



Annual Report 2025/26

1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026

Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal

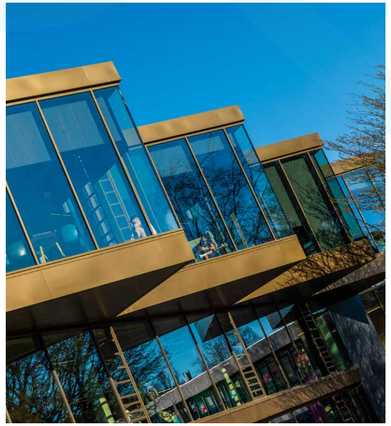
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1 Overview





The Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal is a long-term investment programme designed to unlock the region's economic potential, strengthen communities, and create sustainable, inclusive growth. It brings together the UK Government, Scottish Government, Stirling Council, Clackmannanshire Council, University of Stirling and regional partners to deliver transformational projects that will benefit residents, businesses and visitors.

The deal is built on the belief that economic growth should not only be ambitious, but fair in supporting improved infrastructure, innovation, digital capability, cultural investment, and skills development so that opportunity is accessible across the whole region.

2 At a Glance

The UK and Scottish Government will each invest **£45.1 million** over the lifetime of the ten-year deal totalling

£90.2 million

Delivering **investment** across

Stirling and Clackmannanshire

A shared commitment

between **UK Government**, **Scottish Government** and **local partners**

Focused on inclusive **growth**, **innovation** and

long-term prosperity

Supporting communities

through improved **skills, infrastructure,** and **connectivity**

The deal partnership is a

Tripartite arrangement

between Stirling Council, Clackmannanshire Council and the University of Stirling

A deal spanning

10 years from 2020-30

with benefits realised over 15 years

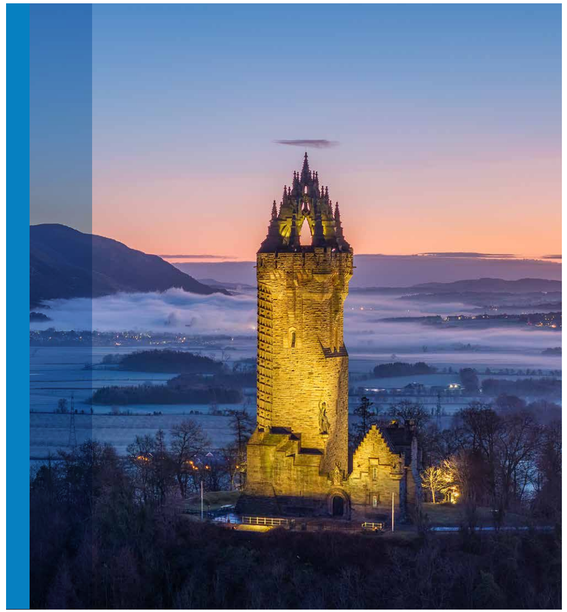
2026 Annual Report covering

Year 6 of 10

3 A **Vision** Rooted in **Partnership and Place**

Located at the heart of Scotland, the Stirling & Clackmannanshire region combines outstanding natural assets, world-class research and learning institutions, thriving communities, and a strong cultural and tourism offer. The City Region Deal is designed to build on these strengths, while addressing long-standing challenges such as inequality, barriers to employment, and the need for modern infrastructure and low carbon connectivity.

The deal is not only about delivering individual projects. It is about **creating lasting change**, strengthening resilience, and shaping a region that is well-positioned to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy.



4 What We're Working Towards: **Strategic Outcomes**

Every project and programme supported by the Deal contributes towards four overarching strategic outcomes. These outcomes guide delivery, shape decision-making, and ensure investment delivers measurable benefits.

Improving access to skills, education and training opportunities for people of all ages.

Supporting a stronger economy that enables businesses to thrive and communities to benefit.



Ensuring the benefits of investment are felt widely, reducing inequality and disadvantage.

Creating better-paid, sustainable employment opportunities, particularly in growth sectors.

Why these outcomes matter

The City Region Deal is designed to deliver more than physical investment. It aims to strengthen opportunity, improve quality of life, and ensure economic growth supports people and places across the region.

5 The Deal Themes: **Six Areas of Focus**

To deliver these outcomes, the Deal is structured around six interconnected themes. Each theme represents a key area where targeted investment can drive long-term impact.

Culture, Heritage & Tourism

Developing cultural and heritage assets to strengthen the visitor economy and enhance the region's identity and attractiveness.

Innovation

Supporting research excellence, entrepreneurship and emerging industries to help the region compete globally.

Digital

Enhancing digital connectivity and capability and ensuring people and businesses can benefit from digital transformation.

Skills and Inclusion

Strengthening pathways into learning and employment, with a focus on widening participation and supporting those facing barriers.

Transport, Connectivity & Low Carbon

Improving sustainable transport options and active travel infrastructure, while contributing to net zero ambitions.

Infrastructure

Delivering essential enabling projects that unlock investment, improve accessibility, and support future development.

A Deal built for the future

By aligning innovation, low carbon investment, and digital transformation with community priorities, the City Region Deal is helping build a region that is **greener, more connected, and more resilient**.

6 How the Deal Works: **Turning Investment into Impact**

The City Region Deal provides a framework for collaborative delivery, bringing together public bodies, academic partners and stakeholders to ensure projects are developed and delivered in a coordinated way.

From investment to outcomes



7 Progress: **Snapshot 2025/26**

During the reporting year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, the Deal moved major projects into delivery and achieved key funding and construction milestones across the programme portfolio:

- **Specific Project Advancement**
  Approved the Business Justification Case for **City Park Stirling** (30,000-capacity venue) with delivery having commenced in **early 2026/27** and our Joint Committee approved the new **Stirling wayfinding trail** in March 2026. A main contractor was procured for the **Stirling Hub project** with works having commenced on site (completed in June).

- **Effective Partnership Working**
  The former **MoD land at Forthside** was successfully transferred to Stirling Council via the Deal. Redevelopment is underway via £19.1m of Levelling Up Funding, including £3m dedicated to **Active Travel** routes.

- **Inclusive Growth Evidence**
  Launched the **Lone Parent project** in Alloa South & East into active delivery, providing targeted key worker support, a 6-week skills academy, and a 6-month paid work placement.

- **Skills & Readiness Progression**
  The University's flagship **National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH)** neared completion, delivering immediate local impact with £2.64m spent with local businesses and £6m with SMEs.

"The Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal is about long-term opportunity, building a stronger economy while ensuring our communities share in the benefits."

