

Agenda Item	11
Report No	CP/18/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 12 May 2021

Report Title: Progress report on implementing the Visitor Management Plan

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Purpose/Executive Summary

1.
 - 1.1 This report describes the plans for visitor management in relation to waste management and public conveniences, two aspects of the new Visitor Management Plan supported by additional one-off investment agreed by the Council in March 2021.
 - 1.2 The service enhancements have been shaped by experience last year. They will continue to be shaped by ongoing engagement with local Members and communities to be responsive to issues and opportunities arising this season.
 - 1.3 A verbal update from the time of writing can be provided at Committee on:
 - any new service ideas emerging;
 - any new provision secured; and
 - any issues arising from the further lifting of travel restrictions and re-opening of hospitality expected on 26.4.21.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note:
 - i. the planned operational deployment of additional resources this year of £60k for public convenience provision by growing our comfort scheme of 37 providers and investing in six of the Council's 75 public conveniences as described in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6;
 - ii. the planned deployment of £180k for waste management through procuring and siting additional waste bins and increasing the frequency of collections in known hot spots supported by 8 new seasonal staff and supporting community litter picks as described in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.4;
 - iii. engagement with Members is underway through Ward Business Meetings and will continue throughout the season to deal with service issues and opportunities arising;
 - iv. that the service will apply for Better Places funding administered by NatureScot to enable further response;

- v. in responding to issues as they arise this could create budget pressures. To date this includes additional costs of roadside litter clearing. Any pressures will be monitored, reported and mitigated where possible and if necessary, opportunities for further investment will be submitted as part of the 2nd tranche of one-off investment possible this year at the Council meeting in June 2021;
- vi. the service will contribute to the proposed Tourism Infrastructure Plan and this will include the support from the community asset transfer process and reviewing public conveniences previously regarded as surplus to requirements or unaffordable to improve/repair;
- vii. the service will continue to contribute to partnership and resilience meetings throughout the season; and
- viii. the Environmental Health team will continue to support business in the tourism sector and in their Covid compliance.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

In 2020 an additional £60k was invested in enhancing the waste service to respond to high visitor numbers from July to October.

3.2 The Visitor Management Plan (VMP) considered at the Tourism Committee on 21.4.21 outlines how the one-off resource agreed by the Council in March 2021 for 2021/22 will be deployed, namely: road management and improvement (£280k); parking management (£250k); access rangers (£300k); public conveniences (£60k); waste management (£180k); motorhomes facilities (£200k); public transport (£60k); and other joint activities (£125k).

3.3 This report focuses on resources for public conveniences and waste, managed in the Communities & Place (C&P) service. Potential further resources may be available through Better Places Funding administered by Naturescot to help alleviate tourism pressures. The service is currently developing bids for additional comfort scheme provision and additional roadside litter picking for the next round of applications in May 2021.

3.4 Responding to new service demands out with the planned investment may lead to new budget pressures. These will be monitored throughout the season and included in any financial monitoring for Members along with any planned mitigation. Flexibility will be required to respond to new issues arising and if necessary, opportunities for further investment will be submitted as part of the 2nd tranche of one-off investment possible this year at the Council meeting in June 2021.

3.5 Legal

The Council does not have a statutory responsibility to provide or operate public conveniences and there are no specific legal obligations to provide litter bins. The relevant duty for waste is contained within the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 89 which is to ensure that all land in our direct control which is open to the air and to which the public has access is kept clear of litter and refuse, so far as is practicable.

3.6 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)

The VMP aims to support positive visitor experience given the economic benefits to the region, and to reduce potential harms and nuisance for communities. In many locations community bodies have improved infrastructure and found solutions to support visitor management. The report highlights the need for ongoing support,

engagement and joint work with local Members and communities responding to issues and opportunities arising in-season.

3.7 Climate Change/Carbon Clever

As noted in the VMP many of the visitors to the Highlands are vehicle-based and the Plan does attempt to reduce the environmental impact of these visitors by reducing vegetation damage and active travel opportunities.

3.8 Risk

There is a risk that without additional public conveniences and waste facilities that the challenges and issues of anti-social behaviour experienced last year will be seen again this year. This creates a reputational risk for the Council and potentially an economic risk to the region's reputation as a desirable tourist destination.

