

Customer Engagement Strategy

2012 – 2015

Document Author and Owner:

Vicki Nairn, Head of E-Government, The Highland Council

Version 1

Release Date: 28th November 2012

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Highland Council Customer Engagement Strategy 20012 – 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Highland Council is committed to delivering excellent Customer Services. This document outlines the Council's Customer Engagement Strategy for the period 2012-2015.

The Strategy is aligned with "2012-2017 Working together for the Highlands". It will ensure that the Council fulfils its duty to deliver Best Value by the delivery of effective and efficient front line Customer Services. The Strategy also takes account of the Scottish Government's Customer First Programme and the Council's own Corporate Improvement Programme.

The Strategy outlines how the Council will continue to transform corporate customer engagement to put the citizen at the centre of service delivery to ensure an enhanced service experience, increasing choice for customers as to where they access services, when they access services and how they access services. This is a corporate approach to customer engagement, however it recognises that some customers will receive services from individual departments which will need to be tailored to specific needs and individual arrangements put in place.

The Strategy will also ensure that the Council continues to provide services which are consistent, professional and co-ordinated to ensure the customer is satisfied at the first point of contact. There are strong links with other key strategies and plans from across the Council including the equality plan, A Fairer Highland, which demonstrates how the Council meets the public sector equality duties. The Strategy will ensure all customers and communities that customers are treated fairly and with respect and are able to access Council services.

To achieve these aims the Council will, via the Corporate Improvement Programme, identify and develop opportunities for the enhancement of the Customer Services Network in the delivery of front line services. As part of this work the Council will introduce more online facilities and self-service opportunities, allowing customers to carry out routine tasks. This will enable The Highland Council to realise efficiencies and reinvest financial and time releasing savings in future developments.

As part of the development of the Strategy the Council will review its systems and technologies to ensure that systems enable and underpin the business in the most effective and innovative way possible. The Council will invest in training and development to ensure that Customer Service staff have the relevant skills and training to deliver excellent Customer Service.

The Council will continue to build and develop its partnerships to deliver improved access to public services. It will become more convenient, easier and quicker for citizens to interact with the Council and all citizens will have equal access to the services they need. The Council will continue to be responsive to customers proactively engaging with them to seek their views via the public performance survey and citizen's panel to provide a range of benefits, entitlements and services that can be delivered at the first point of contact.

This Strategy will continue the investment and modernisation work which has taken place to date within Customer Services and will ensure that the Council meets the needs of all of the people who live, work and visit the Highlands

1. Introduction

This document presents The Highland Council's Strategy for the delivery of customer engagement to the people who live, work and visit in the Highlands. The Highland Council Customer Engagement Strategy will:-

- Recognise and support political and management objectives.
- Respond to the diverse and changing needs of customers.
- Set out a clear vision for the development and delivery of services to customers.
- Deliver real benefits.

The Customer Engagement Strategy has been developed with reference to "2012-2017 Working together for the Highlands". The Customer Engagement Strategy is aligned with the aims of the Council and will pursue best value for our residents and service users, seeking efficiencies in the way we work and continuously strive to achieve our annual efficiency targets. Throughout the Strategy period, The Highland Council will consult with its stakeholders including customers. The Strategy underpins the work which is ongoing to develop the Council's values by ensuring that the delivery and development of services is focussed on the needs of the customer.

Strong consideration is given to Partnership working with other public sector organisations at a local and national level. The Highland Council has many Partners including the Northern Constabulary, National Health Service, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Citizens Advice Bureau. In addition Customer Service has very strong internal and external partnerships with organisations such as the Identity and Passport Service and VisitScotland. The Highland Council Customer Service Partnership Working was noted and commended in the Charter Mark Report December 2008, and again in June 2011 during the Customer Service Excellence assessment. The Strategy period will see a continuation of this work as The Highland Council aims to broaden and deepen the work it does on behalf of and in conjunction with its partners.

In addition the Customer Engagement Strategy continues to be aligned with the

'Customer First' Scottish Government Programme, which identifies the Core Services which should be delivered at the first point of contact through the use of technologies, such as the Customer Relationship Management System, Citizen's Account and National Entitlement Card. The Customer First Agenda sets out targets which all Councils should aim to achieve. The Highland Council has made a commitment to achieving these targets and they are embedded in the Highland Council Corporate Plan and managed through Service Plans.

The Council will: -

a) *Increase the number of core services that are delivered at the first point of contact, with 85% of all enquiries to be dealt with at the first point of contact.*

b) *Achieve up to 95% of customer satisfaction*

The Customer Service Strategy and the Customer First Initiative provides a framework for the Corporate Improvement Programme (CIP) Project "Customer Engagement/Customer Assessment". The Customer Engagement & Assessment Project aims to simplify customer access to all Council Services and increase the percentage of enquiries dealt with at the first point of contact and to simplify and standardise the assessment processes to accelerate decisions and service delivery. The Strategy will be customer needs led and people, processes, technology and partnerships will enable the delivery of service at the first point of contact efficiently and effectively.

2. Vision

The Highland Council's vision is to be an efficient and effective Council, delivering quality Customer Service through a wide range of channels including telephone, face to face in a service point or via self-service e-mail and web interaction. Contact channels will be clearly defined, making contacting the Council an easy and positive experience for customers.

We aim to;-

- Increase choice for customers in the way they access services:
 - Provide an interactive Self Service Website.
 - Increase the opening hours of the Service Centre.
 - Extend facilities for debit/credit card telephony and online payments.
 - Increase the number of services delivered through the customer service network
 - Ensure equality of access to services for all customers

- Provide a service which is consistent, professional and co-ordinated:
 - Resolve the majority of customer enquiries at the first point of contact by
 - a) Assessing entitlements and benefits.
 - b) Getting it right first time.
 - Reduce the number of repeat contacts from customers.
 - Reduce the volume of telephone numbers advertised for the Council.
- Become efficient and effective Council
 - Increase our partnership working e.g.
 - a) More co-located offices.
 - b) Deliver services on behalf of our partners.
 - Promote self-service channels.
 - Develop efficient and effective business processes

3. Scope

This is a corporate strategy and the scope includes all customer interaction including: telephone, mail, face to face, email or via self service and web interaction in all parts of the Council. The Council will ensure the Council extends and enhances the principles of Customer Service Excellence across the organisation.

PART 1

4. Background

The Highland Council Customer Services

Customer Services sits within the E-Government section of the Chief Executive's Service. The Council has a network of Service Points, the Service Centre at Alness and a dedicated Registration office in Inverness (Inverness Archive and Registration Centre). The Service Points and Service Centre act as 'one stop shops' for a wide variety of Council services and provide advice to the public for key Council and partner services.

During the past 8 years the Council has made significant investment in the modernisation of its Customer Services function. In 2004 the Council established the Service Centre in Alness to complement Service Points and act as a hub for telephone contact and Blue Badge Processing.

Table 1 below outlines the primary point of contact for customers who need to contact the Council. The term Service Points includes all customer service locations including the telephony service centre in Alness. The information has been taken from the Council's 2012 Public Performance Survey

Table 1: 2012 Public Performance Survey, type of council office contacted

Office Type	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
	%	%	%	%	%
Service Point	71	66	65	66	69
Transport, Environmental and Community (TEC) Services	6	7	7	6	6
Housing Service	5	4	4	8	6
Planning Department	5	7	7	6	7
Head Office / no service specified	3	4	7	8	6
Education, Culture and Sport	3	1	<1	2	2
Finance	2	1	<1	2	1
Social Work	1	2	<1	1	1
Chief Executive's Office	<1	<1	<1	1	1
Other/unclear	3	7	7	-	-

Base: Respondents whose most recent contact with The Highland Council was in person (N=294 in 2012)

As part of its approach to customer engagement, in 2005 the Council implemented a corporate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and rolled this out across the Council, allowing the Council for the first time, to have a computerised record of customer contacts and service requests made via the Customer Services Team. The CRM system was subsequently replaced and upgraded in 2011, with a new system that fully supports the transfer of additional business processes to Customer Services, to support the Corporate Improvement Programme objectives.

In 2006 the Council reviewed Customer Services, bringing the Registration Service into Customer Services, and continued to develop joint facilities with internal services such as libraries and external partners such as VisitScotland. A further Customer Service Review was carried out during the course of 2010. Over the course of 2011 the Council implemented the recommendations set out in the review and will continually seek to review service provision where possible

The 2011 review proposed a number of changes to the Customer Service Network including strengthening partnerships, further co-location and extending current best practice. In addition, driven by the Councils Payment strategy also implemented in 2011 there were a number of changes to opening hours and staffing levels which have been implemented during 2012 that have delivered efficiencies and service improvements across the network.

