

# Budget Consultation

## Co-chomhairle Buidseit

*Summary*  
April 2013



### Message from Councillor Dave Fallows

The Budget Consultation 2012 ran from August to the end of October 2012. We needed to make savings of £29.7m over the next two years and wanted to gather your views on our proposed budget savings ideas and also to find out your ideas for further savings.

You told us where you thought we could make savings, for example by providing more Council services through local outlets or increasing joint working with public sector partners. We also heard where you did not support savings, such as shortening the school day.

**This document will outline what you told us as part of the Budget Consultation process and what the Council has decided to do. It will also outline the Council's budget for the next two years and detail the savings that have been made.**

*Thank you to everyone who took part in the consultation*

## THE SCALE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

We used a variety of methods to encourage people to take part in our consultation. A high proportion of responses came from online contact, via our online questionnaire, email or our Budget Blog. From August to November 2012:

- over 1,040 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel. This response means we can view the results as representative of the views of adults in Highland with good levels of confidence;
- over 180 online questionnaires were submitted;
- over 100 people sent in forms via email or post;
- over 770 school pupils were consulted through Nairn Youth Forum;
- 55 group responses were generated from 12 Ward Forums;
- nearly 60 people took part in 4 focus groups with specific interest groups like Sight Action and the Highland Users Group;
- 40 posts were received on the Budget Blog;
- 28 emails and 9 letters were received;
- points were fed back from 3 meetings with Trade Unions and Highland Youth Voice.

Not including Citizens' Panel responses, we gathered over 10,000 separate points on the budget questions. These points can be viewed on the Council's website at [www.highland.gov.uk/budget2012](http://www.highland.gov.uk/budget2012) where you can also see the full analysis of the feedback.



## WHAT DIFFERENCE DID THE CONSULTATION MAKE?

On 7 February 2013 the Council agreed a package of savings for the two years 2013/14 and 2014/15 totalling £23.8m. It is currently estimated that further savings of £3.3m still require to be found for 2014/15 with the final figure dependent on any changes to the grant funding from the Scottish Government and other budget assumptions.

The diagram below shows a summary of the total savings agreed. When we consulted on budget savings, we expected that £18.2m of savings would need to be found in 2014/15.

We now anticipate the required savings to be around £15.5m. The savings figure is lower mainly because some of the extra costs we identified have not been as high as we expected.

### TOTAL SAVINGS AGREED TO DATE

2013/14  
£m



2014/15  
£m



2 YEAR  
TOTAL  
£m



The tables below summarises how savings have been made across services.

	2013/14 £m	2014/15 £m
Education, Culture and Sport	2.624	3.311
Health and Social Care	3.350	3.476
Planning and Development	0.582	0.394
Transport, Environment and Community Services (TECS)	1.492	0.870
Chief Executive's Service	1.025	1.032
Finance Service	0.345	0.345
Housing and Property Service	0.548	0.428
Corporate Improvement Programme	1.646	1.951
Corporate Management Savings	-	0.350
<b>Total agreed to date</b>	<b>11.612</b>	<b>12.157</b>

A full list of detailed savings can be found at: [www.highland.gov.uk/specialmeeting-7-feb](http://www.highland.gov.uk/specialmeeting-7-feb)

There was strong support for **community involvement** in service provision. We will develop this through the £1m Community Challenge Fund, which has been set up to explore new ways of delivering services locally.

We heard that we should review our **staffing** costs, particularly in relation to management posts and staff expenses. We will reduce staff numbers through redesigning a number of services. There has been a commitment to achieve this through vacancy management and re-deployment, avoiding compulsory redundancy wherever possible. We will also reduce subsistence and catering budgets for Councillors and staff. £0.35m will be saved in management costs in 2014/15.

You also felt that we should become more **efficient** in our processes, suggesting that we make more use of technology and combine or centralise services. We will develop our Mobile and Flexible Working project, allowing staff to connect remotely through ICT. This will lower travel and subsistence spend through a reduced need to travel. We will continue to make savings through the centralisation of our Business Support service and through the rationalisation of our Dingwall and Inverness offices.

You highlighted the importance of being more **energy efficient**. We will make savings and reduce energy use by switching to LED street lighting and installing bio-mass boilers in schools. We will continue to invest in renewable energy sources and develop ways to become more energy efficient.

Across a range of questions, you told us that **road maintenance** was an important area for us to concentrate on. We have set aside £2m for road maintenance in the next year.

Many of you told us that **empty private properties** should be charged a full rate of Council Tax, rather than the 10% reduction they currently receive. We will levy a 100% Council Tax charge on long-term empty properties from 1 April this year, and keep this additional income locally. As a condition of our settlement from the Scottish Government, we will freeze Council Tax on all other properties for 2013/14.

## BUDGET SUMMARY



On 7 February 2013 the Council approved the budget for 2013/14. Although a package of savings for the two years 2013/14 and 2014/15 were agreed, it is currently estimated that further savings of £3.3m still require to be found for 2014/15. Decisions on these further savings and formal agreement of the budget and Council Tax for 2014/15 will take place in February 2014.

