

Performance Examples and Case Studies Report 2020/21

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 to demonstrate their delivery of Best Value. Accordingly, 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.

Table 1

	Requirement	Approach
SPI1	Performance in improving local public services, provided by the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPIs (CP-LGBF 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPIs (CP-LGBF and LPIs) • Performance Examples and Case Studies Report (strategic and area committee reports, press releases)
SPI1	Progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BVAR Improvement Plan • Service Plans – covering report • 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BVAR Improvement Plan • Annual External Audit Report and Response/ Action Plan • Internal Audit reports relevant to BV
SPI2	In particular, the way it (in conjunction with its partners as appropriate) has engaged with and responded to its diverse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Examples and Case Studies Report • Locality Plans and Reports • Partnership Reports to Area Committees

The report that follows provides case studies and examples to better illustrate Highland Council's performance during 2020/21. These are not meant to be exhaustive, rather a selection of case studies demonstrating the breadth and depth of Council activity during 2020/21.

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

- The annual report on the Statutory Performance Indicators
- Infographics of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicators (a link to the [mylocalCouncil](http://mylocalcouncil.org) website is also promoted)
- The annual Performance report based on the Corporate Plan
- The annual Performance and Attitudes Survey

Performance in improving local public services provided by the Council

These examples highlight performance in improving local public services provided by the Council during 2020/21:

Highland Council Response to COVID-19

During 2020/21 the Council was presented with unprecedented demands to respond to and work towards recovery from COVID-19. Key elements of the Council's response included:

- Rapidly redeploying staff into new roles to support the Council's COVID-19 response.
- Adapting new ways of working to successfully engage with vulnerable people and communities to ensure their welfare and needs were met throughout the pandemic.
- Establishing a multi-strand COVID-19 helpline to ensure our communities received the advice and support they needed.
- Providing 153.27 tonnes of food (34,706 bags) to people shielding, in need and to community bodies through a network of 10 distribution hubs.
- Supporting community resilience by establishing a network of over 330 community bodies and distributing new COVID-19 ward discretionary funding of up to £0.776m.
- Supporting public health teams with the Test and Protect Service including support for individuals and businesses with advice on COVID-19 compliance.
- Establishing a business grants team and disbursing over £193m, making over 37,778 individual payments to 15,700 businesses across 12 different grant streams.
- Creating key worker childcare hubs and supporting vulnerable young people.
- Delivering several Scottish Government funded financial support schemes to improve financial security among those in greatest need, including free school meal vouchers to 4,700 eligible pupils.
- Creating new fuel payment grants totalling £1.9m reaching over 10,000 households.
- Adjusting all core services to keep them running e.g. waste, roads, Registrar services, burials & cremations, housing and homeless services and health and social care.
- Staff adapting to home working to ensure they and the Highlands stayed safe and our essential functions were maintained.
- Deploying technological solutions to maintain communications and ensure our democratic processes continued, with over 240 formal committee meetings run and regular briefings for Members.
- Continuing engagement with Scottish and UK Governments on a wide range of issues and participating in national and professional networks to develop COVID-19 responses and share learning.
- Monitoring rapidly changing guidance and providing information to staff, Members and the public including outbreak support, welfare and business advice, videos, COVID-19 briefings and community newsletters.
- Delivering education and supporting pupils both remotely and in a school environment.
- Delivering a safe by-election.
- Enhancing support for the health and wellbeing of front-line staff through establishing organisational-wide communications, support and expert guidance mechanisms.
- Continuing to deliver the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements managing the risk of sexual and serious dangerous and violent offenders to keep local communities safe.
- Sustaining the uninterrupted service delivery of criminal justice social work to individuals subject to statutory court orders (e.g. community payback orders and drug testing & treatment orders) to reduce the risk of reoffending.

- Working closely with partner agencies to plan and ensure the successful reintegration of prisoners released under the emergency early release of prisoners powers in the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020.

Key elements of the Council's approach to recovery include:

- Developing and setting a budget of £9.81m in March 2021 for health and prosperity with a range of new one-off investments for economic prosperity, visitor management and place-based investment.
- Supporting NHS's vaccination programme with venue and facility support and creating new mobile vaccination and testing units.
- Establishing Recovery Groups, Plans and Strategies to ensure economic and community recovery e.g. Economic Recovery Partnership, City of Inverness and Area Recovery Group.
- Delivering £1.9m of temporary Active Travel improvements to support social distancing guidelines.
- Developing a Visitor Management Plan and allocating £2.4m to support it in preparation for the 2021 season.