Table 2 below, outlines the reasons why customers contact the council, and as outlined in Table 1, most customers contact the Council using the Council's customer services offices. The increase in payment contacts between 2011 and 2012 of 20% can be attributed to the Council's move towards taking telephony payments at the service Centre in Alness and also the introduction of chip and pin machines enabling credit and

debit card payments across all customer services offices in Highland

Table 2: 2012 Public Performance Survey, reasons for making contact

Reasons for Making Contact	2012 %	2011 %	2010 %	2009 %	2008 %
To make a payment	46	26	32	37	37
To make an enquiry	38	49	41	40	40
To request a service	22	27	29	38	41
To make a complaint	11	12	11	16	11
To speak to your Councillor	6	5	7	6	5
Other	5	10	12	2	2

Base: Respondents who contacted The Highland Council during the preceding 12 months (N in 2012 =650)

Note: Multiple responses were accepted

In 2008 new partnerships were developed between Customer Services and the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) with specific Service Points now acting as satellite offices for first time passport applicants, conducting an application interview via web-link. Partnership working has been further strengthened with co-location and front desk sharing in key locations with Northern Constabulary, and with the addition of a new Out of Hours Service run in Partnership with Northern Constabulary. Work is also underway to strengthen relationships with the IPS and other partners to look at opportunities for joint use of offices.

5. Current Service Delivery (Where are we now?)

5.1 Our Customers

The Highland Council serves a population of over 220,490 people over a geographical spread of 26,484 square kilometres. The Highland Council conducts a Public Performance Survey annually. The results from the 2012 Public Performance Survey give a clear indication of how customers contact the Council, what they contact the Council for and how satisfied they are with the service they receive. The following table demonstrates the channels customers currently use to contact the Council:

Table 3: 2012 Public Performance Survey, preferred methods of contact

	2012 %	2011 %	2010 %	2009 %	2008 %
By telephone	48	58	53	57	59
(Personal visit to Council Office	13	17	19)	n/a	n/a
(Personal visit to Service Point	25	26	29)	n/a	n/a
Personal visits - total	34	40	43	48	50
On-line (e.g. Council website or home computer)	22	19	15	12	8
By letter	8	10	13	11	12
Other	4	1	3	3	1
Ward forum	3	1	1	1	2
On-line (public access computer)	<1	<1	<1	2	2
Home visit by Council staff	0	1	2	2	2

Base: Respondents who contacted The Highland Council during the preceding 12 months (N=650 in 2012)

Note: Multiple responses were accepted. n/a denotes 'not asked'

The Strategy recognises the changing trends in customer channels for contacting the Council as identified in the table above. The Public Performance Survey also describes a number of other channels customers would use to contact the Council. It is also important to note an increase in respondents who indicate they would prefer to use the telephone or their home computer to transact with the Council on line. This is a steadily increasing trend in line with the pace of technology, the move to a 24/7 society, development and increased access to internet facilities for customers across the Highlands.

The Highland Councils web-strategy aims to continually improve the Councils web-site in line with rising demand. As part of the Web Strategy the Council are now utilizing social networking tools such as twitter and Facebook to communicate with customers. As a result the Council's online profile is increasing and customers can now use these media to interact with the Council on a range of issues. The council also webcasts committee meetings live and makes them available for later viewing as an archive.

The Customer Engagement Strategy aims to provide communities access to services within their local community wherever possible. The Highland Council's current Customer Service provision is demonstrated in Appendix 1 and 3, and Section 11 outlines how the Council will consult with customers.

The following table demonstrates the number of contacts into a Service Point or the Service Centre to receive a service:

Table 4: Annual contact volumes

Customer Contact Volumes	11/12	10/11	09/10	08/09	07/08
Service Centre Call volumes	291,401	281,933	278,306	306,855	301,973
Service Point Visits	276,908	618,399	863,836	895,401	843,636
Total Contacts	568,309	900,332	1,142,142	1,202,256	1,145,609

As can be seen from the table above call volumes continue to increase due to more customers conducting their business by telephone. Service Point face to face visits have dropped significantly due to the implementation of the payment strategy reflecting that more customers are choosing to make payments by telephone or via post offices and pay point facilities rather than making face to face visits. The asterisked figure for Service Points for 2011/12 has also dropped due to the fact that Service Points now only record formal requests for service rather than all contact made.

This Strategy will also demonstrate how The Highland Council intends to reduce the amount of access doors and further develop service provision within Service Points and Service Centre. This will enable the majority of customers to be met with a member of staff who is skilled and trained to deal with customers and well equipped to resolve their enquiry at the first point of contact.

5.2 Customer First

Customer First Government Targets are as follows:

- a) Increase the number of services that are delivered at the first point of contact, with 75% of all enquiries to be dealt with at the first point of contact.***

The Customer First Agenda highlights 46 core services that all Scottish Council's should aim to deliver at first point of contact. A complete list of those services is available in Appendix 2. The Highland Council Customer Services are currently delivering **55%** of the core services (as defined by the Scottish Government Improvement Service) at first point of Contact. "First point of contact" is defined by the Scottish Government as a service request that has been satisfied to its final conclusion without having to pass the service request to another party. The Council has set the following targets for both resolution at first point of contact and also number of services available on the website. This section applies to both current service delivery, but as can be seen from table 5 below, it also has a significant on the Council's future plans for

the delivery of this strategy.

Table 5: Targets for services delivered at the first point of contact

Target/Period	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Increase the number of services to be dealt with through the Customer Service Network	55% (of ESD core services)	60%	65%	72%	80%
Increase number of services available on the website – taken from front page of web	1%	15%	23%	43%	60%

The Corporate Improvement Programme has also identified 200 processes across the Council which will be transferred to Customer Services by end of 2013. The 200 processes include Core services as defined by the Improvement Service, which will be delivered by the Council, its partners and High Life Highland. From April 2011 – March 2012 there were a total of 568,309 requests processed through the CRM. Management information available indicates 82.5% of service requests processed through the Customer Services in 2011/12 were dealt with at the first point of contact.

b) To achieve up to 95% of customer satisfaction.

The Highland Council has endorsed this target and recently Customer Service Network has carried out a combination of automated telephony surveys and face to face surveys with customers and the current satisfaction level is an average of 95%

5.3 Customer Service Excellence

The National Chartermark Assessment “Customer Service Excellence” accreditation was developed to offer public services a practical tool for driving customer-focused change within their organisation. The Highland Council Customer Service has retained Charter Mark/Customer Service Excellence for 6 years. During the Period of the Strategy it is the Council’s intention to share best practice across the organisation and review the readiness for a Council wide new assessment in Customer Excellence in 2014. The Charter Mark Standard was replaced with a Customer Service Excellence standard in 2010, which is a more rigorous and detailed evidence based audit/assessment of how Customer Service Excellence is delivered.

A full assessment of the Customer Service Network against the new standard, including Registration was conducted in June 2011. The assessment was successful and Customer Services has successfully achieved the Customer Service Excellence award, which is audited on a yearly basis.

The Council has also been recognised as showing excellence in the following areas:

- a) Using technology to improve service to customers
- b) Using technology to offer best value for money
- c) Excellence in partnership working

5.5 CRM

In 2011 the Council replaced the existing CRM system with a new nationally procured system which supports the transition of additional business processes to Customer Services from within the Council as part of the Corporate Improvement Programme. It has also delivered a high level of self-sufficiency for the Highland Council and allowed members access to the CRM members portal.

5.6 Service Centre

The Service Centre handles approximately 1300 calls per day. The Service Centre provides customers with telephone access to an ever expanding number of services such as Blue Badge, travel card, house repair, bulky uplift, raising an enquiry and complaint or compliment. In addition the Service Centre has handled special projects such as the Elections Helpline and in 2012 will provide first line planning resolution to Planning and Development related phone calls and emails.

Opening hours were extended in 2010 and the Service Centre now operates Mon-Fri 08:00 – 18:00 and Saturday mornings 09:00 – 13:00. In addition an innovative shared services partnership has been formed with Northern Constabulary, whereby the Northern Constabulary take selected council phone calls between 6 pm and 8 am and on weekends and public holidays.

5.7 Service Points

The Service Point Network includes 35 Service Points providing a face to face service for the Highland Communities at a local level. The Service Points continue to offer customers' a choice of contact channel.

Opening hours are tailored to demand and efficiencies are met through partnership working such as joint libraries, registration offices, VisitScotland and Northern Constabulary. The Highland Council customers can now also access Payzone and Paypoints across the Highlands to make payments as part of the Councils Payments Strategy. This adds to the choice of locations and opening hours offered by the Service Points. Customers can also continue to use Service Points to make debit or credit card payments in addition to a dedicated payments line available via the Service Centre.

