

Performance Examples and Case Studies Report 2019/20

Highland Council has a statutory duty under the Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) to deliver Best Value in the provision of its services. The Accounts Commission has a statutory power to define the performance information that Councils must publish. The Accounts Commission issued The Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) Direction 2018 which covers reporting up until the financial year ending 31st March 2022.

The Audit Direction covers a wide range of activity and has a focus on partnership working and how Councils work with their communities. The Council's approach to meeting this is detailed in Table 1. This report aims in part to fulfil all the requirements of SPI1 and the final requirement of SPI2 on engaging with and responding to diverse communities.

	Requirement	Approach
SPI1	Performance in improving local public services, provided by the council	-SPIs (LGBF Indicators in the Corporate Plan and LPIs) -Corporate Plan Annual Report -Performance Examples and Case Studies Report (strategic and area committee reports, press releases)
SPI1	Performance in improving local public services, provided by the council in conjunction with partners and communities	-SPIs (LGBF Indicators in the Corporate Plan and LPIs) -Performance Examples and Case Studies Report (To include partnership work: NHS Integration, Children's Services, CPP, HLH etc.)
SPI1	Progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities	-Performance Examples and Case Studies Report (Strategic and area committee reports, press releases, CPP, NHS Integration, Children's Services...)
SPI2	The council's assessment of how it is performing against its duty of Best Value, and how it plans to improve against this assessment.	-BVAR -External Audit Annual Report on BV
SPI2	Audit assessments of its performance against its Best Value duty, and how it has responded to these assessments.	-BVAR -External Audit Annual Report on BV
SPI2	In particular, how it (in conjunction with its partners as appropriate) has engaged with and responded to its diverse communities.	-Performance Examples and Case Studies Report -Locality Plans and Reports -Partnership Reports to Area Committees

Performance in improving local public services, provided by the council

The examples below highlight Highland Council's performance in improving local public services, provided by the Council:

- **Best Value Assurance Report and Improvement Plan**

A Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) of the Council was conducted by the Council's external auditors Audit Scotland and Grant Thornton during Summer and Autumn 2019. The final report was submitted to the Controller of Audit, Accounts Commission by the external audit team and considered by the Accounts Commission Board on 9 January 2020 with the final report issued and public on 23 January 2020.

The BVAR reflects on the past 10 years of the Council, the period since the last Best Value review in 2009/10. The report concludes that the council's pace of change has been inconsistent and slower in areas including improving performance and taking steps to ensure longer term financial sustainability over the period since the last review; there is also recognition that the pace of change has significantly increased under the stewardship of the new Chief Executive.

The report highlights the financial challenges which the Council has faced and continues to face along with the need for improved long-term financial planning the building up the Council's reserves. The report also reflects on the management restructure of the Council and the need for a period of stability to deliver the Council's change and improvement agenda.

Seven recommendations were outlined in the BVAR. In response, the Council has put in place an Improvement Plan detailing actions it will take over the next three years 2020-2023.

More information on the BVAR of Highland Council and the associated Improvement Plan is contained within the [report to the Council meeting on March 12 2020](#).

- **Council Programme**

The Council's programme, "[Local Voices, Highland Choices 2017-22](#)" was updated in 2019 and documents the Council's key strategic priorities. There are six main themes: A Council that Champions the Highlands; A Place to Live; A Place to Thrive; A Place to Prosper; A Welcoming Place; and Your Highland Council.

- **Corporate Plan**

In May 2019, The Council approved its revised [Corporate Plan](#). This provides the framework required to deliver and monitor the Council's Programme, Local Voices; Highland Choices along with the strategic, operational and improvement priorities of the Council which reflect the Council's budget strategy and change programme 'A Sustainable Highland' approved in 14 February 2019. The framework also integrates the key performance indicators for the Council's 22 Strategic Improvement Priorities.

The Council's Corporate Plan sets out how we will achieve these priorities, with a set of 75 performance indicators. The [Annual Performance report 2019/20](#) for the period 01 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 showed good progress being made. 74% of indicators and actions (50 out of the total 68) were performing on target or within the performance threshold. For 18 indicators or actions targets had not yet been achieved, and for a further 7 indicators data was not yet available to report performance.

