Agenda Item	**16**
Report No	**HC/27/22**

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THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

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Date: 22 September 2022

Report Title: The Highland Council Programme Development Update

Report By: The Chief Executive

1.   Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   This report sets out the progress to date in the development of the Council Programme, including research undertaken across other organisations, and the ongoing work of the Administration in identifying the Programme priorities.

1.2   The report describes the next steps that will be taken to further develop the Programme, prior to this being reported to 27 October 2022 Council for approval.

1.3   The Programme commitments and associated targets and measurements will be included in the Council's new Corporate Plan which will come to Council for Members' consideration and approval later in the year.

2.   Recommendations

2.1   The Council is invited to:

- Note the approach and work to date in developing the Programme

- Note the next steps and the approach to engagement

- Note that the final Programme will come back to Council for approval on 27 October 2022

- Note that the Corporate Plan will come forward for approval later in the year, and Directorate Service Plans will be updated thereafter, aligning outcomes with the Programme priorities.

3.   Implications

3.1   Resource Implications: The Council has a limited budget envelope in which to deliver the Council Programme. There could be major resource implications for the Council arising from the approved Council Programme, however financial sustainability is recognised as a key underpinning principle. The detailed resource implications will be worked through as part of the process for developing the Corporate Plan actions and associated Service Plan requirements. This will include our staff aligned to the corporate priorities.

3.2 <u>Legal</u>: There are no specific legal implications arising from the Council Programme at this stage, however the Council has a number of statutory obligations which must continue to be funded.

3.3 <u>Risk</u>: There is a risk around the extent to which too large a number of Programme commitments can be successfully delivered over the next 5 years in the context of a challenging fiscal context and uncertainty regarding the wider economic and political context. Monitoring of implementation and progress will be through the scrutiny of the Corporate Plan at Council, Service plans at Strategic Committees, and locally by Area Committees. There will also be intermittent reviews of the Programme.

3.4 <u>Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)</u>: The developing Council Programme has identified Place as one of its 4 strategic pillars and addressing issues related to poverty and inequality is emerging as a major priority under the People Theme.

3.5 <u>Climate Change / Carbon Clever</u>: The Programme is likely to have a very strong focus on the Council's commitment to addressing the climate and ecological emergency. Environment is one of the four strategic pillars.

3.6 <u>Gaelic:</u> The developing Programme is likely to include the Gaelic language and culture as a priority.

4. Context

4.1 A number of reports to Council set out the context in which the current Council Programme is being developed. Recovery from the pandemic and ongoing health and wellbeing issues linked to COVID 19, impacts of Brexit, the war in Ukraine, the support and resettlement of Ukrainian refugees, and the cost of living and fuel energy crisis - the wider impacts of these on both the Council and our communities in Highland will continue to be a context for consideration.

  Sustainability, resilience and the continued need to work with our partners are key underpinning principles arising from Member engagement and discussion to date.

5. Programme Research

5.1 An Officer Support Group has been established to provide support to the Administration in their work to develop the Council Programme. This support includes the robust research of Programmes and Plans across a range of UK and Scottish organisations, including Councils. This research has demonstrated that whilst there were many apparent variations, there was a striking consistency when it came to those that were associated with high performing organisations.

5.2 Through the research, the broad topics of 'People', 'Place', 'Economy' and 'Environment' emerged, where it was found that, in all but one, (12 out of 13) of the sampled Councils, aligned with these broad strategic themes.

5.3 The majority of the Councils sampled, (69%), aligned with at least three of the strategic themes. These themes can be thought of as 'Strategic Pillars' under which there are high level strategic priorities to set action plans against. By keeping this at a strategic level, the priorities can be constant, even as the enabling actions may vary to address current or urgent concerns.

5.4   Detail of the research to date can be found at **Appendix 2** of this report, and further research data will need to be considered as the Programme develops. This would identify key Highland demographic and other regional economic data which would inform priorities.

6.   Programme Development

6.1   Resilient, sustainable and empowered communities is emerging as a key overarching theme, together with the Highland Council being a resilient and sustainable Council, which engages with, and listens to our communities.

6.2   Members of the Administration have been considering a number of priority areas for focus, listing these against four strategic pillars, People, Place, Economy and Environment. The key priority themes identified are included in this report at **Appendix 1**.

6.3   Development sessions with Members of the Administration have identified a number of initial ambitions within each theme that will be considered as priorities.

