

## **Statutory Performance Indicator 2017/18 Narrative Report**

### **Background**

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 places a statutory duty of Best Value upon local authorities in the delivery of their functions. The Accounts Commission provides information what Councils in Scotland are expected to report on, in order to meet their duties. For 2017/18, there is no change to the information that Councils are required to provide:-

<p><b>Achievement of Best Value</b></p> <p>SPI 1: Each council will report a range of information setting out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Its performance in improving local public services (including with partners).</li><li>○ Its performance in improving local outcomes (including with partners).</li><li>○ Its performance in engaging with communities and service users, and responding to their views and concerns.</li><li>○ Its performance in achieving Best Value, including its use of performance benchmarking; options appraisal; and use of resources.</li></ul> <p><b>Local Government Benchmarking Framework</b></p> <p>SPI 2: Each council will report its performance in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.</p>
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**Figure 1:** Extract from Best Value Audit Direction 2017/18

The audit direction covers broad areas of activity, with a greater focus on partnership working and engagement with communities. This report provides a range of qualitative examples, press releases and case studies providing evidence of how Highland Council has fulfilled the duties outlined against SPI 1 in Figure 1.

Data relating to SPI 2 “Local Government Benchmarking Framework” will be reported separately through a report to The Highland Council on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019. This information will also be held on the Council’s website at [www.highland.gov.uk/performance](http://www.highland.gov.uk/performance). This report will also include other local indicators which help to demonstrate our performance in relation to all areas outlined in Figure 1.

### **1. Performance in improving local public services (including with partners)**

#### **Council Programme**

2017/18 was the first year of reporting on the Council’s Programme “Local Voices, Highland Choices 2017-2022”. The programme is based around five main themes: A place to live; A place to learn; A place to thrive; A welcoming place; and A redesigned Council. The programme contains 30 commitments including: putting communities at the heart of service design and delivery; working collaboratively for economic growth; a whole system approach to education and children’s services; and protecting the most vulnerable in our communities. The annual performance report for 2017/18 showed that good progress was achieved with 93% of the commitments (28 out of 30) being either completed, on target or where performance was being maintained. For 2 commitments (7%) there was mixed performance.

An annual review of the Council Programme was undertaken and presented to Council in March 2019. This has slightly amended themes of:

- A Council that champions the Highlands

- A place to live
- A place to thrive
- A place to prosper
- A welcoming place
- Your Highland Council

The Council Programme can be found at: ["Local Voices, Highland Choices"](#).

### City Region Deal

The [Inverness and Highland City Region](#) deal amounts to £315 million and was signed on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017 by Highland Council, the Scottish Government, and the UK Government. It is anticipated that the deal will help secure the long term productivity and economic growth for the region, including unlocking additional investment by the private sector. Specific funding will be used to enhance digital connectivity, digital healthcare, skills, innovation and infrastructure.

This deal represents a great opportunity for the Highlands to continue to grow and support economic development, attracting investors into the area and continuing to support the tourist economy. Projects are being delivered in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the University of the Highlands and Islands, Albyn Housing, and High Life Highland.

We have promoted the performance of the City Region Deal through press releases, including:-

- [Community development - regeneration projects](#)
- [City-Region Deal - significant long term benefits anticipated](#)
- [16 New affordable homes to be built in the City of Inverness](#)
- [Sutherland considers local opportunities in City Region Deal](#)
- [Community development - regeneration projects](#)
- [Holm Mills Bridge \(Drochaid Muileann an Tuilm\) is the public choice](#)
- [West Link opens to traffic on Monday](#)
- [West Link open](#)
- [Highland residents to benefit from pioneering FitHomes thanks to £3m City-Region deal windfall](#)
- [City Region Deal funding for new homes across the Highlands](#)
- [City Deal investment already bringing local benefit](#)
- [£4.7m boost for Highland digital connectivity](#)

Free Wifi (HiFi) has been rolled out to 14 towns across Highland town centres in addition to Inverness "Ness" Wifi, which won a Bronze Award at the COSLA Excellence Awards in 2018. Work is underway with partners Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) to provide free Wifi to HIAL airports under the same banner of HiFi. Links to press releases on the topic of free Wifi are provided:-

- [Ness WiFi is rolled out across Inverness City Centre](#)
- [Free public Wi-Fi to be rolled-out across the Highlands](#)
- [High-Fi for Aviemore – Free WiFi is rolled out across 14 Highland towns](#)

An innovative free augmented reality app named "HighlandAR Legends" has been launched in Inverness which won a Bronze Award at our Council Quality Awards in November 2018. The app brings local legends to life through augmented reality and an information website, bringing a new attraction for visitors to the city and generating wider economic benefit. The app has now been downloaded over 1,000 times. Discussions are ongoing with other areas (Loch Ness, Nairn and Dingwall) to support similar projects.