The 2013/14 budget agreed by the Council is as follows:

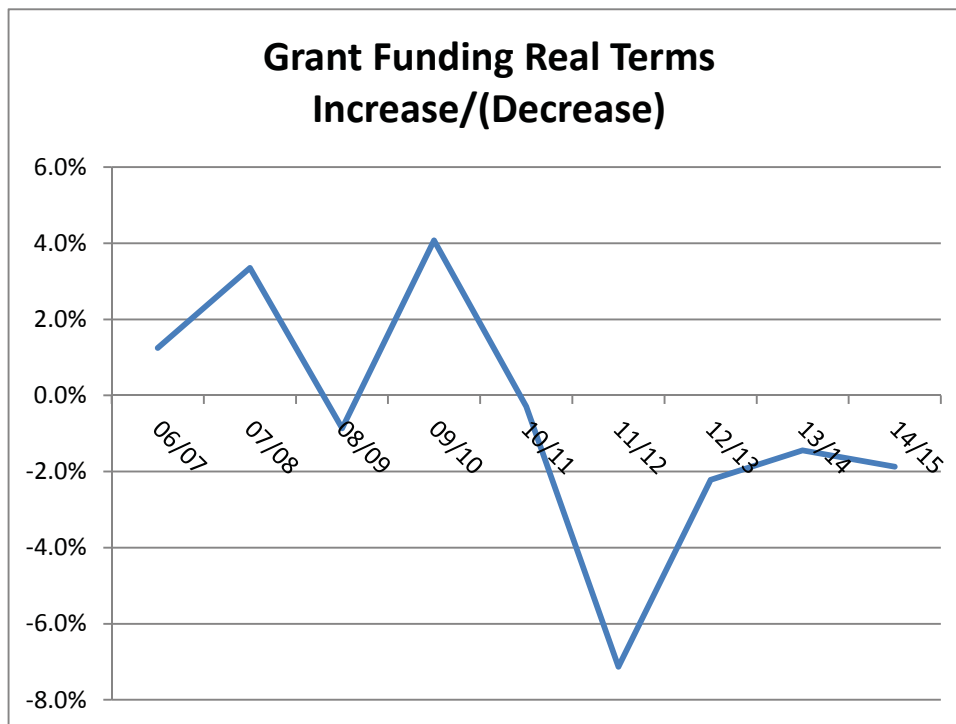
	Budget 2013/14 £m
Education, Culture and Sport	234.911
Health and Social Care	131.154
Planning and Development	7.408
TEC Services	58.408
Chief Executive's Service	23.188
Finance including Housing Benefits	12.551
Housing & Property including Building Maintenance	10.684
<b>Service Total</b>	<b>478.304</b>
Valuation Joint Board Requisition	2.380
Loan Charges	55.510
Interest on Revenue Balances	-0.180
Non Domestic Rate Reliefs	0.606
Affordable Housing contribution from Council Tax	2.600
Agreed pressures and savings held centrally pending allocation to Services	5.216
Preventative spend	3.000
Contingency budget uncommitted	1.000
<i>(Subsequently committed to increasing the budget for Adult Services)</i>	
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>548.436</b>

Within the budget, £9.4m has been provided to deal with budget pressures, including inflationary price increases on goods and services, provision for the implementation and ongoing costs in relation to Welfare Reform and provision for the implementation of the living wage of £7.45 per hour. A further £3m has been provided for preventative spend measures within Health & Social Care and £2m, on a one-off basis from balances, for roads maintenance.

Sources of funding for the Council's budget:

	2013/14 £m	Portion of Funding £m
Scottish Government Funding	435.696	79.4%
Contribution from Balances	2.000	0.4%
Total Amount Needed from Council Tax	110.740	20.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>548.436</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The following graph shows the real terms reductions in grant funding over the period from 2010/11 onwards.



Note : 2013/14 reduction excludes the impact of the revised funding arrangements for the single Police & Fire services.

## BALANCES

The Council holds reserves and balances to provide a contingency to meet unforeseen events not covered within the budget. Examples of use of balances in previous years includes meeting additional costs relating to severe winter weather and flooding events. Balances have also been used to provide for demand led service pressures, particularly in areas such as care for the elderly, and children's placements.

It is important to note, however, that balances can only be used once and when they are depleted, actions must be taken to reinstate them. At present the level of non-earmarked balances held (the general contingency) is projected to be c£16.5m by the end of March 2013. This is equivalent to 3% of the Council's revenue budget, which is the Council's planned level of balances contingency.

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# EDUCATION



## SCHOOL ESTATE

### ● ● ● CONSIDERATIONS WHEN COMBINING SCHOOLS

#### **What we asked**

We asked you to identify the most important factors when considering when to combine schools. Over 1,040 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 320 were gathered from other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

Both Citizens' Panel members and respondents to the overall consultation felt that the length of the journey time to school and the facilities available within a school were important considerations. The number of teachers within each school was considered important by many Citizens' Panel members, while other respondents ranked low school rolls as one of the key factors to be considered.

#### **What we will do**

We will consider the key factors noted by you when undertaking any future reviews of the Highland school estate.

### ● ● ● MOTHBALLING SCHOOLS

#### **What we asked**

We asked whether the approach of mothballing schools should be adopted more frequently across Highland. Over 1,020 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 315 were fed back from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

You told us that there was support for this approach, with 71% of Citizens' Panel members in favour of it. You felt that mothballing schools would be cost-effective and would improve educational and social opportunities for children. However, you told us that certain factors should be considered when mothballing schools, such as the travelling distance for children, numbers on school rolls and the resources and quality of education at receiving schools. We heard that communities should be consulted before schools are mothballed and that mothballed schools should be regularly monitored to determine whether they should re-open.

#### **What we will do**

We will consider mothballing schools where there are concerns about educational and social opportunities due to low rolls. Based upon previous trends, it is anticipated that this will save £0.16m over the next two years.

### ● ● ● ALL-THROUGH SCHOOL APPROACH

#### **What we asked**

We asked whether you would be in favour of an all-through school approach, with nursery, primary and secondary pupils on the same campus. Nearly 1,030 responses were fed back from the Citizens' Panel. A further 1,000 comments were received from other sources including primary and secondary school pupils through Nairn Youth Forum.

#### **What you told us**

Although 82% of Citizens' Panel respondents were in favour of an all-through school approach, opinion was divided among people responding in other ways. Many supported the proposal, telling us that money would be saved through shared resources and staff, that transitions between stages would be



easier for pupils and that different age groups could learn from and support each other. However, just as many, including several young people, expressed concerns about an all-through school arrangement. They said that younger and older children had different needs, that younger children may be intimidated and that it was important developmentally for children to change schools.

