

The Highland Council's Magazine

Winter 2015

Issue 3

Highpoints

Sàr Phuingean



Inside this issue: Quality Awards - Consumer Rights - Future of Inverness Castle

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Welcome

I am delighted to welcome you to the winter edition of our magazine Highpoints (Sar Phuingean).

This issue celebrates our Quality Award winners and focuses on the performance of the council over the past year.

The council is comprised of a vast range of roles and people – telephonists, cleaners, teachers, classroom assistants, planners, accountants, social workers, refuse collectors, welfare advice staff, HR staff and roads maintenance staff are just a very few of the many roles staff play. These are the people who deliver the important services we all value across the Highlands.

The Award winners and runners-up of our Quality Awards demonstrate the enormous wealth of talent, innovation and hard work which goes on day in and day out across the council. My congratulations to everyone!

You will notice a strong link between the stories in this issue and our council values of Listening, Open, Valuing, Improving, Supporting,

Partnering and Delivering. We are, as a council, fully committed to delivering our programme within the spirit of these values.

I hope you enjoy reading about the wonderful people and the great successes in this issue of Highpoints as much as I have.

I wish you all the very best wishes for a happy festive season!



Isobel McCallum
Highland Council Convener



The Highland Council Quality Awards 2015



Employee of the Year



Employee of the Year 2015 is Ishbel Gordon, a Pupil Support Assistant working at Nairn Academy.

Ishbel works with a wide range of pupils with a variety of needs and her extensive experience allows her to support each pupil to a very high standard. She engages with every subject she supports and has built up a wealth of information that she uses on a daily basis to assist both pupils and staff. Described as a very creative person full of enthusiasm, reliable, loyal, generous with her time, fair and very approachable, Ishbel is a big asset to the school.

Ishbel was nominated by Jasmine Woodcraft and Sharon Sharkey from the school's Technology Department. They say that they could write a book about how great she is! Jasmine and Sharon said: "Ishbel brings huge energy to the school. Nothing is too much trouble for her and she always has a cheery smile. Pupils find it easy to ask for her support and her creative approach to learning and teaching gets excellent results. 'Fun' is a great way to describe her as she brightens a lesson and her enjoyment of activities rubs off on the pupils too."

Her colleagues added: "Ishbel is the 'go to woman' at Nairn Academy and goes above and beyond her job remit in every sense. We all need an Ishbel in our lives!"

Two of the nominations for Employee of the Year included Betty Connochie and Jimmy Flint.



Betty retired this autumn after 46 years' service with the Council. For the past 23 years she has been the Cleaning Supervisor at Council HQ, responsible for up to 16 members of staff. Leading a large team comes with its challenges, but Betty has always been professional in carrying out her role. Betty is described as a great 'reader' of people, professional, discrete, caring, and an excellent leader with a wicked sense of humour.



Jimmy Flint, Ward Manager for the Central, Millburn and Culloden and Ardersier wards, has worked with the council for many years. Jimmy is well respected within the communities that he works. He has played a key role in co-ordinating the improvement of Play Parks throughout the city, which involved close partnership working with colleagues to identify priorities and then allocating funds to get the best results.

Community Council Commendation Award

All Community Councils were asked to nominate staff who they felt deserved special recognition. Three members of staff received a Community Council Commendation Award.



Douglas Moore who is responsible for keeping the streets of Invergordon clean, was nominated by Invergordon Community Council who said: "Douglas performs his duties tirelessly and with a cheery smile and a wave, day in and day out. He is extremely conscientious about the standard of his work.

During the winter months he can be relied upon to have the pavements gritted early in the morning and also ensures paths to older resident's homes are treated. Despite being busy, he makes time for people and is a huge asset to our town."



George Stewart was nominated by Golspie Community Council for his role as piping instructor with the Sutherlands Schools Pipe Band. By the time he was 21, George was a fully qualified instructor and had a full and very varied career, including a spell as the Queen's Piper at Balmoral. For the last 31 years George has instructed pupils from Golspie, Helmsdale, Brora, Rogart, Lairg, Rosehall and Invershin.

In their nomination, Golspie Community Council wrote: "George's strength is his ability to encourage young people and give them a purpose. The Band gives the pupils opportunities to develop their social as well as musical skills. It is a credit to his teaching skills and ability to inspire that over the last 31 years the Band's reputation has grown nationally and internationally, with invitations to perform all over the world including Canada, Denmark, Germany and Norway.

None of this would be possible without George's enthusiasm, hard work and dedication."

“George's strength is his ability to encourage young people and give them a purpose.”

John Taylor, Assistant Area Manager with Community Services was nominated by both Kilmorack and Strathnairn Community Councils. John is their point of contact for issues of road maintenance and the treatment of routes over the winter. John Graham from Kilmorack Community Council said of him; "He is always very helpful, and even considering the financial restraints of his service, has somehow managed to fulfil the majority of our requests. He is a pleasure to work with which makes our work more enjoyable and we'd like to commend him for going that little extra to provide us with an excellent service."

Strathnairn Community Council wanted to particularly highlight John's role in helping them over the past 5 to 6 years with road issues arising from the heavy use of HGV's in the area and extra traffic associated with new developments. They said: "All our interactions with John have been professional, timely and he is very patient to listen to our issues and suggestions. His work to resolve problems has had a positive impact on local residents and made our roads safer. We'd like to thank John for his time and patience and for his extremely professional manner."



Trainee of the Year

Our 2015 Trainee of the Year is Debbie Potter who works for High Life Highland as a Trainee Archivist at the Highland Archive Centre. Debbie took up her four-year post last April and is studying for a MLitt in Archives and Records Management with the University of Dundee through their distance learning programme. She does this in addition to working a 35 hour week at the Archive centre where she is a highly valued member of the team.



Debbie has shown a real interest in raising public awareness of the archive collections and helps to deliver the popular Archives for Beginners classes. In April she began research into the Highland's connection to slavery in the Caribbean in order to create an exhibition of original archives for an academic symposium. Her research produced a broad, far reaching exhibition which was not only well received, but showed the complex and inter-related links between Highland families and the plantations. The exhibition went on to open to the public and is now available on-line.

Highland Archivist Alison Mason said: "Debbie has shown real commitment and dedication to both the Archive 'Service and the collections it holds. She is always keen to encourage new users, whether from Highland communities or throughout the UK and abroad to enrich their lives by connecting with their heritage through the records held."



Team of the Year

The Council's Children's Services are delivered by teams of professionals working together to ensure all children are confident, successful and responsible citizens. Megan, a 6th year pupil has nominated the team around her for their help and support over the last year.

Young people face many pressures and challenges in their lives. School can sometimes be the only constant in a young person's life and in Megan's case, a network of school and other staff from Children's Services rallied around her when she needed them the most.