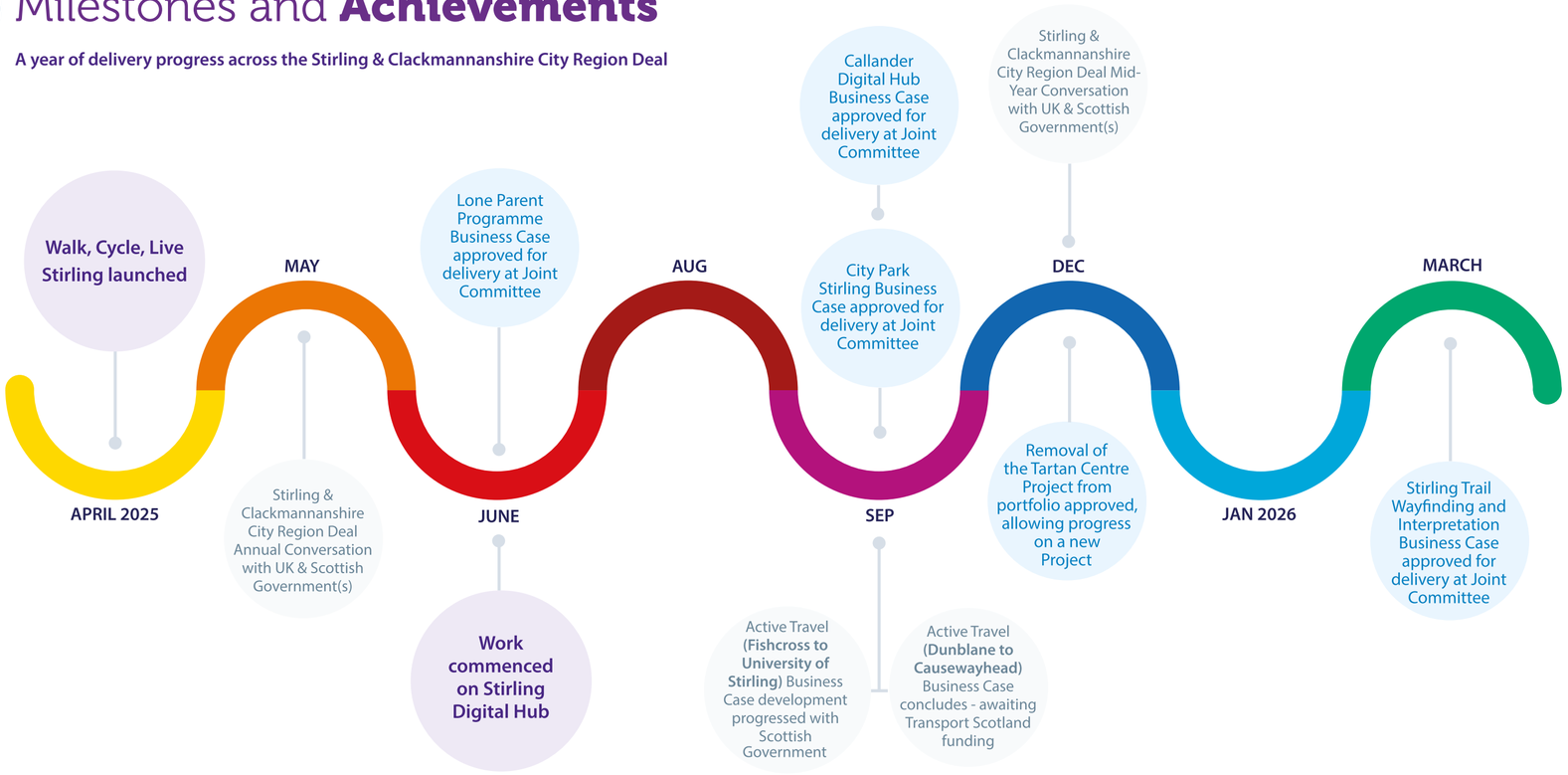






8 Milestones and **Achievements**

A year of delivery progress across the Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal



9 Portfolio **Snapshot 2025/26**

Total Projects in Portfolio **26**

7 Projects complete

6 Themes covered

Projects in delivery **7**

Projects in development /pipeline **12**

10 Foreword

It is our pleasure to introduce this year's Annual Report for the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal.

This past year has demonstrated, once again, the power of partnership and shared ambition. Working together, Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils, the University of Stirling, the UK and Scottish Governments, as well as a wide range of regional partners, businesses, and communities, are continuing to unlock and deliver investment that will shape the future of our region for generations to come.

In the past 12 months we have seen further progress across our programmes, from innovation and skills development to infrastructure investment and inclusive growth initiatives.

Under the Digital theme, work got underway on the Stirling Digital Hub, which will be located at the former Ministry of Defence (MoD) land at Forthside, with completion expected in June 2026. The Business Justification Case was also approved for the Callander Digital Hub, which will be developed in underutilised space in the Callander Library building. Work is due to start on this in 2026.

Major milestones were celebrated in the Culture, Heritage and Tourism theme including the approval of the Business Justification Case to transform City Park Stirling into Scotland's leading sustainable outdoor events space, with a capacity of 30,000. This work, backed by over £750,000 of Deal funding should be completed in the summer of 2026. In addition, exciting plans to create a new interpretation and wayfinding trail that will transform the visitor experience in Stirling and boost economic activity were given the green light in March 2026.

Another highlight this year was the investment at the former MoD land at Forthside. This site, located in a key part of the city centre, was transferred to Stirling Council via the Deal and is now being redeveloped through £19.1 million of Levelling Up Funding, with £3 million of this allocated to delivering active travel routes. This exciting project will unlock significant economic development opportunities.

The Alloa Innovation Campus proposal at Greenfield House has also made great progress over the last 12 months. A first phase repairs contract of this B listed heritage property has been successfully delivered backed by £1 million capital funding from Clackmannanshire Council. An outline business case for the Alloa Heritage & Enterprise Centre is also currently in development which will see Clackmannanshire's Museum collection shared with the public for the first time, celebrating stories of innovation throughout history.

In the skills theme the Lone Parent project received all approvals to proceed and is now in delivery supporting lone parents from Alloa South & East, with dedicated one-to-one support from a Key Worker, wrap-around support for the participant's family, a six-week skills academy and accredited training, and a 6-month paid work experience placement in their chosen industry.

The University's flagship National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH) is nearing completion. During its build phase alone, NATIH met ambitious targets to deliver local social impact, with £2.64 million spent with businesses within 40 miles, and £6 million with SMEs. Five new jobs were created, and more than 80 weeks of apprenticeships delivered.

Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC) continues to deliver for local communities, while leveraging additional regional benefits. Work continues on the Forth Environmental Resilience Array, the pioneering environmental monitoring platform that will power the region's transition to Net Zero, while the Forth Climate Forest has leveraged considerable additional investment. Young Pathfinders - SIEC's educational outreach programme – has helped a further cohort of young people across Stirling and Clackmannanshire to build employability skills and critical thinking, with a total of 115 secondary school pupils now having benefited. Along with Net Zero support for businesses provided through Project Beacon, SIEC is laying the foundation for a Just Transition across the Forth Valley.

The above projects demonstrate that these initiatives are not just about bricks and mortar; they are about improving people's lives in the region through the creation of high-quality jobs, improving skills and opportunities to access work, greater inward investment, better transport links, enhanced digital access, regenerating places and communities, and delivering a greener and cleaner future for everyone that lives, works and visits here.

As we move beyond the halfway point of the Deal and reflect on its sixth year, it is encouraging to see more projects coming into the delivery phase and others getting closer to this stage. We are determined to maintain this momentum and push forward with our programme, driven by an awareness of how transformative these investments can be to our communities.

