

Highpoints

Sàr Phuingean



School rugby festival marks royal opening Pg3



The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd



Skye tourist sites
get funding
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Contact us

Write to:

**Corporate Communications
The Highland Council HQ
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness IV3 5NX**

Email: corporate.communications@highland.gov.uk

Phone: 01463 702020

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Welcome

Welcome to the Spring 2018 edition of Highpoints.

What a long winter it has been! It has been very challenging for all our services, particularly winter maintenance, and we are now faced with the enormous job of fixing the damage to the roads. It has however been a terrific season for winter tourism, especially in our great snow sports resorts in Badenoch & Strathspey, and Lochaber. Our film tourism is also doing very well and you can read more about this on page 8.

This year, 2018, is the Year of Young People and this issue of Highpoints focuses on celebrating the successes involving a great many young people across the Council. The rugby festival in which nearly 500 children from local schools took part highlighted the success of the new Highland Rugby Club and West Link project which provides opportunities for young people across the area. The Calcutta Cup was on display and also taken along to Kingussie for local children to see this historic piece of silver.

The Council employs 50 modern apprentices and it is great to meet some of these young people with promising futures ahead of them in this issue. Well done also to Rachael Taylor of Culloden Academy who is one in 1000 girls to be selected for a Global STEM Alliance!

We are a forward looking Council and we seek to support young people and provide the best possible opportunities here in Highland with nearly 96% of our young people going on to positive destinations after school. You can also read more about the Council's performance in 2016/17 on pages 22 to 35.



Bill Lobban Highland Council Convener

Listening ~ Open ~ Valuing ~ Improving ~ Supporting ~ Partnering ~ Delivering

Royal visit and school rugby festival mark the opening of Canal Park



Almost two years after a turf cutting ceremony on 10th May 2016 to mark the start of the Canal Park Enhancement works, the Highland Rugby Club celebrated its fabulous new home with an official opening by Scottish Rugby's Patron, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal on 19th March.

470 Primary 6 Pupils from local schools took part in a Festival of Touch Rugby on the opening day which was blessed with fabulous sunshine. Balloch, Balnain, Cauldeen, Central, Cradlehall, Crown, Dalneigh, Duncan Forbes, Hilton, Invergarry, Kirkhill, Merkinch, Milton of Leys and Muirtown were all involved in adapted touch rugby games on Highland Rugby Club's new artificial surface.

The artificial pitch is full rugby playing standard (World Rugby compliant) with floodlighting also to playing standard. There is also a new full-size grass pitch,

new junior pitch partly floodlit to training standard and a new car parking area.

The Calcutta Cup, won by Scotland 25-13 against England at BT Murrayfield in February, and presented to Scotland captain John Barclay on the day by the Princess Royal, was also on display at Canal Park for the official opening. See our cover photo where pupils had the unique chance to see the cup up close.

The West Link and associated sports facilities which include Canal Park, form part of the Council's contribution to the City-Region Deal investment by partners. In addition to £4.1m from the Council to create the Canal Park facility, sportscotland invested £0.5m in the project. The project also benefited from an award of £40,000 from Scottish Rugby's Club Sustainability Fund which provides investment to rugby clubs to develop their facilities and enhance infrastructure.

Construction of the new clubhouse, artificial pitch and two new grass pitches at Canal Park began in the summer of 2017 along with the building of Stage 1 of the West Link road, and was completed in October 2017. Stage 1 of the West Link Road was completed and opened to traffic in December 2017.

The state of the art community facility is managed by High Life Highland in partnership with Highland Rugby Club. The sporting facility for the use of the wider community boasts a superb function space and spectators' balcony with catering facilities, top class changing facilities and pitches.

Andy Little, Chairman of Highland Rugby Club which established in 1922 said:

"The completion of the Canal Park Redevelopment marks a new chapter in the history of Highland Rugby Club and provides our club and the wider rugby and sporting community with state of the art sporting facilities. When the club embarked on discussions with The Highland Council on the way forward for the West Link Road I never thought that the outcome would be what we have today. The results are outstanding in terms of uptake in playing numbers at all age grades and increase in volunteers and new coaches coming forward to help at our club."



LEADER funding of £4.9m available for projects in the Highlands



Scottish Rural Development Programme



With just under a year left to commit EU funds, potential applicants are encouraged to come forward for a share of the £4.9million still available from the Highland LEADER Programme.

LEADER aims to promote economic and community development within rural areas and these awards demonstrate the diverse range of projects that can be supported. With just over a year left to commit LEADER funds and funding allocated on a first come, first served basis, we would encourage groups to get in touch now to discuss any project ideas. Funding is available for projects benefiting communities in mainland Highlands, the Small Isles and Skye, excluding Inverness and the Cairngorms National Park.

LEADER aims to promote economic and community development within rural areas. Individuals, groups, organisations and businesses can apply for funding towards a wide range of projects.

Projects already benefiting from LEADER funding

Funding for Rosemarkie

Rosemarkie Amenities Association is set to benefit from LEADER funding to develop and improve the area around the café and recreation area at Rosemarkie Beach. £37,985 was awarded towards the development of two tennis courts, one of which will be used as a multi-sports facility.

Anne Philips, Chair of Rosemarkie Amenities Association said:

“We also secured funding from the LEADER programme in 2012 to develop the café. The café has proved to be popular with the community and visitors and has allowed us to raise income towards developing the sports area. The new courts will be available all year-round and in addition to tennis, we plan to offer activities such as walking football, hockey and 5 aside football. We will also look to introduce new activities to meet local demand.”



Conservation of Dunbeath Broch

An award of £21,014 from LEADER is the last piece of the financial jigsaw required for a project which aims to conserve Dunbeath Broch in Caithness.

Dunbeath Broch is a Scheduled Monument and is the best preserved and most visited of several brochs in the Strath. However, the broch is in need of conservation works to slow or prevent deterioration of the structure and assure safe access.

Neil Buchanan, Chair of Berriedale & Dunbeath Community Council said:

“Dunbeath Strath provides a walk with a variety of interest and is popular with local people, the wider Caithness community and visitors to the area. The Strath is sheltered, picturesque, has a long and impressive history of human settlement and is rich



Photos from LEADER

in archaeological sites. The best known of these are brochs - tall imposing circular drystone towers built over 2000 years ago - some of the most remarkable structures ever built in Britain. Despite this richness very few Caithness brochs have been subject to modern excavation and dating and few are readily accessible or adequately presented."

Accommodation for Shieling Project

A social enterprise, based in Strathfarrar near Beauly, aims to engage people with the tradition of the shieling. The Shieling Project offers school trips, both day trips and residential, summer camps for children and adults, volunteering opportunities for adults, and has recently opened an outdoor nursery for 3 to 5 year olds.



Photo from LEADER

The Shieling Project Community Interest Company was awarded £61,975 to support the creation of accessible and sustainable accommodation at the project site, including six cabins and an accessible compost toilet building. This will support an increase in bookings the creation of new jobs, enabling longer term financial sustainability.

Projects in Sutherland

The Embo Trust, Strathnaver Museum and Sutherland Community Sports & Recreation Hub are among projects in Sutherland set to benefit from funding from the Highland LEADER Programme.

The Sutherland Local Area Partnership has approved funding of £247,578 to date and is encouraging potential applicants to come forward for a share of the remaining funds which must be committed by early 2019. The Local Area Partnership has recently increased the maximum grant available to £75,000 with applicants able to apply for up to 75% of project costs.

Sutherland Community Sports & Recreation Hub has been awarded LEADER funding of £31,217 towards the development of a multi-use games area in Golspie.



Photo from LEADER

The Embo Trust is also set to benefit from LEADER funding with an award of £30,534 to renovate the old school to create a village Community Hub with multi-purpose hall for activities and classes, community shop and outreach post office. The funding will help establish a commercial café/restaurant unit within the new centre. As well as proving employment and training opportunities, the income generated by the café will be essential for the long term sustainability of operating the centre.

Also benefiting from a funding boost of £29,349 is Strathnaver Museum. The Museum Trust is embarking on an ambitious project to redevelop the museum as a heritage hub for north west Sutherland.



Photo from LEADER

For further information about the Highland LEADER Programme please visit:

www.highlandleader.com

contact the Highland LEADER team on:

01463 702 548

or email: EU.Leader@highland.gov.uk



Photo by Andy Law

Funding for improvements at top tourist sites on Skye

The Fairy Pools, near the village of Carbost, are an increasingly popular tourist attraction in Skye. The water in the River Brittle running from the Black Cuillins is crystal clear and its waterfalls and pools provide a magical place to photograph and explore.

The pools are just over 2km walk from the car park which has been struggling to accommodate the increasing visitor numbers over the past couple of seasons.

A total of £600K is to be invested in the popular site of The Fairy Pools. £200K of Highland LEADER funding together with £100K from The Highland Council will go towards the first phase of improvement works at the Fairy Pools to provide enhanced infrastructure.

The Fairy Pools is also one of two sites on Skye being given

support from the new Scottish Government Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund which was set up to address notable rises in visitor numbers experienced by some of the most popular destinations in the Scottish countryside.



Photo by Colin Leslie

The Highland Council will receive up to £300,000 on behalf of the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland to develop visitor facilities, including toilets, at the Glenbrittle pools and waterfalls.

In early 2015 the Council established a project group for the Fairy Pools, the core members of this group being the Council, Forestry Commission Scotland, representatives from the Glenn Brittle residents, Minginish Community Council and Minginish Community Hall Association (MCHA). The Council has coordinated and chaired this group throughout. In addition to the £100k that the Council has committed to the car park construction, the Council has also spent in excess of £50k towards the cost of the options appraisal, topographical survey, feasibility study, design stage, project officer post for MCHA and path improvements.

Land at the Fairy Pools transferred from Forest Enterprise Scotland into local community ownership last year, and is now managed by the Minginish Community Hall Association, who will be working with Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland to develop, build and manage a substantially larger car park to cater for the increased visitor numbers due to the immense popularity of the site.

The site will be enhanced to provide increased parking for approximately 130 cars, with additional space for camper vans and tour buses, helping to reduce congestion in the area. Once constructed, car park income will sustain new jobs to manage, service, maintain and provide visitor information at the site. A proportion of the revenue generated by the car park will also be re-invested back into other community projects.

The Highland Council will also receive £100,000 from the Scottish Government Rural

Tourism Infrastructure Fund towards work to improve road access and parking at the Neist Point lighthouse, a landmark and view point at the western tip of the island.

The Neist Point grant will contribute towards road resurfacing and creating new parking spaces. Total costs will be £165,000 with the council covering the remaining costs.

The Quiraing is an area of spectacular landscape at the northernmost summit of the Trotternish Ridge on the Isle of Skye. The start of the walk is accessed from either of the villages of Staffin or Uig, which are joined by a single track road. It is a popular destination for tourists due to the remote location, stunning rugged scenery and expansive views.

Due to its increasing popularity, the single track roads and parking places are under significant pressure in the height of the

season. Local councillors and officers have been working in partnership with the local Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (SGRPID) office since 2016 to ease visitor management issues at the site. £100k from the (SGRPID) and £90K of Council funding will deliver £190k to provide a significant improvement to parking issues at the site which attracts thousands of visitors throughout the year.

