

Agenda Item	16
Report No	HC/55/23

The Highland Council

Committee: The Highland Council

Date: 14 December 2023

Report Title: Review of Council Programme and Corporate Plan

Report By: Interim Depute Chief Executive

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out progress in delivering the Council Programme in the 10 months since it was first approved by the Council and identifies areas where further progress is planned. The report also provides Corporate Plan performance data and includes Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) and benchmarking information that was not available at the time when the SPI report was brought to Council in September 2023.
- 1.2 Given the scale of the financial challenges facing Highland Council, the Council Programme will need to be recalibrated following approval of the Council budget in February 2024 in light of available resource. This will include adjustments to accommodate additional activity required to deliver improvements in achieving best value from services and reducing spend.
- 1.3 Therefore, Members are asked to approve that a recalibrated Programme, incorporating a strengthened delivery plan element and a clarified performance framework will be brought to full Council following on from the approval of the Budget in February 2024.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. **Acknowledge** the Programme achievements set out in sections 5 – 9 of the report;
 - ii. **Scrutinise** the most recent performance received which is provided at section 10.2 and note that a report will be provided to March Council detailing performance in respect of the 2022/23 Statutory Performance Indicators. This information will also include benchmarking data to enable comparison of the Council's performance against other local authorities; and
 - iii. **Approve** that a recalibrated Programme, incorporating a strengthened delivery plan element and a clarified performance framework will be brought to full Council early in 2024 for approval.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – It is essential that the Council's Plans are aligned with available resources and having medium term financial planning approach is a critical element of this. Consequently, the Council Programme, Corporate Plan and a new Delivery Plan will all be reviewed in the light of the Council's budget once this has been approved in February 2024.
- 3.2 **Legal** – reporting on progress against the Corporate Plan is part of the Council's arrangements for meeting its statutory requirements for public performance reporting.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – All five Strategic Outcomes in the Council's Programme are concerned with delivering improved services for Highland Communities and better outcomes for vulnerable people.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy is one of the five Strategic Outcomes in the Programme and there are a number of corresponding indicators and measures within the Corporate Plan.
- 3.5 **Risk** – There is a risk that the Council's Strategic Programme, Plans and performance become less aligned with its resources over time. This is why it is recommended that that a recalibrated Programme, incorporating a strengthened delivery plan element and a clarified performance framework will be brought to full Council early in 2024 for approval.
- 3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no direct implications arising from this report.
- 3.7 **Gaelic** – The Council Programme contains commitments to promote and support the Gaelic language and culture and there are relevant actions to address these within the Corporate Plan.

4 Council Programme Achievements

- 4.1 On 8 December 2022, the Council approved the Administration's Programme for 2022 – 2027: "Our Future Highland".
- 4.2 The programme set out 5 Strategic Outcome Statements as follows:
1. A Fair and Caring Highland – Working together to improve quality of life and opportunities for Highland people;
 2. Resilient and Sustainable Communities – Helping our communities to be prosperous, sustainable and resilient, making a positive difference to the lives of people;
 3. Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes – Build houses to support communities and economic growth;
 4. A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy – Accelerate our response to the climate and ecological emergency. Make the most of the financial and environmental opportunities arising from the huge renewable energy potential in the Highlands; and
 5. A Resilient and Sustainable Council – Work with partners to address service delivery challenges with a positive approach to change

Each of the Outcomes have a number of priority actions, arranged under the 3 themes – People, Place and Economy.

- 4.3 This is a five-year programme and while the following section highlights a number of areas where good progress has been made during the first ten months of the programme (January 2023 to October 2023), it is recognised that there are commitments where work will be taken forward over the coming year. These include, for example, promoting fair access through co-located services across the Highlands, working with partners to develop early intervention for drug and alcohol reduction, and taking forward The Promise.
- 4.4 The Council will continue to work with the Scottish Government on the delivery of improved transport infrastructure throughout the Highlands such as the dualling of the A9, Corran Ferry and a Public Service Obligation for Wick Airport.
- 4.5 Activity will also be undertaken in relation to taking forward plans to develop the workforce for the future, converting Council assets for housing use and identifying and committing to renewable energy investments to reduce the overall energy costs for the Council. It is anticipated that further progress on attainment will be published shortly.
- 4.6 The following highlights progress that has been achieved in relation to a number of the priority actions.