We have a responsibility to provide strong leadership, and vision. The City Region Deal allows us to do just that by aligning local priorities with national ambitions and ensuring that investment delivers real benefits where they matter most.

Looking ahead, the opportunities before us are substantial. By continuing to champion innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth and, by building on the strengths of our councils, our university, and our wider partnership, we are positioning Stirling and Clackmannanshire as dynamic, forward-looking places to live, work, learn, and invest.

This annual report highlights the progress made so far and reinforces our shared commitment to deliver long-term, positive change. Together, we are building a stronger, more resilient regional economy and a better future for all who live and work here.



Councillor
Ellen Forson, Leader
Clackmannanshire Council



Councillor
Susan McGill, Leader
Stirling Council



Professor
Sir Gerry McCormac
Principal and Vice-Chancellor, The University of Stirling



11 **Finance** Summary

The Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Regional Deal financial summary for the period of 1 April 2025 to 31March 2026 is set out below.

Financial Overview for the Deal up to 31 March 2026



£90.2m

Total Scottish & UK Government Investment agreed for our City Region Deal



£2.51m

Total claimed by our City Region Deal from Governments in 2025/26



£37.20m

Total claimed from Governments

Annual Claims Summary (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026)

CRD Thematic Programme	Project	Claimed in 25/26 (£)
Digital	Stirling Digital Hub	1,787,508.73
Innovation	Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC) Phase 1	526,573.16
Skills & Inclusion	Flexible Skills	73,433.41
	Inclusion Workers & Investment Fund	125,351.63
Total		**2,512,766.93**

Overall Investment & Drawdown Summary (to 31 March 2026)

CRD Thematic Programme	Scottish Government Investment (£)	UK Government Investment (£)	Total Investment (£)	Total CRD claim drawdown to 31 March 26 (£)
Transport Connectivity & Low Carbon	7,200,000	0	7,200,000	2,738,445.09
Culture Heritage & Tourism	15,000,000	750,000	15,750,000	750,000
Digital	4,000,000	0	4,000,000	2,337,508.73
Innovation	17,000,000	39,250,000	56,250,000	25,614.114.56
Infrastructure	0	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000
Skills & Inclusion	1,900,000	100,000	2,000,000	760,345.79
Total	**45,100,000**	**45,100,000**	**90,200,000**	**37,200,414.17**

12 Culture Heritage & Tourism

Our Culture Heritage and Tourism (CHT) theme aims to strengthen and promote the regions cultural, historic and visitor assets to stimulate economic growth, increase visitor spending, and support new and sustainable employment opportunities. Investments under this theme seek to enrich visitor experiences while linking them with inclusive growth and community benefits.

Within the CHT Programme there are seven projects: City Park, Bannockburn House, the Albert Halls, the Smith Art Gallery & Museum, the Wayfinding & Interpretation Trail, the Alloa Heritage & Enterprise Centre and the Japanese Gardens. Progress within the CHT programme has included developing Business Cases with some projects scheduled to enter construction phases in 2026/27.





Project	CRD Allocation
The City Park Outdoor Event Space	£754,000
Stirling Trail - Wayfinding and Interpretation Project	£330,000
The Albert Halls	£5,170,714
Bannockburn House	£1,032,131
The Smith Art Gallery & Museum	£2,213,155
The Alloa Heritage & Enterprise Centre	£5,500,000
The Japanese Gardens (Completed)	£750,000

The City Park

City Park in Stirling is being transformed into a high quality sustainable outdoor events venue capable of hosting concerts, festivals and large-scale cultural events with a capacity of up to 30,000 – capitalising on its location under Stirling Castle and enhancing the City's tourism offer. The project is backed by over £750,000 deal funding, which includes access improvements, utility infrastructure, improved drainage and improved connectivity. The Business Justification Case was approved by Joint Committee March 2026 and works are expected to be completed before the summer 2026.

The Stirling Trail - Wayfinding and Interpretation Project

With the aim of developing and improving wayfinding and interpretation signage, particularly in Stirling City Centre, this project seeks to create a cohesive, accessible and visually engaging system of signs and information boards that help visitors and residents navigate key historic sites, attractions and routes more easily. The Business Justification Case has been approved by Government and Joint Committee in March, an essential part of our governance structure to enable works to begin.

The Albert Halls

Redeveloped into a modern venue of scale

The project focuses on the redevelopment of The Albert Halls, a key civic and cultural venue located in the heart of Stirling's city centre. Constructed in 1883 and funded by local residents to provide a space for live music, artistic offerings and cultural events, the Halls is now showing its age with a dated interior and an absence of modern facilities. The redevelopment will ensure the building is accessible and inclusive while enhancing the overall visitor experience. The work will maximise the capacity of the venue and enhance the front-of-house layout to ensure adequate hospitality provision. This will increase the output of the venue, maximising secondary spend and boosting the city's night-time economy, which will in turn encourage longer stays. During the past year, work has centred on progressing the Stage 2 design proposals and developing the project's Strategic Outline Case.

Bannockburn House

Work has also progressed on the Outline Business Case for Bannockburn House. The project focuses on restoration of the 17th century A-listed mansion.

The Smith Art Gallery and Museum

A Business Case is currently being developed to deliver an enhanced visitor experience and enable the display of objects of major significance, helping to attract new audiences.

Alloa Heritage and Enterprise Centre

The Alloa Heritage and Enterprise Centre addresses a long-standing gap in Clackmannanshire's cultural infrastructure: despite a rich industrial heritage, the county is one of the few local authorities in Scotland without a permanent museum service or central heritage facility. Much of the Clackmannanshire Collection remains in storage, inaccessible to the public.

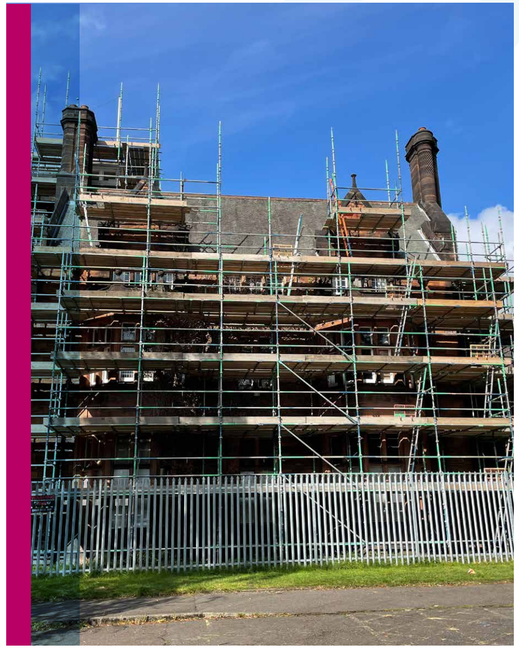
Greenfield House, a B-listed building on the Buildings at Risk Register, has suffered extensive deterioration after more than a decade of vacancy. The project will restore and repurpose Greenfield House as a heritage, learning and enterprise hub, providing a permanent home for the Clackmannanshire Collection, creating a heritage gateway for the region, and supporting skills, employability and innovation.