- **Change Programme: A Sustainable Highland**

In 2019, The Council approved £37.456m of savings to be delivered over the following three years through the change programme 'A Sustainable Highland'. This strategy sets out a positive vision for change, informed by extensive staff, member and public engagement and focussed around four key themes:

1. Making the Council More Efficient;
2. Commercialism and Income Generation;
3. Redesign and Improvement;
4. A Flexible and Well Managed Workforce.

- **Budget Savings and Council Reserves**

The Highland Council reported a successful year end position for 2019/20 delivering £18 million of savings as part of a 3-year plan and an underspend of £7.526m. The key drivers

behind the positive year-end position are improved governance, further reductions in overspend, and robust management of all budgets. The Council's unearmarked reserves, which act as a general contingency against unforeseen events or to meet unbudgeted costs, were £15.451 million at 31 March 2020. At this level the reserve represents 2.7% of the 2019/20 net revenue budget, compared to 1.4% in 2018/19. The raised levels of reserves are critical to the Council's financial sustainability.

- **Absence Management**

A change in culture and behaviours in managing and taking ownership for absence is particularly evident in Education. More experienced Headteachers are supporting less experienced colleagues demonstrating the collaborative approach which is taking place. Attendance Support Officers (ASOs) have supported improvements in absence management, including long term absence, short term persistent absence, ill-health, and redeployment. Long term absences are all being dealt with across the school estate and ASOs are now moving to support shorter frequent absences. Developments to improve attendance management include tools for managers include FAQs, updating online resources, a new instructional video, 104 staff trained as Mental Health Representatives, and establishing the Employee Assistance Programme (which provides free 24hr confidential counselling service to employees and their family).

- **West Link**

The [West Link](#) (Inverness West-Link road and associated amenity and leisure improvements) is an ambitious project and a key commitment in achieving infrastructure for growth.

The West Link project contributes to the Council's performance on improving local services in a number of ways such as enhanced active travel linkages within the city, improving traffic delays and congestion, and new leisure facilities at Canal parks run by High Life Highland. It has enabled the development of significant areas for housing and other economic development at Ness-side and Torvean.

Inverness West Link Stage 1 was completed on December 8th 2017. Advance works for Stage 2 took place in February 2019.

The Construction phase of Inverness West Link Stage 2 commenced on site on 10 June 2019. Significant progress was made prior to work stopping due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Prior to work stopping on site the project was on schedule for completion in December 2020, and number of aspects of the project had been constructed including the bridge abutments for the new Torvean Swing bridge, which involved damming and draining a section of the Caledonian Canal. Also during this period the new roundabout had been constructed on the A82 along with the realignment of a section of General Booth Road. During the COVID-19 lockdown, work continued off-site including the fabrication of the new Torvean Swing Bridge.

- **Performance review meetings with Head Teachers**

In February and March 2020, members of the Education Improvement Team (EIT) met with Head Teachers to explore attainment patterns and to discuss approaches to learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum. Each secondary Head Teacher outlined targets for key measures of attainment and discussion focused on how these would be delivered. Primary Head Teachers met EIT members in Associated Schools groupings, focusing on collaborative approaches to raising attainment in Curriculum for Excellence levels. These meetings will resume shortly, now that schools have reopened, to examine progress towards targets and to establish new targets for 2020/21.

- **Returning young people to Highland**

The Placement Services Change Programme in Children's Services was developed to return young people to Highland from costly Out of Area placements. A combination of new services and the creative use of existing provisions enable children to remain in the communities they know. From June 2018 to March 2020, 60 children returned or were able to remain in Highland, avoiding costs of over £7 million pounds. The money saved has been invested in the development of services in Highland. Additionally, there are much improved educational and emotional wellbeing outcomes for the returning young people. The Programme won the Council's Delivering Efficiency, Earning Income and Improving Services award in 2019.

- **Chromebook roll-out**

The Council completed successfully distributing Chromebook devices to all its schools to support learners in 2019/20. The rollout covered 29 Associated School Groups (ASG), over 200 schools, 22,000 Chromebooks, 35,000+ pupil and teacher accounts.