Budget for Health, Recovery and Prosperity

In March 2021, the Council approved its Health and Prosperity Strategy as part of its budget. This focused on investment in the Highland economy and securing medium term financial sustainability for the Council. The strategy contains three strands:

- Investment in people, infrastructure, places and business across the Highlands
- Recovery, Improvement and Transformation
- Key savings themes for delivering a balanced budget

To deliver this Strategy, an ambitious investment plan was created including: £6M Economic Prosperity Fund; £1.5M Visitor Management Strategy; £2.1M place-based investment; and £2.25M for a Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Fund. The budget includes sustaining non-earmarked reserves above £24.7M. The Council's reprofiled capital plan will see a £260M investment over the next two years.

Financial Reserves

Due to COVID-19, 2020/21 was an extraordinary year. Prudent financial management, coupled with additional government funding support, saw year-end reserves significantly above target levels. This was partly due to a planned and budgeted increase to bring them to the desired level.

Plans are in place for the excess reserves above the target level to be invested during 2021/22 as part of the Council's Recovery and Transformation activity.

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 and Accounts Commission by the external audit team and considered by the Accounts Commission Board on 9 January 2020 with the final report issued and made public on 23 January 2020.

The [Highland Council 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. Seven recommendations were outlined in the

BVAR. In response, the Council put in place an Improvement Plan detailing actions it will take between 2020-2023. A [progress report](#) was reported to Council in September 2021. While COVID-19 has impacted on progress in some areas of the plan, good progress has been achieved overall.

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. The Council's Corporate Plan sets out how we will achieve these priorities, with a set of 75 performance indicators.

The Annual Performance report [2020/21](#) for the period 01 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 showed good progress being made. 67% of indicators and actions (48 out of the total 72) were performing on target or within the performance threshold. For 24 indicators or actions targets had not yet been achieved, and for a further 3 indicators data was not yet available to report performance.

Education Leadership Support

Work continues to develop Highland as the best place to learn. Support was put in place for school leaders, and in 2020/21 there were weekly sessions for new and acting Head Teachers. The Council has also established a collaboratively designed programme for middle leaders in schools.

The Council supported experienced Head Teachers by promoting sign-up for the Education Scotland 2021/22 Excellence in Headship programme. There were 15 participants, a record for Highland.

To develop the next cohort of effective Head Teachers the Council has also recruited 42 leaders for the Education Scotland 2021/22 Into Headship programme, the highest figure ever from Highland.

ICT in Learning During COVID-19

During times of home schooling during COVID-19, the Council's ICT in Learning Team worked hard to ensure and support the delivery of remote learning to all children and young people across Highland. They continually developed effective online learning platforms which enabled teaching staff to continue to deliver quality education remotely to all Highland pupils.

When combined with the Council's provision of Chromebooks to every pupil, this ensured education continued in environments that were as safe as possible both for those receiving education and for those providing it. This, in turn, limited the spread of the virus whilst enabling positive educational outcomes for Highland's young people.

Building and Refurbishing Schools

Despite the delay associated with COVID-19, in 2020/21 the Council's Property service completed and handed over four major education projects. These included new school buildings for Alness Academy and Merkinch Primary (both Phase 1 completions), as well as the refurbishment of Inverness High School and the PE Changing rooms at Charleston Academy.

Phase 2 construction of both Alness Academy and Merkinch Primary was also started, and construction of the brand-new Ness Castle Primary School commenced with completion on target for August 2022. Combined with over thirty additional education refurbishment and alteration projects, these completions demonstrate a strategic commitment to maintaining and improving Highland Council's education assets.

Improving Pupil Wellbeing

Through a place-based strategy and a community-led approach (sitting with Associated Schools Groups) Highland Council committed to prioritising wellbeing as one of the key priorities for education across the Highlands.

To this end, provisions included:

- Sessions on mental health and wellbeing for all head teachers.
- Training and information on topics relating to building resilience, maintaining positive wellbeing, and good mental health for staff and parents to access.

