

Highpoints

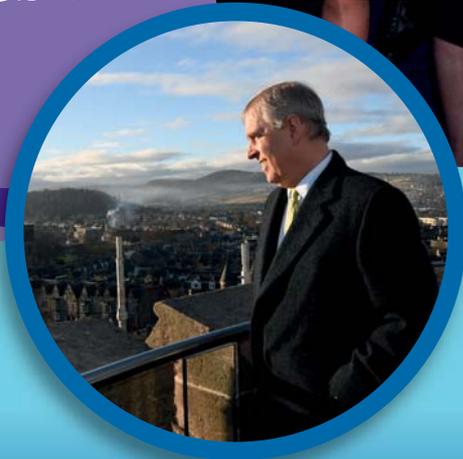
Sàr Phuingean

INSIDE: City-Region Deal Projects page12



Highland Council celebrate staff achievements in Quality Awards 2016

Photo by Ewen Weatherspoon



Royal visit
to the North Tower

Ness Wifi
goes live



www.highland.gov.uk

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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 Winter edition of our magazine Highpoints (Sàr Phuingean).

This issue focuses on the outstanding work of Council staff, highlighted in the Quality Awards which were held in November. It is always quite humbling to hear about the dedication and commitment of our staff to their work and the services they provide to communities.

The Highland Council has worked closely with partners over the past two years on the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal City-Deal and this edition of Highpoints contains an update on the various projects within the Deal Programme.

The City-Region Deal aims to position Inverness and the Highlands as a region of digital opportunity and economic development, with a skilled workforce. HRH, The Earl of Inverness, was very interested, on his recent visit to the city, to hear about all the exciting developments taking place in the Highlands and is keen to encourage innovative businesses to consider the Highlands as an investment opportunity.

Set against the context of investment in innovation and economic growth, the Highland Council Members will have to consider options for significant savings and make very difficult decisions in February. It is clear that the Council will need to considerably reduce or cease some services in order to meet a budget gap of over £20 million and this will not be easy for anyone.

What is important is that we focus our efforts on providing the highest quality services where they are needed most and to ensure the best value for every pound we spend.



Isobel McCallum Highland Council Convener

Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal

The vision behind the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal is to position Inverness and the Highlands as a region of digital opportunity.

This vision was turned into reality with the signing in March 2016 of the heads of terms agreement between the UK and Scottish Governments and the Highland Council. This sets out the broad areas where Governments will commit investment of up to £188m which, together with £127m of further investment by the Council and public sector partners, will deliver a step change in digital connectivity, digital healthcare, skills, innovation and infrastructure.



City-Region Deal
Cùmhnant Baile-Roinne

The next step is for us to develop a detailed implementation plan for approval by both Scottish and UK Governments.

Find out more about the City-Region Deal projects on page 12.

Or visit: www.highland.gov.uk/cityregiondeal

Director Stuart Black receives Outstanding Business Ambassador Award

Director of Development and Infrastructure, Stuart Black, was awarded the SCDI Heathrow Airport Award for Outstanding Business Ambassador in September 2016.

Heathrow's Director of External Affairs Nigel Milton said: "Stuart has been a true leader and played an important part in driving investment and supporting businesses across the Highlands through his roles with Highland Council and previously Highlands and Islands Enterprise. He has been an outstanding ambassador for the region and a great champion on issues such as air connectivity where he was a strong advocate

of the need to reintroduce a Heathrow link with Inverness. "The Highlands have much to offer and with the connection to Heathrow already proving

tremendously popular with tourists and businesses alike, we're delighted to be playing a part in helping the Highland economy flourish."



Stuart Black with David Whiteford, Chair of the North Highland Initiative which does the North Coast 500.

River Ness Flood Scheme gets a Royal Overview



Photos by Ewen Weatherspoon



The River Ness Flood Scheme received a Royal Overview by HRH The Earl of Inverness on Tuesday 13th December, when he visited the view point of the North Tower to get an eagle's eye view of the award winning flood scheme and the city of Inverness.

The River Ness has burst its banks numerous times throughout history often with devastating consequences. The most

disruptive event occurred in 1989 when the railway viaduct was swept away with the floods. More recent flood events were encountered in 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2011, and indeed two flood events were encountered during the construction of the works, that whilst contained, did cause localised flooding.

The scheme offers a 1 in 100 year level of protection and alleviates flooding to some 800 houses and 200 businesses.

The Highland Council submitted a grant application on the 21st December 2011, making an application for 80% funding for the River Ness (Tidal) Flood Alleviation Scheme. Scottish Government confirmed funding support in February 2012.

Due to the major construction works to be undertaken, the scheme also offered the opportunity to upgrade the streetscape environment and

incorporate enhanced footways and cycleways.

Public art opportunities also exist and are being progressed in parallel.

The Scheme was entered and won a Saltire Award in 2015 for the quality of the project.

The Provost of Inverness welcomed HRH The Earl of Inverness to the Town House to unveil a special plaque to mark his visit.

She said: "I am delighted to welcome His Royal Highness, The Earl of Inverness to Inverness. I hope he enjoyed his visit this morning to the castle hill viewing platform in the North Tower, with such splendid views over the city. He will certainly have had a bird's eye view of the award winning flood scheme and the beautiful new surroundings of the River Ness as well as views over the whole of Inverness."

Testing the River Ness flood gates

The flood gates for the River Ness Flood Scheme were closed for around 2 hours on 28th September 2016 as part of a joint training exercise between The Highland Council and SEPA, to demonstrate operating procedures for responding to coastal and river flood events and how they trigger activation of Inverness Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The award winning River Ness flood alleviation scheme was completed in 2015 and includes flood walls, embankments and 12 flood gates which are normally kept open to maintain access at key locations.

The River Ness has burst its banks numerous times throughout history, often with devastating consequences. The most disruptive event occurred in 1989 when the railway viaduct was swept away with the floods. The new River Ness flood scheme not only protects 1000 properties from such devastation, but the scheme has really transformed our lovely riverside and has made it a really attractive place to be.

SEPA is responsible for providing a flood warning and forecasting service (FLOODLINE) within Scotland, and The Highland Council, Emergency Services and the general public can receive flood alerts and warnings direct.

