

**Budget Consultation**  
Co-chomhairle Buidseit **2012**



The Highland Council  
**Consultation Analysis**  
**Infrastructure**  
**& Resources**

# Budget Consultation 2012

## Infrastructure and Resources

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### **Income Generation**

***What other areas should we be exploring in order to generate income for the Council e.g. providing services to other Local Authorities or energy generation schemes?***

*and*

***For which of the following would you be prepared to support an increase in all, or some, of these charges above inflation to help generate additional income to maintain services?***

*and*

***Do you have suggestions about other areas where you would support an increase in charges?***

*and*

***Generally, are you willing to support an increase in charges above the level of inflation?***

*And*

***Should people have to pay for, or make a contribution towards the following services:***

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***What other areas should we be exploring in order to generate income for the Council e.g. providing services to other Local Authorities or energy generation schemes?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

*The Citizens' Panel were not asked any specific questions about generating income.*

### **Qualitative Analysis**

135 separate responses were received on the question *What other areas should we be exploring in order to generate income for the Council e.g. providing services to other Local Authorities or energy generation schemes?* Responses were mainly received from individuals through the online questionnaire, email comments and posted forms and through discussions at ward forums. Organisations expressing their views included Community Councils and Parent Councils. Responses were also

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generated from discussions at focus groups with People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Many respondents were in favour of generating income through energy generation schemes. Raising Council Tax, raising transport and parking charges and making use of advertising and sponsorship were also common suggestions. Some respondents expressed concern about the Council attempting to generate income.

### ***Ideas for generating income***

#### ***Energy generation schemes***

Many respondents suggested that income should be generated through energy generation schemes. This included the use of solar panels, wind turbines, hydro power, biomass and a range of small renewable energy systems.

Several respondents suggested placing solar panels on the roofs of all Council buildings, and requiring solar panels to be installed on all new builds. It was suggested that solar panels should be used to heat water in toilets, as in Thurso, and that lamp posts should have solar panels and batteries, like in several other countries. Respondents proposed that solar panels should be installed on the roofs of Council houses or private properties, noting that the Council could obtain hardware more cheaply than individuals could. It was suggested that the Council could provide the hardware and installation, but receive all of the profit until the owner bought them out, or that the Council could take all of the profit while the homeowner paid a monthly fee towards their own energy use.

Some respondents suggested building more Council-run wind farms, and possibly selling surplus energy to the grid. One respondent suggested arranging to erect Council owned turbines as part of planning consent for commercial development. For example, for a 20 turbine development, there could be an additional Council owned turbine. The infrastructure costs would be covered by the developer and all of the income would go to the Council. It was also suggested that greater incentives should be given for individuals to have wind turbines in their gardens.

A further group of respondents suggested encouraging community ownership of wind turbines, reporting that Common Good funds should be revisited to assist with ownership of wind turbines. One respondent noted that turbines which had been switched off at schools and village halls should be turned on again, so that they can continue generating income.

There were also suggestions regarding the development of hydro and biomass energy generation schemes. One respondent proposed damming Loch Carron and building a road over the tidal power generator.

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Some views were also expressed about increasing the use of small renewable energy systems, such as photovoltaics, micro hydro and small wind turbines. It was suggested generally that feed in tariffs should be used on Council stock.

Although there was much support for raising income through energy generation schemes, some respondents commented that this should be subject to certain conditions. One respondent reported that this must be subject to proper consultation and serious cost/benefit analysis, commenting that this had not been done when wind turbines were installed in school grounds. It was noted that the effect on the environment should be considered, as tourism is a large part of the Highland economy, and one respondent commented that energy generation schemes should not be encouraged unless they are long term.

One or two respondents were completely opposed to creating more energy generation schemes, reporting that they were a waste of money and that there are enough ineffective wind turbines as it is.

### ***Council Tax***

A number of respondents suggested lobbying the Scottish Government to allow an increase in Council Tax. They reported that this would be preferable to charges increasing in many different services, and that it would enable services to be continued at current levels.

Several respondents proposed reviewing Council Tax banding on properties that have been extended or those worth more than, for example, £500,000. It was suggested that holiday homes should be charged the full Council Tax rate, and one respondent noted that unpaid Non-Domestic Rates should be chased in a more determined way.

### ***Transport and parking charges***

A number of respondents suggested introducing charges to park in Council car parks. It was noted that all employees should be charged to use Council parking spaces, with employees who had named or reserved parking spaces being charged more. This was mentioned in relation to the car parks at the Council Headquarters and on Castle Street in Inverness. Some respondents also reported that many visitors to Eden Court use the car park at Council Headquarters and suggested that a charge could be introduced for these users. One respondent proposed introducing a parking levy for all work places, as has been done in Nottingham City.

One view expressed was that, instead of providing school transport, parents could be given the option of taking their child to school with a mileage rate paid. It was also suggested that individuals over 65 should pay a small fee to use buses, instead of travelling for free. A further suggestion was that road tolls be introduced to pay for

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winter maintenance. They commented that, if a tax policy was clearly marketed and its proceeds ringfenced, people would be more accepting of it.

### ***Advertising and sponsorship***

Several respondents suggested introducing carefully selected advertising on Council vehicles, such as the back door of vans, as well as on litter bins and walls.

It was noted that businesses should be encouraged to „adopt“ a facility or road, or sponsor a capital project, such as road improvements. Sponsorship boards could be erected to recognise their contribution, and appropriate sponsorship could be sought, such as Nike for sports facilities. It was suggested that, if the sponsors were tradespeople, they could help with the upkeep of the facility and give their time in kind.

A respondent suggested that companies and unions should be asked to sponsor half an hour a week of primary education, so that this would not be reduced. The sponsorship could be tax deductible.

### ***Using or selling empty facilities***

It was suggested that empty spaces, buildings and function rooms should be rented to outside users. It was reported that the European Leader programme had excellent examples of this being done elsewhere in the UK. The proposal was made in particular in relation to school facilities outwith teaching time, with the suggestion that school hostels could be used for bunkhouses in the summer. One or two respondents suggested that income could be raised from wraparound care in schools or nurseries. It was also suggested that available space could be rented out as storage facilities to the Council's contractors.

One or two respondents suggested that the Council should review its land and assets and sell some of its property.

### ***Tourism, events and entertainment***

Some respondents proposed the creation of a tourist tax for visitors, which could be a percentage on the rate of bed and breakfast rooms. It was also suggested that there could be permits for caravans and mobile homes to be driven.

Some respondents suggested opening more tourist attractions or charging for entry to existing ones. A respondent noted that local resources should be used for new tourist attractions, giving the example of talented art students at Inverness College. Respondents suggested charging for entry to Inverness Museum and Town House and to the Highland Folk Museum. It was proposed that a commercial restaurant should be set up at the Folk Museum, with a glass front and sides to take advantage of good views.

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A further suggestion was the creation of an Inverness Winter Festival, with entertainment such as comedy or music. During the festival, venues could pay for extended licences. A respondent suggested that the Council should work with cruise liners to generate income.

One respondent suggested that the Council should introduce a club lottery, similar to several other organisations.

### ***Fines***

A number of respondents felt that more income could be raised through fines if it was ensured that these were followed through and collected. Respondents mentioned fines for littering, fly tipping, dog fouling, parking offences, speeding and drunk driving. A respondent noted that individuals should be encouraged to report people who commit benefit fraud.

### ***Provide services or resources to others***

Some respondents suggested selling services or resources to other local authorities, private organisations or individuals. It was suggested that the Council organise a consultancy to sell the knowledge and skills of Council employees or other Highland residents to outside organisations. It was suggested that the Council should hire out key staff to other Local Authorities, rather than them using private sector consultants.

A respondent suggested asking talented teachers to create educational resources to sell to other local authorities.

A further option suggested was providing a checking and re-drafting service on basic wills for individuals, on the condition that a small amount is left to the Council or a Council run facility. It was noted that this would also help to reduce the number of people who died without a proper will in place.

A number of respondents suggested ways that the Council could save money by sharing services with other organisations. These comments have been included with the analysis of responses to the question on working with public sector partners.

One respondent raised questions about providing services to other local authorities, noting that they would be unlikely to buy services from the Highland Council if they were in a similar economic situation.

### ***'Community benefit' and charges for organisations***

One or two respondents suggested that community benefit, similar to that paid for wind farms, should be demanded from Scottish Hydro for pylons, Scotrail/Railtrack for railways and forestry and logging companies for roads. Another respondent noted that road improvement funding should be demanded from wind farm developers and road maintenance costs sought from Forestry Commission Scotland. It was noted



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that electric companies should be charged more for working on roads and that there should be a local energy tax on all energy producers.

### ***Introducing charges for other services***

One or two respondents proposed introducing charges for recycling. One respondent suggested introducing charges for other services that are currently free, such as library use.

### ***Encourage local business***

A small number of respondents suggested encouraging local businesses by reducing business rates. It was noted that this would generate more rates overall, and that more jobs would also be created. Respondents also suggested creating a low tax industry park for software companies, and reducing red tape for aquaculture businesses. One respondent suggested creating devolved development companies, which can be funded partly by the Council and partly by sources not available to the Council.

### ***Local fundraising***

One or two respondents suggested gathering local fundraising ideas, for example by consulting Community Councils. To raise money for education, a respondent proposed asking pupils to pay £1 to wear their own clothes once a week.

### ***Influencing Scottish Government***

One respondent suggested trying to influence the availability of funds from the Scottish Government, while another proposed demanding that it hurried the dualling of the A9, which would encourage business investment and tourism. One or two respondents stated that they would not like prescriptions to be provided for free, and one respondent suggested that students should contribute to university fees.

### ***Housing***

It was suggested that private landlords should pay more for landlord registration. A respondent noted that Council house owners should do their own repairs and pay costs if they damage their homes.

### ***Donations instead of charges***

Respondents at one focus group suggested asking for donations for services instead of charges, in the hope that members of the public would provide generous donations. It was suggested that schools could ask for donations or legacies.

### ***Concerns about Council generating income***

A minority of respondents expressed concerns about the Council attempting to generate income. Some respondents commented that the Council should be focussing on providing effective existing services, rather than generating income.

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One or two respondents believed that the Council did not have enough business knowledge to generate income effectively. It was suggested that, if the Council had income generation ideas, it should issue a tender for the provision of the scheme with a generous return to the Council built in to the contract. This would mean that the Council would get the income without the risk.

One respondent reported that they would support the generation of income, but not to the detriment of private businesses.

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***For which of the following would you be prepared to support an increase in all, or some, of these charges above inflation to help generate additional income to maintain services?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Citizens' Panel respondents were asked a series of questions regarding charging. The first of these was: "We already charge for a number of services listed below. For which of the following would you be prepared to support an increase in all, or some, of these charges above inflation to help generate additional income to maintain services?" Their views are found in the table below.

**Respondents' views on whether they would be prepared to support an increase in charges above inflation for the specified services**

<b>or which of the following would you be prepared to support an increase in all, or some, of these charges above inflation to help generate additional income to maintain services?"</b>	<b>Yes %</b>	<b>No %</b>	<b>Total %</b>
<b>Harbour charges</b>	64	36	100
<b>Parking permits</b>	62	38	100
<b>School lets</b>	51	49	100
<b>Car parking</b>	50	50	100
<b>Ferry charges</b>	33	67	100
<b>Burials and cremations</b>	23	77	100

*N=976-1,007*

The views highlight that a clear majority of respondents favour an above inflation increase in the following services:

- **Harbour charges** – 64% support an increase while 36% do not;
- **Parking permits** – 62% support an increase while 38% do not.

Opinion regarding an above inflation rise in school let and car parking charges is divided:

- 51% support an increase in **school let** charges while 49% do not (with 54% of parents with school age children opposing such a rise);
- 50% support an increase in **car parking** charges (support for a rise being highest amongst those who are unemployed – 65% - and those unable to work – 62%) while 50% do not.

There are two sets of charges where a majority are opposed to above inflation rises:

- **Burials and cremations** – 77% oppose and 23% support such a rise;
- **Ferry charges** – 67% oppose and 33% support such an increase.

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### **Qualitative Analysis**

Responses on the question *For which of the following would you be prepared to support an increase in all, or some, of these charges above inflation to help generate additional income to maintain services?* were mainly received through the online questionnaire, posted forms and discussions at ward forums. Organisations that expressed their views included Community Councils and a Parent Council. Responses were also received from discussions at focus groups with People First, Sight Action and Highland Youth Voice.

Most of the response forms for this question allowed only the answers „yes“ or „no“. However, on some forms and at forums and focus groups, some respondents provided additional comments.

### ***Car parking***

205 separate responses were received on the topic of increasing charges for car parking above inflation.

*In the main respondents were in favour of increasing charges for car parking, however there was a body of opinion against this suggestion.*

Of those respondents in favour of increasing charges and commenting, they noted that a small increase would be worth the total savings.