The team includes Tracey Lomas, Christine Fraser, Rhonda Richardson, Ann-Marie Purcell, Mark Jones, Clare Ross, Lorenza Macrae and Julie Moffat.

Megan pays tribute to the team who, she says, have taught her to trust, believe in herself and help her recognise her true potential. She highlights many examples when team members have gone out of their way to offer encouragement, helping her keep focused and giving her a sense of belonging.

After successfully gaining the Highers she needs, Megan plans to study medicine next year. In her words – "I won't forget these people who have all cared enough to work together and do their best for me. They are a fabulous team who have helped me to get where I am today."



Supporting economic activity and growth

A project to revitalise the fishing community of Lochinver has been recognised at this year's Quality Awards.

This project offered training to young people to encourage new businesses in the area, by offering courses in subjects such as safety at sea, navigation and radio, to encourage more entrants to the marine industry.

The training was provided by Assynt Leisure Centre, a locally run charity that applied for funding through Axis 4 of the European Fisheries fund.

The team were presented with the Supporting Economic Activity and Growth Award by the broadcaster Kirsteen MacDonald at Highland Council's Quality Award ceremony. This award seeks to recognise activities that have made a significant contribution to the development of the Highland economy. As a result of the project, a number of new jobs and businesses have been created in an area where employment opportunities are normally considered low, particularly for young people. The scheme has received positive feedback from the local community.



Other nominations in this category included a team of Highland Council officers who supported the development of the new University of the Highlands and Islands Campus at Beechwood, Inverness. The team demonstrated fantastic partnership working, project management skills and problem solving. This resulted in the development of a facility that will encourage learning, research and new business opportunities for years to come.

Another nomination was the Youth Work Experience Programme, which was set up three years ago to tackle the growing problem of youth unemployment. The programme offered six month paid placements within the Council to 16 – 24 year olds, as well as support during and after the placement from the employability team.

To date, 210 young people have gained valuable, full-time work experience as a result of the scheme, with 70% of them moving into full-time employment.



Improving the lives of children and young people

An innovative new way of connecting with young people in care has been recognised at Highland Council's Quality Awards.



The Council's Care and Learning Service worked closely with Who Cares Scotland? and Barnardos to set up a scheme that employed 11 young people with experience of care as Development Assistants.

The role involves raising the profile of those growing up in care and shaping and influencing policy, practice and developments affecting them in the Highlands and across Scotland.

The scheme is the first of its kind in Scotland. The young people involved are working hard to improve their own employability skills, raise their confidence and self-esteem and directly improve outcomes for their peers.

The Participation of Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) team were responsible for the scheme. They picked up the Quality Award for Improving the Lives of Children and Young People at November's ceremony in Inverness.



This project wasn't the only nomination to set the trend nationwide, the Shared Highland Apprentices in Construction project is the first scheme of its kind in the country to offer new jobs to young people while filling skills gaps in the construction industry. The scheme provides modern apprenticeships to young people that give them the opportunity to move between different employers to gain more skills and experience. This attracts young people to the construction industry while making it easier for firms to employ them.

Among the other nominees for this award category was a project that focused on retaining looked after young people who are leaving the area for their care and learning. The Programme for Alternatives to Out of Authority Placements for Young People have worked with partners in the private and third sector to create accommodation where young people can build their independence. This has helped them to stay in the community they have grown up in, whilst also avoiding costs of £1.3 million for the Council this year.

Supporting caring communities

A series of schemes that help elderly and disabled people continue to live independently in Highland Communities were recognised in the Supporting Caring Communities category of the Quality Awards.



The overall winner was the Handyperson Telecare Project; a collaboration between the Council, the NHS and the Highland Handyperson service.

The scheme involves installing telecare technology in the home of a vulnerable person. This is linked to a central "hub" which provides round the clock monitoring and support, allowing people to remain in their own homes.

After originally being supported by engineers from outside the area, the service has taken on extra responsibilities, by setting up an entirely Highland based service, which installs, maintains and repairs equipment. It also provides an out-of-hours breakdown service for the whole region.

This system has proven to be a quicker, more economical and complete solution to safer independent living in the area.

A team from the Council's Development and Infrastructure service has been helping to meet the increasing demand for affordable housing for disabled servicepersons. The group have worked alongside Houses for Heroes to provide 5 specially designed homes for armed forces veterans at Balloan Gardens, Inverness. While these homes look no different to neighbouring houses, they can be adapted to meet the changing needs of tenants.

The project is part of a larger project, which has helped the local construction industry.

The small cluster of homes are energy efficient, close to local amenities and affordable to rent. They will make a major difference to veterans who are returning to civilian life.

Older people in the Loch Ness community of Boleskine have benefited from an innovative approach to care at home. Boleskine Community Care delivers a local service that consults people on when and how their care is delivered. The local community identified a lack of care at home services in the area. This made it difficult for people who needed care to stay in the area. By using local knowledge, the community were able to identify local residents who would be able to work as carers.

Highland Home Carers, NHS Highland Self Directed Support Team and the Inverness East Rural Adult Social Care Team worked together to set up the scheme. It has resulted in a local service that allows elderly residents to stay in their own homes and communities. It has also created new job opportunities in the area.

The model is now being looked at by other communities across Scotland and has been cited in research by Glasgow Caledonian University.



Delivering service improvement and efficiency

Closing a school in adverse weather means more than a day off for pupils - parents, pupils, staff and the media need to be informed.

Closing a school causes a logistical challenge to the Council, who have a responsibility to inform the public about any closures as quickly as possible. Highland Council launched a new school closure web page last December to supplement its telephone information service. The webpage www.highland.gov.uk/schoolclosures is updated by dedicated council staff with information supplied direct from Head Teachers.

Under delegated local decision making powers, Highland Council's Head Teachers are responsible for deciding if schools are closed. Due to the sheer size of the Council's area, local weather situations can be very different and Head Teachers are best placed to decide if their school should or should not be opened.

From 7am onwards during school term times the school closures website is updated and information posted automatically on the Council's social media sites Twitter @HighlandCouncil and Facebook. The new system means that the information is available as quickly as possible. This not only helps parents and pupils, but saves unnecessary travel. The innovative solution for managing the information about school closures was the winner of the Delivering service improvement and efficiency Quality Award. The system is also being adopted by some other local authorities.



School closures

Information line
Phone 0800 564 2272 to get the latest gov recorded message from the head teacher of your child's school. Have your school's PIN ready when you call.

Schools closed Wednesday 1 April
This page is updated from 7 am and cleared each evening. Get alerts of closures on Twitter and Facebook.

Abernethy Primary 7:10 am - Closed (bad weather)
Abernethy Primary Nursery 7:10 am - Closed (bad weather)
Alkaurie Primary 7:10 am - Partially closed - no school transport (severe road conditions)
Alness Academy 7:10 am - Closed (bad weather)
Drummond School 7:11 am - Closed (bad weather)

Total schools closed
Secondary schools: 1 (444 pupils)
Primary schools: 2 (89 pupils)
Special schools: 1 (80 pupils)

Two other projects nominated for this award:

Staff from the Council's Care and Learning service have been working hard to meet the needs of children in Highland who do not speak English as a first language.

