

NHS Highland Chief Executive's Update

November 2025



Fiona Davies,
Chief Executive NHS Highland

Autumn Visits

Helensburgh and Lomond

I was delighted to spend time in Helensburgh meeting our frontline teams across multiple disciplines. Having been Chief Officer in Argyll and Bute I was unsurprised but pleased to hear that the deep commitment of our staff teams to integrated working remains steadfast. I was fortunate to be able to meet with a wider range of service teams including the Palliative Care Nurse Specialist team, Physiotherapy Team, Adult Care Social Work Team, District Nurses, and our Occupational Therapy and

Reablement services. I also met with the Pharmacy Hub Team and the Integrated Community Assessment Team.

I was joined on my visit by Caroline Robertson, the new Head of Adult Services in Argyll and Bute HSCP and I wish her well as she brings her leadership to the HSCP with a determination to see improvements in services there.

All of the teams in Helensburgh work very closely with colleagues in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, across both hospital and community services. Any risk that this could detract from the care that people receive is mitigated by staff going the extra mile to ensure seamless care. I look forward to making improvements with neighbouring Boards such as standardising digital systems, which staff clearly indicated would smooth some of the bumps in the road that can be faced.

Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross

I am pleased to report that the latest Sir Lewis Ritchie Delivery Group meeting was held in early October, bringing together leaders and clinicians from NHS Highland, NHS 24, Highland Council, Scottish Ambulance Service and local stakeholders. The group continues to make constructive progress implementing the recommendations from the Sir Lewis Ritchie report. Louise Bussell, our Board Nurse Director and Senior Responsible Officer for the Skye, Lochalsh and South West Ross redesign, has led this work with great dedication, and I greatly value the input from local communities who have been a driving force behind this delivery group. A new governance structure has been identified to ensure the remaining recommendations continue to be prioritised, and I look forward to working closely with communities across this area to further develop local health and social care services in some of our most remote and rural locations.



While visiting Skye, I took the opportunity to drop into Home Farm care home where I met with Neil Ingall, our Integrated Team Manager for Wester Ross and Deputy Manager, Mark Fraser. It was valuable to hear directly from the team about the unique challenges of providing care in such remote locations and to see first-hand their commitment to maintaining quality services for the island.

Photo caption L-R: Mark Fraser, Deputy Care Home Manager; Louise Bussell, Nurse Director; Arlene Johnstone, Chief Officer, Health & Social Care Partnership; Fiona Davies, Chief Executive; Neil Ingall, Integrated Team Manager and Roddy Machugh, Activities Co-ordinator.

Musculoskeletal (MSK) Community Appointment Day

Building on February's success, we repeated our innovative MSK Community Appointment Day last month. This one-stop-shop model brings together NHS Highland services and partner organisations in a way that represents the future of integrated care delivery.

In Inverness, over 370 people from our MSK Physiotherapy waiting list accessed multiple services in one location, including NHS Pharmacy, Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, and Pelvic Health alongside valued third sector partners such as Change Mental Health, Versus Arthritis UK, Highland Welfare Services, and High Life Highland.

The results were impressive: waiting times reduced from 60 weeks to just eight weeks, patient satisfaction reached 4.75 out of 5 stars, and 43% of attendees took up High Life Highland classes. Of those attending, 42.5% required routine appointments, 19% were discharged, and 30% were placed on patient-initiated pathways. Patients spent an average of two hours accessing multiple services in one visit - whole-person care in action.



Following this success, the team adapted the model for Fort William, expanding it to include not only MSK patients but also those awaiting chronic pain and falls prevention services. Rachel Kirk, Physio Team Lead tailored the offering to meet local population needs, incorporating frailty assessment, mental health and occupational therapy.

Photo caption: Physiotherapists from across Highland from primary care, MSK and orthopaedic services working together with colleagues from strategy and transformation to deliver the new community appointment day.

The results were equally encouraging: 350 people attended, satisfaction reached 4.86 out of 5 stars, and 42% reported being able to self-manage their condition following the event. The MSK Physiotherapy waiting list dropped from 8 months to 7 weeks, with 28% requiring no further appointments.

Highland Care Conference

The Highland Care Conference held in Fort William in October was co-hosted by Angus MacDonald MP and Kate Forbes MSP. I am pleased to report that our Chief Officer of the Health and Social Care Partnership, Arlene Johnstone, and Deputy Chief Executive, David Park, represented NHS Highland at this important event which brought together policymakers, practitioners and sector leaders to discuss the challenges facing adult social care across Highland.