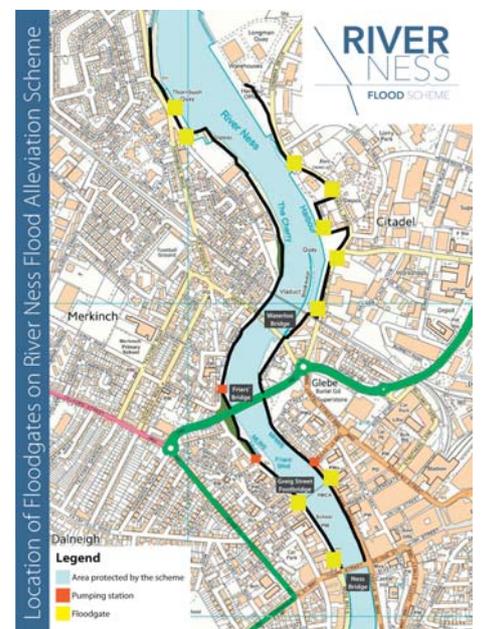


Richard Brown, Head of Hydrology at the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) said:

“This joint training exercise is an excellent example of strong partnership working. Using our state-of-the-art flood forecasting systems along the Moray Firth and River Ness enables SEPA to work closely with local authorities and emergency responders during flood events to ensure people are informed and protected.

“It is never too early for people and businesses to take action and protect themselves, and their properties, against the disruption and damage which flooding can cause. In addition to the well-established River Ness flood warning system, a coastal flood warning service for the Moray Firth was launched in 2014 and we hope that as many people as possible who live and work in, or travel through, the area will sign up to our Floodline service to receive up to 24 hours advance notice when flooding is predicted.”

You can sign up to Floodline to receive free notifications of flood warning messages direct to your choice of mobile or landline numbers at:
www.sepa.org.uk/floodingsignup
or by calling: **0345 988 1188**



Sponsored by



Encouraging Improvement, Recognising Achievement

Employee of the year 2016

Housing Policy officer Gail Ward has been named as our Employee of the Year for the care and compassion she has shown in welcoming Syrian refugees to the Highlands and her work to ease the impact Welfare Reform has had on individuals.

As the first Local Authority to undertake the roll-out of Universal Credit, Gail has been at the forefront of what is a national policy issue and provided experience based advice to the UK Government, Department of Work and Pensions, COSLA and other social landlords, including Councils and Housing Associations nationally. Head of Housing David Goldie who nominated Gail said:

“She genuinely cares about the impact welfare reform has on individuals and has worked tirelessly to help tenants with their problems and cope with fundamental changes to the way they receive their income.”

As well as this role, Gail has also played an important part in the Syrian Refugee Resettlement programme. This work has required considerable planning using her excellent organisational and motivational skills to ensure the Council was able to welcome the first Syrian families to Highland earlier this year. As well as closely working with colleagues and partners, Gail has had a very hands on role in building relationships with the individual families and supporting them through

the difficult process of arriving and settling into a strange environment after the trauma of surviving the civil war and fleeing their country.

David adds: “Gail has shown great compassion and gone well beyond her normal work remit to make this project a success. She has dealt with many obstacles, unexpected events and personal problems experienced by the families with the perfect balance of calm professionalism and genuine empathy.”

Runners up for their outstanding contributions were Wanda Mackay, a Youth Worker with High Life Highland based on the Black Isle



Employee of the year winner Gail Ward



Wanda Mackay

and Shirley Jack, Manager of The Orchard, the Council’s Respite Centre in Inverness for children with disabilities.



Shirley Jack

Community Commendation

The Community Commendation Award went to Eoghan Stewart, a Gaelic Teacher at Alness Academy for his work in organising The Cupa Iomain na h-Òige - a national Shinty Competition for Primary Schools run through the medium of Gaelic.



Pupils from schools across Scotland took part in the tournament which was held entirely in Gaelic at Newtonmore. Eoghan was praised highly for being the driving force and inspiration behind this project which brought Gaelic out of the classroom setting and gave young people the chance to use their linguistic and sporting skills.

Highly Commended Team

A special Highly Commended Team Award was presented to William Aitken and Mick McCann from the Council's Bio Hazard Team.

Willie and Mick respond to requests to attend "disagreeable" situations day and night, all year round. The Bio Hazards they deal with include discarded needles



and the results of illness like the winter vomiting bug. They are also called upon to carry out deep cleaning in social housing premises and industrial cleaning in schools.

William and Mick have been doing this important specialist role for over 14 years, alongside their day jobs.

Trainee of the Year

Our 2016 Trainee of the Year is Lucy Melville, a Senior Technician with the Project Design Unit team based in Golspie. After graduating from Inverness College with an HNC in Civil Engineering, Lucy started work in Fort William where she gained practical engineering experience before joining the Council in 2013 as a Technician within the Traffic and Transport Planning team.



In November 2014 Lucy joined the Project Design Unit and since then she has relished her role within a team designing infrastructure to be delivered through the Council's Capital spending programme.

As part of the Unit's graduate and technician training scheme, Lucy has combined independent study and learning with on the job training and as a result has recently passed the Engineering Technician exam through the Institute of Civil Engineers.

Her next step is to continue her studies and progress to Incorporated Engineer grade.

Principal Engineer with the Unit, Garry Smith said:

"Lucy's progress has been swift and she has shown a real commitment and excellent work ethic. A valued member of our team, I have no doubt she will excel as she moves forward in her career within the Council."

Team of the Year

The Team of the Year Award went to the entire staff at Inverness Royal Academy who pulled together and worked with colleagues in the Council, the constructors and partner agencies to ensure that the building was ready in time to welcome the 950 pupils at the start of the school year.

Staff at the school quickly and effectively settled pupils in and despite a number of issues involving the gas supply, power outages, and some of the ICT installations, the team at the school have been resolute and resilient. The staff have worked through the issues and found solutions, maintaining consistency in learning and teaching for pupils and morale across the school.

Head Teacher Nigel Engstrand says:

"Without the energy and commitment, and the leadership of the school management team, it would not have been possible to keep the school open. This has been an outstanding, impressive effort by everyone".



Enabling a community led Highland

Winning project

The Carbon CLEVER Community Grant Fund project

This Fund was set up in August 2014 to help Highland communities reduce greenhouse gas emissions - taking leadership on carbon reduction, raising awareness and developing local projects.



