

Highpoints

Sàr Phuingean



Find out who are Inverness's City Centre Heroes Pg4

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Highpoints will be published online at:

www.highland.gov.uk/highpoints

The magazine is produced in-house by our Corporate Communications Team.

Welcome

This issue of Highpoints comes amid the backdrop of one of the most difficult and challenging years many of us will have experienced in our lifetimes.

It is, therefore, all the more remarkable that our staff have managed to ensure continued delivery of a first class service to the people of Highland, despite the sea changes in their working practices due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

This year has presented everyone with monumental challenges and some of the work highlighted in this issue really does underline the way in which everyone rose to those challenges and in many cases exceeded expectations.

As we approach a new year and a COVID-19 vaccine already being rolled out to the most vulnerable in society, we can at last look forward with a renewed sense of hope for 2021.

I wish each and everyone one of you a healthy, happy and peaceful festive season.



Cllr Bill Lobban
Highland Council Convener

Rising to the COVID challenge

Staff across the Council have quickly adapted to new roles and new ways of working during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From vastly expanding our ICT capacity, launching a helpline, setting up community hubs for humanitarian aid and working with community groups to processing £millions in welfare and business grants and responding to outbreaks with our partners, staff have adapted and risen to every challenge presented.

Chief Executive Donna Manson said:

“ We have had unique challenges since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic that none of us could have predicted or imagined. Yet the kindness, support and compassion by staff across Highland is helping us to cope with these very challenging times. ”

Ten community hubs were set up across the Highlands with staff volunteers, co-ordinating and providing support to people in need, and delivering food parcels and medication.

Staff including High Life Highland employees also volunteered to help at the key worker childcare hubs for the children of key workers.

The Highland Council was one of the first local authorities in Scotland recognised to develop a Schools Digital Learning Hub, which provides a resource for staff, parents and pupils to support home learning and lockdown didn't stop Highland pupils from learning remotely.

Staff handled 200 calls per day at the height of lock down to the new helpline which saw over 5000 calls by the start of May.

In the first few weeks the Council paid out £26 million to 2341 Highland businesses and by the mid June £60 million was paid out to nearly 6,000 Highland businesses.

Over 7,500 school meals payments were issued in the first month of lockdown with the development of an innovative voucher scheme, providing support to many families who are experiencing difficulties due to the coronavirus emergency. Some 60,000 payments were made by the summer.

In December, some £592,800 of hardship payments (including £137K school meal vouchers) was paid out to families, also helping local economies.

Cllr Bill Lobban said:

“ Council staff and volunteers from our partner organisations are working alongside community groups to provide invaluable local support. The response from people wanting to help has been incredible. I would like to thank each and every one of them for their hard work. Their support is invaluable to communities across the Highlands. ”

Cllr Margaret Davidson said:

“ As we continue to respond to COVID-19 it is so heartening to see the dedication and ingenuity of our staff. Many are delivering frontline services in difficult circumstances, excelling in completely new roles. This is a challenging time for all of us and I can't thank all our staff enough. ”

Help and support to apply for free school meals and benefits is available by emailing:

welfare.support@highland.gov.uk

Free helpline: **0300 303 1362**



THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Donna Manson presenting a Staff Briefing

Highland Council street cleaner one of Inverness's City Centre Heroes for 2020

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, there have been exceptional people within Inverness City Centre who have taken the opportunity to help those around them.

To recognise their acts of kindness and generosity, and as part of the joint Festive Campaign organised by The Highland Council, Inverness Common Good Fund, Inverness BID and Highland News & Media, nominations were sought from the public for individuals, businesses or organisations that went above and beyond to help out others during this unprecedented year.

A judging panel then had the difficult task of choosing the winners from all of the nominations.

The Inverness City Centre Heroes Award winners are:

- Inverness Foodstuff which provided thousands of meals to people who are homeless, vulnerable or financially disadvantaged, often those in special need due to the effects of the pandemic.
- Martin Macdougall, a member of the city centre street cleaning team, who kindly gifted books to over 650 children from his holiday fund during lockdown.
- Morrison's Inverness Community Champions delivered food supplies to many community organisations and food banks. In addition to the company's own food donations, the team put together food supplies in pick-up packs, which were purchased and then donated by customers and delivered by Morrison's Community Champions to local food banks.

All three winners received a certificate and a £100 voucher to spend in the city centre.



Inverness Foodstuff chairwoman Rev Fiona Smith with Al Edwards, catering and training supervisor, June Macleod, the operations manager and trustee Hilary Parkey



Martin MacDougall used his holiday money to buy books for youngsters during lockdown



Morrison's Community Champions team members Kylie Omand (left) and Catherine MacDonald.

Depute Provost Councillor Graham Ross said:

" The people of the Highlands are renowned worldwide for their hospitality and friendliness. In recent times this spirit has never been more necessary nor has it been shown in such abundance as during the current pandemic.

" The City Centre Heroes Awards has highlighted the extraordinary commitment, compassion and real sense of caring for our community shown by so many volunteers across the city. There are countless examples where individuals, community groups and organisations have provided vital services to those most in need during these unprecedented times. As an Invernessian, I am so incredibly proud of the manner in which our city has responded to the crisis and cannot thank everyone enough for all their incredible commitment. "

He added:

" I did not envy the judges their task of choosing only three winners. Everyone who gave freely of their time or who helped in any way is a hero in my eyes and I am sure in the eyes of the many people who benefitted from their kindness. "

Mike Smith, manager of Inverness Business Improvement District (BID) said:

" The Covid-19 lockdown and the period that followed were extremely challenging for individuals and businesses alike. However, during this time many people and organisations came forward and made major contributions to the benefit of the wider city centre community. The Inverness City Heroes Awards reflects the outstanding contribution that the winners have made during this period. "

Steve Barron, publisher, Highland News & Media added:

" We're delighted to be able to shine the spotlight of publicity on these well deserving individuals and organisations. The positive impact they have had on the city centre and beyond during this year is something they should all be very proud of. They are an inspiration to all. "

Staff Spotlights



Name:

Mrs MacPhie

Post title:

Primary Teacher-Gaelic
- Mallaig Primary School

Mrs MacPhie Charity Quiz Champion

Dawn MacPhie is a Primary Teacher at Bunscoil Mhalaig and when not teaching her P1-P3 class she is kept busy hosting quizzes to support local charities.

The quiz nights started as a weekly staff quiz during lockdown. Dawn thought it would be good to develop the quizzes to allow more people to enjoy a way to meet-up socially online.

Dawn has raised over £1100 for various good causes including Alzheimer's Research, Lucy's Blue Day-Children's Mental Health Charity and Lochaber Hope.

Commenting on the quiz nights, Dawn said: "For me, hosting the quiz nights has given me a release during these challenging times. "It's been a way of bringing people together, having fun and raising money for some very deserving causes. I'm indebted to the quizzers who have shown huge generosity."

Deirdre Beck – Depute Head Teacher Mallaig ASG said: "Dawn has brought so many people together in a fun way, it really has been a great way to keep in touch with staff, friends and family during lockdown and it has now become the new weekly 'social' for many of us. It brings people together and really lifts moods."



Name:

Anthony Coyle

Post title:

Systems & Change
Assistant

New Role:

Corporate
Communications &
Engagement Officer

New Opportunities during a pandemic

Anthony Coyle has recently taken on a seconded post within the Corporate Communications and Resilience Team. His previous job role was an IT and welfare reform role within the Systems & Change Team (Resources & Finance Service).

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a changeable and dynamic situation – where it is possible and safe to do so – elements of the Council's business-as-usual activities have gradually restarted over the last number of months.

With both of these now running in parallel, the Corporate Communications and Resilience Team continues to deal with a large volume of varied media enquiries, writing and publishing news releases and engagement via social media – internally and externally – both for business-as-usual activities and the COVID-19 situation as it continues to emerge.

Speaking about his experience of taking on this new role, Anthony said: "Having the opportunity to become involved in the work of this team has been rewarding and fulfilling. A particular highlight for me has been attending Committee Meetings and preparing press releases for the varied range of topics which are presented, discussed and sometimes subject to vote by Members within this forum. It can be a fast-paced environment at times, but it's such an interesting role and I'm expanding my knowledge every day."

"As I continue to find my feet and develop in this new role, the impressive team spirit, drive and level of support demonstrated by colleagues within the team since I joined them in October has been reassuring. I very much look forward to continuing to work alongside them into the beginning of next year."

The Highland Council commended for their humanitarian and welfare response to COVID-19

The Highland Council staff have been commended for their emergency response to the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the region during which £651,000 grant aid has been claimed from the Scottish Government by the Council to support its statutory role in providing humanitarian assistance to local people.

Cllr Henderson said:

“ I would like to thank Council staff and the many community groups and volunteers supporting the response to the pandemic and helping those who are most in need among our communities.

“ While the demand for support reduced over the summer months, we are now seeing an increase in coronavirus cases in communities across the Highlands in recent winter weeks. The Council now has an increased role in supporting the Test and Protect system and in ensuring individuals can self-isolate by providing support to those who need it focussing on food, fuel and financial insecurity. ”

The Council continues to operate local hubs providing food support where required in partnership with FareShare and funded by the Scottish Government. In October, 3,125 bags, equivalent to 13.78 tonnes of food was distributed to 11 different community groups.

The Council also continues to support groups through the Covid Ward discretionary budget.

