

Live Borders Corporate Strategy

2026-31



Welcome from the Chair on behalf of the Board of Trustees



Bill Douglas - Chair of Board of Trustees

This is not an ordinary strategy document. It is not designed to be produced, filed and revisited five years from now. It is a working document, a clear account of where Live Borders is, what it is committing to, and how it will be held to account along the way.

Live Borders is at a defining point in its history. With a refreshed Board, a new Chief Executive and a management team that is building its capability and confidence, the organisation has the leadership and ambition it needs to move forward.

The question this strategy answers is: forward to where, and how.

The answer is straightforward, even if the work is not. Over the next five years, Live Borders will stabilise its finances, strengthen the organisation from the inside, and build the platform for consistently high-quality services that the people of the Scottish Borders deserve. It will do this with discipline and with honesty about what it can and cannot commit to. And it will demonstrate, year on year, that public money is being well used in the service of communities across the region.

The Board of Trustees stands fully behind this strategy. It has been involved in its development, it is accountable for its delivery, and it will report publicly on progress. We are asking our people, partners and communities to work with us on this strategy, to test us against it, and tell us when we fall short.

That is not a formality. It is an invitation.



About Live Borders

Live Borders is a charitable trust whose purpose is to improve lives of those living and visiting the Borders through sport, culture, heritage and lifelong learning. Established in 2016, Live Borders brings together services that in many parts of Scotland are delivered by distinct organisations. That breadth is our strength and our challenge. We recognise our responsibility for place, people and public trust across a region that stretches from the shoreline to the hilltops.

Live Borders operates as an arm's length external organisation (ALEO) under a service level agreement with Scottish Borders Council, delivering publicly funded services on the Council's behalf. As an independent charity, Live Borders also develops and delivers activities in support of its charitable purpose, working with partners and funders to extend its impact for people and communities across the Borders.

What makes Live Borders distinctive is not any single service but the combination of what we do. We have a physical presence across one of Scotland's largest geographic regions through more than 60 venues and facilities, from collections and libraries to sports halls, heritage sites, performance spaces, and community centres and halls, delivering services that are irreplaceable parts of the civic life of the Borders under a single charitable purpose.

That is what makes us the natural partner for the communities, Council and organisations we work alongside, and the foundation on which this strategy is built.





Our Operating Environment

Live Borders is delivering this strategy at a defining moment. The organisation has navigated a period of significant challenge and is delivering a £2.2 million transformation programme designed to stabilise services, strengthen leadership and build the foundations for consistent delivery.

Our region faces real and growing need. More than one in four people in the Scottish Borders is over 65 which is the fifth highest proportion of any Scottish council area. This is in a country where healthy life expectancy has been in decline for a decade. One in five adults in Scotland experiences loneliness, with the oldest and youngest most affected. In the Borders, those pressures are compounded by geography where distance and rural isolation are daily realities, not abstract risks. Around 10% of the population live in Scotland's most deprived communities and deprivation here is often hidden, dispersed across communities that do not show up in national indices but experience its effects just the same. The case for what Live Borders does has never been stronger. The same is true of the expectation that it operates with discipline, transparency and accountability. The review of Live Borders immediately before the start of the period of this strategy is a reminder that honest stewardship sometimes requires difficult decisions. We will manage that transition with care for the communities and our people affected, and we will apply the same clear-eyed thinking to future decisions about our estate.

This strategy has been developed in that context, and with direct input from the people who depend on Live Borders. That is our people, communities, partners and funders. It aligns with Scottish Borders Council's priorities, Community Planning Partnership outcomes, and national frameworks across culture, sport, health, lifelong learning and economic development. But it is shaped first by the realities of this place and this organisation. Live Borders is writing this strategy from a position of honesty. That is honesty about where it is, what it can realistically commit to, and how it will demonstrate the difference it makes. That honesty is the foundation on which

trust is rebuilt. Live Borders enters this strategy period as an organisation that has taken on significant breadth of services, of estate, and of geography faster than its management capacity, systems and financial foundations have been able to support. The central task of the first phase of this strategy is therefore clear: to narrow the focus, strengthen control, restore financial stability and build the consistent delivery platform that everything else depends on. That is not a counsel of timidity. It is the honest precondition for everything the organisation wants to become.