Speaking on behalf of the local members, Councillor John Finlayson said:

“The positive outcomes that have been achieved are due largely to the proactive and collaborative approaches of all involved, which clearly show that if agencies work together in an open and transparent manner and have shared goals that benefit both the immediate local and also the wider Skye communities, successful outcomes will always be achieved.”

£129,970 for Glenelg Visitor Centre

Isle of Skye Ferry Community Interest Company (CIC) has successfully secured an award of £129,970 LEADER funding towards a new visitor centre in Glenelg.

The Ferry has been in community ownership for ten years and carries approximately 33,000 passengers a year between Glenelg and Kylerhea in the Isle of Skye. It currently operates from the Glenelg lighthouse, which has limited space. The new facility will include office and retail space and will allow the CIC to provide visitor information on wildlife, heritage and local tourism opportunities.

The Local Members and Highland Council Officers are committed to working in partnership with public agencies, land owners, tourism groups and communities to identify and support solutions that address tourism and infrastructure issues for the benefit of the local

hot spots and also the Ward as a whole.

Skye is an increasingly popular and unique island and it is important, that we meet the needs of the increasing number of tourists who come here, while at the same time also supporting the day to day life styles of our residents.



Photo by Cameron McMurdo

On location in the Highlands

The Highland Council's film unit has been extremely busy with record enquiries about filming in Highland. This reflects the level of appeal the region now has as a location for everything from blockbuster movies to online commercials.

Enquiries were already 19% ahead of the previous financial year even before what is traditionally the busiest period of production development in March.

Typically, around a third of enquiries convert into actual shoots, but this year over 40% have already commenced or concluded their production in Highland. This level of interest matches that from the 2008-2011 period which saw big name features such as Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Skyfall, The Dark Knight Rises, and Prometheus - all filmed in Highland.

As well as feature films including Edie, Mary Queen of Scots and Outlaw King being released in 2018, the Council's film unit has welcomed a range of projects that showcase travel and cuisine, such as Coastal Railways with Julie Walters (UK) and Delicious Destinations (USA).

Film and television productions, and increasingly shoots for newer media, are a significant contributor to the Highland economy. During a shoot, local businesses commonly benefit from cast and crew use of services such as accommodation, catering and vehicle hire, as well as employing local people in film specific roles. Those shoots that use the services of the Council's film unit to find local locations or services bring an estimated £2m to £4m per year, depending on the types and range of productions in a given year. Even long after a shoot, the area continues to benefit from visitors attracted by movies filmed in Highland. Research by Visit Scotland shows that, in key markets, as many as 16% of visitors were encouraged to visit after seeing Scotland on screen.



Photo by Deva Smith



Photo by Vikki McCraw

Amy Morement, Location Manager for LS Productions said:

"Shooting in the Highlands not only offers dramatic, classic Scottish landscapes, but also the most unique and varied locations. All of the local communities we have worked in have been incredibly receptive to filming and any visiting teams are left with a positive experience of filming in Scotland, from highly skilled local crews and brilliant Scottish-based facilities companies, to high-end accommodation and a breadth of locations you would often struggle to believe are in the UK, not to mention unforgettable memories! The film office also offers an invaluable service, offering in-depth local knowledge and support to make our shoots happen."

Highland schools star in FilmG Awards

The annual National Gaelic short film competition FilmG awards has celebrated 10 years of MG Alba's Gaelic short film competition.

The competition is open to all ages and aims to encourage grassroots Gaelic storytelling through film-making. More than 650 short films, including animations and sports commentaries, have been entered since FilmG was established.

Due to the success Gairloch High School enjoyed in the 2017 FilmG competition, FilmG launched their 2018 call for entries at Gairloch High last June. The theme chosen for FilmG 2018 was "firinn" meaning 'truth'.

There were 75 submissions from schools across Scotland of which 17 were from Highland schools: Alness Academy, Millburn Academy (2 entries), Mallaig High, Ardnamurchan High (2 entries), IRA, Gairloch High, Portree High (2 entries), Tain Royal Academy, Nairn Academy, Ullapool High, Lochaber High, Dingwall Academy, Plockton Primary, and Culloden Academy.

Anndra Cumming from Gairloch High scooped Best Sports Commentary Award. Eòin Cumming, also

from Gairloch High, who is Anndra's brother. Eòin took home Best Mobile Short Film. Portree High School took the Best Script award for their film "Fuaim a' Bhlàir".

Millburn Academy took the prize for Most Creative Production.

Lana Beaton from the Isle of Skye, a previous student of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and now studying BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Screen at Edinburgh Napier University, had an exceptional evening winning 2 awards – Best Performance and Best Student Film – for her film 'Coig Puing a Trì'. She also made it onto three short lists and won the People's Choice award as voted by the public on the FilmG website.

The Highland Council supported a major prize of the evening 'Mar a Thachair do Dh'fhear a Sgur a Dhol dhan Eaglais', by John Murdo MacAulay, Laura and Paul for their modern twist on a traditional tale.



Knoydart landslip



Photo by The Highland Council

There are nearly 7,000km of regional roads across the Highlands and many of these are life line routes connecting local communities with essential services.

One such route is a lifeline road for the communities of Aior, Doune and Sandaig on the Knoydart Peninsula. The road is on a very steep hillside with a sheer drop below. Following a landslip in the Autumn, every effort was made to get this affected section of single track road open to traffic for the Easter weekend.

There has been close liaison between the Council and the community, with every effort to minimise the disruption caused by this loss of essential road.

Following the failure, immediate steps were taken to re-establish pedestrian and quad bike access, and this has been maintained throughout the works. An early action was also to reinstate the power lines that were severed during the landslip.

There were specific challenges to carry out the necessary survey work safely and find the best engineering solution, as well as working in the winter conditions, and getting materials to site in this remote part of the Highlands.

The rock faces had to be stabilised, and the slope excavated with foundations prepared at the toe of the slope to allow the reconstruction of the embankment and reinstatement of the road.



Photo by The Highland Council

Modern apprenticeship programme

The Highland Council's Modern Apprenticeship Programme currently provides employment and training for over 50 apprentices. Offering opportunities for new and existing employees in a wide range of occupations, the programme includes Graduate Apprenticeships as well as Modern Apprenticeships over 2 to 4 years, using the very best training provision locally and across Scotland.



L-R Mechanic apprentices Scott Matheson (22) based in Inverness, Michael Black (20) based in Dingwall and Jon Hutchinson (26) also based in Inverness, and apprentice joiners Ally Macleod (24) and Cameron Davidson (18) both based in Inverness.

Scottish Living Wage .

Significant work continues towards the expansion of the Modern Apprenticeships Programme in the coming 2018/19 financial year.

Ally, an apprentice joiner, who hails from Skye, said:

"We are working in general building and maintenance and some of the work is quite specialist which gives us the opportunity to get these specialist skills."

Apprentice mechanic Scott added:

"It is really good to get valuable skills and licenses, like forklift driving and I'm working towards an HGV license."

Michael Black, from Alness started in October 2016 as a 4-year apprentice mechanic. He said:

"The Council is a great employer with good pay and good opportunities."

The apprentices are all hoping for permanent job opportunities at the end of their apprenticeships.



Lauren Ubych and Bryony McDiarmid

Photos by The Highland Council

Modern apprentices in Business and Admin Support, Lauren Ubych (18) from Tain and Bryony McDiarmid (18) from Cawdor. Lauren and Bryony both started 18-month apprenticeships in October 2017, based at HQ in Inverness.

Lauren, who is based in Operational Support, said:

"I am looking to get experience in different sectors. I enjoy learning new skills and working at the same time and the office hours are good. My work is mainly dealing with Council tax and benefits forms."

Bryony says:

"I am based in E-Planning, dealing with processing building warrants and planning applications and some minute-taking. We are doing SVQs as part of the apprenticeship as well as gaining valuable experience."

Reflecting on ambitions for the future, Bryony added:

"I am going for the Chief Executive's job – you may as well aim for the highest."

Working in partnership with Service managers throughout the Council, opportunities are being developed all the time across the Highlands and in a wide range of occupations to support service delivery.

By the end of April, apprentices will be employed in Business Administration, Civil Engineering, Early Years Child Care, Painting and Decorating, Carpentry and Joinery, Plumbing, Electricals, Mechanics, and Information Technology. These apprenticeships are provided in Dingwall, Inverness, Fort William, Golspie, Alness, Wick, Thurso, Dornoch and Portree. All apprentices in The Highland Council are paid a minimum of

If you are interested in an apprenticeship with The Highland Council, keep an eye on:

MyJobScotland:
www.myjobscotland.gov.uk

Apprenticeships.Scot:
www.apprenticeships.scot

and Hi-Hope:
www.hi-hope.org

The team can be contacted on email at:
THCMA.Centre@highland.gov.uk

Apprentice Day for Highland Youth Parliament Members

The 12th annual Highland Youth Parliament (HYP) Apprentice Day was held on 20th March.

On this day, members of HYP shadow Senior Managers and Elected Members across public sector services. Apprentice Day provides an opportunity to give young people a better understanding of the services provided for them and how services impact on and consult with young people.

This year 26 young people from across Highland 'shadowed' 29 representatives from a wide range of public sector organisations including; High Life Highland, The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Police Scotland, Fire and Rescue Service Scotland, the University of the Highlands and Islands, Scottish

Natural Heritage, HM Prison Service and Highland Third Sector Interface.

Highland Youth Parliament Chair, Joanna Shillaker commented:

"Apprentice Day is a great opportunity for young people to gain insight into how services in Highland operate. In the Year of Young People, it also gives the apprentices, young people, the opportunity to raise their voices on what they like about services and how they can be improved and connect more with young people. I'm sure the day will also inspire young people about their future careers. I am looking forward to shadowing the HM Prison Governor, Stephen Coyle to find out what happens in a prison and how prisoners are supported. I hope everyone has a great day!"

The day is organised by High Life Highland's Youth Services team.

Photo L-R: Chief Executive Steve Barron with young apprentices, Rowan Henderson and Rachel Hatfield, Convener, Bill Lobban and Leader, Margaret Davidson.



S'no problem for Syd!

A former Youth Trainee from Gairloch has been busy behind the wheel of a snow plough keeping routes across Wester Ross open this winter.

Syd Tippett (aged 19) joined The Highland Council's Roads Maintenance Team at the Gairloch depot in June last year as a Youth Trainee. As part of Syd's development the Council's Employability team funded him to attend a Cat C driving course (HGV) which has led him to take up a full-time position with the local Roads Team.

Staff from the Council's Employability team, and his Community Services colleagues, have also supported Syd to attend Highlands and Islands fire training so he now also has a role as a retained trainee fire fighter and is on stand-by for call outs within his own community.

Syd's Supervisor Laura MacAllister said:

"Syd has become a valuable addition to the staff and the injection of youth has portrayed a need to attract a younger generation into the workforce."



Photo by The Highland Council

Highland gritter driver to the rescue



Photo by Ewen Weatherspoon

A member of The Highland Council's winter roads maintenance team has been praised for his quick actions in rescuing a driver whose car had plunged down an embankment and landed in a stream.

A motorist from Newcastle was driving along the B9007 near Ferness, south of Nairn on the 28th December in snowy conditions, when his car went off the road and down a steep embankment.

Although he was able to contact emergency services to tell them about the accident he was not able to give them details of his location.

Luckily for him, gritter driver Derek Reid from Nairn spotted the car skid tracks and stopped to investigate. He was able to scramble down the slope and reach the man who was trapped in his car, then confirmed the location of the accident to the emergency services and stayed with him until they arrived.

