

# Highland Council

## Budget Challenge 2024-27



As part of the budget planning process for 2024-2027, two periods of engagement were held. The first, during November and December 2023, considered priorities and suggestions from the public on income generation and changing how we operate. The second phase, from the end of January to early February 2024, sought further feedback on the suggestions that had been developed and understanding the potential impact if these were to be progressed to proposals. This information has helped to inform the budget proposals due to be considered at the Council meeting on 29 February 2024.

The following provides a summary of both phases of engagement.

## Phase 1: Have your Say

### Summary of Approach

1. The Council's budget engagement challenge was launched on 17 November 2023. There were two strands:
  - Budget Simulator – enabled members of the public to make choices to try and balance the Council's budget. Focused on the 2024/25 budget, the simulator asked people to reduce different areas of the budget or increase income, through fees and charges or Council Tax, to meet the budget gap of £61.7m. The simulator set out the implications of any reduction; the greater the reduction, the greater the impact. There was also the option to increase spend in different areas, however any increase would result in a larger gap to fund.
  - Budget Survey – the survey was a different way for people to have their say. This asked for views on prioritisation of services; what services are most important to people and where there could be reductions. It also sought views on increases in charges, for new ideas on income generation and how the Council could change what it does. Two separate versions of the survey were available, one for individuals and one for groups and organisations.
2. There was also a staff suggestions page, which was launched in October on Staff Connections, to gather views and ideas from staff. Staff were also encouraged to complete the simulator and survey.
3. *Promotion*  
The Budget Challenge was promoted on the Council's website and social media channels, as well as through the community group network – including community

councils and parent councils, to parents through schools and through our partner organisations, for example it was circulated through High Life Highland's distribution network. Distribution also was targeted at key representative groups, recognising that not everyone will wish to engage but understanding the importance of gathering the perspective of key groups such as younger people, older people and people with disabilities. The survey was also made available in hard copy in service points and libraries.

## Levels of Engagement

4. *Have Your Say*, ran from 17 November until the 22 December when both the simulator and survey closed. Over this period there were 464 completed simulator responses received and 2,062 individual surveys and 39 group surveys completed.

Respondents to both the survey and simulator were asked to provide key demographic information to help understand the responses provided.

5. For the Simulator:
  - It was completed by more male (53%) than female (39%) respondents.
  - There was a good response across the age ranges from 35 – 74 but lower amongst the over 75s and under 35s.
  - 37% of those responding indicated they had caring responsibilities, with 58% of those indicating this was for a child under the age of 18, 14% as a primary carer of an older person (65 and over) and 15% indicated they were a secondary carer.
  - 35% of respondents indicated that they had school aged children in the household.
  - Just under three quarters of respondents indicated that they were employed, a fifth that they were retired and a small number that they were unable to work either because they were disabled or long-term sick, unemployed or in full time education.
6. For the Survey:
  - More females (61%) completed the survey than males (33%)
  - There was a good spread across the age ranges from 35-74 but lower amongst under 35s and over 75s.
  - 12% of respondents indicated that they considered themselves to have a disability.
  - 30% indicated that they had school age children in the household.
  - 25% indicated that they had caring responsibilities of some sort
  - 63% indicated that they were employed – this included full time, part time and self-employed – a third noted they were retired and a small number that they were a full time career, in education full time, looking after family, unable to work due to a disability or long term sickness or unemployed.

7. For the Group Survey:
- 6 were Community Councils
  - 7 Parent Councils
  - 4 Development or Community Trusts
  - 1 Environmental group
  - 8 groups providing services or support to disabled people or people with health needs
  - 9 groups providing services or support to children, young people and families
  - 1 group providing services or support to older people
  - 3 did not provide details

## Findings: Budget Simulator

8. The Simulator enabled members of the public to make choices to try and balance the Council's budget. There was a total of 464 Simulator budgets submitted. Overall, there was an average reduction in expenditure of 7.3%, an equivalent of £45m and an increase in income of 9.5% or £19.4m.
9. In the Simulator, there were 5 separate categories within which individual reductions could be made. The following sets out the average percentage reduction across each of these categories.

*Table 1*

Category	Average % reduction	Equivalent Cash Reduction
<b>Supporting children</b>	7.26%	£22.0m
<b>Supporting adults and communities</b>	6.86%	£12.0m
<b>Infrastructure and assets</b>	7.28%	£4.9m
<b>Support and corporate services</b>	10.43%	£4.0m
<b>Environment and waste</b>	6.85%	£2.2m
<b>Total</b>	7.3%	£45.0m

10. It should be noted that there are variations across the functions within these categories and whilst the average reduction in budget was 7.3%, the monetary scale and impact varies considerably across the individual functions.