Housing - Fire Safety

The Scottish Government announced changes to the standards for fire and smoke detectors in all tenures of housing. As social landlords, Highland Council were required to install these upgrades. £1m was budgeted for these works in 2020/21 resulting in improvements to fire safety for Highland Council tenants.

Official Council Business During COVID-19

When COVID-19 restrictions meant that Committee and Council meetings needed to move online via Microsoft Teams, the Demographic Services Team quickly developed Microsoft Teams expertise. This expertise was used to develop the skills of Elected Members, enabling them to continue to fully participate in online Committee and Council meetings. Moving these meetings online has also had a positive environmental impact and reduced associated travel costs.

The move to all Committee and Council meetings being held online was achieved within two months of lockdown. This compares favourably with other Scottish Councils.

The Demographic Services Team also developed a SharePoint site to allow for the electronic distribution of papers including a system for secure distribution of confidential papers. As well as ensuring the safe provision of information this has reduced paper use, with both financial and environmental benefits. In addition, the Team worked with ICT Services to develop an electronic voting system to enable democratic processes to continue despite meetings being online.

LED Street Lighting

The Highland-wide rollout of LED streetlights is part of an ongoing programme to convert 90% of lighting columns to LEDs which will result in a 50% reduction in electricity consumption. The replacement of sodium streetlights with LEDs has already reduced the energy consumption of our streetlighting estate from 18.3MWh in 2011/12 to 10.9MWh in 2020/21. This continues to produce significant carbon and cost savings.

Protecting Highland Consumers and Businesses on Social Media

A significant part of modern Trading Standards work is advisory and preventative, aiming to protect consumers from bad purchases and advise businesses on how to comply with Trading Standards and be successful through good practice. This work was even more important during 2020/21, with new threats and challenges from the pandemic and restrictions on some in-person activities.

By increasing their activity on social media (Facebook and Twitter) the Trading Standards Team were able to provide current information to a wide audience during a period of rapidly changing restrictions and advice. This included consumer and business advice on how to tackle the problems caused by the pandemic, safety information, and consumer advice on scams.

The impact of these messages has not been measured. However, it can be assumed from the number of “hits” and increase in “followers” that the Highland community benefitted from this work.

Mixed Glass Recycling

In November 2020, the Highland Council moved glass bottle and jar recycling from segregated to mixed glass recycling. All glass banks at recycling points across the region are now accepting any coloured glass bottles and jars, making recycling easier for the public. This should see a reduction in bags being left at recycling points due to a particular glass bank being full and an increase in the amount of glass recycled from current rates of approximately 6,000 tonnes p.a. It will also improve the efficiency of material collection.

Gaelic Language Plan

Highland Council recognises that Gaelic is an integral part of Scotland’s heritage, national identity and cultural life. The Gaelic committee meets four times a year. The [Gaelic Language Plan 2018–2023](#) sets out a formal structure for strengthening current developments, introduces new initiatives, and sets clear targets. Quarterly performance updates are made to the Gaelic committee.

Key initiatives in 2020/21 included:

- Partnership event with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig delivering a live online Gaelic Day for parents of Early Years
- Gaelic awareness event aimed at new parents in the Nairn area
- Planned series of Gaelic language classes for parents to build confidence using Gaelic with babies/toddlers
- With FC Sonas, production of a Health and Wellbeing resource “Sonas Slàinte” for schools with Gaelic medium provision
- Live interaction services on Google Classroom provided in response to the 2021 lockdown

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

These examples highlight performance in improving local public services provided by the Council in conjunction with partners and communities during 2020/21.

COVID-19 Business Grants

The social and economic lockdown in 2020/21 had a significant and adverse impact on the economy. In this environment the role of the Council in delivering the COVID-19 business grants has been critical and a lifeline service to business. In response to the lockdowns a business grants team was established, disbursing over £193m and making over 37,778 individual payments to 15,700 businesses across 12 different grant streams.

In particular, the Council's Discretionary Grant Scheme has been able to support 833 Highland businesses who otherwise would have fallen through the support schemes offered by the UK and Scottish Governments.