A capital allocation of £200,000 has assisted 23 different community projects. These range from energy and efficiency improvements to buildings such as the Isle of Eigg Community Hall and the swimming pool at Mallaig, to the setting up of a community split-log project on the Isle of Skye which provides people with a sustainable and low carbon way to heat their homes.

The Highland Council is the first

local authority in Scotland to create a community grant fund to tackle climate change in such a pioneering way.

Delivering for a Well served Highland

Winners

"Kinlochlovin" project at Kinlochleven High School

"Kinlochlovin" is a social enterprise providing enhanced extra-curricular activities to pupils at Kinlochleven High School. With a roll of just 143, as recently as 4 years ago less than 6% of pupils progressed to Higher Education. "Kinlochlovin" strives to ensure finance and rural isolation are not barriers to participation. In its first year there has been a marked increase in involvement with 89% of pupils taking part in a wide range of outdoor, adventure, sporting and enterprising activities.

These have included entering Rock Challenge and taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award, as well as a number of creative and fund-raising projects such as a school up-cycling group, a craft club and a Friday café run by pupils which promotes healthy eating. Young people have got involved in volunteering within

their local community and have embraced the chance to learn new skills and develop their confidence.



"Kinlochlovin has made me feel a better person as now I know how to do more things. I've learnt skills that I might use in life. I have helped make money to help people in the school and it makes me feel good. It makes me feel more confident about doing my work in school now." (pupil).

Achieving a fairer Highland

Winners

Improving Health and Wellbeing for Children and Young People who have experienced loss, change and bereavement

"Seasons for Growth" is an early intervention prevention programme designed to support children and young people dealing with loss, bereavement and changes in their home life. A multi-agency team from the Nairn Associated School Group have been successfully using it to support vulnerable young children, helping them promote their resilience at a difficult time in their young lives and fostering close engagement with school and learning.

Delivering Seasons for Growth involves a co-ordinated approach with care professionals, teaching staff, parents and the young people working as a team. It's based on the belief that change



Photos by Ewen Weatherspoon



and loss are part of life and that grief is a normal response to such losses.

Feedback from parents, carers and pupils has highlighted the very positive impact it has had on helping children and young people understand, express their feelings and to talk openly about them. The true power of the programme can only be understood when listening to pupils' individual stories.

One said: "Seasons has helped me cope with difficult situations. I go to all my classes now. If things got tough before, I just used to leave. Now I stay. My grades have improved massively."

Delivering efficiency and service improvement

Winners

Revenues Redesign project

With the council facing significant financial challenges it was clear that any redesign would need to focus on making substantial savings and delivering efficiencies in revenue collection.

The restructuring, which started in 2014, is now complete and it has delivered £3.3million of savings in its first year and is predicted to deliver a further £4.1million in the coming

year. Costs have significantly reduced while performance, including collections and benefits processing times, has greatly improved. Effective leadership has been key to many of the successes this project has had, as was empowering staff to identify and implement change.



The "Traditional" responsibilities of Council Tax and Housing Benefit now include Scottish Welfare Fund, School Clothing Grants, Free School Meals, Education Maintenance Allowance, Music Tuition Fees, Inverness Winter Fuel Payments and Garden Aid.

Outstanding Partnership Award

Winners

Life-limiting Conditions, Palliative Care, Loss, Bereavement and Trauma support pack

This pack has been created by a multi-service group including charities and the voluntary sector

to meet a gap in the information currently available within schools.

Sadly, over the course of a school year in Highland, up to 6 pupils die as a result of illness or accidents. Schools, professionals and families find it difficult to support and advice in these situations as it may be the first and only time they have to deal with such a bereavement. Trying to find the most suitable information at the time of a trauma can add to the stress of the situation for all involved.

The team behind this project have created an easy to use and comprehensive web-based resource for pupils, their families and schools facing unforeseen traumatic events. The pack is the first of its kind in Scotland and is now being used by charities and other local authorities as an example of best practice.



The team has received very emotional comments from parents and schools that have used the guidance and strategies in the pack to grieve together. They have particularly given the resources high praise for helping them better understand what they were experiencing and helping them make positive memories in their communities of their loved ones.



Convener's Award

Winners

The Spray Injection Permanent Patching project

Spray injection permanent patching of road pavements is a new technique to repair roads, in particular pot holes, using a specialist vehicle.



Traditionally, the Council has used inlay patch repairs and temporary cold repairs to deal with pot holes, but recent technological improvements have brought a change.

Following trials with neighbouring Local Authorities, the Council purchased a Jetpatcher machine which Community Services staff have been trained to operate. Over the last 6 months the Jetpatcher has been touring the Highlands quickly and efficiently tackling the scourge of potholes on our roads.



With this system it takes as little as five minutes to repair a four-and-a-half by one-and-a-half foot squared pothole. This extremely efficient method means delays on the road for drivers are kept

to a minimum while work is underway.

Being able to make repairs quickly and effectively in-house, the cost savings mean an increased number of permanent repairs can be delivered within the existing budget.

Thank You



Speaking at the end of the award ceremony, the Leader of the Council said: "It really has been heartening to hear about the forward-thinking and ground-breaking projects that are taking place across all of our services and by our partners in NHS Highland and High Life Highland.

"I strongly believe we are already one of the most inventive and efficient Councils in Scotland and the strength of our performance lies in the quality of people who work for us. Your commitment, skills, experience and good-will make things happen and our communities are all the better for your hard work and drive.

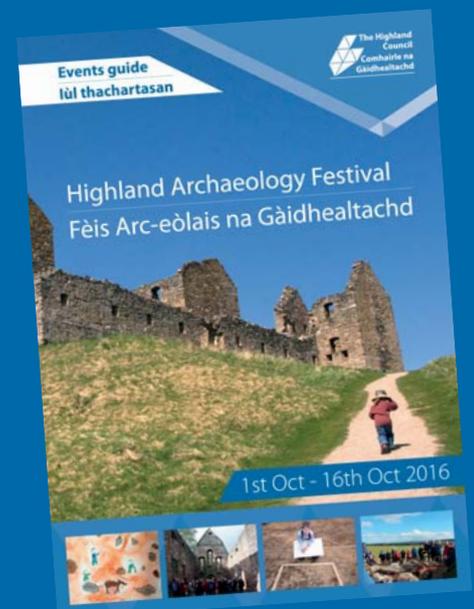
"I am confident that we'll be able to face the challenges head on, and working together, adapt and face changes in how we deliver with a renewed confidence that is forward thinking and captures the essence that makes the Highlands a special place to live, work, visit and do business in."

