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# STOP THE DEATHS

# TOGETHER WE CAN!

## STOP PREVENTABLE DEATHS AND REDUCE DRUG AND ALCOHOL HARMS IN HIGHLAND

Please attend our online Teams Meeting to hear about the feedback, findings and next steps from the successful Together We Can events held across Highland.

**Together We Can Online Event  
January 2026 Report**



# Together We Can Online Event January 2026 Report

## One Page Summary

### Introduction

This report summarises the *Together We Can* online event held on 27 January 2026. There were 47 attendees. It builds directly on earlier work captured in the [Together We Can Project Report \(Summary Report\)](#) (also available).

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### Background

The event shared learning from previous community events in Thurso, Inverness, Fort William and Milton, reflecting themes such as harm reduction, access to services, stigma and lived experience.

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### Key Themes and Findings

Key themes included relationships, early intervention, communication, partnership working, workforce development, peer support, funding gaps, and women's needs.

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### Breakout Room Feedback

Participants shared changes since the events, including increased awareness, stronger connections, improved understanding of services, and greater openness in discussing substance use. They also identified ways to support recommendations, such as developing peer support, supporting women's services, improving communication and enabling lived experience involvement.

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### Recommendations and Next Steps

Updates included progress on service mapping, workforce development, peer support, communications and governance, aligned with the HADP Strategic Plan. *Together We Can* work will report to the HADP Strategy Group.

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### Feedback

21 attendees completed feedback questions, with the majority giving it a 5/5 rating. 87.5% reported improved understanding of the *Together We Can* work. Qualitative feedback highlighted reduced stigma, improved awareness and positive partnership working.

# Together We Can Online Event

## January 2026 Report

### Introduction

The *Together We Can* online event brought partners, practitioners, people with lived and living experience, and community organisations together to reflect on the findings from the community conversation cafés held throughout Highland in 2024–25. The session provided an opportunity to share progress, discuss next steps, and strengthen collaboration across the alcohol and drugs support system.

### Background

The event opened with a welcome from Tracey McFall (Scottish Recovery Consortium), followed by an overview on the origins of the project and the national context. This included links to the [Rights, Respect & Recovery Strategy](#), the [National Drugs Mission](#), the [MAT Standards](#), and the [Charter of Rights](#).

The background presentation highlighted the strong commitment within Highland to meaningful engagement, co-production, and the inclusion of lived and living experience in shaping services. Over 160 participants contributed across four community events in Thurso, Inverness, Fort William and Milton in 2024/2025.

### Key Themes and Findings

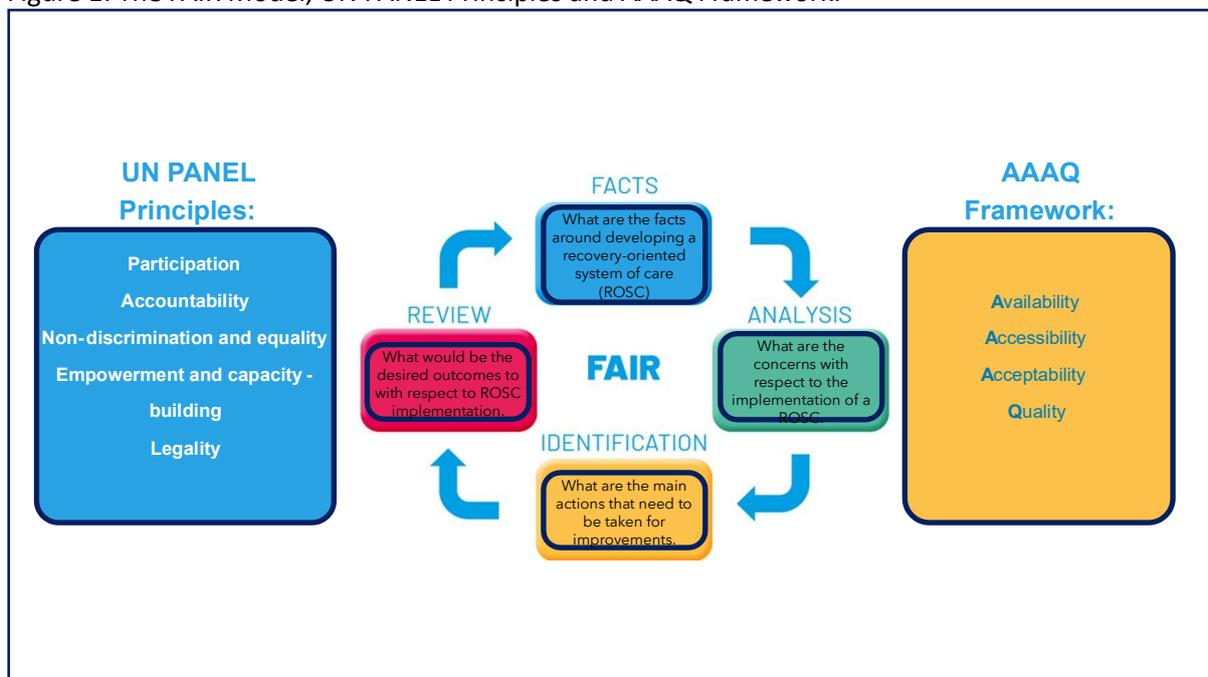
Presentations summarised the themes emerging from the community engagement process. These included:

- the impact of drug- and alcohol-related deaths
- the importance of early intervention and harm reduction
- value in recovery and mutual aid supports

- challenges around accessibility, service visibility and co-ordination
- the need for clear communication and consistent messaging
- workforce capacity, training needs and trauma-informed practice
- stigma and discrimination
- specific needs of women

The FAIR model (Findings–Analysis–Identify–Review) was used to analyse the information gathered and support the development of recommendations.