The average reductions across all service functions can be found in appendix one, key findings were:

**Supporting Children:** the lowest average reductions related to secondary (-6.89%) and primary (-6.98%) schools, whilst the highest reduction was for schools administration (-9.55%).

**Supporting Adults and Communities:** the lowest average reductions related to adult

social care (-6.5%) and mental health teams (-6.56%) and the highest was for supporting communities (-10.99%).

**Infrastructure and Assets:** the lowest average reduction related to maintaining roads (-4.19%) and the highest related to economy and regeneration including support to business (-10.16%)

**Support and Corporate Services:** the lowest average reduction was seen in corporate revenue collection (-8.2%) and the highest reduction in member expenses (-11.55%).

**Environment and Waste:** the lowest average reductions across this category was seen against kerbside collections and recycling (-6.26%) and the largest increase against environmental health and regulation (-9.01%).

Analysis was undertaken to determine whether respondent circumstances impacted upon their budget choices. Variation in budget choices were minimal when considering age, gender and geographical location however respondents with school aged children were more likely to opt for lower average reductions to education when compared to respondents without school aged children.

#### 11. **Income**

Responding to the simulator, people had the option to increase fees and charges and also Council tax alongside reducing service budgets. The average increase in Council Tax by respondents in their budgets was 9.11% and 10.46% was the average increase applied to fees and charges to help balance people's budgets. There were no significant differences in choices identified when analysing responses by respondent demographics.

Table 2

Increasing income	Average % increase
Council Tax	9.11%
Fees and Charges	10.46%
Total increase income	9.5%

## Findings: Budget Survey

12. The survey was a different way for people to have their say. This asked for views on prioritisation of services; what services are most important to people and where there could be reductions.

13. *Prioritisation*

We asked the public to prioritise a range of services, asking out of a list of 35 different services, what were the 10 most important to them. The following sets out the top ten services respondents indicated were most important to them. 81% of respondents chose road repairs as one of their most important services, closely followed by refuse collection and winter maintenance. Half of respondents indicated that primary and secondary education was in their top ten, along with swimming pools and leisure services.

Table 3

What Services are most important to you now?	%
Road repairs and pot holes	81%
Refuse/ bin collection	67%
Winter road maintenance	66%
Primary education	54%
Swimming pools and leisure centres	52%
Secondary education	50%
Residential homes for disabled/ elderly people	44%
Libraries	44%
Services to protect children from harm	41%
Care at home services	42%

Total respondents = 2062

Respondents were also asked to consider the services that would be most important to them in the future. A similar top ten was generated with the main differences being a greater number of respondents prioritising care at home and residential home services.

14. Further analysis found that just over three quarters of respondents with school aged children were likely to prioritise primary and secondary education, which is almost double the respondents without school aged children. Respondents with school aged children were also more likely to prioritise nursery education, although not as high as primary or secondary education.

Considering differences across the age groups, as age increased, respondents were more likely to prioritise care homes and care at home services. Over 65s were also more likely to prioritise library services.

The responses of community groups were broadly similar to the overall responses received. The exception to this was a higher priority for adults at risk of harm and children at risk of harm.

15. The services people were least likely to prioritise, now and in the future, were planning services, the Council service points and service centre, trading standards and advice



on benefits. Less than 10% of all respondents placed these in their top 10 of services. Services that lower numbers of people felt were important to them also included support to business, services to reduce offending and supporting people into employment.

- 16 The survey asked a specific question about services the Council could reduce. People were asked to indicate their top 10 services they thought could be reduced. Similarly, the services which were considered the least important, were where the highest number of people indicated they could be reduced. The top 10 services are outlined in table 4 and include a mix of services that support specific groups of people and wider community based services.

*Table 4*

What Services do you think we could reduce?	%
Council Service Points and Service Centres	59%
Trading Standards	58%
Grass cutting and grounds maintenance	57%
Supporting investment and business	51%
Advice on benefits	51%
Address Climate Change	47%
Cycle paths and walking routes	46%
Museums	46%
Planning applications and building warrants	45%
Services to reduce offending	43%

Total respondents=2062

17. Overall, there was consistency across the different demographic groups on the areas that could be reduced and also across community groups responding. The exception to this was individuals with a disability who were less likely to indicate advice on benefits could be reduced than individuals without a disability. However, across the range of services, this remained within the top ten services from this group of individuals that could be reduced.
18. The survey also sought views on whether the Council should move to a more targeted approach to service delivery as a way of using resources more effectively. It was noted this could mean different types and level of provision in areas across Highland but would ensure service provision can be provided where it is needed.

