

DRAFT

HIGHLAND FIRST

The Council is committed to raising the profile of the Highlands and realising the full potential of our communities.

The Council will actively engage at a Scottish, UK and European level to promote the Highlands and to secure the very best outcomes for our communities.

Supporting our communities across the Highlands to be vibrant and stable is central to the work of the Council. Key priorities will be to improve connectivity especially broadband and mobile coverage, across the Highlands and to work with the Scottish and UK Governments to deliver the City/Region Deal for Inverness and the Highlands.

The Council recognises the very challenging financial climate that we will be operating within over the next few years; however we will continue to deliver services in the most efficient and effective way and will seek to continue to make budget decisions in an open, transparent and fair manner.

Community Led Highland

What the Council will do

1. **Strengthening Local Democracy**

- We will be at the forefront in Scotland of bringing democracy closer to our communities.
- We will create new and better ways of involving communities in decisions affecting them.
- We will deliver new arrangements to deliver decentralised local decision making, prior to the Local Government elections in 2017.

2. **Empowering Communities**

Along with our Community Planning Partners, we will bring forward ways to implement the commitments contained within the Community Empowerment Act to ensure that where they wish to, communities are able to fully participate in the development of services and taking over the running of facilities and land. This will include:

- Development of an asset transfer policy, ensuring we have a transparent and simplified process for communities.
- Reviewing ways of supporting communities to lead on the delivery of services locally.

What we can do with our partners locally

3. **Local Community Planning**

Working with our partners, we will develop new arrangements to deliver Community Planning at a local level, prior to the Local Government elections in 2017.

4. **Communities Delivering Social Care**

We will work with our partners in the NHS to encourage and support communities to deliver more social care services and facilitate community led good practice.

5. **Local Emergency Services**

The Council will actively work with our partners in the emergency services to seek to ensure that national policies, practices and local plans are Highland proofed, taking into consideration local needs and the impact upon Highland communities.

6. Transport

- Community Transport - The Council recognises the importance of Community Transport and will work with our partners to find the best local solutions on how to deliver Community Transport provision across the Highlands.
- Rural Patient Transport - The Council will work with the Scottish Ambulance Service, the NHS and the Scottish Government, to achieve better coverage across the Highlands. We will investigate sustainable solutions to improve Patient Transport in rural and urban areas.
- Public Transport – We will work with public transport providers to improve the integration of services for communities across Highland.

7. Helping Communities Reduce their Energy Use and Costs

The Council, with partners, will support communities to reduce their energy use and associated carbon emissions and costs.

8. Preventative Spend

The Council will work with its partners to maximise the use of collective resources to achieve best outcomes, demonstrating a shift to prevention and the re-allocation of resources between Community Planning Partners where this represents best value.

What we can do with other organisations

9. Rural Impact Assessment

We will further embed Rural Impact Assessment across The Council and share our knowledge with the Scottish Government with the aim of ensuring this best practice approach is a key consideration during the formulation of Government policy.

10. Land Reform

The Council will engage with the Scottish Government over the provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill to promote community land ownership and ensure crofting and farming communities are strengthened.

11. Crown Estate

The Council will work with the Scottish Government to develop proposals for the further devolution of the Crown Estate to ensure local communities control and benefit from the assets of the Crown Estate once it has been devolved from the UK Government.

12. Forestry

The Council will work with the Scottish Government on the full devolution of the Forestry Commission to Scotland to maximise the benefits to local communities. The Council will also seek to work with the Forestry Commission to review land management and partnership arrangements on forestry land.

13. Community Resilience Planning

The Council will work with Scottish and Southern Energy and other utility companies to deliver improved resilience planning for our communities including planning for extreme weather events.

14. Public Access Wi-Fi

The Council will work with the Scottish and UK Governments to improve Public Access Wi- Fi across Highland communities.

Well-Served Highland

What the Council will do

15. Developing our Workforce

- We will help to sustain our communities by ensuring our workforce has a strong presence across the Highlands.
- We will further implement our mobile and flexible working policies, expand the use of video and telephone conferencing, together with the development of Mobile Service Delivery. We will plan, monitor and review this on a regular basis.
- We will continue to support and develop our workforce and we will do all we can to avoid compulsory redundancies.