The rise of digital connectivity is transforming how pupils learn in the classroom and as such The Council developed its strategic action plan to ensure all learners have access to the appropriate technology to help them acquire these vital life skills. Deploying Chromebooks makes up an important part of this plan in narrowing the digital skills gap.

The project was phased over 2 years with approximately £6 million spent on providing Chromebooks to schools and embedding the use of G Suite for Education into the curriculum. The provision of Chromebooks has also allowed the Council to reduce the number of traditional laptop and desktop computers in schools, and in turn reduce ongoing support costs.

- **Improved literacy and numeracy for young people from deprived communities**

Attainment in literacy and numeracy for young people from the most deprived communities in Highland has seen increasing percentages of leavers attaining in National Level 3,4 and 5 awards in other literacy and numeracy and a rising trend for them to access employment, further education and higher education. In 2019/20, the Council reported that it is now 3.65% above the national percentage for young people from deprived areas reaching a positive destination after school.

Exclusions for young people in Highland from the most deprived backgrounds also reduced by 36% at a time when significant numbers of our most vulnerable young people have been returning to be cared and educated within the Highlands.

- **LED Street Lighting**

The replacement of sodium streetlights with LEDs has reduced the energy consumption from our streetlighting estate from 18.3MWh in 2011/12 to 12.6MWh in 2019/20. This continues to produce significant carbon and cost savings. The Highland-wide rollout of LED streetlights is part of an on-going programme to convert 90% of lighting columns to LEDs which will result in a 50% reduction in electricity consumption.

- **Highland Council Website**

All of the Council's corporate performance reports are published on the Council's website at: www.highland.gov.uk/performance. This includes:

- Annual report on the Statutory Performance Indicators;
- Infographics of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicators and a link to the mylocalCouncil website is promoted;
- Annual Performance report based on the Corporate Plan;
- Annual Performance and Attitudes Survey

- **Internal Audit Team**

The Internal Audit Team provides services to the Council, Pension Fund, the Assessor and a number of external organisations. Its purpose, authority and responsibility within the Council is prescribed in the [Internal Audit Charter](#). The purpose of the internal audit function is to provide:

“An independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation’s operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.”

The work to be undertaken by the internal audit team is set out following consultation with Service in the annual audit plan. This work helps to ensure that the Council is achieving Best Value. Completed audits are reported to the [Audit and Scrutiny Committee](#).

- **Public Communications and Press Releases**

Press releases related to performance in improving local public services, provided by the Council in 2019/20 include:

[Former academy and college grounds transformed into unique new homes](#)

[West Link Stage 2 begins](#)

[Council Publishes Education Transformation Strategy](#)

[Completion of new dining hall and commercial kitchen at Dalneigh primary school](#)

[Chromebook rollout prepares pupils for digital learning](#)

[Reducing the attainment gap for young people from deprived backgrounds](#)

[Lochaber High School receives Digital Schools Award](#)

[Wick set to Sparkle – deep cleaning the town](#)

The Council also promotes its performance through various social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr and through the magazine “Highpoints”:

[High Points Issue 13 Spring 2019](#)

[High Points Issue 14 Spring 2020](#)

Performance in improving local public services, provided by the council in conjunction with partners and communities

- **City Region Deal**

The Inverness and Highland City Region Deal totals £315 million and is a ten-year agreement. Funding is being used to enhance digital connectivity, digital healthcare, skills, innovation and infrastructure. Projects are being delivered in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the University of the Highlands and Islands, Albyn Housing and High Life Highland.

As reported to a meeting of the [Economy and Infrastructure committee](#), highlights of progress in 2019/20 include:

- Inverness Castle enablement works and development of design concepts
- Northern Innovation Hub moves to Digital delivery
- New affordable home developments commencing
- West Link progresses at pace
- Completion of Newton Room Dingwall.

The performance of the City Region Deal has been promoted through press releases including:

[West Link Stage 2 begins](#)

[Dingwall Confirmed for Norwegian Style Learning Centre](#)

[WiFi project shortlisted for Connected Britain Award](#)

[Progress for Inverness Castle Transformation](#)

[Progress for Inverness Castle Transformation – Further details](#)

[Castle Wynd Streetscape Improvement Works](#)

[Inverness Castle Transformation – Project Update](#)

- **Integrated Adult and Children's Services**

Following work in 2019/20, in July 2020 The Highland Council's Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee approved a new approach to transform the existing integration partnership agreement and governance arrangements between The Highland Council and NHS Highland.