88% of respondents were supportive of this approach.



Table 5

Should the Council move to a more targeted approach of service delivery as a way of using resources more effectively?	%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	37%
<b>Agree</b>	51%
<b>Disagree</b>	8%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	4%

Total respondents = 2026

19. **Income Generation**

The survey provided the opportunity to consider income generation in more detail. Respondents were asked to indicate their preference for increasing Council Tax across a range of options – from 5% to 16% or more. The most common response in the survey was a 5% increase, with an overall average of 7%. People were more likely to select a higher increase in Council Tax on the simulator, where Council Tax was the balancing figure, than those completing the survey.

Table 6

What do you think would be an acceptable increase in Council Tax for 2024/25?	% of respondents
<b>5%</b>	67%
7.50%	14%
10%	13%
12.50%	2%
15%	2%
16% or more	2%

Total respondents = 1,886

20. A similar approach was taken with income and respondents asked about increasing income across a range of service areas and the level of which an increase could take place. People completing the survey were more likely to support the lowest level of increase in income (2.5%) for more ‘people centred’ services e.g. burials, cremations and school meals.

There was greater acceptance of higher increases in income across EV charging, discretionary planning fees, harbour fees, registration fees for weddings and car parking at visitor locations.



Table 7

What would be an acceptable increase in charge for the following areas	2.5%	5%	7.5%	10%	15%
Electrical Vehicle Charging Points	33%	25%	15%	13%	15%
Car Parking in Towns/City	49%	26%	9%	8%	8%
Car Parking at Visitor Attractions	34%	28%	13%	11%	13%
Discretionary Planning fees (e.g. pre-planning application and advice)	34%	27%	16%	11%	12%
Garden Waste Bins	52%	23%	9%	7%	8%
School Lets Costs	53%	24%	10%	7%	6%
Bulky Uplifts	39%	29%	15%	8%	9%
Burials	59%	21%	10%	5%	5%
Cremations	62%	20%	9%	5%	4%
Harbour fees	27%	30%	21%	10%	13%
School meals	70%	17%	6%	4%	3%
Registration fees for conducting weddings	23%	28%	22%	11%	17%

21. Respondents were asked about whether they would prefer the Council to increase charges, reduce or stop some services or a combination of both. Just half of all respondents indicated that they would prefer a combination of both. This was mirrored across the different demographic groups, with just over two thirds of community groups indicating a preference for a combination of both charges and service reductions.

Table 8

Would you prefer the council to:	%
<b>Increase Charges (including Council Tax)</b>	19%
<b>Reduce or Stop some non essential services</b>	29%
<b>A combination of both</b>	52%

Total respondents=2012

22. The survey also sought views about the Council's capital borrowing and whether the Council should increase its capital borrowing – and increase loan charges – in order to build or extend schools/roads or other infrastructure and buildings. 73% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that there shouldn't be an increase in borrowing. Whilst overall disagreeing there should be an increase in borrowing (56%), respondents with school aged children were less likely to disagree than respondents without. The community groups responding were overall supportive of an increase in borrowing (59%).



Table 9

Should the Council increase its capital borrowing?	%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	9%
Agree	28%
Disagree	47%
Strongly disagree	16%

Total respondents=2012

23. In addition to questions about specific areas of income generation, survey respondents were also asked for general ideas about ways in which the Council could generate income. The suggestions can be categorised into 6 key areas:

- Tourism
- Transport and parking
- Council assets
- Fees and charges
- Housing, Development and Renewables
- General

The following provides a summary of some of the suggestions received:

<p><b>Tourism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of visitor levy</li> <li>• Create facilities and charge for motor home waste disposal</li> <li>• Motor home charges and parking charges and fines for disposal of waste outwith designated areas</li> <li>• Charging for motorhomes on heavy use roads &amp; NC500</li> <li>• Invest and create tourism initiatives that could be charged for</li> </ul>	<p><b>Transport and Parking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce Low Emission Zones</li> <li>• Charge for car parking across all Council car parks and make this mandatory and not voluntary</li> <li>• Specific visitor parking charges</li> <li>• Increase illegal parking fines and enforce pavement parking</li> <li>• Toll on bridges/roads for non-Highland residents</li> <li>• Charge administration fee when vehicles cause damage to roads/bridges</li> </ul>
<p><b>Council Assets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sell advertising on Council assets/sponsorship of local facilities e.g. play parks/events</li> <li>• Sell land and assets surplus to requirement</li> <li>• Charge for hiring council properties/car parks/facilities/ Lease unused properties</li> <li>• Commercialising skilled Council services e.g. solicitors, HR, grant application, graphic design, employability trainers, training courses, food hygiene, trades, grass cutting and services</li> <li>• Build assets with renewable energy incorporated and make assets more</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fees and Charges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase Council Tax</li> <li>• Increase HLH Charges</li> <li>• Increase harbour fees</li> <li>• Larger fines for littering, dog fouling and fly tipping</li> <li>• Charge for toilets</li> <li>• Create EV charging stations</li> <li>• Sell compost</li> <li>• Charge for dog licenses</li> <li>• Allow people to buy things from recycling centres</li> <li>• Levy charge on businesses that contribute to need for street cleaning</li> <li>• Pest Control charge for services to</li> </ul>