6.4   Focusing on each of the identified initial ambitions could enable and support the development of resilient, sustainable and empowered communities across the Highlands.

6.5   The following principles have been identified so far which could underpin the development of Programme ambitions, priorities and actions:

Principles:	Fairness and Equality
	Safety
	Resilience
	Community empowerment
	Connectivity
	Sustainability
	Affordability
	Value for Money
	Realistic
	Partnerships: Public, Private, Third Sector

7.   Next Steps

7.1   Over the coming weeks, the Programme will be refined and developed with the intention of submitting this to the Council meeting on 27 October 2022 for Member approval.

It is proposed that there will opportunities for engagement with Members, staff, and communities. This will include engagement sessions with community groups and local engagement visits across Highland localities, following September Council and into the first week of October. In the longer term, a circular engagement strategy will underpin future review of the Programme and development of priorities and the Corporate Plan in response to the dynamic financial, economic and demographic context.

7.2   The measures and actions required to deliver the Programme in the form of the draft Council Corporate Plan will be submitted to The Highland Council in December following the approval of the final Programme. The draft Corporate Plan will indicate the key performance indicators, actions and the timeframes proposed for delivering the commitments and outcomes in the Programme. This will then be reflected in the draft Directorate Service Plans, with final versions coming forward for approval at Strategic committees early in 2023.

There will be an annual review of the Corporate Plan at Council each Autumn to enable amendments and/or new measures and actions to be considered. It is also intended that the Programme will be reviewed every two years to reflect changes in context and priorities.

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Designation: Officer Support Group

Date: 14 September 2022

Appendix 1: Draft Strategic Pillars - Draft Priority Statements

Highland People	Highland Places	Highland Economy	Highland Environment
HOUSING: • Affordable, energy efficient housing that is fit for purpose • Providing quality homes, raising standards and availability of rented accommodation • Better use of assets for housing use • Explore housing opportunities for key worker accommodation, working with public and private sector partners • Developing housing to enable our vulnerable and elderly adults to be cared for 'close to home' and community	**TRANSPORT:** • Affordable and reliable public transport is crucial for sustainable rural and urban communities and mental wellbeing • Access to work for all • Connected Transport Solutions • Working with Scottish Government on the delivery of strategic road, ferry and rail infrastructure throughout the Highlands • Delivery of active travel infrastructure, working with funders and local communities	**JOBS & SKILLS:** • Modern apprenticeships and inclusive career opportunities for the most vulnerable • Links to key worker housing and transport to access work • Working with public and private sector partners on workforce planning and skills for future economy • Growing and retaining our own talent • Providing whole family support to those choosing to work within and from the Highlands	**RENEWABLE ENERGY:** • Focus and harness our areas of immense natural capital to deliver alternative energy solutions. Incl. development of solar, hydrogen, hydro and wind solutions. • Provide and signpost our communities to trusted sources of advice and funding. • Develop and accelerate 'green fleet' solutions • Development of renewable energy schemes • Identify and commit to renewable energy investments to reduce the overall energy costs for the Council. • Continue to support the delivery of renewable energy schemes in Highland through an effective and efficient planning process. • Work with developers in the renewables industry to ensure maximum benefit from supply chain activities and local community benefit for Highland.

ADDRESSING POVERTY:	RESILIENT COMMUNITIES:	BUSINESS & ENTERPRISE:	RECYCLING & WASTE MANAGEMENT:
• Tackling child poverty and access to welfare support. • Addressing inequalities in the most deprived areas • Develop Whole Family Hubs to enable early support is available	• Support communities to help each other live well and independently • Vibrant, placed based solutions • Empower communities to find local solutions and lever funding • Promote and signpost severe weather resilience • Develop a Community Wealth Building Strategy for Highland – ensuring that local spend is retained as locally as possible.	• Supporting business resilience and signposting business continuity planning • A strong, inclusive economy and supporting diverse growth sectors. • Investment in commercial opportunities to generate new income streams for the Council. • Support the private sector and public sector economic development partners in ensuring that Highland remains a top destination for inward investment • Deliver the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal projects and continue to identify future significant funding opportunities.	• Changing attitudes and behaviours towards waste • Reduce waste through energy efficient assets
HEALTH, MENTAL AND WELLBEING:	INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT:	TOURISM:	CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION:
• Improving mental health and wellbeing through addressing the other priorities such as housing, transport and jobs • Working with partners on	• Roads & Road Safety including preventative solutions such as drainage • Partnership approach to infrastructure and service development	• Implement the Tourism Levy as an enabler to a vibrant attractive tourist experience • Sustain Visitor management, working with partners	• Greener transport incl. low carbon public transport, active travel and the development of hydrogen hubs throughout the area. • Enabler to community-based climate action