5 A Fair and Caring Highland

- 5.1 **Improve outcomes including attainment, achievement, positive destinations for all children and young people with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy, and our most vulnerable learners**
 - 5.1.1 In Session 21/22, Highland was the second most improved local authority in Scotland for P1, P4, P7 literacy (10% increase) and numeracy (9% increase). Session 22/23 ACEL data (Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) is not available in time for this report. However, indicative figures are showing strong improvement from last year.
 - 5.1.2 Leavers' attainment data is not published until February 2024. However, cohort figures for this year show an increase in the number of National 5 entries from the previous year, with 78% of candidates achieving A-C grades. 1,625 pupils in Highland have achieved five or more National 5 qualifications, nearly 2% more than the previous year. For awards at S5, there has been a 1% increase in the number of young people gaining a SCQF Level 6 award.
 - 5.1.3 Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) has provided a catalyst for the ongoing focus of attention on the development of skills for work, as well as life and learning, for all young people whatever their ambitions. Key highlights of impact include learners having more opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work through relevant, real-life contexts. Highland has a positive destination rate of 94.5%. This has increased by 0.2% since 2020-21 and by 2% since 2019/20 and employment rates are the highest ever recorded at 38.7%.

5.2 Work with partners to improve the levels of mental health and wellbeing experienced by people in our communities

Currently undertaking Partner Participation Sessions across Highland. This will enable us to gather the voice and experiences of practitioners in the locality. The information gleaned within these sessions will form the evaluation of need of families and the services that support them.

5.3 Develop a whole family support approach to ensure families stay together and thrive in their local communities

The Council approved the Families First strategy which is delivering a radical shift in spend in order that we can invest in family support and family-based care such as kinship and fostering. £1m additional funding is being used to complete the final stages of the strategy's structure and redesign, to deliver early and preventative help, and intensive support targeted for those families whose children and young people are on the cusp of care. Reported achievements include:

- the lowest numbers of (HC) 'beds' in residential care (30% reduction)
- the lowest numbers in purchased independent care out with the Highlands (53% reduction of which 42% has been from 2021-2023)
- the lowest numbers in Secure Care (81% reduction)
- the lowest total numbers of Children Looked After (20% reduction).

5.4 Continue to promote Gaelic language and cultural development

On 29 June, the Council approved the refreshed Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28, as submitted to Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Plan builds upon the lengthy, engaging, and successful work of Highland Council and highlights its current practice to strengthen Gaelic, such as through corporate identity, the work undertaken in local communities and Gaelic education which is offered in key areas across the Highlands. The aim is to ensure that Gaelic is recognised as an asset and enhances our cultural, economic, and social wellbeing in the Highlands. The Highland Council continues to have the most GME and Gaelic Language learners in Scotland.

5.5 Promote and Enhance the Highland's rich heritage and culture

The development of Inverness Castle as a world class tourism facility is progressing well, on time and on budget. Contracts have also been let for the £11m refurbishment of the Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park, both important heritage assets, funded through the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund.

6. Resilient and Sustainable Communities

6.1 Develop affordable and reliable public transport

Introduced the Council's in-house bus services on an initial ten routes. The vehicles have also been used to support events such as the Highland Cross and the Black Isle Show. Services are also being offered to primary schools for their swimming trips to Inverness Leisure. This will provide additional cost avoidance for the Council as these trips are currently operated by commercial bus companies as private hires.

6.2 Continue to work with partners to develop and promote Road and Water Safety

Introduced a Water Safety Policy for the Council and have contributed to inter-agency work to promote water safety. Implemented the early adoption of the 20mph project in 125 settlements throughout Highland, as part of a fully funded Transport Scotland project.

6.3 **Continue our expanded programme for improving road condition and maintenance**

Provided additional investment of £12.8m to increase the capital programme up to £20m. The Council has delivered 136.9km of road surface dressing and 76.5km of surfacing work as follows:

- **Lochaber, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey** - 30 km surface dressing – which includes sections of the B849 Drimnin road in Lochaber, A939 and U3127 in Nairnshire, and A939 and B9152 in Badenoch & Strathspey. 11 km surfacing – which includes sections in Caol, Glen Etive and the B8004 Banavie road in Lochaber, B9101 Foynesfield road in Nairnshire, streets in Aviemore, Dulnain Bridge, Nethy Bridge and Newtonmore, and A939 Bridge of Brown Road in Badenoch & Strathspey.
- **Skye and Rassay** - 19km of Surface Dressing of which 11 km was double track & 8km on single track roads giving a treated area of (91,770 sq.m). Roads treated included A851, A850, A855, B855, C1241, C1233. 22.6km of Surfacing of which 10.2km was double track & 12.4km on single track roads giving a treated area of (101,100 sq.m). Roads treated include A855, A850, A863, B855, B884, C1227, C1228, U4786, U4827.
- **Caithness and Sutherland** - In Sutherland 42km of Surface Dressing, includes 9km on B873 Altnaharra to Syre, 11km on A838 (various locations). 11km of Surfacing, includes total of 3.8km on A897 (various locations), C1134 Keoldale Ferry Road, Durness. In Caithness 35km Surfacing, includes 2.5km on A836, 3.5km on U1913 Plocan – Brawlbin – Dorrery, 2.8km on U2893 Inkstack Road.
- **Inverness** - 26km of roads have also been surface dressed which for example have included the following urban locations Old Perth Road, Drummond Road, Drum Mossie Avenue Ferntower Avenue and Strothers Lane as well as rural locations such as B9039 Castle Stuart, B851 Brinn, Kiltarlity Village, Findhorn Bridge to Slochd, U1213 Knockie and B851 Farr. 15km of roads have been resurfaced which for example has included the following High profile urban locations such as Culcabock Road, Old Perth Road, Leachkin Road, Caledonian Road, Seafield Road, Henderson Drive and Inverness Retail Park Access Road as well as rural strategic locations such as A833 Redburn, B862 Gorthleck, B9006 Ardersier and B861 Tomfat Woods. We were also able to complete works on some lifeline roads such as Ballaggan to Torness (Inverfaragaig Pass) Braefield (Glenurquhart) and the U1108 Dunchichty Road.
- **Ross and Cromarty** – 19.9km of Surface Dressing of which 8.6km was double track and 11.3 km on single track roads giving a treated area of 92,682 sq m. Roads treated includes A896, A832, C1039, C1223, U1921, U2607, U3029, U3889, U4466 and U4467. 16.9 km of Surfacing of which 4 km was double track and 12.9 km on single track roads giving a total treated area of 54,937 sq m. Roads treated includes A832, A834, A890, B9165, B9166, C1005, C1023, C1031, C1039, U1921, U3006, U3026 and U5346.

6.4 **Support communities to help each other live well and independently**

Drafted the Strategic Plan for the delivery of health and social care services to adult which will be submitted to the next Joint Monitoring Committee for approval. A key

element will be working with communities and partners, including housing, with a view to supporting people to live in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

6.5 Work with partners to promote visitor management

Alongside regular engagement with partner agencies, the Council has also embarked on the preparation of the Council's new Tourism Strategy. This will allow the Council to organise itself better and support our partners in promoting and delivering improved visitor management services and infrastructure. Implemented new Invitation to Pay arrangements in 16 car parks focussed on visitor hotspots, with a share of the income being passed to Area Committees for distribution.

6.6 Work with communities and partners to keep public spaces clean and safe

6.6.1 The Highland Council is in the top quartile of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework for street cleanliness.

6.6.2 Mechanical footway sweepers have now been provided in Caithness and Skye (areas that previously had no mechanical footway sweepers). Increased mechanical footway brushing contributes significantly to improving service performance and standards. A move away from less efficient manual sweeping process also reduces the H&S risk to operational cleansing staff.

6.6.3 Maintaining footways free from detritus will slow the deterioration of pedestrian surfaces and contribute to reducing local flooding risks by helping to keep roadside gullies clear.

6.7 Work with Scottish Government on the delivery of improved transport infrastructure throughout the Highlands

Worked closely with Transport Scotland, CMAL and Caledonian McBrayne on progressing the £47.3m Uig Harbour Improvement Project to ensure long term sustainability of the Little Minch ferry services. Delivered the Raigmore Bus Gate, and progressed bus priority measures through the Bus Partnership Fund. The Council has also continued to press the Scottish Government for investment in the dualling of the A9 and A96; the continuation of the Wick PSO; and support for a replacement Corran Ferry.