The new approach to achieve efficiencies and improve outcomes for children's services and adult care services in Highland communities will be supported by the creation of a new programme management board. Both partners recognise the financial difficulties in providing - and the need for efficiencies - particularly in adult social care.

Also, a Project Board and Project Team will be established to identify and deliver efficiencies and improved outcomes in: care homes; care at home and learning disability across both adult care and integrated children's services.

- **High Life Highland**

High Life Highland develops and promotes opportunities in culture, learning, sport, leisure, health and wellbeing across nine services throughout the whole of the Highlands, for both residents and visitors. Since High Life Highland was established the number of customer engagements has increased from 2.3 million to 8.1million and reliance on Council funding has reduced from 79% to 51%. During the first six months of 2019/20, customer engagements increased to 4.3million from 3.8 million during the same period in 2018/19. 40% of the Highland population had a High Life Highland card in 2019/20.

- **Brexit**

During 2019/20, the Council continued to engage with and contribute to planning through local, regional, national, European and professional networks. This saw Highland Council engage internally at a Member and Officer Group level in preparation for a no deal scenario via the Brexit Working Group and the Brexit Tactical Group. Once the Withdrawal Agreement Bill was enacted on 31st January 2020 this led to a Transition period which saw negotiations on the future trading relations between the EU and the UK commence in March 2020. The Highland Council was very pro-active during this period in terms of advertising the EU Settlement Scheme and keeping the Brexit section of the Council website up to date.

- **Electric Vehicle Infrastructure**

The Local Authority Installation Programme (LAIP) is an annual funding programme which further develops the Electric Vehicle charging network so that drivers can confidently travel throughout Scotland – across both urban and rural locations. The programme is funded by the Scottish Government.

The Highland Council has been awarded over £3m since the first EV charge point was installed in 2012 (~£2.1m of which has been awarded since 2018). In 2019/20, The Council had successfully delivered over 30 charge points around the region. It is expected that upon completion of projects in 2020/21 projects, this provision will have increased to over 80.

- **Energy Efficiency Fund**

In 2019/20, The Council secured a £3.5m interest-free loan from Salix Finance to invest in energy efficiency measures across the Council estate. The loan, which is the largest Salix has awarded in Scotland, match-funds the Council's self-financing investments in energy efficiency to create a £7 million Energy Efficiency Fund.

The fund is ring-fenced for investment in projects that will reduce the Council's energy spend and carbon emissions. This will include switching internal and external building lights to efficient LED lighting, installing Solar Photovoltaics, and upgrading inefficient oil boiler systems.

The Council forecasts a potential saving of over £600,000 per annum on energy bills and annual carbon savings of over 1,600 tonnes CO₂e. Lighting and heating upgrades are also anticipated to make considerable improvements to the working and learning environments for both staff and school pupils.

- **Climate and Ecological Emergency**

The Highland Council declared a climate and ecological emergency on 9 May 2019 in recognition of the serious and accelerating changes to the world caused by climate change. The establishment of the Climate Change Working Group as a result has helped to expedite climate action across the organisation.

The Council has developed the Highland Adapts initiative with support from Adaptation Scotland and Climate Ready Clyde. Highland Adapts will deliver a place-based, partnership approach to climate change adaptation, in collaboration with Community Planning Partners including NHS Highland and NatureScot. Ultimately, it is anticipated that this will provide a mechanism to identify the key cross-cutting risks that climate change will pose in the coming years whilst developing a strategy and action plan to address these.

- **Inverness Townscape Heritage Project**

As lead partner of the Inverness Townscape Heritage Project (ITHP), Highland Council has stimulated private sector investment to restore one of Inverness' most iconic buildings. With ITHP grant funding of over £1m, Rose Street Foundry at 96 Academy Street, the former home to AI Welders, reopened as a bar and restaurant in 2020. Working with Cairngorm Taverns Ltd triggered significant investment from the company to bring the building back into use. Beautifully restored iconic mosaics signalling the building's past coupled with high-end interior finishes herald Rose Street Foundry's new chapter.