Distillery Production of Hand Sanitiser

In March 2020 COVID-19 led to a shortage of hand sanitiser, a vital tool in preventing the spread of the virus, as traditional manufacturers and supply chains were unable to meet the increase in demand. Highland is home to many craft distilleries producing gin and whisky. In response to local shortages, several distilleries moved production to the manufacture of hand sanitiser. This was then supplied to local medical practices, front line services including Highland Council, and to the wider community.

The UK Health & Safety Executive (HSE) usually has responsibility for ensuring compliance with hand sanitiser regulations at the manufacturing level and for professional use, with Trading Standards responsible for supply at a retail level. However, in the pandemic, Trading Standards' remit was expanded to ensure that hand sanitiser for consumer use was safe and effective.

The Team recognised that, as a new area for these businesses, they may be unaware of the complex legislative requirements. Combined with the potential risk to the public if unsafe and ineffective products were manufactured, this led to the Team taking a proactive approach. Free laboratory tests were accessed for businesses, using an existing Council contract. Detailed advice and guidance were also given to 18 local distilleries by Council officers.

During the early phase of the pandemic, these distilleries produced 18,000 litres of safe and effective hand sanitiser that contributed to keeping the Highland community safe.

Advice and Guidance on PPE

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic saw significant and sudden demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) in all parts of society. Under its product safety remit, the Trading Standards Team were able to provide advice and guidance in relation to a range of local enquiries. The Team also took quick action to ensure that any sub-standard equipment being sold from online marketplaces was removed by the platforms involved.

New Technology for Vulnerable Highland Families

Connecting Scotland was a Scottish Government programme set up in response to COVID-19 to provide access to the internet in order to keep people connected to friends and family, informed and entertained, and able to learn, work, shop and access health information and other public services. Phase 1 (April – July 2020) focused on those who were “shielding” and at risk of isolation. Phase 2 launched on 18 August 2020 and focused on households with

children, including pregnant women with no child in the household, and care leavers up to age 26.

In February 2021 Highland Council received 617 devices through the scheme as part of Phase 2. The roll-out was supported by MiFi devices which secured connectivity with unlimited data for up to two years. This technology was used to ensure the most vulnerable children, young people and families were not digitally excluded. Those who received a device also received access to Digital Champions to help support them.

Free School Meals via E-Vouchers

To support families experiencing difficulties due to COVID, the Highland Council provided free school meals via e-vouchers whilst schools were closed. The Council estimated that between March and June 2020, 60,000 payments would be issued to eligible families. This was an innovative service which was initially delivered digitally using e-vouchers and then broadened to include Co-op cards, Post Office PayOuts and Scotmid paper vouchers. Families who already received free school meals were automatically provided with payment vouchers. This was a quick response, and the extension of the scheme ensured that it reached all families, including those in rural areas.

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. The [2020/21 Annual report](#) details progress to date.

Projects funded by the Deal showed resilience in 2020/21 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although progress on these projects slowed, the focus remained on delivering benefits and capitalising on the Deal's substantial opportunities and investments, including £135m invested from the Scottish Government and £53.1m from the UK Government. The core goals of the deal remain to:

- Help to rebalance the population through by attracting and/or retaining an additional 1,500 young people in the 18-29 age group.
- Create 1,125 direct jobs with a further 2,200 jobs in construction.
- Help to upskill the labour market to move to a high wage high skill economy adding an extra £100m p.a. to the regional economy.
- Deliver 6,000 homes over a 20-year period, of which 1,600 will be affordable.
- Deliver private sector investment of £800m over a 20-year period in the region.

In addition to these aims, the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal maintains a key focus on inclusive growth.

Inverness Castle

Inverness Castle is being transformed into a sustainable, viable and "must-see" centre that will celebrate the spirit of the Highlands. This is supported by £15 million Scottish Government and £1.63 million UK Government investment through the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal.

In 2020/21, work continued as planned, with full planning permission and listed building consent applications submitted in January 2021. In March 2021 a tender was issued to engage exhibition designer services for the development and presentation of the Spirit of the Highlands theme. Once appointed, work will begin on interpretation to develop the stories gathered from individuals and communities across the Highlands into this new attraction.

Returning Young People to Highland

The Placement Services Change Programme in Children's Services was developed in 2018 to return young people to Highland from expensive Out of Area placements. The aim of the programme is to deliver better educational and emotional wellbeing outcomes for young people, as well as financial savings. The work continued throughout 2019/2020, resulting in the lowest level of Out of Area placements in over 8 years. In August 2021 only 18 children were placed outside of Highland. The money saved by the programme has been invested in local services, such as a newly built bespoke residential unit which opened in May 2021.

