, timely, and accessible information. Services are more visible, better signposted, and tailored to meet people where they are—helping them know where to go and what is available.
- **Equitable Access for All Communities** - Rural and underserved populations benefit from more locally accessible services that are responsive to their specific needs, reducing barriers and improving outcomes for priority and vulnerable groups.
- **Community-Led Service Design** - Services are more effective, trusted, and relevant because they are co-designed with communities, grounded in shared research, and shaped by lived experience and local voice.

Priority 2: A Stronger Third Sector

- **A Skilled and Sustainable Workforce** (paid staff and volunteers) - The third sector is supported by a confident, capable, and well-informed workforce, enabling the delivery of high-quality, sustainable services.
- **Holistic Health and Equity** - Stronger communication, signposting, and information-sharing practices lead to more effective collaboration and better outcomes for communities.
- **A Culture of Shared Learning and Innovation** - Enhanced collaboration networks foster a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and mutual support across the third, public and private sectors.
- **Fair and Sustainable Funding Models** - Long-term, equitable, and innovative funding arrangements replace short-term grants, enabling organisations to plan and deliver with confidence.
- **Financially Resilient Organisations** - Third sector organisations are better equipped to diversify income streams and build long-term financial sustainability.

Priority 3: Stronger Partnerships and Integration

- **Collaborative Service Design and Delivery** - Services are co-designed and delivered through strong, effective partnerships between the third sector, local communities. NHS Highland, The Highland Council and Scottish government.

- **Trusted Cross-Sector Relationships** - Resilient and trusted relationships are established across sectors, enhancing collective capacity to respond to community needs.
- **Recognition of Third Sector Value** - The third sector's vital contribution is consistently recognised, valued, and embedded within public sector planning and decision-making.
- **Integrated Third Sector Solutions** - Third sector, rights-based approaches are embedded in public sector planning—ensuring services are people-centred, community-led, and grounded in equity, inclusion, and human rights.
- **Aligned Strategic Planning Across Sectors** - Public and third sector partners work together on shared goals, aligning strategies and resources to maximize collective impact.

Engagement and Participation

In preparation for the HWWS Collaboration and the development of this strategic plan, SLCVO undertook a comprehensive programme of research and engagement between September 2023 and June 2025. This work was designed to build a shared evidence base, amplify rural voices, and ensure that the plan reflects the lived experience of communities and the operational realities of third sector providers.

Key Engagement Activities and Findings

- **Mapping the Sector:**
Over 368 third sector organisations were identified across Skye and Lochalsh, including 172 registered charities and 31 groups actively delivering health and social care services. This mapping drew on OSCR, Companies House, SLCVO databases, and local knowledge, and included a targeted survey to 62 harder-to-reach groups. [Link to Profile](#)
- **Direct Engagement**
SLCVO engaged with 210 third sector groups through in-person meetings, online communication, and events. One-to-one discussions were held with health, welfare, and social care providers to gather insights into service gaps, user needs, and operational challenges.
- **Strategic Participation**
SLCVO contributed to local planning forums including the Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross Community Partnership, the Sir Lewis Ritchie Implementation Steering Group, and the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, ensuring third sector perspectives were embedded in wider strategic discussions.
- **Third Sector Visioning Session (March 2024)**
Facilitated by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), this session brought together key third sector organisations to explore co-production, shared priorities, and the potential for a local consortium. Participants called for stronger collaboration, shared evidence, and a shift away from competitive funding models.
- **Third Sector Conference (March 2025)**
Attended by 73 participants (76% third sector, 24% public sector), the conference explored key challenges such as short-term funding, volunteer fatigue, and siloed working. It also highlighted opportunities for shared learning, better engagement, and stronger cross-sector partnerships. Feedback showed overwhelming support for re-establishing a Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care Forum.
- **Follow-up Survey (April–May 2025)**
A post-conference survey captured additional input from those unable to attend, reinforcing the need for inclusive, hybrid engagement and better communication of outcomes.

- **Community Wellbeing and Support Forum (July 2025):**
The inaugural forum brought together a wide mix of third sector and public sector representatives to review and approve the draft vision and priorities for this plan. Participants endorsed the need for a single point of contact, improved support for unpaid carers, and targeted action on invisible disabilities.

Health and Social Care Challenges: Insights from Local Engagement

Skye and Lochalsh, like many rural and remote areas, faces complex and growing challenges in health, wellbeing, and social care.

- **Demographic Pressures:** There is a growing number of older adults alongside people with long-term conditions, mental health challenges, disabilities, and neurodivergent conditions.
- **Geographic Barriers:** Long travel times to services, limited public transport, and digital connectivity issues make it difficult for people to access the care they need.
- **Fragmented Services:** Health, social care, and third sector services often work in silos, leading to gaps, duplication, and inefficiencies.
- **Inequalities in Access:** Vulnerable groups including unpaid carers, neurodivergent individuals, veterans, older adults, LGBTQ+ people, and those with mental health issues—often struggle to get the tailored support they need.

Around 45% of third sector health and social care services in Highland are delivered entirely by volunteers, while others rely on paid staff to manage operations and provide support. Each organisation has its own priorities and plans, but many face persistent challenges that impact the sustainability and reach of their work.

These challenges include:

- Short-term funding cycles that undermine stability, limit long-term planning, and create a competitive funding environment.
- Logistical challenges of rural service delivery, as long travel times to services, limited public transport, and digital connectivity issues, making it difficult for groups to deliver services across the area.
- Fragmented services, where health, social care, and third sector organisations often work in silos—leading to gaps, duplication, and inefficiencies.
- Widespread volunteer fatigue, as a small pool of dedicated individuals is stretched thin to meet increasing demand.
- Under-resourced organisations, which struggle to sustain services amid limited staffing, shrinking budgets, and rising demand.
- Lack of recognition and equitable partnerships with statutory services, alongside siloed working practices and limited capacity for meaningful collaboration in service design.