A once popular pub that had fallen into dereliction has been given a new lease of life. The £422,606 ITHP grant gave Heineken's Star Pubs & Bars the confidence to invest significantly in the Category B listed 18th-century Blackfriars building. Having been sympathetically restored to reveal original features such as exterior stonework, Blackfriars is a high-quality pub and offers accommodation.

- **Public Communications and Press Releases**

Press releases related to Performance in improving local public services, provided by the council in conjunction with partners and communities in 2019/20 include:

[Partnership working on public conveniences – The Comfort Scheme](#)

[Highland Community Play Award](#)

[Council secures largest ever SALIX loan in Scotland to fund energy efficient improvements](#)

[Victorian Market entrances to be refurbished](#)

Progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities

The examples below highlight Highland Council's progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities.

- **Highland LEADER 2014-20 Programme**

The Highland LEADER Programme supports bottom-up community development and is central to the Council's commitment to empower communities. During this programming period, LEADER has funded a total of 120 projects. Overall this has distributed £7,251,268 LEADER funds to Highland communities with total project costs of over £15M. Key achievements of the Programme include: 70 new jobs created and 13 jobs safeguarded; 11 new enterprises established; 35 projects contributing to carbon clever agenda; 159 people receiving training; 214 new tourist beds created and 26 projects extending the visitor season; and 24 new community facilities and 36 existing facilities improved.

- **Modern and Graduate Apprentices Programme**

Since 2017, Highland Council have seen over 250 employees enrol in the Modern/ Graduate Apprenticeship Programme. This includes those upskilling their existing skills within their role to new recruits joining The Highland Council. This creates opportunities and growth for the regional workforce and economy. The Modern Apprenticeship Programme is suitable for people of all ages 16 – 67yrs old.

During 2019/20, Seven Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) achieved their SVQ award, 56 EYPs were registered for the programme and currently working towards their SVQ Level 3 in Social Services – Children and Young People. In addition, 26 apprentices were inducted across a range of vocations, including, Mechanics, Roads Technicians, and Business Administration.

The Council is supporting apprenticeships across the entirety of the region, in many cases helping to support employment in remote and rural communities.

- **Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund in 2019/20**

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund has enabled 13 projects to be taken forward across the Highlands which help give visitors a positive experience of the Highlands. These projects include parking, improved toilet and motorhome waste facilities and path improvements. The first project has now been completed with improved parking and new composting toilets installed by the John Muir Trust to serve visitors to the Blaven and Strathaird area of Skye.

Making the case for continuing this fund was successful and a further allocation of £3m was made in the 2020/21 Scottish Government budget.

- **Trading Standards**

Using external funding and with the approval of the UK national Consumer Protection Partnership, the Council's Trading Standards team devised, set up and promoted the website www.deliverylaw.uk, a "One-Stop Shop" for consumers, businesses and practitioners on the issue of internet delivery surcharges. This initiative reached the Final of the COSLA Excellence Awards in October 2019, winning a Silver Award.

Doorstep Crime: Working in partnership with Police Scotland to tackle itinerant bogus workmen who attempt to con householders out of money in exchange for sub-standard or non-existent exterior home maintenance services has resulted in joint investigations leading to prosecutions. 2019-20 had an estimated loss of £280,000 to householders. New preventative measures include participation in the UK Banking Protocol, used by financial

institutions, enables Police Scotland and Trading Standards to rapidly identify and prevent monies for such services leaving the savings accounts of potential victims.

Scams: 89 ‘Call blockers’ were installed into the homes of those most at risk of scams, preventing 28,468 nuisance and scam calls so far, and protecting the householders from a projected loss of £114,506.

In addition to providing advice to businesses, carrying out inspections, testing trade equipment and implementing enforcement projects and other initiatives, the Trading Standards team launched a total of 66 formal investigations during 2019/20. These covered a wide range of matters including anti-counterfeiting, dangerous goods, unfair commercial practices, age restricted sales and breach of consumer rights. The outcomes are shown in the table overleaf.

