

Ullapool Village Hall SCIO – Chair’s Report for AGM, November 2025

By Ben Williams

This past year has been one of consolidation and progress for Ullapool Village Hall as the transition to our new SCIO structure has begun to settle in. While there are still a few legal hurdles to clear, the new arrangement is already helping us to modernise how we operate and involve the wider community in the life and governance of the hall.

SCIO Transition

The formal transfer of assets from the former unincorporated charity to the new SCIO remains ongoing, and our thanks go to Neil Anderson for his continued work in coordinating solicitors, managing the accounting process, and ensuring that all compliance and reporting requirements are met. We are also grateful to the Ullapool Harbour Trust for its donation towards the legal costs associated with this work.

There are many advantages to forming as an incorporated charity in Scotland (SCIO) and moving away from an older style associations or dual status charities. This is a more modern governance structure which reflects current charity law and will make the village hall more contemporary and therefore, the Hall will be more aligned with other similar organisations and current Scottish Charitable law. Incorporation will give the hall its own legal personality meaning it is treated as separate entity, the charity exists in its own right and can act in its own right, for example it can hold assets and take out contracts as the entity. It will also be more able to access modern funding streams.

Although the legal transfer of title has taken longer than hoped, the hall’s day-to-day management has been fully under the SCIO since March 2024. This has allowed us to move forward with confidence while maintaining continuity for our staff, users and volunteers.

Operations and Finances

The Treasurer’s report sets out the detailed figures, but in summary, while overall revenue has remained steady (just over £41,000), rising costs have led to a small deficit this year. As Neil notes, underlying income fell slightly, and expenses – particularly staff and electricity – increased. Nevertheless, the hall remains in a stable financial position with healthy reserves equivalent to around 15 months’ expenses.

We have made some difficult but necessary hire charge increases again this year—approximately 9%, following a 10% rise the previous year. These adjustments ensure we can keep pace with inflation and meet increasing running costs. We recognise that these are never easy decisions, but our review of other community halls shows that Ullapool remains among the most affordable venues in the region. We continue to make case-by-case concessions for local charities and voluntary groups to ensure accessibility and fairness.

We have continued to invest in the hall's upkeep and sustainability. Plans are underway to upgrade the energy efficiency of the building, working with Matthew Holmes (Energy Officer) from LUCT's Highland Energy and Climate Partnership (HECP) for professional advice. We're also replacing all lighting with LED fixtures, reducing both our energy costs and carbon footprint.

Staffing and Volunteers

Once again, we have been very well served by our hard-working and dedicated team. Rachael Pringle, our Hall Manager, has done an outstanding job managing bookings, events, and communication, while Tony Rickwood, our Caretaker, has been a huge asset, keeping the building in great condition and supporting set-up and maintenance work. Finlay, our cleaner, has also continued to do excellent work in keeping the hall spotless and we were sad to see him leave for his next step into Higher Education – we would also like to put on record our thanks for his help in sourcing two new cleaners (Aiden Parlett & Ella Pringle) who are now getting settled in!

We are pleased to pay the living wage of £12.60hr to our cleaning staff regardless of age.

We'd also like to acknowledge the installation of Laurence's Bench, a fitting tribute to our former hall manager and his years of service. It's heartening to see people sitting there, enjoying the view outside the hall—it feels like a small but meaningful part of the hall's legacy. Our thanks extend to the many volunteers and trustees who give their time, energy, and ideas to keep the hall running smoothly and efficiently.

Users and Community Engagement

The variety and vibrancy of hall use over the past year has been remarkable. Our regular users include: Pipe Band, Toddlers, Bowls, Brownies, Guides, Fencing, Yoga, Solicitors Ledingham Chalmers (Gilly Meighan), the Butchers, Alex Bairstow, Joe Skelly and Alisa Hughes who run massage, physio and earworks services out of the upstairs office and benefit the health and wellbeing of any people in the community, The Ullapool News, Youth Space, Markets, Field Club, Community Council, Podiatrist, Pearson Vue Testing, Vaccine Clinics, MP Surgeries, and LUCT – there are of course many more private bookings and it would be impossible to mention them all.

We've also hosted a wide range of community and cultural events—from the Christmas Dinner, Hogmanay Ceilidh and Flower & Produce Show, to Feis Rois, Cannonbawz, Mother's Day Coffee Afternoon, Himalayan markets, Re-loved Clothing Fairs, and numerous concerts, gigs, workshops, and community consultations. This diversity highlights the hall's importance as a central gathering place for Ullapool and the surrounding area. We've also worked to provide the village with essential local services, including the butcher and fish van, ensuring the hall continues to serve as a practical hub for everyday needs as well as cultural life.

Building Improvements and Modernisation

We've continued to make small but important upgrades to enhance users' experience:

- The Wi-Fi system has been upgraded, giving reliable coverage throughout the building.
- A projector has been purchased and is now available for hirers to use.
- Our Terms & Conditions have been updated to simplify the hiring process—particularly for events involving alcohol, where unnecessary paperwork has been removed.
- We have allowed the installation of planters for the Toddler Group, helping brighten the exterior and give children a chance to get involved in looking after the hall environment.