The Promise

In October 2016, after meeting with and listening to children and young people in care, Scotland's First Minister announced, "an independent, root and branch review of the care system" to look at "the underpinning legislation, practices, culture and ethos". The Independent Care Review's (Care Review) aim was to identify and deliver lasting change in Scotland's 'care system', leaving a legacy that will transform the wellbeing of infants, children and young people. It began its work in February 2017 and concluded on 5 February 2020 with the publication of [seven reports](#), one of which was [The Promise](#).

In February 2021, The Highland Council restated its commitment to The Promise, and implementation of tests, pilots and rollouts of new fit-for-purpose public services. In July 2021, a small-scale practice review was commissioned to determine how well services were able to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people and improve their outcomes, with particular focus on services' abilities to measure and demonstrate their results. 70 front-line staff were involved in the review, which finished at the end of October 2021. It concluded that the use of data gathered by the Service, as well as self-evaluation processes, should be improved.

Tourism Infrastructure Fund

Continued longer term growth in tourism allied to the increased interest in domestic trips due to COVID-19 has required additional investment in tourism infrastructure. Throughout 2020/21, the Council has continued to work with communities across Highland on bids for funding from the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to support this investment.

The first three funding rounds have seen 22 projects in Highland awarded funding – 1 via the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the remainder via the Highland Council. Of those where funding was awarded via the Council, 13 are being delivered by community groups and eight directly by the Council. Ten projects were either completed or nearing completion by the year end contributing new public toilets, parking, footpaths and motorhome waste facilities in advance of the 2021 summer season.

Seasonal Rangers

The Seasonal Access Rangers Team (SART) was established in response to visitor pressure experienced in the Highlands due partly to an increased volume of "staycations" as a result of COVID-19. £300,000 was allocated from a £1.5 million budget as part of the Council's multi-service Visitor Management Plan. 10 Rangers were put in place, and working in collaboration with a number of partners, a successful bid was submitted to NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery fund for a further seven posts. Rangers' activity was recorded and reported engagement with 18,000 people, informing them about the area and available services, and advising them of responsible behaviour. The Rangers also encountered 8,500 tents and 22,500 motor homes, identified and removed the remains of 3,300 fires, 3,700 toileting sites and over 2,000 bags of dropped litter.

Public Toilets and Comfort Schemes

Communities are benefiting from a £240,000 investment by the Council in public toilets and comfort schemes and increased waste collection at key visitor sites. £60,000 was allocated to comfort schemes, with £180,000 for increased waste collection at visitor locations. This is part of the Visitor Management Plan which aims to support visitors to have a good experience and benefit local economies, while leaving no trace on the environment. The additional investments have secured 14 new comfort scheme providers, with the Council running 75 across the region. Additional external funds are being sought to improve and extend these provisions. An enhanced waste collection service has resulted in the employment of eight seasonal staff who are mobile and respond to reported waste-related issues. Over 60 organised community litter-picks have also been supported by the Councils' waste management team.

Highland Employment Recruitment Offer

In February 2021 Highland Council made a commitment to support up to 150 jobs via its proposed Highland Employment Recruitment Offer (HERO), using internal and external funding. The grant scheme was launched 15 March, and by end July 2021, 242 HERO applications had been approved in principle, with 167 staff recruited or in the process of being recruited. This was above expectations and demonstrated business demand to recruit despite the uncertainties linked to COVID-19.

This scheme was achieved using the funding flexibility afforded by the Council's Economic Prosperity Fund commitment. It allowed the Council to offer businesses a single scheme but, behind the scenes, funded each application from different sources depending on who was being recruited and to what type of role.

Smart IoT Technology

In 2020/21, a project was launched aimed at transforming schools, care homes, leisure centres and council offices into smart buildings across the Highlands. The £400k project is being run jointly by the Highland Council and North, an Internet of Things (IoT) service and solutions provider.

The project will use Scotland's National IoT network, IoT Scotland, along with smart IoT sensors to collect data and gain insights on council buildings including CO₂ levels, temperature and humidity, ventilation, electricity consumption and light levels. The data will then be analysed by the Council using its data analytics platform to reduce costs and carbon emissions, whilst improving the environment for those using the buildings.