Respondents who were not in favour of increased parking charges, and had provided comments related to this, noted that increasing parking charges may be detrimental to town and city centre trade, affecting the local economy. Attendees at the Dingwall ward forum noted that they would not support an increase in parking charges in Dingwall.

One respondent suggested that parking charges should be raised only during tourist season, although another raised concern about knock-on effects on tourism. Another respondent proposed having the first hour or two free, and then introducing higher charges for longer stays. One respondent commented that increasing parking charges would encourage out of town development.

### ***Parking permits***

201 separate responses were received on the topic of increasing charges for parking permits above the level of inflation.

*Respondents were mainly in favour of increasing charges for parking permits.*

Amongst the comments received on this issue, some respondents suggested that there should be parking permits in every area of Inverness, while others commented that an increase would be acceptable for on-street parking in residential areas. One respondent noted that parking permit charges should only be increased in cities. Respondents at one ward forum queried the effect on blue badge holders.

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### **Ferry charges**

194 separate responses were received on the topic of increasing ferry charges above the level of inflation.

*Most respondents were not in favour of increasing ferry charges.*

From the comments received on this matter it was noted that this charge would be likely to be added to the cost of the goods that are being transported. A respondent expressed concern that, along with fuel duty and longer journey times, increasing ferry charges would lead to fewer jobs in rural areas, as they would be too expensive to access.

It was suggested that there could be increased charges for tourists, but subsidies for locals using ferries. However, one respondent was concerned about the impact this could have on tourism. A further view was that increased ferry charges should be applied to cyclists, pedestrians and motor homes, but not to car users.

### **School lets**

193 separate responses were received on the topic of increasing charges for school lets above the level of inflation.

*Opinion was divided over whether to increase charges for school lets.*

Respondents commenting felt that schools should be used to generate money when they are not being used for teaching, but that prices should be monitored so they were not prohibitive to potential users. One group of respondents noted that market level charges should be made, but another felt that charges should not be increased for community groups. Members of one focus group commented that community centres should be used in preference to school halls to prevent the former closing.

### **Harbour charges**

195 separate responses were received on the topic of increasing harbour charges above the level of inflation.

*In the main respondents were in favour of increasing harbour charges, although there were also views against the proposal.*

Many respondents who provided comments stated that charges should only be increased for leisure boats, not for fishing vessels or other commercial boats. One respondent was concerned that an increase in charges would be added to the cost of goods that are being transported.

### **Burials and cremations**

195 separate responses were received on the topic of increasing charges for burials and cremations above the level of inflation.

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*Most respondents were not in favour of increasing charges for burials and cremations.*

Several respondents commented that burials and cremations are already very expensive and that the costs already increase every year. Some respondents noted that everyone has to get buried or cremated at some point, and that they did not approve of increasing the cost of dying.

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## **Infrastructure and Resources**

***Do you have suggestions about other areas where you would support an increase in charges?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

*The Citizens' Panel were not asked any quantitative questions on other areas where charges could be increased.*

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The Citizens' Panel and respondents to the consultation in general provided comments on Income Generation. These are both provided below.

### ***Citizens' Panel Comments***

239 comments were received from the Citizens' Panel in response to the question, 'Do you have suggestions about other areas where you would support an increase in charges?' Some respondents suggested areas where they would support an increase in charges, while others proposed *introducing* charges for certain services. There were also some respondents who argued against increasing charges at all.

### ***Suggestions for increasing charges***

Respondents to the Citizens' Panel survey stated that they would support increases in Council Tax and fines, as well for certain services, such as leisure services and obtaining planning permission. A small number of respondents reported that they would support an increase in charges in all areas or for any area where an alternative exists, such as car parking when there is the option of travelling by bus.

#### ***Council Tax***

Many respondents supported an increase in Council Tax, particularly for people with larger homes or homes with a high value. Several respondents were in favour of increasing Council Tax on unoccupied properties or holiday homes, stating that communities were disadvantaged if the owners were not there to patronise shops and services. One respondent suggested that Council Tax should be means tested and paid for by individuals rather than a household and another that stated that voluntary increases at the rate of inflation could be requested from those who can afford it. A respondent noted that Council Tax should only be raised if the community has a say on where it is spent.

#### ***Leisure, learning and events***

Several respondents noted that they would support an increase in Highlife Highland subscription fees and charges for AstroTurf use. One respondent noted that discounts for pensioners and those on benefits should be retained. However, another felt that the discounted entry price should be increased slightly.

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Some respondents supported an increase in charges related to events. One or two mentioned increasing charges for street markets and part time stalls. One view was that charges should be increased for services related to profit-making sporting events, with another suggestion that higher entry charges should be made for events which incurred an additional cost for the Council.

A small number of respondents felt that charges should be increased for museum entry, after school clubs, adult learning, alcohol and nightlife.

### ***Planning permission and building regulation***

A number of respondents felt that charges could be increased for planning permission and building regulation services, particularly for private companies, large projects and wind farm applications.

### ***Fines***

There were a range of views related to the increase in fines. It was suggested that an increase in fines could be levied for late library books, parking in disabled spaces, speeding, not having a current tax disk, and for dog fouling and littering. It was noted that on the spot fines should be introduced for littering, and that fines paid for speeding should stay within the village or city in which the driver was speeding.

### ***Rents and costs for Council houses and other buildings***

Respondents suggested that Council house rent should be increased, especially for those with extra bedrooms or gardens. It was proposed that a rent increase could be means tested or dependant on the number of wage earners in a household. One or two respondents suggested that charges could be increased for Council house repairs and home or garden clearances where tenants refuse to do this themselves.

Some respondents reported that charges should be increased for hiring halls and other Council buildings for events such as conferences. However, it was noted that this should only apply to businesses, and not charities or other non-profit making groups. A review of rent paid by large businesses, such as supermarkets, was suggested.

### ***Licensing and birth and marriage registration***

Some respondents supported an increase in charges for licenses, mentioning gambling, alcohol and taxi licenses, and late extensions for pubs and clubs.

A small number of respondents suggested an increase in charges for marriage licenses or for the registration of births and marriages.



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### ***Refuse collection and the environment***

A number of respondents supported an increase in charges for the removal of large items of waste. One respondent suggested that charges should be increased for allotments.

### ***Travel and transport***

A small number of respondents noted that school transport charges should be increased. One suggestion was made that bridge tolls should be increased.

### ***Additional suggestions***

Respondents made some additional suggestions of areas where they would support an increase in charges above the level of inflation. These included:

- Public toilets
- School meals
- Advertising charges

## ***Suggestions for introducing charges***

### **Travel and transport**

#### ***Parking***

A number of respondents suggested circumstances in which parking charges could be introduced. It was noted that parking charges at hospitals, particularly Raigmore, should be reintroduced, with a £1 fee suggested. Several respondents suggested that parking charges should be made at Council buildings for staff and other users. It was proposed that Council building car parks should be open to the public at weekends, with an appropriate charge made. One respondent supported charges being introduced for parking close to reopened rail stations.

Some respondents reported that charges should be made for out-of-town parking, particularly at retail parks. One respondent commented that this charge should be covered by the retailers, not the customers. It was suggested that retailers in town and city centres subsidise parking, to encourage shoppers into towns.

One respondent suggested that homes with more than one car should be charged a parking fee, while another proposed making an extra charge for 4 x 4 vehicles in car parks. A respondent suggested that there should be an initial one-off payment for a disabled parking sticker.

#### ***Older person's bus pass***

Several respondents felt that bus passes for pensioners should be limited, or that a small charge should be made for bus travel. Respondents suggested that pensioners should pay a small fixed fee for bus travel, such as £1 or 50p, or that they should travel for half of the normal fare. Alternatively, an initial nominal charge could be

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made when the card is issued, or the number of journeys allowed in a week could be limited. One respondent suggested raising the minimum age for the pass to 65, while another proposed that they should only be given, on application, to people who need them.

### *Charges for walkers and cyclists*

One or two respondents suggested that cyclists should pay insurance, or that tax on permits for cycle use should be introduced. Another suggested that there should be a charge for cycling or walking routes, with an exemption for disabled people.

### *Toll charges*

One respondent proposed that tolls should be charged for use of the A9.

### Environmental services

Several respondents supported charges being introduced for refuse collection, stating that this could depend on the amount of waste collected. It was suggested by one respondent that a charge should be made for entry to recycling centres.

It was proposed that there should be an increase in the charges for supermarkets that produce large amounts of waste or use excessive packaging. Another supported charging businesses that create litter, such as take away food outlets, for litter clearance. The introduction of charges for road cleaning in private areas was also suggested.

A respondent reported that dog owners should pay for dog waste bins to be emptied, while another noted that pet owners should pay for dog and cat waste bags at Service Points.

It was suggested that the Council charge for the collection of garden refuse during the summer months, or that the Council creates compost and sells it back to the public.

A proposal was made for the Council to introduce an additional charge for street lighting, for people who want it to remain at the current level.

It was felt that the Council should ensure that the Council and affected communities received their fair share of wind farm revenues.

### Health and social care

Several respondents felt that there should not be free prescriptions. It was suggested that free care for the elderly should be means tested and that there should be a charge for hospital meals. One or two respondents noted that individuals should have to pay health care costs if they have a smoking, drinking or drug related illness.

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### Education

Some respondents suggested that there should be a small charge for school supplies, such as books and paper. One respondent felt that college and university tuition fees could be charged at a low level, while another noted that keeping secondary pupils in school at lunchtime would mean that more school dinners were sold.

### Charges for businesses

A small number of respondents noted that small businesses and charities should pay business rates, with one stating that only people who live in the community should be given small business relief. It was suggested that holiday cottage owners should pay a rate for bed spaces, and that businesses should be charged to place signs on pavements, as this is disruptive.

### Libraries

Some respondents believed that a library subscription fee should be introduced, or that libraries should introduce charges for internet use and e-book lending. One or two respondents noted that late book return fees should be introduced for pensioners.

### Fines

One or two respondents suggested that individuals should pay costs if they cause a disturbance or an accident as the result of alcohol or drug abuse. It was noted that fines should be introduced for people who do not turn up to appointments, for example at local courts or medical appointments. One respondent reported that a surcharge should be made if money is paid to the Council late.

### Additional suggestions

Respondents made some additional suggestions for areas where charges could be introduced:

- Events – it was suggested that the Council hosted car boot sales and charge both display and entry fees;
- Licensing – it was reported that the Council should reintroduce dog licensing;
- Fuel – it was proposed that winter fuel payments for pensioners should be means tested.

### ***Belief that charges should not be increased***

A small group of Citizens' Panel respondents felt that the Council should concentrate on reducing costs through efficiency savings, rather than increasing charges. It was noted that the cost of living is increasing, while wages are staying low, and it was thought particularly unfair to both reduce service provision and charge more for

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services. Respondents reported that increasing charges for the services mentioned in the questionnaire would be particularly detrimental to people on low incomes and to those living in rural areas. One or two respondents noted that services will not be used if charges are too high, and recommended lowering charges so that services will be used more often.

### **Overall Consultation**

111 separate responses were received on the question *Do you have suggestions about other areas where you would support an increase in charges?* These were received mainly from the online questionnaire, discussions at ward forums and posted and emailed forms. Organisational responses included Community Councils and responses from focus groups with People First and Highland Youth Voice.

A number of the areas suggested for this question were similar to views expressed to the question on generating income. Common suggestions for where charges could be increased were Council Tax and business rates, charges for transport and levels of fines.

### **Council Tax and business rates**

Many respondents commented that they would support an increase in Council Tax. It was felt that this would be more effective than increasing other charges by small amounts and that it would allow effective service provision to be maintained. One respondent commented that they would not support an increase in anything other than Council Tax.

A number of respondents stated that full Council Tax should be paid on second and holiday homes, and that Council Tax should be increased on empty shops. Some respondents suggested a review of Council Tax bands, with rates increasing for those in higher bands. One respondent suggested introducing income-related Council Tax, believing that the current system was unfair.

A further view was that rates for large businesses and wind farm operators should be increased.

### **Transport and travel**

A number of respondents suggested increasing rates for transport. Some respondents said that travel charges for over 65s should be introduced, and that charges should be increased for blue badge holders. The Corran ferry was mentioned in particular, with one respondent supporting an increase in charges for visitors and cyclists. Another respondent believed that a 50% charge should be introduced for disabled users, who currently travel on the ferry for free. They stated that some of the income raised from this could go towards reducing the standard ferry fare, which is currently too expensive.

Two respondents suggested introducing parking charges for Council employees, while another proposed a road tax for cyclists.

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Some respondents suggested that school transport should be charged for, particularly to Gaelic schools. It was noted that, if a charge was made for the school bus service, this service must improve.

One respondent suggested increasing charges for gritting services in private business areas.