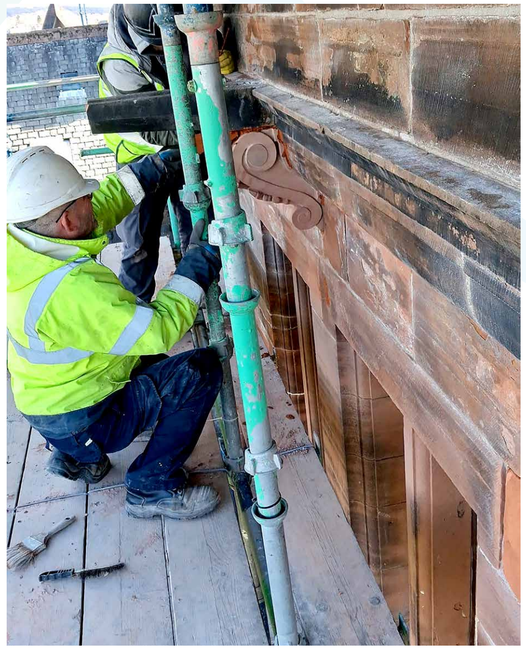
It is also proposed to upgrade Greenfield Park and enhance the greenspace reconnecting the house and park as one, offering accessible learning and recreation for all abilities. Improved biodiversity will create vital wildlife habitat whilst supporting community wellbeing and outdoor education.

The Alloa Heritage & Enterprise Centre project seeks to establish a central heritage gateway and network across Clackmannanshire, connecting existing heritage attractions through interpretation, trails and coordinated visitor information. This approach is expected to increase visitor numbers across the region and support local businesses.

The project includes the Clackmannanshire Heritage Challenge Fund, a grant programme designed to support projects that connect heritage with innovation, tourism, and community development. The fund will invest in projects that celebrate local history (whether built, industrial, or cultural) while also promoting inclusion, wellbeing, sustainability, and skills development. The fund is intended to operate across the whole of Clackmannanshire by supporting a range of interconnected projects rather than a single large development, helping to link towns, villages, and heritage sites into a more cohesive visitor experience.

The project aims to create tangible employment pathways in heritage, digital, and hospitality sectors through apprenticeships, paid community researcher roles, and traditional skills training. It seeks to deliver on both the City Region Deal outcomes of inclusive economic growth, higher value jobs, and shared prosperity, alongside National Lottery Heritage Fund principles of saving heritage, protecting the environment, increasing inclusivity and improving organisational sustainability.





13 Innovation

Our Innovation theme focuses on investment in research, development and innovation infrastructure that drives economic growth by translating new ideas and technologies into commercial and social outcomes. It aims to tackle exclusion, support job creation and raise educational opportunities.

The National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub

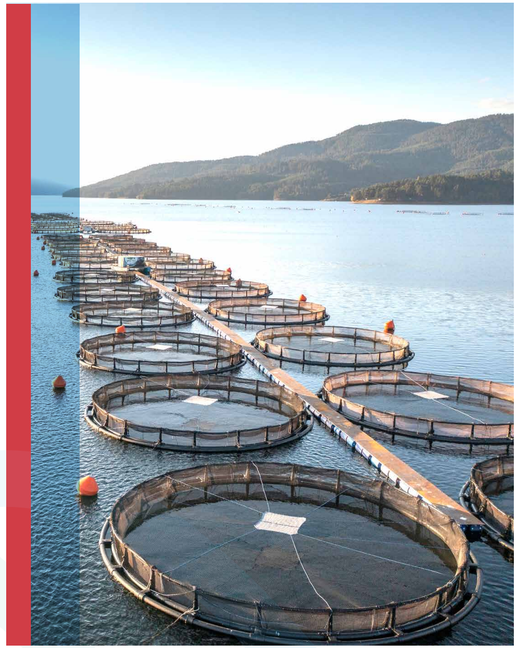
The National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub, (NATIH) at the University of Stirling, is nearing completion. Supported by £17 million of UK Government investment, together with a further £1 million from the Wolfson Foundation and additional investment from the University, the Hub will maintain the University's position at the forefront of one of the world's fastest-growing sectors. NATIH's new, state-of-the-art laboratories and experimental facilities will enable the University's Institute of Aquaculture to expand its research capacity, working with industry to tackle major challenges facing aquaculture producers, from enhancing fish welfare and to better managing environmental impacts.

Scotland's International Environment Centre (Phase 1)

Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC) is continuing to build the research and innovation infrastructure that will underpin the region's transition to net zero. The Forth Environmental Resilience Array (Forth-ERA), which will make the region an international leader in catchment-scale environmental monitoring and innovation, was recently showcased to a delegation of scientists and policymakers, demonstrating how the system's capabilities can power a number of innovations aimed at delivering a Just Transition by supporting adaptation and resilience in the face of climate change. Alongside this, the Young Pathfinders programme continues to engage, educate and inspire the next generation to develop critical thinking, alongside creative and entrepreneurial responses to our changing environment.

Innovation Project

Options are being progressed for a new Innovation Project within our Deal. A preferred option has now emerged, and a Strategic Outline Case is being developed. A Change Control has been approved by Government to reflect this revised direction and more detail will be published on this in future Annual Reports.







14 Digital

Our Digital Theme is designed to enhance digital infrastructure, digital skills and entrepreneurship across Stirling and Clackmannanshire. This includes developing high – quality business spaces and hubs, supporting digital skills development and fostering a vibrant digital ecosystem that helps local businesses start, grow and compete regionally and globally.

This theme includes four Digital Hub projects : Cowie, Callander, Stirling and Alloa's Regional Hub. The digital theme continues to develop and make progress into 2026, enhancing Stirling and Clackmannanshire's ability to foster digital technology, skills and business growth.

Further progress Updates

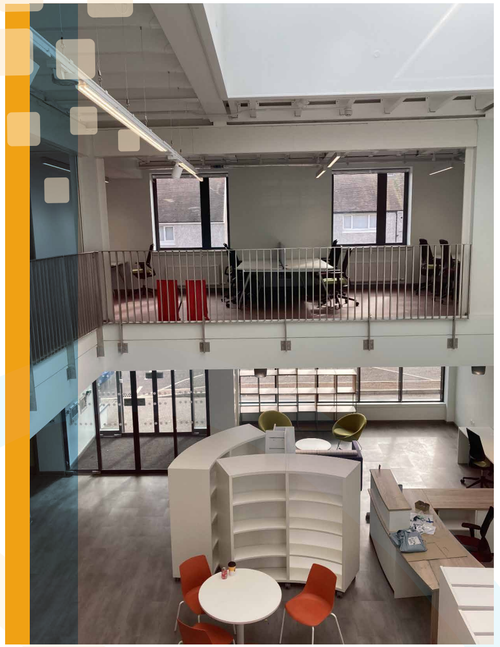
The **Cowie Digital Hub** project has been delivered and provides modern business accommodation in the new library on Cowie main street.