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

The Council has attracted more than £3.5m of investment in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure since 2012. Over 80 charging points have been installed and this is expected to rise to over 100 by 2022, an increase of over 200% since 2018. Charging sessions on the Council network increased by 19% from 2019 to 2020, indicating an increase in EVs and demand for publicly accessible charging points. The Council's first ever strategic control plan was developed for EV Infrastructure in 2020 providing focus and direction for work streams. A draft fleet decarbonisation plan is also underway.

Highland Adapts

The Council is the lead partner on the Highland Adapts initiative. The focus of the partnership, which includes NHS Highland, HIE, Zero Waste Scotland, Changeworks, NatureScot and Forestry & Land Scotland is to enable the Highlands to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. It brings organisations, businesses, and communities together to develop a shared vision and understanding of climate change risks and opportunities across the Highlands. It will identify adaptation and mitigation priorities for

communities, areas, and sectors that will establish where and how the region can increase resilience. It is co-funded by partners, and a dedicated programme lead, hosted by the Council, was recruited in 2021/22.

Installing Solar Panels with E.ON

E.ON partnered with the Highland Council and the Scottish Government to offer eligible residents in the Highlands up to 100% funding towards the cost of installing solar panels and battery storage systems on their property. This has enabled residents to generate their own energy, helping them to save money on their annual electricity bill and become more sustainable and independent from the electricity grid.

This partnership works to reduce energy bills in an area of the UK that experiences very high rates of fuel poverty, (Highland fuel poverty levels are 32% compared to the Scottish average of 25%¹), whilst at the same time helping to address the climate and ecological emergency.

Wake Up and Shake Up Sessions

Highlife Highland provided pupils with online 'Wake Up Shake Up' sessions as part of their support for communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. These movement and dance sessions were available to primary school aged pupils with a Highland Google account. 300 pupils joined the first session, with attendance more than doubling the following week. The feedback from participating young people was very positive and enthusiastic.

Tackling Homelessness – What Works Community

The Highland Council has joined a pioneering national network aimed at tackling homelessness. The Centre for Homelessness Impact has created the "What Works Community" to provide a space for leading councils to develop ideas, network with peers and receive world-class guidance on improving their homelessness service.

As a participating local authority Highland Council will benefit from expert-assisted learning from the fields of behavioural insights, design thinking and data-informed decision making. This will include guided learning, one-on-one support with the Centre's staff and a platform for officers and peers from other councils to share and exchange information and learning. The "What Works Community" is the first of its kind in the UK and follows a successful pilot programme run by the Centre for Homelessness Impact.

¹ 2018 Scottish Housing Conditions Survey (2020)

Progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities

These examples highlight progress against the desired outcomes agreed with the Council's partners and communities during 2020/21.

Partnership Approach to COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

In December 2020, NHS Highland and the Highland Council adopted a partnership approach to the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme. This started with over 9,000 doses being administered to care home residents and staff, as well as medical staff at NHS Highland.

The Council's role was to support the rollout by: providing access to premises which could be used as complementary vaccination centres; fleet support, including the creation of a purpose-built mobile vaccination unit enabling health staff to deliver vaccinations even in the most remote areas of the Highlands; traffic management arrangements; providing staff support with school nurses and Council drivers helping to deliver vaccinations; as well as helping vulnerable people to attend vaccination appointments if required.

Grant Scheme for Community Resilience

A new fund was set up in April 2020 to provide grants for community resilience groups supporting vulnerable people during the coronavirus outbreak. Funds were made available for supporting local volunteer efforts and expenses such as developing promotional materials and support for local volunteer telephone systems, making up food packs for vulnerable households, developing measures to address social isolation or shopping for individuals in the community where households no longer had cash available. Groups were able to apply for up to £1,500 at any one time and reapply once initial funding was spent. The fund was open to all groups within a local area – both constituted and non-constituted.

Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship Programme

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

Since 2017, Highland Council have seen over 320 employees enrol in the Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship Programme with 119 of those enrolled having completed training. This includes both employees upskilling within their role and 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 aged 16 – 67yrs old.

