

The Highland Council

Programme of the Independent/Scottish National Party Administration

This Administration will work for the increased prosperity and wellbeing of people living and working in the Highlands. We will aim to create a greener and sustainable Highland Council in which equality and fairness are central to the way in which we conduct business.

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Care in the Community

This Administration is committed to setting achievable strategies of care for all aspects of community care.

- We will construct 5 new care homes for older people;
- We will secure an increase of 600 sheltered housing units by the end of 2011;
- We will work to increase the number of older people who can be supported in their own homes rather than institutional care;
- We will invest £4.7m annually in Aids and Adaptations to help with mobility difficulties in peoples homes;
- We will provide an additional £1m funding for home care provision in each of the next 4 years – an equivalent of 50% increase in home care provision in the Highlands;
- We will work with NHS Highland and produce an integrated community care strategy serving the needs of older people, those with physical and learning difficulties and those with mental health difficulties;
- We will work with NHS Highland to agree new management and service arrangements for a community health and community care partnership for the Highlands, which will meet the health and caring needs of our population;
- With our Wellbeing Alliance partners we will give a high priority to health improvement in the Highlands and will focus on combating drug and alcohol misuse, improving healthy eating and increasing the opportunities for people to stop smoking and take exercise.

Sustainable Communities

Previous Governmental policy of selling Council houses has limited the access to affordable housing. This is the biggest barrier to sustaining communities and reducing homelessness. The biggest single obstacle to delivering new homes continues to be water and waste restraints. This Administration considers this situation to be unacceptable.

- We will continue to engage with Scottish Water and others to ensure that lack of infrastructure does not hold up housing and other developments;
- We will work with the Scottish Government, local partners and the private sector to enable 6000 new houses, with appropriate amenities to be built in the Highlands over the next 4 years;
- We will ensure that as part of this 2000 affordable houses for rent and low cost home ownership are built over the next 4 years;
- We will set out a plan to ensure that all Council owned houses meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard;
- We will invest £26m to improve energy efficiency in 4500 houses over the next 4 years and in so doing we will help to address the issues of fuel poverty and climate change;
- We will invest £12m to replace 1550 kitchens and 700 bathrooms in our houses over the next 4 years;
- We will continue to lead the fight to retain a sustainable local post office network and universal postal service that meets the needs of Highland communities.

A Clean Environment

This Administration will be vigilant in protecting our environment.

- We will oppose any proposal for new nuclear power generation in the Highland area;
- We will continue to support the above ground storage of intermediate level waste from Dounreay until a national waste strategy is agreed and implemented;
- It remains the policy of this Council to object to the use of Dounreay or any other site within the Highlands for a national nuclear waste repository;
- We actively support a GM-free Highland;
- We will produce and implement a climate change strategy for the Highlands which will reduce our impact on the environment and adapt our service to cope with the impact of climate change;
- As well as improving the energy efficiency of our council housing stock, we will reduce the Council's energy use by 15% by 2010, from a baseline of 2005, saving £3.8m in energy costs;
- We will reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 15% by 2010;
- We will complete the South West Relief Channel for the Inverness Flood Prevention Scheme by 2010, subject to obtaining the statutory consents;
- We will continue to progress Flood Prevention Orders for other areas where there is a history of major flooding and we will work with COSLA and the Scottish Government to promote legislation to simplify the process of securing Flood Prevention Orders;
- We will move resources from winter maintenance to drainage and watercourse maintenance in recognition of the effects of climate change;
- We will give a high priority to community works, ensuring our communities are well looked after by increasing the budget for grounds maintenance, litter picking and street cleaning by an additional £1m in our next budget;
- We will increase the use of renewable energy sources to provide the Council's energy, including wind turbines, wood chip boilers and solar technology, by a minimum of 4,000kw by 2010;
- We wish to see by 2010, a total of 1280 megawatt installed capacity in suitable locations in Highland as part of the implementation of the Council's Renewable Energy Strategy;
- We will work with UHI and HIE to support the Highlands becoming a centre of research and development in renewable energy technologies;
- We will increase the amount of waste recycled in the Highlands to 40% by 2010 and work towards kerbside recycling across Highland;
- We will work to meet our landfill allowance targets to limit the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill. At current waste volumes, we will divert an additional 25,000 tonnes of municipal waste per annum from landfill by 2010;
- We will increase recycling of waste from council offices to a minimum of 50% by the end of 2009;
- We will publish measurable commitments on energy saving by promoting higher standards of thermal and solar efficiency for new buildings;
- We will work with HITRANS to prepare a green travel plan for the Highlands promoting greater use of public transport by 2008;
- We will continue to work with the Scottish and UK governments to seek effective control and monitoring of the movement of hazardous cargoes in the Minches and Pentland Firth.