Derek Reid was presented with a Quaich at the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee and thanked for his quick actions in coming to the aid of the motorist.

Chair of the Committee, Councillor Allan Henderson said:

"Derek demonstrated above and beyond public service when he came to the rescue and we wanted to thank him for his quick actions."

A modest Derek said:

"I only did what any of my colleagues would have done. Coming to the assistance of drivers, especially in the winter, is something we all do, so I see this presentation and thanks not just for me but all my colleagues."

Double success brings new marina at Corpach closer to fruition

The Highland Council has been awarded a £1,465,000 Regeneration Capital Grant Fund grant for a new marina on Loch Linnhe at the entrance to the Caledonian Canal at Corpach. The grant is awarded to The Highland Council on behalf of the Caol Regeneration Company, who are developing the Thomas Telford Corpach Marina as a community project.

Thomas Telford Corpach Marina secured the Marine Licences in January for the dredging and construction works necessary to construct the new marina. The project will deliver a high quality and sustainable all-year round marina facility at the Western gateway to the Caledonian Canal, including 40 yacht berths; comprehensive marina services and facilities such as fuel bunkering, waste disposal, laundry, toilets and showers; a public slipway; car parking; and a café/shop/visitor centre.

The aims of the project are to stimulate regeneration within the communities of Caol and Corpach, neighbouring Fort William, and the wider Lochaber area, and generate significant economic and social benefits.

The marina will be owned by the community, through the Caol Regeneration Company, a registered charity, and will be run as a community enterprise, with other 3rd sector organisations operating the café/shop/visitor centre and providing some of the marina services.

Working in partnership with The Highland Council, Scottish Canals and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the project is expected to start on site this summer and will be complete in the spring of 2019.



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Times table chromebook craze sweeps schools

Such is the pupil enthusiasm for using Chromebooks, that a craze for learning times tables (with the use of an App) has swept through the 2 associated primary school groups of Millburn and Dingwall Academies.

The craze sweeping the Primary 4 to 7 pupils is directly improving the speed that children know their times tables. And pupils and teachers are delighted that they can monitor their learning progress.

The Chromebook rollout is leading the way in Scotland and creating great leadership opportunities for pupils through the creation of digital leaders.

Digital Leaders (pupils) from Inshes Primary Riley MacKintosh, Krisha Aryal and Raigmore Primary Anna Watson and Mackenzie Smith gave an impressive presentation to councillors at a recent committee on their experiences of using Chromebooks while demonstrating their skills of using Google Slides.

The pupils explained how using



Photo: (Left to right) Digital Leaders (pupils) from Inshes Primary Riley MacKintosh, Krisha Aryal and Raigmore Primary Anna Watson and Mackenzie Smith with their Teachers – give their presentation to The Highland Council.

Photo by The Highland Council

Chromebooks made learning fun. Their use of various Apps helped them with their classwork; allowed them to communicate between schools; improved their spelling, numeracy and literacy; and saved them time by not having to “put their hands up to ask” and wait for help, when assistance from spell checkers and voice typing provides independent learning support.

Pupils and teachers are now able to track their learning attainment, and they are improving their awareness of e-safety.

Colour-coded reports help pupils

assess their progress in learning and highlight, with help from their teachers, where they could make improvements.

The rollout of around 22,000 Chromebooks is on a phased basis over 2 years, across the Council’s 29 associated school groups. To date, Chromebooks have been rolled out to Millburn and Dingwall Academies ASGs, with the rollout to Portree ASG currently underway. The next phase of schools starts with Kinlochleven ASG.

Sports Leadership Awards

The Highland Council Gaelic Team in partnership with High Life Highland secured funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig to deliver a week long Gaelic Medium Residential Sports Leadership Award course which took place at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic College in Skye.



Daniel Steele Active Schools Co-ordinator for High Life Highland delivered the week long course through the medium of Gaelic, which gave the young people a total coaching immersion experience in Gaelic and supported an ethos of peer learning.

Fifteen young people in Secondary schools from Mallaig, Ardnamurchan, Plockton, Portree, Dingwall and Inverness completed the SCQS Level 4 in Sports Leadership Award Course in Gaelic.

The Leadership Award initiative is one of the enabling actions within the Council’s Gaelic Language Plan.

Culloden Academy pupil is 1 in a 1,000

A fourth year pupil at Culloden Academy in Inverness has been selected to be one of only 1,000 girls worldwide to take part in a Global STEM Alliance.

The "1000 Girls, 1000 Futures" initiative is designed to engage young women interested in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM), and advance their pursuit of STEM careers through mentoring and skills development.

Rachael Taylor will be assigned a female international mentor who is dedicated to supporting her development in STEM subjects. She will be offered the chance to engage in online courses and activities that develop her leadership, communication, and critical thinking skills.

The program also includes a college-readiness-component to encourage mentees to pursue higher education. All work is done through a virtual platform, facilitating interaction among students and mentors across the globe.

In the summer of 2019, Rachael will be invited to go to New York City for the annual Global STEM Alliance summit, where she'll have the chance to network with STEM experts, their mentors, and their peers, in addition to

participating in workshops and unique STEM-related experiences.

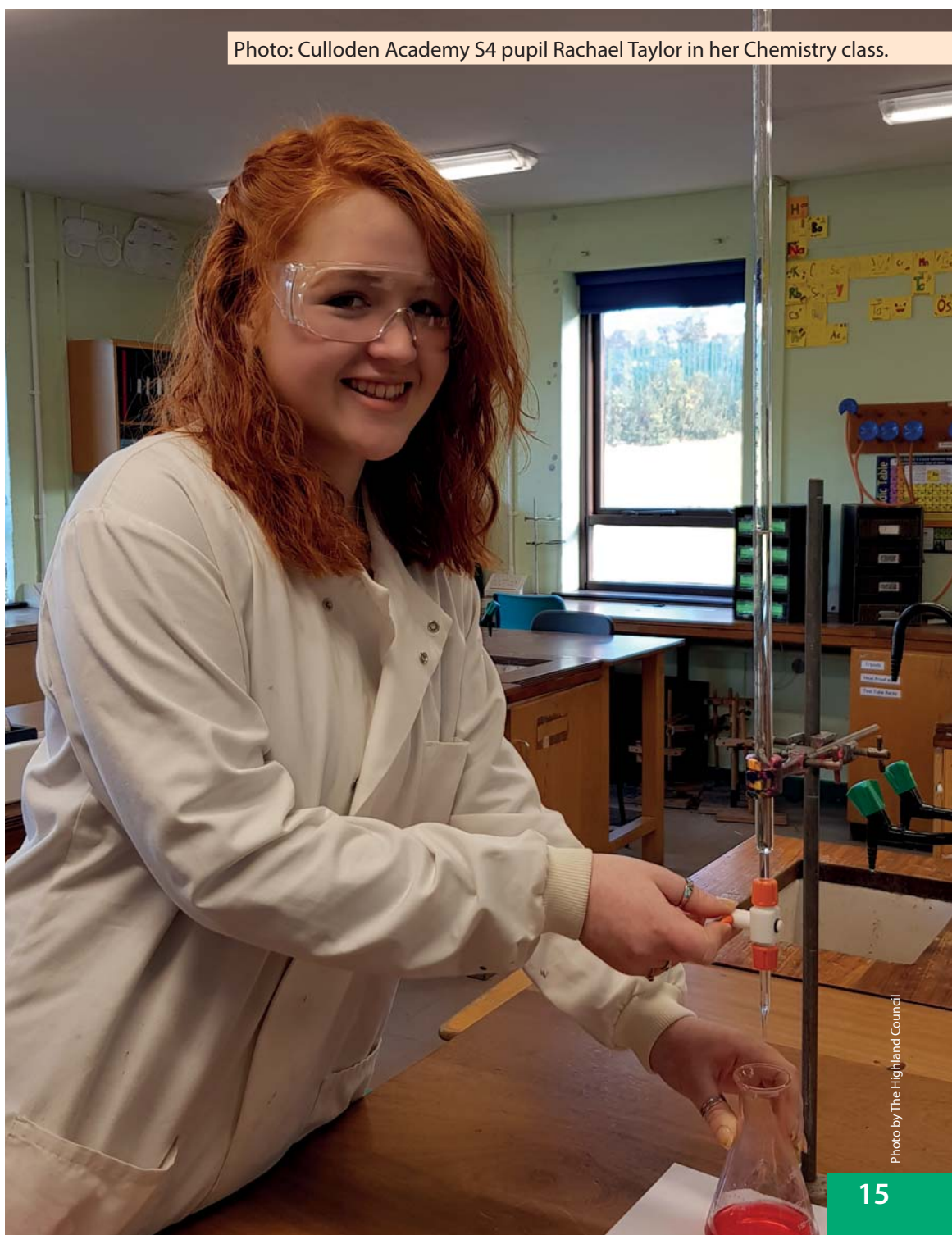
Tracey Lomas, Depute Head Teacher of Culloden Academy said:

"Well done to Rachael, we are very proud, and absolutely thrilled that she has been selected onto the 1000 Girls, 1000 Futures programme by the New York Academy of Sciences."

The programme is for girls aged 13 -18 years old currently enrolled in high school who are enthusiastic about STEM subjects and links them up with women working in STEM, across all disciplines and sectors, who are willing to act as mentors, coaches, and role models.

For further information on the 1000 Girls, 1000 Futures programme visit: www.nyas.org/1000girls

Photo: Culloden Academy S4 pupil Rachael Taylor in her Chemistry class.



Thousands turn out to see Town House transformation

Over three thousand people visited Inverness Town House over a weekend in February to see for themselves the completion of interior works on the historic Grade A listed building following recent renovations.

Around 2,000 visitors passed through the Town House doors on Saturday 10th and another 1,200 people on Sunday 11th February.