Photos by Ewen Weatherspoon

Archaeology Festival

The 2016 Archaeology Festival took place from the 1st - 16th October and was a great success with people of all ages across the Highlands taking part in over 80 activities including walks, talks, workshops, exhibitions, the annual conference and, new for this year, a Museums Trail with 31 participating museums. The festival was an ideal opportunity for people to explore our rich heritage from prehistoric times through to the 20th century.

To find out more about the thousands of historic and archaeological sites across the Highlands and to tell us about sites near you, visit the Historic Environment Record website: her.highland.gov.uk



Artefacts found along West Link route

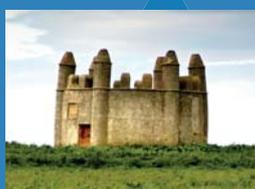
A prehistoric arrowhead, pieces of pottery, clay pipe stems, iron slag and other features including a burnt mound, a kiln, an upstanding kerb cairn and what could be the remains of a roundhouse are just some of the intriguing artefacts and sites of archaeological interest that have been uncovered during fieldwork carried out along the West Link route.

There has been almost no modern archaeological excavation in this part of Inverness, despite antiquarian accounts of significant prehistoric findspots and burials, so the results, from this recent fieldwork have the potential to improve major gaps in our understanding of this part of the archaeological landscape of the area.

The Highland Council's Archaeologist Kirsty Cameron said: "Results from an Archaeological point of view have certainly extended our knowledge of this area of Inverness. Before this work was carried out we didn't have any recorded remains from this whole area. The analysis that will be carried out by specialists will give us better dating evidence and wouldn't it be great if the results could be reported at next year's Highland Archaeology Festival?"



Kirsty at work on the West Link road site



City-Region Deal Projects

Digital

The ambition for the Highlands to be the most digitally connected rural region in Europe will include superfast broadband, mobile connectivity, business adoption and digital access across the Highlands.

An early component of the Digital Programme is the City Centre Wifi project, led by Highland Council, which is piloting free Wifi in Inverness beginning in December, with an aim to roll out across the city centre (see page 14). The wider programme will learn from the pilot with a view to providing Wifi in the main towns throughout The Highlands.

Deal Funding:

£20m UK Government

Digital Programme Lead:

Highlands & Islands Enterprise

Science Skills Academy

The Science Skills Academy (SSA) will transform the uptake of Science Technology Engineering Maths and Digital subjects in schools across the Highlands. It will increase the proportion of indigenous young people who are able to take advantage of the growing opportunities in life sciences, renewable energy and digital technologies.

The main deliverables are a SSA Hub and "Newton Rooms", in various sites in the Highlands.

Deal Funding:

£3m Scottish Government

Project Lead:

Highlands & Islands Enterprise

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City-Region Deal Cùmhnant Baile-Roinne

Skills

To enable the Highland economy to grow and prosper, businesses need a skills set to meet current and future needs. A step change in how public sector bodies at national and local level work together requires local and national partners to align and deliver services better and new services to be aligned with existing provision.

Deal Funding:

Non funded

Project Lead:

The Highland Council

Land Remediation - Longman

This initiative is to carry out land remediation and site servicing works to release a former landfill site for development. This would address lack of availability of appropriate land to meet the needs of both small and medium size businesses and the needs of larger inward investment companies, to ensure the continued economic growth and success of Inverness.

Deal Funding:

£10m UK Government

Project Lead:

The Highland Council

Northern Innovation Hub

The Northern Innovation Hub will be delivered by HIE in partnership with The Highland Council. It will deliver a range of targeted initiatives over a 7 year period, principally across the food and drink, life sciences, creative industry and tourism sectors. The programmes will include:

- Graduate placement programmes
- Intensive support to young and new businesses
- Digital skills programmes
- Adoption of competitive digital practices for highland businesses

Deal Funding:

£11m UK Government

Project Lead:

Highlands & Islands Enterprise

Innovative Assisted Living Scheme

The aim is to establish innovative assisted living schemes using the latest IT healthcare to enable elderly people to live in their communities and avoid the need for them to be in hospitals or care homes. A cluster will also be built in Inverness to suit the needs of veterans. The deliverables will be:

- Monitoring technology
- Adaptable carbon construction modular homes
- Data capture and monitoring systems
- Support packages
- Clinically led evaluation programmes

Deal Funding:

£3m Scottish Government

Project Lead:

Allbyn Housing

School of Health, Social Care and Life Sciences

This project will establish a centre of excellence in innovation and commercialisation in health and life sciences, based on the campus. It will work closely with the NHS to support emerging and attract new businesses. It will deliver:

It will deliver:

- A state of the art research, development and commercialisation centre (including product development small manufacturing capability)
- A space for clinical research directly linked to applied health, and life science
- A professional commercialisation resource
- Product development technical support
- Development pipeline for the new products and services, spin-outs and technology

Deal Funding:

£9m UK Government

Project Lead:

University of the Highlands and Islands

Air Access

This initiative will create a key stakeholder group to ensure the importance of effective regional air access to the Highland economy is recognised by policy makers and industry and which will work with the Highland Council to consider how to promote improved regional access.

Deal Funding: N/A

Project Lead:

HITRANS

Road Infrastructure East Link and Longman Interchange

The A9/A96 Link Road & Longman Interchange are key strategic road improvement projects which will provide significant improvements to connectivity within the city and open up considerable areas for economic development. These projects together with the West Link road are of critical importance to enabling Inverness to grow and act as an economic catalyst for the region.

Transport Scotland is progressing plans for a single road connecting Inshes to Smithton in Inverness. Public exhibitions were held in August 2016. This was with a view to selecting a preferred option for the scheme in 2017.

