

Highland Council: 14 March 2024: Questions

Public Question

1. Mr D MacKenzie

To the Leader

Are the terms of reference for the Economic Impact Assessment on the Academy Street project intended to seek support for the council's proposals?

No – the terms of reference are clear with the first sentence within them stating that the EIA is to support local decision making.

Member Questions

1. Mr A Christie

To the Leader

Please could the Leader detail the rationale or calculations that led to the Budget sums that were included in the papers that were presented to Council on 29th February in respect of Transient Visitor Levy £10m in 26/27, Strategic Operating Model Saving (CS:4)£1.67M across three years, Income from campervan and motorhome charging (CS:18) £1.5m across three years and the Earmarked Reserves of £20m for Adult Social Care -Redesign.

Financial flexibilities including Transient Visitor Levy (TVL) – the report to Council on 29 February showed an indicative sum of £10m against future financial flexibilities in 2026/27. The 29 February report referenced TVL, and did also list other potential opportunities which may include a Cruise Ship levy, with national work taking place to assess the opportunity. The sum shown in 2026/27 of £10m is considered a reasonable and prudent sum given on TVL alone, Scottish Government's analysis suggested that across the Highlands and Islands (SG presented their data on this regional basis) levy income could range from £3.1m up to £21.4m depending on assumptions. TVL may be but one element of the financial flexibilities that could be available to the Council in that year.

Strategic Operating Model saving – this saving, as per annex 5 of the 29 February report, described the focus of this saving on review of area management models. The rationale for the saving is based on opportunities across our Service functions, to review and rationalise area management structures and introduce a more consistent approach on a North/South basis. This saving will also align with other budget decisions made by Council (CS:23), regarding a move to area hubs/community satellites and allowing Council to map its hub/satellite approaches into the new area management models.

Income from campervan and motorhome charging. The rationale for the savings is based on Public feedback from the budget engagement which included a number of Income Generation suggestions in respect of Campervan/Motor Homes. The saving rationale is based on reviewing

existing policies including overnight parking, improving existing sites, creating new sites (Aires) on council-owned sites where there are existing parking-related pressures and introducing a voluntary passport scheme which can support the delivery of sustainable tourism in the Highlands.

Adult Social Care redesign – the rationale for the sum of £20m is based upon consideration of the size of the ASC budget, the level of saving to be delivered, the level of available council reserves, and through Officer discussion between the Executive Team across THC and NESH.

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader

Please could the Leader explain on the following budget items presented to Council; Reconfiguring School Assets (CS:28) and Childrens Services - Family First Approach (CS:22) the schools likely to be mothballed or closed and any children's homes that potentially could be closed?

Reconfiguring School Assets – Where it is proposed that schools are either mothballed or closed, due to reduced demand for school places, we will work within the statutory guidance (issued under section 19 of the schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010).

The family first approach strategy - aims to reduce children and young people having to move into children's homes due to other more suitable alternatives being available (i.e. family; kinship; foster care, etc). At this time, we have no dates or homes identified for closure.

3. Mr M Baird

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

As a result of the recent snow falls and many of the roads in Sutherland being effected. Is it not time to assist the normal council gritting staff to be joined by a voluntary workforce of Crofters/Farmers (those with JCB's and tractors with blades) to assist in lesser road clearances?

During the recent severe weather events, the Roads teams have engaged contractors and other individuals to supplement and assist the in-house resource in the treatment of roads in Sutherland – where available vehicles were suitable for the road type. However due to the requirement to keep the primary and secondary routes clear, it has not always been possible to engage these resources for the treatment of roads classified as 'other', as these types of roads are attended to when our resources and priorities allow. Further details regarding the priorities for the treatment of roads are provided in the Council's Winter Maintenance policy, which is presented to all Area Committees at the start of the winter season.

4. Mr J Grafton

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Can the chair please clarify what percentage increase in the income generated from EV charging has been made by the council, since the increase in charges. As against the income prior to the increase.

The information requested is detailed below.

	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	% Increase
Sessions	47249	51847	10%
Net INCOME	- £64,104.63*	£7,326.33	111%

*This represents a pressure – where income did not cover the cost of operation.

5. Mr A Baldrey

To the Chair of Communities and Place

Under the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015 one of the duties placed on Local Authorities is the provision of land for allotments.

Notwithstanding the report to the recent C and P Committee which largely dealt with allotment policy and rules, please can you tell me what actions Highland Council is taking to actively increase the availability of allotment plots?

The policy was considered at Communities and Place Committee on 6 March 2024 and sets out the framework under which provision of allotments will be managed in the future. The policy outlines what the Council will do to increase the provision of allotments.

In addition to this, within the action plan of Growing our Future: A Food Growing Strategy for Highland, objective 4 is specifically about identifying potential allotment and food growing sites and the actions contained within this to deliver against it. An update on progress was considered at [Communities and Place Committee in May 2023](#). Officers are currently supporting 5 community groups who are working to develop new allotment sites.

At 9.1 of the Allotment Policy report considered by the Communities and Place Committee on 6 March includes:

Actions identified through this policy development and the consultation process, will be incorporated into the action plan supporting the Community Food Growing Strategy. This will be updated and presented to this Committee as part of annual monitoring of the strategy in May 2024.

6. Mr C Ballance

To the Leader

In view of the recent press reports that there are 334 potential breaches of planning law currently under investigation in the Inverness area alone, including 50 in my ward of Aird and Loch Ness, how many planning enforcement officers are currently employed in the South Planning Area?

The Planning Enforcement function is undertaken by a Planning Enforcement Team that comprises a Principal Enforcement Officer, two Enforcement Officers and is also supported by three Access Officers. The team operates cross boundary. The establishment of a new enforcement officer post has been agreed and once filled this will provide an opportunity to consider the structure of the team to meet ongoing demand.