#### **What we will do**

We will consult with communities to develop all-through school models. 3-18 campuses need to meet the needs of all pupils and these will be considered at any developmental stage. We expect to save £0.04m in 2014/15.

## **EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

### **● ● ● GROUP SCHOOL ARRANGEMENT**

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know whether we should introduce a group school arrangement where one Head Teacher would manage 4-6 schools. Nearly 1,030 responses were fed back from the Citizens' Panel. A further 1,000 responses were received from other sources, including from primary and secondary school pupils through Nairn Youth Forum.

#### **What you told us**

From the consultation, you told us that you were not in favour of one Head Teacher managing 4-6 schools. This view was expressed by two thirds of Citizens' Panel respondents. You felt that Head Teachers had an important pastoral role and raised concerns that staff, pupils and parents would not receive enough support. You told us that Head Teachers may be overburdened by this arrangement. These views were echoed by primary and secondary pupils through Nairn Youth Forum. However, some respondents said that they would support a group school arrangement if there was an appropriate staffing structure in place or if schools were close to each other and not too large.

#### **What we will do**

We will develop plans for more group Head Teachers to manage larger groupings of schools. This will help to tackle the problems of Head Teacher recruitment. We will do this following discussions with Head Teachers and Unions and the number of schools managed by each Head Teacher will be assessed on a case by case basis. We expect to save £0.35m in 2014/15.

### **● ● ● SHORTENING THE SCHOOL DAY**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked if we should shorten the school day by 30 minutes per day for pupils in primaries 4 to 7. We wanted to save £3.2m by reducing the need for additional staff to cover this time. We also asked where you thought the 30 minutes each day could be found, if the proposal was to be introduced. Over 1,000 responses were fed back for each question from the Citizens' Panel. A further 1,000 responses were received for each question from other consultation methods, including responses from school pupils through Nairn Youth Forum.

#### **What you told us**

Views on shortening the school day were divided among Citizens' Panel members, with 47% of all respondents and 41% of respondents with school age children in favour of shortening the school day. However, most people who responded in other ways were against the proposal. They raised concerns about educational attainment, childcare, transport arrangements, the impact on teaching staff and the costs involved with redundancy payments. Several suggested that teachers' contracts should be renegotiated to include 25 hours of contact time a week rather than school time being shortened.

When asked where the 30 minutes each day could be found, 42% of Citizens' Panel respondents preferred lengthening morning or lunch breaks, believing that this would minimise disruption for working parents. However, we also heard that staff would need to be paid to supervise these breaks. People who responded in other ways were divided in their views, telling us that starting the day later or ending it earlier could facilitate traveling in the winter and during bad weather. However, they highlighted that wrap-around care would need to be provided.

### What we will do

We will not shorten the school day at present. However, we will take your comments and suggestions into account should we explore further options around the length of the school week in the future.

### ● ● ● ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SAVINGS

#### What we asked you

We asked for your suggestions on alternative savings, if the proposal to shorten the school day was not adopted. The Citizens' Panel were not asked to comment on this question, but over 250 responses were received through other consultation methods.

#### What you told us

The main areas you suggested we find savings were staffing costs, rationalising school estate, changing how teachers' time is distributed and making more use of technology. Some told us that no cuts should be made in education, as it was an important area which had already been required to make cuts.

#### What we will do

The Council agreed a number of savings from the Education budget at its meeting in February. These include finding 1% efficiency savings from the Additional Support Needs budget and, where appropriate, consolidation of Gaelic provision within Associated School Groups. We will consider the areas suggested by respondents when reviewing budgets going forward.

## PRE-SCHOOL

### ● ● ● NURSERY PROVISION

#### What we asked you

We wanted to know how we could rationalise nursery provision further and what models of nursery provision might work in Highland. The Citizens' Panel were not asked about this topic, but around 200 responses were fed back for each question from other consultation methods.

#### What you told us

Your suggestions for nursery provision included merging or closing nurseries with small rolls, not running separate Gaelic medium nurseries and combining nursery and primary provision. Some of you told us that nursery provision should not be changed or rationalised further, either because you felt that too many cuts had been made already or because you thought that the current provision worked well.

#### What we will do

We will consider the suggestions made on how we could rationalise nursery provision further going forward.





# WAYS OF WORKING



## PUBLIC ACCESS TO COUNCIL SERVICES

### ● ● ● PROVIDING SERVICES THROUGH LOCAL OUTLETS

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether you would be supportive of us providing more services through the Post Office or other local outlets. Over 1,030 responses were fed back from the Citizens' Panel and a further 250 responses were received from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

You told us that there was strong support for more services to be provided through the Post Office or other local outlets. This included 92% of Citizens' Panel respondents. We heard that this could improve access to Council services, especially in rural communities, and that it would provide valuable support for Post Offices. However, you also highlighted the importance of maintaining current levels of service.

#### **What we will do**

We will explore ways of delivering Council services through the Post Office or other providers and by delivering more services on-line. Along with changes in the way we interact with customers (detailed under 'Closing some Council facilities'), we expect to save £0.1m in 2014/15.

### ● ● ● CLOSING SOME COUNCIL FACILITIES

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know whether you would be in favour of closing some existing Council facilities if public access is increased in other ways. Nearly 1,020 views were received from Citizens' Panel members and a further 230 responses were fed back from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

You showed support for this proposal, but indicated that you were not as strongly in favour of increasing access to Council services if it involved closing some existing facilities. 72% of Citizens' Panel respondents said that they would be supportive of closing some existing Council facilities if public access was increased in other ways. Several of you told us that there were currently too many Council facilities and that we should rationalise and sell off any unused properties. However, as above, you stressed the importance of maintaining or improving service delivery at the alternative facilities.

#### **What we will do**

We will work on increasing service delivery through the internet, telephone and self-service.