5.8 Registration

There is a network of Registration Offices across the Highlands, which work within the statutory remit of the General Registrar for Scotland. Their main functions are to conduct civil marriage ceremonies, or civil partnerships, citizenship ceremonies, record birth and deaths and conduct ancestry research work. The majority of The Highland Council's Service Points are now joint Registration / Service Point Offices, providing a one stop shop for customers. Staff have been trained in all aspects of both Service Point and Registration duties making the work both interesting and varied whilst providing a cost effective model for delivery.

5.9 Web

The Highland Council's current website was launched in April 2006 is the primary source of information for visitors to the Council. Visitors to the site most commonly seek information in relation to job vacancies, planning applications, schools information, Council minutes and agendas and details of how to contact the Council.

The internet continues to grow as a medium for contacting the Council with steady year on year increases. The number of online payments per year continues to grow with an increase 37% in the number of payments made via the web from 2010/2011 to 2011/2012. In the first quarter of 2012 more than £1.392m was collected via on-line payments and £2.827m was collected in first half of year.

The Council's web-strategy reflects the growing use of the website and is further supported through the Customer Assessment and Engagement workstream. As part of the CEA roll out, further processes will be available on-line where possible, enabling customers to self-serve and request services via the Council's website. The Council's web strategy is attached at Appendix 5.

5.10 Partnerships

Partnerships are a key feature in the current Service Delivery Model. Internal and External Partnerships are managed through a Service Level Agreement Framework. Customer Service provides access to a wide range of services including services delivered on behalf of The Highland Council's partners. Out of the current 35 Service Points approximately 60% are partnership offices. A detailed breakdown of The Highland Council's partnerships, and the core functions delivered from Service Points and Registration Offices is available in Appendix 3 and 4.

During the 2011 Customer Service Excellence assessment, the external assessor again highlighted the strength of partnership working within the network. In particular it was highlighted that customers of both organisations in partnerships were getting better outcomes as a result of working together.

Part 2

6. Future

Whilst The Highland Council is continuously improving the way it delivers services to customers; there is more to achieve and more to do - this strategy will pave the way for the future and give our managers, and staff a clear direction for taking customer contact to the next level. Budget challenges across the public sector mean that the Council continues to strive for best use of resources and to make efficiencies where ever possible.

Through new technologies The Highland Council will aim to deliver services that are joined up in a way that makes sense to customers. Services will be accessible at in a way most convenient to the customer, so they have more choice over the way in which they contact and receive services. The Highland Council will tailor service delivery to the individual customer needs and be customer centric from contact point to actual delivery. The Council will balance these needs against the need to ensure that service delivery models deliver best value for the Highlands and are cost effective.

A key theme running through all National and Council targets is to improve efficiency and reduce costs. The following table of National Statistics demonstrates the cost to Councils for each contact channel. Throughout the Strategy period The Highland Council will look to develop and promote the most cost effective channel, whilst ensuring a range of channels is available to meet all individual customer needs.

The focus across all channels will be to improve efficiencies and effectiveness. The table below demonstrates the average costs per enquiry per contact channel.

Table 6: Socitm Insight March 2012 Data = Cost per contact channel for enquiry

Access Channel	Average cost per enquiry	Level of Cost
Self service using the web	£0.15	low
By telephone	£2.83	low
Face-to-Face	£8.62	High

7. Delivering the Strategy (*What will we do?*)

Through ongoing management development work and the Corporate Improvement Programme, The Highland Council will identify services that are customer facing and deliverable at the first point of contact.

We will:

- Further improve business processes and move them into front line delivery
- Enable back offices to focus their efforts on complex enquiries, which require in-depth investigation, professional expertise and/or assessment

- that supports the front office.
- Increase the number of services delivered in Service Points and the Service Centre.
- Increase Customer choice in respect of contact with the Council e.g. telephone, web contact and the further usage of web/mobile apps
- Increase contacts dealt with at the first point of contact.

The 2012 Public Performance Survey continues to indicate a strong preference for telephone and face to face channels however; email and web contacts are increasing. To achieve the merging of customer preferences with the most cost effective channels. The Highland Council will focus on enhancing two primary access channels moving forward:

- Telephone
- Self Service (Website / Email)

7.1 Telephone

The recent Public Performance Survey results continue to demonstrate that the telephone is one of the most popular forms of customer contact. Utilising the Customer Service Centre for telephony enquiries is a cost effective way of achieving efficiencies. The service delivered from the Service Centre has also been expanded with the introduction of longer opening hours and the dedicated payments line introduced in June 2010. During 2012/13 the Council has a programme of work as part of the CIP to transfer back office work to the front office and this is outlined in Appendix 6.

We will:

- Continue to direct call handling to the Service Centre where appropriate.
- Continue to review the service provision across the network for the most effective delivery model, balancing efficiencies with service delivery and increase the number of services available face to face and via the website.

7.2 Self Service

Website / E mail (Self Service)

Self-service will allow customers to access information any time from within their own home. Customers will be able to carry out routine tasks without requiring any interaction with a representative of the Council. The Highland Council expects to realise significant financial and time releasing savings by encouraging and promoting customer self service.

Future development of the website is linked to the Government Improvement Service Customer First Project, as well as a number of the Council's Corporate Improvement

Projects. The Council also has a Web strategy which underpins the development of the website. The web strategy will focus on the following areas over the duration of this strategy

We will:

- Promote self service, internet and telephony as much as possible.
- Reduce the number of 'front doors' making it easier for customers to access services and link service delivery across the Council e.g. combined library and service points.
- Introduce more online payment facilities.
- Introduce more online application forms.
- Introduce self-serve requests including the ability to apply for benefits, complete an e form to request a service, to book a Council facility or service and, if necessary, pay for these services.
- Develop service standards around these raised customer expectations.
- Increase access via e mail.

7.3 Face to Face

Face to face contact is still an important method of contacting the Council and continues to be an important contact channel for customers, but is reducing. However, it does continue to be our most expensive way of dealing with customers. In the 2010 review the Council looked at the current delivery model, resource allocation and service provision. The Customer Service Review has now implemented a model that will enable best use of resources and align with the Corporate Improvement Programme aims and objectives. Following the review the number of Service Points has now reduced from 37 to 35, a standardised model of opening hours has been introduced and staffing levels have been reviewed in parallel with the Payments Strategy being implemented.

8. Customer Satisfaction & Complaints

An increase in Customer Satisfaction will be a measure of the success of the Strategy, and the Council strives to resolve as many customer requests as possible at the first point of contact. During 2012 the Council has reviewed its approach to complaints handling in line with the SSPO guidance, and has implemented a new corporate CRM based system for handling, tracking and monitoring complaints. The Council, in line with national guidance will increase the speed at which it deals with complaints and will strive to increase customer satisfaction in this area. The Council's approach to complaints can be found here <http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/773BC8CB-E675-4259-8A95-54D21CA4CEBC/0/Item23FHR2412.pdf>

9. Part 3: Enablers

In order to deliver the strategy the Council needs the correct infrastructure in place, a 'can do' attitude to making it happen; the correct people, skills and training in the right place at the right times. Customer Service needs the underpinning business processes required to deliver a service as well as the appropriate technology and effective partnerships.

The following section describes the key enablers of service delivery:

- Processes.
- Technology.
- People.
- Partnerships.

9.1 Processes

Excellent customer service can only be delivered by providing staff with current, accessible and relevant data and information. This, in turn, is achieved through the use of enabling technologies, underpinning efficient and effective business processes. A business process begins with a customer's need and ends with a customer's need fulfilment.

Business Processes are designed to add value for the customer, streamline the organisation and should not include unnecessary activities. The outcome of a well-designed business process is increased effectiveness (value for the customer) and increased efficiency (less costs for the Council). In order to enable service improvement and deliver an efficient and faster service The Highland Council will:

We will:

- Review service standards to ensure customers' expectations are met.
- Monitor and evaluate comments, compliments and complaints.
- Carry out mystery shopping to bench mark our service against other Councils.
- Monitor, review and improve on the results of the Public Performance Survey.
- Ensure processes are fit for purpose, tried, tested and meet the needs of customers & review on a regular basis to ensure continuous improvement.

9.1.1 Assessing Customers Needs

Customer Service telephony and face to face staff will incorporate an assessment process to customer engagement wherever possible. Introducing an assessment element to initial customer engagement, will enable straight forward benefits and entitlements to be handled in the front office. Accomplishing this will enable back offices to deal with customers who have complex enquiries that require both in depth assessment and professional expertise.

9.1.2 Back Office and Front Office Relationship

The Highland Council will continue to develop and enhance the Customer Service processes to enable delivery at first point of contact. Underpinning this will be the staff in the services that will:

- Own and maintain the information that Customer Service staff access in order to deal with customer enquiries. Whether this is held on the internet, intranet or document management system and accessed through share point.
- Decide where the cut-off is in any given situation before the customer is passed on for specialist advice.
- Support the implementation of new business processes to enable services to be routed through the Customer Service Centre and Service Points.