Agreed by Independent and SNP Groups at 2.10pm on Thursday 21st June 2007.

A Planned Culture of Enterprise and Growth

This Administration supports enterprise and is committed to accelerating economic development and increasing the standard of living of the Highland community.

- We will prepare a new Highland Development Plan and a Coastal Development Strategy by 2008, and will prepare 3 Aquaculture Framework Plans by 2011, which will set the scene for the future development of Highland for a generation;
- We will prepare 3 new Local Development Plans which will provide detailed planning guidance and will ensure full community participation in their preparation;
- We will support communities in the formation of local trust groups to buy land and property on behalf of their community;
- We will work with the Scottish Government, the business community, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and other statutory development bodies to develop services and infrastructure that reflect the needs of Highland businesses and create employment opportunities;
- We will work with the Scottish Government on their policy of removing the burden of rates for the smallest businesses entirely and reducing rates for others;
- We will continue to decentralise Council jobs throughout the Highlands and, where opportunities arise, seek the further dispersal of public sector jobs;
- We will continue to seek a strategic shift in the ownership of marine resources by working with the Scottish Government and pressing the UK Government to conduct a full review of the Crown Estates;
- We recognise the world class skills of the workforce at Dounreay and support the decommissioning programme;
- We will work in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency and the Scottish and UK governments to develop an action plan for the regeneration of Caithness and North Sutherland;
- We will take action to pursue initiatives that support the use of local produce, products and services.

A Skilled and Confident Highlands

For people to make the most of their lives in this fast changing world, new skills need to be learned by all. This Administration believes that the key to our future is a competitive University of the Highlands and Islands.

- We will work with the UHI Millennium Institute and HIE to complete the University of the Highlands and Islands Project and secure the development of a high quality campus;
- We will seek to continue to raise levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy for pupils in pre-school, primary and secondary provision and improved outcomes for pupils in externally accredited courses;
- We will place primary schools at the centre of our communities and will work to secure their long term future by developing community schools with a wide range of activities and services;
- We will increase the number of trainees and apprentices in the Council's workforce and work with employers, further education colleges and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to increase training and apprenticeship opportunities across the urban and rural areas of the Highlands;
- We welcome migrants and their families settling in our communities and will increase English Language tuition to assist their integration;
- We will build on the achievement of securing Healthy Living Status for all Highland schools by ensuring that they achieve Eco School status by 2011;
- We will complete the programme of 11 new primary and secondary schools and invest a further £28m in a schools capital building programme which will refurbish 5 secondary schools, replace 2 primary schools and commence work on replacement of a 3rd primary school by 2011.

Arts, Heritage, Culture and Sport

The Administration recognises the worth and work of our contemporary artists, sportsmen and women and their contribution to the economic development, health and well-being of Highland communities.

The administration will help to maintain and develop active interest in the heritage and history of the Highlands.

- We will deliver a state of the art Archive, Family History and Registrars Centre by 2009 as the hub of a network of local archive facilities;
- We endorse the 'Year of Homecoming' in 2009 and will develop a Highland strategy to ensure we play a major role in the celebrations;
- We will continue to encourage the growth in Arts, Literary, Drama and Music Festivals and local involvement in them;
- We will work with other agencies and partners to develop cultural industries;
- We will continue to work with our partners to establish a year round programme of events to follow on from the good work of Highland 2007. A coordinated approach will be taken to link events to maximise visitor numbers to a range of artistic, cultural and sporting events across the Highlands;
- We will build on the success of the Highland Promise, which, as part of Highland 2007, provided opportunities for young people to enjoy the arts, sport and cultural experiences;
- We will actively promote the celebration of the diverse heritage and interpretation of the Highlands.
- We will develop and encourage use of the Council owned Museum and Art Gallery in Inverness, the Highland Folk Museum, and support a range of independent or community run museums across the Highlands with advice, training and grant aid;
- We will support the development of shinty and of other specialised sporting facilities;
- We will continue our work with VisitScotland to further develop tourism in the Highlands as one of our major industries;
- We will continue to support initiatives such as Am Baile, the Feis Movement and the Blas Festival.

Gaelic language

The Administration will work with Bord na Gaidhlig and other partners to support the development of the Gaelic language and culture, fund the growth of Gaelic education and, via the Gaelic Committee, provide political leadership for the promotion and support of Gaelic.