Other press releases that demonstrate our performance in improving local public services (including with partners) in 2017/18 include:-

- [Inverness Trade Waste Policy Implementation Date](#)
- [Knoydart Landslide Repairs Progressing Well](#)
- [Fort William hosts meeting of Regional Transport Partnership Chairs](#)
- [Double success brings new marina at Corpach closer to fruition](#)
- [LEADER funding for projects in Sutherland](#)

### Commercial and Procurement Shared Service

In November 2017 a Joint Procurement Strategy was formed between Highland, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils to form the Commercial and Procurement Shared Service. A new combined structure allowed a more dynamic, flexible organisation to be implemented, where peaks in demand can be managed more effectively and time can be devoted to larger scale, more complex, more business critical project projects that will deliver the most conspicuous savings and benefits and collaborative procurement and commercial opportunities can be explored.

Identified benefits include:-

- Faster implementation than for more complex Alternative Delivery Models (ADMs);
- Other contracting authorities can delegate activities without the need for a procurement exercise;
- A greater voice in shaping procurement frameworks through the participation of User Intelligence Groups and feedback on existing framework agreements to aid improvements into the future;
- Delivery of combined savings when carrying out major procurements across the councils;
- Improved quality and capacity to provide supplier, contract and category management;
- Proves the shared services model and its scalability, laying a foundation to build upon;
- Supports local economies to the full extent permitted by law by offering greater contract opportunities to SMEs;
- Raises performance, productivity and customer satisfaction for the procurement customer base;
- A staffing structure that can meet the strategic and commercial procurement needs of each council within budgets, improving capacity and resilience;
- Systems, tools and processes to be joined up, standardised, and a 'best practice' approach taken.

Further information on the Commercial and Procurement Shared Service can be found in the Highland Council Annual Procurement Report [here](#) at Item 13.

### Redesign of Highland Council

During 2017/18 the Council continued efforts to redesign the Council given the ongoing budget reductions alongside growing demand for, and increasing pressures associated with services. The work was overseen by a Board of 16 elected members and 2 Trade Union representatives. The Board brought forward six reviews during this period, looking at music tuition, grey fleet (private car use by staff for business purposes), procured legal services, and commissioned services for children, car parking and trade services. All of these reviews were carried out using internal staff resources and have delivered a challenging set of recommendations for implementation by Services. Solutions to the issues raised included looking at alternative models of delivery (such as music tuition being passed to High Life Highland to deliver), increasing in-house expertise rather than relying on sub-contractors (such as building up our own trades teams or growing our own in-

house legal team) or putting in place new arrangements for how we deliver services (such as setting up a Car Club and seeking to change travel behaviour in respect of use of private cars). As part of this redesign work, a number of Lean Reviews have been carried out on processes, to identify areas that could be improved and deliver savings. For example, the Council redesigned the bulky uplift service reducing time taken to process requests, improving the service for customers, extending the service over holiday periods, reducing the notice required to request an uplift and making the whole service more direct and responsive. The changes have resulted in £57k savings being delivered.

### High Life Highland

High Life Highland is a Council arm's-length organisation (ALEO) which develops and promotes opportunities in culture, learning, sport, leisure, health and wellbeing across nine services throughout the whole of the Highlands, for both residents and visitors. Particular achievements of High Life Highland in 2017/2018 are presented in their winter newsletter and in the progress reports which are presented to the Council twice per year.

In 2018, Audit Scotland published a report on Council's use of ALEOs. Two Highland Council ALEOs were invited to participate, High Life Highland and Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited. The report recognised that High Life Highland has:

- Delivered financial benefits – saving the Council £9.1m in its first five years of operation;
- Remained an active member of the Community Planning Partnership;
- Received positive feedback on governance arrangements;
- Linked leisure and wellbeing and worked in partnership with NHS physiotherapy and rehabilitation services from community leisure facilities.

### Highland Families Money+ Project

An example of improving local public service within the Care and Learning Service has been around the theme of Reducing Child Poverty which is a key aspiration of The Highland Council. The Care and Learning Service has been working closely with partners to develop the Highland Families Money+ Project. Please find details here:-

### NHS Highland Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services/Looked After Children Development Project

Children and young people who become looked after by their local authority are likely to have experienced early adversity, trauma and disruptions to care giving which can significantly impact their wellbeing, relationships, development and ability to engage with educational opportunities. A partnership working approach sought to address these issues, further information on which can be found here.

### Boleskine Community Care

A change to the approach in the delivery of adult home care to a community based approach has seen drastic improvements in delivery and overcome recruitment difficulties that were being experienced. Further information can be found at Item 8 here.