### ***Fines***

Several respondents said that they would support an increase in fines. Respondents mentioned parking fines, particularly for parking in disabled bays, as well as fines for litter, fly tipping and dog mess. One respondent suggested introducing a call out charge for fire or ambulance services when there is no actual emergency.

It was reported that higher fines would be more likely to deter individuals from offending, as long as they were properly enforced. It was also noted that income from increased fines could be used to pay for more community wardens.

### ***Leisure and learning***

Some respondents suggested reviewing services included in the Highlife Highland card, proposing that swimming lessons should be paid for separately. It was noted that any review must take into account rural users, since the provision was currently biased towards urban areas, with many more facilities. A county membership system was suggested. One respondent suggested increasing charges generally for parks and recreation facilities.

The introduction of library charges was suggested for those over 16 and under 65. Respondents proposed a minimum charge for internet use, or suggested that Wi-Fi use could be included in a £5 monthly retainer fee. One or two respondents suggested increasing library fines, particularly for items other than books, such as DVDs or audio books for people who are not blind.

One or two respondents suggested increasing the cost of music lessons, but another stated that these were very important for children so charges should be kept low.

A respondent suggested increasing charges for commercial events, such as profit-making shows and concerts.

### ***Waste pick up and disposal***

Some respondents suggested increasing the charge to pick up large and bulky items, although noted that there should be a discount for pensioners. One respondent suggested increasing charges at Civic Amenity Sites, depending on what was being disposed of, while another proposed weighing household rubbish and charging householders for its removal.

One or two respondents suggested increasing waste collection rates for businesses, especially large ones.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### ***Additional Suggestions***

There were a range of other suggestions for potential savings provided by respondents:

- Toilets - Some respondents suggested increasing charges for public toilets.
- Housing - One or two respondents reported that rents should be increased, although it was noted that fewer people may pay their rent with an increased charge. One respondent suggested charging Council house owners for repairs due to their own damage, while another reported that people who can work but choose not to should be taken out of low income housing.
- Planning and regulatory services - Some respondents said that they would support and increase in charges for planning applications and building warrants, as well as regulatory service fees such as for the Breeding of Dogs Act.
- No Increase in Charges - One respondent stated that services should be reduced carefully, rather than charges being increased, while another suggested holding prices down to generate more customers.

Several respondents suggested that the Council should be saving money and suggested ways to do this. These are reported in relation to the appropriate question elsewhere in the report.

## Infrastructure and Resources

**Generally, are you willing to support an increase in charges above the level of inflation?**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Respondents were asked: “Generally, are you willing to support an increase in charges above the level of inflation?” Their views are in the table below.

**Respondents’ views on supporting an increase in charges above the level of inflation**

<b>“Generally, are you willing to support an increase in charges above the level of inflation?”</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>
<b>Yes</b>	29
<b>No</b>	71
<b>Total</b>	100

*N=1,016*

The results show 71% of respondents are not willing to support generally an increase in charges above the level of inflation – leaving 29% willing to support such a rise.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

178 separate responses were received on the question *Generally, are you willing to support an increase in charges above the level of inflation?* These were received mainly from the online questionnaire, discussions at ward forums and posted and emailed forms. Organisations expressing their views included Community Councils and Parent Councils. Responses were also received from discussions at a focus group with People First.

Most respondents were not in support of an increase in charges above the level of inflation, believing that this could not be justified when wages were not increasing, and that the Council should look for efficiency savings rather than raising charges.

#### ***Not in favour***

Respondents not in favour of increasing charges above the level of inflation reported that this was not justifiable, given that wages are not rising. It was reported that, especially with pay freezes, many people’s wages, DSS payments and pensions were below the level of inflation. It was noted that, if the Council expect staff to accept a 1% increase, they should accept the same with regards to charges. One respondent expressed concern that increased charges would lead to increased demands for higher wages, resulting in hyperinflation. It was also noted that the cost of living was currently high, especially with increasing fuel and food costs.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

A number of respondents reported that the Council should be looking for efficiency savings, rather than charging the public more. It was noted that, if the income already generated by the Council was used more carefully, and savings made elsewhere, an increase in charges would not be necessary. One respondent stated that an increase in charges would not be needed, since the largest element of the Council's cost is wages, which the Council is proposing to limit to below the rate of inflation.

One or two respondents were concerned that increasing charges would have an adverse effect on those least able to pay. It was noted that there were few jobs in some areas of the Highlands, and so individuals would find it particularly difficult to pay higher charges.

One or two respondents stated that the Council should not be a profit making business, and that increases in charges should be at an annual rate of 1%.

It was noted that increasing charges prevented, rather than aided, development, and that this might bring more problems. For example, increased charges for rubbish collection may lead to more fly tipping.

### ***In favour***

Respondents in favour of an increase in charges above the level of inflation stated that the Council must get money from somewhere. Some respondents mentioned increases that they felt would be acceptable: only just above inflation, inflation plus 1%, 1%-2% and 3-5%.

### ***Conditions***

Several respondents noted that whether or not they would support an increase in charges above the level of inflation depended on certain conditions. Some reported that it would depend what the Council would do with the money, and commented that they would only support the proposal if services were retained or improved. One respondent said that they would only support the proposal if the charges contributed to the green agenda or the fight against obesity.

Some respondents noted that they would only support an increase in charges for services that people chose to use voluntarily, and not for compulsory charges, whilst others stated that they would only support an increase in charges above the level of inflation for one or two years, but not indefinitely.

One groups of respondents stated that they would only support an increase in Council Tax above the level of inflation. One respondent noted that they would only



## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

support an increase in charges above the level of inflation if charges were currently particularly low against market competitors.

It was reported by some respondents that they would only support the proposal if genuine cost savings were made by the Council at the same time.

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## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

**Should people have to pay for, or make a contribution towards the following services:**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

*The Citizens' Panel were not asked any specific questions on making a contribution towards specific services.*

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Responses were received mainly from the online questionnaire, discussions at ward forums and posted and emailed forms. Responses were also received from discussions at focus groups with People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Most of the response forms for this question allowed only the answers „yes“ or „no“. However, on some forms and at forums and focus groups, some respondents provided additional comments.

### ***School transport***

205 separate responses were received on the topic of people paying for, or making a contribution towards, school transport.

Opinion was divided over whether people should have to pay for, or make a contribution towards, school transport, although slightly more respondents were in favour than not in favour.

Respondents who commented noted that whether people should pay for or make a contribution towards school transport should depend on their income and on what seats are available. It was also noted that this would depend on cost, as it could be too expensive for service users.

Two Parent Councils raised concern about travel in rural areas, stating that this proposal would penalise families in these areas. They stated that this proposal either assumes that all households have cars or that children can walk to school. However, they noted that walking to school would be hazardous on busy roads without pavements. It was suggested that an exception be made for very remote areas.

Some respondents raised concerns about the administration costs involved in means testing, while others stated that they would need more information about how much money would be saved.

One Parent Council suggested making safe walking and cycling routes to school in order to remove transport costs. However, another respondent noted that it would be preferable to charge for school buses and maintain them, rather than taking away

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

the provision completely. A respondent raised concerns that this proposal would result in more parents taking their children to school via car, and suggested that the money should be given to Parent Councils, allowing the community to find a solution.

It was noted that the transport service and condition of vehicles would have to be vastly improved if a charge were to be made.

One or two respondents commented that they would be in favour of charges being introduced for children travelling to schools outside their catchment area and/or to religious or language-based schools.

Members of one youth focus group commented that the proposal was very unfair, as children had to go to school and were not given a choice. They commented that school transport providers already get money from paying passengers, so should not be charging more travellers.

### ***Garden aid***

197 separate responses were received on the topic of people paying for or making a contribution towards garden aid.

Most respondents were in favour of people paying for, or making a contribution towards their grass cutting.

Several respondents who provided comments suggested that local volunteer groups could be organised to cut grass, or that this could be done by people doing community service. A number of volunteers stated that this should depend on financial circumstances, and should be means tested. One respondent was in favour of the proposal if individuals could afford to pay, and suggested that the frequency be reduced if they could not. One respondent noted that individuals should be asked to pay unless they are a pensioner with disabilities, noting that often an able bodied member of the family could do the work.

One or two respondents suggested that the service should be publicised more and extended to private estates but that a charge should be made.

One respondent stated that they believed the service was no longer available.

## **Infrastructure and Resources**

### **Property and Capital**

***Should the Council invest in more council house building?***

*and*

***Should the Council provide assistance to enable people to buy their own homes by introducing a mortgage guarantee scheme, helping home-owners meet lenders mortgage deposit requirements?***

*and*

***What can the Council do to bring empty private properties back into use?***

*and*

***Should we invest more in the capital budget which would help boost economic spending in the Highlands, bearing in mind that in order to spend more in this area, corresponding savings would need to be made from the revenue budget to cover this?***

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***Should the Council invest in more council house building?***

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

The Citizens' Panel were asked: "There are currently over 10,000 people who have registered their need for Council and other social housing on the Highland Housing Register. However, only 1,000 properties become available every year. One impact of building more houses will be an increase in council house rents. The benefit of building more council houses and increasing home ownership would be a boost to the local economy and reduction in the number of people on the Highland Housing Register."

Respondents were then asked: "Should we invest in more Council house building?" Their views are found in the table below.

#### **Respondents' Views on investing in more Council house building**

<b>"Should we invest in more Council house building?"</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>
<b>Yes</b>	84
<b>No</b>	16
<b>Total</b>	100

*N=1,041*

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

Some 84% believe that there should be an increased investment in Council house building while 16% disagree with this proposal.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

200 responses were received for the question “*Should the Council invest in more Council house building?*”. Responses were mainly received through the online form and from discussions at ward forums, with other responses collected from online and posted forms. Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and responses from focus groups with Sight Action, Highland Users Group, People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Most respondents were in favour of the proposal, reporting that this was necessary and would be a good investment. Respondents who were against the Council investing in Council house building believed that this should instead be done by Housing Associations or raised concerns that it would cost too much. Some respondents stated that they would only support the proposal if certain conditions were met, such as tenants not being given the right to buy.

### ***In favour***

Respondents in favour of the proposal reported that there is currently a shortage of Council houses and that privately owned houses are very expensive to buy or rent. It was noted that young families are struggling to get into the housing market, with most privately owned houses bought by people from outside the community as second homes. One respondent noted that, if the Council assisted occupiers to become owners of houses, it was important for them to provide a continuing supply of houses for rent.

Several respondents commented that investment in Council house building would encourage economic growth, increase employment opportunities and support the construction industry, which could take on more apprentices. It was also noted that Council house building would be a good long-term investment for the Council, generating rental income and the potential for sales.

Some respondents saw Council house building as an opportunity to provide more appropriate accommodation for tenants. It was reported that providing more flats and smaller accommodation for those unable to look after their surroundings would save on grass cutting, and that more social housing and supported housing for the elderly would be welcomed. A respondent suggested that asking single people in large houses if they would be willing to move into smaller properties would be beneficial for families.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

One or two respondents suggested that the Council should expand their proposal to include district heating.

### ***Not in favour***

A number of respondents who were not in favour of an investment in Council house building felt that housing should instead be built by Housing Associations. It was believed that Housing Associations could build houses more cheaply and efficiently than the Council. One respondent felt that all Council stock should be transferred to local Housing Associations, with these organisations taking on responsibility for future development. However, another commented that the Council should be the only social housing provider, taking over all existing social housing to ensure fair and equal housing policies and rent.

One or two respondents suggested that the Council work with Housing Associations and the private sector instead of building houses itself. They proposed an increase in the percentage of affordable housing required before planning permission is granted for developments, along with a new tax levied when new properties are sold, to contribute to increased service use due to the new tenants. Alternatively, grants for shared ownership builds were suggested.

Some respondents felt that the Council could not afford to build more houses in the current economic climate, with a respondent suggesting that the Government should address the rented accommodation shortage.

A small group of respondents raised concerns that Council houses would be abused by people moving to the area, not trying to find work and waiting until they were provided with a free house. It was suggested that stricter rules should be imposed for Council house eligibility, and that more jobs should be created before additional houses are built.

One respondent reported that there was a large amount of housing in Inverness already, while members of Sight Action noted that many people will be leaving Council houses soon due to changes with the benefits system.

One respondent believed that the Council should be concentrating on building new schools, rather than Council houses.

### ***Conditions***

Many respondents stated that they would only support an investment in Council house building if there was not a right to buy on these new properties. Respondents felt that this scheme had been unsuccessful, allowing private landlords to make money rather than the Council.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

Several respondents agreed with the proposal in principle, but expressed concern about the costs involved. Some respondents reported that they would only support the scheme if costs were reduced overall or if the Council eventually received revenue from the properties. It was noted that other services should not be cut to pay for Council house building, and that the proposal should only go ahead if the Council can borrow to build or obtain Government support for capital funding. It was suggested that costs should be reduced by building houses on Government land, or that spare Council offices should be sold to pay for the scheme.