Deal Funding:

£107m Scottish Government

Project Lead:

Transport Scotland

Affordable Housing

The initiative will offer young people attractive, affordable housing in the Highlands to enable them to stay in the region, retaining a young and vibrant workforce for the Highlands. This would be high quality housing, initially for rent at affordable levels, but with an opportunity to purchase.

The outline Business Case is being developed in conjunction with the Scottish Government Housing Officials.

Deal Funding:

£5m Scottish Government

Project Lead:

The Highland Council

Inverness Castle

This initiative will use the opportunity of the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service relocating from Inverness Castle to create a sustainable, viable and "must-see" centre to attract visitors to the area. It will include:

- the castle viewpoint (the North Tower) currently being refurbished;
- the wider redeveloped castle as a tourist and heritage centre;
- information and exhibits and interpretive programmes; and
- innovative digital and multimedia exhibits.

An outline business case has been submitted to the Scottish Government. Early funding from the City-Region Deal has also been used to convert the North Tower of the castle from offices to a viewing platform (The Castle Viewpoint). This will be open in the spring of 2017.

Deal Funding:

£15m Scottish Government

Project Lead:

High Life Highland

Nesswifi

A project of the City-Region Deal



Connected devices and services have become so commonplace that WiFi access is increasingly seen as a utility, similar to electricity or water, rather than a luxury item.

Many cities are developing WiFi schemes in order to help provide locals and visitors with real time connection to the internet to access online information and services.

Nesswifi project is aligned to the Smart Cities Strategic Intervention, which aims to use technology to improve health, economic and social outcomes in Scotland's cities.

Roll-out

The Nesswifi project will start in the city centre around the historic Victorian Market, including Queensgate, Union Street, Church Street and Academy Street, as well as Falcon Square. The aim is to roll out across the rest of the city centre in 2017.

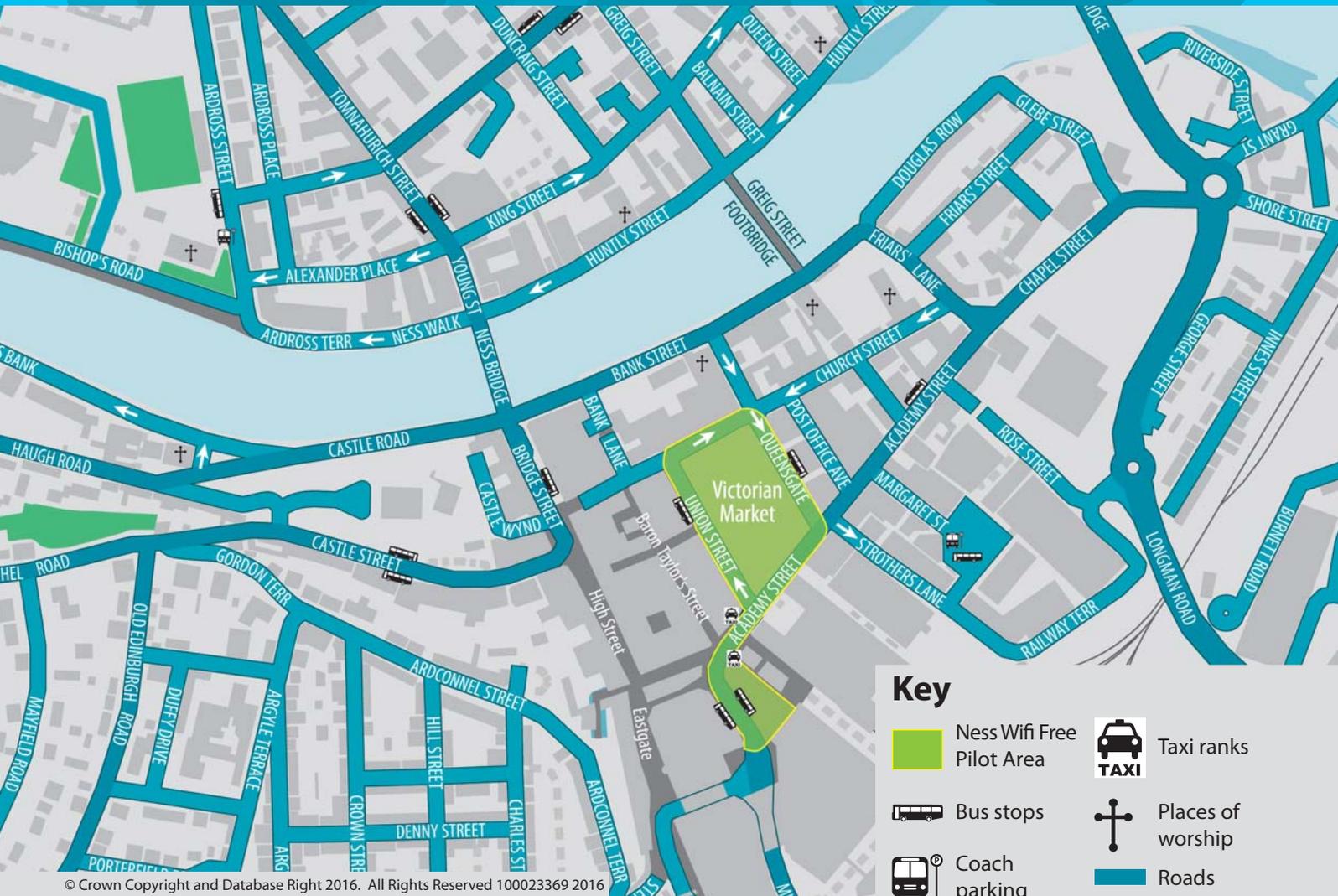
A number of strategically placed access points will be located throughout the city centre, designed to give the greatest amount of coverage possible. These will offer a marked improvement for anyone wishing to access online services while out and about in the coming years.



Connection will be straightforward. There will be a simple login process requiring either a social media account (Facebook or Twitter) or an email address. The Nesswifi scheme will have "Friendly WiFi" Public WiFi accreditation, which means browsing will be safe to use for people of all ages.

www.nesswifi.co.uk





Key

- Ness WiFi Free Pilot Area
- Taxi ranks
- Bus stops
- Places of worship
- Coach parking
- Roads
- Inverness railway station
- Pedestrianised areas
- Buildings

City-Region Deal

Nesswifi is a project undertaken as a part of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, and will be the beginning of a number of exciting projects set to help turn the Highlands into the “most digitally capable rural region in Europe”.