When the Assessment and Interventions for pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) 3-18 project started in 2012, nearly 1,000 pupils were on record as having little or no English across schools and nurseries in Highland. This figure has risen to 1,547 with 40% of these pupils in the Early Years stage of education. The project focused on developing an assessment and intervention procedure for these pupils across Highland. It included on training and empowering staff, parents and carers.

The project has resulted in more empowered staff who can meet the needs of pupils and families and Moray Council are looking to adopt this process.



Public and school bus services provide a lifeline to remote communities in the Highlands. With 15% less to spend on home-to-school and public bus services contracts in Sutherland, the Council's Community Services team were aware that residents may be worried about losing services.

The team consulted with a range of groups including the public, Councillors and public/third sector agencies through a series of meetings across Sutherland. A questionnaire was made available at libraries, service centres and online.

The group also produced an online training video to help transport suppliers through the electronic tendering process.

With new contracts awarded, the team have not only achieved their savings target, but have also managed to introduce some very positive provision changes for local communities, including the introduction of a new Friday evening bus service running northbound from Ardgarth train station to Durness.

Improving housing and infrastructure

Phase two of the award winning £25 million flood alleviation scheme for River Ness was completed in September 2015. The scheme protects 800 homes and 400 businesses in Inverness City Centre from flooding.

In October, the River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme received a commendation in the 'Project' category at the recent Saltire Society Civil Engineering Awards in Edinburgh. The awards recognise excellence in engineering, design and innovation in Scotland.

As well as serving a functional use, the scheme also features a public arts programme to compliment the centre's streetscape enhancements. This has made the city centre a more attractive place for residents and visitors.

During the construction process, the project engaged with the local community by employing a full time Public Liaison Officer, conducting building site safety presentations in schools, inviting children to building site visits.

Overall, the project has delivered value for money and has been well received by the local community.

Following the national commendation, The River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme has also received a Quality Award for Improving Housing and Infrastructure.

Principal Engineer of the Flood Risk Management Team Matthew Smith said: "The flood defences are a fantastic asset to the city that will reduce the risk of flooding and the impact of climate change long into the future.



"I think the judges recognised that this project has transformed the city's riverside. The streetscape works have improved the look and feel of the area adjacent to the river and will be enjoyed for generations to come.

"There are so many people involved in developing a scheme like this, who have all worked very hard. This is a great accolade for everyone involved.

"I think the judges recognised that this project has transformed the city's riverside. The streetscape works have improved the look and feel of the area adjacent to the river and will be enjoyed for generations to come."

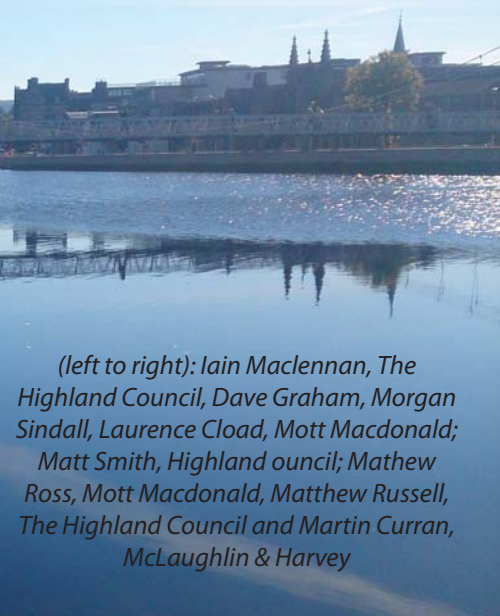


“...this project has transformed the city's riverside.”

Chair of the Council's Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee Councillor Audrey Sinclair said: "This commendation is national recognition of the talent that we have in our Planning, Development and Infrastructure teams. I would like to thank everyone involved for all their hard work and vision in completing what is now an award winning project".

Provost of Inverness Councillor Helen Carmichael congratulated the team: "The River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme will improve the lives of residents and visitors to the city for years to come. While it serves a practical purpose, it has improved the appearance of an already attractive area."

Another Highland entry, the berth improvements at Ullapool Harbour was among the four projects that received a commendation at the Saltire Awards.



(left to right): Iain MacIennan, The Highland Council, Dave Graham, Morgan Sindall, Laurence Cload, Mott Macdonald; Matt Smith, Highland council; Mathew Ross, Mott Macdonald, Matthew Russell, The Highland Council and Martin Curran, McLaughlin & Harvey

Also nominated in the Improving Housing and Infrastructure category of the Quality Awards:

The Modular Housing Pilot involves manufacturing components for housing at a factory in Invergordon and sending them to a site in Alness to be assembled into 8 flats.

The modules are well-insulated and very energy efficient, which helps when it comes to tackling fuel poverty from the inside out. They provide a viable, affordable and practical alternative to traditional buildings used and have provided opportunities for young people to carve out a successful career in the construction industry.



The Inverness Sustainable Drainage (SUDS) Survey is a project which aims to identify and map all of Inverness' SuDS ponds, which are designed to drain surface water from nearby building developments.

Council officers worked with Scottish Natural Heritage and the local amphibian and reptile group to survey the wildlife in the ponds. The survey is the most detailed of its kind ever in Scotland. The project also successfully involved the local community. More than 100 people attended a public event in the city's Inshes Park and 6 visits were also made to local schools.



Supporting strong, safe and empowered communities

Working together to reduce antisocial behaviour

The successful and innovative model for tackling anti-social behaviour used by the Inverness Response Team, is to be rolled out to other areas across the Highlands.

The initiative which was established in September 2014, won the Highland Council Quality Award for "Supporting strong, safe and empowered communities" in November. Two criteria for the Quality Award included that the project must demonstrate leading practice and be capable of replication elsewhere.

Over the past year, the multi-agency Inverness Response Team has managed 987 complaints from 294 separate addresses. The complaints from 283 addresses have been resolved and the remaining 11 are subject to ongoing partner involvement through the Response Team.

Most importantly, there has been a 13% reduction in assaults and serious assaults and a 12% reduction in Breach of the Peace and Disturbances.

“...the real power of agencies coming together to tackle a problem.”



The Highland Council has a primary responsibility for the management of the response of antisocial behaviour in the area supported by the Police Service of Scotland and other Community Planning Partners.

Inverness Response Team was launched in September 2014 to address anti-social behaviour issues on a daily basis. It shares resources and provides a daily tactical response to incidents of antisocial behaviour across the 7 Inverness Wards.