The Business Justification Case for **Callander Digital Hub** was also signed off by Joint Committee this year. The project will redevelop the underutilised space within the existing Callander Library building to provide commercial co-working, office and training space for local business owners and to nurture new start businesses. Works are due to start in 2026.

The **Alloa Regional Digital Hub** project is currently in the early stages of Business Justification Case development and is proposed to be co-located with the Alloa Heritage & Enterprise Centre at Greenfield House. Aligned to national and regional strategic plans, the Hub will seek to encourage innovation through the development of high-quality infrastructure, increasing digital business startups and growth, boosting employment and digital inclusion and increasing the number of apprenticeships in the sector. Early discussions with the National Robotarium have taken place to support businesses exploring the opportunities and benefits of introducing automation.

The **Alloa Regional Digital Hub** will be supported by a programme of skills development and training, involving businesses, schools, Forth Valley College, University of Stirling and local partners. The Alloa hub will support collaboration between digital projects both in Alloa and across the region.

Significant progress has been made on the **Stirling Digital Hub** this year with works underway to refurbish an office block within what was previously a Ministry of Defence site. This site is currently being redeveloped and will host Stirling Studios, a significant new development expected to unlock substantial investment, job opportunities, and a range of economic and social benefits. The hub will provide new modern space for growing digital businesses, with construction of this expected to be completed in June 2026.







15 Skills and Inclusion

The skills and inclusion theme is intended to broaden access to opportunities and tackle barriers to participation in the labour market. It supports inclusive skills pathways and targeted programmes that improve employability, especially for those facing exclusion, and ensure that individuals and communities' benefit from the City Region Deals investment and local Economic Growth. Skills and inclusion continues to support inclusive economic growth and employment opportunities across the region.

This theme includes three approved programmes all of which are now in delivery. These projects are: Flexible Skills Programme, Clackmannanshire Lone Parent Programme and Inclusion Workers and Investment Fund.

Flexible Skills Programme

Our Flexible Skills programme facilitates the inclusive growth ambitions of the City Region Deal (CRD) partners' commitment to providing skills and employment opportunities across the significant CRD project investment in Stirling and Clackmannanshire.

The City Region Deal will drive outcomes for local people through the ongoing and future investment activities of CRD projects, working in tandem with the employment and skills sector partners to realise these ambitions for local people.

The Flexible Skills Project aims to work with all the CRD capital projects to develop skills and employment opportunities focussing on individuals, and groups, facing barriers to the labour market. CRD projects will be supported to provide skills and employment opportunities through the development of a series of Skills Pathway Plans that will identify the key occupations that will underpin workforce planning as well as focussing on the individuals and groups that might benefit from developing skills in these occupational areas.

The Flexible Skills Project has continued to focus on the development of skills and employment opportunities across City Region Deal projects. Projects have access to the Flexible Skills Grant Fund to provide additional resources to assist in the development of specific activities linked to the wider project. The Flexible Skills Grant Fund also encourages City Deal Projects to work in partnership with local skills and employment organisations to harness their expertise in the delivery of skills and employment outcomes.

Clackmannanshire Lone Parent Programme

The Business Justification Case for the Lone Parent project was approved by Joint Committee in June 2025. The project is now underway. A detailed project plan has been prepared, and a small project team are in place. Referrals to the programme are now live (as at February 2026), and employer engagement has commenced to seek out placement opportunities.

The project is now branded 'Parent Pathway' and it will support lone parents from Alloa South & East, with dedicated one-to-one support from a Key Worker, wrap-around support for the participant's family, a six-week skills academy and accredited training, and a 6-month paid work experience placement in their chosen industry. The six-week skills academy will allow participants to gain confidence, learn how to manage their wellbeing, develop skills for job applications and interviews, and receive careers guidance and advice on employment rights and flexible working. All work placements provided by the programme will be flexible, with working days and hours to suit the participant's family life. Participants will continue to receive support from their Key Worker throughout the placement, and they will work together to ensure continued employment when the placement ends.

Inclusion Workers and Investment Fund

Inclusion support is also being delivered through dedicated inclusion workers, who help individuals that are the hardest to reach, engage with skills and employability offers., The CRD Inclusion Worker programme is now in its final quarter of delivery. Over the last 4 years the programme -provided support to those furthest away from engagement tackling multiple barriers, social isolation, loneliness and encouraging early steps into initial pathways of support. The Inclusion programme has been one of the key projects funded through the City Region Deal which has provided immediate direct benefit to people living in communities across Stirling and Clackmannanshire, with a near fifty-fifty split in participation, from the two local authorities. The programme has supported the reduction of isolation and loneliness and helped many take steps to create pathways for personal growth and achievement.

Aaron said that "since becoming involved with inclusion project I feel better within myself and I am more positive about the future.

Aaron's mum Julie said "I have noticed a difference and Aaron is doing brilliantly"

How the fund helped Aaron and the skills he learned

- Improved mental health and well being
- Improved communication skills
- More able to interact with others
- Reduced isolation
- More able to travel independently
- Improved self-esteem and confidence

Case Study 1:

C was very isolated as she had spent all of the last 18 year caring for her disabled son. Due to the needs of her son increasing he was placed into supported accommodation. This left C feeling that she had no purpose, and she realised that she had no identity outwith being her sons mum and a carer.

Her mental health was extremely low, and she had been having thoughts of suicide. She rarely left the house as she felt too anxious to go out by herself. She felt that there was no hope and no way to feel better, she was encouraged to speak to her GP- she did and was referred for counselling and was given anti-depressants.

Initially, support started with short "walk and talk" meetings which aimed to get her out of the house, have an opportunity to talk and to also increase her fitness and overall wellbeing. Her fitness level was low so she was only able to walk for about 5 minutes at a time, but this eventually built to walking for a full hour. These walks were used to build trust and discuss her past and issues she was currently facing. Through these meetings and her support from the GP her mental wellbeing and fitness improved, she was more open to talking about goals, the future and what her hopes and dreams were.

C was supported to explore things that brought her happiness. Visits to the library were incorporated into the "walk and talks" and she joined the Library so that she could take books out. Choosing books and taking them home to read gave C something in her day to look forward to. It also encouraged her to get out of the house and it increased the amount of exercise she was getting in the week. This led to a decrease in C's anxiety which gave her confidence that she could attend a group.

She was referred to the Thrive to Keep Well programme. To reduce a barrier to her attending the group, she applied for a bus pass and started travel training, so that by the time group started C was able to independently take the bus to and from the group. C was then able to complete the 16-week wellbeing programme, her mental wellbeing continued to improve and her confidence grew.

Through the confidence and self-belief she gained from building her self-esteem during initial meetings, joining the library, learning how to get the bus independently and attending the group she realised she had a lot more to offer than being a Mum.

She identified that she wanted to decorate her house which she needed extra funds for so she started applying for work and successfully got a temporary job at ASDA. She was not able to afford shoes for the role, so the Inclusion Worker sourced appropriate shoes so that she was well presented and comfortable for her shifts.

