

# Local voices | Highland choices

## Guthan ionadail | roghainnean Gàidhealach

### 2017-2022

Your Voice - Your Council - Your Future

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Ur Guth - Ur Comhairle - Ur n-Àm ri Teachd

**Review of the Council Programme**  
**Ath-sgrùdadh de Phrògram na Comhairle**





Fairy Pools, Skye by Tomasz Szatewicz

# 1 Foreword

## Facal-tòiseachaidh

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### **Your Vision, Your Views, Your Council**

This is the first revision of the Programme for The Highland Council “Local Voices/Highland Choices” and presents a vision for the Council which is to be Ambitious for a Sustainable and Connected Highlands.

The refreshed Programme builds on the themes established last year to reflect member engagement and a review of the Council’s Corporate Plan commitments which commenced in the summer. In addition, the Council’s Budget Leader and new Chief Executive have spent a month travelling the Highlands, meeting communities, staff and elected members and many of their findings, ideas and requests have been incorporated in the revised Programme which in turn will inform our allocation of resources.

We are ambitious for the Highlands and want it to be the best place to live, to visit and to invest in. For this to happen, we need to foster sustainable local communities and develop better connections with and between public sector partners, the Scottish and UK Governments and communities. In this way we can maximise our significant joint resources and capabilities and address the barriers to provide the best possible local services.

We also know from our public engagement exercise that we need be a Council the delivers for the whole of the Highlands. This means making the most of the opportunities that come from our unique Highland brand, whilst taking time to listen to communities and reflect what we hear in the design and delivery of locally responsive, place-based services.

Lastly, to be successful, the Programme must be supported by the way the Council is organised. Consequently, we are committed to developing a sustainable local workforce aligned to local priorities; redesigning services to be more efficient with a focus on income generation and commercialisation to protect front line services; and identifying a set of ambitious performance targets driving improvement.





Kinmylies Primary School Tree Planting by Phil Downie Photography

# 2 Ambitious for a Sustainable and Connected Highlands

## We will:

- ▶ make the Highlands a stronger, healthier and more resilient region, where we are confident in our culture and heritage and where more people choose to live, work, study and visit.
- ▶ work to invigorate local democracy and put our communities at the heart of the design and delivery of services at a local level. We will also develop the capacity of communities to decide and deliver their local priorities.
- ▶ protect the vulnerable in our communities, promote fairness and welcome diversity.
- ▶ support all children and families to learn and thrive by delivering a whole system approach to education and integrated children's services.
- ▶ promote the contribution our older people make to our communities and support them to live active and independent lives, remaining in their own homes with appropriate support.
- ▶ work collaboratively to drive economic growth and champion innovation as well as ensuring our infrastructure meets the needs of businesses as well as citizens and visitors.
- ▶ address the financial challenges with a positive vision of change.
- ▶ safeguard and enhance Highland's significant reputation and standing nationally and internationally.





View looking South from Inverness Castle Viewpoint by Ewen Weatherspoon

# 3 Priority themes Cuspairean prìomhachais

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The Council will deliver its strategic goals by focusing on a number of high level priority themes.

## 3.1 A Council that champions the Highlands

## 3.2 A place to live

## 3.3 A place to thrive

## 3.4 A place to prosper

## 3.5 A welcoming place

## 3.6 Your Highland Council



## 3.1 A Council that champions the Highlands

**Our Ambition** is to make the Highlands the best place to live, work and do business.

We are passionate about the Highlands and are proud of our people and our communities and the contribution they make to our country. We will engage at all levels of the political process, using every opportunity to the best effect to represent and promote the Highlands, to ensure that the full potential and ambition of our people and region are realised. We will also champion the role that our staff play at every level of the organisation and the pride they take in delivering high quality, locally responsive services.



Food waste truck by The Highland Council



# 3.1 Comhairle a tha a' cliùthachadh na Gàidhealtachd

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## Our key priorities - we will:

- 1) maximise opportunities to influence national policy development and legislation both at a Scottish and UK level.
- 2) continue to make the case for the subsidiarity of decision making and the decentralisation of power to a regional or local authority level, and campaign strongly against the further centralisation of services away from the Highlands.
- 3) accelerate the decentralisation and relocation of Council services and jobs across the Highlands and encourage the relocation of jobs and services to the Highlands.
- 4) use to the full the centres of influence we have (COSLA, Scottish Cities Alliance, Convention of the Highlands and Islands etc.) To ensure that the needs of the Highlands are articulated and represented.
- 5) look to retain and where possible enhance our European and wider global links to promote the Highlands both in terms of our culture and our economy.
- 6) work in partnership to develop a new collaborative regional policy which is nationally aligned but regionally responsive, to promote prosperity and well-being and fulfil the region's economic potential for the long term.
- 7) continue to make the case to Government for a fairer financial settlement that reflects the additional costs of providing services in a vast and remote geographical area and work towards local authorities controlling a greater proportion of their funding.
- 8) to champion the Highlands as a welcoming, thriving and prosperous place by involving all our staff in the design and promotion of high quality public services, delivered in partnership with vibrant highland communities.

