

NHS Highland



Meeting: Health and Social Care Committee

Meeting date: 6 May 2026

Title: Collaborative Care Home Overview 2025-2026

Responsible Executive/Non-Executive: Arlene Johnstone Chief Officer

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Report Recommendation:

The Health and Social Care Committee is asked to **note** the Collaborative Care Home Overview 2025-2026, as detailed within this report.

1 Purpose

This is presented to the Board for:

- Assurance

This report relates to a:

- Government policy/directive

This report will align to the following NHSScotland quality ambition(s):

Safe, Effective and Person Centred

This report relates to the following Strategic Outcome(s)

Start Well		Thrive Well	X	Stay Well	X	Anchor Well	
Grow Well		Listen Well	X	Nurture Well	X	Plan Well	X
Care Well	X	Live Well	X	Respond Well	X	Treat Well	
Journey Well	X	Age Well	X	End Well	X	Value Well	
Perform well		Progress well		All Well Themes			

2 Report summary

2.1 Situation

This report describes the Partnership’s collaborative care home support activity, key achievements and focus areas over 2025-2026 and also looks ahead to priorities for 2026-2027.

2.2 Background

Background

There have been ongoing support requirements of NHS Highland in respect of independent sector care homes since May 2020, when the Scottish Government mandated Boards to have clinical and care oversight of all care homes, in addition to their existing adult social work and social care, commissioning and public health responsibilities.

The focus and emphasis has shifted since this time from oversight to collaboration, following both the publication of the [My Health, My Care, My Home - Healthcare Framework for Adults Living in Care Homes in June 2022](#) and also the updated direction from Scottish Government in December 2022 and March 2023 around collaborative support to care homes to improve the lives of people living in care homes.

This guidance sets out that:

“Every care home resident will live in comfort, supported by compassionate, skilled staff that understand them as individuals, uphold their rights, and work in partnership to ensure that their needs and personal outcomes are fully met. Care will be delivered in a way that promotes dignity, independence and connection, while managing risks confidently and proportionately—never in a way that is overly restrictive.”

This area of activity falls under a Collaborative Care Home Support – Strategic Group, co-chaired by the Chief Officer and Director of Nursing, to whom a Steering Group reports.

There has been specific funding from Scottish Government in relation to collaborative care home support. This funding has previously been non recurring and has been received annually in different forms since 2020, all associated with supporting care homes and improving the lives of people living in care homes.

As previously reported, the cyclical nature of the funding has resulted in the need to annually rebuild the collaborative care home support team, as staff have moved on to other roles for job security. This disruption has heavily impacted on the ability to achieve sustainable outcomes and ongoing representations have been made to Scottish Government to mainstream this funding, to improve impact.

The Partnership’s funding allocation has previously been £681k per annum, and due to the above challenges there were sizeable underspends in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, which enabled a resident wellbeing fund to be implemented. The outputs of these initiatives have previously been reported to this committee.

In March 2025, the Scottish Government confirmed that funding would continue for 2025-2026 and would be baselined going forward. The level of funding to be received was not however confirmed until 26 June 2026, when it was advised to be an ongoing £681k pa.

Whilst the baseline confirmation was a much welcomed development, the delay in receiving notification of the available funding level impacted on the progress of developing the team arrangements and proceeding to permanent recruitment.

As at end March 2026, the Collaborative Care Home Support Team (CCHST) is nearing full establishment.

Core and Whole Team

It is important to highlight that whilst the funding from Scottish Government is focussed on specific care home collaborative activity, there are many wider interfaces between NHS Highland and our commissioned and in house services, where we work collaboratively.

For the purpose of this report however, the focus of the following detail relates to the activity funded or facilitated by the Scottish Government funding, through the Collaborative Care Home Support Team (CCHST).

Over 2025-2026, the CCHST has been re-established to comprise the following areas:

Core team

- Team Lead
- Senior Nurse
- Senior Occupational therapist
- Senior Physiotherapist

Whole team

- Lead Nurse
- Health Protection / Public Health
- Pharmacy
- Stress and distress
- Dietetics
- Speech and language therapy
- Scottish Care – Independent Sector Career and Attraction Lead

There are also close links between the CCHST and Adult Social Care Lead Officers, Contracts and Commissioning Team and wider Scottish Care colleagues.

The **focus** of the CCHST is to:

- Provide core operational support to care homes.
- Lead education, improvement, outbreak support and practice development.
- Respond to serious concerns and supports residents' wellbeing and connection.
- Develop whole service work plans (core team and wider team collaborators).
- Support primary care delivery and leadership.
- Engage in collaboration, quality improvement activity, reporting, learning and development.
- Provide person centred care aligned with the Health Care Framework vision.

