

Agenda Item	3.
Report No	CS/35/13

HIGHLAND TOURISM ACTION PLAN AND PRESENTATION FROM NORTH HIGHLAND INITIATIVE

Report by Director of Planning & Development

SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the development of a Highland Tourism Action Plan which is currently being undertaken by the Highland Tourism Partnership and the Council's work with the North Highland Initiative. The report provides some strategic context to accompany the presentation being given by Mr Tom Campbell, Chief Executive of the North Highland Initiative, on their work to develop tourism in the Caithness and Sutherland area. The activities incorporated in the Highland Tourism Action Plan and those undertaken by the North Highland Initiative support the Council's commitment "*Working with the Scottish Government, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and private sector partners, the Council will maximise the tourism potential of the Highland area.*"

1. Introduction

1.1 Tourism is identified as one of Scotland's key growth sectors in the Government's Economic Strategy and is one of the most important industries for the Highlands with latest full year figures (2012) showing tourism to be worth £90m to the Caithness & Sutherland economy.

2. Tourism Strategies/Action Plans

2.1 Led for the first time by the tourism industry, a new National Tourism Strategy "Tourism Scotland 2020" was produced in summer 2012. Further work at a national level is under way to provide more detail on how the strategy objectives might be delivered.

2.2 At a Highland level the Highland Tourism Partnership, a public private sector group that includes representatives from the Highland Council, has the lead role in developing a tourism strategy for the area. In agreeing their approach the Highland Tourism Partnership has elected not to produce a separate Highland strategy but instead to produce an Action Plan that details a range of activities that members of the Partnership will undertake in order to deliver the national strategy in the Highland area. Work has been under way throughout 2013 and the Action Plan is expected to be published by the end of the year.

3. Working with the Tourism Industry and Local Tourism industry groups

3.1 Across the Highlands there are a number of industry led tourism groups – some are sectoral groups but predominantly these groups exist to develop or promote a particular geographic area. Most operate on a fairly small scale but recent years have also seen the rise of larger destination organisations (often also referred to as

Destination Management Organisations or DMOs) in many parts of the Highlands. These larger groups have now started to take more of a lead in developing tourism in their areas as well as undertaking marketing activity.

- 3.2 As outlined to this Committee at their meeting on 18 February 2013, the North Highland Initiative (NHI) had started to take more of a lead in developing tourism in the North Highlands and, quite innovatively, is doing so in a much more inclusive way by creating a structure that engages the local groups. NHI is clearly accepted as the Destination Management Organisation for the Caithness & Sutherland area and is the local industry group that sits on the Highland Tourism Partnership.
- 3.3 The National Tourism Strategy recognises that DMO's have a significant role to play if the objectives of the strategy are to be delivered but also that public sector support for these organisations will be required. With this in mind the recommendations on how the Council's tourism funds should be allocated, that were presented to and agreed by the Planning Environment & Development Committee on 13 March 2013, included a recommendation that the Council enter into Service Delivery Contracts with each of the DMO's in Highland.
- 3.4 During the summer of 2013 discussions were held with the North Highland Initiative with a view to concluding a Service Delivery Agreement and this was concluded in August. In order to assist the North Highland Initiative in delivering the activities contained in this agreement a financial contribution from the Council of £10,000 was also agreed.
- 3.5 The activities detailed in the Service Delivery Agreement are:-
- Work with the Council to ensure there are opportunities for tourism businesses to access business development opportunities, share best practice, keep up to date on tourism developments and access market intelligence and advice. Recognising the unique geography of the area it is accepted that this may need a variety of different approaches.
 - Continue destination marketing activity for the North Highland area including collaborating with local groups and stakeholders to ensure coordinated activity. Initiatives being undertaken will include coordinating the Highland presence at the 2013 Royal Highland Show, a "Wild North" promotion, wild flower Europe and activity related to the Homecoming theme year in 2014.
 - Coordination of a "Wild North" festival.
 - Undertake social media activity to promote the North Highlands as a destination and to maintain visitor engagement with the area and its businesses.
 - Undertake PR activity including issuing press releases about the area and, if required, assisting press trips.
 - Represent the interests of the local tourism industry on the Highland Tourism Partnership and, when appropriate, by engaging with other groups such as the Scottish Tourism Alliance and responding to consultations on proposals that might affect tourism.
 - Continue to operate a North Highland Tourism Project Board that is representative of the different regions of the North Highlands
 - Support the smaller scale initiatives of local tourism groups with administrative or project management support.
 - Undertake a series of destination development projects including a feasibility study into a North and West Highland Touring Route, the North Highland

Larder Food and Drink Guide and the Dark Skies Initiative.

A number of performance indicators are also included in the agreement allowing the Council to measure progress with these activities.

4. Implications

- 4.1 There are no Resource, Legal, Equalities, Climate Change or Risk implications arising as a result of this report.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 The Committee is invited to note that the Council has entered into a Service Delivery Agreement with the North Highland Initiative to assist their work to develop tourism in the Caithness & Sutherland area.

Designation: Director of Planning & Development

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