### Highland Housing Hub

The Highland Housing HUB was set up in response to the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 50,000 new affordable homes across Scotland by 2021. This cross agency partnership has doubled the amount of new affordable homes in the Highlands delivered each year, maximised the

use of limited resources, improved the quality of new housing and has been recognised by Scottish Government ministers as innovative best practice worthy of replication throughout Scotland.

It has been recognised by private developers that the HUB is an influential and ground breaking forum which can assist in the delivery and acceleration of their business plans. Key private sector players have attended HUB regularly and brought forward mothballed sites due to the confidence of delivery.

Prior to the introduction of the HUB, around 275 affordable homes were delivered each year. In 2016/17 once the HUB was introduced, 510 new homes were approved and 602 new homes were approved in 2017/18. The target for 2018/19 is 650.

The HUB has increased Scottish Government investment in the Highlands for affordable housing from £16 million in 2016 to almost £40 million in 2017/18.

The HUB won a Silver Award at the Council Quality Awards in 2018 in Category 1, Delivering on Localism and Making the Highlands an Even Better Place to Live. It is also worth noting that one of the housing projects delivered through the HUB won the best residential development in the UK at the national Inside Housing Awards.

### West Link

- Stage 1 of the West Link development was completed in 2017/18 and opened in December 2017. The project will deliver greatly improved transport infrastructure to support the future development, growth and prosperity of Inverness and the Highlands. It is part of the City Region Deal and is a key commitment in achieving “infrastructure for growth”. The project includes the delivery of major leisure improvements for both Rugby at the new facilities at Canal Parks and construction of a new Golf Course with associated clubhouse and maintenance facilities. The West-Link will bring numerous benefits to the Inverness area, including significantly reducing congestion in the city centre and speeding up journey times;
- Enhancing active travel linkages across the city;
- Enabling housing development and associated developer contributions;
- Providing construction employment and bring economic benefits to the area;
- Improving amenity and leisure facilities at Canal Parks and for Torvean Golf Club.

Stage 2 will commence construction in June 2019 and will remove traffic delays with crossing the canal.

### Service Performance

Each of the Council Services regularly reports its performance to its relevant strategic committees. These reports can be accessed through the Council's website through the following links:

- [Care and Learning](#)
- [Community Services](#)
- [Corporate Resources](#)
- [Development and Infrastructure](#)

Performance is also reported through [news releases](#), examples in 2017/18 include:

- [Leader responds to performance report](#)
- [Council Administration to present a programme of investment](#)
- [Redesign continues to deliver improvements](#)
- [Winter weather will result in £2m overspend for Highland Council's Winter Maintenance Budget](#)
- [Positive internal audit on roads and bridges welcomed](#)

- [Council performance meets with approval](#)
- [Planning Performance Framework highlights excellent work](#)
- [Welfare Support helps Highland people to £4.651 million](#)

The Council also promotes its performance through social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr) and through the quarterly [Highpoints](#) magazines:

- [High Points Issue 10 - Spring 2018](#)
- [High Points Issue 9 - Winter 2017](#)
- [High Points Issue 8 - Autumn 2017](#)
- [High Points issue 7 - Spring 2017](#)

## **2. Performance in improving local outcomes (including with partners)**

### Delivery Law Website

Shopping online is crucial for Highland consumers and businesses. Delivery problems such as unfair surcharges, false claims of free delivery and refusals to deliver to remote areas are common experiences and result in a large number of complaints to the Council's Trading Standards team. Although the team was successful on a case-by-case basis and in raising the profile of the issues nationally, it was felt that the matter needed to be "taken to the next level" by fully engaging national bodies and enforcement agencies to tackle it fully to the benefit of the Highlands.

This was achieved through participation in a national consumer initiative that led to national funding being made available for Highland Trading Standards to set up a "one-stop shop" website on delivery issues for consumers, businesses and practitioners. The project involved very wide engagement with partner bodies across the UK to further Council goals of recognising and delivering on the unique challenges of the Highlands and boosting the Highland economy.

This project was a winner at the Council Quality Awards in 2018 in Category 3, Making Highland a Welcoming Place where People Succeed in Life and Business.