3.9 Gaelic

There are Gaelic implications for any new signage required ensuring it has bi-lingual content in keeping with the Council's policy.

4. **Background**

4.1 Following the Council budget meeting in March 2021 when one-off investment for visitor management was agreed, a draft [Visitor Management Plan](#) was discussed by the Tourism Committee on 17 March 2021 and a [final draft of the plan](#) was considered at the Tourism Committee on 21.4.21. This plan highlights:

- managing visitor movements and influencing visitor behaviour are critical aspects of developing sustainable tourism and require a partnership response;
- the need to prepare for the anticipated effects of increasing numbers of visitors to the region and mitigate the pressures arising from volume tourism on infrastructure, beauty spots, towns and villages, rural roads, remote glens and trail heads;
- the need to learn from the experience in 2020 when the Highlands were one of the most popular destinations in the UK;
- the need for the plan to be dynamic, responding to issues and opportunities arising in-season;
- the importance of place-based community engagement to resolve local issues;
- ongoing joint work with partners including local and regional resilience partnerships; and
- a separate and complementary Tourism Infrastructure Plan is being developed with some longer-term ambitions and in time this may be able to be combined with this Visitor Management Plan to form a single Visitor Management strategy. This will include new or improved tourism infrastructure that is supported by capital funds, including external funding.

4.2 The Visitor Management Plan (VMP) identifies that Council activity should be focussed on the provision of some of the underlying infrastructure and associated services as well as on informing and educating visitors on good practice. It focuses on the following issues: roads, parking and transport; public conveniences and waste; outdoor access; environmental and public health issues; and public information. Responsibilities lie with the Infrastructure and Environment (I&E) Service and C&P.

4.3 The C&P services within the VMP relate to:

- public conveniences, with an allocation of £60k to increase provision of comfort schemes and investment in public toilet improvements and;

- increased bin capacity and waste collections for key visitor sites with an allocation of £180k.

4.4 The plans for this year build on our experience of the challenges last year when the Service:

- was able to work quickly to open as many of the 75 public conveniences closed during lockdown, mainly due to initial staff absence on health grounds, but most comfort schemes did not re-open;
- an additional £60k was invested in new waste bins and more frequent waste collections and street cleaning from July to October 2020; and
- the service was involved in local discussions, partnership and Government meetings and subsequently submitting a bid for temporary infrastructure which unfortunately did not proceed.

Members too were heavily involved in contact with their constituents and MSPs and in trying to find local solutions.

4.5 Some challenges last year were heightened because of earlier budget reductions in public conveniences dating over three years from 2016/17, however additional budget feeds last year enabled re-opening of public conveniences on supply routes. The additional funding in 2021/22 can enhance service further.

4.6. The Service has other contributions to visitor management and the visitor experience. This includes:

- the support for community asset transfers, with two long leases reported to this meeting of the Committee which would enable local community benefits including much improved public convenience provision;
- the wider grounds maintenance and play parks service;
- the Registration service and particularly marriages, with many couples from outwith the region choosing the Highlands as a destination for their wedding, as reported separately to the Committee;
- the role of Environmental Health in providing support for tourism businesses as described below; and
- community testing facilities as described below.

4.7 The Environmental Health Team currently play a key role in responding to the Covid 19 pandemic. In addition to being one of the appointed regulators for implementing and ensuring compliance with the Covid 19 legislative restrictions, a vital part of their work is supporting businesses by providing advice and assistance in interpreting the vast array of Covid 19 guidance that has been published. Other work has included updating website information, posting social media updates on Covid 19 guidance, undertaking compliance checks in businesses and where necessary investigating any positive Covid 19 cases to minimise the spread of infection in the Highlands.

4.8 Over the last 12 months the team has dealt with over 350 covid related enquiries; 300 complaints and conducted follow up investigations for nearly 400 positive cases throughout the Highlands. The team has 4 newly appointed covid compliance officers to help further support businesses and ensure the spread of infection is minimised within the Highlands. To date these officers have conducted in excess of 250 visits to business premises.

4.9 As the tourism and hospitality sector is such a key industry, with around 4700 food businesses in the Highlands, the officers will be focussing on this in the weeks and

months ahead to offer advice and support as businesses re-open and emerge from lockdown. Any business within this sector that is looking for Covid 19 related advice is asked to submit their enquiry to: envhealth@highland.gov.uk .