One respondent stated that the scheme should be self-funding, with economic rents used to pay for development costs. However, it was noted that, if possible, rent increases should be kept below the Consumer Price Index. It was reported that the Council should scrutinise their building and cleaning service more closely, as some contractors cost the Council a large amount of money in the long run.

A group of respondents believed that certain conditions should be met related to the location and style of new Council houses. It was noted that housing should only be built in areas where it is needed, with one respondent commenting that houses should only be built on brownfield sites. Respondents believed that houses should be well-designed and attractive for communities and families, rather than built simply for profit. It was noted that the use of good quality houses would keep future maintenance costs low. One respondent felt that the Council should invest in small social developments, rather than affordable houses within private developments.

Some respondents believed that the Council should invest in housing, but that they should focus on refurbishing properties and ensuring that empty houses are filled, rather than building new accommodation. Investment in current Council properties was encouraged, including the treatment of damp and the introduction of insulation and double glazing. It was proposed that old empty Council buildings should be renovated and rented out, or that some partially ruined houses should be rebuilt. A respondent suggested using compulsory purchase orders for empty properties to provide more housing, while another proposed making use of the houses built for an eco-project at Milton of Leys.

The importance of ensuring that Council houses are used and cared for properly was highlighted. Some respondents felt that the Council should spend less on property upkeep and require tenants to pay for small repairs caused by their own carelessness. It was suggested that tenants who cause disturbances or leave a house in poor condition should not be allowed to rent another Council house. A respondent reported that Council tenants should not be allowed to rent out rooms on a bed and breakfast basis, or suggested that rent should be increased for these tenants.

## Infrastructure and Resources

***Should the Council provide assistance to enable people to buy their own homes by introducing a mortgage guarantee scheme, helping home-owners meet lenders mortgage deposit requirements?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The Citizens' Panel were asked: about introducing a mortgage guarantee scheme: "Should we provide assistance to enable people to buy their own homes by introducing a mortgage guarantee scheme, helping home-owners meet lenders mortgage deposit requirements?" Their views are found in the table below.

**Respondents' views on providing assistance to enable people to buy their own homes by introducing a mortgage guarantee scheme**

<b>"Should we provide assistance to enable people to buy their own homes by introducing a mortgage guarantee scheme, helping home-owners meet lenders mortgage deposit requirements?"</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>
<b>Yes</b>	70
<b>No</b>	30
<b>Total</b>	100

*N=1,021*

Some 70% of respondents agree with the proposal that the council introduce a mortgage guarantee scheme while 30% disagree with this suggestion.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

198 responses were received for the question "*Should the Council provide assistance to enable people to buy their own homes by introducing a mortgage guarantee scheme, helping home-owners meet lenders mortgage deposit requirements?*" Responses were mainly received through the online form, with other responses collected from discussions at ward forums and posted and emailed forms. Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and opinions expressed at the focus groups held with Sight Action, People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Opinion was divided over the proposal. Respondents who were in favour reported that this was necessary to help residents like young families own affordable homes. However, some respondents disagreed with the proposal on the grounds that it was too risky and not the Council's responsibility. Some people reported that they would only support the proposal if certain conditions were met, like the scheme not applying to the purchase of Council houses.



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### **In favour**

Respondents in favour of a mortgage guarantee scheme noted that, in many areas of Highland, this would be the only way to give young families, single people and people on low incomes the chance to own their own home. It was reported that the cost of buying a house is often too high for people in these groups, and that there can be a shortage of properties to rent privately. Respondents felt that this makes it very difficult for some people to remain in certain parts of Highland. Respondents from Highland Youth Voice reported that, if the scheme was not introduced, good family homes would continue to be bought as holiday homes.

Other respondents in favour of the scheme reported that it may free up Council houses and allow Council house tenants to buy on the open market, making them responsible for property maintenance costs.

### **Not in favour**

Several respondents who were not in favour of the scheme felt that this should not be the Council's responsibility. Respondents noted that this was the job of banks and building societies, although one respondent reported that they would be in favour of the scheme if the Council could manage it better than the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Some respondents felt that this should be a national scheme, run by the Scottish Government, and it was noted that the Government's Shared Equity Scheme was sufficient for helping home-owners to buy their homes. Other agencies with similar schemes were mentioned, including Teaching Unions. Respondents felt that the Council should concentrate on its core services, and not become a financial services provider. However, one respondent suggested that the Council could support an alternative body to set up the scheme. Another respondent was in favour of the scheme but noted that the most pressing requirement is for affordable homes to rent. Some respondents raised concerns that the scheme was too risky, with the chance that money would not be repaid to the Council.

It was reported that the Council should not encourage people who cannot afford it to get into debt. One respondent noted that many tenants would be on benefits, querying why the Council would pay a mortgage deposit rather than housing benefit.

One respondent felt that the scheme was not necessary as people could save deposits if they really wanted to, while another believed that it was acceptable for residents to continue to rent, rather than buy, properties.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### **Conditions**

A number of respondents commented that they would not support the scheme if it was used to buy Council houses. It was noted that good social housing had been lost already, and that the basic Council house system works well, providing income and estate for the Council. However, one respondent felt that Council houses *should* be sold to generate income. They noted that, if tenants want a Council house enough to buy it, they are unlikely to wish to move out, meaning that the house is not freed up and revenue opportunities are lost.

Some respondents felt that it was unfair to restrict the scheme to Council tenants, but queried how the Council would decide who to help with the scheme and whether all mortgage seekers would be eligible.

Several respondents reported that they would support the scheme if the Council had sufficient safeguards in place to make sure that people did not default. It was noted that the Council should thoroughly assess and monitor the creditworthiness of borrowers, perhaps by taking previous rental payments into account or by involving an outside organisation. One respondent suggested introducing shared equity schemes, where default of payment would result in the Council taking shared equity and retaining the home occupier.

A group of respondents stated that it was important for the Council make money on the scheme, for example by charging interest. One respondent suggested that potential home-owners could work for the Council to earn their deposit. One or two respondents felt that the Council should help tenants to buy their own homes but that they should not assist with mortgage deposits. It was considered important for owners to have a stake in the property.

It was suggested that agreements should be in place to prevent resale or properties, or that money that is lent out should be repayable if houses are sold.

## **Infrastructure and Resources**

### ***What can the Council do to bring empty private properties back into use?***

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

*There were not any quantitative questions asked of the Citizens' Panel in relation to bringing empty properties back into use.*

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

#### **Overall Consultation Comments**

185 separate responses were received for the question “*What can the Council do to bring empty private properties back into use?*” Responses were mostly received through the online form and from discussion at ward forums, with further views collected from posted and emailed forms. Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and views expressed at the focus groups help with Sight Action, People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Most respondents agreed that something should be done about empty private properties, reporting that these were an eyesore and damaging to communities since they did not bring any money into the local economy. Some respondents suggested imposing financial penalties on owners of empty properties, while others proposed that the Council should buy properties and either rent or sell them. Further suggestions included offering assistance and incentives to landlords or having the Council lease properties on the behalf of owners. A view expressed by a minority of respondents was that the Council should do nothing about empty properties as they were the responsibility of private owners.

#### ***Penalties for owners***

Many respondents believed that empty properties should not be charged a reduced rate of Council Tax, with several proposing that an extra charge be levied on properties left empty for a certain period of time. Some respondents felt that this charge should be made both on derelict properties and on premises used as holiday homes for only part of the year. It was noted that owners may be discouraged from owning second homes, leaving more properties free for purchase by people who might otherwise rent Council houses. Respondents from Sight Action suggested that the extra money raised could be used to build more Council houses. One or two respondents felt that tax should not be raised for properties regularly rented out for holiday lets, as these brought money into the local economy. However, another respondent reported that holiday home owners run a business so should be charged for this.

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### ***Purchase and renovation of empty properties***

A number of respondents believed that the Council should buy unoccupied properties, either on the open market, or through compulsory purchase orders if necessary. Some respondents reported that a change in the law would be necessary to allow Council take-over and re-letting of empty buildings. A respondent suggested that the Council should operate a fund for this purpose, and work with Housing Trusts and Associations to facilitate this. It was proposed that the Council buy properties cheaply, renovate them and then either let or sell them on.

Some respondents felt that houses should be sold at low rates or through shared equity schemes to people in low-paid employment or to first-time buyers. It was also suggested that properties were sold to local Housing Associations, either before or after refurbishment, or that properties were auctioned off. However, it was unclear whether these suggestions should be carried out after purchase by the Council or arranged directly with the owners.

It was suggested that houses were sold or rented to people at low rates, provided that they agreed to renovate them. Respondents from Highland Youth Voice mentioned a scheme where empty Council houses could be bought for £1 and a low-interest loan given for their refurbishment, subject to certain conditions like a minimum occupancy period.

Respondents suggested that renovation costs could be kept down by using community-based volunteers or people on Jobseeker's Allowance to help. It was noted that renovation schemes would provide employment and develop people's skills, and a respondent suggested that the Council work with training organisations and people on community service to facilitate this. One respondent suggested that the properties should be passed onto a charity, which could then renovate them.

### ***Working with private owners***

Several respondents felt that the Council should work with private owners to bring private properties back into use. It was suggested that the owners should initially be encouraged to let their properties, through contact from the Council, „naming and shaming“ and/or a marketing campaign detailing the benefits of working with the Council to let their properties.

It was noted that a dedicated officer should be in charge of identifying empty properties and contacting owners, as in many parts of England, and that people should be encouraged to report empty properties in their area. Owners should be given assistance and a set timescale for letting or selling their property, after which a compulsory purchase order should come into force or owners should face financial penalties.

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Respondents suggested that offers of grants, temporary reductions in Council Tax or low-interest loans should be given to landlords willing to renovate their properties for letting. It was noted that this money could be paid back through rent payments or at point of sale. A further suggestion was for the Council to provide advisory and planning assistance to property owners. The simplification of planning and building warrants was supported by one or two respondents, with another suggesting a one-stop shop to resolve planning and building control issues. It was also proposed that the Council should act as an agent, brokering the deal between the property owner and a potential tenant. Several respondents believed that incentives should only be given if landlords agree to the properties being used as social or sustainable housing for a certain period of time following renovation, or if those on the Council waiting list are given priority for tenancy.

A number of respondents proposed that the Council should lease empty properties from owners or rent them out on the owners' behalf, taking on the role of a letting agent. Some respondents suggested leasing premises from owners at a nominal fee, and renting them out at a higher rate, or passing all rents to owners but charging a substantial administration fee. Another suggestion was that owners should not receive rent payments but would benefit from maintenance of the property and a reduction in Council Tax. It was proposed by one respondent that owners should be encouraged to transfer management of their properties to Housing Associations. Another respondent suggested allowing short leases on premises to enable small start-up businesses to get set up.

### ***Other suggestions***

Some respondents made other suggestions for dealing with empty private properties:

- Consulting with communities and property owners on the best course of action;
- Starting with a pilot project in one or two areas;
- Demolishing properties in very poor states of repair to minimise on-going running expenses.

### ***No action by Council***

A small group of respondents felt that the Council should not take action to try to bring empty private properties back into use. It was believed that what private owners did with their property was not the Council's business, and that this should be left to the open market. One respondent raised concerns about the costs incurred by administration and management, believing that the Council would get very little return from this. One or two respondents noted that the Scottish Government was

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currently undertaking a consultation on bringing private properties back into use, and that they should be left to tackle the issue.

It was felt by some respondents that, before tackling empty private properties, the Council should first concentrate on renovating and developing its own empty properties. One respondent believed that the Council should focus on building new Council homes rather than dealing with empty properties.

### **Citizens' Panel Comments**

726 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel for the question *What can your Council do to bring empty private properties back into use?* Similar themes emerged as in the overall consultation, with respondents advocating penalties for owners of empty homes, purchase and renovation by the Council and collaboration with homeowners to bring private properties back into use. Some Panel members also felt that it was not the Council's responsibility to deal with empty private properties. However, some additional points were made by Citizens' Panel members:

#### ***Purchase and renovation of empty properties***

Although a number of Citizens' Panel respondents were in favour of the Council buying empty properties to rent out, a small group raised concerns that this would take properties away from young people who could potentially afford to buy them. Respondents suggested that the Council work with local businesses and construction agencies to arrange a way for local people to buy low-mortgage houses in their area.

In regards to rented housing, Panel members stressed their preference for houses being rented to local people. One respondent felt that properties should only be rented to people in work.

It was noted that buying and renovating empty properties was more cost-effective than building new Council houses. Some respondents suggested altering disused properties into flats, to relieve pressure on the Council for one- and two-bedroom accommodation. One or two respondents noted that they would not like empty properties to be turned into H.M.O. residences.