Arlene delivered a presentation titled “From Pressure to Possibility: A Highland Approach to Social Care”, which I understand was very well received. I was particularly pleased to hear that Angus MacDonald MP found Arlene's commitment to partnership working very insightful and fed back his appreciation for the collaborative approach she outlined. This recognition of our partnership ethos from our local representatives is encouraging and aligns with my own vision for how we must work together to address the challenges ahead.

I am committed to supporting Arlene and the team as they lead our response through the Highland Health and Social Care Partnership's Joint Strategic Plan, conducting rapid service reviews to identify and remove barriers, and implementing the Highland Care Model with its focus on people, place and partnership.

Partnering for Progress Event, Fort William

I was delighted to attend the recent Partnering for Progress event in Fort William, which brought together residents, community groups and organisations from across Lochaber alongside NHS Highland and 40 other partners. This collaborative event, hosted with Lochaber Community Partnership, Fort William 2040, The Highland Council and Voluntary Action Lochaber, exemplified the partnership approach I believe is essential for our success.



Photo caption: the design of the new hospital to be built at Blar Mhor, Fort William

Heather Cameron from our Estates Team very articulately presented our plans for redesigning health and social care in the region. Heather explained the journey we are on to deliver the new hospital and clearly communicated our vision which was brought to life by showcasing a [walk-through video](#) of the proposed new hospital at Blar Mhor.

Colleagues engaged with visitors from across the community, listening to their questions around health and social care in Lochaber.

Our focus is on building sustainable services that optimise the skills of our local workforce, improve recruitment and retention, and offer enhanced training opportunities. It is our intention to submit our Outline Business Case to the Scottish Government by May 2026, with the Full Business Case following in July 2027. This is an exciting project that I believe will unlock significant benefits for communities across Lochaber, from developing health and social care services fit for the future, to boosting the local economy and supporting our workforce development.

Annual Review FY24/25

I was delighted to support our Chair, Sarah Compton-Bishop, at the NHS Highland Annual Review, which was well attended by members of the public and media. Sarah presented a comprehensive overview of our progress and challenges under the theme of "Strategy, Sustainability, and Service Excellence," outlining the significant financial transformation we achieved during the year. We reduced our deficit by £62m to a final position of £49.5m, covered by Scottish Government brokerage.

Sarah highlighted the implementation of our "Together We Care" strategy through seven major transformation programmes, including notable achievements such as our Psychological Therapies service reaching 90% of patients seen within 18 weeks (making us the top-performing mainland board), and innovative place-based initiatives like the MSK Community Appointment Day which reduced waiting times from 60 to 8 weeks.



She also addressed areas where we need to improve, including scheduled care, cancer waiting times, and unscheduled care performance, while outlining clear targets and actions under our Operational Improvement Plan, alongside three strategic commitments for the future: Sustainable Services, Partnership Delivery, and Workforce Excellence.

Photo caption: Sarah Compton-Bishop presenting the Annual Review in Aviemore with British Sign Language support.

The morning sessions provided valuable opportunities for engagement with key stakeholders, with constructive discussions taking place with the Area Clinical Forum, Area Partnership Forum, and Patient and Carer Meeting groups. These sessions enabled Sarah and I to hear directly from clinicians, staff representatives, and service users and carers about their experiences and priorities, enriching the formal review proceedings with frontline perspectives. It was clear that progress is being made in service delivery and organisational culture which was reflected in the conversations, however accessibility and service planning for those with complex needs, those requiring interpreting services, and those needed seamlessly integrated health and social care, require ongoing focus and improvement. Board members also had the opportunity to visit Aviemore Community Hospital and the local GP surgery, providing first-hand insight into service delivery in a rural community setting and demonstrating our commitment to understanding the operational

realities and unique challenges faced by teams working across the Highland region's extensive geographic area.

These engagements over the past two months, from the Annual Review to my visits across our communities, reinforce my conviction that through honest dialogue, genuine partnership, and unwavering commitment to our people and the communities we serve, we will continue to transform health and social care across Highland and Argyll & Bute despite the very real challenges we face.

Fiona Davies, Chief Executive NHS Highland