Partnerships

This year, we've worked closely with the Ullapool & District Youth Group to co-develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This new agreement is intended not as a lease but as a collaborative partnership between the two SCIOs, ensuring a fair and sustainable arrangement for the Youth Hut and strengthening our shared commitment to young people in the community.

Looking Ahead

The year ahead will focus on improving our energy efficiency, securing grant funding for essential works, and diversifying our income streams—including potential office-space rentals and further community partnerships. We will continue to balance affordability with financial sustainability, ensuring the hall remains welcoming and accessible while remaining on a secure footing for the future.

Thanks

Thank you to Alan Nutu and Gordon Wink have generously donated their services to fix various building issues. And on behalf of the Trustees, I would like to thank everyone who contributes to making the Village Hall a success—our staff, volunteers, users, funders and partners. Your efforts ensure that this historic building continues to serve the Ullapool community, as it has done for over a century.

Ben Williams
Chair, Ullapool Village Hall SCIO
October 2025

Appendix: A Brief History of Ullapool Village Hall

The Ullapool Village Hall has its roots in the Free Church School built after the Disruption of 1843. Following the 1878 Education Act, it became the main local school until the opening of the present primary school in 1929.

After the school closed, the building was sold to local representatives in the 1930s for £150 and, with support from the Carnegie Trustees and local fundraising, was converted into the community hall we know today. The first recorded use of the “Ullapool Village Hall” name was in December 1935, for a Whist Drive and Carnival Dance to raise funds for its upkeep.

Over the decades, the hall has served as a central hub for countless community initiatives—from social gatherings and youth groups to village markets and events—and even briefly as the local Youth Hostel before 1951.

Major refurbishments have taken place over the years, including a significant renovation around 2000, ensuring the hall continues to adapt and serve future generations.

(Source: Collected historical notes by Chrissy Boyd & Joan Michael, October 2025.)

Ullapool Village Hall Association – AGM 2025 Treasurer’s Report

SCIO transition

- The legal structure of the organisation which runs the village hall is changing from an unincorporated trust to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). There are three main reasons why we are doing this:
 - The SCIO is a more modern structure, which is better when looking for grant funding
 - The SCIO is a more open and democratic, as it allows anyone in the community to become a member and members elect the Trustee
 - There is less personal liability for Trustees, which will help us to get new Trustees on board
- The SCIO was set up in August 2023 and day to day management of the hall was handed over to the SCIO from March 2024
- We have not yet been able to wind up the old charity as the transfer of the hall to the ownership of the SCIO is still underway, and involves two sets of solicitors, one acting for the old charity and one for the SCIO. We are grateful to the Harbour Trust for a donation towards costs
- We give our thanks to the Trustees of the old association (Kenneth Morrison, Angus MacDonald and Jemma Middleton) for bearing with us

Accounts

- We prepare a combined set of accounts for the old charity and the SCIO. In practice almost all the transactions this year have been through the SCIO bank accounts
- The accounts are prepared and reviewed by Leggatts in Dingwall and I would like to express my thanks to them. They provide an excellent service, processing our payroll as well as the accounts.

- The reported revenue is just over £41,000, very similar to the previous year, with a surplus of £2,700, down from £10,725 the year before.
- However these headline figures contain significant non-recurring items, specifically revenue from temporary users (Post Office in 23-24, Ullapool Unpacked in 24-25) and donations for specific purposes a (grant for accessible access to the Youth Hut and the donation towards legal costs).
- Stripping these figures out, we have a more realistic picture – underlying revenue down by around 6% and a deficit of just over £6,000 this year. (That figure doesn't strip out costs related to the non-recurring users, such as electricity so it's actually not quite as bad as that.)
- That deficit is driven by significant increases in our expenses, which are up by 27%
- Of these, the main contributors are staff costs and electricity. Staff costs are up because we asked Rachael to take on more responsibilities, with a corresponding increase in her hours and rate of pay. Costs have also gone up as we keep our pay rates in line with the national living wage. Electricity costs were up, due in part to the hall being used more when Ullapool Unpacked were operating full-time in the foyer.
- We had reserves at the end of the year of £51,631, equivalent to about 15 months of expenses. (Our objective is to have reserves equal to around 12 months expenses.)

Outlook

- Bookings for the current financial year are slightly up on last year after stripping out non-recurring items. However as noted above, the loss of Ullapool Unpacked means that we are looking at a significant deficit for the year.
- We increased hire charges from 1 May this year, by around 9%. This came on top of a 10% increase the year before. These increases were playing catch-up on inflation since 2021 and we know that our hall is still one of the most cost-effective community venues in the region.
- We will need to give some serious thought to hire charges when we review them again in the early part of next year. We do not want to put undue financial pressure on the regular users of the hall, but it rates for commercial / non-local / non-charity users are possibly still too low.
- We will also reduce electricity costs by replacing all the lighting in the hall with LED bulbs. This will cut electricity usage significantly, as well as reducing our carbon footprint.
- More importantly, we need to find ways of generating more income for the hall. One avenue is to hire rooms out as office space, but we need to find others.
- We are looking for sources of grant funding. It can be difficult to get funding for revenue costs but funding for capital projects could be used for things like doing up the vet's room to make it into office space which would then bring in more revenue.

Neil Anderson, Treasurer
October 2025