Outcome	No. Cases
Report to Procurator Fiscal for prosecution	2
Civil Enforcement Court Order	1
Legally-binding Formal Undertaking from business	1
Formal Written Warning issued	1
Compliance achieved & informal assurances from business for future conduct	23
Report submitted to other agency for further action	9
No breaches identified during investigation	5
Investigation incomplete or listed as “dormant”	24

- **Benefits and Welfare**

The Council’s customer-focused model provides local services at the point of need and single access to Council entitlements. This provides positive outcomes for local people by improving their financial and overall wellbeing. Effective leadership, skilled and motivated staff, continuously improving our online facilities and trusted collaboration with partners were key to our performance. This included an increase in benefit take-up by £6.6m and promptly deciding claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction in 12 days. When customers reported changes in their circumstances, our team made the relevant changes in less than 2 days, ensuring the correct benefit was paid promptly for individual households.

- **Syrian Refugee Resettlement**

Highland Council has been working with partners since 2015 in preparation for Syrian families coming to Highland. Six families were welcomed to the Highlands in 2019/20, making a total of 23 families resettled to date. The families welcomed in Autumn 2019 were resettled in Inverness. While pressure on housing stock is significant, this was the first-time families were placed in an area where housing pressure is particularly acute. This was eased by working with a housing partner, Cairn Housing Association.

- **Climate and Ecological Emergency**

In May 2019, The Highland Council agreed to declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency. In a statement, Highland Council announced that:

“Highland Council recognises the serious and accelerating changes to the world caused by climate change and therefore declares a climate and ecological emergency. The Council will

establish a Climate Change panel with responsibility for the following reporting back to full council on progress;

1. Inform ourselves on what the Council is currently doing to reduce our carbon footprint.
2. Revisit the Carbon Clever declaration made by the Council in 2012 with a view to updating and reinvigorating those commitments working towards a carbon neutral Highlands by 2025.
3. Consider and recommend any new targets and priorities for the Council's Corporate Plan by June 2019.
4. We realise we can achieve far less by working alone so we commit to listening to and involving Highland citizens in all that we do and to involve them in the preparation of our new carbon reduction plan.
5. Promptly, we will target areas for behavioural change, such as plastic reduction. These areas to be selected by public consultation."

The Climate Change Working Group first met in October 2019 and its [minutes](#) can be found on the Council website.

- **Newton Room - Dingwall**

Following the successful completion of Newton rooms in Thurso and Fort William, and third room has now been completed in Dingwall. Funded through the City Region Deal (A £315m funding package from the Scottish Government, UK Government, and local partners), the centres are aimed at encouraging more young people in the area into studies and careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The Dingwall Newton Room is located with Dingwall Town Hall and is accessible to schools from across Ross-shire.

- **Public Communications and Press Releases**

Press releases related to progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities in 2019/20 include:

[School Meals commitment to Food for Life](#)

[Ten-year City partnership continues to provide improved public safety](#)

[Inverness Castle Transformation](#)

[Council Wi-Fi project shortlisted for Connected Britain Award](#)

[New homes in Dingwall funded by Highland Council and Scottish Government](#)

[Council commits to Dingwall Flood Action Plan](#)

[Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund](#)

In particular, how it (in conjunction with its partners as appropriate) has engaged with and responded to its diverse communities
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- **Citizen and Customer contact relationships**

The Council's service centre handles over 240,000 calls annually and 2019/20 records show Council Services responded to 51,388 enquiries, 1,725 complaints, 1,840 FOI enquiries and subject access requests and 836 MSP/MP enquiries. The Council is aware of some under performance with regards to meeting response timescales and is taking action to address this. Our ambition is to change the focus to see customer and citizen contact as central to how we connect with our communities.

- **Your Cash, Your Caithness**

"Your Cash, Your Caithness" was participatory budgeting event held in February 2020 where local residents cast their votes for their favourite local projects. Eleven out of the twenty-five projects bidding for £10,000 community funding, of which £9,465 comprised of funds handed over by the former Caithness partnership, were successfully voted for by just over 115

people who registered to vote on the day. Applicants were allocated a 3 minute slot to sell their project with a further 2 minutes allocated to allow any questions from the audience.