News releases that provide evidence of our performance in improving local outcomes in 2017/18 (including with partners) are provided below:-

- [Highland Council to generate income through solar energy](#)
- [Northern Alliance data demonstrates Highland Schools 'closing the attainment gap'](#)
- [Funding for improvements at top tourist sites on Skye](#)
- [Trade waste workshops for city centre businesses](#)
- [Consultation on pilot trade waste project for City Centre underway](#)
- [Silver award for children's support pack](#)
- [Council to set up Tourism Working Group](#)
- [Co-location improves local access to services](#)
- [Skye Gaelic Primary Teachers collect national innovation award](#)
- [Joint measures agreed to tackle speeding in Milton of Leys](#)
- [Review of Debt advice and related services](#)
- [Lochaber Committee reviews priorities](#)
- [Working towards safer streets in Inverness](#)

### For Highlands Children 4

The performance management framework developed within our integrated children's service plan, 'For Highlands Children 4' (FHC4), is designed around the achievement of better outcomes for

Highlands's children, their families and the communities in which they live. The outcomes relate to the impact of services on the well-being of children and young people using the "SHANARRI" indicators. It focuses on their experiences and the extent to which their lives and life opportunities will be enhanced to ensure they are: Safe; Healthy; Achieving; Nurtured; Active; Respected; Responsible and Included.

The performance framework is designed to monitor and scrutinise progress in meeting these outcomes. The performance measures in this framework are high level and are reported on to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee. More detailed performance measures against outcomes in Improvement Group plans are contained within individual improvement group plans.

#### Life-limiting conditions, Palliative Care, Loss, Bereavement, and Trauma Support Pack

A needs gap analysis in Highland in relation to children and young people attending school with life-limiting conditions highlighted a lack of confidence in staff and supportive resources related to this type of situation. Equally, a scoping exercise across Scotland had identified no comparable resource for schools.

In 2017/18, a support pack was developed by a partnership including NHS, Local Authorities, charities, and the voluntary sector, to meet the gap identified. This is a web based resource hosted on a number of Intranet sites within Highland, with links to NHS Highland guidance and contacts, support groups, book lists and resources for pupils. It also contains policy and guidance for schools facing unforeseen traumatic events.

The project has received excellent feedback from families and schools who have been directed to the resource following a tragic event. They report high praise for the resource, which helped them to understand what they were experiencing, but also has helped them make positive memories in their communities of their loved ones. Several other Scottish Authorities are now seeking to use this material and there is an interest to develop a national initiative. This project won a Silver Award at the COSLA Excellence Awards in 2017.

#### ASPIRE: Autism Strategies for Parents to Improve Relationships and Experiences

As part of national and local efforts to close the equity gap and support children and young people with autism to achieve their potential, multi-agency staff in Highland are developing a training pathway for parents of children with autism, fulfilling an aim in the local Integrated Children's Services Plan.

ASPIRE (Autism Strategies for Parents to Improve Relationships and Experiences) is an initiative within this, incorporating workshops to develop practical skills and also Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) both on an individual basis and within a group setting. Two successful pilot programmes have taken place.

Initial results from this show increased confidence and understanding regarding play, communication, behaviour and sensory issues and increased efficacy to parent and to connect. ASPIRE delivers excellence as it combines training approaches in a unique and effective way and can be delivered flexibly in rural and urban settings to meet the needs of families in their local communities. This project won a Bronze Award at the COSLA Excellence Awards in 2018.

### **3. Performance in engaging with communities and service users, and responding to their views and concerns**

#### Community Planning Partnership

Work for the Community Planning Partnership in 2017/18 continued to focus on implementation of the Community Empowerment Act, through both the development of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) and supporting the new Community Partnership structures established in 2016/17. Key activities for the partnership are outlined below:

Development and agreement of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan: this included:

- **Approach:** the partnership agreed several key principles on which to develop the HOIP: listening to communities to ensure that the HOIP will make a difference; changing how we do things so that we focus on inequalities and prevention; engaging with communities in a way that supports a focus on outcomes and co-production; and that the HOIP will be different from the current SOA, strategically focused on a small set of outcomes and priorities for the partnership as a whole and requiring partnership outcomes.
- **Engagement:** a period of engagement was held between April and June 2017 focusing on the development of the HOIP. This included 11 engagement workshops, drawing together community groups, third sector organisations and representatives from public sector bodies. Listening underpinned each of the workshops, to ensure that the HOIP is reflective of the needs of communities. 150 individuals participated in the workshops over the period, most from third sector organisations. Alongside the workshops, a survey was distributed across the CPP network. Other agency specific work has taken place including the Third Sector Interface annual conference, the Third Sector Assembly and a session with Highland Council elected members.
- **The Plan:** the HOIP focuses on 5 strategic outcomes with an overall aim to reduce inequality. The outcomes include Poverty Reduction, Community Participation and Dialogue, Infrastructure, Community Safety and Resilience and Mental Health and Wellbeing. A draft HOIP was considered at the CPP Board in June 2017 following which a period of statutory public consultation took place. The final HOIP was agreed by the CPP Board in October 2017.

[Engagement summary June 217](#)  
[Final HOIP October 2017](#)

- **Next Steps:** An initial action plan for the HOIP was agreed in [December 2017](#).