At 9th November 2020, £161,344 or 30.1% funding had been spent on 347 separate awards.

A public support information leaflet was produced by the Council for Granttown on Spey (with copies in Polish, Latvian and Romanian) and distributed within the local community.

The leaflet has been adapted for further outbreaks and is on the Council's website at:

www.highland.gov.uk/covidoutbreaks

The response to local outbreaks in Granttown, Kinlochleven, Fort William and more recently Easter Ross were commended.

Since 12th October Highland Council has supported Test and Protect by handling calls to people who have been asked to self-isolate. These calls are to ensure that they have enough food, medicines and supplies and financial support to enable them to isolate and to determine if they are entitled to £500 if they lose income as a result of being required to self-isolate. Between 12th October and 11th November, 391 individuals were referred to the Council. Successful calls were made to 314 of them and a further 331 follow-up calls were made. Sixty-three referrals were made to the Council's Welfare Team for potential entitlement to the £500 payment.

Different supports are in place to address financial insecurity which has been on the rise particularly in the west in Fort William and Skye.



Housing staff thanked for their work during COVID-19

Members of The Highland Council's Housing and Property Committee have praised and thanked staff for their work in continuing to provide priority housing services during the COVID-19 emergency.

Chair Councillor Ben Thompson particularly highlighted the work undertaken to balance staff and client safety with service demands. He said:

" The emergency affected every area of housing services delivery and impacted on every one of our 14,000 tenants and other housing customers. The nature of the day-to-day work is very much based on face-to-face contact with tenants, especially vulnerable clients. Staff had to react quickly and make changes to the way services could be safely and effectively delivered at very short notice. "

Over the first few weeks of lockdown the tenant participation team made direct contact by phone with 3,264 tenants, emailed a further 3,973

and stayed in touch via text messages with 6,858. An online survey was also set up so that the welfare needs of tenants could be captured and anyone requiring support or assistance was referred to their local Community Hub.

As well as supporting welfare, the housing staff have been continuing to deal with complaints and other tenancy matters. Although routine home visits were not possible during lockdown, staff continued to follow up issues through other channels. Tenants living in sheltered accommodation have been able to use a Help Call system to replace personal visits and increased cleaning regimes for common areas were introduced and are still in place.

Despite the exceptional circumstances during the pandemic, the performance report

presented to Committee reflects the great proactive work that has been done. It has been a huge effort and staff should rightfully be recognised for their effort. The professional approach and determination of Highland Council staff to make sure people received the support they needed is to be commended.

Staff have had to prioritise emergency work, figures show a high level of performance in the average time taken to complete repairs in the first quarter of 2020/21. The repairs team managed to continue to undertake reletting repairs on a targeted basis during the emergency.

The hard work continues as we move into the recovery phase, undoubtedly there will be extra pressure on the service to address a backlog of needs, such as non-emergency repairs, allocations, development work on rent arrears and homelessness. However, with the resourcefulness and dedication of all staff progress will continue.



Three schools in Highland earn prestigious Unicef UK Award



Inverness Royal Academy, Dornoch Primary and Bonar Bridge Primary are to receive the Silver Rights Respecting School Award by Unicef UK, an agency of the United Nations.

Unicef is the world's leading organisation working for children and their rights. The Rights Respecting Schools Award is granted to schools that show commitment to promoting and realising children's rights and encouraging adults, children and young people to respect the rights of others in school. Silver is given to schools that make excellent progress towards embedding the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into its ethos and curriculum.

The Award recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of a school's planning, policies and practice. A Rights Respecting School is a community where

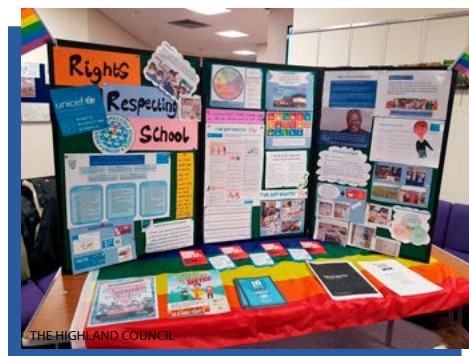
children's rights are learned, taught, practised, respected, protected and promoted.

Projects leads within Inverness Royal Academy, Lindsay Muluzi and Morven Neil, said:

" We are absolutely delighted that our young people have been recognized as rights ambassadors. Our pupil groups have successfully and positively impacted upon school life by making changes to whole school policies such as a positive behaviour system, have taken action on sustainable development issues such as climate action, and have set up vital support groups in the school for the LGBT+ community, and a mental health group in the planning stages, too. "

Head Teacher at the school, Nigel Engstrand added:

" As a school we are not only proud that the school has achieved the Silver award but we are committed to achieving the Gold award in the coming year. For the whole school community, the challenge now is for the principles and values of the convention to permeate all of the work that we do as an institution. It seems too obvious to stress the importance of putting children's rights at the heart of a school but, surprisingly, it is only in recent years that such an approach has been recognised as being fundamental to young people's health and wellbeing, their academic success and their participation in society as active citizens. " ▶



Dornoch Primary and **Bonar Bridge Primary**, both schools included in the Dornoch Firth 3-18 Campus, collaborated together to fulfil all the required aims of their Silver Action Plan. Over lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic, the pupils built wildlife areas, completed sports activities, carried out research and investigated the 42 articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Acting Head Teacher of Dornoch Firth 3-18 Campus, Norman Ross said:

" Since lockdown some pupils have exercised their democratic rights by holding elections and carrying out surveys to ensure our schools look after children's rights. Other pupils have learned about persuasive writing and have written letters to their local MP. We have continued to fully include our pupils in as much of the decision making processes in our schools as possible. Our pupils and their parents have fundraised for charities both local and international and learnt about children in the world whose rights may not be supported. We are extremely proud of how the Dornoch Firth 3-18 Campus Community has supported the school to achieve this award. "

Congratulations to the pupils and staff of Inverness Royal Academy, Dornoch Primary and Bonar Bridge Primary.

Learning during lockdown

The Highland Council has produced a video which shines a spotlight on how children across the region have been able to continue learning during lockdown.

The Council produced a video 'Learning During Lockdown' to highlight how teachers were able to continue to deliver education despite the closure of school across the UK.

The video looks at what learning during lockdown meant for Highland school pupils and how new technology and support from teachers has enhanced digital literacy.

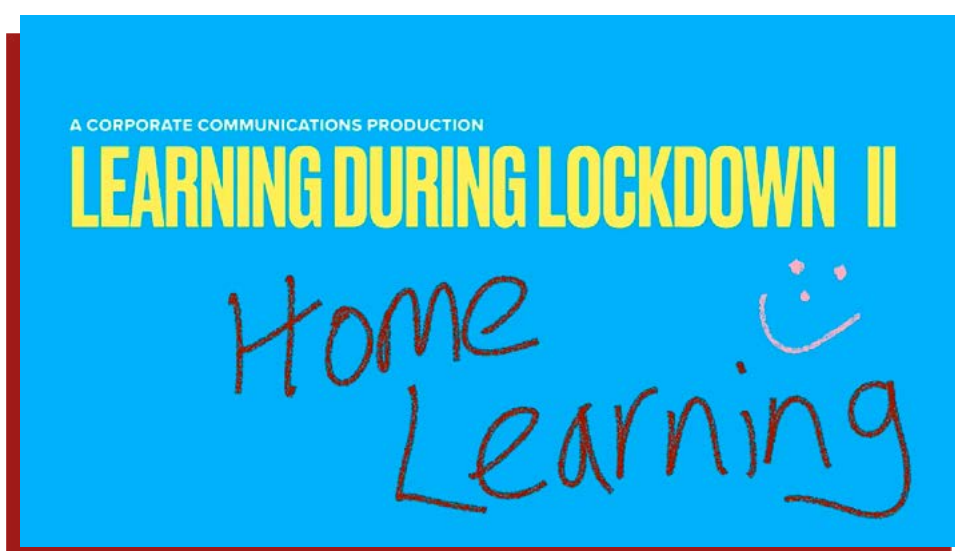
This short film, 'Learning During Lockdown II - what does learning at home look like?' looks at what life was like for pupils throughout Highland prior to the return of full time education on 11th August 2020.

Learning during Lockdown has been a new and fast paced challenge, but it has also been innovative and rewarding in many different ways. IT skills have improved for both students and teachers as a result of having to adapt quickly and learn at pace.

The Highland Council thanked pupils, parents and school staff, for all their hard work and creativity throughout lockdown. The return to full time education and the experiences gained during lockdown will have a lasting legacy and open new opportunities for future learning.

The film can be viewed on YouTube (external link):

www.bit.ly/LearningDuringLockdown2



Why not start your journey with The Highland Council?

A technician with The Highland Council's Infrastructure and Environment service has been awarded the accolade of becoming Highways and Street Lighting Apprentice of the Year Finalist at the Association for Public Service Excellence Awards.

Ewan Gordon, who is based at the Drumbuie Council Offices in Golspie, started his career with the Council as a trainee technician in October 2017, a few months after completing high school.

While at school Ewan had a keen interest in engineering, particularly the design of engineering works, and gained some experience of using design packages as part of his Graphic Communication course.

Since starting with the council in 2017 he has made excellent progress, completing a National Certificate in Civil Engineering for which he was awarded student of the year. He is now more than halfway through a Higher National Certificate in Civil Engineering, and Scottish Vocational Qualification in

Construction Contracting Operations: Site Technical Support which he expects to complete in May next year.