<p>energy efficient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase buildings for rental income</li> </ul>	<p>private homeowners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase charge for commercial waste collection and hire out skips</li> <li>• Increase planning fees for large scale developments</li> <li>• Increase Council house and property rents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Housing, Development and Renewables</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charge for second homes</li> <li>• Improve income from windfarm/renewable energy schemes to the Council and to local communities for development and support</li> <li>• Increase income from developers</li> <li>• Invest in renewable energy projects to generate revenue</li> <li>• Land tax on land estates</li> <li>• Investigate carbon or biodiversity offsetting including the introduction of a carbon budget/credits</li> <li>• House building for market rent</li> <li>• Attract more funding from renewable energy companies</li> </ul>	<p><b>General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilise private finance via joint initiatives, sponsorships for community events (fireworks, new year, winter wonderland)</li> <li>• Create pop-up shops for rental/markets Deliver and charge for out of school and holiday activities</li> <li>• Offer premium service to those wishing to pay (more frequent bin collection/pothole repairs)</li> <li>• Charge for wraparound childcare and at the weekend</li> <li>• Parents to contribute to school transport costs/reduce school transport</li> </ul>

## 24. ***Being More Efficient***

Respondents were asked to consider how the Council could be more efficient in how they operate and deliver services. There were a number of suggestions received that can be summarised as follows:

<p><b>Structures and ways of working</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and reduce salaries of senior staff, reduce management, and redirect resources to frontline</li> <li>• Streamlining administration to avoid duplication/red tape/bureaucracy</li> <li>• Join up teams, merge services, reducing duplication &amp; improving service delivery</li> <li>• More online meetings – less travel/travel time. Fewer Council meetings</li> <li>• More work from home/remote working</li> <li>• No working from home</li> <li>• Improve services and funding outwith Inverness/rural areas</li> <li>• Increase auditing to prevent benefit fraud, fraud, monitor expenses, non-payment, ensure tight rein on spending and back-office functions</li> <li>• Automate and use AI for more processes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Approaches to Service Delivery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix roads, pavements, drainage, fencing, buildings, and potholes properly to prevent more expensive repairs later.</li> <li>• Do not cut verges or grass/devolve grass cutting decisions to local community, reduce use of glyphosate.</li> <li>• Do more online and digitise all admin, finance, records, online forms, letters, training and transactions.</li> <li>• Volunteer programme/opportunities to get involved in local communities. Offer support to communities to be more resilient and empowered through training.</li> <li>• Best value from procurement – use local</li> <li>• Reduce and review bin collection and improve recycling/encourage composting/review food bin collection</li> <li>• Better utilisation of community</li> </ul>
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<p>to reduce staff costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devolve more power and accountability to local level/ return to District Councils</li> <li>• Employ more trades inhouse rather than external contractors</li> <li>• Need to work in partnership with other agencies and organisations.</li> <li>• Reduce duplication and overlap in services – if third sector providing then the Council shouldn't.</li> <li>• Apply business-like approach, best practise and private enterprise discipline.</li> <li>• Outsource/partner/share/collaborate with other Local Authorities for back office.</li> </ul> <p><b>Councillors and Staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have fewer Councillors and reduce Councillor pay and expenses</li> <li>• Value staff, invest in them, pay them properly, focus on retention and training.</li> <li>• Reducing sick pay/pension entitlements/more robust sickness policy</li> <li>• Improved performance management and accountability</li> <li>• Better use of existing staff than outsourcing or agency.</li> <li>• 4 day week for council staff and schools</li> <li>• Ensure Council staff are based and live across Highland</li> </ul>	<p>service/payback orders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contracts should include completion date, reasonable pricing with a financial penalty for late delivery</li> <li>• Support the vulnerable (elderly, children, domestic abuse victims, unemployed and homeless) first, then if funds allow - help other service user groups.</li> <li>• More virtual courses/AI tutors in schools</li> </ul> <p><b>Use of Council Assets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce building footprint – support flexible working, reduce travel, maintenance, energy use, co-location</li> <li>• Mothball schools with low numbers/merge/less schools</li> <li>• Utilise school space, halls, libraries, leisure centres as hubs/pop up services</li> <li>• Fewer vehicles and remove any for personal use</li> <li>• Storage warehouse with used council assets (online list available) so staff do not need buy new</li> <li>• Modernise and insulate remaining buildings</li> <li>• Reduce heating and switch off lights and use LED lights in Council buildings including schools</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reduce or stop</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change and net zero less of a priority</li> <li>• Stop subsidising buses with low passenger numbers</li> <li>• Spend on arts and museums</li> <li>• Stop mobile libraries and reduce the number of libraries</li> <li>• Turn off/reduce street lighting/motion sensors</li> <li>• Stop spending on consultants</li> <li>• Reduce the number and opening hours of service points.</li> <li>• Reduce/stop cycle routes</li> <li>• Stop providing chrome books</li> <li>• Reduce staffing and work on equalities</li> <li>• Reduce opening hours of recycling centres</li> <li>• Stop spending money on tourist hotspots</li> <li>• Stop catering for Councillor meals</li> <li>• Spend less money/stop funding external</li> </ul>	<p><b>General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on statutory service provision/core business</li> <li>• Streamline planning process and make more local decisions</li> <li>• Lower business rates and support businesses</li> <li>• Encourage active travel/more cycle routes</li> <li>• Stop nursery care or only provide for 2-3 year-olds for working parents only</li> <li>• Manage expectations with the public about what is achievable and deliverable</li> <li>• Spend less on consultants</li> <li>• Take over public transport</li> <li>• Provide housing in rural areas for Highland Council staff</li> <li>• No longer have By-elections. Only hold elections toward the end term</li> <li>• Allow rural facilities to be accessed by keycode and not involve facilities</li> </ul>