#### ***Working with owners***

Some Panel members suggested additional incentives for owners to renovate and let their properties. They proposed that the Council could provide rent and damage liability insurance to potential landlords, as well as an income guarantee. Instead of

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grants for renovation of properties, respondents suggested offering a rebate incentive or a Council Tax holiday while work was underway. Panel members stated that the Council should lobby the Government to reduce V.A.T. on renovation work, so that it is in line with that for work on new builds. Other suggestions for Council assistance were help with the provision of building and roofing materials, legal assistance on property rights, free electrical inspections and a reduction of regulations on private landlords, for example landlord registration.

Citizens' Panel members suggested that the Council could assist owners with finding potential tenants through advertising on the Council's website and noticeboards or by circulating a list of empty properties to estate agents. The use of a warden was suggested to check all properties regularly and ensure that tenants were not abusing them. Respondents felt that the Council could attract more tenants to an area by ensuring that it was well-kept and improving local amenities. One or two respondents suggested that landlords should be encouraged to reduce rents to attract tenants.

### ***Commercial use***

Some Panel members suggested that business rates and rents should be reduced for empty properties to encourage commercial use. It was noted that this would rejuvenate towns, encouraging important local shops and businesses. One respondent suggested converting empty homes in town centres to shops, but another proposed converting old shops into houses. A respondent believed that the Council should support an increase in access to flats above shops in Inverness, encouraging residential use of the city centre as well as small local businesses.

### ***Planning permission for new builds***

Some respondents felt that the Council should have tighter planning regulations, with no permission given for expansion on green field areas, additional holiday homes or any other developments which would lead to a reduction in resident numbers. It was noted that developers should be forced to build good quality properties which are small enough to be affordable to residents.

### ***Working with the Government and legal issues***

One respondent raised concerns about possible legal issues, which they feared would be costly to the Council. As in the main consultation, respondents noted that changes in the law may be necessary. However, a respondent noted that the Council might have legal leverage already if empty properties are dangerous or encourage vandalism. Another Panel member felt that the Council should encourage the Government to reject E.E.C. regulations on property letting.

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### ***Materials following demolition***

It was noted that material from demolished houses could be used by the Council to build more houses.

### ***Following best practice***

One or two respondents suggested that the Council should follow best practice from other Councils in tackling the problem, or that the Council should consult business professionals for advice.

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## **Infrastructure and Resources**

***Should we invest more in the capital budget which would help boost economic spending in the Highlands, bearing in mind that in order to spend more in this area, corresponding savings would need to be made from the revenue budget to cover this?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

*There were not any questions asked of the Citizens' Panel in relation investing in the capital budget.*

### **Qualitative Analysis**

159 responses were received on the topic of investing in the Council's capital budget. Responses were mainly received from individuals through online, posted and emailed forms. Opinions were also collected from discussions at ward forums. Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and opinions expressed at a focus group with People First.

Most respondents were not in favour of more being invested in the capital budget, feeling that the Council should not spend money that it does not have and suggesting that capital funds should come from other sources, such as the Government. However, a number of respondents were in favour of the proposal, stating that this would create jobs and generate revenue for the Council. Some respondents noted that they would only support the proposal if the capital budget was spent in certain ways, or if it could be guaranteed to generate income.

#### ***Not in favour***

Several respondents stated that they were not in favour of the Council investing in the capital budget because it did not have any money to spare. It was noted that investing in capital spending could be done later, when the economic situation has improved. The current priorities were considered to be retaining existing Council services and undertaking maintenance.

Some respondents felt that capital funding should be provided by organisations other than the Council. It was noted that the Government should be investing more in rural areas to boost economic spending in the Highlands. A respondent reported that this would give benefits on a national level, with reduced unemployment, fewer people on benefits and fewer people using the NHS. One or two respondents believed that the Government should give benefit back to the Council or match the Council's capital spending.

A small group of respondents felt that Highlands and Islands Enterprise should be investing in capital projects, or that the Council should support and promote small

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start-up buildings for new businesses. Other ways that respondents suggested of accessing capital funds without affecting revenue finance were grants, trusts, low-cost loans and working with Crown Agents.

Respondents expressed concern that the Council would not spend money for capital projects wisely, stating that Council projects often cost more than they should and that such schemes tend to attract poor business ideas that are unlikely to generate income quickly.

Concerns were also raised that short-term fixes in terms of capital investment would cause long-term problems. A respondent reported that many Council buildings were in need of maintenance, and that these would cause issues in the future if they were not looked after.

### ***In favour***

Respondents in favour of investing more in the capital budget stated that this would bring much-needed jobs to the area, allowing people to come off benefits and providing them with money to spend locally. It was noted that investment in capital projects was necessary at both a Council and Government level to boost economic revival.

Several respondents noted that, invested wisely, the capital budget could generate revenue for the Council. For example, one respondent suggested funding improvements to the environment to encourage tourism.

One or two respondents noted that this was a brave move, but one that would be beneficial in the long-term. A respondent reported that the Council's capital budget was better value than Private Finance Initiatives, while another suggested working with other Councils nationally.

### ***Conditions***

A number of respondents felt that the Council should only invest more in the capital budget if the money is spent cautiously and carefully.

Several respondents stated that the Council should only invest in projects where a clear capital return can be expected, especially if this benefits the local area. It was noted that the Council should invest in low risk markets and areas, such as tourism, hospitality and events.

A respondent commented that investment would be worthwhile if there is a lack of local facilities to generate spending, and mentioned community-owned land in Kyle which could be redeveloped into tourist facilities and shops. Some respondents

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

specified that projects should be undertaken by local businesses or in-house, or at least that local labour and suppliers should be used. It was stated that the tendering process for projects must be transparent, and the agreed price and terms made binding.

Other respondents noted that the Council should only spend if it will save money in the long term. Examples were given of energy-saving bulbs in street lamps, installation of biomass boilers and new, more energy-efficient schools.

It was reported by some respondents that capital projects should only be undertaken if there is a real need for them. Roads, school buildings and housing were mentioned as important areas for investment.

A group of respondents believed that more should only be invested in the capital budget if appropriate savings can be sought, which do not greatly compromise other services. Respondents felt that the capital budget should not be increased at the expense of school and road maintenance or education.

One or two respondents mentioned projects that the capital budget should not be spent on, including building more wind farms and undertaking building work that is not sustainable for the economy.

A view expressed by a small group of respondents was that their answer depended on the geography involved. It was queried whether the proposal would apply Highland-wide or just to Inverness, with one respondent noting that they would not support it in Caithness.

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## **Infrastructure and Resources**

### **Purchasing Services**

***Should the Council carry out further work to determine the most efficient way to deliver services – in-house or by an external provider?***

***and***

***If it is more efficient for a service to be run by an external provider, should the Council pay an external provider to deliver the service?***

***and***

***What else should the Council consider in addition to contract cost when paying another provider to deliver a service e.g. local jobs, quality of service, long term sustainability, wider community benefit?***

***and***

***When buying goods or services, should the Council include a requirement to officer apprenticeship/training schemes, where appropriate, in order to promote youth employment?***

***and***

***How can we help make local businesses more able to compete for Council contracts?***

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***Should the Council carry out further work to determine the most efficient way to deliver services – in-house or by an external provider?***

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

*There were no questions asked of the Citizens' Panel in relation to determining the most efficient way to deliver services.*

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

150 responses were received for the question “*Should the Council carry out further work to determine the most efficient way to deliver services – in-house or by an external provider?*” Most responses were received through the online form, with other responses collected via emailed and posted forms and from discussions at ward forums. Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and the focus group held with Highland Youth Voice.

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Most respondents were in favour of the Council carrying out this research, noting that such work should be done regularly by the Council anyway or that money spent on research would pay off in the long-term. However, several respondents were not in favour of the proposal, believing that the Council should instead focus on delivering services in-house. Some respondents stated that they would only support the proposal if the assessment did not cost more than the potential savings.

### **In favour**

#### ***Continuous assessment important***

A number of respondents reported that the Council should constantly be working to determine the most efficient way to deliver services. It was believed that the Council should follow the example of private businesses, regularly questioning the quality and value for money of services and investigating whether they can be improved. A respondent noted that, once the most efficient way to deliver services had been determined, stringent quality measures should be put in place.

#### ***Long-term value for money***

A small group of respondents felt that, although an assessment may be initially expensive, it would pay off in the long-term if effective procurement decisions were made.

#### ***Dissatisfaction with current procurement arrangements***

One or two respondents believed that more research should be undertaken as the current procurement system was not effective. In particular, dissatisfaction was expressed with the Fujitsu contract and the outsourcing of home care services and ground maintenance.

#### ***Suggestions for carrying out research***

Several respondents made suggestions about how research into efficient service delivery should be carried out. Some respondents felt that analysis should be undertaken in-house, to avoid paying fees to consultants. Respondents suggested that opinions should be sought from Community Councils, the Citizens' Panel, Council staff and service users. However, other respondents noted that external consultants should be used to offer an unbiased assessment of cost-effective service delivery.

A group of respondents raised points that they felt should be considered when evaluating the provision of services. It was noted that services should be looked at individually, rather than a blanket approach being adopted. The importance of considering quality as well as cost was highlighted, and one respondent proposed that the Council should have a clear remit to move as much business as possible to local providers. It was suggested that, in undertaking an evaluation, the experience of all other Councils in the UK should be reviewed.

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Some respondents stated that the cost of assessments should not be more than the potential savings, and one respondent suggested a capped spending limit for a review. One respondent felt that a review should not generate an unnecessary post. Another respondent noted that they would only support an assessment if the results were fully implemented.

### **Not in favour**

#### ***Preference for in-house (or external) provision***

A number of respondents reported that services should always be provided in-house. There may have been some confusion in the interpretation of the question, with respondents believing that they were being asked for their preferences about how services should be delivered. However, respondents may also have felt that an evaluation was not necessary since external service delivery was not welcome. Respondents stated that in-house provision should always be cheaper than external provision as external providers were trying to make a profit. Concerns were raised that external providers undercut the Council by paying their staff lower wages, which was unfair. One respondent felt that external providers were less efficient as they do not have as much general knowledge about the Council, and another stated that the Council had less control over external providers.

One or two respondents noted that they would be content with a mix of in-house and external provision. One respondent believed that providers like Fujitsu did not provide a satisfactory service, but that Highlife Highland, for example, provided a good standard of service. A minority view was that only external providers should be used, and one respondent queried whether the Council still had sufficient staff to provide services in-house.

#### ***Council should focus on own service***

Several respondents felt that, instead of working to determine the most effective method of service delivery, the Council should focus on ensuring that its own services were run efficiently. It was suggested that an incentive scheme could be introduced to encourage staff to identify effective ways of doing things. Some respondents recommended that each department should look into simplifying processes, and consider cuts or amalgamations of departments. A respondent suggested that the Council should work to find the most efficient way to provide services and then adopt these practices in-house.

#### ***A review should not be necessary***

Some respondents noted that an assessment of service delivery methods should not be necessary as the Council should be able to consider specific contracts and know the answer to this already. It was suggested that the Council work with other Councils to determine the best way to deliver services, rather than carrying out its own research.

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### *Cost of a review*

A group of respondents raised concerns about the cost of reviewing service delivery methods, especially if external consultants were used.

### *Review would not identify any savings*

One respondent believed that budgets had already been cut considerably, and that an assessment of service provision was unlikely to identify any more savings.

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## **Infrastructure and Resources**

***If it is more efficient for a service to be run by an external provider, should the Council pay an external provider to deliver the service?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

*There were no questions asked of the Citizens' Panel in relation to external providers delivering Council services.*

### **Qualitative Analysis**

187 separate responses were received for the question "*If it is more efficient for a service to be run by an external provider, should the Council pay an external provider to deliver the service?*" Responses were mainly received via the online form, with views also collected from discussions at ward forums and from posted and emailed forms. Organisations that expressed their views included Community Councils and Parent Councils. Responses were also received from the focus group held with People First.

Many respondents stated that they may support a service being run by an external provider, but noted that the quality of service must be maintained and that the Council should consider possible hidden costs, employee conditions and local benefits. Respondents who were not in favour of the proposal felt that an external provider was unlikely to provide a truly efficient service and mentioned external providers who had not provided satisfactory services in the past.

### ***In favour and with conditions***

A number of respondents were in favour of an external provider running services, believing that this would lead to savings or a better service being provided for the same price. Suggestions for services that could be delivered by the private sector were recycling facilities and waste disposal for schools. However, respondents were equally likely to only agree with the proposal reluctantly, and mention several conditions that must be met to gain their full support:

#### ***Ensuring quality of service***

Respondents highlighted the importance of the service being of the same or better quality than before. It was noted that the contract must be fully thought-out and managed well, with strict quality criteria put in place. The monitoring of services was considered necessary, and respondents suggested that key performance targets and associated penalties should be introduced. It was noted that the external provider should have a proven service-delivery record, and that they should be able to respond to changing circumstances. A respondent reported that an external provider must work with the same transparency and openness that would be expected from the Council.