16. Growth in Early Years Workforce

- We will support increasing numbers of young families to access additional pre-school hours and trial innovative approaches to early years and P1 education in some of our smaller schools.
- We will plan for the increased workforce needed, particularly in our smaller communities, and find ways that we can support a sufficient and qualified workforce.

17. Contracts and Procurement

The Council will complete its review of procurement practices by spring 2016 with a view to supporting local businesses and social enterprises, as well as maximising spend and benefit within the Highland economy, whilst ensuring that these provide value for money for the Council and meet legislative requirements. We will monitor the actions from this review on a regular basis to ensure the objectives are being met.

18. Enhancing our Town Centres

We will seek additional opportunities to help address localised economic decline in town centres, specified streets or localities, including business rates incentives.

19. Libraries

We will work with our partners High Life Highland to build social and cultural capital throughout our communities by promoting an innovative and progressive Library Service.

20. Europe

We will evaluate our activities and opportunities for influencing European policy, targeting our contribution where it is most effective and ensuring we make the very best of all financial opportunities for the Highlands.

21. Roads, Maintenance and Future Investment

We will review capital and maintenance programmes for our Highland roads, identify clear choices and prepare for any investment opportunities that may arise.

22. Winter Maintenance

We will continue to implement our winter maintenance policy including a pre gritting regime.

23. Community Works

We will explore how community works, including drainage, verges, grass cutting and road improvements could be delivered in the context of local decision making and local priorities.

24. Flood Alleviation

- The Council will bring forward a Local Flood Risk Management Plan by June 2016 and we will raise awareness within our communities and individual householders on how they can protect themselves from flood incidents.
- We will further prioritise smaller flood relief schemes and will increase the funding available for this work.

25. Bridges

We will review the arrangements for our bridge inspections along with their maintenance and investment programmes.

26. Piers and Harbours

- The Council will work with community groups to improve the sustainability and use of small piers and harbours and, where appropriate, to help rationalise the Council's ownership.
- The Council will prepare a Strategic Investment Plan to identify specific developments and areas for investment at selected Highland ports and harbours, including in partnership with the private sector.

27. Dealing with our Waste

We will develop plans to meet our obligations as a result of the landfill ban of biodegradable municipal waste by 1st January 2021.

28. Tourism

We will improve our internal practices and policies to promote the positive impact they have on the significant tourism industry in the Highlands.

29. Road Safety

We will work with our communities to promote pedestrian and cycle safety such as expanding the use of 20 mph zones and safer routes to schools.

What we can do with our partners locally**30. Strengthening our Partnership with NHS Highland**

- The Council and NHS Highland will review the current partnership agreement with a greater emphasis on stronger financial scrutiny and governance.
- We will work with NHS Highland to accelerate efforts to shift the balance of care and provide more services within our communities.

31. Building the Local Economy

- Where we can, we will create cohesive Highland and local workforce plans with other partner organisations.
- We will work with partners to develop training and apprenticeships with a particular focus on areas of skills shortages.
- With our partners, we will also seek to attract young people and families to the Highlands, to broaden the economic potential of the Highlands and enrich our communities.

32. Region for Young People

- We will enable Highland's young people to develop their skills for work, and support them to achieve ambitious and positive destinations after school. We will work specifically with young people who are unemployed to support them into work.
- There is a growing business demand for young people with an interest and ability in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics as well as language skills. The Council will encourage and promote a greater uptake in these subjects, so that Highland young people can successfully compete in a global market.
- We aim to provide our pupils with a technology-rich environment, to address their learner needs and curriculum goals, and transform their learning experience.

33. Building Tourism

The Council will strive to grow tourism by working with partners to retain and develop world class events and promote destination management.

34. Gaelic

We will work with all our partners and across all communities to develop Gaelic as a regional asset, sharing our experience, skills and resources to continue implementing and building on the Gaelic Language Plan.