She struggled with the demands of the job but was able to get encouragement and advice to sustain the job from her Inclusion worker, which helped her make a success of the opportunity. With this role on her CV, she then began to look for a permanent role elsewhere. At this point Inclusion referred her on to Clacksworks, so she was able to get support from them to look for paid employment. Because she was now able to travel confidently on the bus, she was able to take on a permanent cleaning job in the next village. She went from being suicidal, anxious, isolated and with no plans for the future to being happy, confident, able to travel independently and work in a permanent role.



16 **Transport,** Connectivity and Low Carbon



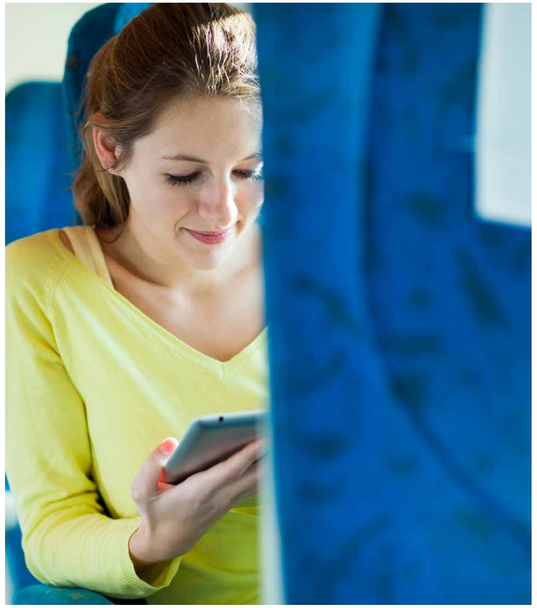
The Transport, Connectivity and Low Carbon theme focuses on improving regional connectivity and transport infrastructure, while advancing the city regions low carbon ambitions. This includes creating active travel routes to improve local and regional accessibility, and planning for future low carbon energy deployment to support the transition to net zero. It contributes to economic growth by improving access to jobs, education and services in a sustainable way.

As part of this theme there are three projects which include: **Active Travel, The Regional Energy Masterplan and Walk Cycle Live Stirling.**

This theme is continuing to focus on improving strategic connectivity whilst supporting the regions transition to a low carbon economy. This year, work has focused on the **Dunblane to Causewayhead** Business Justification Case. The first phase of the project, connecting Causewayhead with Bridge of Allan, is programmed for construction starting in summer 2026. This is subject to securing the remaining required funding from Transport Scotland (bid submitted). The Bridge of Allan to Dunblane part of the route (Phase 2) is programmed for construction in 2028/29. **The Fishcross to University of Stirling**, Business Justification Case is currently in development. **Phase 1 Alva to Menstrie** is complete and was fully funded by Transport Scotland Active Travel Transformation Fund to £1.75m. During 2025/26 the Council has now completed 870m of a new off road, multi-user active travel route. This new path extends between Fishcross and Shavelhaugh Loan and sees the start of Phase 2 of the full planned route from Fishcross to University of Stirling. Stirling Council is progressing the Business Justification Case for the Alloa to Stirling route. Final designs, and costs, to upgrade and improve the existing cycle route between Manor Powis and Alloa town centre have been presented. These designs will be progressed to initial construction phase in 2026/2027, subject to match funding.







17 Infrastructure

Our Infrastructure theme enables investment in physical infrastructure that unlocks development potential and supports broader economic goals. This includes projects that provide essential foundations for new housing, business space and community facilities which in turn enable inclusive growth and enhance the city regions attractiveness for private investment.

This theme supports key foundational projects that unlock development and investment across the region. The Forthside Ministry of Defence site was transferred to Stirling Council in two phases in March 2024 and March 2025. £19.1M of Levelling Up Funding has been secured to redevelop the site and provide Complementary Active Travel routes.

£19.1m

Of Levelling Up Funding has been secured to **redevelop the Forthside Ministry of Defence** site and develop Active Travel Routes



18 Benefits Realisation

Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC)

SIEC continues to deliver for local communities, while leveraging additional regional benefits. The Young Pathfinders educational outreach programme ran for its fourth year, empowering 30 secondary school pupils from Stirling and Clackmannanshire with employability skills and critical thinking. Pupils from Lornshill Academy in Clackmannanshire scooped the coveted Climate Competition trophy, while Stirling High pupils were the winners of the Sustainable Art Challenge. The scheme welcomed a further 25 pupils in its fifth year, who in November 2025 – working with the Forth Climate Forest and Clackmannanshire-based charity The Conservation Volunteers – planted the first trees as part of a new woodland in Sauchie. Since its establishment, a total of 115 pupils have now taken part in the programme.

The Forth Climate Forest, hosted by SIEC, secured an additional £460,000 from the Scottish Government in 2025/6. Former Scottish Government Minister for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands Mairi Gougeon MSP called the model a "fantastic example of how partnership working can help tackle climate change, restore nature and improve the quality of life for people across the central belt."

In September 2025, the capabilities of the Forth Environmental Resilience Array (Forth-ERA), which will make the region an international leader in catchment-scale environmental monitoring and innovation, were demonstrated to a delegation of scientists and policymakers from industry and the Scottish Government on a visit to Loch Katrine in the Trossachs.

State-of-the-art-sensors have been installed on Scotland's oldest steamship, the Sir Walter Scott, as part of the first of its kind digital environmental observatory. Scottish Government Chief Scientific Adviser for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, Professor Mat Williams, said Forth-ERA "provides a robust evidence base to inform adaptive management strategies and support the transition toward a more resilient and sustainable socio-ecological system."

In Stirling, Project Beacon continues to deliver net zero support to local businesses, providing free guidance to SMEs to put in place plans to reduce their carbon impact. Supported with additional funding leveraged from the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund, the project helps Stirling's businesses play their part in meeting Scotland's target of achieving net zero by 2045.

Hoose Ltd, a Bridge of Allan-based regenerative house builder, was one of a number of regional SMEs to develop a long-term support relationship with SIEC, benefiting from carbon literacy training, a full carbon footprint assessment, and the establishment of an organisational carbon baseline.

SIEC's community benefits will continue to accrue, culminating towards the end of the City Region Deal's 15-year benefit delivery timescale.





Lornshill Academy pupils, winners of the 2025 Young Pathfinders Climate Competition



Stirling High pupils, winners of the 2025 Young Pathfinders Sustainable Art Challenge

The National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH)

NATIH is nearing completion and is attracting the attention of the global aquaculture community. During its build phase, alone NATIH has met ambitious targets to deliver local social impact, with £2.64 million spent with businesses within 40 miles of the University, and £6 million with SMEs. Five new jobs were created, while more than 80 weeks of apprenticeships have been delivered through lead contractor Robertson Construction, and 10 weeks of work experience placements provided for local young people.

Ideal Candidate, Robertson Construction's flagship employability programme, saw 23 pupils from Wallace High and Lornshill Academy gain SCQF Level 3 and 4 Certificates in Employability Skills, while further site visits from local schools offered a special focus on encouraging women into construction.





Walk Cycle Live Stirling

The Walk Cycle Live Stirling project has now concluded. The Council is developing a monitoring system to establish a live measurement record of users of the active travel links. Anecdotally, the numbers using the facilities have increased significantly. Feedback from the Wallace High School is very positive, with numbers of school pupils using bicycles at record levels.