6.8 Encourage private and public sector economic development partners to ensure that Highland remains a top destination for inward investment

Contributed to the Regional Economic Partnership and the Scottish Cities Alliance, including representation at Scottish Cities Week in London and the ReiFF Conference in Leeds - to promote Highland investment opportunities. Continued management and implementation of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal in partnership with Scottish and UK Governments, including the formal opening of the £9.7m Life Science Centre at Inverness Campus – a key academic base for inward investment and innovation.

6.9 Work with partners to develop a community wealth building strategy

The Council has approved the approach for developing a Community Wealth Building strategy.

7. Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes

7.1 Build quality, affordable, accessible homes

Completed 161 affordable council homes since the beginning of January 2023. 80 homes are on-site, completing by the end of 23/24, with a further 200 programmed to

complete during 24/25. This includes the following locations: Inverness, Carrbridge, Conon Bridge, Alness, Dulnain Bridge, Drumnadrochit, Invergordon, Kincaig, Dingwall, Kingussie, Fort William, Nairn and Skye. There has been an active programme around the purchase of existing properties with 94 completing during that period (included in the above figures).

7.2 **Provide warm and energy efficient homes**

7.2.1 Increased the proportion of energy efficiency works in our Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme and some examples include the Wick District Heating project, which is well underway to connect 123 council houses, many of whose tenants are in fuel poverty. Also seeking match funding to enable full house retrofit works to 80 houses in Ross-shire which are currently rated low in terms of energy efficiency.

7.2.2 Funding of £1.926m has been allocated from the Council's Housing Capital Programme towards works which include external wall insulation, new energy efficient heating, solar panels, and battery storage as identified from site surveys. In addition, the Council is accessing external funding through Energy Company Obligation to augment investment in the Council's housing portfolio. The low carbon technology combination will replace a range of inefficient heating systems including electric storage heaters, reducing the risk of fuel poverty within the communities, and improving householder comfort.

7.2.3 Adding to the £1m secured in October 2022, the Council has secured a further £2.4m funding for 2023/24 programme from the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme (EES:ABS). This means that the Council has been able to target fuel poor households across the region to provide energy saving measures including insulation, air source and heat pumps, and solar panels with battery storage.

7.3 **Support the needs of veterans through the Armed Forces Covenant**
Taking forward the new legal duty to support veterans in the specified areas of education and housing.

7.4 **Work with partners to develop key worker housing opportunities so that sustainable public services and economic growth are not constrained by a lack of housing**

Worked with partners to convert property in Inverness for 'blue light' workers. Also worked with Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association to lease houses to NHS priority staff. Contributed to the HIE-led housing task force with a focus on identifying solutions to meet the need for business related housing.

8. **A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy**

8.1 **Promote active travel infrastructure across Highland**

Work completed to deliver a new active travel connection from Cradlehall to Inverness Campus. Completed phase one of the Fort William improvement programme to enable the 'Fort William 2040' vision of making active travel across Fort William a more sustainable, healthy, and affordable transport choice. Construction started on the Inverness Riverside project as part of the Inverness Active Travel Network funded project. In addition, work has progressed across the region, for example at:-

- Bikeability
 - On course for achieving our target of 32% of schools delivering Level 2 on-road training in the current academic year. As of the end of term two, 17%

of Highland Council Schools have either delivered or have committed to delivering Level 2 on-road training.

- In the past 6 months 7 BSI courses have been delivered training a total of 30 new volunteer/teaching staff Bikeability Scotland Instructors.
- Highland is actively investigating moving away from the volunteer based delivery model to a paid sessional instructor model to achieve increased delivery rates.
- 20mph schemes - The Council has delivered new 20mph schemes in 125 settlements across the Highland Council Area. This equates to around 600km of the Local Authority Road Network.
- 9 cycle shelters and 4 scooter pods have been installed via the CWSR programme in the current financial year at schools.
- Around 70 projects, of varying sizes, are being delivered via the 23/24 CWSR funding programme to encourage active travel both on the school run and communities as a whole. These range from footpath construction, pedestrian crossings, dropped kerbs, traffic calming, speed limits etc. 20 projects sitting on the books already for next year.
- Road Safety Improvement Fund will deliver active travel improvement schemes including settlement wide drop kerb improvements encouraging the use of sustainable transport modes and supporting disability access within villages, gateway improvements to slow vehicle speeds, shared use footpath construction and traffic calming.
- Production of a Junior Road Safety Officer Video to be used by all schools in Highland to train their JRSO's (including a signed version). Currently working with BSG Lochaber to produce a Gaelic Version.
- West of the Ness secured £90k for financial year 23/24 for stage 2 design delivery.