The core partners Highland Council, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service participate in a daily conference call. They share intelligence and react to incidents of anti-social behaviour in the previous 24 hours across the 7 Inverness Wards. The agreed partnership actions are identified, actioned and reviewed on a daily basis until the case is resolved.

Other agencies from the public, private and third sectors, for example Victim Support, Albyn Housing, Cairn Housing, BID Inverness, Social Work Services, and NHS are involved in a case by case basis.

An agreed Operating and Information sharing protocol recognises that joint working is vital to the provision of a coordinated approach by services and public agencies in responding to anti-social behaviour.





The Team is quick to identify problems, agree action plans and jointly deliver the service to the right people at the right time in a dynamic and responsive timescale. There is a reduction in duplication of effort by sharing services across the public, private and third sectors and as a result, a more responsive service is being delivered which reacts to community concerns.

A recent review of Operation Notebook also identifies that, since the introduction of the Inverness Response Team, the level of anti-social behaviour within the 7 Inverness Wards has reduced. As a consequence, the reduction on demand to services is being sustained.

It also evidences a decrease in the numbers of cases escalating through Operation Notebook which is attributed to the early intervention and collective efforts of the Inverness Response Team.

This model of partnership working has recently been rolled out to the Caithness Area for local partners to replicate in a model fit for their purpose and case load.

Scott Hay Local Senior Officer for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service said: "This initiative has demonstrated the real power of agencies coming together to tackle a problem, with a partnership approach.

The reduction in antisocial behaviour in Inverness underlines the success of this model and we will be looking at how we can apply the learning in a tailored way to manage local needs in other areas in the Highlands."

Chair of the Communities and Partnerships Committee, Councillor Hamish Fraser said: "The Inverness Response Team has been very successful in delivering an increased partnership focus on prevention and early intervention around antisocial behaviour. Their actions on a daily basis have shown that cases of low level antisocial behaviour can be prevented from escalating into more serious behaviour and crime, making our communities safer and more pleasant places to live. Everyone who has been involved in this ground-breaking work should be congratulated."



Customer Service Excellence

“

Information is provided to the right people, at the right time and using the right channel.”

recognised with national Award

Highland Council customer services staff have been praised for achieving and retaining the externally assessed Customer Service Excellence Award since 2010. This standard is only awarded when an organisation is able to demonstrate to the Cabinet Office that they are “producing a first class customer service”.

The customer must be central to service delivery and emphasis is placed on complete customer satisfaction throughout their contact with the council. Continuous improvement is also measured.

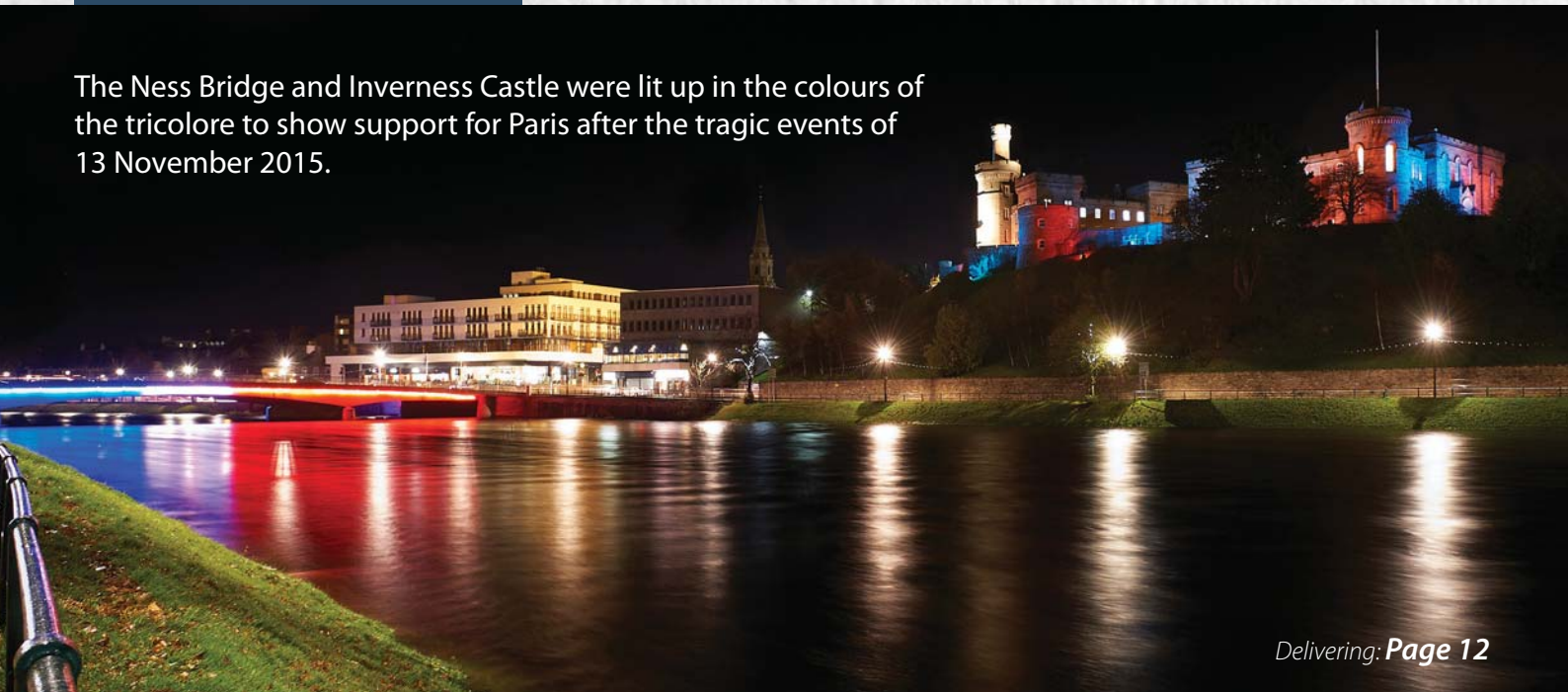
The comprehensive assessment covers all aspects including Service Points, the Service Centre, the Registration Service, digital services and the provision of partnership services to external customers such as HM Passport Service.

The external assessor was very impressed with “the helpfulness and friendly approach of staff in the locations visited”. He commented on the quality of services saying: “this demonstrates a complete focus and ethos of first class service delivery.”

The report praised the range of information available: “Full and meaningful information is provided in a variety of ways, including web-based facilities, electronic channels, social media and hard copy visual material. Information is provided to the right people, at the right time and using the right channel.”

Chair of Resources, Councillor Bill Fernie praised all the staff involved saying: “Achieving and retaining this national award demonstrates the high quality service delivered by council staff. Everyone involved should be very proud of this prestigious recognition.”

The Ness Bridge and Inverness Castle were lit up in the colours of the tricolore to show support for Paris after the tragic events of 13 November 2015.