Ewan, who is delighted to have received the national award said:

" When I saw the Trainee Technician job advertised with the Council, I thought that it would be a good opportunity to work in a subject area which I enjoy. I also thought that this opportunity with the Councils Roads Department would give me the chance to gain a qualification, whilst gaining work experience at the same time to enhance my learning. The Council also appealed to me as an employer thanks to its conditions and job security. "

Ewan now aims to complete his Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in Construction Contracting Operations: Site Technical Support and a Higher National Certificate in Civil Engineering. His longer-term objectives are to gain enough experience to enable him to complete an EngTech, and then, if possible, to continue studying Civil Engineering up to degree level.

The Association for Public Service Excellence Awards, which



receive nominations from local authorities across the UK, also paid tribute to the work of The Highland Council who won an award for supporting Ewan's apprenticeship.

The Modern Apprenticeship programme offers a wide range of opportunities for apprenticeships in different roles, such as Engineering, Building Standards Surveyor, Architectural Technicians, Housing, Early Years Childcare, Business & Administration, ICT, Mechanical and Building trade to name a few. To find out more information about the Modern Apprentice scheme visit the Skills Development Scotland website:

www.apprenticeships.scot

To date the Council has had 226 people currently working towards or completed their apprenticeships.

Opportunities are all advertised throughout the year with apprenticeships starting from £9.34 per hour and a great benefits package. To find out how to apply visit our website:

www.bit.ly/THC-ModernApprenticeships



Supporting businesses though COVID

Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Highland Council has successfully been able to provide hardship support to several thousand businesses operating in the Highland area through a number of financial schemes introduced by Scottish Government.

At the outset of the pandemic within the UK, Scottish Government quickly established two main grant schemes – the Business Fund and the Self-Catering Fund. The Highland Council, along with other Scottish local authorities, was responsible for administering local applications to these funds – both of which acted as a critical safety-net for several thousand businesses in our area. Within Highland, the Business Fund enabled awards of either £10,000 or £25,000 to be paid to 4,812 businesses, which totalled £58,870,800. Meanwhile, the Self-Catering Fund was able to support 2,125 accommodation providers by awarding £19,938,750 in grants.

BUSINESS HARDSHIP FUND

In October, with positive COVID case numbers rising sharply again, the Business Hardship Fund was launched to support the food and drinks element of the hospitality sector and also gyms, where firms had to operate in a restricted way. One-off grants of £2,155 or £1,440 were made available to eligible businesses based on their rateable value. In the Highland area, this scheme reached 406 businesses and contributed £633,995 worth of financial support.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK BUSINESS FUND

More recently, during November, the Strategic Framework Business Fund was established to support businesses which are required to close by law or to significantly alter their operations due to COVID-19 restrictions. Under this scheme, which is still open to new applications, four-weekly grants of either £1,400 or £2,100 are available to businesses which are allowed to remain open, but need to modify their operations by law. The grant awarded from this scheme is determined based on the rateable value of the property from which the business operates. Under this scheme, to date, 185 businesses operating in the Highland area have successfully received a grant – the current total paid is £298,100.

Financial support available to businesses from Scottish Government and The Highland Council has evolved throughout 2020 to meet the changing circumstances of the pandemic. While some of the original schemes which were initially established have since closed to applications, there are still a number of grants and funds available to support businesses experiencing hardship.

The Strategic Framework Business Fund, which is detailed above, continues to accept applications from businesses who have been impacted by the pandemic.

NEWLY SELF-EMPLOYED FUND

Additionally, support for those who became self-employed on or after 6th April 2019 is also set to be continued through the upcoming launch of a further Newly Self-Employed Fund, as announced by Scottish Government on 9th December. When the original iteration of this scheme was launched earlier in the year, The Highland Council awarded £672,000 to more than 330 self-employed applicants – those who had been in business on or after 6th April 2019 and who were not eligible for the UK Government support scheme.

CORONAVIRUS BUSINESS INTERRUPTION LOAN SCHEME

EVENTS INDUSTRY SUPPORT FUND

THIRD SECTOR RESILIENCE FUND

THE HOTEL RECOVERY PROGRAMME AND SELF-CATERING GRANTS

SUPPORT FOR COASTAL COMMUNITIES

AQUACULTURE HARDSHIP FUND

BOUNCE BACK LOAN SCHEME (BBLs)

COVID-19 SELF-ISOLATION SUPPORT GRANT

JOB SUPPORT SCHEME

Refer to the Council's website for details of which schemes are still active and accepting applications:

www.bit.ly/Grants-and-Loans

Inverness housing boost as Academy Street apartments near completion

Located on the old Farm Foods site on Academy Street in Inverness, Wyvern House it is being redeveloped by the Highland Housing Alliance (HHA) and The Highland Council to create 37 new apartments and 3 commercial units.

The development is due for completion early next year. 14 of the homes will be for mid-market renters through HHA and 23 apartments available to rent through The Highland Council.

The completion of the development will mark the continued regeneration of Inverness city centre and add a boost to the availability of housing in the Highlands.

The project is a collaboration between HHA, Scottish Government, The Highland Council and City Region Deal.

Gail Matheson, HHA chief executive, said:

“ People in Inverness and beyond will soon have access to quality mid-market housing and these attractive, one and two bedroom apartments offer an affordable option in a prime city centre location.

“ The completion of Wyvern House comes as a result the hard work from our colleagues at the Scottish Government, The Highland Council and the local construction sector and we are all excited to welcome the first new residents in 2021. ”

A time lapse camera has recorded the construction of Wyvern House. The video shows the development of the building - from groundworks to the scaffolding being taken down.



A time lapse video of the construction of Wyvern House to date is available to view: www.bit.ly/WyvernHouse (external link)

The Scottish Government’s housing minister, Kevin Stewart said:

“ This exciting regeneration project, supported by £1.871 million from the Scottish Government, will provide new homes for people in the heart of Inverness, marking an important stage in the regeneration of the city centre.

“ The partnership between Scottish Government, Highland Council and HHA is a good example of how we can sustain our construction industry, stimulate growth and meet our ambition of ensuring everyone has a safe and warm place to live.”

The provost of Inverness, Helen Carmichael said:

“ The Council is delighted to be a partner in this exciting project which brings much needed high-quality affordable homes to the city centre and will provide new retail opportunities helping to regenerate and support the city centre, in particular the northern end of Academy Street. ”

Five year Draft Strategic Housing Plan approved

The Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee has approved a draft Strategic Housing Plan for 2021-2026 that sets out the Council's key housing investment priorities and demonstrates how they will be delivered.



Funding will come from a mix of City Region Deal cash, The Highland Council prudential borrowing and grants from the Scottish Government.

Chair of the Committee, Councillor Trish Robertson said:

" Our investment in housing is helping to support jobs in the building industry and also providing people and families with access to good quality, affordable homes where they can be safe and warm. I am pleased that the Committee have approved this draft strategic plan as we need a clear and workable way to see our ambitions turn into reality over the next five years. "

The Plan, which will be submitted to the Scottish Government for their approval, also identifies the resources required to deliver new homes and outlines the partnership approach with housing associations and developers to achieve the Council's commitment to providing more quality affordable housing across the Highlands.

The Plan sets out how investment in affordable housing will be directed up until 2026 with up to 500 new homes built each year, of which 70% will be for affordable rent and 30% for intermediate affordable housing (e.g. low-cost home ownership or mid-market rent).



Spaces For People update

After two successful bids for funding The Highland Council is currently rolling out a programme of interventions aimed at encouraging active travel whilst social distancing in Highland towns as part of the Scottish Government's Spaces for People project.

Spaces for People interventions completed in Inverness have included the introduction of the one-way system around the Castle, temporary measures put in place to widen pedestrian access along Academy Street and road surface painting along Millburn Road to better highlight the reallocated lane space for active travel.

In Fort William work to create a safe cycling and walking route at Black Parks was completed in time for the 2020 National Cycle To School Day. The project involved carrying out drainage works, resurfacing and formalising earth-beaten tracks to make walking, wheeling and cycling to school, work and for leisure safer, easier and more convenient. This car-free route has become very popular, particularly with pupils cycling back and forth from their school. Sustrans issued a short film clip on their twitter account to highlight how appreciative people are of having this safe way of travelling around. This can be viewed by visiting:

www.twitter.com/SustransScot/status/1311689938837164032?s=20



THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

One-way system around Inverness Castle



THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Temporary measures along Academy Street



THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Road surface painting along Millburn Road



The Spaces For People work has been delivered from across the Economy and Infrastructure Service, with officers from Project Design Unit, Transport Planning, Planning, Road Safety and Area Roads Teams working in partnership and this co-ordinated approach has gone really well.

Highland Council's Head of Infrastructure, Colin Howell, said:

" All of the interventions we have put in place under the scheme support active travel. In Inverness in particular we want to ensure we give people confidence that the city centre is a safe and welcoming environment to walk and wheel around. This is particularly important in the festive season where footfall in the city centre tends to increase."

Also, as part of Spaces For People we are in the process of rolling out 20mph schemes in towns across Highland. The Dingwall scheme is already in operation, Aviemore is due to be implemented and Fort William, Portree and Thurso are coming soon.