Review of CPP structure:

- A review of the CPP structure began during 2017/18. Initial focus was on the CPP thematic structure, the aim to put in place the support and delivery mechanisms required to deliver and monitor the HOIP. In 2017/18, work began with mapping the existing structure of both formal and informal partnership groups, scoping the purpose, drivers and governance of these groups and considering how the existing groups could potentially contribute towards delivery of the HOIP.
- It was also agreed during this period that a review of the COG and the Board should take place.

Supporting Community Partnerships: in 2017/18 work continued on supporting the new Community Partnership structure in place, this included:

- **Establishment of the Chairs Development Group** which includes all Community Partnership Chairs and key officers from the Chief Officer's Group. The purpose of the group



is to provide a forum through which to share good practice and learning, to raise issues and seek collective solutions and consider development opportunities for the partnerships.

- **Developing a governance structure** to support the oversight and delivery of local children's and adults plans which will link to the Strategic Commissioning Groups and Joint Monitoring Group arrangements as part of the integration model approach.
- **Developing a locality plan governance structure** supported through a self-evaluation and peer review approach, with oversight from the Chairs Development Group, CLD Strategic Group and COG/ CPP Board.
- **Development of a self-assessment tool** to support the Partnerships to review and assess their activity and progress.
- **A second Community Partnerships Development Day** was held in October 2017. This seminar moved on from the seminar held in the previous year which focused on the development of the Partnerships and what the aims, objectives and expectations would be. The focus of the October 2017 seminar was the opportunity to share experience, reflect on successes but also consider next steps for each Partnership.
- **A series of support process and tools** were developed for the partnerships. This included an inequality impact assessment tool to assist partnerships to demonstrate how they are meeting the public sector equalities duty under equalities legislation and the new socio-economic duty, a conflict resolution approach and an approach for identifying and agreeing any new areas for locality planning.

#### Agreed the Community Justice Plan for 2018/2021:

- Responsibility for the Community Justice Plan sits with the Community Planning Partnership.
- Engagement to develop the plan was undertaken in conjunction with the workshops to develop the HOIP. Focus groups were also carried out with those with an offending history within a prison setting and within the community. A planning day was held with key partner agencies to determine the Highland priorities and how these would link with the HOIP priorities. The key priorities support those in the HOIP and are Mental Health, Early Intervention and Diversion Employability and Employment. The Plan was agreed by the CPP Board in March 2018.

#### Skills Investment/Talent Attraction and Retention

Work began to focus on what the Highland CPP would do to complement the work on Talent Attraction being progressed by the Convention of the Highlands and Islands. This was in recognition of the challenges faced by public sector organisations.

#### Social Media

Social media is an increasingly important communication tool. We have seen the number of people "liking" our Facebook page increase from 14,930 (March 2017) to 19,197 (April 2018), and Twitter followers have increased in this period from 18,806 to 22,852.

Over this period 727 news releases were issued and 1,959 media enquiries were logged and responded to. All news releases are linked from Twitter and Facebook and partner tweets and posts are shared and retweeted, particularly around campaign activity, awareness raising, severe weather events and other emergencies.

Examples of press releases which relate to the Council engaging with communities and services users, and responding to their views and concerns in 2017/18 are provided below:-

- [Community projects in Aird and Loch Ness short-listed for public vote](#)
- [Launch of Highland Child Protection Toolkit for Community Groups](#)
- [Kyle Community projects get funding after public vote](#)
- [Employability course on Skye fully booked](#)
- [Public invited to take part in Inverness West Ward Consultation Sessions](#)
- [Help is available to reduce Council Tax charges](#)
- [Councillors' commitment to understand challenges in acute mental health services](#)
- [Merkinch locals have had their say](#)
- [Your Cash Your Caithness](#)
- [Development plans out for public consultation](#)
- [Key Council publications will help shape future of the Highlands](#)
- [Commission on Highland Democracy report launched](#)
- [Council gives assurance that ecology considered during Dingwall Flood defences works](#)
- [Naming of new bridge goes to public vote](#)
- [Holm Mills Bridge \(Drochaid Muileann an Tuilm\) is the public choice](#)
- [Rural Inverness Communities Convention](#)
- [A place to live - Citizens Panel Survey reports highest ever percentage of people feeling safe](#)
- [Positive response to MyRiverNess](#)
- [Tenants to be more involved in decisions about housing](#)
- [Local priorities under spotlight at Sutherland Committee](#)
- [Council to raise Police Control Room decision making with First Minister](#)
- [Highland Council assurance on Wick Campus](#)
- [Public ideas sought for Nairn Paddling Pool and Play Area](#)

## Housing

In 2017/18 we continued to focus on developing excellent communication with our housing tenants.