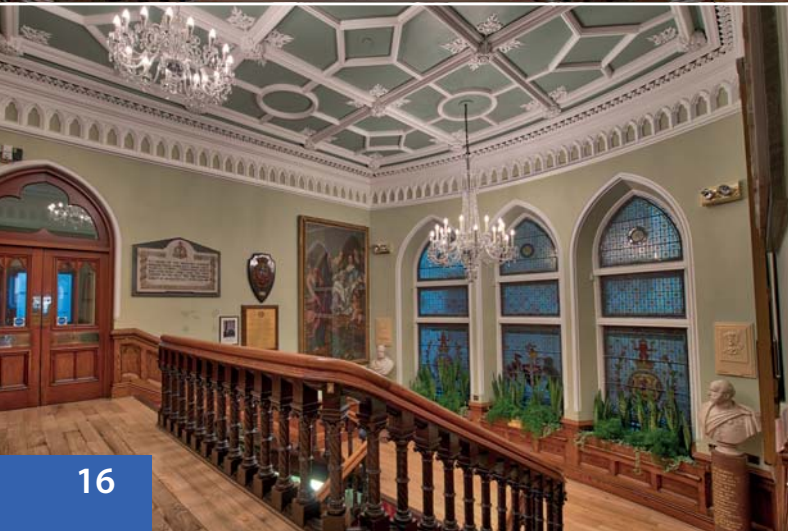
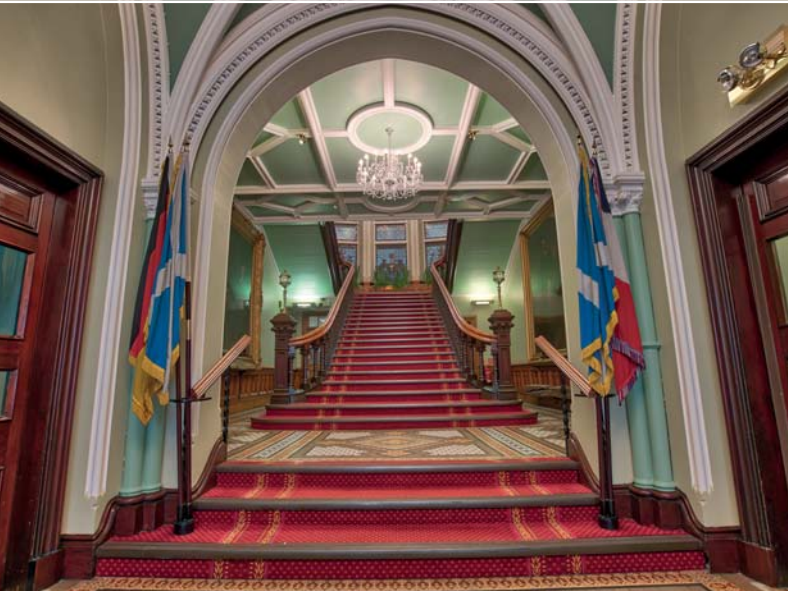
For many years the Town House has participated in the annual national Doors Open Days scheme, but this was the first time the public had a chance to see the Town House in all its glory following an extensive £3.9m refurbishment.

The Town House renovation works carried out by Laing Traditional Masonry were on time and £300k under budget. The cost for Phase 1 and 2 was £3.9m, funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund and Historic Environment Scotland.

Phase 3 of the works will include full stone repairs and replacement, mortar re-pointing, guttering and window repairs and replacement. This final phase will deliver the completion of the Town House at a total cost to the Common Good Fund in the region of £5.4 million.

Plans are in place to open the Town House for tours during the tourist season, through High Life Highland.

All Town House photos by Walter Geddes Pastime Photography



Funding for new homes across the Highlands



The Highland Council has agreed to use City-Region Deal funding to part fund new mid-market housing projects throughout the Highlands.

The affordable housing projects will be developed by Albyn Housing Society and Highland Housing Alliance in Ullapool, Fort William, Alness, Inverness, Aviemore, Grantown, Drumnadrochit and Newtonmore and will deliver 61 new affordable homes for young people to help retain a young workforce in the area.

The new homes will be let at mid-market rates - approximately 80% of the average rate charged by private landlords in the area. Those being developed by Albyn Housing Society will be leased by its subsidiary, Highland Residential, which specialises in providing mid-market tenancies.

All 61 new homes are expected to be completed by the end of 2019. They include 8 units in Alness, 4 in Aviemore, 25 in Inverness, 6 in Fort William, 8 in Grantown, 4 in Newtonmore, and 6 in Ullapool.

They follow on from the 5 homes already underway in Drumnadrochit which are also funded by the Highland city-region deal. Work on site started in November last year with the 5 homes forming the first phase of an overall wider housing development which includes 23 homes for social rent, including community care housing), and 4 for low cost home ownership.



Further projects in other areas of the Highlands are planned and the Council and our partners are on target to deliver 750 new mid-market homes over the next 10 year period.

Six houses suitable for wheelchair users have been completed in Inverness. This development on Old Edinburgh Road comprises 4 semi-detached single storey houses and two bungalows, each designed to incorporate maximum accessibility and cater for individual needs. The project was commissioned, designed and managed in house by The Highland Council's Development and Infrastructure Service. O'Brien Properties carried out the construction. Tenants have settled into all the homes and are finding the excellent facilities are making a real difference to their lives.

Future bright with income from solar energy

The Highland Council is to progress with plans to generate over £4 million profit and significantly reduce its carbon emissions by installing solar panels across its estate.

Solar Photovoltaics, or Solar PV for short, is a technology that converts daylight into electrical power. Energy generated will be 'sold' to power Council buildings in close proximity.

Net profit can be achieved each

year for the anticipated 20-year lifespan of the panels. It will also reduce the organisation's annual carbon footprint by an estimated 1,000 tonnes per year.

The self-financing project using £2.3 million of capital will install 2.5 megawatts of solar panels on sites across the Council estate. The portfolio is estimated to generate net profit of £4.01 million over the course of 20 years. This is after repayments for the £2.3 million investment have been made, and accounting

for maintenance, insurance, fees and charges.

The Council is committed to looking at new ways to generate income, make savings and become more commercial. It is hoped that this will be the first of multiple projects to generate income by from renewable energy on the Council estate. Solar has been selected for the first project as it is most efficient for the desired time scales, relatively straightforward to deploy, reliable, and market proven.



More projects benefit from participatory budget events

People in communities across the Highlands have been putting their votes to good use in awarding funding to local groups. Participatory budgeting is a process of allocating funding by empowering local people to decide how funding should be spent.

Tain and Easter Ross projects share £15,000

11, out of the 32 projects bidding, won a share of £15,000 community funding in the Tain and Easter Ross Ward.

Members of the public voted after listening to all the applicants who were given a 4 minute slot to talk about their projects and their plans for using the funding.

The successful bids voted for by the audience are as follows:

- Tain & District Development Trust - Community Market for Tain and District - £1,500
- Tain Task Force for floral displays - £1,500
- Tain Amateur Swimming Club - £1,500
- Tain & District Museum for flyers and signs - £1,097
- Tain Gala Association for the purchase and renovation of portacabins into toilets - £1,070
- St Duthus Special School for outdoor improvements - £1,500
- Tain and Easter Ross Civic Trust for Tain Picture House Regeneration Project - £1,500
- 1st St Duthus Scout Group for Scout Hall makeover - £1,500
- Inver Toddler Group - £1,500
- Seaboard Memorial Hall for Gopak Go - £1,500
- Tain and District Youth Café YMCA for Holiday Meals project - £1,250

£10,000 awarded in Kyle Let's Decide

Kyle Community Council area locals had the chance to cast their votes in March 2018 at the first ever 'Kyle Let's Decide' participatory budgeting event held in the Lighthouse Centre, and as a result a wide range of community projects are now set to benefit.

Around 60 people took part in deciding which projects should be supported from the £10,000 funding pot. £4,000 was made available by the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Councillors from their Ward Discretionary Budget and this was boosted by £6,000 from the Scottish Government Community Choices fund.

A total of 5 out of the 9 projects put forward by community groups have been successful and will now receive funding to help them put their ideas into action.

The successful bids were:

- Kyle Parent Council - Talking, Learning and Leisure Playground Upgrade - £2,000
- Lochalsh Youth Community Trust - Just a Habit? Diversionary Youth Work - £1,940
- Lochalsh Leisure Centre - Family Fun Hour - £2,000
- Lochalsh Junior Pipe Band - LJPB Succession Band - £2,000
- Kyle Public Hall - A Hall Fit for All Accessibility Improvements - £2,000



Photo by The Highland Council

Budget 2018/19

The Revenue Budget for 2018/19 was agreed at Council on 15th February 2018.

The Administration prioritised education, roads and winter maintenance, protecting these areas from savings cuts. Impact assessments were carried out for all proposals to ensure savings chosen had the least possible impact on service users.

Overall, the budget gap of £15.146 million has been met by a package of savings which includes increasing Council Tax income by £3.448 million, increasing income by £3.059 million, reducing expenditure by making savings of £5.1 million, and setting a target of £2.250 million to be saved through Redesign. Read the budget papers at:

www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3934/highland_council

Council Tax

Council Tax will increase by 3% in 2018/19 which will mean an increase of £35.93 per annum on a Band D property. Find out more about Council Tax; fact sheets; and help that is available to reduce your council tax if you are on a low income on our website:

www.highland.gov.uk/counciltax

Increasing income

To avoid making cuts to some services, the Council agreed to increase income by charging more for some services or fees, or charging for things which previously were free, such as parking and garden waste charges.

Fees and Charges for Waste and other Services will increase and a minimum fee of £1 for first period of parking will be introduced at all locations and there will be an uplift of all Parking Permits Fees by 5%. Parking charges will be introduced in more council car parks over the coming year. The Council operates 96 public conveniences and 28 comfort schemes across the Highlands. A charge of 50p will be introduced at a further 10 of these sites and a widening of the comfort scheme. Details are on our website.

The Council will seek to increase advertising income from its assets such as roundabouts and lamppost banners. Find out more about how to advertise your business with us at the link below. There is also a plan to set up a new MOT test centre for Council vehicles and taxis.

www.highland.gov.uk/advertising

Reducing expenditure

There will be a continued reduction in management posts across the Council and streamlining of services and administration costs where possible, such as out of hours call handling. We have also reduced our travel and subsistence costs, training budgets and insurance premiums.

Ward discretionary budgets have been halved, still allowing money for local initiatives and Community Council grants have been cut by around 50%. A number of Community Councils have access to other sources of income and some also have significant reserves. There will also be a reduction in funding to other organisations.

The Council has 435 play areas and rationalising the number and maintenance of these will save over £200,000. There will be opportunities for communities to have an increased role in managing these.

Savings will be made to flood risk work and flood alleviation. Any works identified through watercourse inspections will need to be funded through Area Roads budgets, or if significant, through the capital programme.

Around 50 posts have been deleted to help make the savings, without the need for redundancies. This is around 0.5% of the total staff numbers. Many of these posts are vacant posts which have been deleted and redeployment is possible for others.

Redesign

The Council's Redesign Programme aims to make improvements and find efficiencies by finding different or better ways of doing things. Thousands of pounds have already been saved in redesigning some services. Find out more about Redesign:

www.highland.gov.uk/redesign

Trading Standards take delivery surcharging to House of Commons

Internet delivery surcharging is one of the biggest problems facing Highland consumers and the Council's Trading Standards team receive a number of new complaints every week.

Typical issues are the unfairness of high surcharges, false claims like "free mainland delivery" and refusals to deliver to the more remote areas.

Trading Standards' approach is to combine taking action to change the practices of website operators with an ongoing campaign in the media and with policy-makers to improve the situation for Highlanders.

The latest development is an investigation by the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee and the Council's Trading Standards Manager David MacKenzie gave evidence at a public meeting to put the Highland case.



Consumers can report unfair delivery issues: www.highland.gov.uk/info/20000/trading_standards/196/buying_goods_online

View the evidence session on Parliament TV: <http://bit.ly/2HkEzYo>

Find the written evidence supplied: <http://bit.ly/2He3rA0>

Help is available to reduce Council Tax charges

Help is available for low income households, including home-owners, to apply for help to reduce their Council Tax. Eligible households can receive up to 100% reduction from their Council Tax which means that those households who receive the full reduction will only have to pay their Scottish Water and wastewater charges. Currently around 17,135 households in the Highlands are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

For a Band D property, 100% reduction is equivalent to £1,233.82 for 2018/19. Households can quickly check whether they are eligible for these reductions by completing the Council's innovative 'Apply Once' online application form which is available at the following link:

www.highland.gov.uk/applyonce

This form will automatically identify any other entitlements that are administered by the Council based on the individual circumstances of the applicant. Applicants supply their details only once and the Council will put into payment all entitlements that are legitimately payable. There are Council Tax Fact Sheets on our website that provide more information about Council Tax and the various reductions that are available for many people including home owners.

www.highland.gov.uk/counciltax

The Welfare Support Team can be contacted by phoning: **0800 090 1004** or by emailing: welfare.support@highland.gov.uk

Alternatively, customers can visit our Service Points where staff can also provide assistance or local Citizens Advice Bureaux can provide support and advice regarding benefits, housing and money.