### ● ● ● E-BILLING

#### **What we asked you**

We asked if you would be supportive of a move to introduce e-billing for Council Tax. The Citizens' Panel fed back 1,020 responses and a further 220 comments were received through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

You told us that you supported the introduction of e-billing, mentioning its use by many other organisations and its financial and environmental advantages. 71% of Citizens' Panel respondents were in favour of introducing e-billing, with respondents aged 25-44 showing the highest level of support. Although mainly supportive of e-billing, you stressed that it should not be compulsory since it may not suit everybody.

### What we will do

We will save £0.05m by introducing e-billing. This will be optional and we will ensure that people who do not want to participate do not have to.

## STAFFING

### EFFICIENCY

#### What we asked you

We asked what areas we should be considering to make us more efficient in our service delivery. This question was not asked of the Citizens' Panel but nearly 150 responses were received through other sources.

#### What you told us

Several of you believed that the Council should act more like a private company to become more efficient. You suggested that technology should be used more to help with meetings and public communication. Your other suggestions included more outsourcing, greater monitoring and reviewing of processes and some centralising or combining of Council departments.

#### What we will do

The Council agreed a number of efficiency savings at its meeting in February. These included efficiencies related to procurement, centralising of services in relation to Business Support and efficiencies through an increase in mobile and flexible working. Specific efficiency savings suggested will be considered when reviewing budgets going forward.

### SPENDING ON STAFF

#### What we asked you

We wanted to know if you thought that we should reduce our spending on staff and, if yes, how this should be done. Over 1,000 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 200 comments were gathered from other sources.

#### What you told us

You told us that there was strong support for reducing spending on staff, with around 80% of Citizens' Panel respondents in favour of this. You suggested, for example, that wages should be reviewed, staff and Councillor numbers cut or spend on expenses reduced.

#### What we will do

The Council has agreed to reduce staffing budgets across a number of services and departments. This includes management as well as front line staffing budgets. There has been a commitment to achieve this through vacancy management and re-deployment avoiding compulsory redundancy wherever possible. The total savings from management costs in 2014/15 will be £0.35m.

### LIVING WAGE AND 1% PAY SETTLEMENT

#### What we asked you

We asked whether we should support the Government-recommended public sector pay settlement of 1%, given that we have committed to introducing the living wage for lower paid staff. The Citizens' Panel fed back nearly 1,020 responses and a further 200 responses were received from other sources.

#### What you told us

68% of Citizens' Panel respondents supported the 1% pay settlement. Of the 32% who did not support it, around eight in ten preferred a settlement of a higher amount. People who responded through other consultation methods answered this question from different perspectives. Several of you told us that there should be a pay rise, instead of a pay freeze, citing rising costs of living and believing that this would boost the local economy. Others said specifically that the pay rise should be capped at 1%, telling us that this was in line with other organisations. Some of you felt that pay rises should only be given

to lower paid workers or stressed the importance of the living wage, regardless of whether a 1% pay settlement was introduced.

#### **What we will do**

We will introduce a living wage of £7.45 by 1st April 2013 to protect lowest paid staff. Provision has also been made for all staff to receive a 1% pay increase for the next two financial years. The pay settlement is agreed on a national basis.

## **CARE SERVICES**

### **● ● ● SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO LIVE LONGER IN OWN HOMES**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether the Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live longer in their own homes. Citizens' Panel members provided nearly 1,025 responses and a further 180 comments were received from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

You told us that there was very strong support for the Council and NHS Highland to do more to support people to live longer in their own homes. This included support from 96% of Citizens' Panel respondents. You mentioned the cost of residential care and the wellbeing of individuals as the main reasons for your support. However, you also highlighted that individuals' needs and wishes and the costs involved must be taken into account.

#### **What we will do**

We will work with NHS Highland to invest greater resources and widen the range of community activity and support and enable people to stay in their own homes for longer. This makes good professional sense, and it also makes good financial sense in the longer term.

### **● ● ● ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO ARRANGE THEIR OWN CARE**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether people should be encouraged to arrange their own care, if this can be done at less cost than the Council. We also wanted to know what we should do if people seek funding to make their own arrangements and a traditional service is no longer affordable for us to run. Around 1,000 responses were received for each of these questions from the Citizens' Panel, and a further 200 responses were fed back for each question through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

Many of you, including 85% of Citizens' Panel respondents, strongly supported encouraging people to arrange their own care, if this can be done at less cost than the Council. We heard that choice for individuals was important but that there was a need for services to be monitored to ensure that appropriate care was being provided.

Citizens' Panel members were less likely to support people arranging their own care if this impacts on the viability of Council services. Only 35% of respondents were in favour of this. Opinion was divided over what the Council should do if a traditional service is no longer affordable for the Council to run. Some felt that the Council service should be stopped or contracted out to other organisations. Others told us that the service should continue or that it should be changed to become more efficient.

#### **What we will do**

We have committed to implement self-directed support, which the Scottish Government is now legislating for, but we shall do so incrementally, seeking to safeguard traditional services as we move forward, and taking account of local needs. This will enable more people to arrange their own care, but also take account of the interests of those people who wish to continue to use the current services.

# WORKING WITH PARTNERS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

## ● ● ● WORKING WITH PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERS

### What we asked you

We wanted to know if we should be working more with public sector partners to share functions and reduce costs. We also asked for your suggestions for potential areas or functions where joint working would lead to savings. Over 1,020 responses were fed back from the Citizens' Panel on this topic and a further 170 comments were received from other sources.

### What you told us

We heard that there was very strong support for joint working with public sector partners, with 93% of Citizens' Panel members in favour of it. Several of you mentioned that there was duplication of work and services, which could be reduced through joint working. However, you highlighted the importance of services continuing to be run efficiently. Areas that you suggested for joint working included sharing buildings and back office functions, working with third sector organisations and volunteers and providing care and social services.

### What we will do

Continue to work with public sector partners to look for opportunities to share services and reduce costs.

## ● ● ● INTEGRATING SERVICES WITH THE NHS

### What we asked you

We wanted to know if you would support the NHS and the Council joining up services such as the management of health, education and social work. We believe that this could reduce management and administration costs. The Citizens' Panel did not answer any specific questions on this topic, but nearly 170 responses were received from other sources.