agencies HLH/Crofters Commission/HIE/Eden Court <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaelic – reduce staffing, funding, education, signs and documents</li> <li>• Remove free bus passes for 60-year-olds</li> <li>• Reduce the need for school road patrollers where there is a zebra crossing/road crossing</li> <li>• Reduce/cut floral &amp; lighting displays, fireworks, Hogmanay celebrations and Christmas decorations</li> </ul>	management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online voting for elections</li> <li>• More focus on ASN and invest in services for young people</li> <li>• Support Green Areas, natural assets and schemes to including rangers</li> <li>• Up standards/more funding in education</li> <li>• Focus on mental health</li> </ul>
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25. **Communities Doing More**

The final section of the first phase engagement survey asked for views on what services could be delivered by the community. A range of suggestion were proposed. Some were focused on what volunteer community groups could provide whilst others appear to suggest a range of community-led service providers could support. Whilst a wide range of services were suggested, issues with volunteer fatigue and community capacity were highlighted by a number of respondents.

Environmental and community based services including:

- Planting/weeding/maintenance public amenity areas
- Grass and verge cutting
- Pavement gritting
- Local street maintenance including litter picking
- Play parks
- Cemetery maintenance
- Foodbanks
- Debt and welfare advice

Health and social care services including:

- Home care services
- Mental health support
- Day care/lunch clubs for elderly

Leisure services including:

- Leisure facilities
- Museums
- Libraries
- Community centres/halls/hubs

Transport provision including:

- Community transport
- School transport



Services supporting children including


- Childcare/after-school care
- Youth work
- School meal provision

## Phase 2: Tell Us More

### Summary of Approach

26. The feedback from the phase 1 period of engagement provided rich information about the views of the public, what was important to them and a number of suggestions about what the Council could consider to address its budget challenge. Based on the feedback received a number of suggestions were developed. These were grouped around four key themes:
- Developing our operating model
  - Redesigning our assets
  - Being more efficient
  - Generating income
27. From the end of January until early February 2024, the public were asked to consider the suggestions that had been developed under these four themes. The intention was to better understand whether the public were supportive of these but also whether there were specific impacts should these suggestions develop into budget proposals. There were also two general questions that sought views on reducing services or stopping services. This was also based on the feedback received during phase 1.