9.2 Technology

The Highland Council will continue to develop and enhance the customer service technology to enable delivery at first point of contact and data sharing. A key development was the replacement of the CRM system in March 2011 which has improved functionality and flexibility over the current system and importantly will provide improved on-line services via the website. Further development of the Council's web presence and the use of technology to offer improved services to customers is key and this is outlined in the web strategy in Appendix 5 of this document.

We will:

- Continue to review and upgrade CRM and integrate to other ICT systems such as Housing, Revenues and Benefits, Civica and Flare.
- Use Management Information to analyse and improve service delivery
- Continue to build and improve the Council's website and on line services, including use of mobile apps and social networking where applicable

9.3 People

The Highland Council customers want to be assured that when they contact the Council their enquiry will be promptly dealt with by someone who is knowledgeable in the subject matter.

Customers expect staff to be professional, knowledgeable and empowered to resolve issues and complete transactions quickly and efficiently. Irrespective of the job, excellent customer service will always be an essential part of what The Highland Council set out to deliver.

9.3.1 People - Training

Investing in employees through appropriate training and development is key to the

successful implementation of this Strategy. All staff who deal with customers on a routine basis will have access to a wide range of training programmes which are delivered by Employee Development including:

- Customer Care.
- Dealing with challenging behaviour.
- CRM Investigation Officer Portal – dealing with enquiries and complaints.
- Responding in writing effectively to customers.
- Equal opportunity and Diversity.

Customer Service Staff will undertake the new “Customer Service Professional Qualifications”. The qualifications were developed by Councils for Councils, and designed to be directly relevant to customer service issues within Scottish Local Authorities. The qualifications are nationally recognised, certificated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and endorsed by COSLA and are portable across all Scottish Councils. We will also investigate new ways of delivering training to staff in cost effective ways, such as webcasting and webinars where the opportunity is presented.

9.4 Partnerships

The Highland Council has many successful partnerships including the Northern Constabulary, National Health Service, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Citizens Advice Bureau and the Immigration and Passport Service. Our commitment to the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) requires closer partnership working which has already been identified as key to The Highland Council’s success and key to achieving efficiencies.

We will:

- Continue to work with internal and external partners in a Service Level Agreement Framework delivering services to customers.
-
- Attract other partners by demonstrating best practice in Partnership working through Customer Service Excellence standards and other means.

10. Benefits

Delivering the strategy will see real benefits for customers and the Council. The following table demonstrates those benefits:

For The Customer	For the Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier access to Council Services. Including extended opening hours. • Choice of method of access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phone - Face to face 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved effectiveness of Front Offices Services, with staff more able to respond to enquiries. • A more consistent approach to the management and delivery of customer contact and service. • Reduced costs. • Greater integration between Council Services,

- Internet / E mail
 - Mail / Fax
 - Self-service
 - No need to understand the Council's organisational structure.
 - Majority of enquiries and requests conclude at first time of asking.
 - No need to keep repeating yourself when dealing with the Council.
 - More effective and efficient response to information & service requests.
 - Less of a need to keep following up on the status of an outstanding service request.
 - Less bureaucracy in form filling and paperwork.
 - Less engaged tones and unanswered calls.
 - Overall improvement in the standard of customer service delivered.
- linking Front and Back Office operations.
- More informed decision-making through better use of management information about service usage, demand and customer preferences.
 - Greater job satisfaction and job variety for front line staff.
 - Staff more able to track progress with service requests, and to answer follow-up enquiries.
 - Use of Customer transaction history (i.e. Citizen Account) to better understand customer needs and enable service to be better targeted to eligible citizens.

11. Consultation and Inclusion

Throughout the strategy period the Council will consult with customers and stakeholders on issues affecting them. The Council also consults with people with disabilities and with older people which has provided valuable information on the preferences of the different groups in society and is very useful in informing how service provision should be designed.

Throughout the strategy period the Council will consult with customers and stakeholders on issues affecting them. Communication is a two way process and through the Annual Public Performance Survey, citizens panel, telephony and face to face Surveys the Council will capture the views of all our customers and respond appropriately in order to meet their needs and expectations.

The Council is committed to meeting the requirements of equal opportunities legislation for the six recognised equality strands (gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief). The Council aims to ensure that all customer engagement will be inclusive, based on the needs of customers and delivered without discrimination on the equality grounds referred to above.

There are strong links with other key strategies and plans from across the Council including the equality plan, A Fairer Highland, which demonstrates how the Council

meets the public sector equality duties. In order to ensure we are delivering the right services in the right way, we need to know our community and understand the needs of varied customer groups. We also need to understand about the people who do not use our services. The Fairer Highland commitment has 3 aims, namely

- a. People are, and feel, free to live their lives without harassment and discrimination, and can take part in community life;
- b. People benefit from public services in a fairer way and are able to have their say about them;
- c. Staff feel there is an organisational culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The Customer Engagement Strategy is recognised as a significant area of the Council's work which could impact on equalities groups (potentially both negatively and positively). The Strategy will ensure preventative measures are taken to avoid discrimination or unfairness on any equality grounds before it occurs. The Strategy will ensure all customers and communities that customers are treated fairly and with respect and are able to access Council services.

12. Governance

The strategy will be approved by members at Finance, Housing and Resources Committee.

Specific Roles under this strategy are:

Finance, Housing and Resources Committee

- Agree the vision and the Customer Services Strategy
 - Review the strategy on an annual basis
 - Receive reports on performance against the strategy and implementation plan.

Senior Management Team

- Consider and recommend the Strategy to Resources Committee
- Ensure the development of the strategy is in line with the aims of the Corporate Improvement Programme.
- Scrutinise and recommend future Customer Services strategy, plans, and investments
- Manage service delivery to ensure focus on the customer and excellent customer service.

Resources

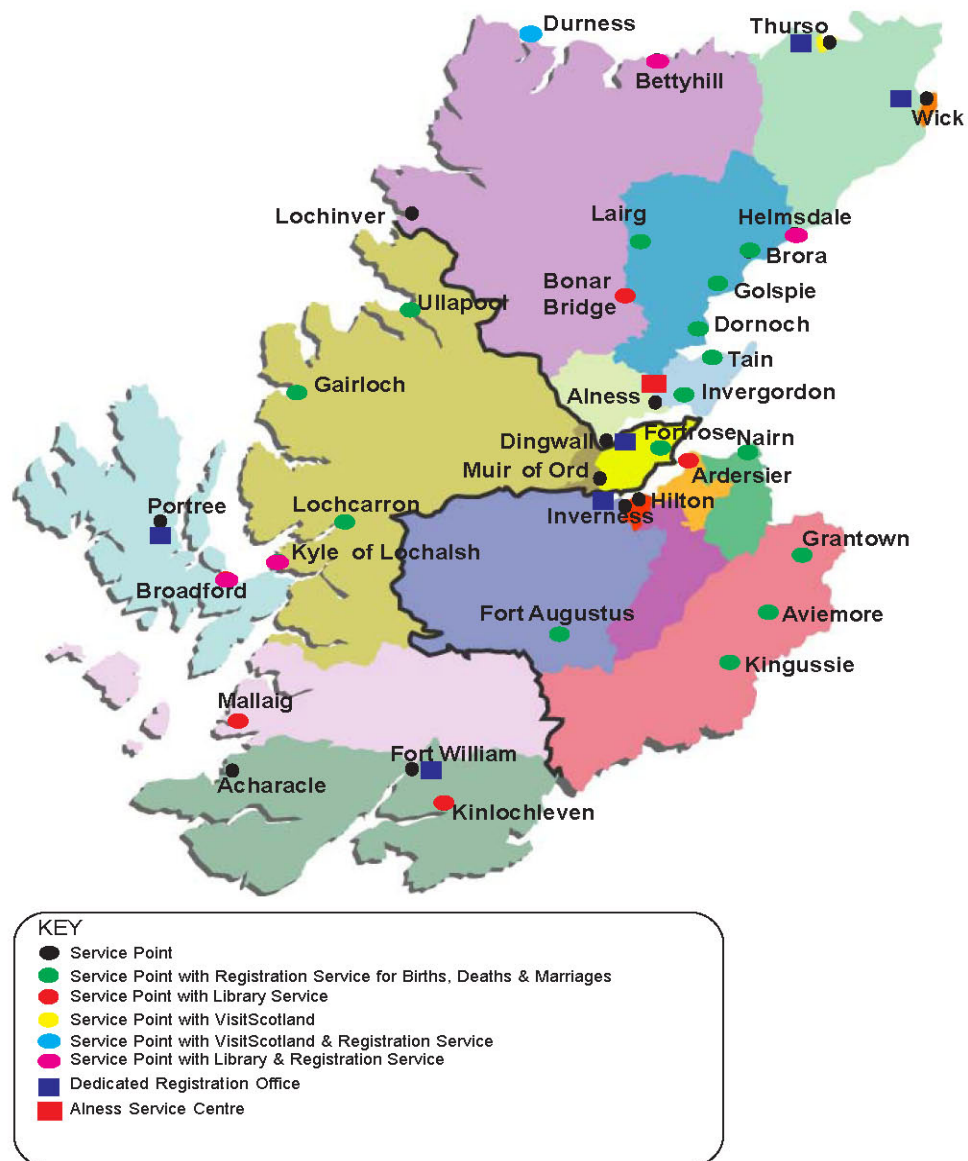
As part of the work to develop the strategy the resource requirements will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Assistant Chief Executive and the Head of E-Government as part of the ongoing management of the Customer Services function. Any additional resource requirements will be identified to the Council's Corporate Improvement Programme.