4.10 The Council is working with NHS to provide place-based community testing for people without symptoms. This will be focused where public health requests are made and most likely associated with any local Covid outbreaks that may arise. The Council has three mobile units and trained staff to deploy where that is required. Visitors as well as residents can attend our facilities for this service. Our community testing units will complement the universal offer of community testing expected to begin on 26th April 2021 and the arrangements in place with travel providers to encourage anyone planning travel to the islands to order a home test kit online in advance of travel.

5. **VMP and Public Conveniences**

5.1 Current provision

The Council currently operates 75 Public Conveniences throughout the Highlands and has 37 Comfort Scheme agreements with local businesses and Community Groups. This provides an essential amenity for our residents, businesses and visitors.

5.2 An operational restructuring of the service has resulted in the majority (59) of Council run facilities being serviced by mobile teams. This in turn has delivered improvements in the cleanliness and condition of our facilities. Facilities not maintained by mobile teams are in more remote locations, where this model of service delivery is less effective. These are serviced by individual members of staff.

5.3 The 37 Comfort Scheme agreements with businesses and community groups are aimed at meeting demand in areas that are not served by Council run facilities. There are three levels of payment (£100, £200 or £300 per month), and these are dependent on the quality of the facilities offered. Payment for composting toilets has just been added to the scheme with a payment of £50 per month. Information on the assessment for comfort schemes, including photographs for examples of standards is attached at **Appendix 1**. Details of where comfort schemes are located and how operators can join the scheme are available on our [website](#).

5.4 Additional Provision for 2021 to date (accurate at the time of writing)

Using the additional one-off £60k resource agreed by Council, the service can increase the number of seasonal or one-year comfort schemes and invest in some of our buildings for additional charging and people counter infrastructure and some vandalism repairs.

5.5 Investment in our buildings is programmed for:

- Ullapool charging (including showers) – one paddle gate system (cash and card) and contactless for showers (£12k);
- Shower charging in Aviemore, Kingussie and Grantown (£7k per site, £21k total);
- Contributing to vandalism repairs at Muir of Ord (up to £11.7k); and
- installation of a people counter in Dornie Hall public convenience (£1k).

Improvements in other facilities are also being considered with e.g. condition surveys underway.

5.6 New comfort schemes have been encouraged and at the time of writing over 20 different providers have come forward and the following are being considered;

- Altnaharra Hotel (Ward 1);
- Staxigoe Village Hall (Ward 3);
- Canna Café (Ward 11);
- Roybridge Hotel (Ward 11);
- Cleadale, Eigg (Ward 11); site is a composting toilet therefore only eligible for amended version of the scheme;
- Loch Ness Hub, Drumnadrochit (Ward 12)
- Dalwhinnie service station (Ward 19);
- Muir of Ord Hub (Ward 8)

At the time of writing the following new comfort schemes have been agreed:

- Salen, Acharacle (Ward 21);
- Traigh beach (Ward 11); site is a composting toilet therefore only eligible for amended version of the scheme;
- Ardnamurchan Natural History and Visitor Centre (Ward 21)
- Rum Enterprise; Isle of Rum (Ward 11);
- Sea View Hotel, John O'Groats (Ward 13);
- Coach House Dornoch (Ward 4) whilst Council operated PC is being upgraded with Common Good Fund monies

5.7 A verbal update can be provided at the meeting as more schemes are expected to have been agreed by then.

5.8 To contribute to the Tourism Infrastructure Plan a review of public conveniences previously identified as surplus to requirements or unaffordable to improve/repair will be undertaken. Bringing any back into use would likely require significant capital resources and consideration of sustainability, value for money as well as any community interest issues.

6. VMP and waste management

6.1 Waste bins

The enhanced waste service with £180k one-off resource will be achieved through a combination of providing larger 1100 litre bins with lid design to reduce the risk of fly-tipping and a larger number of smaller 240/360 litre litter bins. The bins will be both general waste and where possible recycling bins. The bins will be clearly marked with information on responsible waste disposal. There will be increased bins and/or an increased frequency of collection within all Highland areas with focus on locations with expected high visitor numbers.