Figure 1: The FAIR Model, UN PANEL Principles and AAAQ Framework:



The FAIR Model summary found;

- **Findings:** Through thirteen meetings and four community events, the *Together We Can* Steering Group identified key themes: the importance of trust, service visibility, trauma-informed care, peer support, and rural access challenges.
- **Analysis:** Feedback from over 160 individuals and organisations revealed systemic fragmentation, underfunded community-led services, workforce strain, persistent stigma, and opportunities for innovation such as mobile outreach and digital tools.

- **Identify:** Mapping and collaboration with national partners explored service gaps, community assets, intervention effectiveness, and co-production opportunities—ensuring solutions are rooted in local evidence.
- **Review:** A continuous review process—via event evaluations, a steering group, and alignment with national frameworks—ensures accountability, adaptability, and sustainability, guided by lived experience and frontline insight.

## Breakout Room Feedback

Participants joined facilitated breakout rooms to reflect on two questions:

1. Changes made since the *Together We Can* events (e.g., new connections and partnerships).
2. Ways to contribute to the recommendations going forward.

Feedback reflected strengthened networks, greater clarity on shared priorities and a strong appetite for collaboration. The themes and key points of each question are detailed below.

Firstly, Changes made since the *Together We Can* events - Summary of Feedback: Themes and Key Points;

### 1. Stronger Connections and Networking

- Increased links and referrals with services.
- New connections made with national, regional and local charities and services.
- Networking opportunities from the events were actively used, creating a “hub of activity” for substance-use support in Highland.
- Met new contacts and learned of existing resources and organisations

This reflects a growing, more integrated network across Highland, improving collaboration and reducing siloed work.

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## **2. Improved Clarity of Available Support**

- Better understanding of what services exist across Highland.
- Helped highlight specialisms of partner organisations, supporting alignment and reducing duplication.
- Increased confidence about where to refer people (though recognition this is not universal).
- Suggestion to use the [Highland Directory of Services](#) to support navigation.

This reflects a clearer service landscape and stronger shared knowledge, with some remaining need for promoting and practical referral guidance.

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## **3. Enhanced Relationship Building Through In-Person Engagement**

- Added more in-person elements to work.
- Strengthened relationships and improved personalisation.
- Created a feeling of closeness, shared purpose and stronger connections.
- Events generated a personal touch valued by participants.

This reflects face-to-face interaction is helping (re)build trust, collaboration, and community warmth.

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## **4. Community Hope, Engagement and Peer Support**

- Increased interest in expanding peer support.
- Individuals expressed a desire to be involved and contribute their skills.
- Events generated hope for others in the community.

- Awareness of specific peer-led opportunities (e.g., SMART Recovery meetings for veterans).

This reflects a positive cultural change; more empowered individuals, more community energy, and growing peer-based pathways.

Secondly, Ways to contribution to re recommendations going forward -  
Summary of Feedback: Themes and Key Points;

### **1. Strengthening Prevention and Early Intervention, Training and Harm Reduction**

- Early intervention and family support available from services.
- Naloxone training being delivered.
- Training programmes for professionals supporting young people underway.
- NHS involvement in training and development opportunities.
- Advocacy for public and workforce education, including challenging stigma and personal biases around substance use.

This reflects partners are well-placed to advance early intervention and harm-reduction efforts, with commitment to equipping both staff and communities with practical skills and knowledge.

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### **2. Enhancing Visibility, Communication and Access to Support**

- Increasing social media presence and cross-organisational visibility.
- Advertising services and project developments, especially for small organisations without comms resources.
- Supporting clearer pathways and better network knowledge, which is crucial for small services.

- Addressing communication gaps highlighted by comments like “I stumbled across this by accident.”
- Plans to arrange an invite for HADP to engage directly with teams.

This reflects there is strong motivation to improve communication, promote what services exist, and ensure people can find support without relying on chance.

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### **3. Expanding Peer Support and Lived Experience Involvement**

- Developing peer support and strengthening women’s services.
- Multiple organisations want to support people they work with to take part in Lived and Living Experience (LLE) feedback.
- Creating more person-centred processes by gathering lived experience insights.

This reflects a growing commitment to embedding lived experience.

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### **4. Improving Gender-Responsive and Person-Centred Care**

- Involvement in improving experiences for women using drugs within services, recognising the value in women’s only spaces.
- Developing women’s peer support in specific roles.
- Recognising the need for language change to reduce barriers and stigma in service interactions.

This reflects partners recognition of the importance of trauma-informed, gender-responsive and stigma-free approaches to achieving better outcomes.