- We have a regular housing newsletter which goes out to our tenants providing a wide range of information and advice. Contact details are given on this to enable tenants to contact the Housing service;
- We have developed our tenant participation Facebook page;
- We have increased [tenant participation and scrutiny](#), and we regularly conduct satisfaction surveys of our tenants;
- We have carried out Rate your Estate walkabouts across Highland to ensure we are listening to our communities as to what environmental works are a priority for their estates;
- We have carried out Senior Safe Highland events to encourage home safety for our older tenants;
- We consulted on the [Local Housing Strategy](#) and this was approved at Committee;
- We conduct a detailed tenant survey every 3 years, and are currently collating results from over 5,000 tenants from the survey issued in late 2018. This survey identifies tenant opinions, such as on the Highland Council as a landlord, preferred communication styles, rents and value for money, and the quality and maintenance of homes;
- We complete our [annual return on the Charter \(ARC\)](#) to the Scottish Housing Regulator. This helps to publically monitor and assess our performance;
- We won awards at the annual Tenant Participation Advisory Service Conference; this included our Caithness & Sutherland Tenant Participation Officer being named National Tenant Champion of the Year.

## Small Applications Team

In November 2017, the Council established the Small Applications Team (SAT), a virtual team consisting of planning staff from across Highland. Previously all householder and other small applications and enquiries were dealt with within our area office structure and were allocated to any of our team of around 40 Planning staff. This meant that there was no priority given to the more straightforward planning applications; rather these were dealt with within the day to day caseload of individual officers.

An important driver was a focus on customer requirements – put simply, applicants expect a quick turnaround and an efficient service. For these more straightforward planning applications, the assessment is generally routine, and the customer has to apply for them because the legislation requires this. Although our performance has been generally high (84.1% of such applications were dealt with in 2 months (2016/17), compared to a Scottish average of 87.1%), the target was to increase performance to over 90%. Since the introduction of the SAT performance has significantly improved, 2017/18 performance is noted below to demonstrate the improvement made:-

November - 96.1% of applications within target  
December – 88.8% of applications within target  
January – 91.6% of applications within target  
February – 96.8% of applications within target  
March – 95.8% of applications within target

This project won a Silver Award at the Council Quality Awards in 2018 in Category 4, Delivering Efficiency, Earning Income and Improving Services.

## Road Construction Consent

On 8th January 2018, the Highland Council implemented new processes following a LEAN review of the entire Road Construction Consent process from receipt of the application through to the management of road bonds and in most cases, adoption of the road by the Council. There has been a transition from an entirely paper-based process to a mainly electronic one. This uses the connector functionality available on the [ePlanning.scot Portal](http://ePlanning.scot) for the submission of documents and a combination of email and [Public Access](#) for the issue of approved documents. In an effort to improve the quality of submissions and reduce time spent on invalid applications, Highland has also implemented a new [submission checklist](#), [revised forms](#) and [web pages](#) and a validation procedure. As a result, RCC's are being administered via the Planning case management system enabling a more consistent approach to managing applications.

This project won a Silver Award at the Council Quality Awards in 2018 in Category 4, Delivering Efficiency, Earning Income and Improving Services.

## Development Plans

In 2017/18, the Development Plans team continued to engage local people to better understand the needs and aspirations of the communities we serve:

Through the [Inverness East Development Brief](#) we built on earlier engagement from 2016/17 to prepare the detailed land use framework for this major urban expansion area. Our consultation on the draft version ran from January to March 2018 online, and at face-to-face events that included drop-in exhibitions and stakeholder meetings and workshops with young people at Inverness College UHI and Culloden Academy. 11,500 people saw our promoted posts on Facebook and over 4,000 users visited our consultation portal generating 104 comments from 32 respondents. We spoke to over 500 people during the consultation and used the feedback received to finalise the Brief for adoption.

The team have continued to work closely with Transport Scotland on the design of the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton Link Road, ensuring that the design and layout of this City and Region Deal project delivers benefits to the trunk road, but importantly does not impinge on the potential of future development to deliver on the outcomes and objectives identified through the consultation on the Inverness East Development Brief.

The Inverness City Centre Development Brief was adopted in February 2018 following a suite of public engagement during this and the last reporting period. In 2017/18, consultation on a draft version resulted in 50 people attending public exhibitions and over 300 users visiting our online consultation portal, with 220 comments being submitted by 35 respondents.

To ensure the Council secures the right financial contributions from developers to support infrastructure needs of new and existing communities the team updated the Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance. This project was undertaken as part of a cross-service holistic approach to modernising the way we secure, manage and monitor developer contributions in Highland. During the consultation that ran from January to March 2018 we received 208 comments from 21 organisations or individuals.