Appendix 1

Map of Highland Council Customer Service Network

Appendix 1

Customer Services Offices



Appendix 2
Customer First – ESD Core Services

In terms of Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) all service activities (where feasible), should be delivered over multiple channel access – telephone, online and face-to face						
	Service Activity	The Highland Council Service	Service Activity Description	Delivering at first point of contact		
				Phone	Face to Face	On Line
1	Leisure & Recreation - Booking a Council facility and making a payment	Education Culture and Sport	The booking and payment of all sporting activities provided by the Council, or managed services supplied by an external service provider on behalf of the Council.	√	√	Partial
2	Public Library - Renewing, extending and reserving library books	Education Culture and Sport	Access to the full range of Council's Library Service for the loan, renewal, extending and reserving of all materials and products.	√	√	√
3	Council Tax - Making a Council Tax payment	Finance Service	The payment of Council Tax through multiple channels - e.g. Direct Debit, Internet payment, Voucher book, Paypoint, Over the Telephone, etc.	√	√	√
4	Council Tax - Making an enquiry about entitlement to benefit/discounts exemptions or relief	Finance Service	Citizens making specific Council Tax enquires about Entitlement to Benefit/Discounts/Exemptions and Relief.	√	√	Partial √

5	Council Tax - making an enquiry about banding, balance, direct debit or payment due date	Finance Service	Citizens making other specific Council Tax enquires	√	√	Partial
6	Council Tax - Applying for benefit, discount, exemption, relief and direct debit	Finance Service	Citizens making application for council tax benefit, discount, exemption, relief and to pay using direct debit.	Partial	√	Partial
7	Housing Benefit - Making a general enquiry or notifying change of circumstance	Finance Service	Citizens making general enquiries against housing benefit.	Partial	√	Partial
8	Housing Benefit - Applying for housing benefit	Finance Service	Citizens making application for housing benefit.	Partial	√	Partial
9	Housing - Requesting a repair	HAPS	The request and processing of a Housing Repair.	√	√	No
10	Housing - Enquiring about the status of a repair	HAPS	Advising on status of a Housing Repair.	√	√	No
11	Housing - Requesting general information and advice	HAPS	A request received for information and advice about any housing issue or problem.	√	√	√
12	Housing Rent - Making a payment	Finance Services	The payment of rent for Council house property.	√	√	√
13	Housing - Applying for a house	HAPS	The application for the request to obtain a Council house property.	√	√	√

14	Housing - Making an enquiry about status on the waiting list (including points)	HAPS	A request received for information about the status on a Waiting list for a Council house property. Also, specific information on the allocation of points in terms of an application.	√	√	No
15	Planning - Applying for planning permission and making a payment	Planning and Development Services	The process for making a Planning Application to the Council.	√	√	Partial
16	Planning - Enquiring about the status of a requested planning application	Planning and Development Services	Advising on status of a requested Planning Application.	√	√	Partial
17	Refuse Collection - making a general enquiry about refuse collection	Transport Environmental and Community Services	Enquiries received and information provided on the collection of Business and Residential waste refuse.	√	√	Partial
18	Refuse Collection - Making a complaint about refuse collection	Transport Environmental and Community Services	Complaint about the Business and Residential waste refuse not collected on a regular basis (collection not made as per Council's schedule).	√	√	√
19	Street Light Fault - Reporting a fault	Transport Environmental and Community Services	Reporting of any defects and street lighting issues.	√	√	√
20	Roads and Pavements - Reporting faults with roads and pavements	Transport Environmental and Community Services	Reporting of any defects and faults relating to roads and pavements.	√	√	Partial

21	Special Uplift - requesting a special collection (including making payment where appropriate)	Transport Environmental and Community Services	Request made to the Council in respect of a Special Uplift. Full service provision includes completion of the request	√	√	No
22	Building Control - Applying for a building warrant (including making payment where appropriate)	Planning and Development Services	The process for making a Building Control Application to the Council. The primary objective being the processing of building warrants and completion certificates.	Partial	√	Partial
23	Pest Control - Requesting a service to deal with pests (including making payment where appropriate)	Transport Environmental and Community Services	Request from citizens and businesses to deal with pests that are harmful to public health and well-being.	Partial	√	No
24	Pest Control - Reporting general instances of pest infestation	Transport Environmental and Community Services	General reporting from citizens and businesses of pests that may be harmful to public health and well-being.	√	√	No
25	Education Grants - Applying for a clothing grant	Education Culture and Sport Service	An application for Education – Clothing Grant to assist with the cost of school clothing for state-maintained school pupils whose families are receiving particular state benefits or have a low income.	√	√	Partial
26	Education Grants - Applying for free school meals	Education Culture and Sport Service	An application for Free School Meals provided to children of families who are in receipt of appropriate social benefits.	√	√	Partial

27	Education Grants - Applying for an Education Maintenance Allowance	Education Culture and Sport Service	An application for Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA's) which is a government funded scheme to assist young people from lower income families to stay on in school for further education.	√	√	Partial
28	Education - Transferring pupil information between schools	Education Culture and Sport Service	Transfer and exchange of pupil information within a specific school and between schools using electronic mediation. I.e. electronic data management.	N/A	N/A	N/A
29	Education - Providing information for parents	Education Culture and Sport Service	Provision of information to parents specific to Education services.	√	√	Partial
30	Education - Recording pupil attendance in schools	Education Culture and Sport Service	Recording pupil attendance using registers facilitated by electronic mediation.	N/A	N/A	N/A
31	Education - Making a general enquiry about Lifelong Learning	Education Culture and Sport Service	Enquiries received by the Council specific to learning activities that are available within council facilities.	√	√	Partial
32	Education - Booking a course and other learning activities	Education Culture and Sport Service	Bookings received by the Council specific to learning activities that are available within council facilities.	√	√	√
33	Social Work - Ordering and Supplying Aids and Adaptations to the home	Social Work Services	The Process for making changes and obtaining aids for people who need help around the home.	√	√	No

34	Social Work - Assessing need for social care (Single Shared Assessment)	Social Work Services	The process for assessing and determining the social care requirements for an individual.	√	√	No
35	Social Work - Applying for Home Care	Social Work Services	Provision of home care and support to eligible people in their own home. This service may be provided by council staff or by a third party.	√	√	No
36	Social Work - Applying for social work services	Social Work Services	The process required to action referrals/enquiries through to provision of social services.	√	√	No
37	Blue Badge - Applying for a blue badge	Chief Executive Service	Application for people with severe walking difficulties, who are registered blind, or who have severe disabilities and may be eligible for a Blue Badge to allow vehicle parking in appropriate areas.	√	√	√
38	Corporate - Making a Complaint	Chief Executive Service	The process for dealing with Corporate Complaints received from receipt of enquiry to resolution of complaint.	√	√	√
39	Council - Notifying a change of address	Chief Executive Service	The process to inform the Council about a citizen's change of address.	√	√	Partial
40	Council - Applying for job with the Council	Chief Executive Service	The process for publication of council vacancies and managing recruitment through electronic mediation.	√	√	√

41	Registration - Registering a Birth, Death or Marriage (including making payment)	Chief Executive Service	The processes for the registration of births, deaths and marriages using electronic mediation where feasible.	No	√	No
42	Licensing - Applying for a Taxi Driver licence (including making payment)	Chief Executive Service	The process for any person to be authorised to drive a licensed private hire vehicle.	Partial	√	Partial
43	Licensing - Applying for a Street Trader licence (including making payment)	Chief Executive Service	The process for any Street Trading to be authorised before the selling or offering for sale of any article in the street.	Partial	√	Partial
44	Licensing - Applying for a Liquor licence (including making payment)	Chief Executive Service	The process for application to sell alcohol in hotels, pubs, discos, restaurants and shops.	Partial	√	Partial
45	Business Development - Applying for a Business Development Grant	Planning and Development Services	The process for the provision of grants to assist business development needs requirements within the council boundary.	Partial	√	Partial
46	Transport - Paying a Parking Fine	Transport Environmental and Community Services	The process to facilitate the payment of parking fines.	√	√	√

Please note: Not all 46 Services are deliverable across all channels. Further development work is in progress to meet our multi-channel commitment.