7. Mr R MacKintosh

To the Chair of Housing and Property

Since it is a requirement for all short-term premises to obtain a short-term licence, including those accommodations that are shared with residents. Can the Highland Council give me the full break down of all short-term licences that have been applied in every local area? A breakdown of the number of applications received, the number processed and the number still outstanding by local ward area.

The following statistics are correct as at 3 March 2024 and are in line with the information provided on the short term let (STL) licensing public register, a copy of which is available on our website at <https://www.highland.gov.uk/stlpublicregister>:

Whole Highland Council Area

- 7,610 applications for an STL licence have been received;
- 2,686 STL licences have been granted;
- 4,750 applications are pending determination;
- 158 applications have been withdrawn (see note 1 below);
- 16 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder (see note 2 below);
- and
- 0 applications for an STL licence have been refused.

Note 1

Applications may have been withdrawn for various reasons including where the applicant has decided to not to proceed with their application, or where they have sold their property prior to the STL licence being granted, or where they have made a material error on their application form, such as applying for a temporary licence instead of a full licence, which requires them to withdraw their original application and reapply with the correct details.

Note 2

Licences may have been surrendered by the licence holder for various reasons, such as the licence holder has sold their STL property or the licence holder has decided they no longer wish to operate their premises as an STL.

WARD 1

- 429 applications received;
- 150 licences granted;
- 272 applications are pending determination;
- 7 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 2

- 103 applications received;
- 42 licences granted;
- 59 are pending determination;
- 1 applications have been withdrawn;
- 1 licence has been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 3

- 190 applications received;
- 82 licences granted;
- 101 applications are pending determination;
- 6 applications have been withdrawn;
- 1 licence has been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 4

- 290 applications received;
- 131 licences granted;
- 148 applications are pending determination;
- 11 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 5

- 948 applications received;
- 290 licences granted;
- 621 applications are pending determination;
- 31 applications have been withdrawn;
- 6 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 6

- 95 applications received;
- 35 licences granted;
- 59 applications are pending determination;
- 1 application has been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 7

- 111 applications received;
- 36 licences granted;
- 73 applications are pending determination;
- 2 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 8

- 88 applications received;
- 29 licences granted;
- 59 applications are pending determination;
- 0 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 9

- 169 applications received;
- 53 licences granted;
- 112 applications are pending determination;
- 4 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 10

- 1,403 applications received;
- 527 licences granted;
- 827 applications are pending determination;
- 49 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 11

- 564 applications received;
- 136 licences granted;
- 418 applications are pending determination;
- 10 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 12

- 583 applications received;
- 228 licences granted;
- 346 applications are pending determination;
- 4 applications have been withdrawn;
- 5 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 13

- 188 applications received;
- 73 licences granted;
- 111 applications are pending determination;
- 4 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 14

- 407 applications received;
- 144 licences granted;
- 259 applications are pending determination;
- 4 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 15

- 61 applications received;
- 23 licences granted;
- 36 applications are pending determination;
- 2 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 16

- 86 applications received;
- 32 licences granted;
- 52 applications are pending determination;
- 2 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 17

- 61 applications received;
- 28 licences granted;
- 33 applications are pending determination;
- 0 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 18

- 168 applications received;
- 57 licences granted;
- 110 applications are pending determination;
- 1 application has been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 19

- 118 applications received;
- 48 licences granted;
- 70 applications are pending determination;
- 0 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 20

- 796 applications received;
- 360 licences granted;
- 426 applications are pending determination;
- 10 applications have been withdrawn;
- 0 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

WARD 21

- 752 applications received;
- 182 licences granted;
- 558 applications are pending determination;
- 9 applications have been withdrawn;
- 3 licences have been surrendered by the licence holder; and
- 0 applications have been refused.

8. Mr D Macpherson

To the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader of the Council please detail how much money Highland Council received in European funding in each of the last 3 years of the European funding programmes, compared to how much this Council has been awarded from the replacement funding schemes from the UK Government of the Levelling Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund, since their introduction?

In the final three years of the EU programmes (ERDF, ESF, LEADER), Highland Council received £10.53m grant (albeit some of this sum is currently in final stage of claims). Across Highland the total claimed figure will have been much higher, as other organisations will have been involved and additional funding beyond ERDF and ESF sources used, such as Interreg or Horizon 2020. The information is not available however, in a format that allows for a total Highland figure to be calculated.

The UK Government have managed the successor funds differently and hence it is difficult to make direct comparisons. To date the Council has been awarded £32.17m (claims ongoing) from the Levelling Up Fund, UKSPF, Community Renewal Fund and CLLD programme.

9. Mr A Graham

To the Leader

Charleston Academy: please provide details of the present situation with survey work being undertaken in connection with RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) including expected date of receipt of final report(s) and when they will be reported to Housing & Property Committee.

The Final RAAC survey report for Charleston Academy is complete and is published online, available at the following link:

[RAAC Survey Final Reports | \(highland.gov.uk\)](https://www.highland.gov.uk/raac-survey-final-reports)

All critical RAAC related remediation works have been completed and the school is being monitored by the appointed structural engineer on a quarterly basis. Building fabric and mechanical/electrical surveys are well underway and interim survey reports will be available to the Council by mid-May 24. The structural survey is also in progress and the structural engineers report will be with the Council by the end of June 24. A report on the survey findings will be presented to the August Housing & Property Committee.

An update on progress at Charleston Academy will be issued before the Easter holidays and a meeting will be arranged with Charleston Academy Parent Council representatives in the new term.

10. Mr P Logue

To the Leader

Do you agree that there should be equity in educational provision across Scotland and, if so, is that being delivered by Highland Council?"

Yes, and yes.