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### **5. Building Local Partnerships and Strengthening Community Support**

- More referrals to family support.

- Intention to link services more effectively and support local groups, linking with the hub development being community led and far reaching.
- Desire to tackle stigmatising media portrayals, promoting strengths-based narratives.

This reflects communities and services want to work more collaboratively, challenge stigma and amplify positive stories.

In addition, some Steering Group members provided feedback of their experience of being involved with *Together We Can*.

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD) highlighted their experience of *the Together We Can* events, stating they were an important reminder of how valuable it is to be present in communities and to be listening. Creating spaces for these conversations brought connection locally and having the events in different parts of the Highlands was essential for creating local momentum around the most deeply and widely felt experiences in that locality. The SFAD member of staff that was involved remembers feeding back at one event that we had agreed the importance of focusing on systems change as people in all parts of the system that day felt frustrated, worried, and open to change. At another event, they remember the feeling of hope that a better mapping of that area could unlock, such as the idea to introduce co-located workers from statutory into third sector space that had the potential to create more holistic care, in one place, with better multi-disciplinary conversations happening to support each individual.

Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) highlighted experiences from the Lived Experience Panel members who were involved;

*"Great events, informative stalls, well done all round. Family input was also nice to see and good for mingling and chatting with other like minded people that I otherwise wouldn't have met. Would love to do another one"*

*"Lots of networking and met nice informative people that I have since still kept in touch with"*

*"Everyone under the same roof was great, it's hard to do that and get everyone together"*

*"Don't want just another talking shop, it's about having these events and seeing actions"*

SDF also highlighted that they found the events extremely useful, understanding the value in having everyone in a room together. They valued the discussions and hoped it help focus priorities for Highland that had input from different places. This event helped SDF to recruit participants to be involved in the experiential interviews gathered for Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards feedback, they developed staff contacts, plus took the opportunity to thank people who had participated and helped already. The *Together We Can* events were helpful for raising awareness of this work, and helped them engage with potential participants. Furthermore, SDF shared they have recently developed a plan to develop and support a Community of Practice for people with lived and living experience working in Highland. The meeting was a good chance to promote this development, which will fit well with ongoing improvement plans. They highlighted that people seemed responsive to the idea which was great.

Participants were encourage to become involved in the Community of Practice work, to look at the available [Scottish Recovery Consortium Recovery Community Development](#) support options, and to [sign up to the HADP newsletter](#) as a way of keeping connected.

## Recommendations and Next Steps

Eve MacLeod, Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP) Coordinator presented progress on the recommendations arising from the *Together We Can* report. Key areas of ongoing work include:

- **Service Mapping & Directory Creation**

The updated HADP website now includes a broader [Directory of Services](#), incorporating organisations identified through the engagement process.

- **Community Hub & Outreach**  
HADP is contributing insights to a feasibility study being led by the Crisis & Distress subgroup of the Mental Health Delivery Group, exploring options for a community hub model similar to Hope Point (Dundee).
- **Workforce Development & Training**  
Priorities include trauma-informed practice, stigma reduction, and continued partnership delivery of alcohol and drugs training.
- **Peer Support & Lived/Living Experience Integration**  
HADP will strengthen mechanisms for hearing and acting on lived experience, and expand harm reduction approaches including peer-led naloxone access.
- **Women's Services**  
Work is planned to further support women experiencing harm, collaborating with public protection partners and drawing on recent health needs assessments.
- **Communication & Awareness**  
A communications plan is being developed to highlight services, reduce stigma and share positive stories through multi-platform channels.
- **Strategic Governance**  
*Together We Can* recommendations are now embedded within the [HADP Strategic Plan](#), strengthening alignment, oversight and reporting to local and national partners.

## Online Event Feedback

All 47 participants were asked to complete two feedback questions. The ratings were positive.

The first question asked participants to rate the event out of five stars. 21 people responded. Most people (61%) gave the event 5 stars, with 14% giving 4 stars, and 23% giving 3 stars. No one rated the event with a lower number of stars. On average (mean), participants scored the event 4.4 stars.

Figure 2: Star rating feedback of the online event



Participants were also asked if their understanding of the *Together We Can* events and next steps improved. 32 people responded. 87.5% said yes, 12.5% said their knowledge level stayed the same, no one said they didn't learn from the event.

## Conclusions

The *Together We Can* events have strengthened networking, improved understanding of the service landscape, enhanced relationship-building through in-person work, and sparked new community-led energy and hope. Partners feel more connected, more informed, and more aligned in their roles, though practical navigation support is still needed for some.

Partners are eager and able to contribute significantly to the recommendations through prevention work, training, harm reduction, stronger communication, visibility, peer and lived-experience involvement, gender-responsive improvements, and better community collaboration. A clear appetite exists to reduce stigma, broaden networks, and build shared pathways across Highland.

The *Together We Can* recommendations are incorporated into the HADP Strategic Plan, to ensure they are actioned and HADP are accountable for progressing the suggested improvements.

Sincere thanks go to all the people that were involved in any of the Together We Can work.

Eve MacLeod, HADP Coordinator

March 2026