Appendix 3

Highland Council Customer Service Delivery

The following table outlines the services which are available to customers throughout the Customer Service Network. In addition the Network offers a variety of partnership services which are detailed in Appendix 4.

Service Centre (Telephone Contacts)	Service Point (Face to face customers)	Registration
Request a bulky uplift Request a house repair Apply for a blue badge Apply for a travel card Request a form for a range of services Make a service enquiry Make contact via the web Make a rent or council tax enquiry Raise a complaint, make a comment or compliment Make a Payment	Make a payment Request a house repair Apply for a house Apply for a travel card Apply for benefits Make a rent enquiry or council tax enquiry Apply for blue badge Request a form for a range of services Raise a complaint, make a comment or compliment	Registration (Birth, Marriages, Deaths) Civil Partnership Archive records Ancestry research Citizenship ceremonies

Appendix 4

HIGHLAND COUNCIL CUSTOMER SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS

The Highland Council has a successful track record in developing and providing partnership services. In addition to its strategic Single Outcome Agreement Partners, The Council operates a wide range of partnerships services via the Customer Service Network.

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

1	Registration of Births, Deaths & Marriages	All service points
2	Library Service	Ardersier, Bettyhill, Bonar Bridge, Broadford, Helmsdale, Kinlochleven, Mallaig,
3	Visit Scotland	Dornoch, Durness
4	Identity & Passport Agency	Fort William, Kingussie, Lochcarron, Lochinver, Portree, Ullapool, Inverness
5	Cairngorm National Park	Grantown
6	Local Woodland Trust	Grantown
7	Grantown Initiative	Grantown
8	Planning	Nairn
9	City Link (ticket selling agent)	Fort Augustus, Kinlochleven, Brora, Golspie, Dornoch
10	Bio – mass energy	Aviemore
11	Citizens Advice Bureau	Bettyhill, Bonar Bridge, Dornoch, Lairg
12	DWP – Pension Service	Fort William, Fort Augustus, Fortrose, Golspie, Invergordon, Kyle, Lochcarron, Dingwall, Nairn, Ullapool, Dornoch, Gairloch
13	Credit Union Surgeries	Fort William - although all SPs can register customers for the Hi Scot Credit Union
14	Mobile Banking Service	Bettyhill
15	Citizens Advice (Formally NW Advice & Info Service)	Durness, Golspie
16	Money Advice	Grantown, Golspie
17	Community Advice & Info Serv	Grantown
18	Working For Families	Invergordon
19	NW Highland Geopark	Lochinver
20	Lochaber College	Mallaig

21	Highland Alcohol Counselling	Various – by appointment
22	Criminal Justice	Various – by appointment
23	MP/MSP Surgeries	Various – advertised locally
24	Local Councillor Surgeries	Various – advertised locally
25	Northern Constabulary	Golspie, Bettyhill, Broadford, Muir of Ord, Lairg, Gairloch

Appendix 5

Customer Engagement Strategy - Web Strategy

V.1 November 2012

1.0 – Introduction

This document presents the Highland Council's Strategy for the delivery of services and information via the internet to Highland residents, businesses, partner organisations and visitors as well as Council staff and Councillors.

The Council has recognised the potential of the internet to improve communication and engagement with its communities in its programme document "Working together for the Highlands". This Web Strategy will assist in the delivery of a number of actions under the heading "Working together to empower our communities"

The Council's Customer Service Strategy and the Scottish Government's Customer First Programme, state that 'In terms of Electronic Service Delivery all service activities (where feasible), should be delivered over multiple channel access – telephone, online and face-to face'. This Web Strategy will cover the online element of this requirement.

Fully integrated self- service can drastically reduce the cost of a transaction. Socitm have estimated that self-service via a website could cost as little as 15p compared with £2.83 for a phone call and £8.62 face to face.

Much of the work required to achieve this strategy is being driven by the Council's Corporate Improvement Programme (CIP) through the Customer Engagement and Assessment Project (CEA) and the Information Management Project.

While the document refers to the Highland Council's Website – www.highland.gov.uk – it must be appreciated that the Council's "web presence" is made up of a suite of different web sites providing specific services (E. Planning, webcasting, trading standards information and job vacancies are all provided by different web sites). This Strategy relates to the Council's web presence as a whole and many of the required improvements will be provided through new systems and online technologies. As a result of this, over time, www.highland.gov.uk will become the portal to signpost where services can be accessed as well as a public information store.

Staff from CIP, the PR Unit, Customer Services and Business Support have discussed and agreed the future requirements for the Council's use of the internet. The requirements provide a vision for the Council's future web presence which can be group under the following topics:

- Transactional web – the provision of online services
- Interactive web – online consultation and communications
- Information store – proactive publication of information in compliance with legislation
- Technological improvements – making the website work better for the user
- Accessibility – making the website work for everyone
- Roles and responsibilities – Establishing governance and ownership

This document describes the Council's aspirations in relation to these areas and how it is intended they will be achieved.

2.0 – Transactional Web

The provision of online services is key to future improvement of the Council's web presence. Online services provide a cost effective means of providing services to the public and are accessible out with normal office hours from any location. The CIP CEA project focusses on services which the Council provides to the public. An audit of public facing services has been carried out and it is the intention to make as many of these public facing services available on line as possible.

At the present time very few services are available online. It is possible to make payments online but, with the exception of E. planning, it is not possible to apply for a service and make the required payment at the same time. The Council will make improvements in the following areas:

2.1 – On-line forms

The Council has purchased the Lagan Citizen's Portal which is integrated with the Lagan Customer Relationship Management system (CRM). This enables the Council to create on line forms which, once completed and submitted by a customer, are automatically added to work flows within the CRM to be actioned by the next available member of staff associated with the service in question.

Staff within the Customer Services CRM Team are now working on creating forms for public facing services such as bulky uplifts and freedom of information requests. Links to Lagan forms will be added to www.highland.gov.uk via new or existing pages. The on-line forms will be accessible through home page links, the search facility and the A to Z.

2.2 – On-line payments

The Council uses the Capita online payments system to collect payments. Until recently, a customer could only make payments on-line as a result of being sent a bill or fine by the Council. This system has now been integrated with the CRM system and Lagan Citizen's Portal making it easier for the Council to receive payments for services requested.

Customers will be able to request services and pay for them via the Council's website rather than having to telephone the Council to provide their card details for payment. This facility increases the number services that it will be possible to create on-line forms for and transfer to the web site.

2.3 – On-line bookings

On-line bookings are more complex than on-line forms because the service request must be matched to a limited number of slots within a diary. The system must update automatically to avoid double bookings or over subscription. The Council will review its requirement to provide for on-line bookings and investigate cost effective solutions.

2.4 – Frequently asked questions

In order to enable a customer to access services via on line forms, there must be sufficient information to answer any questions that may arise, along with instructions on how to fill out the form. Failure to provide sufficient information may result in the customer choosing to use a more expensive channel to request the service instead.

The Council will publish sufficient information on its website for each service which is put on-line. This may include video or other suitable media. The information will be reviewed and updated regularly as a result of feedback received from customers.

2.5– Contact details for assistance

It is becoming common on commercial websites for applicants to click on a help button to receive telephone assistance with filling out forms. The Council will investigate how best it can provide real time assistance to customers who are having trouble completing on-line forms.

3.0– Interactive Web (social media technology)

Over the past few years, numerous different forms of web technologies have arisen which enable interaction between users. These are collectively known as social media. Most forms of social media enable users to share information and opinions interactively in a public forum.

The Council has its own official twitter feed (www.twitter.com/HighlandCouncil) and facebook page (www.facebook.com/highlandcouncil) and staff are becoming more familiar with using social media to communicate with the public.

The Council does not have the facilities for social media within its content management system so any use of social media relies on using external websites (usually at no cost) in combination with the Council's website.

In future the Council will extend its use of social media in the following ways:

3.1 – Online consultation

In 2010, the Council used the web as an extension of its budget consultation enabling members of the public to comment on proposals and take part in discussions online. This was warmly received and other Councils copied the example. A similar consultation is to take place in 2012.

The Council will identify opportunities for using social media to carry out further online consultations.

3.2 – Blogs

A Blog (web log) is simply an on-line diary where a user can post articles or updates and followers can respond and make comments. The budget consultation included the "Budget Leader's Blog" where the issues associated with the budget were outlined along with questions that the Council requested feedback on.

The Council will identify opportunities for the use of further blogs to provide regular updates on the work of the Council and to enable the public to provide feedback.

3.3 – Discussion and feedback

Social media in general provide opportunities for instant feedback and public comment. Many public bodies have used social media to host events where a representative fields questions and provides responses in real time. Council staff have recently collaborated with Northern Constabulary to take part in an event regarding on line safety.