8.2 **Promote green transport including low carbon public transport and the development of hydrogen hubs throughout the area**

Expansion of electric vehicle charging with data showing that Q1 of 2023 had 2,701 more sessions than the same period in 2022. This highlights the pace at which the network is developing.

8.3 **Value and protect Highland's natural environment**

- 8.3.1 Submitted UNESCO bid of Flow Country and hosted UNESCO world Heritage assessors in August 2023. Secured Better Places funding to continue Access Rangers patrols during summer season. Undertaken 37 Protected species surveys and secured Highland as a pilot area for Nature Networks mapping.
- 8.3.2 Secured £676,000 Nature Restoration Fund for 23/24 to support new or to enhance existing approaches to restoring biodiversity. Council partnered with Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather Community Council to secure £250,000 from the Nature Restoration Fund towards the proposed £620,000 Castle Heather Park nature-based flood scheme. Also obtained 25k from the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund for salt marsh mapping in and around Loch Fleet.
- 8.4 **Reduce residual waste and increase re-use, repair, recycling, and upcycling**
Undertaken a reuse and repair campaign this Autumn with the aim of breaking down barriers to reuse and repair in Highland. Ongoing work to introduce planned service change funded through the Scottish Government's Recycling Improvement Fund (£6.5m for improving the quantity and quality of collected recycling and reduce levels of residual waste). The service changes will be phased in from April 2024. Also

completed the new Waste Transfer Station in Inverness which became fully operational in April 2023.

8.5 Achieve Net Zero targets

The Council's Net Zero Strategy was launched on 5 October 2023, this sets out the Council's approach to addressing the climate emergency and contributes towards Scotland's national legally binding target to become Net Zero by 2045. The Plan sets out the Council's actions across 8 Themes: Built Estate and Energy; Social Housing and HRA; Transport; Land Use and Environment; Development Plan and Place-based Approach; Waste; Circular Economy; and Procurement and Community Wealth Building.

8.6 Invest in commercial renewable energy opportunities to generate new income streams for the Council

In June 2023 the Council approved the development of business cases for investment in renewable energy projects. The benefits include added value to the Council's property portfolio, an additional revenue stream and the encouragement of significant carbon reduction. The development of solar PV across the Council's commercial estate would offer tenants reduced energy costs through a power purchase agreement.

8.7 Promote a "Just Transition" by moving to a more environmentally sustainable economy in a way that's fair to everyone

8.7.1 On 13 January 2023, it was announced that the Inverness and Cromarty Firth bid was successful in being awarded Green Freeport status by the Scottish and UK Governments. When operational, the Green Freeport will offer a package of tax and customs incentives to attract inward investment and stimulate innovation and growth. This will ensure developments have the potential to reverse the long-standing socio-economic issues facing the region. It will assist the Council in addressing the local and national transition to net zero, help to create sustainable high-quality jobs in a green economy, while regenerating and strengthening communities and reversing depopulation.

8.7.2 On 3 October 2023, Council agreed to the submission of the Outline Business Case to both the Scottish and UK Governments for approval. Development of the Full Business Case and its approval is expected to be complete by Spring 2024 with formal Green Freeport designation following shortly afterwards.

9. A Resilient and Sustainable Council

9.1 Grow and retain our own talent within the Council

22 employees have completed their SVQ qualifications through the Highland Council SQA Centre. As part of the COVID recovery the Economic Prosperity Fund, 33 positions were created in the organisation across all services supporting 14 different Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. 8 employees completed their qualifications and have secured permanent employment in Highland Council. Across the wider Modern Apprenticeship/Graduate programme, 63 employees started on their pathways to gaining qualifications in their chosen field.