The funding model Live Borders operates within is itself a constraint on what this strategy can deliver. Annual flat cash settlements, ring-fenced project funding and a lack of multi-year certainty limit what any organisation can plan for and commit to. Making the case for a different model, with evidence and persistence, is part of the work.

We recognise that behind every statistic is a person, whether an older resident for whom their local library is their only connection to the internet and the digital world, a young family for whom cost is the barrier between their children and sport, someone whose GP has nowhere to refer them and no-one to call. This strategy is written for them.



How We Behave

Live Borders CARES describes how we work together and what communities can expect from us.

We are:

Collaborative

which means we work together across all roles, teams, services and partners. We succeed or fail together.

Accountable

which means we do what we say we will. We are clear about what we can commit to and honest when things change.

Resourceful

which means we make the most of what we have. We learn from insight, listen to feedback, and keep improving. We fix what is broken before we look elsewhere, and we innovate.

Excellent

which means we focus on clear standards, reliable delivery, and services people can trust. We are committed to quality and high standards in everything we do.

Supporting

which means we work so everyone can access what we offer. We adapt how we work to serve all communities across the Borders.



Our Strategic Framework

OUR PURPOSE

To improve health and wellbeing and widen access to culture, heritage, sport and lifelong learning, enabling people and communities to connect their past, empower their present and inspire their future in a thriving Scottish Borders.

OUR VISION

A Scottish Borders where culture, heritage, sport, and lifelong learning are woven into everyday life and are valued, used and championed by the communities they serve.

OUR MISSION

To deliver high-quality, consistent cultural, heritage, sporting, and lifelong learning services communities rely on, by building a stable, accountable organisation and strengthening our people, infrastructure and partnerships over the long term.





Our Strategic Priorities

Live Borders operates in one of Scotland's most challenging service environments – a large rural region with an ageing population, dispersed deprivation, and geography that compounds social disadvantage. In that context, the case for what this organisation does has never been stronger, and the expectation that it does it well has never been higher. This is our response to that reality, sequenced deliberately: we stabilise first because an organisation that cannot reliably deliver its core services cannot credibly pursue anything else. We build capability because delivery without accountability produces inconsistency. We pursue excellence and impact because that is why we exist. And we do all of this in genuine partnership, because no single organisation can serve the Borders alone.

We will deliver this strategy by focusing on five strategic priorities. These strategic priorities guide decisions, shape investment, and focus effort where it will make the greatest difference for communities, partners and the organisation over the next five years. These priorities also define our boundaries. Work that cannot be clearly connected to them will not be pursued, however important it might appear. In practice, this means we will actively review activities, programmes and commitments, and make deliberate decisions about what to stop, what to defer, and what to hand to others. That discipline is as important as deciding what to do.

Together, they form a single, coherent approach to delivery. The five strategic priorities remain constant across 2026–31, providing continuity and focus over time. But they do not carry equal weight in every year. In Year One, Sustainability and Investment and Organisational Capability and Strength carry the greatest weight. They are the precondition for everything else. Without financial stability and a capable organisation behind it, none of the other priorities can be delivered with any consistency or confidence. The weight given to each priority will shift as the strategy period progresses and foundations become secure.

Detailed service plans and partnership plans will be developed through business planning, ensuring these priorities are translated into clear, actionable programmes.

Monitoring approaches are intentionally high-level in this strategy. Detailed measures and targets are set through the business planning process.



1. Sustainability & Investment

What this priority is about

Getting our finances right and investing where it matters are the foundation for everything else in this strategy. We will deliver transformation within our agreed governance and budget framework. The approved transformation plan is the key delivery mechanism for this priority and for strengthening organisational foundations early in the strategy period.

What we will focus on

We will operate within budget and reinvest in our future. A core focus in the early years of this strategy is reducing our operational deficit through delivery of the approved transformation programme. We will strengthen systems, processes and ways of working to deliver better value, focus and consistency.