What we can do with other organisations

35. Connectivity

- We will work towards achieving Highland's ambition to provide effective broadband and mobile coverage for all.
- We will work with our partners to develop a joint action plan in order to define and deliver solutions of broadband and mobile technology to the most difficult to reach areas of the Highlands.

36. Developing Local and National Infrastructure

Working with the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, Network Rail, HI-TRANS and HIAL, we will lobby to increase investment in infrastructure in the Highlands with a view to improving the road, rail and air links from the area.

This will include:

- The upgrade of the A9 north of Inverness, including the Berriedale Braes and the Tomich Junction.
- The upgrade of the A82.
- Influence the implementation of the A9 South and A96 upgrades.
- Seek a long term solution for the Stromeferry bypass.

- Reducing rail journey times north and south of Inverness.
- Plan for communities to benefit from additional rail stops.
- A long term solution for the Corran Ferry.
- Seek improved air-links to and from the Highlands, including direct access to Heathrow.
- A831 twin tracking at Torgoyle Bridge.
- A830 extension.
- Seek additional funding for road and bridge maintenance.

37. Reducing Fatalities on our Roads

We will support efforts to reduce fatalities on our roads, such as a graduated driver licensing scheme and measures to reduce speeding.

38. Cycle Tracks

We will work with Sustrans and Hi-Trans to focus Scottish Government cycle track investment on some of our key commuting and tourist routes.

39. Emergency Towing Vessels

The Council will work with the Scottish Government to press the UK Government for the same level of protection as previously provided by two emergency towing vessels with fire-fighting capability covering the Minch and Northern Isles.

40. Ferries

We will continue to lobby for improved and additional ferry services, including more flexibility in timetabling to facilitate employment and tourism opportunities.

41. Dealing with our Waste

As part of our approach to reducing and dealing with our waste, we will explore opportunities with other Local Authorities for a North of Scotland solution.

A Fairer Highland

What the Council will do

42. Reducing the Attainment Gap

We will improve pupil attainment by taking focused action in and beyond the classroom to help improve the performance of pupils, particularly those experiencing poverty and deprivation.

43. Additional Support Needs

- We will continue with the agreed actions to fully implement the recommendations of the Additional Support Needs Review, making the most effective and efficient use of resources and in so doing, achieve the best outcomes for children and young people with Additional Support Needs at all stages.
- We will develop the work emerging around helping young people to move to adult services for those individuals with additional support needs with a particular emphasis on preparing them for work.

44. Supporting Headteachers

We will work collaboratively with Headteachers to provide them with the best opportunity to maintain standards, reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and to drive further improvement.

45. Physical Activity and Health

We will continue the introduction of PE groups in each Associated School Group and we will trial simple and effective initiatives such as the 'Daily Mile' project in Highland Primary Schools.

46. Treating People Fairly, with Dignity and Respect

The Council will continue to work towards achieving the equality outcomes set out in the Fairer Highland Plan and will promote equality of opportunity in all its work.

47. Council Housing Schemes Environmental Improvements

We will target 10% of Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme spend on external works including environmental improvements.

48. Housing

- We will promote and support more community led housing initiatives in rural areas to deliver housing to meet local need.
- Working from the initial modular housing pilot project developed in Alness and Invergordon, we will encourage development of locally produced energy efficient modular housing units to deliver part of the Council housing programme quicker and more efficiently than traditional built housing.
- We will develop new methods of meeting the needs of disabled householders who have a need for ground floor facilities irrespective of tenure.

What we can do with our partners locally

49. Poverty and Deprivation

With our partners, we will develop an anti-poverty strategy to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable within our communities. This will include maximising incomes, addressing fuel poverty, improving digital access and capability as well as equipping people with the skills to manage their money.

50. Looked After Children

We will put the views of our young people who have experienced care at the heart of our decision-making and will build on the commitment for all Community Planning Partners to provide employment for care leavers. We will continue to reduce the number of children who are placed out with Highland, and will progress the case for a new residential home in Inverness for young people with Autism.

51. Affordable Housing

We will deliver at least another 50 new National Housing Trust homes providing midmarket homes with an option to buy after 5 years. We will also work with the NHS to deliver housing for the elderly via clusters of self-contained houses with care support.