Council commends Internal Auditor appointment

Josh Gallimore has been appointed to the post of Assistant Auditor with The Highland Council following his successful completion of final exams to become a Chartered Internal Auditor (CMIIA) with the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors.



Josh was a Trainee Auditor with the Council prior to this appointment.

Cllr Richard Laird, Chair of the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee congratulated Josh while presenting him with his CMIIA certificate at a meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee (on 28th March 2018), he said:

"I have the pleasure of presenting Mr Gallimore with his certificate; this is excellent news that the Council has been able to support the professional development of staff enabling Josh to complete his professional qualifications. This is a win-win-situation both for Josh and the Council."

Photo by The Highland Council

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How did we do?

Measuring our performance

An annual report of Corporate Performance is prepared each autumn for the previous financial year. This is an assessment of Council performance against the commitments set out in the Council's Programme and its performance framework.

You can find the report at:

www.highland.gov.uk/performance

The period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 shows good progress with 89% of the commitments (64 out of 72) being completed, on target or where performance is being maintained, the same as the previous year.

Community Engagement and Empowerment

The Commission on Highland Democracy spoke with communities across Highland about how to improve local democracy. The final report published in December 2017 is on our website: www.highlanddemocracy.wordpress.com

Community Partnerships have been established in nine communities across Highland, developing local plans for children's and adult health and social care services, and for communities facing the greatest disadvantage. The Council is one of five partners leading on community planning with Police, Fire, NHS Highland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Participatory budgeting (PB), where communities are involved in allocating public money, has continued to develop across Highland. In 2016/17, these events were held in seven areas, 2,496 people participated and £155,200 was allocated to local groups. You can read about recent events on page 18.

A Fairer Highland

In 2016/17, 15,248 customers accessed money and welfare benefits advice, an increase of 35.7% from 11,240 customers in the previous year. We increased the financial benefit to customers from the advice given by the Council from £4.0m in 2015/16 to £4.65m in 2016/17. The Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) receives funding from the Council to provide money advice on our behalf.

To support independent living in 2016/17 we developed a "one stop" delivery model, using the Handyperson Service to deliver Repairs and Adaptations, along with Telecare installations and maintenance (on the behalf of NHS Highland). This speeds up the process, minimising duplication and ensuring that clients get the benefit of a suite of services from a single Handyperson visit. We are looking to include adaptation stores management within the service, better integrating the range of services on offer. We received a COSLA Quality Award for this service.

Economy

The most recent data for Highland tourism shows growth of almost 7% from 2015 to 2016. Other tourism data such as “visitor attraction visits” indicates that the rate of growth in Highland is exceeding the national rate. Two major international events were supported in 2016/17 – The World Orienteering Championships which brought around £9m to Highland and Moray, and the Fort William Mountain Bike World Cup which generated £2.8m. Our film tourism is also growing significantly – see page 8.

The Highland LEADER programme was launched in May 2016 with EU funding and the first projects were approved in November. There are currently 14 projects with grants committed of £463,694 (total project costs just under £1.1m). Read more about Leader funded projects on page 4.

The Inverness Castle Viewing platform was completed and opened during April 2017 and has had a very successful first year with nearly 30,000 visitors.



Photo by Ewen Weatherspoon

Digital and Connectivity

We welcomed the Scottish Government commitment to ensure that 100% of premises across Scotland will have superfast broadband (>30MB/s) by the end of 2021. We continue to work closely with all partners to ensure that this objective is met in the Highlands.

Our Digital First programme provides an increasing range of services online with 42% of Council services being available online by March 2017, ahead of a target of 40%. We have successfully moved the majority of our customer contact to on-line via the website which has delivered savings and been positively received by customers.

The first part of the Wi-Fi project in Inverness was successfully implemented with the roll-out across Inverness in the summer of 2017. The free service is being expanded to a further 14 towns in Highland this spring.

Supported by Citizens Online, we led the Digital Highland project between September 2015 and November 2016. This focused on digital skills and digital participation across the Highlands, giving training to 850 people and thousands of other people were supported informally at drop in events and through partner organisations. The project also recruited 144 digital champions across the Highlands, surpassing the target of 30.

Infrastructure

We published our Local Flood Risk Management Plans in June 2016. These prioritise the actions we will take up to 2022. This plan includes the progression of three flood schemes at Caol, Smithton and Culloden, and the River Enrick at Drumnadrochit. Scottish Government grant funding (at an intervention rate of 80%), has been secured for these.

During 2016/17 a further 435 council houses were built, bringing the total to 1,028 against a target to achieve 688 by March 2017. We are developing, along with Albyn Housing Society, NHS Highland, The Highland Hospice and the private sector, a pilot project in Alness which will deliver a cluster of sustainable and digitally enabled homes.

Extensive engagement by the Council with the Marine Coastguard Agency secured the retention of a single Emergency Towing Vehicle (ETV). This will travel throughout the waters of the Highlands and Islands in response to assessments of risk arising from the types of vessels and cargoes transiting the waters and also predicted weather patterns.

779 new homes were constructed in Highland in 2016/17, out of a total of 4,308 new homes built between 2012/13 and 2016/17, less than our target of 5,000. We continue to provide a generous supply of viable housing land across Highland, identified within the three local development plans.

We administer the Scottish Government Home Energy Efficiency Programme (HEEPS-ABS) in Highland for home insulation. We receive the relevant funds as an annual award, and use this to lever in additional funding from the energy supplier through the Energy Company Obligations (ECO). The programme for 2016/17 focused on Caithness, Fort William, Aird & Loch Ness, Gairloch, Mallaig and Applecross and a total of 344 homes received insulation.

An aim of the Inverness Townscape Heritage Project (2015-2020) is to bring vacant floor space back into use. Our team continue to work with owners to explore possible uses for properties on Academy Street and encourage building repair grant applications.

We have also been successful in securing a £1.2m grant from the Scottish Government for the Midmills Creative Hub.

A Market Manager has been recruited as a result of the action plan prepared by the Victorian Market Stakeholder Group.

Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal



Our Winter issue of Highpoints covered the completion and opening of the Inverness West Link and Canal Parks Enhancement Stage 1 which was started in May 2016. This issue of Highpoints celebrates the Royal opening of the Highland Rugby Club in March 2018. Stage 2 will provide the second swing bridge across the canal, a new roundabout and relocated tie in to General Booth Road. This is on target and due to commence in Spring 2019. The new 18 hole Torvean Golf Course, clubhouse and maintenance buildings are being built in two phases, which commenced in August 2016.



Photo by Alison Gilbert

Due to existing traffic issues, works were undertaken on two of the approaches to Inshes Roundabout to improve the flow of traffic, completed in April 2016.

Transport Scotland is currently developing proposals for the East Link (A9-A96 link road), with three routes and options still under consideration.

For more information on upcoming projects please visit:
www.highland.gov.uk/cityregiondeal

Children and Young People

We continue to explore new ways of delivering Early Years provision. Early level (combining nursery and P1) continues to have a positive impact. From 2017/18 there are 53 local authority nurseries providing flexible early learning and childcare. We will continue to adjust the amount of staff we have as these nurseries expand to ensure they provide flexible services. We are also considering options for phasing in more additional hours to meet the 2020 target of 1140 hours of free early learning and childcare. We are focused on providing high quality, flexible, accessible and affordable services. Parents are able to purchase additional hours over the 600 hours funded by the Scottish Government.

To encourage young people to consider employment in child care, there are college programmes on offer to school pupils to complete whilst staying on at school. These courses are offered across all three college areas in Highland providing Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) progression from level 4 to level 7. There is increasing demand for level 4 & 5 courses in Early Education and Childcare with 151 places taken up last year – an increase of 50% on the previous year. Highland colleges also offer Foundation Apprenticeship courses in: Social Services & Childcare and Children & Young People. Information and taster events are organised through the NHS programme with a focus on Health, Education, Child & Social careers.

Helping young people develop skills for the workplace remains a high priority for schools. The implementation of the Developing Young Workforce initiative has renewed the focus on these skills. These skills are now developed from a much earlier stage. Primary schools are beginning to build them into their core curriculum delivery. The development of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as well as language skills remains a high priority for Highland. Improvements are being delivered through the STEM initiative where Highland has claimed additional resources to improve development in primary schools.

We aim to increase consultation and engagement with Looked After Children. The Highland CHAMPS board (a regular meeting between care experienced young people and senior officers from organisations with corporate parenting responsibilities) has been in place for some time and is being reviewed to see if any changes are required. The one stop shop for care experienced young people was completed in autumn 2017. This facility in Inverness acts as a base for young people to obtain advice and support and to meet with other young people.

The percentage of young people from Highland going from school to positive destinations has increased once again to 95.5% for 2016-17.

Over the past 6 years, the percentage of senior phase school leavers (in the Highland Council area) in any positive initial destination have increased year on year from 91.2% in 2011-12.

Of the 2,411 senior phase Highland school leavers in 2016-17, 36% went into higher education; 24% into further education; 31% into employment; 2% training; 2% activity agreements; 1% entered voluntary work; 1% were seeking employment, and 1% were unemployed (not seeking) while for 2% destinations were not known.

What did our survey tell us?

The Highland Council's annual Performance and Attitudes survey is used to gauge levels of satisfaction with Council services.

Every year the Council surveys members of its Citizens' Panel, which is randomly selected and designed to be representative of the adult population. This year we received 955 responses from a possible 2,340 panel members, including 491 electronically, providing a 40.8% response rate. While the Citizens' Panel membership is balanced, the profile of survey respondents is less so and as a consequence the survey responses are less

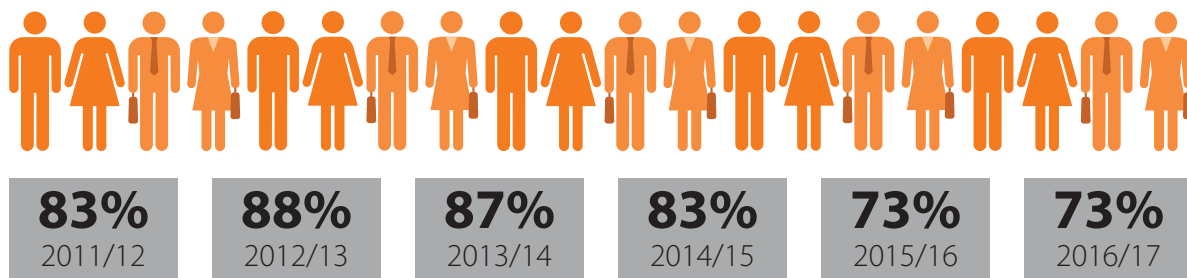
representative of young people's views. To help address this a shorter survey of core questions using social media targeting 16-34 year olds was run in parallel to the main survey. This was extremely successful and secured 357 responses.

Maintaining good quality local services is the quality valued the most by most people. The Council's ability to sustain levels of service is severely challenged by the financial position. The Council will use the results to understand the extent to which the relationship between the Council and its public has to change given our

budget context. As services are redesigned, cut back or stopped we will expect communities to do more for themselves and in their communities.