The Council is currently working with partners in developing a behavioural change plan to help increase the number of confident cyclists. This plan will see a programme of progressive actions relating to: improving bike availability, secure bike locking system and training opportunities. The WCLS scheme has now set the benchmark for other linked active travel schemes which are currently being designed to augment the active travel network.

Regional Energy Masterplan (REM)

Project is fully completed with the REM delivering a special mapping tool and targeted investment focused road map as per the business justification case objectives.

In terms of projects progressing from the REM this year.

Forthside District Heating Network: we have been working to optimise efficiencies of the existing Forthside district heating network, increasing the percentage of low carbon heat to St. Modan's High School which reduces the school's emissions from heating and also brings cost savings.

In practice, this means that for the initial phase of the Forthside DHN, the network makes an average surplus for the Council of around £50K per year after all borrowing and operational costs have been paid. In addition to this, the local school saves an average of £3-4K on its annual heating bills (the cost of district heating is 10% lower than using their gas boilers, so they get a 10% saving on their heating bills).

Forthside District Heat Network Expansion: we were successful in securing £50K grant funding from Scottish Government's Heat Network Support Unit for a detailed feasibility to look at expanding the existing Forthside district heating network up to the capacity of the existing energy centre, taking into account potential to connect new large-scale developments in Forthside, as well as existing public buildings. This will provide low cost, low carbon heating wider across the Forthside area, reducing emissions and reducing the reliance on fossil fuels through decarbonisation of heat for the area.

Large-Scale Power Generation: Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire Council have significant building and land assets across the Council area, bringing opportunities to optimise renewable energy generation for use at a local level. A key area of work being progressed is the potential for large-scale renewable energy generation and/or energy storage opportunities on former landfill sites at Borrowmeadow and Lower Polmaise. Officers are exploring a range of delivery models to optimise Council revenue generation opportunities and cost savings, alongside decarbonisation of the Council estate through provision of renewable energy to meet nearby building power demand.

Council Energy Consumption: Council annual gas consumption (kWh) has decreased over the last 5 years, with emissions associated with gas use also decreasing as we decarbonise our estate and improve energy efficiency. Council electricity consumption (kWh) has decreased by 16% comparing the most recent year with the baseline year of 2006-07, with emissions from electricity use decreasing by 75% due to significant decarbonisation of the grid.

Inclusion Workers and Investment Fund

The Inclusion programme has been one of the key projects funded through the City Region Deal which has provided immediate direct benefit to people living in communities across Stirling and Clackmannanshire.

The programme has supported the reduction of isolation and loneliness and helped many take steps to create pathways for personal growth and achievement.

Expected overall target numbers (245) for the engagement of participants exceed original targets with 298 people being supported across Stirling and Clackmannanshire.

The programme annually has consistently performed above target for improvement with soft outcomes (self-esteem, confidence, motivation, social skills etc) and the alleviation of barriers to participation.

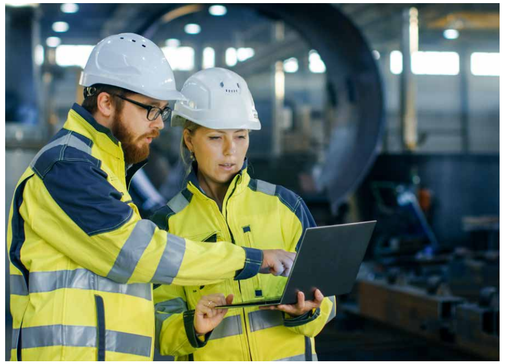
The programme has faced challenges when looking to support progression to pre-employment support and the achievement of qualifications (*). Targets for these two areas could not be achieved as what could not be anticipated prior to the commencement of the programme was the starting point of participants and how significantly far-removed people were from engagement with any service. Mental health and wellbeing levels were significantly poor and people experienced multiple barriers to participation, all of which were exacerbated by the pandemic with project inception starting just as communities across Stirling and Clackmannanshire were coming out of lockdown.

Annual Summary Reporting Table (Acheived/target)

Year	No. of Participants supported	No. reporting improvements in soft outcomes	No. reporting barrier alleviation	No. Achieving qualifications * see above	No. Progressing into Employability support * see above
2024/25	90/70	73/40	48/20	17/20	10/30
2023/24	72/70	50/40	26/20	9/20	10/30
2022/23	70/70	46/40	30/20	9/20	13/30
2021/22	66/70	42/40	28/20	4/20	8/30

To support the reduction of isolation staff have provided support in the following areas;

- Traveling independently
- Developing confidence and self-esteem with a view to building relationships
- Providing access to volunteering so participants could meet new people as well as learn new skills
- Supporting skills to improve wider family relationships
- Building communication skills to aid interaction with others
- Providing access to weekly group opportunities e.g. drop ins, coffee and chat, mid week movers”



Case Study 2:

B was a school leaver who had been referred from her guidance teacher as she was leaving school without a positive destination. B is autistic and struggled with many aspects of life and her parents were worried about how she would cope with life after school. At the initial meeting, B attended with her mum, but was unsure about what she wanted to do. Support started with weekly 1 hour meetings, where the emphasis was chatting about different things that she liked, did and how she travelled to meet friends and family. She would not travel on her own as she got very anxious. Her mum, dad or sister would drive her to anywhere she needed to go and picked her back up again.

B didn't get on very well at school and she didn't like the environment, she thought college would be the same so she didn't want to go to college but was still unsure about what she wanted as she felt that she wouldn't be able to do anything at the moment.

A plan was made to start with travel training, B would learn how to use public transport, bus app and goggle maps. B found it confusing at times but got the hang of it. She also completed a Level 3 Adult Achievement Award on what she learned while doing travel training. During the sessions B became more confident and developed many new skills, communication, following instructions, teamwork and interpersonal skills. She also started to think about employment and what type of job she might want to do, she also thought about learning to drive, and applied for funding for her driving lessons through the Independent Living Fund, as she would qualified due to her autism. She is now learning to drive. B also saw a job for a trainee shop assistant in a shop near where she lives, applied and was successful. She has been working as a trainee shop assistant now for around 13 weeks.

19 Reflections and Year Ahead

The reporting year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 marked a continued period of progress across the Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal portfolio. This progress has been delivered within a wider context of ongoing economic adjustment following the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside sustained inflationary pressures, supply chain disruption and a challenging public sector financial environment.

These factors have continued to influence the pace, cost and delivery profile of major infrastructure and capital programmes across the UK. In this context, the ability of partners to maintain momentum, adapt to changing conditions and sustain investment confidence has been a significant achievement.

Projects across the Deal have advanced through key stages of development and delivery, supported by strong and sustained partnership working between both local authorities, Scottish and UK Government partners, delivery organisations and a wide range of regional stakeholders.

While the pace and nature of progress continues to vary across a diverse and complex programme, the overall direction of travel remains positive. The Deal continues to provide a strong platform for long-term, place-based investment in the region's economic future — supporting improvements in infrastructure, strengthening innovation capacity, enhancing cultural and heritage assets, advancing digital ambition and widening access to inclusive skills pathways.