### What you told us

Many of you were in favour of the Council and the NHS having better integrated services, believing that this would lead to reduced bureaucracy, a more holistic service and reduced costs. However, some of you told us that, if services were to be integrated, there must be a reduction in management staff and clear roles and responsibilities agreed for each organisation. We heard that the integrated service must be better, and not just cheaper, than before.

### What we will do

We integrated health and care services in 2012. This was motivated by a commitment to achieve better services, and to help people to achieve better outcomes. We also believe it will save money by reducing bureaucracy, albeit in the longer term. We will save £0.1m over two years by collaborating and sharing functions with NHS Highland, including in ICT, HR, Property and Public Relations.

## ● ● ● EFFICIENCY SAVINGS FROM PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

### What we asked you

We asked whether, when buying services from other organisations, we should expect them to find efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity that the Council funds. We also wanted to know whether we should seek annual efficiency savings from private and third sector organisations when we are buying services in the future. For each of these questions, over 1,000 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 160 responses were fed back through other consultation methods.

### What you told us

We heard that there was support for both of the proposals. 80% of Citizens' Panel respondents believed that we should expect public and voluntary organisations to find efficiency savings of 3%, while 83% of Panel respondents thought that this should be the case for private organisations that the Council buys services from. Many of you felt that it was fair to expect savings to be spread across everyone, although some people thought that savings should not be sought from certain organisations, such as third sector groups. You told us that efficiency savings should only be sought if the service does not suffer and believed that savings should be negotiated as part of the tendering process.

### **What we will do**

We will give Highlife Highland a 3% per year efficiency target, saving £0.77m over two years. We have agreed with NHS Highland that the grant settlements from Government will be used as the future basis for funding both children's and adult services. This will incorporate the Government's efficiency targets.

### **● ● ● REDUCING GRANTS AND DISCRETIONARY FUNDING**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should consider reducing all grants and discretionary funding, in line with our efficiency targets. Over 1,020 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel on this topic and a further 200 responses were fed back from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

We heard that opinion was divided on this issue, with 58% of Citizens' Panel respondents believing that we should not consider reducing grants and discretionary funding. Many of you felt that the funding for each organisation should be considered individually, depending on their needs and the type of work carried out. You highlighted the importance of monitoring discretionary spend, to ensure that it was distributed fairly and offered value for money. Those in favour of reducing grants told us that organisations could seek funding from various other sources. However, those against the proposal felt that grants and discretionary funding were very important for recipients and enabled organisations to save and make money for the Council.

#### **What we will do**

We will not reduce all of our grants and discretionary funding this year. In 2013/14, we will maintain the existing grant level for most arts and sports organisations, as well as museums, heritage centres and youth and adult services. In 2014/15, we will reduce these grants by 3% per year, in line with our own efficiency targets. Grants to support Gaelic projects and to help maintain community facilities like village halls will be reduced by 3% in both years. We will also reduce funding to Eden Court and Inverness Leisure and will reduce our Ward Discretionary budgets. This will save £0.257mm over two years.

## **WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES**

### **● ● ● COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES TO CONTRIBUTE TO SERVICE PROVISION**

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know what additional activities your community could do to contribute to more efficient service provision. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on this topic, but nearly 140 responses were fed back through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

Your suggestions included communities taking on ground maintenance activities, helping to provide community care and childcare services, running community facilities and providing community transport. You also made suggestions about how these activities could be run. You told us that there should be clear organisers, such as Community Councils or voluntary groups, and that activities could be carried out by volunteers or individuals doing community service.

#### **What we will do**

We have established a £1m Community Challenge Fund, and welcome bids from communities who would like to deliver services at a local level.

### **● ● ● COMMUNITIES RUNNING SERVICES FOR THEMSELVES**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether communities should be encouraged to run services for themselves, with some support from the Council, where it will lead to overall savings. Citizens' Panel members fed back nearly 1,020 responses on this topic, and a further 180 responses were received from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

We heard that there was support for this proposal, with 84% of Citizens' Panel respondents telling us that

they were in favour of it. You believed that this approach would lead to improved service delivery and cost savings. However, you also pointed out that adequate funding and support must be provided and that communities should not be forced to provide services if they do not want to.

#### **What we will do**

We have established a £1m Community Challenge Fund, and welcome bids from communities who would like to deliver services at a local level.

### ● ● ● **HELPING COMMUNITY-RUN SERVICES TO BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE**

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted your suggestions on how we can help make the services which communities provide become more sustainable. Nearly 130 responses were received for this question.

#### **What you told us**

You suggested several ways that we could help communities, including providing funding, giving planning and start-up advice, ensuring effective lines of communication and providing training to community members. We heard that it was important for the Council to provide initial advice and funding, but that many organisations could then be run at 'arm's length', with minimal Council support. You highlighted that there must be a clear need for a service and that the opinions of communities have to be taken into account.

#### **What we will do**

We will consider these points as we assess submissions to the Community Challenge Fund and determine what support we can give to any organisation/community wishing to provide services.





# INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES



## INCOME GENERATION

### ● ● ● IDEAS FOR GENERATING INCOME

#### **What we asked you**

We asked for your suggestions on ways we should be exploring for the Council to generate income. The Citizens' Panel were not asked this question, but over 130 responses were fed back through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

Common suggestions for generating income were investing in energy generation schemes and raising Council Tax, especially for higher-value properties. Other suggestions included raising transport and parking charges and making use of advertising and sponsorship.

#### **What we will do**

The Council agreed a number of ways in which to generate income at their meeting in February. These included continuing to develop advertising and sponsorship opportunities and increasing income from our Industrial and Investment Property portfolio. We will also increase charges for some services, as detailed below. Your additional ideas for income generation will be considered going forward.