### Levels of Engagement

28. Tell Us More used the engagement HQ platform to gather views from the public. This enabled four separate surveys to be developed under the theme headings and a general ideas board for individuals to post on and also indicate support for other contributions. Similar to phase 1, the information was promoted on the Council's website and social media channels, as well as through the community group network – including community councils and parent councils, to key representative groups and through our partner organisations, for example it was circulated through High Life Highland's distribution network.
29. 1,092 individuals responded to the Tell Us More engagement. This varied across the individual themes and the suggestions within them:
- Developing our operating model – 641\*
  - Redesigning our assets – 356\*
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- Generating income – 359\*
  - Being more efficient – 689\*
- (\*average across suggestions)

## Findings: Tell us More

30. Under each of the four themes were between three and five suggestion areas. These were:

Developing our operating model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using technology</li> <li>• Reducing management</li> <li>• Improving who provides services</li> <li>• Redesigning services</li> <li>• Redesigning services – people focused</li> </ul>
Redesigning our assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconfiguring school assets</li> <li>• Rationalising our asset base</li> <li>• Light fleet redesign</li> </ul>
Generating income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing fees and charges</li> <li>• Increasing income from car parking</li> <li>• Increasing income from tourism</li> <li>• Increasing income from energy</li> </ul>
Being more efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiencies from procurement</li> <li>• Efficiencies from hybrid working</li> <li>• Things we could reduce</li> <li>• Things we could stop doing</li> </ul>

### 31. ***Developing our operating model***

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the suggestions as part of this theme. There was strong support across all five suggestions, with over 70% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the suggestions outlined.

*Table 10*

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Using technology	30	46	18	5	2
Reducing management	41	38	13	5	2
Improving who provides services	38	47	12	2	1
Redesigning services	28	48	18	4	1
Redesigning services – people focused	34	46	15	3	1

32. Table 11 outlines the views of respondents regarding impact as a result of the suggestions for developing our operating model:

Table 11

	High impact %	Medium impact %	Low impact %	No impact %
Using technology	12	40	35	13
Reducing management	17	29	36	19
Improving who provides services	20	44	27	8
Redesigning services	18	50	26	7
Redesigning services – people focused	22	44	27	7

*Using technology* - Overall there was support for using technology more with few indicating that this would result in a high impact. A number of respondents noted this would result in a positive impact, that technology would reduce staff time, costs, travel and improve service delivery. There were concerns from some however that this could lead to a reduced access to services for those without internet/capability to use internet and also concern that AI is a high risk.

*Reducing management* - Over half of respondents reported that there was low or no impact in reducing management. It was reported this would free up resources for the front line, lead to more efficient operations, decision-making and communications. However, from those noting a potential impact there was particular comments on the reduction of the role of leaders within schools and that this was not in the best interests of pupils, schools or communities. There was a general concern on the loss of expertise and knowledge and the additional workload this would lead to for remaining managers.

*Improving who provides services* – 20% of respondents reported that this suggestion could lead to a high impact. Concerns were expressed that outsourcing is not cost effective and open to poor procurement processes and overcharging by contractors. A concern was also noted at the lack of support or capacity of third sector organisations.

*Redesigning services* – over half of respondents note that this suggestion could have a medium impact on them and their families. It was noted this suggestion could have an impact on staff employment morale and productivity and some concerns at the impact on children as a result of changes to school meals. However, it was noted the impact on rural communities by reductions to service provision/bus provision which the suggestion is proposed to overcome and the positive impact on the environment as a result of changes to waste collections.

*Redesigning services – people focused* – 22% of respondents noted a potential high



impact as a result of this suggestion, amongst the highest noted in the survey. However, the comments suggest that impact was viewed both positively as well as negatively. There were concerns that any redesign of adult services would result in a reduction in service and the impact this could have on rural communities. Other comments suggested that this could have a positive impact. There was concern at a loss of face to face provision for older people.

### 33. **Redesigning our assets**

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the suggestions as part of this theme. There was strong support across all three suggestions related to assets, with support for reconfiguring school assets slightly lower.

*Table 12*

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Reconfiguring school assets	28	39	13	12	8
Rationalising our asset base	36	42	12	7	3
Light fleet redesign	37	44	15	3	1

34. Table 13 outlines the views of respondents regarding impact as a result of the suggestions for redesigning our assets:

*Table 13*

	High impact %	Medium impact %	Low impact %	No impact %
Reconfiguring school assets	23	23	33	21
Rationalising our asset base	17	35	34	15
Light fleet redesign	6	21	43	31

*Reconfiguring school assets* – respondents were mixed in views on the potential impact of this suggestion. Concerns were noted that this could result in overcrowding/overcapacity in schools and attainment and the distances pupils and staff may have to travel. Concerns were also noted of community cohesion and sustainability if schools were to close and the challenge ASN pupils can find in larger schools. It was noted that housing developments would impact without appropriate levels of infrastructure. It was also reported that there was a challenge in providing education in small schools and the sustainability of these schools.