6.2 Additional waste collections

Another important service enhancement is the deployment of 8 seasonal staff. The 8 additional staff will be operational between May and September. The staff will use pick-up vehicles to exchange full litter bins and through an increased frequency of service, keep the hotspot areas clear of litter and refuse. The staff will be mobile and will cover areas where they are most needed, the anticipated base of the additional seasonal staff is set out below:

- North West Coast – Base is Lochinver
- West - Base is Ullapool

- Lochcarron
- Portree
- Brora/Golspie
- Fort William
- Aviemore
- Inverness – Loch Ness areas

Recruitment is timed for staff to be in post for 26.4.21 when some lockdown restrictions are expected to be lifted.

6.3 The use of the additional seasonal staff will allow Waste Management core staff to focus additionally on areas not covered by seasonal work.

6.4 Supporting community litter picks

A positive response to the tourism problems experienced in 2020 was the noted increase in volunteer community led litter picks. The number of requests from Community Groups to carry out litter picks has remained encouraging into this year. The waste team will support as much as possible any group wishing to carry out a clean-up of accessible public areas and open spaces. Groups can request litter-picking sticks, bags and arrange for the waste to be collected by the Council after the event. Area Waste Management Officers are the point of contact for Community Groups.

6.5 Roadside litter clearing

In advance of visitors expected, the waste team has arranged special roadside litter clearing. On the weekend of the 24th and 25th of April, all areas of Highland participated in a coordinated road verge litter-pick. Other dates are planned, this is additional work that is not currently budgeted and may be reported as a pressure in future budget monitoring.

7. A dynamic VMP and responses services

7.1 While we anticipate a very busy season it is not known if the enhanced service described above will be enough or best targeted for effective visitor management. Our response on public conveniences and waste management will have to adapt based on experience and with budget flexibility. As noted above any additional costs arising may need to be submitted as part of the 2nd tranche of one-off investment possible this year at the Council meeting in June 2021.

7.2 A round of engagement with local Members is underway through Ward Business Meetings, and the majority of meetings in our 21 Wards will have taken place by the time the Committee meets. These discussions may identify further areas for enhanced services and potential joint working with community bodies. With the plans above shared for public conveniences and waste services, Member feedback will be important on whether there are any other public convenience locations to cover and any other points on waste management. Engagement will be on-going throughout the season so that services can respond and adjust as far as possible.

7.3 It will be important to learn as we go. The experience of the Easter weekend, when travel restrictions had not been lifted highlighted some limited issues, which included:

- litter and mess from wild camping in several areas; and
- increased litter and some fly-tipping in lay-by areas of Loch Ness.

- 7.4 Issues were dealt with quickly by existing staff. The additional seasonal waste management staff will help provide a quick response throughout the season to the anticipated high number of similar environmental issues. Arrangements for communication with the new Rangers team are in place to respond to issues emerging and weekly partnership forums are established to deal with cross service issues arising.
- 7.5 Travel restrictions were lifted within Scotland on 16.4.21, earlier than expected, and enabled travel for outdoor socialising, recreation and exercise. This led to partnership resilience meetings being held, operational plans put in place and local public advice communicated. The key messages were:
- reminder that facilities for overnight stays and many other visitor facilities are not open until 26 April;
 - urging people to follow current Government advice on movement and gatherings, and to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code;
 - particularly important as there is a heightened risk of wildfires at the moment and people are being urged not to use anything involving a naked flame; and
 - a strong reminder for people visiting beauty spots to leave no trace and also to park responsibly to allow for emergency access.
- 7.6 A verbal update of any additional pressures and responses can be provided given that it was announced on 20.4.21 that as expected, the Government confirmed that:
- hospitality venues such as cafés, pubs and restaurants can reopen, along with tourist accommodation. Non-essential retail outlets and close contact services such as beauty salons can also reopen, in addition to indoor attractions and public buildings such as galleries, museums and libraries; and
 - all parts of the country will move to Level 3 from Monday 26 April. The remaining travel restrictions within Scotland will be lifted and travel within the UK will be permitted for any purpose.