We continue to use social media as a cost-effective way of advertising and engaging with communities, where costly press notices are not required by statutory process. For example, during the promotion of the Inverness East Development Brief, for a cost of £25 per Facebook post, on average 11,500 users saw the post and 16% (1,084) actively engaged with it.

### Year of Young People 2018

Engaging with children, young people and their families is integral to the work of the Care and Learning Service. As an example, 2018 was the Year of Young People and High Life Highland and the Service supported young people to take control of social media platforms ensuring that the participation of children and young people ran as the central theme of the year. Further information is provided here on pages 7 and 8.

### Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy and Guidance

Our Care and Learning Service developed the 'Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy and Guidance' in 2017/18. This policy was developed by young people across Highland from initial consultation through to its launch. Members of the Misty Isle Youth Forum on Skye had previously identified that the existing bullying prevention guidance no longer reflected the landscape across Highland schools. In agreement with the Head of Additional Support Services, it was decided that the policy would be redeveloped by young people, with the Misty Isle Youth Forum consulting with young people from across Highland to create the new policy and guidance.

### Community Asset Transfers

Highland Council is committed to supporting a community asset transfer process that supports communities to identify their needs and take control of the assets they feel they require to deliver better outcomes in communities.

We have put in place a clear community asset transfer process that engages with communities and harnesses the expertise of a variety of Council officers and partner agencies to inform our approach and decision making on asset transfer.

During 2017/18, 50 expressions of interest were received and 8 full community transfer asset requests, 7 of which have concluded including approval, refusal and withdrawals in favour of alternative agreements other than asset transfer.

Two transfers of note that were particularly successful were:-

- Wick MS Centre - Wick MS Centre - a community asset transfer of this building to the local Multiple Sclerosis Therapy Centre has allowed the organisation to seek external funding to improve the building and develop the services they provide to 40 clients with a range of conditions;
- Seaboard Memorial Hall - Balintore Harbour Toilets - a community asset transfer of this building has delivered improved toilets with disabled provision and a small retail unit. The proposal has also acted as a catalyst to start the regeneration of the harbour area, improving the local amenity.

#### **4. Performance in achieving Best Value, including the use of performance benchmarking, options appraisal and use of resources**

##### Environmental Advice and Consultancy Team

2017/18 was the first full year of operation of the Environmental Advice and Consultancy Team (EACT). EACT is a one-stop-shop for environmental consultancy services and advice covering ecology, forestry, building conservation and archaeology. EACT provides flexible and responsive services across the Council to ensure statutory obligations with regard to the natural, built and cultural heritage are met.

EACT generate an income and, when compared to buying in comparable expertise from the commercial sector, realise significant financial and efficiency savings for the Council. At the same time, EACT continue to provide a high level of professional advice in respect to development management and development planning. In recognition of its achievements and commitment to fulfilling the goals of 'A Redesigned Council', the team won the Convenor's Award at the 2017 Quality Awards.

##### Highland Council website

On the Council's performance webpages, we publish infographic reports on how we compare to other Councils using the Scottish Local Government Benchmarking data, and a link to the mylocalCouncil website is also provided.

##### Quality Improvement

Improvement Groups have adopted a Quality Improvement Model supported by Scottish Government funded improvement collaboratives. In addition, frontline staff and managers across a range of services are using this 'Model for Improvement' to accelerate change.

Highland's Improvement Co-ordination Group has a key role in leading and driving forward this work. A series of Quality Improvement Learning Networks have been established and two 6 month learning programmes were undertaken during 2018. The programmes provided an opportunity for a total of 20 participants to develop skills to support the use of improvement methodology and build capacity within services. The fourth quality improvement network commences in April 2019 and is already fully subscribed. An example of the improvement activity undertaken through the network is illustrated here.

##### Workforce Planning Strategy

The Council has continued to develop its Workforce Planning Strategy, with the 2017-2023 [Strategy](#) approved in August 2017 and Service Workforce plans submitted to Strategic Committee's in October and November 2017.

Progress has been made in the following key Workforce Planning Strategy areas:

- Future Workforce - Grow our workforce for the future, rebalance our age profile through initiatives such as Modern Apprenticeships and retain knowledge through effective succession planning;
- Create a culture of continuous improvement through continuous review and improvement of processes - LEAN six sigma;
- Develop, with our Trade Union partners, a flexible workforce with job designs and contracts that reflect the future needs of the organisation and retain a commitment to be a fair employer;
- Reinforce our positive equalities and wellbeing culture.