- We will put in place a Gaelic Language Plan based on the principle of equal respect for Gaelic and English, and review the plan and progress in implementing it annually;
- We will continue to promote Gaelic medium education in primary schools and expand Gaelic medium education in the secondary sector;
- We will develop Gaelic medium education in pre-school provision where there is parental support for it;
- We will enhance the Gaelic team, led by a new post of Gaelic Development Manager, to co-ordinate the development of Gaelic;
- We will work with the Scottish Government and Higher Education institutions to address the issue of supply of Gaelic medium teachers;
- We will continue implementation of the Council's Memorandum of Understanding with Nova Scotia to ensure collaboration on a range of mutually beneficial cultural projects;
- We will work with Sabhal Mor Ostaig – Scotland's Gaelic College – to develop partnership projects which will support the Council's objectives for Gaelic.

Improved Transport and Connectivity

This Administration will seek to tackle the historic lack of investment in transport infrastructure and will work to achieve the following priorities.

- We will work with the Scottish Government and HITRANS to secure the upgrading of the A9, A96 and A82 trunk roads to and within the Highlands;
- We will work with the Scottish Government and HITRANS to secure funding for the Inverness Trunk Link Road, crossing the River Ness and Caledonian Canal with a target for completion of the whole project by 2015 and the rail network to and within the Highlands;
- We will invest £72m over the next 4 years to maintain and improve on the quality of the Highland's roads;
- Within this sum we will invest over £6m over the next 4 years in lifeline roads and bridge improvements;
- We will set out a programme detailing planned maintenance of local roads and bridges;
- We will continue to enhance, develop and promote the bus network in both rural and urban areas, improving both the quality and frequency of buses and access for the disabled;
- By 2008, we will implement an agreed £6m programme of traffic management and streetscape improvement measures in Inverness City Centre which will reduce traffic congestion and improve the quality of the environment;
- We will work with Highlands and Islands Airports, HITRANS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to attract new and enhanced air services into the Highlands and will continue to work to safeguard Inverness to Gatwick and Inverness to Heathrow flights;
- We will accelerate the focus on safe school transport for all pupils, encouraging more healthy and environmental options such as "walk to school" pathways, safety support and safe cycle tracks.

Children and Young People

Young people are our future. This Administration will do all we can to foster their talents and work with them.

- We aim to achieve full implementation of the Scottish Government's policy of "Getting it Right for Every Child" which will ensure that all children get the help they need when they need it, by 2008;
- We will undertake to review and consult on childcare and educational services for young children to ensure that we deliver and support a sustainable network of quality wraparound childcare and educational services for young children and their families by 2010;
- We will give a high priority to our corporate parenting responsibilities for Highland's looked after children including educational attainment; transition to work; further and higher education and training; support at home; more family placements and fewer children living outwith the Highlands;
- We have already commenced an examination of involvement of young people in the decision making process and are committed to acting upon the findings;
- We will ensure a youth worker is present in every Associated School Group and that a review is completed on leisure, recreation and development opportunities available to young people;
- We will roll out a single smart card to all young people giving access to leisure, libraries, arts and culture activities, youth information and school meals in 2008;
- We will support the continued development of Highland Youth Voice and the Scottish Youth Parliament to represent the interests of young people in the Highlands;
- We will seek to reduce the number of young people who are not in employment, further or higher education or training by 40% by 2008;
- We will work more closely with the police promoting road safety issues, particularly for young people.

The Administration's Corporate Objectives for the Highland Council

This administration wishes to support the greater involvement of Highland residents in shaping the future of their communities and will support the efforts of voluntary and community organisations which enable people to contribute to strong and vibrant communities. We aim to deliver a more responsive and better value council over the coming four years.

- We will develop a five year concordat with the voluntary sector in the Highlands governing the Council's £14m investment;
- We will provide financial and practical support and guidance to community councils in the Highlands to fulfil their roles;
- We will adopt a meaningful and realistic approach to consultation which adopts the national standards of community engagement;
- We will value and consult with staff and trades unions through joint consultative committees between the Council and trades unions;
- We will work with the trades unions to deliver modernised working conditions and a single status workforce by 2008;
- We will continue to pursue best value for our residents and service users, seeking efficiencies in the way we work and we will undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's spending priorities by 2009;
- We will increase the support for welfare rights and money advice services in the Highlands by £100,000 this will bring the total funding to over £1.2m;
- We will work through the Highlands and Islands European Partnership and the Scottish Government to secure the maximum benefit for the Highlands from the European funding programmes for the region and play a full part in key European organisations;
- We will seek the support of the Scottish Government for the removal of the remaining discount on Council Tax for Second Homes;
- We shall establish Ward Forums for every new council ward which will enable the public and community representatives to be informed of and to scrutinise Council activities and service delivery, including community planning.