We will invest in technology, buildings and infrastructure where this supports service delivery, improves efficiency, and contributes to environmental sustainability for the long-term benefit of Live Borders and our communities. Capital investment decisions are material in this period and will be managed through agreed governance and business planning processes. Significant estates decisions, including closure, disposal, major capital investment or change of use, will be taken through the agreed governance framework with Scottish Borders Council, with explicit reference to the strategic purpose they serve.



Our Strategic Priorities

How we will monitor progress

Monitoring will include delivery of transformation milestones, achievement of agreed financial targets set out in business plans, reduction of the operational deficit, and priority investment and maintenance actions.



2. Organisational Capability & Strength

What this priority is about

Delivery depends on leadership, clarity, accountability and ways of working. Our people need a stable operating environment that supports them to perform well.

What we will focus on

We will build a strong, capable organisation with clear leadership, accountability and ways of working. We will invest in our people, strengthen management capability and support continuous improvement. We will create an environment where our people are empowered to perform, develop and contribute to Live Borders' success. This means investing not only in management capability and accountability but in the working environment and wellbeing of every one of our people. This work is delivered as a core part of the transformation plan.

How we will monitor progress

Monitoring will focus on clarity of accountabilities, consistent management processes, organisational capability to deliver the transformation plan and this strategy, and confidence and engagement in Live Borders as an employer.



3. Excellence & Innovation

What this priority is about

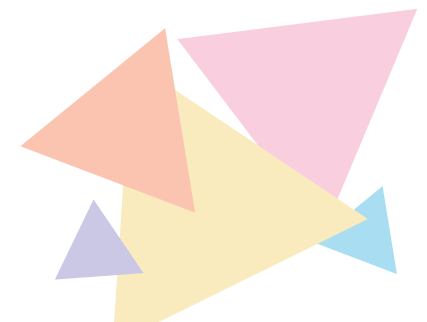
Communities deserve services they can rely on. Consistent, high-quality delivery is not the ceiling, it is the floor from which improvement is built. Innovation that outpaces core delivery creates risk, not progress.

What we will focus on

We will progressively strengthen service quality and consistency across all sites, guided by data and customer feedback. We will stabilise and improve core delivery, integrating how we work so that over time people experience Live Borders as one organisation. Innovation will be purposeful and deliberate, focused on improving reliability, efficiency and how services feel to the people using them as our foundations become stronger.

How we will monitor progress

Monitoring will focus on service standards, customer experience, and the organisation's ability to report performance consistently across sites.



4. Impact & Inclusion

Live Borders exists to make a difference for people and communities. We need clear evidence of our impact and a practical approach to reducing barriers to access.

We will focus on the difference Live Borders makes to people's lives and communities across the Scottish Borders. We will evidence this through our contribution to health and wellbeing, lifelong learning and social connection, and use that evidence to guide decisions. We will work to remove barriers to access and promote inclusion, paying particular attention to who benefits from our services, and who does not yet, so that people across the Scottish Borders benefit equitably from our offer. We recognise that different communities and different populations need different things from Live Borders and that the same service, delivered the same way, will not produce equitable outcomes across a region as diverse as the Scottish Borders. The three barriers we are most focused on reducing are geographic distance, cost and social isolation. Progress against each will be tracked and reported. The populations for whom these barriers are most acute are the people this strategy is most determined not to leave behind.

Monitoring will focus on participation, access and impact, including demographic insight, barrier-related data and feedback from the people who use our services.

5. Partnership & Influence

Live Borders will be a trusted and effective partner in delivering shared outcomes for the Scottish Borders. Culture, heritage, sport and lifelong learning must be integral to local and national strategic planning and delivery.

We will be a key partner and consultee for Scottish Borders Council, communities and national and local bodies. We will champion the role of culture, heritage, sport and lifelong learning as core enablers of health and wellbeing, inclusion, place and opportunity. The cultural, heritage, sporting and community assets Live Borders stewards are central to the identity and visitor economy of the Scottish Borders. We will work with tourism and economic development partners on the basis that this contribution is recognised and reflected in how the region plans and invests.

Live Borders will work with cultural partners to develop a coherent approach to delivering the Scottish Borders Cultural Strategy, including agreeing the governance and leadership model for that work. Live Borders will also contribute to and support delivery of the Scottish Borders Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, working in partnership with Scottish Borders Council and relevant partners.