At the time of writing the impact of these changes is unknown.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 23.4.21



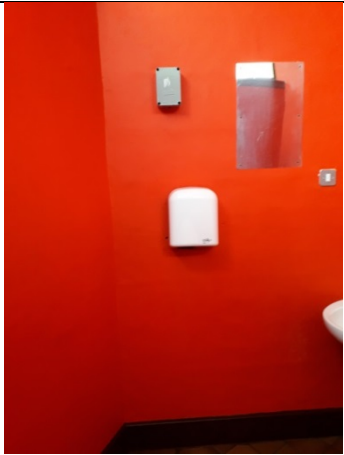


Author: Caroline Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources
Alan McKinnie, Senior Waste Manager
Debbie Sutton, Amenities Service Manager
Gregor MacCormick, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Carron McDiarmid, ECO Communities and Place

Appendix 1

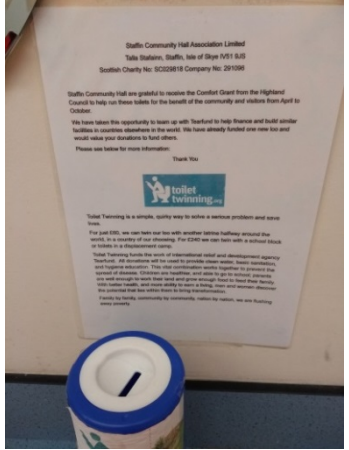

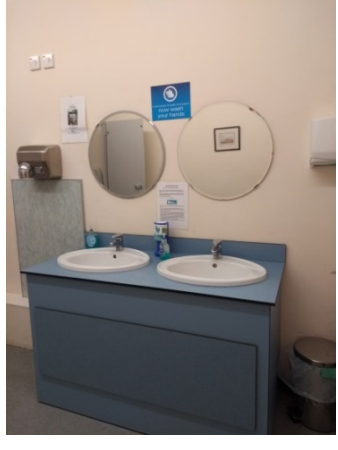
Comfort Scheme Scoring Matrix and Examples

Standards Scoring	Composting Facility	Basic Standard (1)	Meets expectations (2)	Exceeds Expectation (3)
Adequate directions to the toilets for both foot and car users. (Where appropriate).	✓	✓	✓	✓
Proper signage, both outside and inside the toilets, including name of Location, facilities available, person/authority responsible and how to contact if required and advertising the Comfort Scheme	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adequate facilities for female toilet users. (No. Of male cubicles + no. Of urinals x 2 = required no. Of female cubicles).			✓	✓
Adequate hand cleaning facilities (i.e. sanitiser)	✓			
Single entrance Unisex toilet		✓		
Hot and cold running water to wash basins in all facilities provided, with adequate provision for soap.		✓	✓	✓
Showers Provided				✓
Adequate provision for hand drying.		✓	✓	✓
Lockable toilet tissue dispensers, preferably with spare rolls/tissue.			✓	✓
Sanitary towel disposal units inside all ladies cubicles.			✓	✓
Properly designed and equipped accessible toilets, to include adequate sanitary disposal facilities.				✓
Basic Baby Change Facility within Male and Female Facility			✓	✓
Dedicated and properly equipped baby change facilities in both male and female toilets, to include adult toilet Facilities and room for double pushchairs.				✓
Child/family friendly cubicles and/or family toilets, properly equipped, large amount of floor space				✓
Older child/adult fixed or height adjustable changing bench in accessible or dedicated cubicle(s).				✓
Changing Places Toilet facility or similar with track hoist system, adjustable changing table, adequate space and non slip flooring				✓
Effective cleaning regime and management, to ensure proper Standards of cleanliness at all times.	✓	✓	✓	✓




£100 a month, example 1:

Exterior of Building	Directional Signage	Clean Facility
		
Hand Dryer	Good internal information	Disabled toilet provision
		

£200 a month, example 2:

<p>Sign describing CS and other initiatives</p>	<p>2 Clean & maintained stalls</p>	<p>2 Sinks, hand dryer, mirrors, hand towels and bin</p>
		

£300 a month, example 3:

<p>Directional Signage</p>	<p>Large room with several stalls</p>	<p>Private shower facilities</p>
		
<p>Several Sinks with hot water/soap dispensers</p>	<p>Information for cleaning posted</p>	<p>Adequate internal directions</p>