Overall satisfaction with Council services

73% of the panel say they were satisfied overall with Council services in 2016/17 compared to 73% in 2015/16. For those surveyed aged 16-34 years the response rate falls to 34.6%. However the approach to surveying this group needs to be considered in reviewing the results due to the self-selecting nature of the social media responses.



Council qualities

We ask questions on the qualities people feel are important about their Council.

We have used these to help understand what matters to people about how their Council behaves as well as what it achieves. This year we added four new qualities to test the mood on the new redesign values of: *challenging; open to ideas; empowering; and participating.*

Overall results in this section include:

- 64% of the panel believe the Council meets or exceeds their general expectations, (57% the

previous year). This compares to 26.6% of those aged 16-34 (social media responses).

- Ranking of qualities in order of importance is noted below. The top three are the same for

the main survey and that of the younger age group. Notably only 16% of the younger age group (social media responses) thought efficiency was important compared to 47% below.

Qualities as ranked in order of importance by respondents in 2017 survey	Respondents mentioning Quality in their top 5		
	(2017) %	(2016) %	(2015) %
1. Maintains good quality local services	75	75	68
2. Provides value for money	57	60	54
3. Listens to local people	54	61	62
4. Is efficient	47	46	38
5. Treats all residents fairly	38	34	35

Community Life

The panel were asked to rate a range of issues with key results including:

77% feel we have strengthened the profile of the Gaelic language to a great or some extent (76% in 2015/16).

Community safety - the top 3 areas of concern remain as road safety (85%), alcohol abuse (66%) and drug misuse (63%).

When asked about awareness of the impact that hate incidents or crimes have on people in Highland 72.7% said they were aware (70.9% in 2015/16) with 27.3% saying they were not aware (29.1% in 2015/16).

Community safety – 98.1% of respondents consider the area within 15 minutes' walk of their home to be 'very' or 'fairly' safe compared to 96.7% the previous year. This is the highest ever recorded figure. In comparison a lower number (86%) of the younger age group felt safe, while this remains a high figure 13.7% feel rather or very unsafe.

Equalities – 81.6% agree that Highland should do everything it can to get rid of all types of prejudice the same as the previous year. An overall improving trend can be demonstrated from 66.9% agreeing when the question was first asked in 2010/11. In comparison 77.3% of the younger age group agreed.

Council Services

There are 6 services that 85% or more of respondents say they use:

- Refuse/bin collection (97%)
- Recycling facilities (95%)
- Road repairs/potholes (95%)
- Winter road maintenance (94%)
- Street cleaning (89%)
- Street lighting (88%)

The top three most important services for the public are road repairs and potholes; winter road maintenance; and refuse/bin collection.

The table below highlights the most important services to respondents where at least 10% of the panel place them in their top 5 most important:

Importance of services to respondents - appearance in respondents' top five					
Services	2017 %	2016 %	2015 %	2014 %	2013 %
Road repairs and pot holes	55	66	63	57	57
Winter road maintenance	42	43	50	43	48
Refuse/bin collection	27	26	45	47	41
Primary education	24	23	21	19	19
Public Parks and other open spaces	21	24	20	21	19
Secondary education	19	21	17	18	18
Swimming pools	17	18	15	16	15
Recycling facilities	16	18	28	30	32
Care at home services	15	13	9	8	9
Libraries	14	14	17	20	19
Street cleaning	13	10	14	15	16
Residential homes for disabled/elderly people	13	11	7	6	8
Other sports facilities	13	16	15	13	13
Council Service Points	11	11	10	11	6
Pavement maintenance	10	14	15	16	12

Using our online services

This is the second year we have asked a set of questions to gauge the panel's views on overall satisfaction with their online experience at: www.highland.gov.uk

Overall 70.9% said they were very or fairly satisfied with online services compared to 75.1% the year before.

In relation to questions on the qualities of online services:

- 81% said they would use online services again (85% in 2016);
- 72% agreed that online services were easy to use (75% in 2016);
- 73% said they were able to find the online services they needed (71% in 2016);
- 64% agreed that online services were quick to complete (70% in 2016);
- 65% agreed that online services were easy to find (68% in 2016).

Involving Communities

This is a developing set of questions around community engagement, participation and localism. Results from this section include:

- 61.3% say they volunteer in the community by helping a neighbour, family or friend with 42.8% saying they volunteer through an organised group or club;
- 77.2% feel they have no or not very much influence over decision making in their communities. This however compares to 96.9% of those in the younger age group (social media responses);
- The main reason given for not having an influence was 'not enough time' (28.5%) this compares to the younger age group where the main reason was 'public bodies don't listen to community views' (61.9%);
- 57.3% say they would like to be very or fairly involved in decision-making in their area, this compares to 84.3% of the younger age group (social media responses).

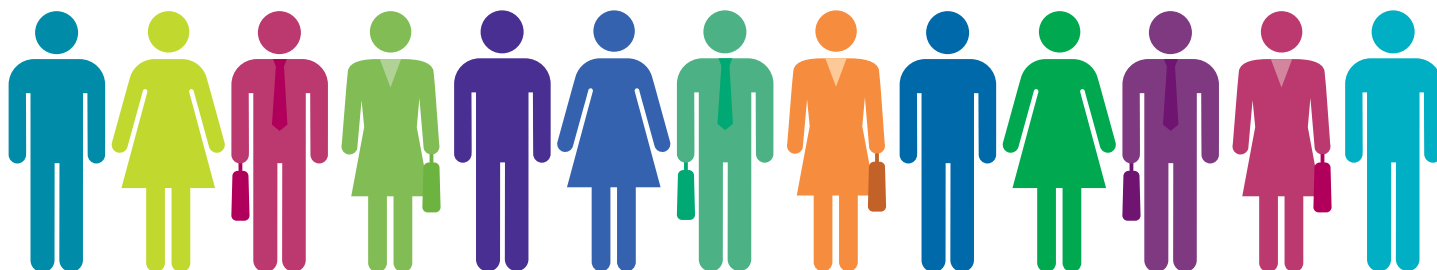
Areas for improvement

The impact of financial austerity creates a challenging environment in which to drive improvement in public perception.

Improvement activity needs to be focused on improved communication with the public, informing budget planning and budget decisions and driving new ways of local engagement with communities.

Actions:

- Communicate budget decisions and their impact on service delivery to the public;
- Use survey results to inform budget planning including prioritisation and efficiency;
- Use survey results to inform budget decisions;
- Use survey result to inform Council redesign and choices on the balance of cost and quality when determining service delivery options;
- Engage with local communities on service delivery options including community opportunities to lead on delivery;
- Service management teams will use the results to inform their ongoing improvement activity.



How did we do: Local and National Statutory Performance Indicators 2016/17

The latest year's report on Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) for 2016/17 show a positive picture of performance overall with 76% of SPIs improved by 5% or more or performance was maintained compared to 75% the year before.

Improvements (cost reduction) are seen in many of our local and benchmark cost indicators, however it should be noted that budget decisions have been a significant driver for these changes. This is equally true of indicators based on a ratio of staff to resources. However this is not exclusively the case with areas where there is greater scope for process improvement such as Benefits Administration showing reduction in cost through efficiency. Benchmark indicators such as cost of roads maintenance focus on the lowest spend being ranked highest nationally. The result is that additional investment in services such as roads maintenance being perceived negatively as the result is an increase in unit cost.

Some areas which show improvement by 10% or more between 2015/16 and 2016/17 are:



Care and Learning

Libraries

Number of visits per 1,000 population increased from 10,661 to 13,110.

Social Care

The proportion of adults (18+) who use direct payments for their care increased from 5.3% to 6.3%.

Community Services

Waste costs

The net cost of waste collection per premises has decreased from £94.44 to £78.27.

Housing

The average time to re-let (days) decreased from 48.2 to 43.0.

Housing

The average time to complete emergency repairs (hours) has decreased from 7.9 to 6.9.

Corporate Resources

Council Tax

Council Tax collection costs decreased from £10.68 to £8.83.

Equalities

The Gender pay gap decreased from 8.6% to 7.2%.

Business

Total direct spend with Highland small and medium sized enterprises increased from 25.7% to 30.1%.

Development and Infrastructure

Business

The number of Business Gateway start-ups per 10,000 population increased from 10.76 to 12.14.

Planning Costs

The cost per planning application has decreased from £4,286.54 to £3,683.53.

Some areas where performance has decreased by 10% or more between 2015/16 and 2016/17 are:

Care and Learning

Education

Teachers sickness absence (average working days lost) increased from 6.1 to 6.9 days.

Education

Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds decreased from 34% to 27%.

Social Care costs

Adult Home Care costs per hour for people aged 65+ increased from £32.66 to £36.09.

Children's Services

The number of Looked After Children accommodated by the Council increased from 73 to 85.

Community Services



Roads cost

The cost of road maintenance per km increased from £6,200.86 to £8,577.10.

Homelessness

Households in temporary accommodation increased from 541 to 658.

Corporate Resources

Creditors

The unit cost of creditors invoiced increased from £1.30 to £1.57.

Rates

The cost of Non Domestic Rates collection per chargeable property increased from £17.75 to £20.29.

How do we compare: Benchmarking



What is the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)?

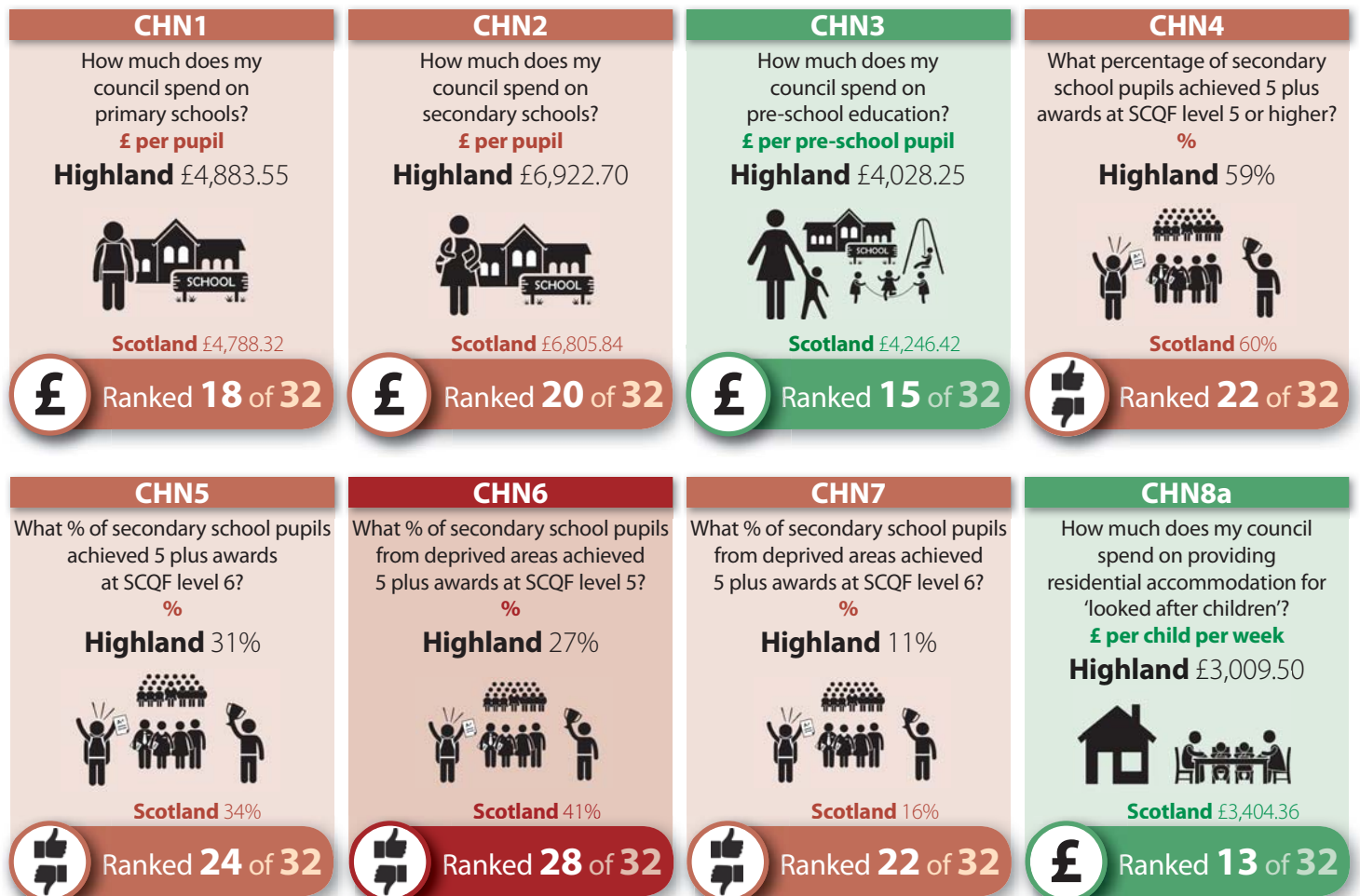
Local councils across Scotland are required to publish their performance information using the LGBF each year. This ensures that councils report standard information on the services councils provide to local communities across Scotland. The indicators within the LGBF were selected through a wide consultation process to cover the major service areas of local authorities.