Our relationship with the health system is a strategic priority. In a region with Scotland's fastest-ageing population and a decade of declining healthy life expectancy, Live Borders has a distinctive role to play in the health and wellbeing system. For us, that is being present in communities, trusted by residents, and capable of delivering at scale in partnership. Building that role over the strategy period is an explicit part of our ambitions for partnership. Realising that role requires genuine partnership: early involvement in locality planning, shared use of data, and joint accountability for outcomes.

Our Strategic Priorities

We will pursue that actively and be clear about where it is working and where it is not. We will support approaches such as social prescribing to strengthen our partnership with NHS and community planning partners.

We will work collaboratively to shape priorities, deliver shared outcomes, and advocate for the role of our services within the wider system, acting as a genuine partner and, where appropriate, a co-applicant and shared contributor.

Realising that role requires genuine partnership: early involvement in locality planning, shared use of data, and joint accountability for outcomes. We will pursue that actively and be clear about where it is working and where it is not. We will support approaches such as social prescribing to strengthen our partnership with NHS and community planning partners.

Through this, we will build the profile and credibility that reflect what Live Borders actually delivers, and make sure our voice is heard in the decisions that impact our communities and our services.

How we will monitor progress

Monitoring will focus on partner confidence, the effectiveness of joint working, evidence that Live Borders is engaged early in strategic planning, and alignment to shared priorities and agreed plans.





Strategic Outcomes

The following outcomes describe what success will look like by 2031 if this strategy is delivered with discipline and consistency.

They represent the long-term position Live Borders is working towards across financial stability, service delivery, impact, partnership and organisational strength.

By 2031, Live Borders will have:

01 Become an organisation communities can rely on

People across the Borders have a partner they can count on to be there. Live Borders operates within its agreed financial framework, generating consistent annual surplus, investing in its future and demonstrating year on year that public money is well-stewarded. Transformation has been delivered. The organisation is no longer in recovery. It is building.

02 Delivered consistent, reliable services across the Scottish Borders

Communities experience Live Borders as dependable, safe and well-run, with clear published standards applied consistently across all sites and services.

03 Managed a sustainable and strategic estate

Buildings and infrastructure are safe, affordable to operate and aligned to strategic purpose rather than historic provision, with capital and maintenance decisions supporting long-term financial and environmental sustainability.

04 Demonstrated that more people across the Scottish Borders are healthier, better connected and more able to participate in the life of their region because of us

Clear evidence, measured using validated tools and reported annually, links our services to improved health, lifelong learning, inclusion and social connection across the Scottish Borders.

05 Made the barriers of geographic distance, cost and social isolation measurably smaller than they were in 2026

Access and participation are more inclusive and geographically balanced, and Live Borders can give a clear account of who is still not reached and why.

06 Strengthened trust with partners

Live Borders is a first-call partner for Scottish Borders Council and a trusted partner for national bodies. It is engaged early, trusted to deliver, and recognised as a confident voice for the role of culture, heritage, sport and lifelong learning in the life of the Borders.

07 Built strong organisational capability and leadership depth

Clear accountabilities, strengthened management capability and sustainable succession planning reduce dependency on individuals and enable consistent performance.

08 Embedded disciplined decision-making

Major decisions consistently reflect outcomes, affordability and sequencing principles, ensuring resources align with strategic priorities.

Our purpose
culture, heri

Accountability matters. We are committed to transparency, proportionate use of data, and learning and adapting over time. Where delivery falls short, we will take responsibility, review our approach and make changes.



How we track progress

This strategy is delivered through annual planning and review. Over the strategy period, our emphasis will shift from stabilisation, to building capability, to pursuing excellence, while maintaining consistent service delivery throughout.

Live Borders will develop business plans setting out a focused set of strategic objectives. As the organisation moves through stabilisation and capability is built, this will evolve from an annual plan to a rolling multi-year approach, aligned to this five-year strategy. Baseline measures and targets will be set and approved through the business plans. Typically, this will involve 15–20 objectives, with three to four objectives aligned to each priority. These objectives will change year to year as the organisation stabilises, develops and builds capability. The five strategic priorities remain constant across the life of the strategy, providing continuity, focus and discipline over time.