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### ***Ensuring cost-effectiveness***

Concerns were raised about the costs involved with an external service provider. Respondents noted that cost-benefit analyses must be done properly since initial savings may be outweighed by future increases once the Council is tied into a contract. It was noted that the Council must bear in mind the cost of monitoring the contract, as well as any necessary redundancy costs and re-training costs for staff that are redeployed. Respondents stated that the Council should consider possible extra costs if the provider fails to deliver the service properly, or if the provider runs out of money before the end of the contract.

### ***Ensuring that employees are treated fairly***

Respondents felt that external providers should meet the same terms as the Council does, including paying their employees a living wage. It was noted that the Council should check that external providers who offer services more cheaply do not treat their employees unfairly or fail to provide them with adequate equipment.

### ***Importance of local providers***

Some respondents noted the importance of keeping contracts in the Highland area, stating that this would have considerable social and economic benefit. It was noted that, although local providers may sometimes be more expensive, they tend to be committed to their community and give money back to the local economy, providing better value for money than organisations based elsewhere. One respondent reported that, since the Council is funded by public money, it has a social responsibility to provide employment in the Highlands.

### ***Depends on the service***

A group of respondents believed that the question of external provision should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. One respondent felt that functions of the police should not be provided externally, while another stated that they would not support Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs). A respondent noted that the Council should provide regular, long-term services, but that, for a short-term project, using an external provider would save the cost of an office. Another respondent felt that the decision should depend on the Council's expertise at providing a service. They believed that external providers should be used if the Council-run service was poor and an external organisation can provide it for a reasonable price.

### ***Views on Council redundancies***

A small group of respondents felt that external providers should not be used if this would lead to redundancies in Council staff. However, one respondent reported that the Council must make corresponding job cuts, to avoid paying for the same service twice.

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### ***Importance of consultation***

It was noted that everyone that will be affected by a service must be properly consulted before an external provider is arranged. A respondent felt that the Fujitsu contract had been disadvantageous for schools because schools had not been consulted before it was agreed.

### ***Not in favour***

#### ***Not cost-effective***

Respondents who were not in favour of using an external provider for services felt that this would not be cost-effective in the long term. As well as the concerns noted in the, „*Ensuring cost-effectiveness*“ section above, respondents warned of unseen costs due to a lack of flexibility in the contract and noted that the re-tendering process itself would be costly and time-consuming.

#### ***Unsuccessful past contracts***

Several respondents mentioned current and past contracts with external providers which they felt were unsuccessful. The Fujitsu contract, and contracts for road gritting, grass cutting and facilities for school janitors were provided as examples.

#### ***Council should learn to provide a better service***

A number of respondents stated that, instead of using an external provider, the Council should work on delivering a better service in-house. It was suggested that the Council should learn from the way the external provider runs their service, or exchange best practice models with other Scottish Councils. Respondents felt that the Council should ensure that they employ enthusiastic, committed staff, and monitor their staff more closely.

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***What else should the Council consider in addition to contract cost when paying another provider to deliver a service e.g. local jobs, quality of service, long term sustainability, wider community benefit?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The Citizens' Panel were asked about the following: "Your Council spends a significant amount of its money on purchasing services from external organisations. Over £120m of services are bought from Highland businesses each year. Most are small and medium sized businesses but some are large local providers. Over 1,200 total businesses have supplied goods and services to us."

Respondents were then asked: "Which of these should we consider in addition to contract cost when paying another provider to deliver a service?" Those sampled were invited to tick all the options that they felt applied. Their responses are in the table below.

**Respondents' views on the factors that should be considered in addition to contract cost when paying another provider to deliver a service**

<b>"Which of these should we consider in addition to contract cost when paying another provider to deliver a service?"</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents selecting factors %</b>
<b>Local jobs</b>	87
<b>Quality of service</b>	83
<b>Whether apprenticeship/training schemes are offered</b>	66
<b>Wider benefit to the local community</b>	63
<b>Youth employment</b>	54
<b>Long term sustainability</b>	54
<b>Other</b>	6

*N= 1,041*

Some 87% of respondents were in favour of considering "**local jobs**" while 83% supported considering "**quality of service**" in addition to contract costs.

Some 66% of those responding were in favour of considering "**whether apprenticeship/training schemes are offered**". For 63% the "**wider benefit to the local community**" was a factor that ought to be taken into account.

Some 54% of respondents regarded "**youth employment**" as an additional issue to be considered with support for this factors being at its highest amongst people aged 65 and above (62%) and at its lowest amongst those aged 25-44 (48%). Support for

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bringing this matter into calculations is also greatest amongst those who are retired (62%) and employed (55%) than it is amongst those who are unemployed (49%) or those unable to work (44%).

“**Long term sustainability**” is a factor endorsed by 54% of the entire sample. There is a notable gender difference here – whereas 58% of female respondents support this matter being considered alongside costs, less than half the male respondents (46%) chose this option. There is also an appreciable difference in the support for this matter to be considered according to the age of respondents with 59% of those aged 25-44 selecting it compared with 46% of those aged 65 and above.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

#### **Citizens’ Panel Comments**

Members of the Citizens’ Panel were asked for additional factors that the Council should consider when paying another provider to deliver a service. 71 responses were received on this topic. Respondents considered value for money, environmental impact and the employment practices of businesses to be particularly important. Some respondents felt that services should only be provided in-house, while others believed that cost should be the only factor considered by the Council.

#### **Factors to consider**

Several Panel members suggested that **value for money** should be considered. It was noted that this was different from the cost and quality of a service, but was not defined by any respondents.

The **environmental impact** of an organisation was considered important, with respondents stating that the Council should take into account emission levels, carbon saving, the amount of landfill waste produced and the amount of recycling done by a business.

A number of respondents stated the importance of the **employment practices** of service providers. It was noted that organisations should be equal opportunities employers and support the employment of disabled people. One respondent stated that job opportunities for adults were important and another suggested that contractors should provide volunteering opportunities. It was noted that organisations should employ their own tradespeople.

A group of Panel members reported that **cost** was a key factor for consideration, noting that the Council should not overpay for services. One respondent stated that community not-for-profit organisations should be preferred.

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It was believed that the Council should give preference to providers with a **community focus**. A community partnership ethos was considered important by one respondent, with another believing that community benefit clauses should be written in to all contracts. A respondent noted that the Council should consider anything which would help to keep the Highland way of life.

Some respondents placed importance on the **location, size and ownership** of companies. It was believed that companies should be local, or at least Scottish, and that their employees should not travel large distances, incurring excessive fuel consumption and travel costs. One respondent felt that the provider should benefit the UK, and supported the use of franchises. A respondent stated that the size of the company should be considered, with no multi-nationals used. Another Panel member felt that the ownership of the company was important.

Some respondents expanded on the criteria of **quality of service** mentioned in the question. It was noted that the provider must be efficient and able to carry out services to an agreed timescale and to a reasonable quality. The flexibility of an organisation was also considered important by one respondent.

The **ethical status** of providers was mentioned by one or two respondents. This was mentioned in particular in relation to banks, with employee working conditions and the company's investments noted as important considerations.

Other factors mentioned by Citizens' Panel members were:

- The provider's **financial standing and records**
- The provider's **understanding of local issues**
- The **view of end users** on the suitability of services provided
- The **loyalty** of the company to the Highland Council

### **Suggestions for effective procurement**

Some respondents provided suggestions to ensure that the Council's procurement of services was effective. It was proposed that four quotes should be obtained for all goods before they are purchased. One respondent suggested that the Council produce a catalogue of providers who give value for money, and that goods and services should only be purchased from these organisations. Another Panel member noted that, once a service is in place, a regular audit of all company accounts and expenditure should be made.

### **Services provided in-house**

A group of respondents felt that the Council should provide all services in-house. It was noted that, if privately run services are cheaper, services or wages must suffer

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to ensure that a profit is made. Respondents felt that the Council would provide cheaper services than external providers and be able to fulfil the considerations mentioned in the question.

### **Only cost should be considered**

A small group of respondents believed that the Council should only consider cost when buying services. It was noted that this was appropriate in a free market economy.

### **Overall Consultation Comments**

157 separate responses were received for the question “*What else should the Council consider in addition to contract cost when paying another provider to deliver a service e.g. local jobs, quality of service, long term sustainability, wider community benefit?*” Responses were mostly received from the online form and from discussions at ward forums, with additional comments received from posted and emailed forms. Responses were received from Community Councils, Parent Councils and from the focus group held with People First.

Respondents tended to agree with the considerations suggested in the question, and mentioned some additional factors such as supporting local businesses. Some respondents reported that services should always be provided in-house, while others believed that it is unnecessary or unrealistic to lay down conditions for providers.

### **Factors to consider**

Many respondents stated that **quality of service** was an important factor. It was noted that the quality of service should be at least as good as that provided by the Council, and that the external organisation should provide this within similar terms and conditions to the Council. One respondent mentioned the importance of the provider “fitting in” with the character and nature of the task they will undertake. One or two respondents reported that quality of service should be included in the specification of the contract anyway, so this did not need to be considered as an extra factor.

**Local jobs** were another priority for respondents. It was noted that the Highlands are very sensitive to job losses, with communities suffering greatly from young professionals moving away to find work. Respondents reported that having local employees would help with the quality of the service, as people would have pride in their communities, and that it may bring a cost advantage. However, some respondents noted that local jobs were likely to be created anyway, since the workforce would need to be local, or suggested that a clause requiring this should be written into all contracts.

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A number of respondents mentioned the importance of **long term sustainability**, in terms of both cost and quality of service.

**Wider community benefit** was considered a priority by several respondents. Respondents mentioned the importance of providers using local services, and sourcing local food and goods. Examples of community benefit given by respondents were helping to keep school places filled and allowing local people to stay and have the ability to buy a home. One respondent noted that the effect on a community of a staff member being let go should be considered before redundancies are made.

Several respondents reported that whether the provider was a **local firm** should be taken into consideration. It was noted that small local businesses often find it difficult to compete for contracts and that big international companies were likely to put them at risk by undercutting them. Respondents reported that local firms would reinvest in the area and help to keep a local „face“. One respondent stated that a well-established local branch should be used, if not a local firm.

The importance of considering **employee conditions** was brought up by some respondents. It was stated that the organisation should have parity of wages and employment conditions with the Council, and that they should provide the living wage for their staff. One respondent reported that the external provider should have a progressive pay policy, with no staff earning more than five times the average wage. Another respondent stated that the Council should take into account whether organisations employ disabled people and people with learning difficulties.

Another criteria suggested by respondents was **staff training and development**. It was noted that organisations should provide apprenticeship and employment opportunities for young people, and that training should be provided for school leavers to encourage them to stay in their communities.

It was noted that the Council should consider whether **safeguards** are in place in case a provider fails to deliver. Respondents suggested penalty clauses in contracts, with the introduction of financial penalties if a provider overruns. It was suggested that the Council should consider the creditworthiness of a potential supplier.

Some respondents noted that the Council should consider **value for money** of the services, which was usually defined as a combination of the factors mentioned above. One respondent suggested that the Most Economically Advantageous Tender principle should be used, with factors such as quality, price and environmental characteristics given a certain weight in the tendering process.

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Other considerations that respondents suggested were:

- **Environmental impact;**
- **Cost of service**, including consideration of increased costs after the start of the contract;
- **Reliability** of the provider;
- A provider's **experience and reputation;**
- The **length of the contract;**
- Whether the provider had a **moral, rather than simply commercial approach** to providing services;
- The potential for **payback**, with the suggestion of a profit share arrangement with providers.

### **In-house only**

Some respondents did not suggest factors to be considered, but instead stressed that all services should be provided in-house. It was noted that, if the Council contracts out services, it loses control of many of the variables mentioned above. One respondent reported that the Council should not consider external contracting for rural areas, stating that it was the best provider of all of the criteria mentioned in the question.

### **Conditions should not be imposed**

A group of respondents felt that the Council should not lay down conditions for providers. One respondent stated that, if the contract is set out properly at the start, there should be no concern about the issues mentioned above. Another reported that European legislation may not allow such conditions to be considered. It was commented that, when the Council is considering large cuts in areas like education, they are in no position to impose conditions on their providers.

### **Importance of consultation**

One or two respondents noted the importance of consultation before providers are selected. It was reported that, if employees will transfer from the Council to the new provider, it is important to seek their views and suggestions. Local consultation was also recommended, along with liaison with Community Councils and Ward Managers.