Over the course of 2025-2026, the CCHST **primary activity areas** have been on:

1. Quality Improvement Support

- Support care homes to deliver safe, evidence based and person centred care.
- Support self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

2. Education, Training and Workforce Development

- Offer training, advice and development programmes across topics such as:
 - Stress and distress
 - Falls
 - Infection prevention
 - Dementia care
 - Meaningful activities
 - Nutrition, appetite and sleep
- Support implementation of *My Health, My Care, My Home* standards.

3. Specialist Support

- The whole service provide targeted advice, guidance and support when needed and includes professionals from:
 - Pharmacy
 - Dietetics
 - Speech and Language Therapy
 - Health Protection and Public Health
 - Mental Health & Stress/Distress
 - Nursing and AHP teams
 - Social Work Teams

4. Support During Concerns or Crises

- Respond to serious concerns, including Adult Support and Protection issues.
- Offer outbreak management and IPC guidance.
- Coordinate across agencies when risks need to be managed sensitively and proportionately.

5. Helping Residents Thrive

- Promote wellbeing, connection and independence.
- Support care homes to help residents remain connected to loved ones.
- Encourage meaningful daily living and social activity.

The **approach** of the CCHST is to work:

- **Collaboratively** with and alongside, care home managers and staff (doing with, not to)
- **Respectfully**, recognising care homes as essential community partners
- **Proportionately**, avoiding unnecessary restrictions
- **System-wide**, linking with GPs, hospitals, CI, commissioning colleagues etc
- **Data-led**, using evidence to drive improvement

The CCHST report into a Steering Group, who have been able to support the development of the team on the advice of the Strategic Group in terms of required outcomes of the service.

2025-2026 Activity

During 2025–2026, the CCHST made progress developing and embedding a whole-system approach to supporting care homes across Highland. The collective aim was to strengthen clinical support, improve outcomes for residents, and enable care home staff to feel confident, capable and connected to wider health and social care systems.

Activity throughout the year reflects a strong emphasis on collaboration, prevention, and relationship-based working, with care homes positioned as active partners. Progress was made around the following areas:

- 1. Strengthening clinical support to care homes through collaborative working**
The CCHST continued to embed multidisciplinary, relationship-based support to care homes across Highland, focusing on early intervention, shared problem-solving, and sustained improvement.
- 2. Reducing avoidable hospital admissions and supporting effective discharge**
Joint working between care homes, community nursing, hospital teams and professional leads supported earlier decision-making, timely escalation and improved confidence in managing complex care in care home settings.
- 3. Embedding distress-reduction approaches**
The Stress and Distress workstream played a central role in supporting staff to respond differently to behaviour that challenges, promoting non-pharmacological approaches and consistent, person-centred care.
- 4. Supporting workforce capability, confidence and leadership**
Education, coaching and professional advice were delivered through collaborative forums, care home visits and remote support, strengthening both clinical practice and leadership capacity within care homes.
- 5. Strengthening partnerships with the independent and third sector**
Close working with Scottish Care and individual providers supported shared learning, two-way communication and alignment between system priorities and operational pressures facing care homes.
- 6. Improving medicines, prescribing and primary care support to care homes**
Primary Care Pharmacy input continued to support safer medicines use, medication reviews and improved communication between care homes and primary care teams.
- 7. A maturing collaborative model, with clear foundations for 2026–2027**
Across reports, there is a shared emphasis on consolidation, consistency and sustainability of the collaborative model, alongside recognition of growing demand and system pressure.

Spotlight Areas 2025-2026

In addition to the ongoing core activity of the CCHST, there are four notable areas to draw to the committee’s attention, which evidence collaboration in practice:

Spotlight Area 1
Hospital Admissions Short Life Working Group (SLWG)

- A cross sector SLWG was established in late 2025 in response to concerns raised by Independent Sector care homes regarding hospital admissions and discharges.
- The SLWG developed a comprehensive improvement programme including a revised communication pathway ensuring acute wards "reach out" to care homes with proactive updates throughout a resident’s stay; standardised paperwork, updated discharge checklist, development of the “Home Safe” approach (below), shaping shared understanding between care homes and acute staff.



- The new approach has been rolled out from March 2026, supported by a video to support internal and external information sessions and awareness raising on the new process. Mechanisms are in place to oversee and monitor the impact of this new process.
- This work has been highly collaborative, involving acute hospital colleagues, including ward teams and the Directorate Nurse Managers, along with Scottish Care, Independent Sector care home managers, Highland CCHST Lead Nurse, clinical managers, and CCHST colleagues.