Taking part in such events enables public authorities to change public perception of them in terms of openness and accountability. The Council will identify opportunities to host social media events involving senior staff or members.

3.4 – Other media

Web sites such as Youtube and Flickr enable users to post content such as videos and photographs. Viewers are able to review and comment on this content. These sites provide opportunities for publicising the work of the Council

and can be used as an alternative way of providing information. The Council has posted its corporate video on YouTube as well as simulations of the proposed Inverness West trunk link road. Videos describing the Council's Services in British sign language have also been posted. Flickr has been used to create photographic galleries of council events and over 1000 hits were received by the gallery on the Olympic torch.

The Council will utilise Youtube and Flickr as appropriate to help provide information which explains the services provided and promotes its work in the Highland Community.

4.0 – Information Store

As the Council's web presence becomes more transactional and interactive, www.highland.gov.uk will still be required to act as a public information store. This section explains some of the aims and aspirations in this area.

4.1 – Knowledge base for customers, staff and members (link to 2.4)

The Council's aim to provide as many services on-line as practicable must be supported by quality information and guidance on the services provided and the application process. As stated in section 2.4, the Council will ensure that each service which is put on-line is supported by appropriate guidance and supporting information.

It is intended that this information will act as a knowledge base for Council staff and members as well as our customers. This follows the information management concept of having "one version of the truth" and ensures that our staff and customers are following the same guidance.

4.2 – Leaflets and documents (other media from 3.4)

The Council produces a number of documents for the public each year. These range from key official documents such as the annual accounts to through to leaflets advertising services and events. It is important that as many documents as possible are published online to make them available to a wider audience than would have access to printed copies.

It is also important that thought is given to web publishing when designing documents to make sure information is available in suitable formats and to ensure it is accessible. The Council will ensure that all documents and leaflets published on-line will adhere to its web standards (link). This will ensure that they have currency, and adhere with accessibility requirements. The Council will

also take advantage of opportunities to make use of alternative media formats for disseminating its information and messages (see 3.4 above).

4.3 – Proactive publication (FOI and EIRs)

Section 23 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) and regulation 4 of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs) both require public authorities to proactively publish information. This was intended to reduce the impact of the legislation as information which is already published is covered by exemptions and exceptions. Regulation 4 of the EIRs also obliges public authorities to progressively make environmental information available electronically.

This does not simply require the Council to publish documents and leaflets as described in 4.2 above but it must review the records that it creates and assess opportunities for publishing these as a matter of course. A good example of proactive publishing is food safety reports, where many requests for information have been avoided by publishing proactively since FOISA came into force. Examples for future consideration include road inspection reports and enforcement registers. If such information could be published proactively, a large number of requests would be avoided.

Council services will review the records that they hold and assess the suitability of proactively publishing as much information as they can.

The Council is also required to publish and maintain a publication scheme ([link](#)). This describes the information that the Council makes available as a matter of course and how it can be accessed. To date the publication scheme has not been widely used. However, the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner intends to change its focus from the approval of individual schemes to assurance that agreed schemes are being maintained and updated. The Council's publication scheme is approved until 1st June 2013. After that date it is likely that a simpler model publication scheme will be approved and the focus will move to the implementation of the scheme.

The Council will ensure that its publication scheme is integrated into the website to ensure that information relating to the services provided by the council are available alongside the knowledge base created in relation to 4.1 and 2.4 above.

4.4 – Minutes and agendas (webcasting)

Minutes and agendas account for a large proportion of the information stored on the Council's website. This has grown into an excellent archive of previous

meetings and background reports as well as popular source of information for media and the public in relation to forthcoming meetings.

Webcasting has enhanced the Council's web presence in this area and the agendas within the webcasting pages link directly to the background reports on the Council's website. The Webcasting service has been improved through the use of social media and further opportunities are being investigated by the supplier.

The Council will continue to provide this service in relation to its committee meetings and will investigate ways of improving this service where technology and resource allows.

4.5 – Press releases and consultations (linked to 3.0)

All Council press releases are published on the Council's website with the most recent appearing on the home page. Since July 2010 every press release has also been tweeted with a link to the full press release on the website. The number of followers of this service has quickly grown to over 3000 and is increasing every week.

The PR Unit are also involved in producing web pages and publicity material for Council consultations e.g. the budget consultations. This involves a mix of press releases, hard copy information and social media technologies to provide a mix of information and seek opinions from the public. Working with services it has been possible to publish high quality information and other content via the Council's web presence. This content backs up public meetings where services staff give presentations and answer questions regarding the consultation and enables a wider audience to become involved.

The Council will continue to provide this service in relation to its committee meetings and will investigate ways of improving this service where technology and resource allows.

4.6 – Gaelic content

The Council's programme "Working together for the Highlands" makes a commitment to the principle of equal respect for the Gaelic and English languages. Whilst the vast majority of information available via the Council's various websites is in English, the Council's latest Gaelic Language Plan 2012-16 will herald the restructuring and consolidation of the Gaelic elements on the Council Website. The Council will review all pages relating to Gaelic on the website; and create a new, unified area which will include:

- information on Gaelic Education and bilingualism
- Gaelic Development in communities and across the Council
- a Gaelic language learning toolkit and
- links with partners.

Every page on the Council's website will have a link to its main Gaelic area at the top of each page; and this Gaelic area will provide bilingual information on the Council's Gaelic Plan and other initiatives. Where a press release is particularly relevant, it will be translated into Gaelic; and Gaelic translations of important Council documents will also be published. Meetings of the Gaelic Implementation Group are webcast in Gaelic and its minutes and agendas are available in both Gaelic and English.

The Council will continue to investigate ways to increase the Gaelic content which it provides. This will be achieved through use of the Council's web site and through use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr.

5.0 – Technological Improvements

The Council's website is provided via Fujitsu Services Ltd using the Microsoft Content Management System (MSCMS). This enables decentralisation of the creation and updating of web pages. It also enables control of the look and feel of the site through the use of a number of corporate templates. This technology is aging and does not include "out of the box" functionality for social media technology described in section 3.

The current content management system is due to exit extended support in April 2014, at which point it will become 'end of life'. There is no formal upgrade path for the current web content management solution so the Council will be forced to look at alternative technologies or develop its own solution in the short to medium term. This will require a project to procure and setup a new web site on new technology with the current web content being migrated to the new system. Migration of the current content will be resource intensive but implementation of new technologies will enable the delivery of the requirements described below.

5.1 – Better use of home page real estate

The design of the Council's homepage was agreed in 2006 when the site was re-launched using MSCMS. There is a constant tension over which links should be prominent on the homepage and, as a result of the large number of services which the Council carries out, it is impossible to ensure that every service gets an equal prominence.

To date, the home page has concentrated on corporate priorities which exist at any given time. The navigation, search and site map are provided for those seeking “deeper” content.

There are, however, options for making the home page more flexible and increasing the amount of information which can be directly accessed from it. For example it would be possible to create a number of optional home pages which users could set as their favourite depending on their interests. Other options include using tabs to increase the space available on the home page and using technology to enable users to customise the home page for their own purposes.

Part of the website replacement project would involve working with users of the Council’s web site to redesign the home page in a way that suits them best.

5.2 – Improved search

The search functionality on the Council’s web site is very basic and does not take advantage of the functionality provided by the search software that it uses. Very little change has been made to this since 2006 when the site was launched with MSCMS.

Council staff have been working with Fujitsu to improve the search facilities and new search functionality will be available to the web team in Autumn 2012. This will enable many common search features to be used such as using synonyms to direct a user to the appropriate page and the ability to provide key pages at the top of specific searches to present the most current information on a topic.

There will also be management information available to show which links are most commonly selected as the result of a search and to promote popular links to make them appear higher in the results pages. Council staff will also be able to see searches made and take action to improve the results presented in the future.

Once the functionality has been tested and put into the live environment, the Council will use this functionality to greatly improve the search on the Council’s web site. Effective search functionality will be a key requirement for the new web site.

5.3 – Integration of Social Media functionality (link to 3.0)

Section 3 described social media technology and the way it will be used by the Council. Much of the Council’s work in this area is carried out on public sites over which the Council has no control and in many cases this may be appropriate. However, a limitation of a social media site such as Facebook is the

need for a member of the public to have registered as a Facebook user prior to being able to take part in discussions.

As a result of the age of MSCMS, there is no in built social media functionality within the Council's web site to enable the public to comment on the site or to enable the Council to use it more fully for consultations. Many newer content management systems would now come with this functionality and this will be a key requirement of the new system. In the meantime, the Council must work with Fujitsu to investigate ways of improving the provision of social media functionality on the current site.

5.4 – Geographical information and reporting

To date the Council has made limited use of geographical information on its website. The Council's Geographic Information System (GIS) has been used to help members of the public locate their polling station and provide a map of its location. Many Council properties have pages on the web site which include a link to a google map of its location.