The Bus Rapid Deployment Fund is part of the same Covid response work on sustainable transport and is delivering bus lanes at Rose Street in Inverness and Raigmore Hospital. Work is well advanced and will transform how buses can move around the city and Inner Moray Firth area. Again this was a cross-service team, with council staff working in partnership with Stagecoach, NHS Highland and HITRANS.

Anyone can provide comments, both positive and negative to all the works taking place to improve active travel by visiting the Spaces For People consultation portal which is available on the Council's website:

<https://consult.highland.gov.uk/kse>



Partnership approach to increase Gaelic Medium Education

At a meeting of the Council's Gaelic Committee, The Gaelic Team and education and community officers were recognised for their work and engagement with other sector partnerships to promote Gaelic Learner opportunities and GME provisions across Highland.

The Highland Council annually hosts the Gaelic Education In-Service which delivers training opportunities and experiences associated with learning and teaching across GME and Gaelic Learner Education for professionals in Early, Primary and Secondary settings. Partner Centre staff and neighbouring Authorities also engage in these sessions.

In addition to the above, it is proposed that virtual platforms will be used for future GME Bitesize training. The Council's School Digital Hub hosts digital Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions which support the delivery of the 1+2 Language Learning. Resources have also been created in partnership between the Council's Education Improvement

Team and the Gaelic Team to support settings during a potential future lockdown.

During her presentation to the Committee, Lena Walker, Gaelic Development Manager for The Highland Council, said:

" Often, many of the pupils who benefit from the projects and innovative initiatives, including extra-curricular activities, have opportunities to learn and use Gaelic that would otherwise not have been available to them. The partnership working between education, external agencies and the Gaelic Community Learning and Development Officers in turn maximises the impact on learner's progress and achievement. "

Dòigh-obrach chom-pàirteach gus Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig a mheudachadh

Aig coinneamh Comataidh Gàidhlig na Comhairle, chaidh aithne a thoirt do Sgioba na Gàidhlig agus oifigearan foghlaim agus coimhearsnachd airson an cuid obrach le com-pàirteachasan roinneil eile gus cothroman do Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig agus solar FtG a bhrosnachadh is a mheudachadh air feadh na Gàidhealtachd.

Bidh Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a' toirt aogheachd gach bliadhna do In-Sheirbheis Foghlam Gàidhlig a bhios a' libhrigeadh chothroman trèanaidh agus eòlasan co-cheangailte ri ionnsachadh is teagasg thar Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus Foghlam Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig do phroifeiseantaich ann an ionadan Tràth-Ìre, Bun-sgoile agus Àrd-sgoile. Bidh luchd-obrach bho ionadan Com-pàirteach agus ann an Ùghdarrasan san nàbachd cuideachd a' gabhail com-pàirt sna seiseanan seo.

A bharrachd air seo shuas, thathar a' moladh gun tèid àrd-ùrlaran bhiorail a chleachdadh airson trèanadh Bitesize FtG san àm ri teachd. Bidh Hub Didseatach Sgoile na Comhairle a' cumail sheiseanan Leantainneach a bhios a' toirt taic do libhrigeadh Ionnsachadh Cànan 1+2. Chaidh goireasan a chruthachadh cuideachd ann an com-pàirteachas eadar Sgioba Leasachadh Foghlaim na Comhairle agus Sgioba na Gàidhlig gus taic a thoirt do dh'ionadan ma 's e 's gum bi

**Gaelic Medium
Education
Foghlam
Tron Ghàidhlig**

glasadh-sluaigh eile ann san àm ri teachd.

Anns an taisbeanadh aice dhan Chomataidh, thuirt Lena Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig aig Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd:

" Gu tric, bidh na sgoilearan a bhios a' faighinn buannachd às na pròiseactan is na h-iomairtean innleachdach, a' gabhail a-steach cleasan taobh a-muigh a' churraicealaim, a' faighinn chothroman gus a' Ghàidhlig ionnsachadh is a chleachdadh nach biodh aca mura biodh seo. Tha an obair chom-pàirteach eadar foghlam, buidhnean-ghnìomha air an taobh a-muigh agus Oifigearan Ionnsachadh is Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig a' meudachadh na buaidh air adhartas is coileanadh an luchd-ionnsachaidh. "

Gaelic Committee members praise the success of the first virtual Royal National Mòd

Members of the Highland Council's Gaelic Committee, during their November meeting, reflected on the first virtual Royal National Mòd which took place between 9th –17th October 2020.

This year's Royal National Mòd was originally due to take place in Inverness, however, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, event organisers An Comunn Gàidhealach took the decision to cancel the event and move it online.

The event showcased a range of performances from children and adults who participated online this year.

When discussed at the Gaelic Committee, members were keen to share their praise and congratulations with all of the talented individuals who

participated this year. This admiration extended to a fellow member of the committee, Cllr Raymond Bremner, who represented the Caithness area at this year's virtual Mòd, performing a Gaelic Medley which was very well received.

Cllr Calum Munro, Gaelic Committee Chair, Highland Council said,

" Despite the fact that this event had to be conducted in a different manner this year, I'm delighted that the Mòd was still able to take place and thoroughly enjoyed watching this on television and on social media. Cèilidh na Comhairle, which was organised in partnership with Fèis Rois and concluded the event, was a personal highlight. Due to COVID-19, we have all had to be creative and innovative, along with making greater use of

technology, in order that events such as the Mòd can proceed. I am sure that being able to attend the Mòd, albeit by virtual-means, helped many individuals to feel a sense of normality during these strange times. "

" I would once again like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to An Comunn Gàidhealach for pulling together this superb and well-received event under difficult circumstances. "

Subject to Government guidance in force at the time, the Royal National Mòd is scheduled to take place in Inverness during October 2021. Preparations for the event have already commenced.



A' chiad Mhòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail air-loidhne ga mheas soirbheachail

Bhathar an dùil Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail na bliadhna seo a chumail ann an Inbhir Nis, ach air sàillibh galar mòr-sgaoilte COVID-19, cho-dhùin An Comunn Gàidhealach gun deigheadh a chumail air-loidhne. Mar sin, chaidh a' chiad Mhòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail air-loidhne a chumail eadar 9–17 Dàmhair 2020.

Chaidh raon thaisbeanaidhean a shealltainn bho chloinn is inbhich a ghabh com-pàirt air-loidhne am-bliadhna. Chòrd am Mòd gu mòr ris a' mhòr-shluagh agus cùisean cho dùbhlach aig an àm seo.

Rinn Buill na Comhairle moladh mòr air na daoine tàlantach uile

a ghabh com-pàirt agus chuir iad meal a naidheachd chridheil orra. Thuirt an Comhairliche Calum Rothach, Cathraiche Comataidh na Gàidhlig, Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd,

" Ged a b' fheudar an tachartas a chumail ann an dòigh eadar-dhealaichte am-bliadhna, tha mi fìor thoilichte gum b' urrainn dhan Mhòd a dhol air adhart agus chòrd e glan rium a bhith ga choimhead air an telebhisean agus air na meadhanan sòisealta. Chòrd Cèilidh na Comhairle, a chuireadh air dòigh ann an co-bhann le Fèis Rois agus a thug an tachartas gu crìch, sònraichte math rium fhèin. Air sàillibh

COVID-19, tha againn uile ri bhith cruthachail is innleachdach agus barrachd feum a dhèanamh de theicneòlas gus an urrainn do thachartasan mar am Mòd a dhol air adhart. Tha mi cinnteach gun robh e na chuideachadh do mhòran dhaoine gum b' urrainn dhaibh a bhith an làthair aig a' Mhòd, ged a b' ann air-loidhne, agus gun tug sin togail dhaibh san aimsir neònaich seo. "

Le ùmhlachd do stiùireadh an Riaghaltais aig an àm, thathar an dùil gun cumar am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail ann an Inbhir Nis anns an Dàmhair 2021. Tha ullachaidhean airson an tachartais air tòiseachadh mar-thà.

Virtual Climate Change Conference hailed a 'success'



Summary of the day

In May 2019, The Highland Council announced a climate and ecological emergency in recognition of the serious and accelerating changes to the world caused by climate change.

The Highland Council's first online climate conference held on the 2nd November 2020; allowed the public the opportunity to discuss regional, national and global responses to climate and ecological emergencies caused by climate change.

The conference was split into four themes:

- **Biodiversity and Habitat**
- **The Bigger Picture** – looking at international policy and sustainability targets
- **Personal Responsibility**
- **The Green Recovery**

Attended by a large and diverse audience and offering the public access to 30 guest speakers with almost all the 200 workshop tickets allocated. It was a positive and welcomed sign of the demand from Highland residents to embrace change and decrease their impact on the planet.

The contributions made by over 30 speakers offered an interesting range of issues for attendees to consider.

Below indicates a snippet of the wealth of discussion of ideas to emerge from the cross collaboration from both the public and speakers.

Summary of Biodiversity and Habitat workshops

Chaired by Joe Perry, The Highland Council

The future of forestry in Highland came under discussion, with some concern that plantation forestry is having a negative impact on biodiversity and carbon sequestration in carbon-rich soils.

The use of locally produced timber in construction was seen as a greener approach to development, which plantations in Highland could support.

The Highland Council's decision to support the Sutherland space port came under some criticism in relation to its impact on the peatlands.

There was universal support across both workshops for ongoing work to protect and restore our peatlands, as well as to find out more – possibly by conducting an audit – about our blue carbon resource.