The performance between all 32 Scottish Local Authorities is reported in quartiles.



For the LGBF indicators The Highland Council is in the top quartile (ranked 1-8) for 13 indicators and in the bottom quartile (ranked 25-32) for 16 indicators. It should be noted that there are a wide range of factors that influence these indicators including geography, service delivery models and budget priorities.

Children's Services




CHN8b

How much does my council spend on providing fostering/family placements for 'looked after children'?

£ per child per week

Highland £159.92



Scotland £312.73


£ Ranked **3** of **32**

CHN9

How many 'looked after children' are being cared for in foster/family placements rather than residential accommodation?

%

Highland 82.6%



Scotland 89.9%


Ranked **30** of **32**

CHN10

How satisfied are residents with local schools?

%

Highland 80.0%



Scotland 75.3%


Ranked **15** of **32**

CHN11

What % of pupils enter a positive destination after leaving school?

%

Highland 95.5%



Scotland 93.7%


Ranked **7** of **32**

CHN12a

Average total points awarded for levels of attainment achieved - Overall average tariff

Average tariff score

Highland 836



Scotland 886


Ranked **22** of **32**

CHN12b

Average total points awarded for levels of attainment achieved - SIMD Quintile 1

Average tariff score

Highland 445



Scotland 624


Ranked **28** of **32**

CHN12c

Average total points awarded for levels of attainment achieved - SIMD Quintile 2

Average tariff score

Highland 630



Scotland 750


Ranked **28** of **32**

CHN12d

Average total points awarded for levels of attainment achieved - SIMD Quintile 3

Average tariff score

Highland 849



Scotland 880


Ranked **24** of **32**

CHN12e

Average total points awarded for levels of attainment achieved - SIMD Quintile 4

Average tariff score

Highland 948



Scotland 999


Ranked **22** of **32**

CHN12f

Average total points awarded for levels of attainment achieved - SIMD Quintile 5

Average tariff score

Highland 1,036



Scotland 1,207


Ranked **27** of **32**

CHN17

Children meeting developmental milestones (27-30 months)

%

Highland 61.1%



Scotland 72.4%

2015/16 Figures


Ranked **30** of **32**

CHN18

Funded early years provision rated good or better

%

Highland 92.7%



Scotland 91.7%


Ranked **18** of **32**

CHN19a

School attendance rates

%

Highland 93.4%



Scotland 93.3%


Ranked **17** of **32**

CHN19b

School attendance rates for looked after children

%

Highland 91.2%



Scotland 91.6%

2014/15 Figures

Ranked **21** of **32**

CHN20a

School exclusion rates per 1,000 pupils

%

Highland 22.7



Scotland 26.8

Ranked **17** of **32**

CHN20b

School exclusion rates for looked after children per 1,000 looked after children

%

Highland 73.2



Scotland 94.3

2014/15 Figures

Ranked **20** of **32**

SIMD Quintiles
 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)
 Quintile 1 = 20% most disadvantaged
 Quintile 5 = 20% least disadvantaged

CHN21

What % of 16-19 year olds are participating in learning, training or work
%

Highland 93.0%




Scotland 91.1%

Ranked **11** of **32**

CHN22

Child protection re-registrations within 18 months
%

Highland 5.1%




Scotland 6.5%

Ranked **14** of **32**

CHN23

Looked after children with more than one placement in the last year
%

Highland 34.7%



Scotland 21.2%

Ranked **31** of **32**




Corporate Services

CORP1

How much of my council's total running costs is spent on administrative support services?
%

Highland 7.8%



Scotland 5.0%

Ranked **31** of **32**

CORP3b

How many women are in top 5% earners?
%

Highland 51.7%




Scotland 52%

Ranked **17** of **32**

CORP3c

What is the gender pay gap?
%

Highland 7.20%



Scotland 4.1%

Ranked **25** of **32**

CORP4

How much does my council spend on collecting council tax?
£ per home

Highland £8.83




Scotland £8.98

Ranked **15** of **32**

CORP6a

What is the level of sickness absence for teachers in my council?
Average number of days per teacher

Highland 6.85 days




Scotland 6.06 days

Ranked **27** of **32**

CORP6b

What is the level of sickness absence in my council?
Average number of days per employee (non-teachers)