9.2 Work with public and private sector partners to coordinate employment opportunities

The Council is working in a number of ways to coordinate employment opportunities. Some highlights include: -

- developing a Third Sector Employer Placement Initiative and supported Paid Work Experience Placements within the Council, Highlife Highland and the NHS;
- developing a joint Initiative with NHS Highland to provide opportunities within NHS for Modern Apprentices and Scottish Vocational Qualifications;
- developing an initiative with the CITB for routes to work in the construction industry;
- working with Nature Scot to consider the future employment opportunities which will emerge from the large-scale peatland restoration initiative;
- working to identify employment opportunities which will emerge from the Green Free Port to ensure Highland residents have the right skills to access these opportunities as they emerge;
- granting funded the Scottish Childminding Association to run an initiative to support residents to take up self-employment in childcare to address capacity issues within the Council area which in turn impacts on parents being able to take up employment opportunities in all sectors;
- during 2022/23, the Employability Service helped a total 680 new clients with a further 325 clients registering during the first half of 2023/24. A broad range of employability activity has been delivered including community engagement, key worker support, barrier removal, confidence building and motivation, skills development, work experience and job creation initiatives including:
 - Rural Community Engagement Fund enabling community organisations to develop new referral routes onto Employability Services;
 - Aim High offering training and work experience to support young people transition from school;
 - The opportunity to enhance work experience via a suite of work placements across public and third sector organisations;
 - Raised Up North offering qualifications to enable low income, working parents to progress their careers;
 - Launch Pad supporting the development of self-employment opportunities; and
 - HERO offering an Employer Recruitment Incentive to encourage employers to create new jobs for supported clients; and
- the use of the UK Government Shared Prosperity Funding has been focussed on key projects related to business support and employability including the launch of a new Test & Learn initiative to support clients with longer-term, more intensive support needs to progress towards employment.

9.3 **Improve our response times in replying to enquires and service requests from the public**

Taking forward the My Council Programme to review and create a joined-up customer contact experience at the Council, including the opportunities to further utilise digital approaches to support improved outcomes for our citizens, our staff, and the Council. By developing self-service digital options for those who can use it, resources are released to better support customers who need it the most.

9.4 **Actively redesign service delivery in response to constrained budgets to ensure the sustainability of the Council**

Taking forward the Roads Improvement project which aims to redesign the service where necessary and deliver improvements for the effective, efficient, and sustainable delivery of all engineering and roads operations and improve road condition across the Highlands.

- 9.5 **Work together with communities and partners to produce local place plans which meet communities' needs**
Launched the Council's Local Place Plans webpage with the first Local Place Plan to be registered being the Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council Local Place Plan.
- 9.6 **Continue the Council's success in attracting rural tourism infrastructure funding to provide improvements to local infrastructure**
In 2023, the Highland Council has seen the completion of seven rural tourism infrastructure fund (RTIF) projects across the region. These projects were funded across multiple RTIF funding rounds:
- Cromarty Campsite
 - Elgol Toilets and Motorhome Waste Unit
 - Foyers, Toilets and Motorhome Waste Unit
 - Gairloch Toilets and Motorhome Waste Unit
 - An Crubh, Skye Motorhome Facilities
 - Glencoe Village Toilets
 - Glen Nevis Lower Falls Visitor Car Park and Toilets.
- 9.7 **Promote and support business development opportunities through Business Gateway and Highland Opportunity Investment Limited**
- 9.7.1 Our Business Gateway Service has continued to provide business start-up grants which have seen an increase of 57% in 2022/2023, compared with 2021/2022. Growth businesses grants have increased by 73% in 2022/2023 compared with 2021/2022. Business Gateway Highland scores higher than average for satisfaction in the Progressive national research. Latest figures show the average Business Gateway service in Scotland is 80%, in Highland it is 90%.
- 9.7.2 Our Investment Company has continued to provide business loans to Highland businesses. The development and growth of Highland Council businesses in turn support the sustainability of existing jobs and the development of new opportunities.
- 9.8 **Implement the tourism levy as an enabler to a vibrant attractive visitor experience**
Since the publication of the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill the Council's cross service working group have been reviewing the content of the Bill and working through the practical implications to enable the Council to be able to deliver on its Programme Commitment to introduce a levy. The Convener recently has given evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee on two occasions in Aviemore and Edinburgh respectively.
10. **Update on performance against the 2022/23 Corporate Plan**
- 10.1 The [Annual Corporate Performance Report 2022/23](#) was scrutinised by Council on 14 September 2023. At the time this report was produced it was noted that the Local Government Benchmarking Framework data (LGBF) had not yet been published. An update was subsequently received from the LGBF in October which provides information relating to a number of indicators for the financial years 2022/23 and 2021/22. A further update is expected later in December.