### ● ● ● INCREASING CHARGES ABOVE INFLATION

#### **What we asked you**

We asked if you would be prepared to support an increase in charges above inflation for certain services. We wanted to help generate extra income to maintain services. The Citizens' Panel provided around 1,000 responses for this question and a further 200 responses were gathered from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

**Car parking:** Opinion was divided over increasing car parking charges above inflation, with 50% of respondents in favour of it.

**Parking permits:** You were mainly in favour of increasing charges for parking permits above inflation, with 62% of Citizens' Panel respondents expressing this view.

**Ferry charges:** You told us that there was not strong support for increasing ferry charges above the level of inflation, with two thirds of Citizens' Panel members opposing this.

**School lets:** Opinion was divided over increasing charges for school lets, with 51% of Citizens' Panel respondents in favour of this. We heard that it was important to monitor prices so that they do not discourage potential users.

**Harbour charges:** There was support for increasing harbour charges, including from 64% of Citizens' Panel respondents. Several of you felt that charges should only be increased for leisure boats, and not for fishing vessels or other commercial boats.

**Burials and cremations:** Many of you did not support an increase in charges for burials and cremations, with 77% of Citizens' Panel respondents opposing this.

**In general:** Most of you were not generally in favour of an increase in charges above the level of inflation. 71% of Citizens' Panel respondents said that they were not willing to support this.

#### **What we will do**

We have decided to increase a range of charges. Generally fees and charges will increase by 4%.

Specifically there will be increased charges for car parking, parking permits and burials and cremations. We will increase harbour charges for leisure vessels, but this will not affect commercial fishing. We will introduce a new fare structure for the Corran Ferry and explore ways to reduce costs and increase income from school lets. Together, this will save nearly £1.26m.

### OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING CHARGES

#### What we asked you

We asked for your suggestions on other areas where you would support an increase in charges. Around 240 comments were provided by the Citizens' Panel and a further 110 responses were fed back from other sources.

#### What you told us

We heard that many of you would support an increase in Council Tax and business rates, as well as charges for services like building regulation and leisure services. Your other suggestions included increasing fines for offences like speeding and littering, and raising rents for Council houses and other Council buildings. Some of you said that we could introduce charges for some things, such as for certain car parks or for refuse collection.

#### What we will do

We will consider your suggestions for budgets going forward.

### PAYING OR CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS SERVICES

#### What we asked you

We asked whether people should have to pay for, or make a contribution towards, school transport or grass cutting for certain owner-occupiers of Council houses (Garden Aid). We currently do not charge for these services. The Citizens' Panel were not asked for their views on this topic but around 200 responses were fed back through other consultation methods.

#### What you told us

**School transport:** We heard that opinion was divided over whether people should pay for or make a contribution towards school transport. Some suggested that this should depend on income, the number of available seats or whether children were travelling to religious or language-based schools. We heard that introducing charges could penalise families in rural areas and lead to more parents taking their children to school by car. However, we also heard that it would be better to charge for school buses and maintain them, rather than losing them completely.

**Garden Aid:** You told us that there was support for people having to pay for, or make a contribution towards, their grass cutting. Some of you believed that whether people are charged for grass cutting should depend on their financial circumstances. You suggested that grass cutting could be undertaken by local volunteer groups or by people doing community service.

#### What we will do

We will introduce a charge of £1 per pupil per day for school transport. No charge will be made for pupils who are entitled to free school meals or who live further than two or three miles (depending on age) from their local school. This will save £0.12m over two years. We will save £0.02m by discontinuing Garden Aid.

## PROPERTY AND CAPITAL

### COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING

#### What we asked you

We wanted to know whether we should invest in building more Council houses. Over 1,040 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 200 responses were fed back through other consultation methods.

### **What you told us**

We heard that many of you, including 84% of Citizens' Panel respondents, supported the building of more Council houses. You felt that this was necessary and would be a good investment, encouraging local economic growth. However, we also heard that there should not be a right to buy on new Council houses and that the developments must be cost-effective in the long run.

### **What we will do**

We have committed to building at least 600 new Council houses by 2017. This year, we will increase Council house rents by 2% (1% lower than inflation) to enable the building of 69 additional Council houses.

## **MORTGAGE GUARANTEE SCHEME**

### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should introduce a mortgage guarantee scheme to assist people in buying their own homes. This would help home-owners to meet lenders' mortgage deposit requirements. Over 1,020 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 200 comments were fed back from other sources.

### **What you told us**

Seven in ten Citizens' Panel members agreed that the Council should introduce a mortgage guarantee scheme. Responses from the overall consultation were more divided. Some of you felt that it was necessary to help young families, single people and people on benefit own their own homes. However, others told us that it should not be the Council's responsibility. You thought that it should be left to banks or run as part of a national scheme. We also heard concerns that this could encourage people to get into debt that they have difficulty getting out of.

### **What we will do**

We are currently evaluating options for supporting a mortgage guarantee scheme.

## **EMPTY PRIVATE PROPERTIES**

### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know what we can do to bring empty private properties back into use. Over 720 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 180 responses were fed back from other sources.

### **What you told us**

We heard that it was important to take action on these properties, since they were an eyesore and damaging to the local economy. You suggested that we should impose penalties on the owners of these properties, including charging at least a full rate of Council Tax. You also proposed that we buy, renovate and then sell or rent empty properties. An alternative approach was to work with owners of empty properties, offering them advice and incentives to bring their properties back into use. We heard that reducing business rates and rents could help with encouraging properties to be used for commercial purposes.

### **What we will do**

We will charge a full rate of Council Tax on long-term empty properties. The additional income will be retained locally, with the Council deciding how it is used. We are identifying and writing to owners of empty homes offering to help with advice and possible grant support to help bring these back into use.

## **INVESTING IN CAPITAL BUDGET**

### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should invest more in the capital budget, bearing in mind that corresponding savings would need to be made from the revenue budget to cover this. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on this topic, but nearly 160 comments were fed back through other consultation methods.