The future of Castle Hill Àm ri teachd Cnoc a' Chaisteil

Have your say on the future of Inverness Castle

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service is to move from Inverness Castle to a new justice centre within the next three years. Possible uses for Inverness Castle and its surrounding area are on show in a public exhibition at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery. A consultation aims to identify options for the castle complex that will promote tourism and culture and benefit the wider economy.

The exhibition was organised by the Inverness Castle working group, which was formed last summer and jointly chaired by Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism and Highland Council.

The working group is keen to learn what people think about suggested options before reaching a conclusion.

<https://www.highlifehighland.com/castle-hill/>



In the meantime, planning permission is in place to convert the North Tower of the castle into a visitor attraction with a viewing platform and this is expected to be completed and open during 2016.

Measuring our performance

An annual report of Corporate Performance is prepared each autumn, covering performance for the previous financial year. An assessment of Council performance against the Corporate Plan and the Council's Programme covers the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. Good progress is reported with 94% of the commitments (130 out of the total 139) being either completed, on target or where performance is being maintained. The Council will report on statutory performance indicators including national benchmark positions for 2014/15 in March 2016 once national results are available. More information on Council performance is available at www.highland.gov.uk/performance

Supporting the economy



We aim to support local businesses by paying invoices quickly to enable a healthy cashflow.

We have exceeded our targets to pay **60% of invoices** within **10 calendar days of receipt** and **90%** within **30 days**.

During 2014/15 we paid **76.9% of invoices** within **10 days** and **94.3%** of invoices within **30 days**.

We spent over **£116million** with Highland businesses during 2014/15 and over **£85m** of this with smaller businesses.

We are achieving our target to increase our spending with Highland businesses by 5% by 2017.

During 2014/15 our Business Gateway **supported 424 business start-ups**, up from 250 in the previous year and provided 1013 businesses with advice, information or training.

This was more than double the number in 2013/14.

Get SET for Growth: **Women in Business programme** has been specifically designed to help women grow their businesses by providing business support from people who understand the challenges not just of business in general, but for women in business in particular.

The **percentage of women in our top 5% of non-teaching earners also increased to 48.2% in 2014/15** compared to 46.7% in 2013/14. This is a national benchmark indicator and for available data for 2013/14 we were ranked 22 of 32 in Scotland with a national average of 50.7%.

We monitor our progress in supporting large-scale employment opportunities through the available unemployment rates in key Travel to Work Areas (TTWA).



	2013/14	2014/15
Thurso	2.8%	2.1%
Invergordon	2.9%	2.5%
Inverness & Dingwall	1.8%	1.0%
Skye & Lochalsh Ullapool & Gairloch	2.2%	1.7%

These show good progress against the Scottish average in 2014/15 of 2.5% and progress towards the Highland average of 1.43%.

Our target is to increase the **percentage of young people leaving school moving into education, training or employment** by 3% by 2017.

We achieved **92.7%** in 2013/14.

Figures for 2014/15 (as normal) will be available in January 2016.

We hosted the **Royal National Mod** in October 2014 and this **injected some £3.57 million into the local economy**. This most successful Mod ever was an integral part of the Scottish Government's Homecoming 2014 Programme, with over 3,000 competitors taking part and attracting some 9,000 people.

Children & young people

Our bi-annual survey of school pupils carried out in October 2013 shows a positive picture with **87.5% reporting a positive learning environment**. The results of the latest survey are due in early 2016.

The Physical Activity Plan for pupils aged 5-15 years aims to ensure that **pupils receive two secondary school periods and two hours in primary schools of physical activity** each week. **98%** of schools achieved this during 2014/15, up from 96% the previous session.

For 2013/14 the average tariff scores for examinations in secondary schools within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) cover the average total points awarded for all exam results.

The scores are:

S4/5/6 **lowest 20%** at **175**, higher than the (national comparator of 163, against a baseline of 151 in 2011/12.



S4/5/6 **middle 60%** at **793**, slightly up on the baseline of 789 in 2011/12.



(national comparator 805)

S4/5/6 **top 20%** at **1763**, up on the baseline of 1747 in 2011/12.

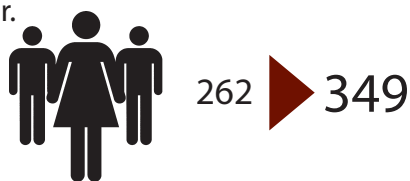


(national comparator 1817)

The proportion of children with **Additional Support Needs** who are able to sustain full time education increased from 94% in 2013/14 to 99% in 2014/15.

Communities and Infrastructure

The number of people receiving **self-directed support** (SDS) increased to **349** in 2014/15 compared to **262** the previous year.



Telecare involves the use of technology to support people to live in their own homes. **Telecare also provides a wide range of support** from basic community alarms to enhanced telecare sensors and packages. The full range of **services reached 7512 people in 2014/15** in settings, including sheltered and very sheltered housing, residential and care homes.

Money advice

The financial benefit to customers from advice services during 2014/15 was:

£3.974 million

compared to: **£3.974 million** the previous year.

We also assisted **1330** customers with our money advice and welfare rights service.

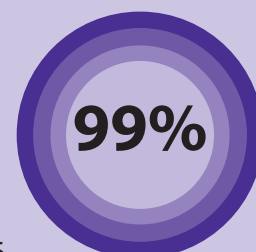
Customer contact levels with Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB) remain high with **55,419** customer contacts in 2014/15, compared to **42,415** the previous year, and with cases presented increasingly complex, including successfully appealing welfare benefit decisions.



Clean streets

99% of Highland streets met the standards of the new **national benchmark indicator** "Cleanliness Score" in 2013/14 compared to the national average of 96%.

We were also **ranked 4 of 32 nationally**. Data for 2014/15 will be available in March 2016.



Housing

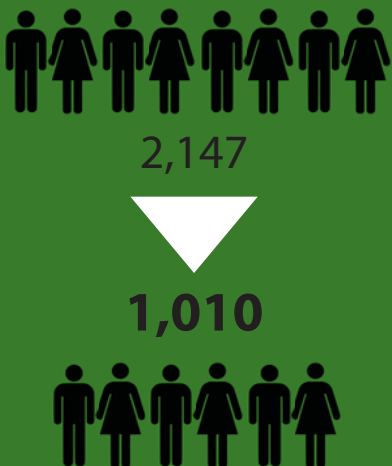
We built 173 council houses in 2014/15, exceeding our target of 120. We have now **built 434 houses** against our target to build 688 houses by March 2017.



We aim to enable the building of 5000 new houses through planning policy by March 2017. We achieved 2599 in the first three years of this 5 year target, including 874 houses in 2014/15. We continue to work with partners and the housing industry to assist in the delivery of the overall target.

The proportion of our council **housing stock meeting the energy efficiency standard in 2014/15 increased to 88.0%**, compared to 75.7% the year before. (subject to verification) This is on trajectory towards a target of 93%, however, there have been particular problems in finding renewable heating options in areas not served by town gas supplies.