## **Infrastructure and Resources**

***When buying goods or services, should the Council include a requirement to offer apprenticeship/training schemes, where appropriate, in order to promote youth employment?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

*The analysis in relation to apprenticeship/training schemes is included in the analysis to the previous question, however on the specific question the panel reported:*

Some 66% of those responding were in favour of considering “**whether apprenticeship/training schemes are offered**”. For 63% the “**wider benefit to the local community**” was a factor that ought to be taken into account.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

179 separate responses were received for the question “*When buying goods or services, should the Council include a requirement to offer apprenticeship/training schemes, where appropriate, in order to promote youth employment?*” Responses were mainly received through the online form, with additional opinions gathered from discussions at ward forums and posted and emailed forms. Responses were received from organisations including Community Councils and Parent Council. Responses were also collected from the focus group with People First.

Most respondents were in favour of introducing the requirement to offer apprenticeships or training schemes stating that it was very important to invest in young people. Some respondents reported that they would only support the proposal if certain conditions were met, such as not introducing the requirement at the cost of a saving. Several additional suggestions were made for the scheme, like extending it to include other groups who find it hard to obtain work. Respondents who were not in favour of introducing a requirement for providers to offer apprenticeships and training schemes raised concerns that this would exclude some companies, especially smaller ones.

#### **In favour**

Respondents in favour of the proposal noted that apprenticeships and training schemes were excellent opportunities for young people and should be encouraged. Concerns were raised that, if training was not offered, young people would leave the Highlands and start their families elsewhere. The importance of companies „giving something back“, and providing a social benefit from their contracts was mentioned. One or two respondents reported surprise that this was not already a condition of contracts with the Council.

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### **Conditions**

A number of respondents noted that they would not support a requirement for traineeships if this would be at the cost of a saving. It was reported that training opportunities should be considered, but that it should not preclude getting the best value for money for goods and services.

Several respondents believed that introducing the requirement would be ideal but not always practical, especially in the current economic climate. Respondents suggested that the provision of apprenticeships and training schemes should be encouraged but not required. It was proposed that an incentive scheme could be introduced, or that providers investing in young people could be preferred suppliers if they provide competitive quotes.

Some respondents felt that a requirement should be introduced, but only where reasonable and not on a blanket basis. A respondent noted that the efficacy of introducing the requirement should be investigated before implementation.

Concerns were raised that apprenticeships and training schemes would be used simply as a form of cheap labour. It was noted that these schemes must provide real opportunities for employment and not impede the development of paid work for other community members. One respondent stated that these schemes should only be offered to unemployed young people and not to existing employees reskilling. One or two respondents noted that providers should be forced to pay living wage, as the Council supports this policy for its own staff.

A group of respondents felt that the Council must monitor the up-take of apprenticeships and traineeships, and carry out checks to ensure that training is properly implemented and supervised. Regular reviews of the success of the scheme for individuals and employers were recommended. The importance of supporting and enabling organisations to provide these opportunities was mentioned.

One respondent stated that they would only support the proposal if it was a long-term arrangement. However, another noted that the Council could only impose the requirement if the contract was equal to the duration of the apprenticeship. If not, the apprentice could be made redundant at the end of the contract.

### **Suggestions**

Some respondents were in favour of introducing apprenticeships or trainee schemes, but suggested that these should be extended to include other members of the community. It was noted that just focusing on young people could be seen as age discrimination, and that training opportunities could be offered to older individuals too. A respondent suggested the use of an equalities policy to employ more women, while another advocated supporting other groups who find it difficult to get into work,

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such as people with learning disabilities. It was noted that organisations should employ people on benefits so that they can earn money and learn a skill.

A group of respondents felt that the Council should provide apprenticeships and traineeships itself, either instead of or as well as introducing this requirement for its providers. It was noted that this would build a sustainable workforce for the future. One respondent felt that it was only fair to impose the suggested requirement on providers if the Council provided similar schemes currently.

A respondent noted that the Council may need to part-fund the scheme, with apprentices required to conduct additional voluntary work in the community as part of an assisted-places arrangement.

A further suggestion was that, instead of apprenticeship and traineeships, there could be a requirement to recruit a certain number of unemployed people and a certain number of individuals referred by outside agencies.

### **Not in favour**

Respondents who were not in favour of the proposal raised concerns that this would exclude companies, especially small local businesses. It was noted that the Council may not be able to purchase the best goods or services if the provider is unable to offer traineeships or apprenticeships. Respondents reported that small businesses are often not in the position to offer training schemes, or that they may have to make other job cuts in order to sustain them.

Some respondents felt that it should be left up to organisations to take on apprentices or trainees if they are able to. It was noted that businesses can fluctuate, and that the provision of apprenticeships and training schemes will come naturally if a business is successful.

One or two respondents noted that the Council should not meddle in this area, and that it interferes with the market for providers.

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### ***How can we help make local businesses more able to compete for Council contracts?***

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

*There were no questions asked of the Citizens' Panel in relation to helping local businesses compete for Council contracts.*

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

135 separate responses were received for the question “*How can we help make local businesses more able to compete for Council contracts?*” Responses were mostly received through the online form, with additional responses collected from posted and emailed forms and through discussions at ward forums. Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and views from the focus group held with People First.

Suggestions for helping to make local businesses more able to compete for Council contracts included simplifying the tendering process, reducing red tape, offering smaller contracts and providing support and advice to local businesses. A small number of respondents felt that the Council should not do anything to help local businesses to compete for contracts, and that this was up to the businesses themselves.

#### ***Simplifying tendering process and reducing red tape***

Many respondents felt that the tendering process should be simplified as it was currently complicated and confusing. It was suggested that forms should be easier and less onerous, perhaps with a section for businesses to state who else they have provided services for so references are easier to obtain. Respondents felt that the procurement policy should be clear, fair and transparent, with specifications and contracts made easier to understand. It was stated that the requirements set out in a tender should be kept to a minimum to allow as many companies as possible to bid.

As well as clear briefs provided by the Council, it was proposed that there should be scope for suggestions on how the contract might be improved or delivered more efficiently. Some respondents suggested setting up a procurement website, where businesses could get information and apply to be a Council supplier. One respondent proposed the creation of a webpage where community members could post things that the Council needs and others could offer suggestions for obtaining these cheaply.

Several respondents recommended that red tape should be reduced, especially with regards to public liability insurance. It was suggested that paperwork reporting should be minimised, and that it should be easier for companies to join the approved

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Council contractors list. One respondent proposed that small contracts should be able to be awarded locally without the need for businesses to be registered in the procurement framework.

### ***Smaller and more local contracts***

A number of respondents suggested that the areas covered should be reduced for the purposes of procurement. It was noted that only large companies have the capacity to bid for Highland-wide contracts, but that local contracts could be fulfilled by smaller businesses. One respondent felt that work should be awarded to very local contractors, stating that, for example, an Inverness contractor should not undertake work in Caithness.

More local control was also advocated, with staff who manage small contracts being given discretionary power to open these up to small businesses and contractors. One or two respondents suggested running local contracts through Community Councils.

Respondents proposed that larger contracts could be broken down into smaller bundles of work, not necessarily by area. It was noted that this would give small businesses a better opportunity to compete for contracts.

### ***Providing advice***

The creation of an advisory service was suggested by several respondents. It was noted that the Council could hold workshops or take on an advisory officer to ensure that businesses fully understand how to apply for contracts. One respondent reported that this advice service may only be needed temporarily as companies will learn about the appropriate procedures. Respondents suggested that the Council should help to fund training and education schemes for local companies, or at least signpost them to partners who could provide this.

Some respondents felt that there should be a dialogue between the Council and the potential supplier when bids are being prepared and that local businesses should have the chance to meet people who are putting contracts out to tender. The importance of giving detailed feedback to unsuccessful bidders was also mentioned.

### ***Give preference to local providers***

Several respondents felt that the Council should actively give preference to local providers. It was suggested that contracts could be offered to local businesses first, and only advertised to other providers if no suitable candidates were found. Some respondents suggested introducing a locality ranking, with preference given to more local companies. Alternatively, local employment opportunities could be part of the

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contract criteria, giving Highland-based providers an advantage. One respondent felt that the Council should not use *any* non-Highland supplier.

One or two respondents noted that Pre-qualification Questionnaires were biased in favour of large companies, and suggested that the Council work with small businesses to re-write these so that they were slanted towards small local providers.

### ***Financial considerations***

A number of respondents stressed the importance of ensuring that all financial requirements that have to be met are appropriate for a small business. It was felt that the amount of capital spend needed was currently set too high for local firms and that this should be reduced. A respondent suggested asking local wind farm companies to provide grants to help cover costs, while another believed that costs could be saved if the Council provided companies with apprentices. Some respondents noted the need for local businesses to be paid promptly, within 30 days of invoicing.

### ***Reduce impression of favouritism***

Some respondents felt that the Council gave an impression of promoting favouritism, with contractors only chosen if they have the right contacts. It was noted that this reputation should be changed, possibly by recording and analysing where money is spent, and making this information transparent and publically available. One respondent suggested more frequent tendering processes, while another stated that five quotes should be obtained for each contract.

### ***Consider value for money, rather than cost***

It was noted that the Council should not just take the lowest priced bid, but should consider other factors such as local employment, sustainability and the quality of the service. One respondent suggested offering small incentives for activities such as promoting environmentally friendly measures or encouraging youth employment.

### ***Effective advertising***

Effective advertising was felt important by some respondents, and it was noted that appropriate advance notice should be given of contracts becoming available. Respondents suggested that the Council should set up a website to advertise contracts or that social networking sites could be used to spread awareness. A group of respondents felt that the Council should keep a list of local providers and approach them to encourage them to compete for contracts.

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### ***Contractors working in partnership***

Respondents believed that the Council should encourage and enable small businesses to collaborate, so that they can compete effectively for larger contracts. It was noted that the Council should work with the Chamber of Commerce to provide project management resources and enable multi-company contracts to work. Alternatively, the Council could set up an arms' length project management company to do this.

### ***Council should do nothing***

A small group of respondents felt that the Council should not do anything to make local businesses more able to compete for contracts. It was believed that the Council should focus on acting like a business, and only choose local providers if these were the best value for money. Respondents reported that the Council should make the procurement process as fair, simple and transparent as possible, but that the winning of contracts was up to the business.

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## **Infrastructure and Resources**

### **Prioritising Services**

***Where would you like to see the Council concentrate its resources?***

***and***

***In order to priorities certain areas, funding needs to be reduced or services stopped in others. In what areas would you reduce activity/stop delivering services in order to finance your priorities?***

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

*There were no questions asked of the Citizens' Panel in relation to prioritising spend.*

***Where would you like to see the Council concentrate its resources?***

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

130 separate responses were received to the question “*Within the context of a flat grant settlement, where would you like to see the Council concentrate its resources?*” Responses were mainly received through the online form and from discussions at ward forums. Responses were also generated from posted and emailed forms. Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and views from the focus groups held with People First and Highland Youth Voice.

A key theme was that respondents would like the Council to concentrate its resources on education, social services and social care. Roads and health were also considered important.

#### ***Education***

The area of most importance to many respondents was education. It was noted that this was an investment for the future and that it delivers the quality of people coming out of school, which benefits everyone. One respondent stated that the Council should concentrate its resources on education, but not on pre-schools. While some of these respondents were representatives of Parent Councils, many respondents who felt education was important did not state an affiliation with an organisation.

#### ***Social services and social care***

Several respondents believed that the Council should concentrate its resources on social services and social care. A number of respondents stated that resources should be concentrated on care and facilities for the elderly, with some respondents



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adding that this should be in their own homes. It was commented that this care must be co-ordinated with the NHS. Several respondents reported that resources should be concentrated on social services, social care or social work in general, while some stated that provision for welfare, for the poorest and for those at risk should be given particular attention. On or two respondents reported that resources should be concentrated on care of and provision for children and young people.

### ***Roads, road maintenance and road infrastructure***

A number of respondents stated that the Council should concentrate its resources on roads and their infrastructure and maintenance. It was noted that roads should be maintained and improved, with respondents mentioning potholes and resurfacing in particular. One respondent noted that too little was currently spent on roads, and that this was likely to lead to problems in the future. Another respondent noted that the Council should concentrate its resources on road maintenance, but that this had to be done by local contractors.

### ***Health***

A number of respondents believed that the Council should concentrate its resources on health. In particular, essential health, adult health, hospitals and the NHS were mentioned.

### ***Housing***

Several respondents noted that housing was an important area. Respondents believed that more housing should be built, especially affordable social housing. One respondent stated that resources should be concentrated on providing suitable housing for elderly people, while another noted that priority should be given to young, local people and families who cannot afford high house prices. One respondent believed that resources should be concentrated on housing, but that a „developer-led“ approach must be stopped. A respondent reported that the Council should concentrate on getting homes up to modern standards, but it was noted that any grants should be means tested and repayable if the property is then rented to someone else.