The Modern Apprenticeship Programme is aligned to key service outcomes, reflecting the need to retain skilled and valued staff whilst taking measures to re-balance the workforce age demographic. To maximise return on Apprenticeship Levy costs, a dedicated team was set up to lead on the MA Programme.

#### **Case Study**

Our Modern Apprenticeship [Programme](#) approved by Corporate Resources committee 30<sup>th</sup> August 2017 has become an exemplar in Public Service, with over 100 MA's in the Council from a standing start in 2017, this is a key factor in developing and retaining our sustainable workforce of the future.

Support has also been provided to our EU Workforce with reassurance, help and guidance provided where needed, to support them through this uncertain evolution.

Lean six sigma is an important vehicle for process redesign and efficiency. The Council has invested extensively in training and developing staff in Lean which has enabled the successful delivery of re-engineered processes supporting our corporate strategy of redesign.

#### **Example of Improved HR process using Lean**

The Council's Occupational Health referral process was reviewed using Lean methodology which removed stages in the OH referral from HR staff to enable Service Managers to submit OH referral forms direct to the Council's Occupational Health provider. This resulted in HR staff adding 100% value to the OH process and HR capacity being released, achieving staff savings of £62k equating to 1.4 FTE posts which were taken as part of the 2017/18 Service Budget saving.

The development of an agile and flexible workforce that reflects the future needs of the Council and cements our commitment to be an employer of choice and lead provider of public services is underway. Utilising our staff resource more efficiently and effectively to minimise the need to supplement gaps in service delivery with more costly alternatives such as agency workers, overtime, use of contractors. By flexible we mean staff who are able to, if asked, perform a variety of different jobs and functions within the Council. This flexibility will ensure that the Council has a sustainable

workforce which can be used more effectively to deliver high quality services across the Highlands linked to the Council's strategic goals.

### **Examples of Flexible Working**

In Sutherland we have utilised Community Works Officers with the same job families and grades to do roads work (including gritting) in the winter months and grass cutting during the Spring/Summer.

Using current terms and conditions and working within current Council policies we have worked with staff in rural areas who were considering retirement to take up opportunity of Flexible Retirement with annualised hours. o Previously Community Works Operatives operated distinctly in two sections of Community Services - Roads and Amenities.

Employee Wellbeing is a key principle of our Workforce Planning Strategy with initiatives such as Mental Health Reps network formally launched in January 2017, actively contributing to improving wellbeing across the Council through the team of 58 Mental Health reps who volunteered to carry out this important role in addition to their normal duties and at no additional cost. The team have supported over 100 employees to find appropriate mental health services. This early and appropriate intervention has greatly improved employee chances of early recovery and reduces the requirement for time absent from work. The work of the team can be challenging for them as they support colleagues with significant mental health issues including suicidal thoughts and intentions. The rewards though are seeing the impact that the service has on people's lives.

### **Statements from employees who have contacted Mental Health Reps include:**

"Thank you for making the appointment with the doctor, I was unable to do it myself"

"I feel like a normal person again, being back at work is what I needed,"

"Thank so much for your support yesterday, it was very much appreciated. I hadn't heard of Breathing Space. I'm not very good at talking over the phone but I will most definitely check out their app. I will also have a look at the \*\*\*\*\* club's website. I'm not good at meeting new people but I will definitely consider it."

The Mental Health Rep team also play a wider role in the community raising awareness and reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues.

**Initiatives such as '365 Brighter Days - practising positivity for better mental health in Scotland'** was publicised on the Council's intranet to raise awareness of a new campaign launched on National Breathing Space Day (which is also Time to Talk Day) on 1st February 2018 which encourages everyone in Scotland to practise a positive outlook to life.

Press releases that provide information on how performance in achieving Best Value, including the use of performance benchmarking, options appraisal and use of resources within the Council in 2017/18 include:-

- [Times table craze sweeps Highland schools due to Chromebook rollout](#)
- [Council's Benefits Service commended for outstanding performance](#)
- [Positive destinations increasing for Highland senior school leavers](#)
- [Operation Respect success rolls out across Highland](#)
- [Top ranking for Inverness](#)

- Success at national awards for Council's Planning Service
- A Redesigned Council - Redesign projects produce results
- External audit highlights a forward looking Council
- Restructure to save £235,000
- Options Appraisal for Corran Ferry to get underway
- Improvements to Council's bulky uplift service as savings achieved
- 'Tell Us Once' automatically updates government departments

The outcome of the Best Value Audit of Highland Council, which is taking place from Spring 2019, will be known in advance of the next SPI Narrative Report which will be published early in 2020.

**Lorna Bailey, Corporate Performance Officer, Corporate Performance Team**  
**8<sup>th</sup> February 2019 (revised 28<sup>th</sup> March 2019 and 8<sup>th</sup> April 2019)**