Once the Inverness scheme is up and running, our aim is to roll out free public WiFi to other communities in the Highlands.

Logging on to the free WiFi is simple:

- Turn on WiFi on your mobile phone or other device
- Look for **NESS_WiFi_Free** in your list of available WiFi networks
- Select **NESS_WiFi_Free** and wait for the pop-up window
- Log-on with either your social media details or by entering your email address
- Start enjoying the free WiFi!



Work on the West Link road and bridge over the River Ness is progressing well.

The new bridge over the River Ness is a composite bridge with steel beams and a reinforced concrete deck and parapets.

Wills Brothers, the main contractor, has procured the bridge beams and these have been fabricated and painted in Belgium.

The bridge beams were delivered in sections, and fabrication of the complete beams is currently ongoing on site, where the sections are welded together and then braced into pairs of beams.

Fabrication of each half will occur on each side and, when fabrication is complete in February, a large crane will be mobilised so that pairs of bridge beams can be lifted into place onto the new abutments and bridge piers. Works will then commence on the construction of the reinforced concrete works.

This work is currently progressing well and the bridge construction - critical to the delivery of the Stage 1 works, is on programme.



Construction of the new bridge underway



Aerial view of West Link construction



Aerial photos courtesy of Scotavia Images
www.scotaviaimages.co.uk



Artist impressions of new swing bridge

Photos courtesy of Capita www.capita.com



Digital First

The aim of the Digital First project is to have 40% of transactions with customers carried out online by April 2017, providing customers with an additional choice of how to interact with the council.

As you will see from this graph, we currently have 31% of transactions carried out online.

also compatible with all mobile devices, in fact our pothole reporting form works better on a smartphone than other devices, using the camera and gps location to improve the accuracy of the report.

User-friendly processes and forms

As well as providing a choice of where and how you engage with the council, the usability and functionality of the forms also supports the needs of our customers. We design all our forms with your customer experience in mind.

Immediate acknowledgement that applications are received

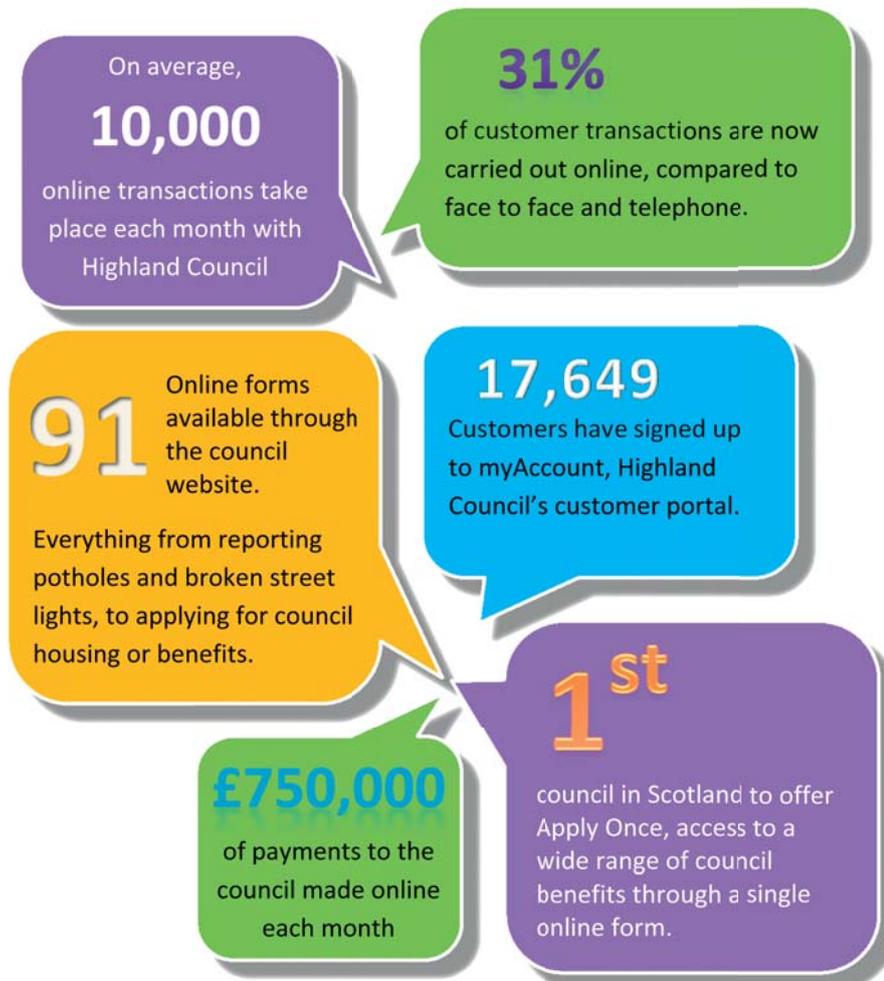
The forms and payments send automated emails to customers, providing you with confirmation that your form or payment has been received.

Integrations with back office systems

We are increasing the amount of integration, putting data from customer forms straight into back office systems. This cuts out the need for manual data entry and improves the time for processing the request.

Saving time and resources

Our online forms are reducing the workload required to process customer transactions, by sending the information directly to the appropriate team, collecting all necessary information from customers first time in a legible format, gathering all necessary evidence and presenting that for staff in a way that helps them to process it more efficiently. As well as making savings in terms of staff time, evidence is starting to emerge that this is speeding up processing times for customers too.



This is a really positive milestone and we now need to maintain that momentum in order to head towards our 40% target in April of next year.

To date, we have 91 forms available for customers online, up from 34 forms 18 months ago. These forms range from reporting street lights that are out, to paying rent and applying for a council house.

Another success for our project is the ability not only to accept evidence uploaded online rather

than presented face to face or posted, but we are the first council in Scotland to accept photographed and electronic evidence, as well as scanned. This helps customers who do not have access to a scanner at home.

Access to council services anytime, anywhere, on any device.

With 24/7 availability, our online services allow you to complete your business with the council at a time that suits you. Our website and online forms are

Apply Once

The Highland Council has recently launched Apply Once, a new online form designed to help customers to work out which council benefits they may be entitled to.