Highland 10.41 days




Scotland 10.92 days

Ranked **12** of **32**

CORP7

How efficient is my council at collecting council tax?
%

Highland 96.1%



Scotland 95.8%

Ranked **14** of **32**

CORP8

How efficient is my council at paying invoices on time?
%

Highland 94.0%




Scotland 93.1%

Ranked **17** of **32**

C-AST1

How many council buildings are suitable for their current use?
%

Highland 66.0%




Scotland 79.8%

Ranked **30** of **32**

C-AST2

How many council buildings are in a satisfactory condition?
%

Highland 82.7%

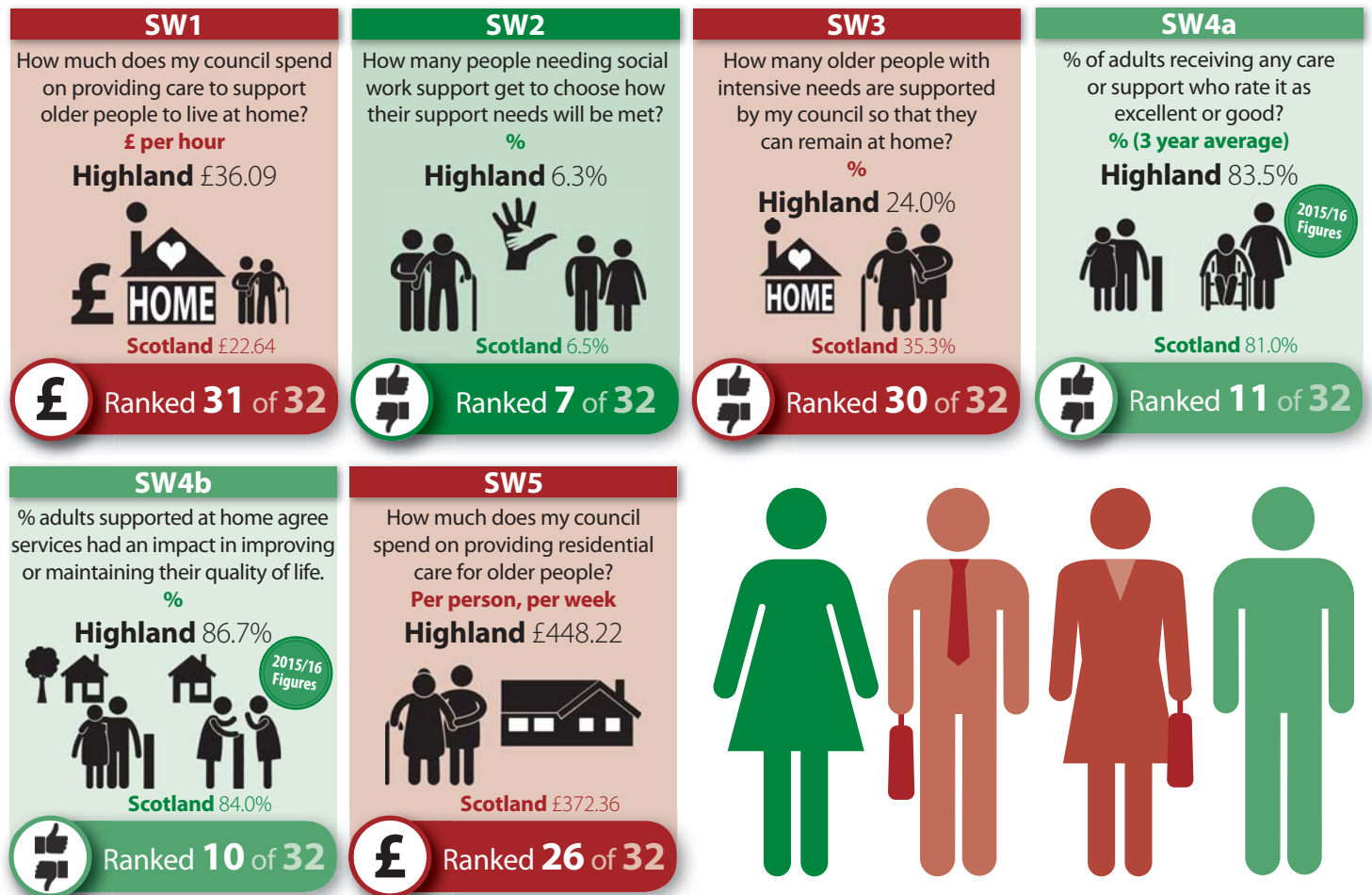


Scotland 84.5%

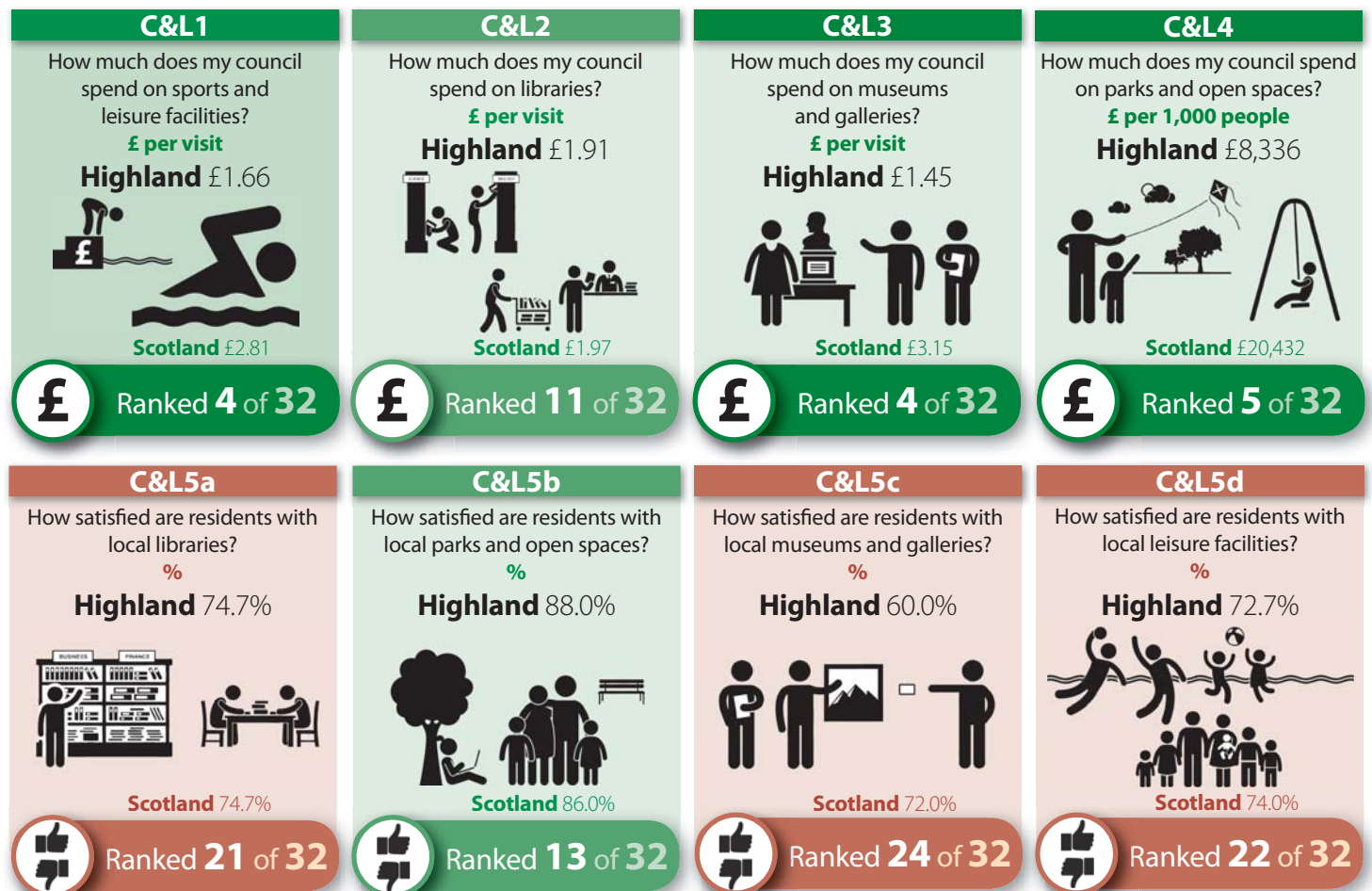
Ranked **23** of **32**



Adult Social Care Services



Culture and Leisure Services



Environmental Services

ENV1a

How much does my council spend on refuse collection (net)?
£ per premise

Highland £78.27



Scotland £64.54

£ Ranked **29** of **32**

ENV2a

How much does my council spend on waste disposal (e.g. recycling and landfill) (net)?
£ per premise

Highland £93.98



Scotland £98.77

£ Ranked **15** of **32**

ENV3a

How much does my council spend on street cleaning?
£ per 1,000 people

Highland £9,192



Scotland £14,431

£ Ranked **5** of **32**

ENV3c

How clean are my local streets?
%

Highland 95%



Scotland 94%

Ranked **15** of **32**

ENV4a

How much does my council spend maintaining the condition of my roads?
£ per kilometre

Highland £8,577.10



Scotland £10,307.65

£ Ranked **13** of **32**

ENV4b

How many of my local A class roads are in need of repair?
%

Highland 29.1%




Scotland 29.5%

Ranked **21** of **32**

ENV4c

How many of my local B class roads are in need of repair?
%

Highland 36.3%




Scotland 34.8%

Ranked **23** of **32**

ENV4d

How many of my local C class roads are in need of repair?
%

Highland 40.2%



Scotland 34.6%

Ranked **23** of **32**

ENV4e

How many of my local unclassified class roads are in need of repair?
%

Highland 43.3%



Scotland 39.5%

Ranked **24** of **32**

ENV5a

How much does my council spend on providing trading standards, money advice, and citizen advice?
£ per 1,000 people

Highland £2,376.79



Scotland £5,494.29

£ Ranked **3** of **32**

ENV5b

How much does my council spend on providing environmental health
£ per 1,000 people

Highland £14,878.39




Scotland £15,883.03

£ Ranked **14** of **32**

ENV6

How much household waste is recycled by my council?
%

Highland 44.5%




Scotland 45.2%

Ranked **21** of **32**

ENV7a

How satisfied are residents with local refuse collection?
%

Highland 88.7%




Scotland 81.7%

Ranked **5** of **32**

ENV7b

How satisfied are residents with local street cleanliness?
%

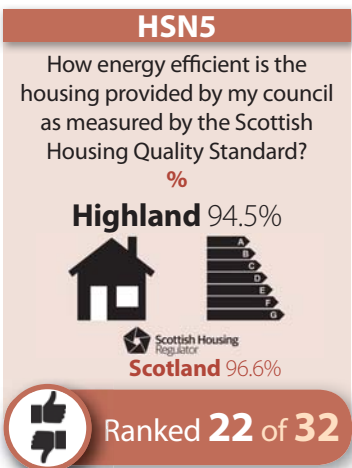
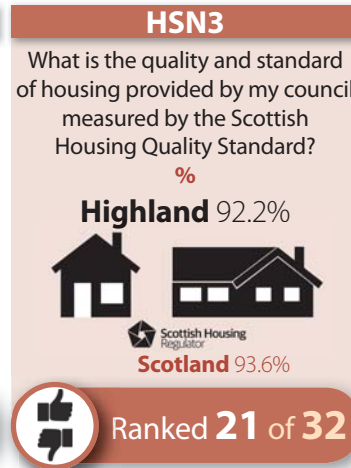
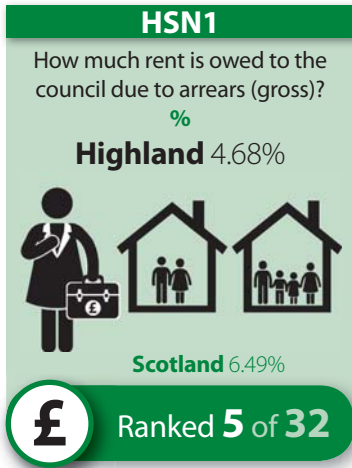
Highland 74.3%



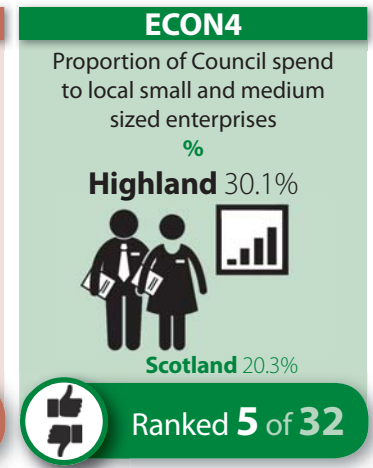
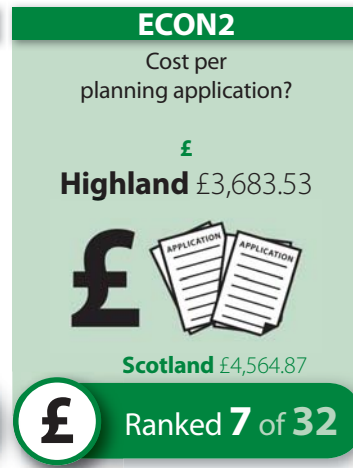
Scotland 72.3%

Ranked **17** of **32**

Housing Services



Economic Development





Volunteer as a Citizen Advocate

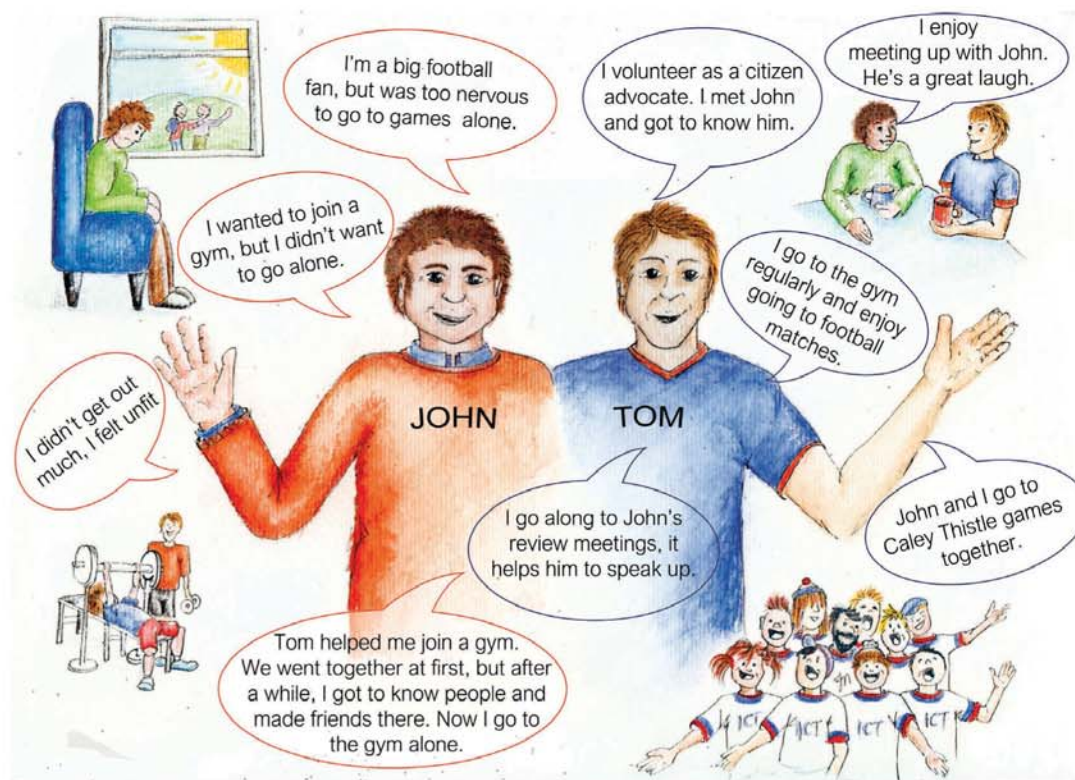
Make a difference to someone in your community



Citizen Advocacy Inverness

Connects a person with a **learning disability** with a **Volunteer Citizen Advocate** in their community.

We provide training and ongoing support to **Volunteer Citizen Advocates**.



Contact Us

Citizen Advocacy Inverness

Advocacy Highland, 2 Seafield Road, Inverness IV1 1SG

01463 233460 | 07917 327714

info@advocacy-highland.org.uk | www.advocacy-highland.org.uk  Find us on Facebook

Charity No. SC035363 | Company No. SC265395