Personal Responsibility workshops

Chaired by Cllr Trish Robertson, The Highland Council

Food production and food security were important issues for the Personal Responsibility workshops, with many attendees showing enthusiasm for the idea of growing their own fruit and vegetables in their gardens and allotments. One potential barrier to this was a lack of "know-how" and it was suggested that basic classes or support from the Council could help to increase participation in individual food production. Seasonal food should also be encouraged, to reduce food miles.

Climate change education in schools was identified as an effective way of encouraging behaviour change from an early age. It was accepted that some work on this is already being done in Highland.

Improving home insulation is important for family budgets as well as carbon emissions. Making more funding available to support this in Highland. Attendees also felt that home energy efficiency reports should be produced for all homes.

Littering was identified as a problem in Highland. A possible answer to this would be a new litter campaign, perhaps encouraging people to pick up 3 pieces of litter when they visit the beach.

There was overall agreement that we can have a bigger impact on the climate and ecological emergency by organising at a community and regional level.

Summary of The Bigger Picture workshops

Chaired by Keith Masson, The Highland Council

Native woodland expansion was enthusiastically supported for Highland, while concern about the impact of plantation forestry on biodiversity and carbon was expressed. The impact of agriculture on emissions was also expressed, with general agreement that more incentives for eco-friendly management is needed for land managers and farmers.

The planning process was frequently referenced, and it was noted the climate and ecological considerations are now front and centre of new local development plans as well as the Council's consultation response to NPF4 and its submission of an indicative regional spatial strategy (IRSS) for the region.

Funding for low-carbon initiatives was also a topic of discussion, with concern expressed that Council funding has now ceased, despite high appetite for these types of projects. It was also expressed that a Highland-wide focus would be welcomed. An interesting funding option was put forward in the form of a local benevolence fund; whereby local people could leave money for local low-carbon projects in their will.

Active and public travel infrastructure is often limited in Highland. Investment here could not only reduce car use, but potentially aviation emissions. It was also expressed that developers in Highland should be subject to stricter guidance in respect of low carbon heating solutions.

An increase in the carbon literacy for Highland residents is important and if this could be tied to local impacts, it would add weight to the need for individual and community action. Many participants recognise that communities want to be involved in climate action and recognise that it isn't just the Council's responsibility, but the flow of information and support requires improvement. Part of the answer to this messaging issue could come from more frequent dialogue between the Council and local community councils.

What is being planned for COP26, a comment was made that it presents an opportunity to highlight to world leaders the potential of Highland to contribute to national and global climate ambition. It was confirmed that Highland will indeed be represented at COP26 and outline plans will be pulled together early in 2021.

www.bit.ly/HighlandClimateChangeConference

Summary of the Green Recovery workshops

Chaired by Stuart Black, HIE

The Green Recovery workshop also considered food production and security. Attendees agreed that seeing empty shelves at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak made people more interested in food chains and food security. In a similar vein, the idea of encouraging more local networks of suppliers to work more loosely together was supported. Not only would this reduce the miles that products and services need to travel, but also this would keep money in Highland.

Waste - Another important theme of the green recovery workshops was the concept of turning waste into something useful. This could be the production of energy from waste, for example through biomass boilers. This conversation moved on to the idea of the circular economy and it was agreed that it would be beneficial not only to the green recovery but also to the reduction of emissions if Highland were to do more to keep products in useable condition for a longer period of time, perhaps through re-using or recycling components of products.

Tourism was a topic of interest, in particular the idea of promoting slow and sustainable tourism. The NC500 route was recognised as a double-edged sword for Highland; while it undoubtedly has brought money to the area, this money has not been evenly spread across the driving route, while the traffic issues have affected a wide range of communities.

City-Region Deal infrastructure projects back in full swing



An update on projects across the Highlands receiving support from the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal was discussed during The Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee on the 4th November 2020.

Members were pleased to note that despite the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent national lockdown earlier in the year causing work on projects to be suspended, sites are now back up and running.

All City-Region Deal projects have had to adapt to the current Covid environment by temporarily changing the way they work.

The projects affected include the building of affordable homes across the Highlands and the enabling works to transform Inverness Castle into a top visitor attraction. Other highlights of progress made included the completion of the A9/A96 Smithton Interchange consultation, the restart of the Fit Home build programme and the installation of the eye-catching hoardings around Inverness Castle.

Chair of the Committee, Cllr Trish Robertson said:

" It is good news that work on sites has resumed as not only does it provide local employment but it also results in an increase in spend in areas and during these economic challenging times, this is very welcomed.

" While we cannot currently make the Newton Room facilities available to schools, a good example of how every effort is being made to adapt to the situation is that the special education kits and outdoor

learning resources are being provided to schools until pupils can attend."

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Margaret Davidson added:

" I am very pleased that we are moving forward again and have been very heartened by the excellent efforts of staff to get us there. The Castle project is doing particularly well, and I know that Transport Scotland is working closely with us on

the 2 main roads projects and how we are adapting them to a new post covid world. I am also delighted we are finally making some progress of the broadband project and seeing how that can help us deliver our ambitions of a fibre to premises model for all of Highland. Where we may not be able to deliver a full project, we are negotiating with both governments to see if we can divert spend to other areas or to expand current projects.

" Our new officer in post, Felix McGunnigle is doing well and keeping us well apprised of developments. "



Ready for winter

The Highland Council has invested in 10 new winter gritting vehicles to replace some of the ageing fleet, which are ready to be deployed as soon as they are needed.

The new vehicles, which have been dispatched across the Highlands, complement the Council's existing winter fleet that includes 99 gritters, 42 footpath tractors, 2 snowblowers with over 200 staff ready to provide winter maintenance services.

Chair of the Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Councillor Trish Robertson who was given a test drive in one of the newly purchased snow ploughs said:

" Modernising our fleet by buying the new vehicles is an investment that will help us provide our communities with an efficient and reliable service over the coming winter months. These new top-of-the range vehicles have all the equipment to make them as efficient as possible when carrying out the work. "

The winter roads maintenance budget for 2020/21 is £5million which will be used to look after the 6,766km of roads for which the Council has responsibility. Planning is in place and crews across the Highlands are prepared and ready to deliver the winter service as and when required. The new fleet of snow ploughs will have an important role in making

sure we are able to provide our communities with the best service we can within the resources available.

There have been no changes to this year's winter policy so service levels throughout the local areas and will remain, essentially, unchanged from last year. The service will commence at 6am each day as and when required. There will be a Monday to Friday service in which all roads are treated and a weekend service which includes treatment of all the Primary routes, strategic Secondary routes and difficult 'Other' routes. The service will be

provided within the resources available and as weather conditions permit.

Details of the Council's Highland-wide and local area gritting policies and maps are available from this link:

www.highland.gov.uk/gritting

As in previous years, Highland Council is offering assistance to communities who wish to take action in their own area to help clear snow and ice from footpaths but providing salt in either bins or heaps, snow shovels and pushers, gloves and hi-viz vests, Health and Safety advice to volunteers and public liability insurance.

Full guidance and an application form can be found on this website:

www.bit.ly/WinterResilienceCommunityAid

For further information visit:

www.highland.gov.uk/gritting



EWEN WEATHERSPOON

Cllr Trish Robertson and the Council's Transport and Logistics Manager Mike Cooper are photographed with two of the new snow ploughs.

The Highland Council's Welfare Team

The Highland Council's welfare specialists provide an effective support service on all matters relating to benefits and entitlements. Our team can also provide professional advice on personal budgeting to enable you to manage your money effectively.

The overall aim of the Council's welfare specialists is to ensure that the correct amount of benefit is paid to you at the correct time and to assist you with budgeting skills so that you can pay your bills, heat your home and have a better quality of life.

COUNCIL TAX

Help with your Council Tax

Council Tax is a tax paid for the delivery of local services. It generally needs to be paid in respect of all domestic properties where people live permanently. Your Council Tax bill will depend on what council tax band your property is placed in and the level of Council Tax set each year by your local council.

Am I entitled to a reduced Council Tax bill?

You may be entitled to a reduction in your bill if you are on a low income, even if you own your own home. Council Tax Reduction can't be used to reduce water or sewerage charges on your bill.

Second Adult Rebate

If you are liable to pay Council Tax and live with another adult who is on a low income or in receipt of certain benefits (and who is **not your partner**), you could qualify for a Council Tax rebate of up to 25% via the Second Adult Rebate Scheme. This scheme is also available to home-owners.

Second Adult Rebate is calculated based on the financial circumstances of the low-income or out-of-work adult who lives with you – it will not take your income or savings into account. Note that you can't be awarded Second Adult Rebate at the same time as Council Tax Reduction (CTR).

As a guide, the section below outlines the percentage of Council Tax rebate which may be available to you under this scheme based on the financial circumstances – whether in work or not – of the adult who lives with you:

The adult who lives with you is not working and is in receipt of a benefit listed below:

You may be entitled to a 25% rebate on your Council Tax bill if the adult who lives with you is in receipt of:

- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Note that when calculating any rebate you may be entitled to we will ignore any income received from payment of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance and Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

If the second adult in your household is getting Universal Credit (UC), although this is a benefit, you won't automatically get a 25% rebate. Instead, you should think of them as 'not on benefits' for this purpose and treat their Universal Credit award (including any earnings they may have alongside this) as income. The 'in work' income thresholds in the next section will therefore apply.