The online form asks customers for some basic personal details, before assessing what that customer may be entitled to and giving an indication of how much they might receive. The customer can then choose what benefits they want to include in their application, and complete the single online form to apply for all the benefits they choose.

The Apply Once form helps customers make sure they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to, at the same time reducing the number of forms they need to complete and the amount of evidence they need to provide. The online form is immediately received by the council, speeding up the turnaround time for customers. And the online form accepts scanned, photographed and

electronic evidence, meaning customers no longer have to post their originals, or visit service points to complete their applications.

Apply Once is available at www.highland.gov.uk/applyonce.

- On average, 10,000 online transactions take place each month with Highland Council.
- 31% of customer transactions are now carried out online, compared to face to face and telephone
- 91 Online forms are available through the council website. Everything from reporting potholes and broken streetlights to applying for council housing or benefits.
- 17,649 Customers have signed up to myaccount, Highland Council's customer portal
- £750,000 worth of payments to the council are made online each month,
- 1st council in Scotland to offer Apply Once, access to a wide range of council benefits through a single online form.



APPLY ONCE



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myAccount

We are approaching our 18,000th customer account on our customer portal, myAccount.

This allows customers to sign up to use some of our more complicated and secure forms, and to have forms prepopulated with all the information we know about them, reducing the time it takes to complete forms and reducing the need for us to check their identity in every form.



Photo by Ewen Weatherspoon

Coach Friendly Status Award for Inverness

Inverness has been awarded Coach Friendly status by the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT), the trade association representing the UK's bus and coach industries, for the warm welcome and facilities offered to coach visitors to the city.

The status acknowledges the commitment made by Inverness to meet the needs of coaches, their drivers and their passengers to the city centre.

The Highland Council put in place a package of measures to develop Inverness as a 'coach friendly city', including the creation of a coach drop-off and pick-up point on Ardrross Street in Inverness. A Coach Ambassador role was also created with funding from the Common Good Fund which has greatly enhanced the coach tourism experience for visitors to Inverness.

Provost of the city of Inverness, Councillor Helen Carmichael said:

"This is great news for our 'City in the Highlands' which not only prides itself on our 'Highland Welcome', but recognises the major economic importance of the tourist Industry and the vital part that the Coach Travel Sector plays in making Inverness the fourth most popular destination in Britain."

Jeremy Tinsley, Manager for CPT Scotland said: "The Highland Council in partnership with Inverness Business Improvement District has worked tirelessly over several years to deliver high quality facilities in Inverness for visiting coaches and their passengers. It has made excellent provisions in terms of passenger

pick-up, drop-off and coach parking. CPT, drivers and passengers are delighted with the service provided by their Coach Ambassadors who offer a true 'Highland Welcome.'"

Mike Smith Manager of Inverness Business Improvement District (BID) said "BID is delighted to have worked with The Highland Council on delivering a successful coach friendly facility in Ardrross Street. This dedicated drop off and pick up point will be used by a fantastic 1900 coaches this season – up 18% from 2015. The feedback from coach passengers, guides and drivers is that they all are very pleased with the welcome we have provided for them."





Photo courtesy of Scottish Council on Deafness

Dingwall Academy pupils shine at SCoD Star Awards

Four pupils from Dingwall Academy came home with trophies for their school from the SCoD (Scottish Council on Deafness) Star Awards which was held on Tuesday 15th December in the DoubleTree Hilton in Glasgow.

Dingwall Academy and the pupils won the 'Lifelong Learning Initiative' category and were shortlisted in the 'Children and Young People Achievements' category

Winning the Lifelong Learning Initiative award – Dingwall Academy Deafbase was described as: "A school with a sense of community – a school where, by taking a collective responsibility, pupils and staff have the opportunity to achieve extraordinary things. The values of the school are Respect, Responsibility, Honesty and Determination."

The other nominations in this category were Tayside Deaf Hub and Ann Lavery of Forth Valley Sensory Centre.

D/deaf Pupils at Dingwall Academy were also runners up in the Children and Young People Achievements award for a new innovative Deaf Studies course that was introduced in 2014. This is delivered at the Academy enabling the hearing and D/deaf communities to come together giving equality and empowerment through shared learning. These young people are encouraged to explore activities and strategies to build their confidence and self-resilience.

Photo L-R:

Janis MacDonald Chief Officer SCoD;
 Molly Munro-Main S3, the runner up certificate for the Children and Young people Achievement award;
 Niamh Mackay S3;
 Fraser Owen S3, holding the trophy for Lifelong Learning Initiative award;
 Angela Bonomy Interim Director NDCS (National Deaf Children Society);
 Isla McLean S6; and
 Margaret Kinsman Acting Head of Service (HDES)/ PT Deaf Dingwall Academy.

Margaret Kinsman, Acting Head of Service (HDES) Dingwall Academy said: "It was a pleasure to witness young people demonstrating their signing and deaf awareness skills learnt in school when they found themselves seated beside Deaf adults at the awards lunch. They engaged in conversation and even managed to share a joke with one of the ladies who had previously visited the school. I cannot think of any finer ambassadors for the school and their peers."

The term D/deaf is used throughout higher education and research to describe students who are Deaf (sign language users) and deaf (who are hard of hearing but who have English as their first language and may lipread and/or use hearing aids).



Winners of the MOD Under 13 Folk Group Competition

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& entertainment
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the day.



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Sgoil an Rubha, in Lewis have won top prize in the Folk Group Competition for Under 13 year olds at the Royal National Mod in the Western Isles.

For the eighth year running The Highland Council has supported this competition, and this year the winning group received a £200 prize.

Councillor Hamish Fraser, Chair of the Highland Council's Gaelic Implementation Group, said: "I had the honour of presenting the prize in this excellent competition. It's been a delight to be present here today to see the young people perform to such a high standard."

He continued, "The standard keeps improving each year and all the young people taking part should feel very proud of their performances. I've every confidence that they will all progress and become successful ambassadors for Gaelic in the future."

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Ardnamurchan High School pupils are Maths Masters

On Tuesday 15th November, the Ardnamurchan High School Maths team did the school proud at the Enterprising Maths Team Challenge Scottish final in Glasgow.