52. Affordable Warmth

We will work with our partners to bring forward a new affordable warmth programme as part of our anti-poverty strategy and will aim to prioritise the delivery of as much as we can at our own hand.

53. Temporary Accommodation

We will refresh the plan and continue to deliver supported temporary accommodation for those who are homeless, such as one bedroom flats as an alternative to bed and breakfast.

54. Supporting Independent Living

- We will support independent living by leading on the delivery of adaptations and technology enabled care with, and on behalf of, our NHS partners.
- We will use the Highland Council's Scheme of Assistance Model to work with partners to deliver works for injured Armed Forces personnel.

55. Tackling Empty Properties

We will work with partners to use the Scheme of Assistance and Empty Property legislation to tackle property disrepair in the private sector, improving housing stock, promoting affordable warmth, and returning empty and substandard property to housing use.

56. Alcohol Dependency

Working with our partners including the Drug and Alcohol Partnership, we will support efforts to address alcohol dependency in all of our communities.

What we can do with other organisations**57. Welfare Reform**

With our knowledge and experience we will inform the UK and Scottish Governments about the impacts of Welfare Reform in the Highlands and seek to ensure a fair and equal welfare system for our communities.

58. Modernising the Council Tax System

We will work with the Scottish Government, other Local Authorities and COSLA to devise fairer forms of local taxation and work towards Local Authorities controlling a greater proportion of their funding.

59. Affordable Housing

- We will lobby for an infrastructure grant fund mechanism from the Scottish Government to open up strategic sites throughout the Highlands to enable the delivery of new affordable housing.
- We will continue to lobby the Scottish Government for additional resources to enable us to deliver more affordable homes in the Highlands.

60. Fairer Fuel and Energy

We will work with UK and Scottish Governments and energy suppliers to promote fair domestic fuel pricing for the Highlands and a fairer system for targeting energy efficiency funding based on levels of fuel poverty.

61. Grid Connections

We will work with the Scottish Government to lobby the UK Government to reduce grid access charges which impact negatively on renewable energy production in the Highlands.

62. Housing Debt

We will take a fresh look at how we can continue to press UK and Scottish Government to write off the Council's historic housing debt.

Inverness City – the Capital of the Highlands

We are committed to developing a successful and thriving City in Inverness, which will contribute to a growing and sustainable Highland economy and we aim to achieve the following:

- City/Region Deal - Progress the City/Region deal to lever in additional infrastructure investment, improve connectivity and enhance the skills of our young people across the Highlands.
- Infrastructure for Growth – to continue to grow, Inverness needs to address infrastructure constraints to enable the delivery of new housing, business and recreational facilities.
- City Promotion – We will progress the move of the Scottish Courts Service from Inverness Castle and turn the castle and surrounding area into a major visitor attraction for the city and region. We will also work with partners to enhance visitor experience by seeking to deliver further attractions for the city centre including the riverside arts trail.
- City Centre – We will work with our partners to deliver city centre Wi-Fi and other projects to deliver SMART Cities; as well as playing a full part in the Scottish Cities Alliance.
- Business Vibrancy - We will encourage new businesses to locate in the city centre, notably in creative industries and information technology. We will also progress the development of the Victorian Market as a major attraction.
- Health and Wellbeing – Working with our partners we will progress the delivery of a regional sports facility for the Highlands in Inverness incorporating indoor cycling, tennis and athletics as part of our aim of promoting the Highlands as a great place to live, work and visit.
- Transport - Working with our partners we will develop public transport provision in the city and we will work with Abellio Scotrail to prepare and implement a masterplan for Inverness Railway Station. We also will aim to make Inverness one of the most family and visitor friendly cities in the UK through expanding 20mph zones throughout the residential areas of the city.
- Social Equality - Working with our partners we will seek public sector infrastructure investment and training opportunities in our deprived communities to create jobs and improve quality of life.
- Education - We will work to develop the presence of the University of the Highlands and Islands within the city, to enhance options for the retention of young people within the City and Region and encourage sector growth in industries.