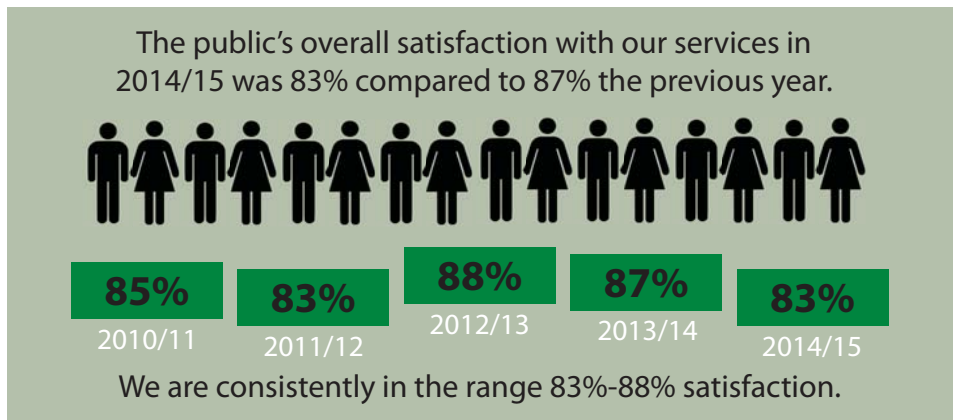
Homeless presentations have reduced from **2,147** in 2010/11 to **1,010** in 2014/15, against a target to reduce presentations to below **1,000** by 2016/17.



How did we do?

Highland Council's annual Performance and Attitudes survey continues to show a high level of satisfaction with Council services. Every year the Council surveys members of its Citizen's Panel, which is designed to be representative of the adult population. This year 1,024 respondents of a possible 2,346 replied to the survey which asked for opinions on a range of topics.

Overall satisfaction with Council services continues to remain above the target of 80%, with the highest scores found for Service Points, walking routes and payment of Council Tax (83%). Refuse/bin collection and parks and open spaces both scored 78%.



Panellists were asked to agree or disagree with statements relating to the Council's values of: listening, being open, valuing, improving, supporting, partnering and delivering. Those that responded agreed that the Council maintained good quality local services, was approachable, helpful and environmentally friendly.

Of those that responded, **88% said that they found it easy to contact the Council**. 60% felt that their request was dealt with by the first person they contacted. 69% of the panel believe the Council meets or exceeds their general expectations, down from 78%.

There are 4 qualities where over half the panel agree with the statements that the Council 'maintains good quality local services' (59% agree), 'is approachable' (58%), 'is helpful' (54%) and 'is environmentally friendly' (53%). On balance, the Council is viewed positively in demonstrating all of these.

In being asked to rank qualities in order of importance, **'maintains good quality services' is ranked 1st**.

Qualities as Ranked in Order of Importance by Respondents in 2015 Survey	Respondents Mentioning Quality in Their Top 5		
	2015 %	2014 %	2013 %
1. Maintains good quality local services	68	69	71
2. Listens to local people	62	58	59
3. Provides value for money	54	51	56
4. Is efficient	38	38	36
5. Treats all residents fairly	36	38	32

The survey also showed an increase in satisfaction with the **Council's website** from last year's survey, with **53% of respondents rating it as good** compared to 39% in 2014. Many more respondents were aware that they could access information via social media, with an increase from 39% to 55%.

Great progress has been made in relation to our on-line services, which have been increased to 23.9% compared to 9.4% the previous year.

% satisfied with elements of website					
Council's website: www.highland.gov.uk	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Home page content	53	39	46	46	44
General content	52	36	45	46	45
Ease of use: A to Z	43	31	42	38	35
Navigation	36	23	34	31	30
Search	37	24	32	30	30
Links on Homepage	39	27	35	36	32
Webcasting Council meetings	34	35	46	40	44
Social networking e.g. Facebook, Twitter	26	24	36	49	41



Almost all aspects of satisfaction with Council website have improved including 53% of respondents rating the homepage as 'good' compared to 39% in 2014.

Community life

Respondents were asked to rate a range of local services within their communities. Local schools, local health services and leisure facilities/events (62%) received the top 3 highest ratings.

Highland residents continue to have a high level of engagement in volunteering. **39% of respondents said that they were engaged in volunteering activity**; well above the most recent national average of 28%.



Handling your complaints

We aim to resolve 80% of all stage 1 complaints within 5 working days and this is an area which requires more work.

During 2014/15 we achieved 48.4%, compared to 53.1% the previous year. We aim to resolve 80%. During 2014/15 we achieved resolution of 65.8% of all stage 2 complaints within 20 working days, compared to 66.1% the previous year.

Areas for improvement

The survey also highlighted areas that needed improvement. Respondents indicated more dissatisfaction than satisfaction with road repairs and winter maintenance. This is within the context of savings agreed by the council in 2014, which has resulted in fewer gritters. However, work to make these services more innovative and efficient is currently ongoing, with extra funding being made available for roads to ensure that repairs are permanent rather than temporary. The Council is also undertaking a further review of winter maintenance services over this winter.

There was also a reduction in satisfaction levels for some areas of contact with the Council. 56% thought that waiting times for visits to Council offices were "good" compared to 62% in 2014. The number of respondents who were satisfied with the ease of getting through to someone who could help them via telephone fell from 54% to 49%. We are looking to increase the number of services available online and via telephone, to reduce waiting times and give customers a greater choice in when and how they interact with us.

Leader of the Council, Councillor Margaret Davidson said:

“The results of this survey show that despite the challenging financial climate and the impact of savings on services to date, Highland Council continues to provide quality services with a very high level of customer satisfaction.”

Highland Communities

continue to feel safe

Highland communities continue to view their neighbourhood as a safe place to live.

A Highland Council attitudes survey has revealed that 96.8% of respondents view the area within 15 minutes' walk from their home as very or fairly safe.

The Citizen's Panel survey in 2015 included a number of questions on community safety concerns, fear of crime, precaution against crime and perception of safety in the local area.

The survey revealed residents' top concerns as road safety, alcohol abuse, drug abuse and antisocial behaviour.

Chair of Communities and Partnership Committee, Cllr Hamish Fraser said: "It is reassuring to see that the vast majority of people feel very safe where they live right across the Highlands. We must not be complacent however, where there are a very small minority of people who tell us they don't feel safe. We need to understand what else can be done in those communities.

"There is excellent work being done to reduce antisocial behaviour in Inverness and Caithness, and to reduce casualties on Highland roads.



"Initiatives such as these by the Council and our partners are vital in keeping the Highlands as safe a place as possible."

The Highlands continues to be one of the safest places to live in the UK, but the survey shows that perceptions of safety and crime can be very different from the reality.