*Rationalising our asset base* – over half of respondents reported that this suggestion would result in low or no impact. Comments provided reported concern at any closure or reduction in libraries or service points, as this would disadvantage those who need services in the community the most, and also greater distances for people to travel.

*Light fleet redesign* – over 70% of respondents reported that there would be low or no impact to the as a result of this suggestion.

### 35. **Generating income**

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the suggestions as part of this theme. There was support from respondents for all four suggestions outlined. 90% reported being supportive of generating income from tourism and over 80% from energy. Whilst slightly lower, there remained strong support for increasing fees and charges (71%) and car parking income (65%).

*Table 14*

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Increasing fees and charges	24	47	15	11	3
Increasing income from car parking	24	41	12	16	6
Increasing income from tourism	58	32	4	4	1
Increasing income from energy	48	36	10	5	1

36. Table 15 outlines the views of respondents regarding impact as a result of the suggestions for generating income:

*Table 15*

	High impact %	Medium impact %	Low impact %	No impact %
Increasing fees and charges	12	51	30	7
Increasing income from car parking	18	39	36	7
Increasing income from tourism	8	18	42	32
Increasing income from energy	6	26	42	26

*Increasing fees and charges* – only 12% of individuals indicated that the impact of an increase in fees and charges would be high, but half of respondents indicated that this



could result in a medium impact. Comments shared highlighted concerns with the cost of living crisis and particularly on the elderly or those on a low income.

*Increasing income from car parking* – comments on the potential impact of this suggestion included the financial impact on individuals on low incomes, particularly as a result of the reliance of cars in Highland due to the lack of public transport. It was noted it could impact on the ability to access independent shops and services and push people into parking in residential areas. It was noted charges on staff could impact on morale and it not being applied across all facilities.

*Increasing income from tourism* – three quarters of respondents indicated that there would be low or no impact from this suggestion. A small number of comments noted that charges need to be in line with other areas so as not to discourage tourists and that second homes should not be taxed as this brings income to the area. There were comments received that noted the negative impact that tourism currently has on some areas.

*Increasing income from energy* – few respondents reported that there would be a high impact from this suggestion. Comments included noting concern about the impact windfarms could have on tourism and also the maintenance costs of EV chargers. Positive impact was noted of working with renewable energy providers to develop systems that benefit Highland and the potential to work with a private EV charging company to provide the offering.

37. **Being more efficient**

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the suggestions as part of this theme. There was strong support across the first two suggestions but weaker support for the suggestion about things that could be reduced.

Table 16

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Efficiencies from procurement	33	41	17	5	4
Efficiencies from hybrid working	32	43	18	5	2
Things we could reduce	12	20	14	22	31

38. Table 17 outlines the views of respondents regarding impact as a result of the suggestions for being more efficient:



Table 17

	High impact %	Medium impact %	Low impact %	No impact %
Efficiencies from procurement	11	27	42	20
Efficiencies from hybrid working	11	25	38	26
Things we could reduce	44	33	17	6

*Efficiencies from procurement* – respondents reported limited impact as a result of this suggestion however comments noted concern at the impact on local sourcing and suppliers and that procurement processes can prevent selection of cheaper options.

*Efficiencies from hybrid working* – comments received suggested positive impacts in relation to greater efficiency, reducing costs and improved opportunities for rural based employees. There were a small number of comments noting concern about reduced face to face interaction.

*Things we could reduce* – over 75% of respondents reported a high or medium impact about the suggestion to reduce services. Comments included concerns about the impact on communities from reducing libraries and health and wellbeing from reducing leisure centres and also the environmental impact of reducing recycling opening hours. There were both positive and negative comments regarding the reduction of street lighting – support for reducing light pollution but also safety concerns. Other comments noted concern about the impact on community groups from any reduction of grants and other respondents noted the impact of local job losses and the impact on staff. Comments were also received about managing public expectations on what the Council can provide when reductions are required.



39. **Things we could stop doing**

During the first phase engagement, there were a number of suggestions received about things that the Council should consider stopping doing. A number of these things are statutory and must be done or provided. It was also suggested that the Council should concentrate on statutory services and not carry on doing anything discretionary. In response to this, the second phase of engagement asked respondents to consider a range of discretionary services that could be stopped. It was noted that these were only suggestions and not proposals. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with any reduction and also about the potential impact if services were stopped.