The ECHO Project

The Council collaborated with the Highland Hospice through their ECHO project to host a series of virtual sessions for Health & Social Care staff on 'Wellbeing and Resilience through COVID-19'. The aim of the project was to create a national training and knowledge exchange hub for practitioners across many health and social care disciplines.

During the pandemic in August and September 2020, virtual sessions focused on providing access to factual, accurate and at times fast-changing information about COVID-19 from specialist speakers, as well as topics such as the impact of moral injury, or how to support children and young people with loss and change. The sessions also included opportunities for case-based learning and sharing of good practice. This successful collaboration with the Highland Hospice was highlighted at the TEC Scotland DigiFest session in December 2020.

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.

The Financial Inclusion Initiative

In 2019, the Council’s Health Visiting Service and Welfare Team were invited to join other organisations in Scotland in a national financial inclusion improvement project aiming to address the high level of unclaimed benefits by families with young children and to maximise household income.

To address this, pregnant women and parents of young children are now routinely asked by their health visitor about money worries and are offered a referral to an advice service that is accessible and sensitive to their needs. NHS Highland’s Health Improvement Team have been very supportive of this project and offered extra training to the health visitors. This project uses a training package developed in partnership with Highland Council’s Welfare Team to help health visitors upskill and become more proficient when asking families about financial concerns. The joint project won the 2021 Best Start in Life Award, as well as the People’s Choice Award granted by the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative.

Integrated Adult and Children’s Services

The Highland Council and NHS Highland entered into a Partnership Agreement in 2012, establishing the principle of service integration in relation to both children’s services and adult care services and setting up the lead agency model. Following work in 2019/20, in July 2020 The 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 includes the creation of a new Project Board comprising senior officers from both partners, as well as a Project Team. The aim of this approach is to identify and deliver efficiencies and improved outcomes across both adult care and integrated children’s services. The work of the Project Board is reported to the Council’s Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, the NHS Highland Board and the Joint Monitoring Committee.

Highland Violence Against Women Partnership

The Highland Violence Against Women Partnership (HVAWP), which the Highland Council is a part of, is a group of services that work together to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. HVAWP worked throughout the pandemic to ensure that anyone who was a victim of domestic abuse got the help they needed, as lockdowns increased risks for the victims.

Domestic abuse incidents were 8% higher in Scotland between April and September 2020 than the equivalent period in 2019. In Highland, from 23 March to 30 June 2020, 1,006 Child Concern Forms were submitted to the 'Named Person' mailbox. 278 of these related to domestic abuse issues. Highland Women's Aid groups reported receiving 584 new referrals for women experiencing domestic abuse in the period from March to October 2020. In November 2020 the Council took part in an awareness campaign regarding the impact of gender-based violence, with a specific focus on sexual violence.

New North Coast Care Facility project

In 2020/21 Council staff worked with NHS Highland on a feasibility study for a new North Coast Care Facility to be located in Tongue. The plans were amended to incorporate learning and experience gained during the pandemic to ensure that the new design would minimise the impact of any infectious outbreak on residents and staff. In October 2021 the Council agreed that a new Health and Care Hub was the best option, considering the financial factors as well as risk and community impact. The Hub, consisting of a new Care Facility and new GP surgery, with an estimated capital cost of £10.4m, will be developed by Wildland and then leased to Highland Council (care facility) and NHS Highland (GP surgery). NHS Highland will be the occupier, operator and responsible party for the management and delivery of all services provided from the new Hub.

New Integrated Children's Services Plan

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill places duties on public bodies to coordinate the planning, design and delivery of services for children and young people with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes. The first Highland Integrated Children's Services Plan completed its cycle during 2020 but due to the pandemic was extended to April 2021. In November 2020 a draft of the next iteration of the Plan was presented to the Council. The Plan provides for collaborative working across the Highland Community Planning Partnership, third sector organisations and other key community groups to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. It also sets clear indicators for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of children's services. The new Plan was formally signed off by the Highland Community Planning Partnership Board in June 2021.

In particular, how the Council (in conjunction with its partners as appropriate) has engaged with and responded to its diverse communities

These examples highlight how Highland Council (in conjunction with its partners as appropriate) has engaged with and responded to its diverse communities during 2020/21.