Divisional Commander Julian Innes responded to the report saying: "I'm delighted local people continue to feel safe across our Highland communities - they are right to enjoy living in one of the safest parts of the county. I'm in no doubt that improved partnership working, in addition to communicating closely with local people to identify the issues that matter to them, is key to local policing and keeping people safe.

"Successful multi-agency initiatives such as the Inverness Response Team and Operation Respect, which focus on anti-social behaviour and disorder, have helped tackle the very issues that have the potential to disrupt local communities.

"We will continue to build on these good working practices to help ensure everyone in the Highlands feels safe and secure wherever they live."

“...perceptions of safety and crime can be very different from the reality.”

New Consumer Rights

The Highland Council's Trading Standards team is urging shoppers to know their new consumer rights as the countdown to Christmas continues. The new Consumer Rights Act came in to force on the 1 October 2015 and makes a number of changes. The most of important of these for shoppers are new rights when buying goods and a brand new regime to govern "digital content", bringing consumer law up to date with the internet age.

The main changes to buying rights for goods are:

- If an item is faulty, shoppers now have up to 30 days to "reject" the item and get a refund (they do not have to accept a repair or replacement)
- After 30 days, the shop only has one attempt to repair or replace faulty goods; if this fails to remedy the matter the consumer can then claim a refund.

The new law defines digital content as "data which are produced and supplied in digital form" and does not deal with it in the same way as other goods and services. It is "intangible" content supplied via email, streamed, or otherwise supplied via the internet. It does not include products like CDs or DVDs which have digital material on a physical format and are considered to be "goods".



Examples of digital content include: computer software, apps, games, ringtones, e-books, streamed television programmes, music, video.

And the new digital provisions do not only apply to content that a consumer has paid for directly. It also covers digital content supplied free of charge along with other goods, services or digital content which have been paid for.

A new remedy of a free repair or replacement applies if the digital content is found to be:

- not of satisfactory quality (e.g. faulty)
- not as described or
- not fit for the particular purpose for which it was bought.

Unlike faulty goods, there is no direct right to a refund and this type of product is also exempt from the short term right to reject

(30 days) which is applicable to other consumer contracts for goods. However, where faulty digital content cannot be repaired or replaced without significant inconvenience to the consumer, then the consumer is likely to have a right to compensation, which could in effect result in a full refund of the purchase price.

Also, where the faulty digital content purchased has damaged a consumer's device, (such as software downloaded with a virus which has deleted music or photo computer files on your system), a consumer can ask for the files to be reinstated free of charge or compensation.

For more information about these new shopping rights, consumers can speak to an advisor from Trading Standards partners the Citizens Advice Consumer Service helpline on 03454 040506. The more difficult cases are referred on to Trading Standards.

For further information about consumer rights when buying goods and digital content products and information on how to resolve consumer disputes go to Highland Council Trading Standards webpage at:

www.highland.gov.uk/tradingstandardsnews

or follow us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/HCTradingStandards>

Listening

Facebook provided a useful forum for budget dialogue

Highland Council has held a series of Budget Facebook Chats with members of the public over the autumn.



BUDGET SITUATION

The first chat in October focused on explaining the budget situation and sought to gain views on council tax. A council tax rise of 5% would equate to just under £5 per month for properties on Band D.

The chat was viewed by around 300 people. Around 150 comments were made on the page. Overall, the post for the chat had a reach of more than 5,000 people. 51 people engaged (liked or shared) with the event.

A poll was included on the page which asked the question "The Council has to save around 6% across all services next year. Would you be willing to pay a bit more council tax to protect some services against cuts eg. education, care, roads, voluntary groups etc?"

A wide range of opinions were expressed on the topic of raising the council tax. However, many people said that they would be happy to pay a bit extra on their Council Tax as long as it helps to protect frontline services and doesn't affect the poorest disproportionately.



COMMUNITY SERVICES

Over 1,200 people took part in the second chat which focused on community services, including bin collections. Community Services delivers many of the Council's everyday services, with staff in regular contact with the people of the Highlands. The Service delivers a wide range of services including refuse collection, grass cutting, winter maintenance, housing, homelessness, public conveniences, playparks, roads maintenance and many more services which help to make your community a safe and pleasant place to live.

Councillor Allan Henderson said: "We are currently looking at a wide range of proposals and ideas to save money and increase income, whilst protecting the most essential of services as far as possible. The facebook chat was pretty successful and we would have had to visit a lot of village halls to speak to that many people."

There were a total of more than 600 comments on the event page relating to frontline services such as bin collection and car parking.



CARE AND LEARNING

The third event focused on Care and Learning.

Around 2300 Highland residents on the Citizens' Panel have been asked questions on budget savings, including their view on paying more Council tax to avoid cuts. The survey will be analyzed and feedback considered at a special council meeting on 21 January 2016.

You can view the facebook chats and some of the questions posed on our facebook event pages at: <https://www.facebook.com/>



Over 10,000 people like the Council's Facebook page. The vast majority of these people live in the Highlands, with around a quarter living in the Inverness area. There is a wide spectrum of ages, with 74% of people aged between 25 and 54. 10% are over 55's and 16% under 25's.

“ We would have had to visit a lot of village halls to speak to that many people. ”

Online Housing Repairs

Are you a council tenant?

Did you know you can now report routine housing repairs online through the Highland Council website?

Visit:

www.highland.gov.uk/housing

for more information.



Apply & Report on-line

Apply and Report on-line

We've launched new selection of online forms making it easy for customers to access council services anytime, anywhere, on any device.

The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction application gathers information and personal details required for assessing entitlement to benefit. The form allows customers to upload scanned or photographed copies of evidence directly with the online form, minimising the need to post originals or visit the Council's service points.

The Housing Application form uses clever questioning to present only the questions relevant to the customer applying. This reduces the number of questions and level of information required to complete the form, compared to the paper version.

And the housing repairs form helps the customer report non-emergency, routine repairs. As with all our online forms, the housing repairs form is available on tablets and smartphones, allowing customers to report the problem on any device.

Online forms are available on the Highland Council website.

For more information, and to view the range of available online services, go to:

www.highland.gov.uk/request

and

www.highland.gov.uk/report

Overleaf you will find a list of all the things you can request, pay for or report on-line.