suicide prevention and fairer access to integrated services	• Place based plans that focus on quality neighbourhoods and direct local funding opportunities towards local priorities. • Develop an asset management strategy for buildings and implement in a way that makes best use of existing assets, whilst identifying opportunities for effective working with partners.	• Tackling campervan issues and continuing the Council's success in attracting Rural Tourism infrastructure Funding to provide infrastructure.	• Ensure our services, facilities and staff address sustainability and climate change • Achieve Net Zero targets
EDUCATION, CULTURE & SPORT: • Retaining young people through skills for work and ensuring lifelong learning • Raising attainment and achievement for all – especially our most vulnerable • High Quality affordable sports, cultural and fitness opportunities for all • Strategic sports and cultural planning for all of all of The Highlands • Gaelic language and cultural development	**COMMUNITY FACILITIES & AMENITIES:** • Fair access to facilities and amenities • Making better use of local spaces and shared assets	**DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY:** • Deliver an excellent customer Experience within budget • Be a digital Council and help all our residents get online tackling digital exclusion • Use of data for targeted solutions • Support Scottish and UK Government broadband initiatives to ensure maximum coverage of fibre solutions across the area	**CLEAN ENVIRONMENT:** • Keep your community and green spaces safe and clean • Increase the amount of land and seas being well-managed for nature: incl. rewilding

Appendix 2 – Programme Research

Executive Summary

<u>Research Brief</u>

Learn from Best Practice.

1. Examine and analyse eight specific examples of best practices.
2. Identify and examine other high-quality examples of Council Programmes across the UK.
    a. A diverse set of exemplars from across the country will be used to spark discussions.
    b. Include branding, visual, and graphic examples to understand different styles/presentation of information.
    c. Include bi-lingual examples.

<u>Research Method</u>

A. Content analysis on a sample of 13 Councils across the UK in this phase.
B. Literature Review (ongoing) focused on engagement, change and psychology theory.
C. Subject Matter Expert Consultation on political dimensions, performance, and community engagement.

<u>Key Findings</u>

Content Analysis – Sample of 13 - not large enough for significant conclusions, but suggests:
1. The majority of the sample, (N=9, 69%) align on three or more of the broad strategic themes.
2. 6 out of 13 (46%) sampled Councils align on the four broad strategic themes of "People", "Place, "Economy" and "Evironment" and a further 3 out of 13 (23%) align on three themes.
3. Despite 12 out of 13 (92%) of documents examined using "People" as a strategic focus, 9 out of 13 (69%) have no 'voice' of the user/customer.
4. Instead of Purpose (31% = 4), Mission (15% = 2) and Values (38% = 5), Local Authorities in the sample appear to use the terms Vision (77% = 10) and Themes / Priorities (92% = 12).

Literature Review & Officer Supporting Group (OSG) Consultation:
1. Concept of the Engagement Bridge formed the Content Analysis Framework.
2. Critiques about the Rebel Playbook: Engagement Bridge applicability to the Public Sector led to finding significantly interesting studies about brand 'personification'.

Literature Review

<u>Literature Search & 'Lens' Development</u>

There are a variety of areas and topics to consider that would be relevant to the research brief. Phase 1 of the Research has reviewed theory and articles on organisational change, organisational culture, psychology concepts & models. One topic of key relevance was 'engagement.'

In *'Build It the Rebel Playbook: Engagement Bridge,'* the engagement bridge is explained as the building blocks to creating an engaged culture.

The Playbook integrates various psychology theories like social identity theory (the belief that one derives meaning from the groups they belong to, including their work groups). Key themes of the book include:

- Trust
- Honesty
- Open Communication

Within the Playbook, these 'human' traits are applied to business practices to drive performance and benefits. The humanising of business was considered in tandem with trying to address the critiques of the applicability of the Engagement Bridge to the public sector. This led to the discovery of three key studies:

Brand Personification in the Public Sector

In a study involving Northern Ireland Hospital, a key finding was that brand 'personality' facilitates positive connections between staff and customers (Whelan, Davies & Walsh, 2010). In other words, the researchers found both employee and customer values and expectations became aligned when a strong brand 'personality' was developed at the Hospital.