Ben Gregg (S3), Alistair Tait (S3), Ella Christian (S3) and Kay Christian (S4), were the Maths squad who, after winning the regional finals in Inverness, in September, went to the Glasgow Science Centre to compete in the National Finals. There they spent

a day puzzling over mathematical problems and came thirteenth out of the sixty four schools that were all representing their own areas as top regional finalists. For Ardnamurchan High to win the Inverness heat was a great achievement. To come thirteenth at the final, where all the schools who came higher were much bigger schools, was a real testament to the hard work and excellent team effort and hard work of Ella, Kay, Ben and Alistair, their supportive parents and their maths teacher, Mr Aitken.



Ardnamurchan High School is located in Strontian and serves the wider areas of Sunart Morvern and Ardnamurchan and has a roll of 100 pupils.

Ella Christian (S3) said, "It was a really fun experience, we met some really cool people and realised that mathematicians are really nice people!"

This Christmas remember to recycle!



paper & cardboard



food tins, drink cans & aerosols



plastic bottles, pots, tubs & trays



food & drink cartons



Are you ready for winter?

Are you ready at home and on the move for winter?

Have you got a winter kit in your car?

Are you prepared for all eventualities?

Are you looking out for elderly neighbours?

Do you know how to find out and what to do if your school is closed?

We're once again supporting the Scottish Government's Ready Scotland campaign www.readyscotland.org and are urging people in the Highlands to take some time to get prepared and ready for winter and all kinds of severe weather so not to be caught out.

We have 105 gritters, 45 footpath tractors and 1 snow cutter ready for action and over 200 staff will be providing winter maintenance services on the 6,744kms of roads for which we have responsibility. Trunk roads in Highland are the responsibility of Transport Scotland and their operators Bear Scotland.

Salt Stocks

Our road salt stocks are currently at 35,000 tonnes with another 25,000 tonnes due for delivery shortly and arrangements are in place to re-stock during the winter if required.

Gritting policy & priority routes

We grit our roads according to policy and priority. Primary routes are gritted Mondays to Saturdays 6am to 9pm and on Sundays and public holidays from 7am to 9pm. Secondary routes will follow the completion of Primary routes and are gritted Mondays to Saturdays from 6am to 6pm within available resources. 'Other' routes are treated as resources permit. In extreme conditions all efforts will be made to keep Primary routes clear.

Grit/salt bins on council roads have a telephone number displayed on them to allow the public to request a refill. The Council's Winter Maintenance Policy and existing local area gritting maps are on the council's website at: www.highland.gov.uk/gritting

School closures

To find out if Highland schools are closed check the Council's website: www.highland.gov.uk/schoolclosures or call the school information line on **0800 564 2272** and dial in your local school PIN number to get the latest pre-recorded message from the head teacher. The list of school PIN numbers is on the council's website at: www.highland.gov.uk/schoolclosures Make sure you have the phone number and PIN number ready in a handy place now.

FLOODLINE

- Did you know 30cm of flowing water could move the average family car?
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SEPA's floodline provides live flooding information and advice on how to prepare for, or cope with, the impacts of flooding 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Why not sign up and receive free flood messages for your area direct to your phone? **Be prepared.**

Floodline

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

0345 988 1188

floodlinescotland.org.uk

New era of education as pupils settle in at Caol Joint Campus

The new joint campus building to accommodate Caol Primary School and St Columba's RC Primary School was handed over to The Highland Council and occupied by pupils prior to the start of the October holidays.

This is the latest phase to be completed in the £16m development project in Caol, which has already delivered a building comprising new accommodation for Caol Community Centre, Caol Library, Caol Youth Centre and Room 13.

Work is continuing on the project with demolition of the former Caol Primary school building to make way for new car parking, school drop off and public green spaces ongoing. Overall completion is scheduled for early in 2017.



Photo by Highland Council

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Electoral Registration

Every year Electoral Registration Officers must issue households in their area with an enquiry form, to know who is eligible to vote at each property. Enquiry forms were issued to properties on 15th August 2016. If you have yet to respond, reminder forms will be issued from Monday 12th September 2016 with final reminders being issued on Monday 10th October 2016. Continued non response will result in a visit from a doorstep canvasser.

You can respond by internet, telephone or SMS message – just follow the instructions sent with your form. This is the cheapest way for you to provide us with the information and saves taxpayers' money. Alternatively, complete the paper form and return to us, postage is free (to the user).

So far, over £4,200 of taxpayers' money has been saved in postages due to responses made by the internet, telephone or SMS.

Not already registered?

If your name does not appear on your household enquiry form, you will then need to register to vote. The easiest way to register is online at: **www.gov.uk/register-to-vote**

Not being on the electoral register can affect your credit rating.

The screenshot shows the 'Register to vote' page on gov.uk. It includes a breadcrumb trail: Home > Citizenship and living in the UK > Voting. The main heading is 'Register to vote'. Below it, it says 'Use this service to apply to register to vote or to:' followed by a list of actions: update your name, address or other details; change your voting preferences; and change whether you're on the open register. It notes that it usually takes about 5 minutes. There is a link for Welsh (Cymraeg) users. A section titled 'You may need the following, if you have them:' lists National Insurance number and passport. A 'Start now >' button is at the bottom.



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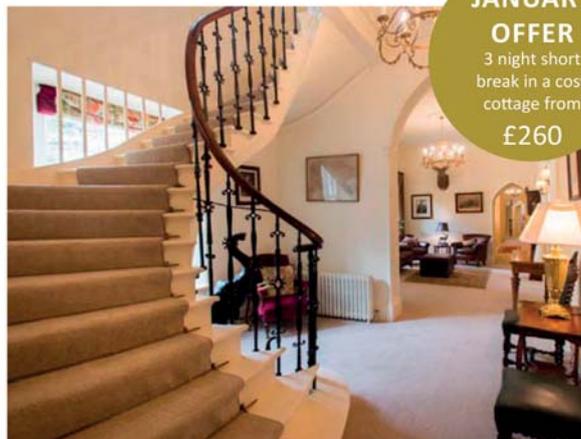
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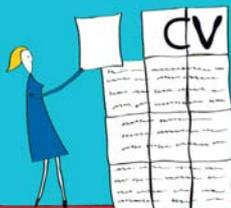
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