There are a number of ways in which geographical information could be used on the web to improve services. In some Council web sites users are able to register their postcode and be provided with information relevant to their locality. These websites are able to link diary information to postcode and provide such as the date of the next blue bin collection. The Council will investigate ways to provide postcode specific information through its corporate GIS.

Other examples use maps to collect information and report faults to the Council. Where these maps are integrated to CRM they can display whether faults have already been reported. These facilities are now available to the Council through the Lagan Citizen's Portal and the Council will use this functionality, where appropriate, to enable faults to be reported online through to its CRM.

5.5 – Mobile versions and smart phone applications

More and more people are using mobile phones to access websites. Since it was built the Council's website has been able to be viewed on mobile devices with the page shrinking to the appropriate size and all the standard links in place. However, the design of the home page and the large number of links available means that this method does not supply a good experience for someone attempting to access the Council's site via a mobile device.

Major web sites such as the BBC have developed separate mobile versions. These are generally simpler versions of the web site with fewer, key links being

promoted. Mobile versions are likely to involve less text and provide easier steps to enable users to access services.

The Council must review the suitability of its websites for mobile devices and develop specific provision for them. This task would best be carried out once transactional services are put online and is likely to involve making an appropriate selection of these services available via a mobile version of the web site.

5.6 – Integration with share point document libraries (link to 4.1 and 4.3)

Section 4 described the need to use the Council's web site as a public information store. Documents which are published on the web site are usually created by council staff and stored on the Council's internal servers. Copies of documents are then published on the web site. This leads to the risk that changes to internal versions of documents are not reflected in the public version.

The Council now has access to Microsoft Sharepoint which can be used to create document libraries for storing documents. This software can also be integrated with workflow which can enable the production of documents, e.g. policies, committee reports or background papers to undergo approval prior to publication to the web. The Council will use these facilities to ensure that there is better integration between internal and external documents to ensure that there is one version of the truth and to ensure that information published on the web site is as up to date as possible.

5.7 – Customer registration and login (link to 2.0)

In order to truly personalise provision of information and services over the internet it is usually necessary to create accounts for regular users. These enable verification and security to be managed. Customer registration can enable customers to access their own information as in online banking but it does create an additional administrative overhead and may represent a risk under data protection where personal data is processed.

Other than for the purposes of taking part in discussion forums on the Council's website (these are used to avoid anonymous comments and only name and email address are required), it is not advisable to implement systems for online registration and management of customers at this time. The on-line forms (Section 2.1) will collect the appropriate amount of data to enable the Council to associate a request with a person within the CRM. Until the decision is made to enable customers to access their own data in back office systems there is no need to go to the expense of creating customer registration systems.

6.0 – Accessibility

The Council is under obligation to make its web site accessible to all users. The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Council, as an employer and service provider, makes reasonable adjustments to make sure that its website is accessible to disabled people. This may include:

- people with visual impairments, who use text-to-speech software
- people with manual dexterity impairments, who cannot use a mouse
- people with dyslexia and learning difficulties.

In making reasonable adjustments, we should not wait until a disabled person wants to use the website but should anticipate what people with a range of impairments might reasonably need.

The Council, therefore, has a duty to measure its accessibility. The international standard for web accessibility has been developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). This specifies three level of accessibility “A”, “AA”, and “AAA”. As holders of a .gov.uk domain, the Council is expected to achieve “AA” compliance.

6.1 – Technical Accessibility

Technical accessibility can be measured by IT systems automatically and compares the code quality against international and national standards for compliance with the W3C standards.

Since 2010, the Council's website has been ranked somewhere between 5th and 35th out 429 UK Councils in Sitemorse's independent quarterly testing of Local Authority web site accessibility. These tests also place the Council website in the top 5 of the Scottish Local Authorities tested.

This independent analysis indicates that the use of the content management system with corporate templates designed to a high technical standard by Fujitsu, enables the web site to meet the technical standards required.

It should be noted that maintenance of these standards requires regular monitoring to detect and fix errors created by users which can't be corrected by the system. The council will continue to monitor its technical accessibility in order to maintain a high level of compliance.

6.2 – Usability Testing

Usability testing can detect issues with the accessibility of web sites. This is carried out by people rather than computers, usually through the use of assistive

technologies. These technologies help users with specific disabilities to access information on the web, and may involve special software or equipment. Only by testing the site with these technologies can you tell if the site is truly accessible or not. The results are compared to the same W3C standard as is used for technical accessibility.

The Council is seeking accreditation for the accessibility of its web site and procured usability testing through the Digital Accessibility Centre in February 2012. The Council is working with Fujitsu to address the problems identified with certain aspects of the site and will seek re-accreditation once these changes have been made.

7.0 – Roles and Responsibilities

PR Unit (Web team)

Editorial control. Administration of the content management system. Monitoring the site for quality of content and accessibility. Liaison with ICT provider for fault fixing. Liaison with ICT provider for system developments and changes. Liaison with Council Services in relation to content, quality, accessibility, developments and changes.

Fujitsu

Provision of web services and fault fixing. Development of changes and improvements through liaison with the Council's web team.

Customer Services

Provision of online services. Creation and management of online forms via Lagan. Liaison with web team regarding location of links and structure of online service pages.

Directors

Ensuring that Services use web technologies to provide online services and information to the public.

Process Owners

Liaison with Customer Services regarding creation and development of online forms. Provision of knowledge base and frequently asked questions associated with online forms and services. Proactive publication of information in compliance with FOI and EIRs.

Business Support

Creation of standard web pages and publishing of information in support of process owners.

Appendix 6 - List of process for migration to Customer Services in 2012/13

Service	Process	Phase
TECS	Apply for a Pass Plus Grant	1a (14 Processes)
TECS	Apply for Parking Cards	
TECS	Apply for Residents Parking	
TECS	Apply for Road closure	
TECS	Apply for Road opening permit	
TECS	Apply for school transport	
TECS	Report 20mph zone fault	
TECS	Report Complaint about Play Area	
TECS	Report emergency lighting/traffic signal faults	
TECS	Report Grounds maintenance issue/complaint	
TECS	Report lighting/traffic signal faults	
TECS	Report Missed bin collection	
TECS	Report road maintenance complaint	
TECS	Report street cleansing complaint	
CEX	Apply for a Liquor Application	1b (8 Processes)
CEX	Apply for Approval of Civil Marriage Location	
CEX	Apply for Civic Government Licence	
CEX	Apply for Landlord Registration	
CEX	Apply for a food export certificate	
TECS	Apply for Licence to occupy road	
TECS	Apply for License (Miscellaneous)	
TECS	Apply for Petrol, Explosives, Poisons, Feed stuffs License	
PDS	Apply amendment of a Building Warrant	1c (9 processes)
PDS	Apply for a Building Warrant	
PDS	Apply for a Letter of Comfort (Completion Certificate where no Building Warrant obtained)	
PDS	Apply for Aquaculture Planning Permission	
PDS	Apply for Planning Permission	
PDS	Apply to extend period of validity of a Building Warrant	
PDS	Report a New Property	
PDS	Report Change of House Name	
PDS	Report Long Distance Route Maintenance Requirement	
CEX	Report of web problem to Webmaster	1d (6 Processes)
CEX	Comments	
CEX	Complaints	
CEX	Compliments	
CEX	Report suggestions to Improve Webcasting	
CEX	Report residential care complaint	
HAPS	Apply to Lease a Commercial Property	1e (10)

HAPS	Apply for Housing Adaptations (Council Tenants)	Processes)
HAPS	Report Change to Housing Tenancy Agreement	
HAPS	Make Good/Complaint on Housing Repair	
HAPS	Out of Hours Repairs	
HAPS	Report Housing Repair	
HAPS	Report Re-chargeable Repairs	
HAPS	Request for Drawdown of Funds (Landbank Fund - Feasibility Studies)	
HAPS	Request for Loan Drawdown (Landbank Fund)	
HAPS	Apply for provision of equipment or minor home adaptation	
ECS	Apply for Education Maintenance Allowance	1f (13 processes)
ECS	Apply for Free School Meals/ Clothing Grant	
FIN	Apply for Backdated Claims - Council Tax/Housing Benefit	
FIN	Apply for Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions	
FIN	Apply for Council Tax/Housing Benefit	
FIN	Apply for Disablement Band Reduction - Council Tax	
FIN	Apply for Discretionary Housing Payments & Local Schemes	
FIN	Apply for NDR Relief and Remission	
FIN	Recover Over Payments	
FIN	Report Change of Circumstances - housing and council tax benefits	
FIN	Report Change of Circumstances - council tax	
FIN	Report Change of Circumstances - NDR	
FIN	Request for Refund of Over-paid Rates	