Public Sector External Brand

A Swedish study examining market versus brand orientation in the public sector found that trust is significantly valuable for public sector external branding: *"Today there exists a broad consensus among social scientists that, for society's institutions, trust is an important point of departure for well-functioning democracies" (Rothstein & Uslander, 2005).* Further, Gromark & Melin (2013) explain that if public-sector can ensure trust this positively impacts democracy.

Public Sector Internal Brand

Another, very recent, Swedish study found that effective internal branding brought employees several benefits including:

- *"Sense of belonging"*
- *"Pride"*
- *"Commitment"*

    Leijerholt, Biedenbach & Hultén (2022)

Reviewing the findings from the three outlined articles, the applicability of the Engagement bridge to the public sector could be argued due to the synergies between the texts. For example, the 2022 Swedish study found that internal branding is associated with employees' sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is a key social identity theory continued referenced within the Engagement Bridge.

It is worth considering that 'branding' within academic studies appears to be more focused on philosophical personification (human values) rather than the traditional sense of branding (the actions of marketing). The personification definition of branding appears to align with the research brief, for example in deriving strategic priorities.

Content Analysis of 13 Strategic Documents

Method: Content Analysis. The Engagement Bridge was used to shape the data collection headings and searches. This provides an element of a framework which helps to make sense of the data.

Sample:

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership	Manchester
Kent County	Aberdeenshire
Bristol	Gwynedd (North Wales)
Cornwall	Perth & Kinross
Uttlesford	Wigan
Cambridgeshire	Dundee
Melton Borough	

Researcher Critiques of Content Analysis Initial Findings:

1. 13 is not a big enough sample to draw significant conclusions from, but initial (indicative/suggestive) findings are shown.
2. Definition of Pillars may be open to subjective interpretation.
3. Quality research is time-consuming, with findings unlikely to be the full picture depending on the sample, lens, perspective taken and the stage of research.
4. The Literature search was limited/constrained by the need to rely on open access (no fees) research studies.

Content Analysis - Initial Key Findings

1. General Pillar Alignment across the sample

6 out of 13 (46%) sampled Councils align on all four strategic pillars and 3 out of 13 (23%) aligns on three strategic pillars. 9 (69%) align on 3 or more strategic pillars.

In the absense of criteria, framework or definition, the alignment to pillars was taken purely on whether the document had a "People", "Place", "Economic" or "Environmental" literal / explicit / obvious / semantic focus.

2. Lack of illustrating People 'Voice' across the sample

People 'Voice' Definition: Participant (user) voice is a core "*tenet*" of qualitative research. This is the: "*emphasis and honouring of the participants' own words as generative of meaning and knowledge*" Chandler, Anstey & Ross (2015).

12 out of 13 (92%) of documents were examined as having "Our People" as a strategic focus. Using the qualitative research definition above, 9 out of 13 (69%) have no 'voice' of the user/customer.

3. The majority of the sample uses Vision and Themes / Priorities

Vision: The Engagement bridge uses the terms '*purpose', 'mission'* and *'values'* to explain their framework. Instead of Purpose (31% = 4), Mission (15% = 2) and Values (38% = 5), Local Authorities in the sample appear to use the terms Vision (77% = 10) and Themes / Priorities (92% = 12). This may be due to American / UK nuances in language and/or highlights the public and private sector differences.

All vision statements are shown in a separate table on page 10.

Themes / Priorities in Sample:
- Termed as Themes: 5 / 13 (38%)
- Termed as Priorities: 5 / 13 (38%)
- Termed as Objectives: 1 / 13 (8%)
- Termed as Goals: 1 / 13 (8%)

4. The majority of the sample takes a common Strategic approach

Broadly speaking, most of the sample (11 / 13, 85%) follow the process of context setting (data, foreward from Leader, demographics etc) through to Vision / Mission, from which the themes / Priorities are then derived, through to more specific delivery detail.

There is therefore a heavy emphasis on contextualising and promoting an evidence-based approach.

5. The majority of the sample have used large numbers of Graphics to present data

11 / 13 used infographics, of them; the range was 2 to 233 infographics, Average = 77.

Graphics were used in a much larger number than photographs. This may be due to shapes, formatting and tables highlighting text all being included in the numbers during the counting. Graphics were used for a range of different purposes and were found to be particularly effective for contextualising the strategic document.

Infographics were used for a range of purposes including demographics. Highlighting key areas that needed to be prioritised, and as a way of illustrating demographics of the region/county/place was frequent within the sample.