COVID-19 Helpline

A COVID-19 helpline was set up at the end of March 2020 to give assistance on urgent COVID-19 issues and to collect details of individuals and community groups looking to provide volunteering support. A separate helpline was created to support the most vulnerable in the community who received a shielding letter from the NHS requiring them to self-isolate for 12 weeks and who required urgent help with food or medicine. By May 2020 the helpline had handled 5,000 calls. The helpline has continued to provide support throughout the pandemic. The Council also updated its website to include a special Coronavirus webpage providing updated information to further support the community.

Tenant Participation and Welfare – COVID-19

The priority at the start of the pandemic in 2020 was to identify and help the most vulnerable tenants and housing clients. During the first few weeks of lockdown tenants were contacted to carry out welfare checks. This included:

- Direct contact by phone – 3,264 tenants
- Email contact – 3,973 tenants
- Text message contact – 6,858 tenants

Emails and texts linked to an online survey on welfare needs, which was completed by 2,703 tenants. Any tenant requiring help was referred to the local Community Hubs.

The priority in the second phase of lockdown was again to identify and help the most vulnerable tenants and housing clients. In January 2021, the following welfare checks were completed:

- Direct contact by phone – 2,672 tenants aged over 70
- Email contact – 688 tenants
- Text message contact – 8,158 tenants

These emails and texts linked to a Tenant Briefing on Housing Services and useful contacts. This information was also promoted on social media and through media outlets.

Online sessions have been held on “Energy Saving” and “Scams”. Future sessions are planned on “Mental Health Wellbeing” and “Fuel Poverty”. Virtual social events for tenants to address loneliness and social isolation have been held, including a Christmas party, quiz sessions, and a regular drop-in coffee morning.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey

The [2021 Tenant Satisfaction Survey](#), carried out every three years, indicated higher rates of satisfaction than in previous surveys, including:

- 85.9% of tenants were very or fairly satisfied with the overall service provided by Highland Council’s Housing Service (78.1% in 2018 survey)
- 92.5% of tenants said that the Highland Council’s Housing Service was very good or fairly good at keeping tenants informed about services and decisions (69% in 2018 survey)
- 93.8% of tenants said they were very or fairly satisfied with the opportunities to participate in the Highland Council’s Housing Service’s decision-making process (55.7% in 2018 survey)

- 77.2% of tenants were very or fairly satisfied with the quality of their home (75.2% in the 2018 survey)
- 88.0% of tenants were very or fairly satisfied with the Highland Council’s Housing Service’s contribution to the management of the neighbourhood they lived in (68% in 2018 survey)
- 88.9% of tenants said that they thought their rent was very good or fairly good value for money (87.7% in 2018 survey)

Community Support Co-ordinators

In August 2020, the Communities and Place committee agreed a framework for engagement and involvement with Highland communities. This led to the employment of 10 temporary Community Support Co-ordinators to engage directly with communities.

This aligns with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, which provides legislation to better empower and involve communities, eliminate discrimination and advance equality along with supporting communities to take forward priorities in the recovery and renewal stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. A key role of the co-ordinators remains humanitarian support.

A monitoring framework has been established to record the activity and build understanding of areas for support and shared learning. Weekly performance reports are supplemented by detailed monthly reports of issues, challenges, and outcomes. The initial focus was on reaching out and making connections. As such, the first 6 weeks of activity included engagement with 661 groups, with the breakdown of the groups’ focus as follows:

- 19% - Tackling Mental Health and Wellbeing
- 18% - Social Inclusion
- 18% - Signposting and Information
- 11% - Food Support

Other groups engaged with also have a focus on climate change, sport community events and digital inclusion.

Mental Wellbeing Pathfinder Project – Caithness

In 2020 a package of funding was provided by the Scottish Government to support mental health and wellbeing services for children, young people and their families. The Highland Council benefited from more than £700,000 of funding.

The Caithness area was selected as a pathfinder area. The Caithness Cares project was shaped largely by the feedback from young people who took part in special workshop sessions. The main objective was to deliver new and enhanced community-based services, including the rollout of a range of free training sessions in schools and among the general public, which covered topics such as emotional literacy, child protection or suicide prevention. A pilot was also run to respond to immediate crisis points in the community with short-term action plans. Nine funding bids were accepted for this piece of work in March 2021 and the funding released into the community.

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.