

Highland Council

3.9.09

“Strengthening the Highlands”

The Programme of the Highland Council

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Report by the Chief Executive

Summary

A review of the Council’s programme “Strengthening the Highlands” has taken place and amendments are proposed. Amendments relate in the main to refreshing and expanding commitments. One new commitment is proposed and two former commitments are combined. Several improvements to performance indicators are proposed and a full report on performance in the first year of the programme will be reported to the Council meeting in October 2009, when the results of the survey of public opinion will also be available.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In September 2008 the Council agreed its new programme “Strengthening the Highlands”. In October 2008 the Council approved the Corporate Plan which includes programme commitments and the performance framework to measure progress against them. After the first year of this programme, it has been reviewed to take into account:
 - the progress the Council has made in 2008-9;
 - legislative changes;
 - the economy and financial considerations.
- 1.2 A full report on the Council’s performance in 2008-9 will be brought to the Council meeting in October 2009, along with the results from the annual survey of public opinion and satisfaction with Council services. Interim performance reporting indicates that progress is being made with all of the Council’s commitments in the programme.
- 1.3 The financial outlook has become significantly more challenging since the programme was agreed, and the review of the programme has been set in the current financial context. The Council is in the process of developing three-year budgets for the period 2010/11 to 2012/13, and has set savings targets of 5%, 6% and 6% for those years. With these increasing financial challenges, and the prospect of difficult decisions being faced by the Council, through the budget process the Council will be seeking to focus on delivering efficiency, and focusing resources on delivering key programme commitments.
- 1.4 A revised programme for “Strengthening the Highlands” along with a refreshed performance framework is appended for Council members to consider.

2. Amendments to the Strengthening the Highlands Programme

- 2.1 Amendments to the programme are highlighted in the appendix in bold text. There is one new commitment, number 7 on page 3, relating to the quality of learning, teaching and leadership capacity. All other amendments refresh, expand or combine some original commitments.

2.2 Refreshed commitments relate to: timescale changes or national / legislative change. These are described below.

Timescale changes

1. extending and increasing the original 2009 target of 87% to 95% by 2011 of young people leaving school moving into education, training or employment (p3, no.8);
2. removing an out-dated reference to the 2007 Year of Culture legacy fund (p.3, no.11);
3. removing an out-dated reference to the opening of the Archive, Family History and Registrars' Centre in 2009 (p.8, no.12);
4. to emphasise sustainable business growth and reflecting the operation of the Council's Business Gateway service (p12, no.1);
5. amending the date from 2008 to 2010 for modernising working conditions and single status reflecting the on-going work programmed.

National or legislative change

1. new work streams to improve transport following the Government's review (p13 and 14, nos. 1, 2 and 3);
2. having successfully worked with COSLA and other Councils to press for legislative changes to simplify the process of securing Flood Prevention Orders, the focus will now move to implementing the requirements of the new Flood Risk (Scotland) Act 2009 (p.19, no.3).

2.3 Expanded commitments relate to:

1. all schools, not just primary schools, being at the centre of communities (p.3, no 9);
2. an express commitment to increase the number of Gaelic learners in our schools (p.3, no.10);
3. emphasising the need to change attitudes and behaviours towards alcohol as a priority and supporting those in need with better prevention and treatment services (and to align with the Single Outcome Agreement) (p.7, no.8);
4. supporting communities to contest any further Post Office closures (p.14, no.8);
5. making a commitment to achieve a minimum of 10 small scale flood prevention schemes completed each year.

2.4 Two former commitments are combined relating to road safety for vulnerable people and the use of 20mph speed limits (p.4, no.18).

2.5 With proposed amendments to the Strengthening the Highlands programme, there is still strong alignment with the Single Outcome Agreement in place with partners and Scottish Government. A summary of the local outcomes is provided in the appendix.

3. Amendments to the performance framework

3.1 To reflect the amendments in the programme and to continuously improve how we measure Council performance against programme commitments, the following revisions to the performance indicators are proposed:

1. developing outcomes indicators (rather than process indicators) for children who are "looked after" (p.5);
2. new quality indicators on self-evaluation in schools and in community learning and development services (p.5);
3. developing new indicators jointly with NHS Highland for shifting the balance of

care (p.9);

4. new indicators for the Business Gateway Service (p.14);
5. refreshed indicators for new transport commitments (p.16);
6. the development of new targets in 2010 for reducing carbon emissions for alignment with national requirements (p.20);
7. the new target of at least 10 small scale flood prevention schemes completed annually (p.20);
8. the development of indicators and/or targets to support the new policy on allotments (currently in development) (p.20);
9. to increase the number of ranger-led events, as well as the number of participants attending (p. 21);
10. to increase the % of planning applications where biodiversity checklists are completed instead of increasing participation in biodiversity events (p.21);
11. to refresh the action on influencing Land Reform legislation since the Government has agreed to the review (p.21);
12. a new action to implement self-evaluation across the Council using the Public Service Improvement framework by 2011 (previously reported to the Council as part of the briefing on the Best Value 2 audit).

3.2 Any further changes required to the performance framework as a result of the annual review of performance will be reported at the next Council meeting.

4. Resource implications

4.1 The Council will be developing a three year budget, for years 2010/11 to 2012/13, over the coming months, and this will be reported to the Council in February 2010. As part of that budget process, the Council will consider resource requirements to support the programme.

5. Recommendation

5.1 Members are asked to agree the changes proposed to the Strengthening the Highlands Programme and to agree refreshed commitments and amendments to the performance indicators.

5.2 Members are asked to note:

- that the full annual corporate performance report, including the annual public survey results, will be reported to Council in October.
- that the budget proposals for 2010-11 to 2012-13 will be reported in February 2010
- that the Corporate Plan will be refreshed following the Council meeting in October 2009.

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

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