Spotlight Area 2
Independent Sector Career and Attraction Activity

At the sector’s request, an Independent Sector Career and Attraction Lead position was created in January 2024 and is hosted by Scottish Care. The focus of this role is to increase number of people working in independent sector care homes and specifically, to:

- Lead and support coordinated sector care home attraction activity
- Create single online presence and positive social media content
- Proactively identify potential new employees, generate interest in care home employment, raise positive profiles and support locality attraction initiatives

Key achievements and impact of this role over 2025-2026 are summarised as noted:

- Delivered **7 Adult Social Care workshops** reaching **76 students** from 10 secondary schools, with 95% of participants reporting they would recommend to a friend
- **112 attendees** engaged through three ASC specific employability careers events (Inverness, Alness & Wick)
- **320 pupils** engaged via DYW secondary school careers events
- **13 displaced care workers** successfully recruited to Highland services – including six to Care Homes
- Activity has seen **12 additional care providers** from other types of care services benefit from the career’s events
- **25,000 social media views** through targeted accommodation support campaigns which generated 20 leads for accommodation
- **12,900 visits** to the Highland Care Home Map during the reporting year (22,300 since launch)
- **3-part film** launched during Scottish Apprenticeship Week to highlight the experiences of working care home

This role continues to make a demonstrable impact in creating and maintaining awareness independent sector care home roles, has had a significant reach into secondary and further education to innovatively promote care as a positive career option, and has been instrumental in creating opportunities for Highland care providers to access displaced workers.

These achievements have been delivered through extensive collaborative activity across a wide range of local, national and strategic networks.

Spotlight Area 3
Collaborative Care Home Event, November 2025

The Scottish Care Independent Sector Lead (Care Homes) developed and led a CCHST stakeholder survey in October 2025 and organised a “Collaborating for Impact” workshop, which took place in November 2025.

This event brought together NHS (CCHST, nursing, commissioning, adult social care, acute), Council, Care Inspectorate and care home partners to discuss collaborative values, vision and priorities and identifying some practical barriers to collaborating.

This was a well received event, helping to establish or re-connect relationships, which are key to working collaboratively together. It is intended that this event takes place annually.

Spotlight Area 4
Highland Games 2025

The Highland Games 2025 started in 2024 as the Care Home Olympics and evolved through the Highland and Argyll & Bute Meaningful Activity Network, which is a network open to all in-house and Independent Sector Care Homes across North Highland and Argyll and Bute.

The Independent Sector Lead led the concept, development and implementation of the Highland Games 2025, subsequently preparing this report [North Highland - Care Home Highland Games 2025.pdf](#) and images [Highland Games 2025.webm](#). This referenced report is also available at **Appendix 2**.

This initiative showed collaboration across the participating care homes, community spirit and intergenerational connection.

Priorities for 2026-2027

Forward priorities across core and whole CCHST team activity will focus on consolidation, consistency of access, and sustaining the collaborative approach as core business rather than time-limited support.

The following key areas represents our priority focus:

1. Consolidate CCHST model.
2. Strengthen prevention and early intervention in supporting care homes.
3. Continue to build workforce capability and leadership confidence.
4. Workforce attraction, career and partnership working.
5. Develop and implement quality indicators to measure impact.
6. Develop and expand opportunities for collaborating on meaningful activity.

2.3 Assessment

Significant progress has been made to develop and embed a Collaborative Care Home Support Team to work across care homes in Highland, supporting care home partners in a way which will improve the lives of people living in care homes.

This activity is now benefiting from baselined funding, which will support the sustainability and reach of this provision.

There are strengthened NHSH / care home relationships arising from this and wider collaborative activity.

Measuring impact and quality improvement is a future focus for this area.

2.4 Proposed level of Assurance

Substantial	X	Moderate	
Limited		None	

Comment on the level of assurance

The level of assurance offered is substantial, due to the now baselined funding, the ability to embed the CCHST and as a result, to realise the scope and reach benefits of team continuity. The intentions to focus on quality improvement over 2026-2027 will be able to provide future evidence of impact.

3 Impact Analysis

3.1 Quality/ Patient Care

The primary objective of the collaborative activity is to improvement lives of people living in care homes.
There are positive impacts to residents from strengthening collaborative arrangements with care home providers and from working more closely on process improvements.

3.2 Workforce

The collaborative activity intends to provide access to training, support and advice to support and improve care home staff skills and confidence, across commissioned and in house provision.

3.3 Financial

Scottish Government funding has now been baselined, enabling a permanent CCHST to be put in place.
Scottish Government has confirmed they do not have any ongoing monitoring requirements of this area. Notwithstanding, the Partnership is developing quality improvement arrangements in order to evidence service impact.

3.4 Risk Assessment/Management

In addition to business as usual operational and professional routes, governance arrangements are in place via the Strategic and Steering Groups, to address risk management issues.

3.5 Data Protection

No issues.

3.6 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

No issues.

3.7 Other impacts

None.

3.8 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

No issues.

3.9 Route to the Meeting

This 2025-2026 report has been developed with the following inputs as noted:

- Collaborative Care Home Support Steering Group - input
- Co-Chairs of the Collaborative Care Home Support Strategic Group - input
- Collaborative Care Home Support Strategic Group – copy for awareness

4.1 List of appendices

The following appendices are included with this report:

- **Appendix 1:** Collaborative Care Home Support Core and Whole Team Summary
- **Appendix 2:** Care Home Highland Games 2025