This strategic plan directly responds to the complex challenges facing health and social care in Skye and Lochalsh. By fostering stronger collaboration between third sector and public sector partners, investing in community-led solutions, and prioritising inclusive, place-based service design, the plan aims to reduce fragmentation, improve access, and build long-term sustainability. Through shared evidence, co-production, and targeted development support, it will help ensure that services are better connected, more resilient, and truly reflective of the needs of our diverse and rural communities.

Delivering the Skye and Lochalsh Caring Communities Plan

The Skye and Lochalsh HWWS Collaboration will deliver this plan through a dynamic, community-led Delivery Programme. This programme will build on the priorities and projects identified through Year 1 research and engagement, while remaining open to new ideas emerging from the Skye and Lochalsh Community Wellbeing and Support Forum.

The Delivery Programme will be overseen by the HWWS Collaboration Steering Group, made up of core third sector health and social care organisations. The group will monitor progress, review priorities, and ensure accountability. Where specific priorities are identified, resources may be allocated to support feasibility studies, business case development, and project planning.

SLCVO's project team will coordinate and manage the Delivery Programme, facilitate the Forum, and provide operational support to the Steering Group—ensuring the work of the Collaboration is joined up, focused, and effective.

To achieve our shared vision, the third sector must work collaboratively with a range of partners to develop services that respond to local needs and have the greatest impact on our communities. This includes active participation in the development of Skye Lochalsh and Wester Ross District Plans and strategic commissioning priorities.

We will encourage broad engagement through the Skye and Lochalsh Community Wellbeing and Support Forum, enabling individuals and organisations to propose ideas that help shape the future of third sector health, wellbeing, and social support across the area.

While this Strategic Plan focuses on third sector services, we recognise the critical role of public sector strategies in meeting the full range of community needs.

These include:

- [Highland Outcome improvement Plan](#)
- [NHS Highland Together We Care](#)
- [Highland Adult Services Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027](#)
- [Highland Children and Young People's Participation Strategy](#)
- [Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership](#)
- [Highland Children's Service Plan](#)
- [Highland Children and Young People's Participation Strategy](#)
- [Whole Family Wellbeing Programme](#)
- [Scottish Government Mental health and wellbeing strategy: delivery plan 2023-2025](#)
- [Scottish Government Self-directed support: improvement plan 2023 to 2027](#)

As we implement this Plan, we will work with existing forums, networks, and the wider third sector to ensure coordinated progress. Our work will be delivered under a shared commitment to develop and implement a Caring Communities Third Sector Delivery Programme that is collaborative, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of Skye and Lochalsh.

Delivery Timeline(2025–2030)

The plan will be rolled out over five years, with key milestones as follows:

- **Year 1 (2025–2026):**
Initiate the delivery programme, conduct feasibility studies, and launch pilot projects.
- **Years 2 to 4 (2026–2029):**
Focus on implementing priority projects and capacity-building initiatives.
Conduct ongoing evaluations and a strategic review of the HWWS Collaboration.
Secure funding to sustain the HWWS Collaboration beyond March 2026.
- **Year 5 (2029–2030):**
Review outcomes of HWWS Collaboration projects and initiatives.
Scale successful initiatives and carry out a review of the 2025-2030 Skye & Lochalsh Caring Communities Plan.

How we will Measure Success

The success of the Skye and Lochalsh Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care (HWWS) Collaboration will be measured against the strategic priorities outlined in this plan. Progress will be reported quarterly to the HWWS Steering Group and summarised in an annual Performance and Impact Report. This report will contribute to wider performance frameworks, including those of the Highland Third Sector Interface, Highland Council, and NHS Highland.

Data and insights will be gathered through:

- Ongoing engagement with communities and partners
- Feedback from third sector organisations and public sector stakeholders
- Learning from delivery of projects and services

Key Indicators by Strategic Priority

Priority 1: People and Communities

- Participation rates in HWWS engagement activities, events, and forums
- Community feedback on whether services meet local needs and reflect lived experience
- Number of new or improved services that increase access for rural and underserved groups
- Evidence of co-designed services shaped by lived experience

Priority 2: A Stronger Third Sector

- Number of third sector organisations supported through the project
- Number of capacity-building sessions delivered
- Feedback from organisations on the relevance and impact of training and support
- Amount of funding secured by third sector organisations through HWWS support
- Evidence of improved organisational resilience and sustainability

Priority 3: Stronger Partnerships and Integration

- Number of new partnership initiatives developed through the HWWS Collaboration
- Third sector representation in community planning and decision-making structures
- Reflections from partners on the effectiveness of cross-sector collaboration

- Examples of integrated service delivery and shared learning across sectors

Qualitative insights will include:

- Reflections from partners and community members on collaboration effectiveness
- Stakeholder insights on amplifying rural voices, strengthening inclusion, and supporting underrepresented groups (e.g., unpaid carers, neurodivergent individuals, and those in rural isolation)
- Case studies demonstrating impact and innovation

Conclusion

The Caring Communities Plan represents a collective commitment to improving health, wellbeing, welfare, and social care across Skye and Lochalsh. Grounded in community voice, co-production, and strategic collaboration, it provides a clear framework for action over the next five years. By aligning third sector strengths with public sector priorities, and by fostering inclusive, locally driven solutions, this plan aims to build a more resilient, equitable, and connected region. Success will depend on continued partnership, shared learning, and a willingness to adapt as needs evolve. Together, we can create lasting change that reflects the values and aspirations of our communities.

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