## 3.2 A place to live

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**Our Ambition** is to make the Highlands an even better place to live. For that to happen we need attractive and sustainable communities and, working with others, we need to attract more people to make the Highlands their home, encourage our younger residents to stay here and our older citizens to be supported in their communities to live independent and productive lives for as long as possible.

The Highlands has a rich and unique culture and heritage. It has some of the cleanest air, purest water and world renowned unspoiled natural environments. We must ensure these precious commodities are protected and enhanced for future generations and provide opportunities for developing new and exciting cultural experiences for all.



Corpach Lochs looking towards Ben Nevis, Fort William and Ardgour by Helen Cunningham



## 3.2 Àite airson fuireach

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### Our key priorities - we will:

- 1) provide homes across the Highlands that are responsive to local needs including affordable homes for younger generations and families; housing in areas where attracting professionals is a challenge and homes where the elderly and vulnerable can be supported to live independently.
- 2) working with our partners, we will develop strategies to stabilise and reverse population decline affecting some remote and rural areas.
- 3) work with our partners to do all we can to promote the contribution our older people make to our communities and help them to live independently in their own homes with appropriate support.
- 4) collaborate with NHS Highland to produce a joint strategic plan to shift the balance of care services into the community and work with them to plan the delivery of these services and to grow and encourage community organised services for adults across the Highlands using self-directed support.
- 5) engage and work with our communities to provide quality, sustainable and responsive services to maintain the local natural and built environment.
- 6) introduce a range of strategies and plans to support our commitment to sustainability, including phasing out single use plastics from Council sites and schools and developing solutions for residual waste treatment that will meet the requirements of the ban on landfilling Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) by 1st January 2021.
- 7) recognise the substantial social, cultural and economic benefits of Gaelic language and culture in the Highlands and continue to promote and support it through the third generation Gaelic Language Plan.
- 8) promote opportunities in culture, learning, sport, health and wellbeing as well as encouraging participation in locally led cultural activities and the creative arts in collaboration with Highlife Highland, Eden Court, partners and communities.

## 3.3 A place to thrive

**Our Ambition** is that no matter where they live or whatever their needs, all of our citizens are supported to be successful and our communities are helped to be safe, healthy, and nurturing places for all.

We believe in a Highlands that includes and supports everyone to lead fulfilled, healthy and productive lives, where drive and ambition is rewarded, innovation and creativity supported, and where we work together with partners and within our communities to reduce inequality and tackle poverty and discrimination.

All children and young people need to be able to reach their full potential which requires a sustained reduction in the attainment gap for those from more disadvantaged communities; a focus on meeting the needs of all children and young people including those with additional support needs; and equality of opportunity and access to high quality learning and teaching across the Highlands. Everyone should be given the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and experience, regardless of age or background.



Rugby training on the new rugby pitch in Inverness by Alison White Photography



## 3.3 Àite airson fàs

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### Our key priorities - we will:

- 1) through the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, work with our partners to tackle poverty and inequality and explore ways of improving mental health crisis response and suicide prevention. Develop multiagency working to coordinate our response to homelessness, criminal justice, drug and alcohol, and mental health services.
- 2) support children and young people to be protected, healthy, safe and responsible by continuing the delivery of a whole system approach to integrated children's services. This will include a particular focus on those affected by adverse childhood experiences and, through our role as a Corporate Parent, young people who are, or have been in care.
- 3) reduce the number of out of authority placements and bring more children home to the Highlands.
- 4) implement our Sustainable Education Programme, to improve and sustain educational provision across Highland, with subject specialists available in all curricular areas, in all schools, across the Highlands.
- 5) improve educational attainment across all groups and reduce the attainment gap for young people from deprived areas.
- 6) continue the programme of refurbishment and renovation of Highland schools, and where possible, provide new school buildings using innovative and flexible approaches to make best use of the available budget.
- 7) expand early years provision and provide the best start for young people across Highland.
- 8) work with NHS Highland and other partners to help and support vulnerable adults and families within our communities.
- 9) lead the development and implementation of the Community Learning and Development Plan with our Community Planning Partners.
- 10) the Council will use all opportunities to promote active lifestyles in our workplaces; schools and nurseries. We will also work with others to promote sustained activity with our older people.

## 3.4 A place to prosper

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**Our Ambition** is to maximise the economic potential of the Highlands. We will work with public and private sector stakeholders to strengthen our infrastructure; support the growth of new and existing businesses; and to create and protect jobs across the whole of the Highlands.

Economic growth is critical to enabling our communities not just to survive, but to thrive, and we recognise that ensuring improved infrastructure and digital connectivity across our region is essential for our economy to expand.