- **Housing**

In 2019/20, The Highland Council continued to focus on developing excellent communication with its housing tenants and improving service delivery. Achievements include:

- Highland tenants and officers participated in the Scottish Government's Next Steps programme designed to highlight good practice in tenant and community engagement;
- Consultation with residents at the Council's four gypsy traveller sites focused on identifying future improvements to the sites in line with investment projects;
- "Senior Safe Highland" events took place across Highland to encourage home safety for older tenants;
- "Rate your Estate" walkabouts took place across Highland to ensure we are listening to our communities as to what environmental works are a priority for their estates;
- Highland hosted the Highland Housing Extravaganza for Scottish Housing Day which brought together a number of partner landlords and agencies and showcased housing development work;
- As part of the annual rent consultation, officers visited communities across Highland;
- Highland's first Annual Assurance Statement was approved at Committee and submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator. The Regulator attended Highland in January 2020 and provided positive feedback on Highland's Statement and the engagement with tenants as part of the process.

- **Rate your Estate**

The Rate your Estate initiative is a joint inspection of Council owned housing estates by Housing staff, Tenants and Elected Members where tenants can prioritise improvements to their estates. These are funded from the environmental improvement budget which was created following wide consultation with tenants who said they were happy to pay a little extra on their rent to make their estates a better place to live. In 2019/20, Rate your Estate inspections occurred in 32 locations across Highland. 126 tenants were involved and improvement works were carried out directly reflecting the priorities of the residents.

- **Kilmallie Neighbours project**

The first phase of a community led project by residents in amenity housing in Kilmallie Road, Caol, Lochaber, to regenerate the communal area outside their homes. has been successfully completed. They are now working on ambitious plans for ongoing improvement of the area. The work has made a massive difference to the residents' quality of life by making a useable communal space for tenants to connect and socialise. Fencing was repaired by The Council and the group painted the fences and the old benches. The existing flower planters and slabbed seating area were cleaned up and the group provided compost and flowers to brighten it up.

- **Bayfield Car Park – Portree**

In 2018, the Council in partnership with local stakeholders carried out a Parking Options Appraisal for Portree. Redevelopment of Bayfield Car Park and the adjoining land owned by the Tennis & Squash Club was identified as the preferred option. In 2019/20, the Council working in partnership secured funding from the Rural Tourism & Infrastructure Fund, the Town Centre Regeneration Fund, the Scottish Land Fund and Council funding. When complete the project will provide an additional 86 car parking spaces, 8 dedicated motorhome parking spaces, a chemical waste disposal point and 2 road safety crossings to the town centre.

- **Highland Community Planning Partnership**

The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) 2017-2027 was approved by the Community Planning Partnership Board in October 2017 with the agenda “Working Together to Reduce Inequalities in Highland. The outcomes, priorities and cross-cutting themes identified through community consultation set the framework for partnership delivery. [Minutes of the Board](#) are held on the Council’s website.

- **Community Asset Transfer**

The Council has put in place a community asset transfer process compliant with the Community Empowerment Act. In 2019/20, the Council received a total of 12 asset transfer requests. Of these, five were successful, one was unsuccessful, and six are yet to be determined.

The Council has agreed to 10 asset transfers during the year 2019/20:

- 5 were new transfer requests received during the course of the year
- 5 had been received during the previous year
- 8 were for ownership of the asset and 2 for rental
- All, except one, were transferred on the basis of a 100% discount.

- **Fort William Community Action Group**

The Council have led on a joint initiative to set up Fort William Community Action Group, formed to address inequalities in the area. Following community consultation, an action plan is in place which addresses areas such as health and well-being, community participation and dialogue, community safety and resilience and poverty reduction. The Group is driven by the community and has ambitious plans to tackle inequality and make a positive difference to people’s lives. The Group organised a community wellbeing event which ran activities across 3 sites. Over 150 people participated and it was very well received.

- **Public Communications and Press Releases**

Press releases related how The Council (in conjunction with its partners as appropriate) has engaged with and responded to its diverse communities in 2019/20 include:

[Highland Council fly rainbow flag for Proud Ness](#)

[Ross and Cromarty Councillors liaise wit communities over festive lighting](#)

[Parental Involvement and Engagement Census](#)

[Town Centre Health Checks](#)

[Public Consultation on Skye Infrastructure Improvements](#)

[Council listens to community concerns](#)