The adult who lives with you is working, but is on a low income:

Gross weekly income of less than £208.99
– 15% rebate on Council Tax.

Gross weekly income of more than £209.00 but not exceeding £273.00 – 7.5% rebate on Council Tax.

Don't miss out, find out ►

Your household circumstances

Many benefits take your income into account. However, some are based on your individual circumstances. For example, if you need help to look after yourself because of physical or mental disabilities you may qualify for benefits known as Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance. Both these benefits are not means-tested, which means it doesn't matter how much income or savings you have.

If either of these benefits are awarded to you, they can help to obtain additional benefit for you and may also qualify you for concessions on public transport, exemption from road tax, the Blue Badge Scheme, and the Motability Scheme.

Depending on your household circumstances there are a variety of benefits and entitlements you may be entitled to receive. These include:

- Universal Credit (including help with rent) is a means-tested payment to help with living costs. It's normally paid monthly, but you can request fortnightly payments once you have applied. You may be able to get it if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work.
- New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) if you are ill or have a health condition or disability that limits your ability to work you may be able to get New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) instead of Universal Credit, depending on your National Insurance record.
- New Style Jobseeker's Allowance If you're unemployed or work less than 16 hours a week you may be able to get New Style Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) instead of, Universal Credit, depending on your National Insurance record.
- Housing Benefit (HB) (over state pension age) if you need help to pay your rent and you are over state pension age. You can apply for Housing Benefit whether you're unemployed or working. You can be a tenant of:
 - the council or housing association.
 - a private landlord.
- The Scottish Welfare Fund is intended to offer grants or in-kind support for two purposes Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants:
 - Crisis Grants provide safety net in emergency or when there is an immediate threat to health and safety.
 - Community Care Grants enable independent living or support when families are facing exceptional pressure.

BENEFITS AND GRANTS

Don't miss out, find out

Contact the Welfare Team

Getting in touch with the Welfare Team is the first step to maximising your potential income and managing your money well.

The Welfare Support Team provide free, impartial and confidential support to claim all benefits and entitlements:

Council Tax Reductions

Claiming all benefits

Claiming entitlements

Telephone: **0800 090 1004** or email: **welfare.support@highland.gov.uk**

Alternatively, you can also get help and advice on Benefit and Money Advice issues from your local Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB). Contact details of local offices, please visit:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/benefits

Scottish Child Payment is now open for applications

Scottish Child Payment is a new payment for families on tax credits or certain benefits to help towards the costs of looking after a child. It's £40 paid every four weeks for each child under six.

The payment starts on Monday 15th February 2021, with first payments made from the end of February onwards, but Social Security Scotland is taking applications now to help manage demand. You can apply if your child will be under six on 15th February 2021.

The qualifying benefits are:

- Child Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Social Security Scotland will ask for evidence that the person applying is responsible for a child under six, usually through the child being named on a benefit claim form.

SCOTTISH CHILD PAYMENT

Apply today

Find out more information and apply at:

www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment

or call Social Security Scotland on: **0800 182 2222**

The Council's Welfare Support Team provide free, impartial and confidential support to claim all benefits and entitlements including the Scottish Child Payment. Contact the Welfare Support Team at:

Phone: **0800 090 1004** or email: welfare.support@highland.gov.uk

If more than one person applies for the same child, there's a process for deciding who gets the payment - prioritising the person who the child lives with most of the time.

Scottish Child Payment will not be taken into account for UK benefit and tax credit assessments and there is no cap on the amount of children this payment can support.

First payments will be made

from late February onwards. When someone gets paid will depend on how many applications we get and the process each individual application goes through.

If someone applied before Monday 15th February 2021, this will be the date that their payment will be calculated from. If they apply after this date, it will be calculated from the date that they applied.

Payments will be made every four weeks following the first payment.

Young Carer Grant

The Young Carer Grant is a new scheme launched by Scottish Government to support those aged between 16–18 years old by way of a yearly payment of £305.10. Young people in Scotland who have a caring responsibility for one or more individuals for an average of 16 hours per week (and have done so for at least 3 months) may be eligible. This could be someone in your family, a friend or a neighbour. If you care for more than one person,

Applications can be submitted online at: www.mygov.scot/young-carer-grant/how-to-apply or by phone by calling **0800 182 2222**. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.



it is acceptable to combine the hours to meet the requirement average of 16 hours per week.

Those who are eligible for the Young Carer Grant do not need to repay this and there is no restriction on what you choose to spend it on. You can get the Young Carer Grant once a year, up until you reach 19 years old. Those who could not apply before their 19th birthday due to the disruption caused by coronavirus (COVID-19) can still submit an application.

COVID Winter Hardship Payment of £100 per child for low income families in receipt of Free School Meals

Families with children in receipt of Free School Meals, due to a low household income or receipt of certain benefits, are eligible for a £100 per child COVID Winter Hardship Payment from the Scottish Government.

There are no restrictions on how families choose to spend the additional payment. The payment is per child, not per household.

However, note that P1-3 pupils receiving Free School Meals due to universal provision (i.e. not due to a low household income) are not eligible.

The Highland Council will administer this payment on behalf of the Scottish Government. Eligible households will be identified automatically, so you are not required to apply for this payment – the Council will contact those families directly to arrange payment.

For those in receipt of Free School Meals on or before 30th November 2020, The Highland Council will make payment COVID Winter Hardship Payment prior to Christmas. Households who think they are maybe eligible for the COVID Winter Hardship Payment and have not received notification of an award by Monday 21st December 2020 should contact the Council's Welfare Support Team on freephone:

0800 090 1004 or email:

welfare.support@highland.gov.uk

It's not too late to apply

Households who apply and are awarded Free School Meals due to low income after up until 22nd December 2020 will also be eligible for the COVID Winter Hardship Payment.

Those eligible families will be notified, and an award will be made no later than 15th January 2021.

WINTER HARDSHIP PAYMENT

Who is eligible for Free School Meals due to low income?

Families with children in receipt of free school meals due to reasons of low income are eligible for the COVID Winter Hardship Payment. Eligibility for Free School Meals based on low income, is where the household is in receipt of:

- Income Support
- Universal Credit (where the monthly earned income does not exceed £610)
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
- Any income related element of Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit, but not in receipt of Working Tax Credit, and your income is less than £16,105 (as assessed by the HMRC)
- Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit and an income below £7,330 (as assessed by the HMRC)
- If you are 16 to 18 yrs old and receive any of these benefits in your own right, then you can claim for yourself
- If you are an asylum seeker receiving support
- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit.

Vouchers

A cash payment via PayPoint voucher will be made to eligible households.

Vouchers will be redeemable at local PayPoint outlets.

A small minority of households will receive payment via Post Office Pay-out and will be advised in their notification.

Help is at hand for people struggling with fuel insecurities

WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

As winter begins to bite, The Highland Council is urging residents in the region not to suffer in silence if they are finding it hard to pay their fuel bills. There are many reasons why people can't pay their fuel bills. You might hear this referred to as 'Fuel Insecurities'.

Depending upon household circumstances, you may qualify for extra financial support during the winter, these include:

UK Government's Winter Fuel Payment

A Winter Fuel payment is a one-off, tax-free payment of between £100 and £300 made during the winter to help with heating costs; it is made to households with someone over Pension Credit age. Most payments are made automatically during November and December. If someone applies for the first time, they will receive their payment by Christmas. The amount a household will receive each winter can vary according to their personal circumstances. For example, age or other people living in the house who are also eligible can increase the eligible amount.

UK Government's Cold Weather Payment

A Cold Weather Payment is a £25 payment to help with fuel costs during periods of very cold weather. The period of cold weather must cover seven consecutive days, between 1st November and 31st March, when the average temperature must be zero degrees Celsius or below. The £25 can be paid multiple times if the 7 consecutive day criteria are met.

The Warm Home Discount Scheme

The Warm Home Discount scheme (WHDS) offers a one-off payment of £140 (inclusive of VAT) towards the energy bills of those who need it most. The scheme is managed by energy suppliers and the money isn't paid directly to the customer; it is a one-off discount that is credited to the customer's energy account, prepayment card or key, during the winter.

Scottish Government's Child Winter Heating Assistance

The Child Winter Heating Assistance is a new £200 payment to help families of a child on the highest rate care component of Disability Living Allowance for Children to heat their homes.

Don't miss out, find out

Getting in touch with the Council's Welfare Team is the first step to maximising your potential income and managing your money well. The Welfare Support Team provide free, impartial and confidential support to claim all benefits and entitlements. Alternatively, you can also get help and advice on benefit and money advice issues, and fuel insecurities from your local Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB).

It's important that people make sure they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to.

The Council's Welfare Support Team is ready to support you on freephone **0800 090 1004**; and Citizens Advice Bureau can also give free advice for anyone having problems paying their fuel bills, visit their website below:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/energy/energy-supply [External Link]

Lets help make Highland Scam Aware!

Highland Council Trading Standards are this month partnering Friends Against Scams in their Scamnesty 2020 campaign to raise awareness of Scam Mail and encourage those who receive it to send it into the FAS team who will seek to identifying those behind the offending mail.



www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk

Did you know?