Throughout 2025/26, there has been a consistent focus on ensuring that investment remains aligned with the Deal's strategic outcomes. This includes delivering inclusive and sustainable economic growth, supporting higher-value employment opportunities, widening participation in skills and learning, and ensuring that the benefits of investment are shared across communities.

While significant investment has already been made to date, a substantial level of expenditure remains required to deliver the anticipated outcomes and realise the deal's long-term objectives.

Progress at a Glance

During 2025/26, progress was supported by:

- strengthened programme **governance** and **oversight**
- continued **development and delivery momentum** across projects
- ongoing **engagement** with partners, communities and stakeholders
- an increased focus on aligning delivery with **inclusive growth** outcomes

Key **Lessons** Learned

Delivering a complex, multi-year investment programme across multiple partners continues to generate important insight and learning. As the Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal matures, there is an increasing emphasis not only on identifying lessons, but on embedding continuous improvement activity across governance, delivery and benefits realisation.

Throughout the course of the deal a number of key lessons have emerged which are actively informing how the programme is being strengthened for future years.

What we have Learned so far

- **Strong and proportionate governance remains essential to** maintaining pace, accountability and clarity of decision-making. Ongoing work is being undertaken to refine governance arrangements, ensuring they remain efficient, transparent and appropriately scaled as projects move from development into delivery.
- **Early and sustained engagement with delivery partners, stakeholders and communities adds significant value.** This approach is being further embedded across the programme, supporting better project design, stronger alignment with regional priorities and increased confidence among partners and local communities.
- **Programme flexibility is critical in a changing economic and policy environment.** In response to inflationary pressures, market volatility and evolving policy priorities, partners have continued to adapt delivery approaches. This has been supported by more active programme monitoring and scenario planning to manage risk and maintain momentum.
- **Realism in project development and delivery planning is essential. E**xperience this year has reinforced the importance of fully accounting for procurement timescales, technical design requirements and statutory approvals. As a result, there is a stronger focus on robust early-stage planning and risk management across the portfolio.
- **Capturing the full value of the Deal requires a clearer articulation of partner contributions, leverage and wider benefits.** Work is underway to strengthen the programme's approach to benefits realisation, including improved identification and tracking of partner funding, leverage investment and the broader economic and social impacts arising from Deal activity.
- **Embedding inclusive growth objectives from the outset strengthens long-term outcomes.** There is continued progress in ensuring that projects are designed to deliver wider benefits — including fair work opportunities, community wealth building and improved access to skills — with further work planned to enhance how these impacts are measured and reported.



City Region Deals are **long-term programmes delivered over multiple years**. They require sustained collaboration, strong governance, and ongoing flexibility to respond to inflationary pressures, procurement challenges and evolving policy environments. **Maintaining momentum while ensuring value for money remains a key priority across the programme.**

Reflections on the Year: A Programme Maturing

As the Deal moves further into delivery, the programme is increasingly operating within a **"maturing"** phase — where early-stage planning is translating into **tangible delivery activity**. This transition is a critical stage for any City Region Deal and requires careful management of cost, risk, phasing and stakeholder expectations.

The progress made during 2025/26 reflects the continued commitment of partners to maintaining momentum while ensuring investment remains targeted, deliverable and aligned with long-term outcomes.

As part of this maturation, there is also an increasing emphasis on active portfolio management. This includes ongoing review of project scope, timing and strategic fit to ensure that the Deal continues to respond effectively to changing economic conditions, policy priorities and regional opportunities.

In this context, partners have begun to explore potential opportunities to refine elements of the programme. This includes early-stage consideration of how best to maximise the impact of innovation-focused investment, alongside reviewing the deliverability and strategic alignment of a small number of future-profiled projects. This work remains at a formative stage, with any proposals to be developed further and brought forward through the Deal's governance structures in due course.



The **Year** Ahead

As the Deal continues into its next stages of delivery, focus remains on ensuring **investment is targeted, effective and aligned with the region's long-term ambitions**. By strengthening infrastructure, supporting innovation, enhancing skills pathways and investing in the places that matter most, the Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal will continue to play a central role in shaping a stronger, fairer and more sustainable regional economy.

In 2026/27, programme activity will focus on **progressing key projects through major delivery milestones**, strengthening benefits realisation, and ensuring the Deal continues to deliver visible and measurable impact across communities.

Alongside this, a key priority for the year ahead will be the continued development of the programme's strategic pipeline. This will include further work to bring forward potential proposals to refine and, where appropriate, reset elements of the Deal — ensuring that the overall portfolio remains deliverable, impactful and aligned with evolving regional priorities. Any such proposals will be subject to detailed appraisal and consideration through established governance arrangements.

20 **Key** Priorities for 2026/27

1. Accelerating delivery and milestone achievement

A central priority for 2026/27 will be maintaining momentum across the portfolio, ensuring that projects progress through procurement, design, construction and delivery stages in line with agreed timescales. Alongside this, partners will continue to actively manage the overall programme pipeline — including progressing work to refine and, where appropriate, reset elements of the Deal to ensure that investment remains focused, deliverable and aligned with strategic priorities.

2. Strengthening benefits realisation and performance reporting

The partnership will continue to enhance its approach to measuring impact, ensuring that project outputs and outcomes are captured consistently and aligned with the Deal's strategic outcomes. This will include ongoing improvement activity to better identify and track the full range of partner contributions, leverage funding and the wider economic and social benefits generated through the Deal.

3. Continuing to embed inclusive growth

The Deal will continue to ensure that investment supports inclusive outcomes, including fair access to training and employment opportunities, support for communities experiencing disadvantage, and the creation of high-quality jobs. There will be a continued focus on embedding these principles consistently across all projects and strengthening how inclusive outcomes are measured and reported.

4. Managing affordability and long-term sustainability

Given ongoing market pressures, a key focus will be ensuring projects remain financially sustainable, with continued review of cost pressures, phasing opportunities and delivery models.

5. Strengthening stakeholder and community engagement

As projects move further into delivery, communication and engagement will remain essential. The partnership will continue to work with communities and stakeholders to ensure projects deliver local benefit and support wider place-making ambitions, while also strengthening early engagement to inform emerging proposals and future pipeline development. This will be supported by ongoing programme-level assessment of affordability and value for money, including consideration of how resources can be best deployed across the portfolio to maximise impact.

21 **Looking** Forward with Confidence

While City Region Deal delivery continues to face challenges common across major public investment programmes, the progress made during 2025/26 demonstrates the strength of partnership commitment and the continued relevance of the Deal's strategic objectives.

The year ahead will be shaped by a continued focus on delivery, affordability, and ensuring that investment translates into real and visible benefit. By maintaining strong governance, active risk management and clear implementation planning, the partnership remains committed to ensuring the Deal delivers lasting economic, social and environmental value for Stirling, Clackmannanshire and the wider region.

The Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal remains a significant long-term opportunity for the region. Through sustained collaboration, targeted investment and a shared commitment to inclusive growth, **the Deal will continue to deliver transformational change** — supporting a stronger economy, a fairer society and a more sustainable future.



Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal

For further information:

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