



<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Highland Health &amp; Social Care Committee</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>02 July 2025</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Chief Officer Assurance Report</b>
<b>Responsible Exec/Non-Exec:</b>	<b>Arlene Johnstone, Interim Chief Officer</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Arlene Johnstone, Interim Chief Officer</b>

## 1. Purpose

To provide assurance and updates on key areas of Adult Health and Social Care in Highland.

## 2. Digital, Telephones and Electricity

The Telecare Analogue to Digital Switchover in North Highland is part of a UK-wide transition driven by communication providers upgrading their networks. This change affects all analogue phone lines, which are being phased out in favour of digital services by January 2027. In North Highland, NHS Highland is leading the local transition, aiming to complete the switchover by March 2026. As of June 2025, approximately 50% of telecare clients in the region have already received their new digital telecare units.

BT / Openreach, the main communication providers, have not yet confirmed the exact dates for the analogue shutdown in the Highland area. However, they are currently running a telecare migration pilot until the end of July 2025, which is expected to inform the broader rollout. NHS Highland has been proactive in communicating with clients since 2020 through letters, newsletters, and social media, ensuring that people understand the reasons for the change and what to expect.

Clients are reassured that the new digital telecare units are provided free of charge, and they are warned to be cautious of scams involving fake charges for equipment. During installation visits, the Handyperson Service offers face-to-face support, written guidance, and answers to any questions. Staff involved in installations and support receive regular training from Tunstall Healthcare, with the most recent session held in April 2025.

To support the digital infrastructure, the Highland HUB's alarm receiving software will be upgraded in July 2025. This upgrade will improve the reliability and resilience of digital alarm calls. NHS Highland has also established data-sharing agreements with BT/Openreach and Sky to ensure that communication providers are aware of which households have telecare devices. In terms of power resilience, BT has committed to providing free backup batteries and hybrid phones to people with additional needs. These hybrid phones can switch to mobile networks during power outages. For clients who do not use or want broadband, BT will offer a dedicated landline service from 2025 to 2030, allowing them to continue using their phones as they do today.

A robust Business Continuity plan is in place to protect telecare clients during power outages,

OFFICIAL	<p>involving local emergency planning teams and Care for People groups. The Scottish Government's Digital Office is also working with Ofcom and communication providers to address the broader national challenge of maintaining digital services during power failures, which affect not only homes but also essential services like shops and petrol stations.</p>
	<p><b>3. Community Led Wellbeing Hubs</b></p> <p>There are currently six Wellbeing Hubs operating in Sutherland, one in Caithness, and one in Lochcarron. These hubs are locally managed charitable or not-for-profit organisations that deliver a wide range of services and activities tailored to the needs and interests of their communities. Their core aim is to support individuals to remain connected, active, and healthy within their local areas.</p> <p>Wellbeing Hubs typically provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Health and wellbeing services</b>, including meals, physical activity sessions, advice, and referral pathways;</li><li>• <b>Social and recreational opportunities</b>, such as clubs, classes, outings, and community events;</li><li>• <b>Education and training</b>, through courses, workshops, and mentoring programmes;</li><li>• <b>Volunteering and employment opportunities</b>, including placements, skills development, and supported roles.</li></ul> <p>Despite their vital role, Wellbeing Hubs face ongoing challenges in securing adequate and sustainable funding to support their diverse and evolving functions. Given the breadth of services offered, it is expected that hubs will seek and receive funding from multiple sources. These may include service-level agreements with public sector bodies, charitable grants, donations, fundraising activities, social enterprise income, and legacy contributions.</p> <p>NHS Highland currently has funding arrangements in place with the Wellbeing Hubs, although the level of funding has remained unchanged since the original agreements were established. NHS Highland has been engaging with the hubs to explore how best to support their valuable work. A constructive meeting took place in mid-May 2025, with further discussions scheduled.</p> <p>Community-led Wellbeing Hubs are of strategic importance and are integral to the successful delivery of the Joint Strategic Plan. NHS Highland remains committed to working in partnership with these organisations to ensure their long-term sustainability and continued contribution to community health and wellbeing.</p>
	<p><b>4. Update on the Redesign of Services – North Coast of Sutherland</b></p> <p>The business case for the redesign of health and social care services across the North Coast of Sutherland is scheduled for a private, formal presentation to the Highland Council Full Council on Thursday, 26 June 2025. This proposal is a key component of NHS Highland's strategic programme to modernise service delivery in rural areas, addressing persistent challenges such as workforce sustainability, aging infrastructure, and fragmented care pathways.</p> <p>A verbal update on the outcome of the Council's deliberations will be provided following the meeting, this will confirm the Council's position and outline the next steps for implementation, subject to approval.</p>
	<p><b>5. Sutherland Care at Home Service</b></p> <p>As the operational response to the current situation remains ongoing, a verbal update will be provided alongside the written report to the Health &amp; Social Care Committee to ensure the most accurate and up-to-date information is presented.</p>
	<p><b>6. Staffing Updates</b></p>

Royal College of Nursing Scotland Nurse of the Year Awards - Nursing Support Worker of the Year: Chelsey Main, a nursing support worker from the NHS Highland Forensic Service, was announced as the 2025 Nursing Support Worker of the Year.

Nominated for the profound impact she has had on the lives of forensic inpatients and community patients, Chelsey offers tailored 1:1 activity, supporting patients with practical life skills to foster independence, confidence, and help patients re-engage with the community, encouraging transitions to more independent living. The judges praised Chelsey’s enthusiasm and inspiring commitment to delivering exemplary care.

7. Joint Inspection of Adult Services

The Highland Health and Social Care Partnership (HHSCP) were informed of the Joint Inspection of HHSCP commencing on 10 February 2025 with consideration of the following question:

“How effectively is the partnership working together, strategically and operationally to deliver seamless services that achieve good health and wellbeing outcomes for adults?”.

The inspection is considering the question by examining the provision of services for the lived experience of adults (aged 18 – 64) living with mental illness and their unpaid carers.

Current status:

Monday 23rd June 2025 Week 21 of 35 of the Inspection activity.

Staff Survey completed 21st March 2025 with 118 staff responses, Engagement with people, carers, commissioned providers, third sector and voluntary organisations throughout March where the Inspection team spoke to a total of 124 people, above average response with 93 people and 31 carers.

Review of records and Team Around the Person (TATP) completed with 33 records reviewed and 5 people with 4 carers interviewed directly. The Inspection team had a good geographical spread of people identified in TATP. A total of 18 Scrutiny focus groups were held with 90 staff involved across the sessions and two site visits included New Craig’s Hospital, Mental Health Assessment Unit, Highland Forensic Services and Inverness Community Mental Health team.

Partnership Meeting 3 held on 18th June 2025 with Executive and Senior Leadership Team representation, positive headline findings included:

- Shared values and purpose: understanding roles
- Effective information sharing
- Early intervention and Prevention
- Providers included as partners

Good Practice: Collective advocacy approach through Spirit Advocacy served the partnership and people living with a mental illness well.

Report draft to be submitted to HHSCP for accuracy check on 28th July 2025, final Partnership

meeting to be held on Wednesday 30 July with report scheduled for publication on 19 August 2025.

**8. New Craigs PFI**

As previously reported, the PFI agreement with Robertsons will terminate on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2025. All operational plans to transfer hard and soft FM services to NHSH Estates are fully underway. No impact on patient care is anticipated.