### **What you told us**

Many of you told us that this was not appropriate in the current economic situation, as the Council

did not have money to spare. You believed that we should instead focus on retaining existing Council services and maintaining current stock. We heard that capital funding should come from other sources, such as the Government. However, several of you were in favour of investing more in the capital budget, telling us that it would create jobs and generate revenue for the Council.

#### **What we will do**

We will consider your views when developing a new longer-term 10 year capital programme to be agreed in summer 2013.

## **PURCHASING SERVICES**

### **● ● ● DETERMINING MOST EFFICIENT WAY OF DELIVERING SERVICES**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should carry out further work to determine whether it is more efficient to deliver services in-house or through an external provider. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on this topic, but 150 responses were received through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

We heard that there was support for this research being carried out. You believed that the Council should work for continuous improvement and that money spent on research would pay off in the long-term. However, a number of you told us that we should concentrate on providing effective in-house services rather than carrying out further research.

### **● ● ● USING EXTERNAL PROVIDERS**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should pay an external provider to deliver a service if this was more efficient than providing it in-house. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on this topic, but nearly 190 responses were received from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

There was support for services being run by an external provider, but only if service quality is maintained. You told us that the service must be run cost-effectively, that the service provider's employees must be treated fairly and that local providers should be used.

### **● ● ● CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXTERNAL PROVIDERS**

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know what else we should consider in addition to contract cost when paying another provider to deliver a service. Over 1,040 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 160 comments were fed back through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

You told us that local jobs (selected by 87% of Citizens' Panel respondents), quality of service (selected by 83% of Panel respondents) and the localness of a contractor were important factors to consider. Other factors you thought we should consider included long-term sustainability (54% of Panel respondents), wider community benefit (63% of Panel respondents), fair conditions for employees and staff training and development.

### **● ● ● REQUIREMENT TO OFFER APPRENTICESHIPS/TRAINING SCHEMES**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether, when buying goods or services, we should include a requirement to offer apprenticeships or training schemes, where appropriate. Over 1,040 responses were fed back from the Citizens' Panel and a further 180 comments were received from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

We heard that there was support for introducing this requirement. Around two thirds of Citizens' Panel respondents believed that the provision of apprenticeships and training opportunities should be considered when we are paying another provider to provide a service. 54% of Panel members felt the same about youth employment. We heard that it was very important to invest in young people and

encourage them to stay in the Highlands. However, you told us that this should not be introduced at the cost of a saving and highlighted that it would not be practical for all organisations.

### ● ● ● HELPING LOCAL BUSINESSES TO COMPETE FOR COUNCIL CONTRACTS

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know how we can help make local businesses more able to compete for Council contracts. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on this topic but over 130 responses were received through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

Your suggestions included simplifying the tendering process, reducing red tape, offering smaller and more local contracts and providing advice to local contractors. You also said that we should give preference to local suppliers and consider value for money, rather than just cost.

#### **What we will do**

The Council is currently carrying out a review of its Procurement operations which is due to be reported to its Finance, Housing, and Resources Committee later this year. Your responses will be taken into account in the formulation of any recommendations for change and improvement.

## PRIORITISING SERVICES

### ● ● ● FOCUSING OUR RESOURCES

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know, in the context of a flat grant settlement, where we should concentrate our resources. We also asked where you would reduce activity or stop delivering services in order to finance your priorities. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on this topic but around 130 responses were fed back through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

The key areas where you suggested we concentrate our resources were education, social services, social care and roads. Other areas that were considered important included health, housing, core and front line services and policing.

Areas where you suggested reducing or stopping activity included some parts of education, especially Gaelic education, as well as ground maintenance, street lighting, heating and leisure and the arts.

#### **What we will do**

We will consider your views on prioritising services when reviewing budgets going forward.

## PREVENTATIVE SPEND

### ● ● ● INVESTING FOR THE FUTURE

#### **What we asked you**

We asked for your ideas on what areas we could spend money on now that may reduce spending in the future. The Citizens' Panel were not asked about preventative spend, but 110 responses were received from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

Your suggestions included spending on road repairs, education, training and employment schemes, efficient energy provision, housing and maintaining and merging Council buildings.

#### **What we will do**

We will spend £3m on preventative spend each year, focussing on three main areas: early years, older people and tackling deprivation. For example, we will increase the number of Public Health Nurses and Community Midwives in the Highlands and invest in developing work skills for young people.

# THE ENVIRONMENT



## ENERGY

### ● ● ● COUNCIL REDUCING ENERGY

#### **What we asked you**

We have put a range of measures in place to make us more energy efficient, such as using more renewable energy sources and reducing our amount of business travel. We asked you what else we should do to reduce energy. Nearly 150 comments were received for this question.

#### **What you told us**

You suggested that we reduce energy use in Council buildings. This could be achieved by mothballing or closing used buildings and by making existing facilities more energy efficient in terms of heating and lighting. We heard that we should reduce energy used for street lighting, for example by turning it off entirely or dimming lights. A further suggestion was to invest in renewables, which would reduce energy costs and generate further income. You also mentioned reducing energy used for transport and increasing the use of video or tele-conferencing.

#### **What we will do**

We will consider the suggestions made by respondents as we go forward to continue to make the Council more energy efficient.

### ● ● ● INVESTING IN RENEWABLES AND ENERGY GENERATION SCHEMES

#### **What we asked you**

We asked you whether we should continue to invest in renewables and in energy generation schemes. Nearly 1,010 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 160 comments were fed back through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

You generally supported investment in renewables and energy generation schemes, with 81% of Citizens' Panel respondents agreeing that we should invest further in energy generation schemes (the Citizens' Panel were not asked about investing in renewables). However, you highlighted that investment in such schemes must have financial and other benefits. You suggested that we should invest in areas like hydro schemes, wood boilers and solar panels. However, your views were divided on whether more wind turbines should be built.

#### **What we will do**

We will explore options for energy generation schemes, based on a business case approach considering costs, risks and benefits.