The only area where there was a majority support for stopping was for grass and verge cutting. Views were mixed across patrolling school crossing, secondary school meals, discretionary staff training and service points, with some respondents agreeing these could be stopped, others disagreeing and a number neither agreeing or disagreeing.

40. *Table 18*

	Patrolling school crossings	Secondary school meals	Grass and verge cutting	Countryside rangers	Discretionary staff training	Public toilets	Community transport	Subsidising public transport routes	Mobile libraries	Service Points
Strongly Agree %	13	13	34	8	13	6	6	7	8	9
Agree %	22	21	26	8	22	5	8	11	10	18
Neither agree nor disagree %	26	18	12	14	29	5	20	20	19	31
Disagree %	23	24	17	21	27	30	31	31	29	24
Strongly disagree %	17	24	12	49	9	55	35	31	35	18
Total Respondents	700	699	704	710	699	703	702	700	705	698

41. Table 19 outlines the views of respondents regarding impact as a result of the suggestions for stopping services:

*Table 19*

	Patrolling school crossings	Secondary school meals	Grass and verge cutting	Countryside rangers	Discretionary staff training	Public toilets	Community transport	Subsidising public transport routes	Mobile libraries	Service Points
High %	8	15	15	40	7	49	21	27	21	10
Medium %	7	8	22	19	19	31	23	29	18	22
Low %	22	19	33	20	35	14	30	25	24	37
No %	63	58	30	21	39	5	26	19	37	31
Total respondents	701	702	702	713	697	702	696	698	698	696

42. The opposite of what was seen elsewhere in the phase 2 engagement, could be seen in the response to reducing services. Whilst there was not strong support for the proposals, in the main, respondents reported limited impact on them or their family as a result of the suggestions.

The exception to this was public toilets, where 80% of respondents noted stopping this would result in a high or medium impact, public transport routes (56% high/medium) and countryside rangers (59% high/medium).

Comments highlighted that the closure of public toilets would have a health impact and an environmental impact on tourism. It was noted that stopping Countryside Rangers would have a detrimental effect on communities, environment, wellbeing, and education and a detrimental impact on rural areas if mobile libraries were stopped. Concerns were also expressed about the impact on families if secondary school meals were stopped and the ability for people to access services in rural areas if bus subsidies were stopped. A number of comments were received about the impact generally on rural communities if a number of these services were stopped.

#### 43. ***Tell Us More – Ideas Board and General Suggestions***

A further range of suggestions were proposed by respondents in the second phase engagement, both on the Ideas Board and through comments contained within the responses. Where these are new suggestions, these are summarised below:

#### 44. Council Tax

- A range of suggestions on council tax were received, including increasing Council Tax for everyone to sustain services, increasing Council tax on second homes and short-term lets and reviewing Council tax bands.

#### 45. Other Taxes

- Suggestions were received about imposing taxes on salmon farms on the waste discharged into the sea and a localised windfall tax for large companies like energy providers and retail companies to contribute to essential services.

#### 46. Community Based Services

- Permanent contracts for grass cutting teams using sponsorship by private businesses (provides workforce 12 months of the year that could also be utilised by the roads team in winter months).
- Invest in robot mowers for large council managed lawns – Reduce staffing costs.


#### 47. Leisure

- Explore other services that could be offered through leisure centres.
- Build astroturf pitches and charge for hire
- Reopen the Ironworks and run it generating income for the Council
- Employ a “tourism officer” who could provide local walking tours at points of historical interest.

#### 48. Service Delivery

- Chrome books to be paid for and money returned at end of school when the chrome book is handed back. If not in good condition the money is retained.
- Council to offer MOT services which staff could pay for.
- Meal Services – creating an affordable meal collection/delivery service for the elderly/vulnerable from school catering facilities.

#### 49. Assets

- Consider the location of depots to reduce travel and cost of staff travel.
  - Sell school canteens to local businesses – providing school meals but providing the opportunity to be creative and entrepreneurial in what they offer.
  - Selling common good assets to free up resources currently managing them.
- 

- Offer FM services to Hotels and B&B's for maintenance checks and small jobs.
- Schools self-funded repairs - Allow schools to raise their own funds and carry out repairs or improvements to the school using local tradespeople.
- Community - Public Partnerships - Support communities to build facilities for lease by Highland Council – the Strontian model.

50. Corporate

- Bottom-up re-design of the council – starting with what is required to be provided from a statutory perspective and redesign a minimal organisation to deliver this.
  - Improved contract design to derive best value.
  - Employ rather than use agency/outsourcing - Cost saving and better control on quality of service being delivered.
  - Apply lean sigma methodology to review and streamline service delivery processes.
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