Things you can request, pay for or report on-line

You can request:

Boat Hire Licence
 Cinema or Theatre Licence
 Civic Government Licence
 Dangerous wild animals Licence
 Taxi or Private hire licence
 House of Multiple Occupancy Licence
 Liquor Licences
 (personal, extended hours, occasional)
 Trading Licences
 (e.g. second hand dealer, knife dealer)
 Late hours catering Licence
 Street trader Licence
 Public Entertainment Licence
 Petrol or Explosives Licence
 Parking Permit
 Export Certificate
 Road Opening Permit
 Road Closure Permit
 Road Occupation Permit
 Garage or garage site
 Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions
 Disabled Band Reduction
 School transport
 Vacancies
 Choice based lettings enquiry
 Planning applications*

Blue Badge*
 Benefits advice
 Money and debt advice
 Disposal of large household items
 Food premises registration
 Freedom of information request
 New and Replacement Parking Cards
 New household bins
 Housing Benefit
 Council Housing
 Pre-application advice for local development
 Development Enquiries
 Commercial waste

You can pay for:

Council Tax
 Non Domestic Rates
 Rent
 School Meals
 Parking Fines
 Other fines (dog fouling, littering)
 Planning and Building services
 General Invoices

You can report:

Bonfire or smoke problem
 Breach of planning control
 Damage to bridges or bus shelters
 Comments, compliments & complaints
 Dog Fouling
 Blocked or damaged drains
 Fly Tipping
 Light or traffic light faults
 Missed Bin Collections
 Issues in parks and cemeteries
 River or stream issues
 Roads maintenance issues
 (potholes, road surface or pavement issues)
 Street Cleaning issues
 Change in Circumstances
 Environmental Health Concern
 High Hedge
 Routine Housing Repairs

www.highland.gov.uk

* uses a national website



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Care and Learning Alliance

What Care and Learning Alliance offers -

- Our out of school clubs provide regular reliable childcare out with school hours which may include holiday and in service days
- Our day care provisions are Wimberley Estate Childcare Centre, Inverness Junior World, Nairn
- Fully registered with the Care Inspectorate
- Both centres accept Childcare Vouchers (tax free)!!!
- 132 toddler groups across Highland offering mums, dads, grannies, grandads, childminders a chance to meet up and have a coffee

DIRECT Childcare Sitter Service

What Direct Childcare Sitter Service offers -

- Our Sitter Service provides quality childcare in the family home for children & young adults ages 0-19 including those with ASN
- Maintains the child's regular routines and fills in between other childcare and education services with opportunities of supported free play
- Fully registered with the Care Inspectorate
- Can be used by families in receipt of Self Direct Support payments
- All staff are fully vetted, trained and registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. We are also a registered charity

For further information call: 01463 703033
 Email: info@calachildcare.co.uk
 or visit our website
www.careandlearningalliance.co.uk

For further information call: 01463 703036
 Email: info@directchildcare.co.uk
 or visit our website
www.directchildcare.co.uk

Ross & Cromarty Pipes and Drums

A three-night mini tour of Ross-shire in late November rounded off a successful competing season for Ross & Cromarty Pipes and Drums School. The concerts were an outstanding success and the band was delighted at the level of community support at every venue.

Pipe Major Niall Matheson and Drum Major Drew Caldwell praised both the main and development bands – many of whom hadn't performed in public before.

The members are all tutored via The Highland Councils' Instrumental Tuition Service and are a credit to the hard work and dedication of all who support their efforts.

Marion Munro School of Dancing and special guest bands Gizenbriggs from Tain; ShortBreed, Invergordon and the Strathpeffer and District Pipe Band from Dingwall also performed in the concerts.

Thanks to the generosity of the audiences, local businesses, Highland Council, parents, tutors, and the bands' efforts - a sizeable donation was raised for the MFR Cash for Kids charity and a contribution towards the funds needed for the 2016 competition season.



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plastic bottles pots, tubs & trays



food and drink cartons



and remember your collection dates may change over the festive season!

YOUR NORMAL COLLECTION :	WILL BE COLLECTED ON:
Tuesday 22nd December 2015	Saturday 19th December 2015
Friday 25th December 2015	Tuesday 22nd December 2015
Tuesday 29th December 2015	Saturday 26th December 2015
Friday 1st January 2016	Tuesday 29th December 2015

Recycling Centres closed on the 25th, 26th December and 1st, 2nd January

Preparing for winter

Severe weather can strike at any time, so taking action now will serve you well in winter, and all year round.

In the last few years, we've had snow, floods and strong winds. And it doesn't take much for it to impact on our daily lives. Like getting stuck indoors for a few days, or losing your phone communication, power or water supply.

Severe weather can cause a range of problems - but you can be ready for them. By doing a few small things now, you can save yourself a lot of trouble later on.

You can also do your bit to help out in your community. In previous years, severe weather left some people vulnerable. Helping each other a little can make a big difference.

Here's how you can play your part in making your community more prepared:

- Identify family members or neighbours who may need an extra helping hand if severe weather strikes.
- Have useful phone numbers to hand.
- Offer to help with grocery shopping or other essential tasks.
- Clear ice or snow from pathways.
- Volunteer to help others by visiting:
www.volunteerscotland.org.uk
- If you are part of a community group, think about what your group can do to help others during bad weather.
- See examples of how communities across Scotland are working together to get ready for winter/severe weather.

A good starting point is the Scottish Government's Guide to Emergency Planning for Community Groups, which suggests a range of things that you and others in your area could do and has templates for household and community plans.

The Ready Scotland website has information on this and lots of other useful information on preparing for severe weather.

<http://www.readyscotland.org/are-you-ready/winter-weather/>

DO YOU STRUGGLE TO GET UP AND DOWN THE STAIRS?

It is estimated that during our lifetimes we will use our stairs approximately 250,000 times. However for some people this may prove increasingly difficult. A stairlift can offer an alternative solution to moving or modifying a house. A stairlift can offer many benefits, mainly giving you the freedom and independence to move up and down in your house without the fear of falling and injuring yourself. When you buy a stairlift you are also buying a greater sense of security.

Our aim at Ableworld is to provide caring solutions for our customers enabling them to enjoy greater independence and more comfortable and active lives. We do this by providing quality products and services

at value for money prices. Established in 2000 Ableworld are the largest mobility and stairlift retailers in the country.

We employ professionals who have been in either Mobility (including engineering) or Nursing and Care Home sectors for up to twenty years, however, Ableworld is also a company with a retail and buying background, so you can rely on us to supply quality branded products at value for money prices.

Ableworld are very proud of our highly skilled stairlift division. Our "in house" Stairlift Engineers provide a service second to none.

We stock both new and reconditioned stairlifts and also have a wide range of stairlifts that can be rented. This is ideal for customers who do not need the lift for a long period of time.

We will first do a FREE survey and assess which is the best lift to suit your individual needs, and then quote you a price. You are under no pressure or obligation to buy. If you decide to go ahead with the lift then our engineers will fit the lift at a convenient time and with little disturbance. Your lift will normally be fitted in less than half a day!

Alternatively if you wish to go in-store, ensuring peace of mind, you have the option to 'try before you buy' fully operational stairlift demonstration models. Our friendly store staff are more than happy to advise and assist where needed.

Ableworld offer a 24 hour, 7 days a week, 52 weeks of the year helpline where you can talk to a person. Plus out of hours engineering support.

To request more information or to book a FREE no obligation quote please call (01463) 224386

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