## STREET LIGHTING

### ● ● ● REDUCTIONS IN COSTS FROM STREET LIGHTING

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should continue to look for reductions in costs from street lighting. In particular, we wanted to know whether we should switch off street lights between midnight and 6 am in smaller communities and switch to LED lights in urban areas. Over 1,030 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel on the topic of street lighting, and around 200 further responses were fed back from other sources.



### **What you told us**

You told us that there was strong support for exploring further cost reductions from street lighting. This included 84% of Citizens' Panel members. Your suggestions included dimming lights, reducing the number of street lights or using more energy efficient lights. We also heard that the times lights go on and off should be reviewed and that Council buildings should not be lit when they are empty. However, you highlighted the importance of considering safety when reducing or switching off lights.

We heard that you were generally in favour of switching to LED lighting in urban areas and switching lighting off entirely in smaller communities. Some suggested that both of these measures could be applied to both rural and urban areas. Some respondents were concerned about the safety of switching lights off completely in rural areas. Instead, they suggested reducing or dimming lights, or using sensor controlled lighting.

### **What we will do**

We will consider the economic case for replacing existing street lights with low energy LED lights as part of the review of our Capital Programme. We will also seek to identify areas where street lights can be switched off between midnight and 6am, or completely in summer months. This will be agreed on a community by community basis.

## **WASTE**

### **● ● ● REDUCING WASTE AND INCREASING RECYCLING**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked for your suggestions on what communities could do to decrease the amount of waste produced and increase the level of recycling. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on this topic, but over 160 responses were received through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

You mainly provided suggestions of things the Council could do to help communities decrease waste and increase the level of recycling. Your suggestions included having more local recycling points, recycling a wider range of materials, encouraging more involvement from retailers, educating people about recycling and supporting local composting schemes.

#### **What we will do**

We will consider your ideas when exploring ways to decrease waste and increase the level of recycling going forward.

### **● ● ● GREEN WASTE COLLECTION**

#### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should stop the collection of green waste between December and February. We wanted to save £30,000 each year. Over 1,020 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 200 responses were fed back from other sources.

#### **What you told us**

There was strong support for this proposal, with 91% of Citizens' Panel members in favour of it. We heard that a small amount of green waste is produced during this time as there are fewer daylight hours to garden and not many plants are growing. Several of you told us that green waste collection could be stopped over a longer period, for example from October to May. You highlighted that alternative provision, like local recycling centres or compost sites, must be easily accessible.

#### **What we will do**

We will save £0.04m by stopping green waste collections between December and February. This will also provide additional staff to help cover other services over the Christmas and New Year period.

## ● ● ● LOCAL WASTE TREATMENT FACILITIES

### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know whether we should introduce local waste treatment facilities which would see more waste treated within the Highlands. The Citizens' Panel provided over 1,030 responses and a further 180 responses were received through other consultation methods.

### **What you told us**

You told us that you supported the introduction of local waste treatment facilities. This included nearly three quarters of Citizens' Panel respondents. We heard that this would be environmentally friendly, encourage sustainability of communities and improve job prospects. Some of you felt that you needed more specific information to make a decision, while others stressed that the developments must be cost-effective and sited appropriately.

### **What we will do**

We will consider your views when reviewing and re-designing our waste treatment service. This will include the creation of a green waste composting facility at Longman, allowing us to bring this service in-house and save £0.1m.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

## ● ● ● GRASS CUTTING AND FLOWER BED MAINTENANCE

### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should reduce the frequency of grass cutting on road side verges, the frequency of grass cutting in towns and villages, and/or the number of flower beds maintained. Over 1,020 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 200 responses were fed back through other sources.

### **What you told us**

Citizens' Panel respondents tended not to be in favour of a reduction in frequency: 42% of Citizens' Panel members believed that we should reduce the number of flower beds maintained, 37% felt that we should reduce the frequency of grass-cutting on road side verges and around one third were in favour of reducing the frequency of grass-cutting in towns and villages. However, people who responded in other ways were generally in favour of reducing the frequency of these services.

Those in favour of reducing these services told us that they were not a priority and that a reduction in grass-cutting could have a positive effect on bio-diversity. Many suggested that these services could be provided by community groups, unemployed people or people on community service. Some of you expressed concerns about the impact on tourism, and highlighted road safety concerns in relation to road side verges.

### **What we will do**

There were no proposals in the Council's budget which involved a reduction in the current level of service.

## ● ● ● STREET CLEANING AND LITTER PICKING

### **What we asked you**

We asked whether we should reduce the frequency of street cleaning and litter picking. Over 1,010 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel and a further 200 responses were fed back from other sources.

### **What you told us**

We heard that you were generally against the reduction of this service. 84% of Citizens' Panel members were against reducing the frequency of litter picking and 82% were against reducing the frequency of

street cleaning. We heard that the service had already been cut and should not be cut further. You told us that people are less likely to care for the environment if it is already dirty and raised concerns that this would have a negative impact on tourism. You did suggest that the public should take more responsibility for their local area, including the involvement of school or youth groups, people on community service or unemployed people in providing street cleaning and litter picking services.

#### **What we will do**

There were no proposals in the Council's budget which involved a reduction in the current level of service.

### **● ● ● COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

#### **What we asked you**

We wanted to know if you felt that communities could do more to maintain their environment, with support from the Council. We proposed that this would lead to an overall longer term reduction in costs. The Citizens' Panel were not asked any specific questions on this topic but nearly 160 responses were fed back through other consultation methods.

#### **What you told us**

You told us that there was strong support for communities doing more to maintain their environment. We heard that many communities already participate in activities like litter picking and flowerbed maintenance, and that more of these could be taken on locally. You highlighted that communities should work with the Council to identify areas that they could take on and told us that financial support must be provided.

#### **What we will do**

The Council has set up a Community Challenge fund which will provide funding to community groups who develop proposals to deliver existing services more effectively.