- Scams cost the UK economy £5-£10 Billion a year
- 53% of people over 65 have been targeted by scams
- Only 5% of scams are reported
- Our statistics indicate that the average scam victim has lost over £3000

Mark McGinty,
Trading Standards Team
Leader states:

“ Scam mail is not only a real nuisance to almost everyone with a letter box, but it can cause real harm when it falls through the letter box of someone who engages with it. The big problem is identifying the scam mail and who has received it. Scam mail arrives by someone who is trusted and often visits, your postie! Its content isn't known until the mail is opened, and any responses are just as secretive. Scammers know this and take full advantage of it. ”

There are many different types of scam mail being circulated into homes across the country. Most people receive the news that they have won a lottery, others can have a curse removed, fall in love or buy some luck. What they have all got in common is that they want money and personal details, and once engaged it is difficult to let go.

Mark adds:

“ This campaign has been running annually for a few years now, in non-covid time we'd have a place for the public to hand in their unwanted mail. We can't do that right now but this year the mail can be sent directly the Friends Against Scams Team, this helps enormously in identifying the scams that are going about and in bringing the scammers to justice. ”

To find out more please visit:

Please send your scam mail to:
**NTSST, FREEPOST,
MAIL MARSHALS**
(no need for a stamp).

In the months ahead the Trading Standards team will be furthering the fight against scams and hope to make Highland much more Scam Aware and an even safer place to live.



LOTTERY/ PRIZE DRAW SCAMS

How to spot them:

- MAKING IT PERSONAL**
Criminals will make it personal and address you by name to make it feel as if you've been specially selected for entry into the lottery/prize draw.
- TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE**
The winnings will be too good to be true. Very few prize draws actually give away millions of pounds.
- LETTERS APPEAR 'OFFICIAL'**
The letter will often have official-looking stamps or seals, quotes from alleged winners and a director's signature.
- TIME LIMITS**
Letters will be written in a way that puts you under pressure to respond, phrases like "This is a limited time offer" or "act quickly before you miss the deadline".
- PROCESSING FEES**
Many scam prize draws/lotteries will require an admin/processing fee in order to release your winning prize. It is unlawful to request payment to claim a prize.
- HOLDING YOUR 'PRIZE'**
Criminals may also ask for your personal information or bank details before they can release your "prize".

WWW.FRIENDSAGAINSTSCAMS.ORG.UK



CLAIRVOYANT/ PSYCHIC SCAMS

How to spot them:

- OUT OF THE BLUE**
Clairvoyant or psychic scams are often unexpected and are received out of the blue. The criminals may claim to have a special insight into your life, especially around love or fortune.
- 'YOU'VE BEEN CURSED'**
Some of the letters will claim that you are cursed and offer to remove this for you in exchange for a fee. If you do receive a letter by a psychic or clairvoyant and they tell you that you are in danger, have bad luck or have been cursed - be wary. Their solution is likely to be in exchange for money and likely to be a scam.
- CHARMS AND SECRETS**
Other letters may offer a good luck charm, trinket or secret to get enormous wealth or winning lottery numbers in exchange for a fee.
- PERSONAL DETAILS**
Clairvoyant and psychic scam letters will often include personal details, such as date of birth or address, as "proof" that they are genuine. In reality, these details are taken from marketing lists bought by the criminals.

WWW.FRIENDSAGAINSTSCAMS.ORG.UK

www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/scamnesty

Reduce waste this Christmas

- Make the most of recycling

We'd like to say a big thank you to everyone for continuing to recycle in 2020 despite it being a very challenging year and here are some tips and advice on how we can all reduce waste over the festive period.

Did you know that Scotland will use 19,000 miles of wrapping paper this Christmas?

That's enough to wrap the coast of mainland Scotland more than two and a half times!

Why not try the traditional Japanese art of gift-wrapping using fabric?

Known as Furoshiki, this can be used again and again and looks amazing! How about also re-using gift bags, boxes and wrapping paper?

When buying gifts, if it's possible, buy from companies that use recycled or paper packaging and then try to reuse this. For those with children, cardboard boxes are great toys! If you can't reuse the packaging, paper and cardboard can go in your blue recycling bin. Empty plastic sweetie tubs and other clean plastic tubs, pots and trays along with Christmas cards, wrapping paper, food tins, drinks cans, envelopes, food and drink cartons, aerosols and clean plastic bottles can all be recycled in your blue bin. Unfortunately, we can't recycle black plastic food trays, so please keep these out of your blue recycling bin.

Cutting food waste is important all year round but Christmas can be a time when food waste increases. To avoid Christmas food waste, be prepared. Plan meals over the festive period, create and stick to shopping lists and make room for leftovers in the freezer.

Visit www.lovefoodhatewaste.com for tips on saving money,

preventing waste and using up your Christmas leftovers. For unavoidable food waste such as turkey bones, fruit and veg peelings, tea bags and coffee grinds, Inverness residents are reminded to make maximum use of their food waste collection service. If your caddy has gone missing, please get in touch and a new one will be delivered to you.

Remember to take any empty glass bottles and jars to your local bottle bank. The banks are all mixed glass recycling, so you don't have to segregate your glass when



you dispose of it. Household Waste Recycling Centres can be used for recycling your real Christmas tree where it will be used for making compost. Please also remember that if you have excess cardboard this is also accepted at Household Waste Recycling Centres. Other packaging such as plastic wrapping, bubble wrap, polystyrene etc needs to be disposed of in your green refuse bin.

Household Waste Recycling Centres Festive opening times:

Household Waste Recycling Centres are open throughout the Christmas period except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and 1st and 2nd January. Please check: www.highland.gov.uk/recycle for full details of Recycling Centre opening hours and for the current range of materials accepted. Please remember that trailers and vans (under 3.5T) need to book to visit the larger sites and you can do that on this link: www.highland.gov.uk/recyclingcentres

Christmas and New Year Collections:

If your usual collection for recycling or refuse falls on Friday 25th December or Friday 1st January 2021 you will have a different collection day. Please check the sticker on your bin for your alternative collection day. You can also find details on The Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/bincalendar

Boxing Day refuse and recycling collections remain the same this year.

For further information about recycling in the Highlands visit:

www.highland.gov.uk/recycle

Email: recycle@highland.gov.uk or phone: 01349 886603



Caithness Mental Wellbeing Pathfinder Project

Mental health services have become an increasingly important topic in Caithness in recent months following several tragic events and issues relating to suicide and addiction.

At a special meeting of the Caithness Committee earlier this month the Caithness Mental Wellbeing Pathfinder Project was launched that will bring statutory service providers across health, education, housing, and emergency services, third sector delivery partners, politicians, community representatives, families, and young people themselves together to move forward in a connected way.

The Scottish Government has provided the Council with a grant of £534,000 to support young people's mental health and wellbeing post-Covid, and additionally provided £178,000 to plan and prepare for the development of community mental health and wellbeing services for 5- to 24-year-olds, their families and carers. This money will be used for the Caithness Pathfinder pilot.

In selecting Caithness for the pilot, it was acknowledged that the local community have played an outstanding role in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and there is a real opportunity to capture this momentum and build on all the excellent work going on across the area.

Chair of the Caithness Committee, Cllr Nicola Sinclair said:

" Young people must be at the heart of what we do. The voice of young people is critical in shaping services that are inclusive and relevant. This will involve helping young people to develop skills and empower them to grow and learn and become ambassadors for the programme within their own community. "

Fellow Caithness Councillor Karl Rosie said:

" During these challenging times having hope can be a strong incentive to bring about change. We must build hope in our community by tackling challenges openly and helping to create a sense of place for everyone. The feedback from everyone who took part in the launch was very encouraging and we will work tirelessly to pull together a package of support that we hope will make a genuine difference. We ask the public to get behind this and continue to support one another as they have done so well in recent months. "

Wellbeing in the workplace during COVID-19 and winter months

The coronavirus outbreak has brought with it much uncertainty. With many of us working in a different environment whether in a school, office, home, or in communities, it is understandable that we may experience frustration, concern, anxiety or feel overwhelmed at times.

Yet even with these unprecedented challenges and pressures there are still some simple steps we can take to look after our own wellbeing.

Due to COVID-19 the workplace, and that of every other in the world, is adapting to a new norm. We're all working under new challenges, pressures and expectations. We need to find new ways to take care and look after ourselves to enable us to carry out our daily lives. We've put together some tips on how to support your wellbeing and those of others as we approach the darker nights and winter months.

Those that have returned to the workplace are adapting to advances in hygiene, cleaning and distancing protocol and those working from home are learning new ways to virtually communicate and carry out daily tasks in a new working environment.

Evidence suggests that feeling close to or valued by others is a basic human need. Good relationships are

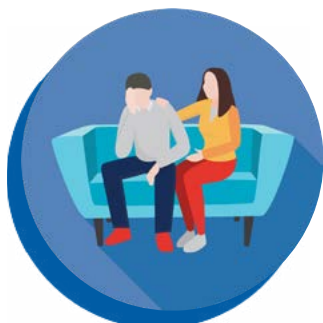
important to our wellbeing. The usual support we access in the workplace might not be possible right now, right down to that morning tea break or a walk round the block at lunch with colleagues. Therefore, now more than ever we should reflect on what keeps us well and identify what we can all do to look after our wellbeing.

Working on what can trigger poor wellbeing (mental health) could help you anticipate the change in mood and allow you to find solutions. Are you taking sufficient breaks away from the screen? Are you watching too much news coverage? Are you drinking plenty water? Are you eating at regular intervals? Are you separating your work time from leisure time?