West Link Bridge opened December 2017. Photo by Kirsty Foster



## 3.4 Àite airson soirbheachadh

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### Our key priorities - we will:

- 1) encourage and assist the regeneration of our town centres and high streets across the Highlands and review opportunities to maximise the use of the built environment..
- 2) help communities to make informed choices about broadband options that are currently available; press for the early rollout of the Scottish Government's R100 programme; and work with UK Government to expand to the Local Full Fibre Network to households and businesses across the Highlands.
- 3) maximise the use of the £20 million of digital funding in the City-Region Deal across the Highlands, to continue to expand digital access in our towns and villages and grow commercial opportunities, especially through innovation and technology.
- 4) press for an increase in national investment to improve our key road, rail and air transport links.
- 5) strive to maintain the current funding for our local road network and continue to make the case for additional resources in recognition of the unique challenges and costs of maintaining the largest road network in the UK.
- 6) work to ensure the Highlands retain a fair share of the income derived from the development of the natural resources of hydro and on and off shore wind.
- 7) trial new methods of community engagement to develop solutions including the use of community transport schemes and with partners and public and private transport providers ensure fewer people experience transport as a barrier to accessing services, employment or leisure activities.
- 8) with our partners and business organisations we will promote the region as a place for business to invest, thrive and grow.
- 9) develop the range of opportunities available for young people by working in strategic partnerships with UHI, employers and other key stakeholders to develop employability skills; sustain the level of positive destinations for school leavers; and continue to develop the Council's Modern Apprenticeship scheme.

## 3.5 A welcoming place

**Our Ambition** is to develop sustainable and connected communities.

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, study, work or visit here.

Tourism is also of huge importance to the Highlands. We recognise the benefits, challenges and impact that tourists have across the area and we welcome the opportunity address these in partnership with the tourism sector and the Scottish Government.



Welcome to the Highlands sign. Sign design and photo by Kirsty Foster



## 3.5 Àite fàilteachail

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### Our key priorities - we will:

- 1) work with business and partners to continue to promote and develop the Highlands as a world class, year round, tourist destination. We will also work with communities and businesses to secure funding to enable improvements in local tourism infrastructure. We will press the Scottish Government to continue and increase its Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.
- 2) work with partners to explore options for retaining more of the revenue generated by tourism for investment in the local area, which would include exploring the possibility of a tourist levy.
- 3) collaborate with our partners to develop integrated workforce planning strategies and talent attraction to deliver a joined up approach making it easier for people to relocate to the Highlands.
- 4) together with partners, develop Inverness Castle to become a nationally significant attraction that encourages visitors to explore the whole of the Highlands.
- 5) seek to attract more visitors to make increased use of our genealogy research resources, museums and other attractions across the Highlands.
- 6) work with communities and partners to raise awareness around sustaining and improving our natural, built and cultural environment.
- 7) play our part in welcoming refugees by leading a multi-agency approach to their re-settlement in the Highlands.

## 3.6 Your Highland Council

**Our Ambition** is to improve and strengthen the relationships between the Council and the communities it serves.

Communities are happier, healthier and more resilient when they are listened to and can play an active part in the development and delivery of the services that matter to them. We are committed to deliver meaningful engagement with Highland communities; to listen and respond to what we hear; and encourage more community activity and community-run services where there is capacity and appetite to do so. We will devolve more powers, responsibilities and budgets to our area committees and trial new methods of involving local people in the decisions these committees make.

The Council needs to re-structure to respond to budgetary and demographic challenges using bold, creative and innovative approaches; and we must have a stable and sustainable local workforce because our staff are integral to shaping, communicating and delivering this new approach in the communities in which they live and work.



Torvean Gateway public consultation. Photo by Kirsty Foster



## 3.6 Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agaibhse

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### Our key priorities - we will:

- 1) establish a renewed sense of trust and respect between our staff and communities, and develop ways to deliver services that are affordable, efficient and local, embracing future challenges and opportunities.
- 2) actively engage in the Local Governance Review which seeks to explore how all public services can be more accountable to the people they serve.
- 3) accelerate and support work to bring more decision-making to local areas to reflect local priorities and local needs.
- 4) align the Council's strategic and financial priorities and set a three year budget which will seek to make the Council as efficient as possible.
- 5) adopt a commercially minded and innovative approach to generate income to support council services and jobs across the region.
- 6) support the ambitions of communities to control more local assets, land and delivery of services; and increase our capacity to support communities and elected members to drive forward a step change in community control.
- 7) aspire to work more closely with our public sector partners and businesses to understand and, where we can, to support their priorities. We will also actively promote joint working including the co-location of services.
- 8) with our partners (public and 3rd sector) we will develop collaborative and decentralised approaches to public services and delivering a sustainable local workforce.
- 9) capitalise on the opportunities for greater efficiency, productivity and effectiveness offered by digital transformation.

# Ambitious | Sustainable | Connected



Filming on location in the Highlands. Photo by Deva Smith