10.2 The following indicators from the Corporate Plan have now been updated as shown in the tables below. It should be noted that the reference numbers used accord with the relevant commitments set out in the [Corporate Plan](#) (CP).

2.5 Support communities to help each other live well and independently.

Performance Indicator	FY 22/23			21/22 Actual	Comments
	Target	Actual	RAG		
People aged 65+ with long-term care needs receiving personal care at home (SW03a)	61.52%	52.92%	R	55.76%	Target is to reach LGBF Quartile 2 by 2027 (16 th or better). Ranked 31 st in 22/23.
<p>Red RAG comment NHS Highland is reporting levels of unmet need in terms of care at home which contribute to this statistic. These challenges arise in terms of difficulties in recruiting both directly and by commissioning as some contracts for care delivery have been handed back by the providers.</p>					

2.8 Support Scottish and UK Govt initiatives to ensure maximum digital connectivity across the area.

Performance Indicator	FY 22/23			21/22 Actual	Comments
	Target	Actual	RAG		
Proportion of properties receiving superfast broadband (ECON08)	86%	86%	G	83%	Target is to increase by 1% each year reaching 90% by 2027.

3.2 Provide warm and energy efficient homes.

Performance Indicator	FY 22/23			21/22 Actual	Comments
	Target	Actual	RAG		
% Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme grant funding utilised	80%	92%	G	n/a	This is a new indicator in the CP.

4.9 Identify and commit to renewable energy investments to reduce the overall energy costs for the Council.

Performance Indicator	FY 22/23			21/22 Actual	Comments
	Target	Actual	RAG		
Council carbon emissions tonnes CO2e	49,077	36,147	G	33,766	Note that actual figure is a draft, subject to possible change pending further verification.

5.8 Accelerate the delivery of our Asset Management approach to increase efficiency and reduce overheads and carbon impact.

Performance Indicator	FY 22/23			21/22 Actual	Comments
	Target	Actual	RAG		
Asset Management - % Suitability (CAST1)	83.1%	77.7%	R	75.9%	Target is LGBF family group average.
Asset Management - Condition (CAST2)	89.3%	85.9%	A	84.7%	
<p>Red RAG comment: Progress continues to be made towards the targets set and the position has improved on the previous year. However, performance remains below target which reflects the challenges of geography, resource, construction industry, materials inflationary pressures, and contractor availability. It also illustrates the need to accelerate the Council's asset rationalisation programme.</p>					

5.10 Broaden the Council's income base through taxation and delivering more commercial Value for Money services.

Performance Indicator	FY 22/23			21/22 Actual	Comments
	Target	Actual	RAG		
Council Tax Annual % received (CORP07)	96.19%	96.71%	G	96.48%	Target is LGBF Scottish average.

11. Next Steps

- 11.1 Given the scale of the financial challenges facing Highland Council, the Council Programme will need to be recalibrated following approval of the Council budget in February 2024 in light of available resource. This will include adjustments to accommodate additional activity required to deliver improvements in achieving best value from services and reducing spend.
- 11.2 All of the Council's associated Plans: Corporate Plan, Service Plans and operational plans, will need to be amended to align with the recalibrated Programme and also with the refreshed Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP). Furthermore, the additional activity required to deliver reductions in spend and increases in income will need to be closely managed to ensure a balanced position is returned across the lifetime of the Council's medium term financial plan and beyond. Therefore, a Delivery Plan will also be developed to ensure risks and issues are appropriately managed and the budgetary decisions made by the Council in February 2024 are fully achieved.
- 11.3 The Delivery Plan will be framed around 6 Portfolios – Corporate Business Solutions; People Centred Approaches; Reconfiguring the Asset Base; Future Workforce; Income from Tourism; Green Energy and New Technologies – which will each be sponsored by a member of the Council's Corporate Management Team and will promote cross-service teamwork. Within each Portfolio will be a series of programmes and projects which will either deliver a saving or an income stream to

the Council or both; to be presented for approval as part of the Council's budget meeting in February 2024. These projects will all be developed and delivered using a consistent methodology focused around the iron triangle of project management: Budget, Scope and Schedule. This will set out the critical pathway for delivery and with a defined approach to managing risks and issues to ensure success.

Designation: Interim Depute Chief Executive

Date: 24 November 2023

Authors: Kate Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive
Gordon Morrison, Policy Manager
Donna Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit & Performance)