

Agenda Item	5
Report No	TC/01/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Tourism Committee

Date: 18 March 2020

Report Title: Future Tourism Strategy

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report describes for Members the current situation regarding Scotland's new National Tourism Strategy and outlines the current proposals in Highland that include a suite of Destination Management Plans that identify the tourism priorities across the different areas of Highland.

2. Recommendations

3.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the current situation regarding the National Tourism Strategy and
- ii. Note the proposals for strategies and destination plans that will identify tourism priorities in Highland.

3. Implications

- 3.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report. However, where the Council agrees to implement any Council led activities defined in any local tourism strategies, there will be resource implications which will require to be considered by the services concerned.
- 3.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report
- 3.3 There are no community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications arising directly from this report. However, the approach to developing tourism strategies and plans described will require there to be a degree of community input.

- 3.4 There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report. In broad terms the national tourism strategy has been developed with climate change implications in mind and it is anticipated that this will also be the case with local strategies thereby helping to reduce climate change impacts.
- 3.5 There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.
- 3.6 There are no Gaelic implications arising directly from this report.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 Across Scotland the strategic direction for tourism has largely been defined by the tourism industry but with the support of the Scottish Government and the wider public sector – including local authorities. In recent years this has seen the National Tourism Strategy complemented by a series of regional strategies or action plans including a Highland Tourism Action Plan. Both national and Highland plans had an end date of 2020.

5. Current situation with National and Highland Tourism Strategies

- 5.1 Following on from “Tourism Scotland 2020”, the Scottish Tourism Alliance have prepared a new national strategy – “Scotland Outlook 2030”. This strategy, outlining priorities for the next decade was launched on 4th March 2020 following input from over 2500 tourism leaders and stakeholders from Scotland’s tourism industry. This strategy focusses on four key priorities to realise Scotland’s tourism ambition: -
- Our passionate people
 - Our thriving places
 - Our diverse businesses
 - Our memorable experiences

The strategy is available at <https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Scotland-Outlook-2030.pdf>

- 5.2 Complementing the national strategy, a Highland Tourism Action Plan for the period to 2020 previously identified the priority areas for Highland so this also requires to be replaced.
- 5.3 Economic circumstances have changed quite significantly since 2012 and this has been reflected in the new national strategy. In particular the period leading up to 2012 was characterised by a challenging economy after the banking crisis with features such as high youth unemployment. As such, the focus was very much on marketing, achieving growth and areas such as skills. Since then economic circumstances have changed and factors such as a high international profile for Scotland and a favourable exchange rate have seen tourism grow with areas such as Highland seeing particularly strong growth. The focus of the new national strategy reflects this and it is anticipated that any Highland strategy / strategies will also see differing priorities that reflect the changed economic circumstances.

6. Future Highland Tourism Strategy / Strategies

- 6.1 Previous Highland Tourism Strategies including the most recent Highland Tourism Action Plan have been produced by the Highland Tourism Partnership (HTP) – a partnership of the key business and public sector organisations involved in Highland tourism. HTP members are: -

- 7 Destination Organisations from across Highland
- Scottish Tourism Alliance
- Federation of Small Businesses
- The Highland Council
- VisitScotland
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Forestry & Land Scotland
- Cairngorms National Park Authority

Cllr John Gordon and Cllr Gordon Adam represent the Council with officer support also provided through the Council's Principal Officer for Europe, Tourism & Film. The Council formally endorsed the Highland Tourism Action Plan produced by the HTP on 12 February 2014 as the strategic document that should guide the Council's tourism activity.

- 6.2 Following the launch of the new national strategy the Highland Tourism Partnership are meeting on 27th April to consider how the ambitions of this strategy might be delivered in Highland and what local strategy / strategies might be required to support this.
- 6.3 The new national strategy puts people and place at its heart and recognises that *"Scotland's communities will benefit from a 21st Century approach to tourism. They should therefore be recognised as a key stakeholder in tourism related planning"* and that *"We will actively engage local communities as valued stakeholders in tourism development and delivery."* These ambitions fit well with the Council's increased localism agenda and greater involvement of Area Committees while also suggesting that a new strategy only at a Highland level without some more local priorities is unlikely to be the best approach.
- 6.4 Indeed, even prior to the launch of the new national strategy there has been an increased level of interest in more localised tourism or "Destination Plans" with some areas such as the Cairngorms and Wester Ross having already done significant work in this area. While a Highland wide plan may be an appropriate place for detailing elements such as workforce needs and skills, more local destination plans would allow the opportunity to define more location specific priorities rather than just focussing on broader themes. This is likely to be particularly relevant in setting priorities such as those around sustainability, visitor management and local infrastructure.
- 6.5 Some discussion regarding this approach has taken place and it is anticipated that the Highland tourism priorities for the future are likely to be defined in a series of more local "Destination Plans" rather than a single Highland plan. This is likely to involve not just engagement with the Council's tourism specialists but will also overlap with some of the wider community engagement activities undertaken by the Council. As different areas are at different stages of this process there is no set timeline for the development of these plans but it is proposed that updates be provided to this committee and area committees as required.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 9 March 2020

Author: Colin Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film