Progress will be tracked through:

- delivery of the annual strategic objectives
- a small number of headline indicators
- regular reporting to the Board and to Scottish Borders Council
- publication of an annual impact report

More detailed measures, baselines and targets will sit within business plans and internal performance reporting. This ensures accountability while retaining flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and emerging evidence.



Governance, review and accountability

This strategy is owned by the Board of Trustees, which is responsible for setting strategy, providing oversight, and holding the organisation to account for its delivery.

The Chief Executive is responsible for delivering the strategy day to day, translating it into business plans, and ensuring progress is monitored and reported.

Live Borders operates within an agreed governance framework with Scottish Borders Council. Progress against the strategy will be reported regularly through established reporting arrangements, ensuring transparency and alignment with the Council's priorities and expectations.

The strategy will be reviewed annually as part of the annual reporting cycle. This allows priorities to be refreshed, learning to be embedded, and the organisation to respond to changing circumstances, while maintaining a clear and stable strategic direction across the period 2026–31. That learning will come from delivery experience, staff insight, customer engagement and partner dialogue in addition to performance reporting. Where delivery reveals that our assumptions were wrong, we will say so and adapt. The annual review is not a reporting exercise, it is a genuine opportunity to change course based on what we have learned.



Statement from the Chief Executive

This strategy is about more than where Live Borders is going next. It is about why we exist, who we serve, and the difference we believe we can make in people's lives across the Scottish Borders.

Live Borders is first and foremost a charity. We exist to improve lives through sport and physical activity, culture and heritage, lifelong learning and creativity. These are not optional extras. They shape health and wellbeing, confidence, opportunity and belonging, and they matter deeply to individuals, families and communities across the Borders.

Over the past year, we have faced the reality of where we are. We have started the difficult work of stabilising the organisation, taking tough decisions and rebuilding the foundations we need for the future. That period has tested us, but it has also shown the strength, care and commitment of our people. I am incredibly grateful for the resilience and professionalism of our people throughout this time.

What remains absolutely clear to me is the scale and importance of what Live Borders holds. We care for places, programmes and experiences that are central to our sense of place, support tourism and the local economy, and touch lives every single day. We are not simply a provider of public services on behalf of others. We are focused and true to our own charitable purpose, and responsible to the people of the Borders.

A vital part of delivering that purpose is how we work with others. Live Borders must be and continue to grow as a trusted, impactful partner. Our strategic priorities do not sit in isolation. They are deeply intertwined with the work of council, health and social care partners, education, the voluntary sector, communities and national agencies. By working in genuine partnership, we can achieve far more than any of us can alone. Collaboration, trust and shared ambition are essential to fulfilling our charitable aims and maximising our impact.

This strategy sets out how we will do that. It gives us clarity of direction and a framework for making decisions, focusing our effort and holding ourselves to account. It is not a document to be admired from a distance. It is how we will work, every day.

For it to succeed, it must belong to all of us. I want every one of our people to see themselves in this strategy, to understand how their role contributes to our wider purpose, and to feel pride in the difference they make. That is how strategy becomes real and meaningful.

We will continue to learn as we go. Where we need to change course, we will do so openly and with integrity. What will not change is our commitment to improving lives across the Scottish Borders and to being a charity that people trust, value and believe in.

Live Borders has the potential to be a strong, confident and compassionate organisation rooted in place, driven by purpose and focused on impact. This strategy is our next step in that journey.

I believe deeply in the power of this organisation and in the people who make it what it is. With this strategy, we have a shared direction and a renewed sense of belief in our impact. Together, we will continue to build an organisation that makes a meaningful difference to lives across the Scottish Borders.



Catriona McAllister
Chief Executive



Thank You

This strategy was developed in consultation with our people, communities and partners across the Scottish Borders and beyond.

We are grateful to the following organisations for their time and input.

Borders Community Action
Creative Scotland
Melrose Music Festival
Museums and Galleries Scotland
NHS Borders
Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership
Scottish Borders Council
Scottish Libraries and Information Council
South of Scotland Destination Alliance
South of Scotland Enterprise
Sport Scotland

