

## 3.1 A place to live

The Council's first priority is to the people of the Highlands: the people who live and work here, those who grow up here, have settled here and grow old here.

We want to make the Highlands an even better place to live. For that to happen we need attractive and sustainable communities. Working with others we need to attract more people to make the Highlands their home and encourage our younger residents to stay here.

The Highlands has a unique culture and heritage, it has some of the cleanest air, purest water and most renowned unspoiled natural environments in the world and we must ensure these precious commodities are protected and enhanced for future generations.

### **Key priorities**

1. Provide homes across the Highlands that are responsive to local needs so that both young and old have a secure roof over their head. We need to provide affordable homes for younger generations and families; housing in areas where attracting professionals is a challenge; accommodation for the homeless; and homes where the elderly and vulnerable can be supported to live independently.
2. Encourage more engaged, better informed, more resilient, sustainable and attractive communities by helping and strengthening tenant and community representation structures.
3. Identify and recognise the unique challenges of living in rural and remote areas of the Highlands and ensure council policies and the provision of services have local people in mind. Work with the Scottish Government and other public authorities to do the same.
4. Encourage and assist the regeneration of our town centres and high streets across the Highlands.
5. Work with communities and partners to mitigate against and adapt to climate change whilst raising awareness around sustaining and improving our natural, built and cultural environment.
6. Continue to promote and support the Gaelic language and culture through the Gaelic Language Plan.

## 3.2 A place to learn

Schools are at the centre of the lives of our citizens and local communities and the democratic control of schools is at the heart of local government. We will continue to fight to ensure it remains so.

We are committed to ensuring all children reach their full potential. This includes our determination to close the attainment gap for those from more disadvantaged communities and meeting the needs of all children including those with additional support needs.

Everyone should be given the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and experience, regardless of age or background.

### **Key priorities**

1. Strive to achieve the highest standards in all our schools, and reduce the attainment gap, so every young person has the opportunity and skills to succeed by supporting an accessible and broad curriculum for all.
2. Grow and retain our own skilled workforce in the Highlands; making it an exceptional place to come and study, and to remain to work.
3. Provide services that support all our children to have the best start in life.
4. Continue the programme of refurbishment and renovation of Highland schools and address the need for additional capacity.
5. Protect the delivery of education in our schools by implementing an ambitious school's management programme to support our Head Teachers and staff, securing long-term sustainability, especially in our rural communities.
6. Promote the wider use of technology and blended teaching approaches to support the way our children learn.

## 3.3 A place to thrive

We will work for a Highlands that includes and supports all children and adults to lead fulfilled and productive lives, free from poverty and discrimination. No matter where they live or whatever their needs, all of our citizens should always know what support is available, where they can find help, and whether that help is right for them.

We recognise that economic growth is critical to enabling our communities not just to survive, but to thrive. We will do all we can to strengthen our infrastructure; support the growth of new and existing businesses; and the creation of new jobs

### **Key priorities**

1. Urgently seek new and better ways to ensure superfast broadband and digital services are provided to all communities across the Highlands.
2. Support children to be protected, healthy, safe and responsible by delivering a whole system approach to integrated children's services.
3. All people should live a life free from poverty and discrimination and benefit from good mental health and wellbeing. We will work with our partners to achieve this.
4. Build on the work of the City Region Deal to help businesses to fully cultivate commercial opportunities including the development of international markets.
5. Promote and support Highland business from all sectors including traditional sectors like agriculture, forestry and aquaculture as well as newer technology-driven businesses.
6. With Government, HITRANS, SUSTRANS and others, deliver improvements to our key transport links.
7. With partners and transport providers ensure fewer people experience transport as a barrier to accessing services, employment or leisure activities, including working with communities to develop community transport schemes.
8. Work with NHS Highland and others to grow and invest in community based services for adults across the Highlands.

## 3.4 A welcoming place

The Highlands is an exceptionally safe and friendly place. Our natural environment is famous for its beauty as well as for supporting a wide range of sports and leisure activities. We have an increasingly diverse population and we welcome people of all faiths, nationalities and backgrounds who wish to live, work or visit here. We also welcome people who wish to create businesses and those that can work in key sectors where we have skill shortages.

### **Key priorities**

1. With businesses and partners identify “pull factors” to actively promote the Highlands as a desirable and welcoming place to work, live, invest and create businesses.
2. Collaborate with our partners to develop integrated workforce planning strategies to address skills gaps, attract key workers and encourage young people to return after studying away. Engage with Scottish and UK governments to develop measures that allow for greater workforce freedom of movement.
3. Tourism continues to be of massive importance to our economy and we will work with business and partners to promote and develop the Highlands as a world class, year round, tourist destination.
4. Continue to implement a wide range of measures with our partners so that communities feel safer around roads and to reduce accidents.

## 3.5 A redesigned council

The council will be more open-minded to new ways of delivering services; more commercially-minded, raising income to sustain services and jobs across the region; and more community-minded by listening locally. The council will also support community bodies to do more and target support to particular people and places in most need.

Staff are central to identifying and making the changes needed and they will be empowered to do this.

### **Key priorities**

1. Accelerate work to bring decision-making to local areas.
2. Develop new ways to deliver services that are affordable, efficient and local in order to be fit to embrace future challenges.
3. Consider the key recommendations from the Commission on Highland Democracy, which seek to reinvigorate local democracy.
4. Adopt a commercially minded and innovative approach to generate income to support council services and jobs across the region.
5. Many communities across the Highlands are increasingly ambitious to control more assets and land with increasing interest in local service delivery. The council will work with public agencies and communities to simplify our processes and to innovate and spread good practice.
6. Align the Council's strategic and financial priorities and aspire to work more closely with our public sector partners and businesses to understand and, where we can, to support their priorities.