Here are a few tips on how to support your wellbeing

Be kind to yourself and others

In our current climate and as situations change, remember it's okay to not feel okay at times. Our moods may fluctuate from one day to the next as long as they don't stay low for too long. It's important to be kind to yourself and those around you.



Move your body

Get those steps in. With many people working from home daily steps may have dropped as you're not walking to work or taking the office stairs! Get outside daily and enjoy fresh air. Being near trees and nature releases feel good hormones that are known to have a mindfulness effect. It will help clear the mind and re-focus.



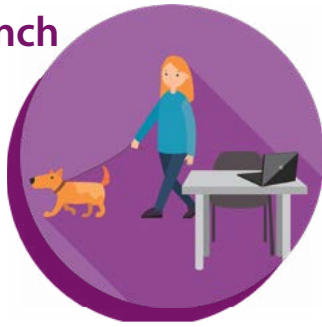
Connect with others

Maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. If you're working from home, call colleagues from time to time rather than emailing. If you are missing your lunchtime walk with colleagues, schedule a catch-up via telephone or video instead. Remember others may need that chat just as much as you.



Take a break for lunch

Step away from the desk/work and get outdoors during daylight. This will help to maintain wellbeing and health. Block time out in your diary. A short break can recharge the mind and allow for increased productivity. It may also give you a different perspective on any work problems.



Take up a new hobby

A hobby such as yoga helps promote relaxation which is the natural opposite of stress and helps train the brain to relax and feel better. It also allows your body to get a good stretch and release tension. There are lots of tutorials available online, suitable for beginners. Listen to your own body and limitations. Breathe work alone will help ease tension.



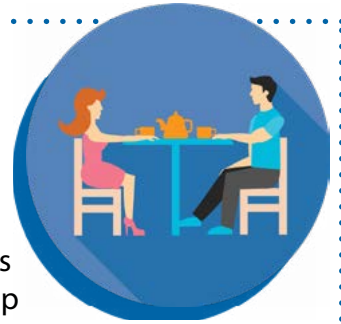
Time for yourself

Spending time on yourself is essential to your wellbeing and helps you be more resilient. It is vital to prioritise your own needs sometimes rather than the demands of your work or others. Ignoring your needs can lead to stress and burn-out.



Adapt your plans

If you had something fun planned that can't now go ahead, there is no need to cancel completely. There are lots of innovative ways to keep social lives going. Quizzes, coffee-catch-up and even after work drinks can all be done through a video call.



Celebrate the small successes

We all enjoy feeling accomplished and that we have achieved. So mark the successes big and small. Some days that might mean a great piece of work, other days it could be making a nice meal.



Give back

Supporting others can go a long way for both the giver and receiver. Making a regular phone call to someone that is living alone or feeling isolated from friends and family would appreciate to hear a friendly voice. Volunteer as an NHS volunteer responder or join one of the local initiatives in your community.



Get a good night's sleep

Sleep restores the body, increases concentration and regulates mood. A good reason for an early night! Aim for 8hrs sleep per night.



Be present

Prioritise the now and reduce screen time in the evenings, dedicating some down time to something that will relax your body and mind.



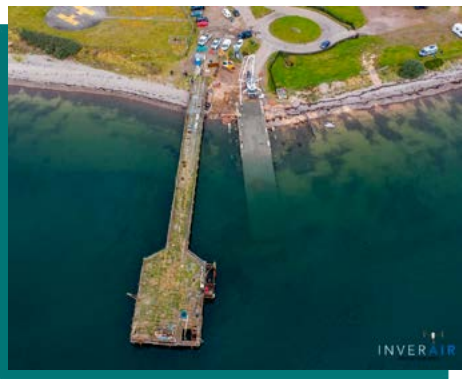
Drink plenty water

Keep your body hydrated. Drink at least 2 litres of water each day.



Highland Council announces completion of three key infrastructure projects

Three tourism infrastructure projects in Highland which benefited from the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) and LEADER funding have been completed.



Work on the slipways at Cromarty and Nigg, additional car parking at Glenfinnan viaduct and Skye's Old Man of Storr Footpath Improvement Project have all been ready to enhance visitor experiences at all three sites.

There has been a 30% growth in the traffic on the Nigg - Cromarty Ferry and Cromarty Community Development Trust wanted to provide improved slipways for the Cromarty-Nigg ferry to protect the lifeline service and make the slips big enough to cater for a larger ferry that can take up to 16 cars and larger vehicles such as motorhomes.

A £300k RTIF grant was awarded and split between the slipways and the Cromarty campsite project to cater for the increasing number of motorhomes. £210,654 was allocated for the slipways. The Project is match funded by, HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise), Highland Council, Beatrice Windfarm Fund, Wakelin Trust, Aberdeen University, Global Energy, Cromarty Community Development Trust and Nigg Community Council.



Meanwhile additional parking has been created at Glenfinnan to cater for 100 cars and 10 motorhomes/buses. This was in response to demand placed on the area by fans of the Harry Potter films to the viaduct and the steam train.

In October 2018, The Highland Council in partnership with Glenfinnan Community Facilities SCIO secured £269,906 of funding from the first round of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund managed by VisitScotland.

The fund aims to support projects that focus on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that have faced pressure on their infrastructure or negative impacts on communities due to the significant increases in visitor numbers.

The project was matched by £115,674 in LEADER funding which is part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). The fund aimed at promoting economic and community development within rural areas.

In addition to the car park, The Highland Council in partnership with Glenfinnan Community Facilities SCIO also secured additional funding of £53,704 from round two of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund with a successful Crowd Funder to match, organised by the community for the final phase of the Glenfinnan Viaduct project. This project will see a new footbridge and path link the new car park to the existing path to the viaduct, preventing visitors having to walk on the main trunk road.



The Old Man of Storr Footpath Improvement Project designed to enhance visitor access while protecting iconic landscapes and internationally important habitats is funded by both the Rural, Tourism & Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) at £184,508 and Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Directorate (SGRPID) £79,075.



New Visitor Management Plan for Highland

Highland Councillors have given the go-ahead for the local authority to produce a 5-year Visitor Management Plan which will aim to address the forthcoming 2021 tourism season and future years' visitor demands expected upon the region.

The exponential growth of visitor numbers is a positive for the Highlands and Islands, however a clear direction on where and how the Council will allocate its resources for visitor management will aim to help alleviate the pressures on infrastructure at visitor attractions, beauty spots, rural roads, locations and in our villages and towns. It is vital to adapt to immediate issues, but also to plan over the longer term. In the summers of 2019 and 2020, Council services and partners

such as Police Scotland have experienced a range of rapidly increasing visitor demands on roads, parking and transport; amenity and waste; outdoor access and environmental and public health.

To try and address some of the issues being experienced during summer, Highland Council met in July with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism and local Members and community bodies.

A variety of new local approaches

will be introduced for the tourism season in 2021 pending available resources and funding.

A new Tourism Infrastructure Plan will be developed – this involves identifying what services and facilities can be improved for summer 2021 within staff and budget resources. Long term recommendations are also being considered. The Plan will address the key areas of toilets and roads while trying to ensure that tourism areas under pressure are tied in with the Council's capital strategy. It will also look at parking, motorhomes (overnight parking and laybys), communications, and waste and litter.

Following consultation with community groups, public sector partners and Members a final draft which will come back to the Tourism Committee for Members' consideration early 2021.

Investment announced for two new schools in Highland

Funding bids for two new schools to replace Nairn Academy and Broadford Primary have been successful.

These are the latest schools to be awarded funding as part of Phase 2 of the Scottish Government's £1 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme, developed in conjunction with COSLA, which announced the successful bid for Tain Campus in Phase 1 in September 2019.

The Highland Council is committed to delivering world class, digitally enabled, sustainable schools, at the heart of communities, in partnership with the Scottish Government.

The Highland Council has 203 schools and Nairn Academy and Broadford Primary are on a list of agreed priorities for replacement or refurbishment.

Council Leader Margaret Davidson said:

" This is fantastic news for communities in Nairn and Skye and represents our ambition and a huge investment in both of these areas. It is a day for celebration to announce the building of not one, but two new schools. "

The existing Nairn Academy building was constructed in the

1960's and is typical of the poor construction and design of buildings in that era. A new school will present opportunities for not only a greatly enhanced educational environment but also enhanced community facilities.

The new Broadford Community Campus with a learning hub and community facilities is an ambitious project which will support the development of community-based learning and adult lifelong learning and enable the innovative development of Gaelic immersion within a community and school setting.



Worrying about money?

Financial advice and support is available
if you're struggling to make ends meet

Download our leaflet to find out where to get help in Highland.

The leaflet focuses on 3 steps:

Step 1:

What's the problem?

- I suddenly have no money
- My money doesn't stretch far enough
- I have debt
- I am waiting on a benefit payment/ decision

Step 2:

What are some options?

- Scottish Welfare Fund
- Maximise Your Income
- Debt Advice
- Benefit Advance
- Hardship Payment
- Challenge a Decision

Step 3:

Where can I get help?

- The Highland Council
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Scottish Welfare Fund
- plus more...

www.bit.ly/WorryingAboutMoneyAdvice

Welfare support

Are you missing out on benefits you might be entitled to, or needing support with money matters or personal budgeting advice?

Get in touch for free confidential help and advice.

Telephone: 0800 090 1004

Email: welfare.support@highland.gov.uk



Social Security Scotland
Tearainteachd Shòisealta Alba