### ***Core and front line services***

One group of respondents specified no particular service but instead stated that the Council should concentrate its resources on all core and front line services. It was noted that local frontline services in particular should be a priority. Respondents noted that resources should be concentrated on workers in frontline positions, rather than managers and consultants. One respondent stated that the Council should allow the private sector to provide more services.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### ***Policing***

Several respondents felt that resources should be concentrated on policing and ensuring public safety.

### ***Environmental and community services***

A number of respondents stated that the Council should concentrate its resources on various environmental and community services. Waste collection, litter picking and recycling were noted, while others were in favour of concentrating resources on maintaining the natural environment. One respondent stated that flood prevention was important, while another suggested that resources should be concentrated on play parks. A further respondent reported that resources should be concentrated on ponds.

### ***Energy efficiency and generation***

Several respondents stated that the Council should concentrate its resources on energy efficiency and energy generation. It was noted that all properties should be energy efficient, irrespective of income or circumstances. One respondent specifically mentioned insulation. Another respondent stated that resources should be concentrated on energy generation from private homes, which could then be sold on.

### ***Businesses, employment and local economy***

Some respondents reported that resources should be concentrated on businesses, employment and the local economy. One respondent particularly mentioned business development, while others stated that small companies and social enterprises were important to support. A further respondent noted that the Council should concentrate its resources on regeneration of towns.

### ***Transport, winter maintenance and pavements***

Some respondents noted that resources should be concentrated on transport, with one stating that too little is currently spent on this area. Two respondents stated that winter maintenance, including gritting, was important, while a further respondent stated that resources should be concentrated on pavements.

### ***School buildings***

A few respondents stated that resources should be concentrated on the maintenance of school buildings, and on improving and/or rebuilding old schools.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### ***Communities and community empowerment***

Some respondents noted that resources should be concentrated within the local community. One respondent stated that communities should be built up so that they can care for people with special needs, while another commented that communities should be empowered and decision making should be devolved.

### ***Fire service***

One or two respondents stated that the Council should concentrate its resources on the fire service.

### ***Sport and cultural organisations***

One respondent stated that resources should be concentrated on sport, while another felt that independent cultural organisations should be invested in. They stated that this would involve a minimal cost, which would produce a big return.

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## **Infrastructure and Resources**

***In order to prioritise certain areas, funding needs to be reduced or services stopped in others. In what areas would you reduce activity/stop delivering services in order to finance your priorities?***

### **Qualitative Analysis**

128 separate responses were received for the question “*In order to prioritise certain areas, funding needs to be reduced or services stopped in others. In what areas would you reduce activity/stop delivering services in order to finance your priorities?*”

Most of these were received from individuals through the online form or from posted or emailed forms. Responses were also generated through discussions at ward forums. Organisational responses were received from Community Councils, Parent Councils and from the focus groups held with People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Many of the areas that respondents suggested for reductions have been mentioned elsewhere in the consultation. The most common services mentioned for reduction were some areas of education, ground maintenance, street lighting, learning and leisure and the arts. Some respondents also provided additional suggestions to save money, such as working with communities or negotiating reductions in debt repayments.

### ***Suggestions for reductions***

#### ***Gaelic education***

Many respondents stated that they would like activity to be reduced in Gaelic education. Respondents suggested that the Council mothball spending on Gaelic, or reduce this where it is not necessary or excessive. It was felt that spending in this area was a waste of resources and one respondent queried why the Council was duplicating what the Scottish Parliament was spending. A respondent suggested that resources should instead be focused on other languages, such as Spanish, Russian or one of the Chinese dialects. One or two respondents expressed views against the Gaelic school in Fort William.

#### ***Ground maintenance***

A number of respondents reported that the Council could stop or reduce grass cutting and flower bed maintenance. It was noted that volunteers and communities could take on these services, with communities fundraising for flower displays if appropriate. Respondents reported that the Council should focus on safety, rather than aesthetics, when considering roadside verge cutting, and noted that reducing grass cutting would improve bio-diversity.

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One respondent stated that the department dealing with local access and public footpaths should be closed down, and that this could instead be managed by a community group in association with a tourism body. Another felt that the Council should not do all of the gardening and maintenance for individuals in Council properties.

### ***Education***

Several respondents suggested finding savings in education other than Gaelic education. One respondent suggested closing small schools with fewer than 12 pupils. Another believed that families who have children in school residences should make a contribution towards this.

Two respondents suggested cutting education staff, with one stating that classroom assistants were not needed and another reporting that nursery Principle Teachers should be cut. Further views were that nursery provision should be reduced so that it only covered children aged 4 and over, or that parents should pay for pre-school education. It was noted that school signs should be turned off during the holidays.

Although respondents made several suggestions for how savings could be found in schools, there was not a large amount of support for any one suggestion.

### ***Street lighting and heating reduction***

Several respondents noted that funding for street lighting could be reduced. They suggested halving the number of street lights in suburban areas, turning off street lights in small villages permanently and turning street lights off between midnight and 6AM.

Some respondents proposed saving money by reducing heating levels in public buildings. It was suggested that heating should be reduced in winter or turned off from May to September.

### ***Learning, leisure and the arts***

Some respondents felt that services could be reduced in the areas of leisure facilities and community education. Two respondents queried whether the Highlife Highland management fee was value for money, and whether any profit was being made that could be reduced.

Some respondents stated that arts funding should be reduced, with one suggesting that the Eden Court grant should be cut and then directed to local communities. It was suggested that funding could be reduced to libraries, with a respondent commenting that these were a thing of the past. One respondent queried the need for library vans.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### ***Head office costs and infrastructure***

A number of respondents stated that head office costs should be reduced. Administration costs were mentioned, particularly in relation to ward management, and a respondent queried whether a centralised business support system was value for money. Respondents believed that the Council could spend less on postal costs, with a suggestion that glossy leaflets should not be sent out with Council Tax. A respondent suggested that reminders for returning electoral role register details should be sent out later, or should be mailed with Council Tax bills. It was proposed that the Council should not pay to chase Council Tax, but that this should be taken off people's salaries or benefits.

A small group of respondents felt that costs could be saved by changing the infrastructure of the Council and reducing centralised services. However, these respondents did not expand on their suggestions.

### ***Staffing***

Respondents offered suggestions about savings that could be made on staffing. These are detailed in the *Staffing* section elsewhere in the report.

### ***Social care and health***

Several respondents suggested that social and care services could be reduced. Respondents mentioned children's services, services for older adults and disabled people and care at home services. One respondent suggested that Council-run support groups should be reduced, as these could be provided on a voluntary basis. Another respondent suggested reviewing efficiency of spending on social work.

### ***Benefits***

Several respondents believed that funding should be reduced for benefits. One respondent mentioned housing benefit in particular, stating that there should be stricter criteria and that the benefits should be lowered for people who can work but choose not to.

### ***Waste collection and litter picking***

A number of respondents reported that waste collection and litter picking could be reduced. One or two suggested a fortnightly waste pick up, introducing a charge for an extra bin if it is needed. It was noted that an exception could be made for large families. However, a respondent disagreed with this suggestion, stating that it was disgusting to leave rubbish for two weeks. Some respondents suggested reducing or cutting out blue and brown bin collections.

One or two respondents reported that fewer litter pickers would be needed if there was a policed instant fine system for litter droppers.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### ***Public and school transport***

Some respondents suggested that funding could be reduced for transport concessions and subsidies. It was suggested that public transport subsidies and concessions should be means-tested, especially free bus passes for pensioners.

Respondents suggested that there should be less free school transport, particularly to Gaelic schools or when children choose to go to schools outwith their catchment area. It was noted that most people have cars, and respondents suggested that parents could either be charged for school transport, or it could be offered to social enterprises at a lower cost to the Council.

### ***Road signage***

Some respondents suggested that road signage should be decreased, as some is not necessary. Gaelic signage was mentioned in particular.

### ***Planning and building control***

Some respondents stated that less money should be spent on planning. Two respondents felt that there should be fewer tree officers in the planning department. One respondent stated that building control should be cut, since almost all new builds have guarantees backed by a professional body.

### ***Grants and discretionary funding***

Some respondents suggested that grants and discretionary funding should be reduced. It was noted that people should be encouraged to look for alternative sources of funding, rather than the Council being the first port of call. Further discussion on a reduction in grants and discretionary funding can be found in the „*Working with partners and other organisations*’ section.

### ***Council buildings***

It was noted that the Council should not build more offices and that existing Council buildings should be used or sold.

### ***Tourism and events***

Two respondents reported that firework displays should be cut or reduced, while another queried whether the tourism budget was being spent effectively.

### ***Technology***

Some respondents suggested that unnecessary spending on IT and phone use should be reduced and that the Council should review its technology contract. However, another respondent suggested that costs could be saved with the use of Skype and IT.

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### *Police, fire and valuation*

One respondent queried whether savings could be made with changes to the police and fire service, while another felt that money could be cut back on the valuation board and assessors.

### *Other suggestions*

Other suggestions for areas where funding could be reduced were:

- Housing
- Corporate development
- Council Service Points
- All Council services beyond the minimum
- Environmental health – it was proposed that this service should be vastly reduced and its functions passed to the police and SEPA.
- Money spent on satisfying EU laws – a respondent stated that the Council should simply report that it cannot afford this.

### ***Other considerations and suggestions***

#### *Work with communities*

Some respondents suggested that the Council should pay attention to the requirements of individual communities, rather than adopting blanket policies. It was noted that the Council should work with Community Councils, schools and other services providers to find out what works best for them. A respondent proposed asking communities to get involved in schemes such as childcare, provision of after school care and public area maintenance, to help to reduce costs.

#### *Geographical considerations*

A small number of respondents answered the question with reference to geographical areas of the Highlands. While one respondent stated that the same services must be available in all parts of the Council area, others mentioned that reductions could be made in Inverness, Nairn, Fort William, Wick and Thurso. Another respondent reported that services could be reduced in large towns and villages but that rural areas required more support.

#### *Council Tax considerations*

Some respondents stated that Council Tax should be increased or a local tax introduced instead of reducing services. One respondent felt that, if services were stopped, there should be a reduction in Council Tax. Council Tax is discussed further in the „*Income generation*’ section.



## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

### *Council debt*

One or two respondents reported that the Council should negotiate a reduction in the repayment of their borrowing costs, allowing them to save money.

### *Choosing areas to reduce*

A respondent noted that the same criteria that were used for choosing areas to fund should be employed to evaluate the needs of services on an annual basis. However, another respondent felt that the Council should not prioritise certain services, but should reduce all services equally.

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### **Preventative Spend**

***Do you have any ideas on what other areas we could spend money on now that may reduce spending in the future?***

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

*There were no quantitative questions asked of the Citizens' Panel in relation to preventative spend.*

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

#### **Overall Consultation Comments**

110 separate responses were received for the question “*Do you have ideas on what other areas we could spend money on now, that may reduce spending in the longer term?*” Most responses were received via the online form. Other responses were collected from discussions at ward forums and from posted and emailed forms. Responses were received from organisations including Community Councils and Parent Councils and from the focus groups held with People First and Highland Users Group (HUG).

Suggestions from respondents included road repairs, education and training and employment opportunities. One or two respondents were sceptical about whether preventative spend would be effective. Not all the suggestions provided by respondents to this question could be categorised as preventative spend but do outline ways the Council could save money.

#### ***Road and road sign repairs***

Many respondents reported that money should be spent on road repairs. It was felt that, if pot holes are filled in quickly with good quality materials, damage can be minimised and repairs maintained for a long time. One respondent noted that road repairs should be done in summer, as pot holes filled in winter deteriorate quickly.

One or two respondents mentioned the problem of flooding, and suggested that ditches should be regularly cleared to minimise this.

It was proposed that the Council employ engineers to check the state of small bridges, preventing long delays and expensive replacements if they collapse. A respondent suggested that preventative work should be done on hillsides that are prone to landslides, to minimise road blockage caused by this. Another respondent reported that worn road markings and signs should be updated to prevent accidents.

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### ***Education***

A number of respondents highlighted the importance of spending on education. It was noted that a good basic level of education should be ensured, to avoid later reliance on Council services. Some respondents suggested teaching management of personal budgets to secondary school children to prepare them for leaving school. One respondent felt that development of the University of the Highlands and Islands should be supported, allowing young people to stay at home instead of moving to other cities.

### ***Supporting training and employment***

Several respondents reported that the Council should help to create jobs in the Highlands, especially for young people. The provision of apprenticeships was recommended, particularly in caring industries, and a respondent proposed that young people should be educated in entrepreneurial skills. Some respondents suggested that training should be provided for people wishing to volunteer, for example in schools or with elderly people. One respondent reported that expensive disclosure requirements for such volunteering should be reduced.

Respondents from HUG noted the importance of training opportunities for people with mental health problems, mentioning the Bike Shed, Rag Tag „n“ Textile and other arts and creative projects. These opportunities often supported individuals during periods when they were unwell and prevented admission to hospital.

### ***Energy provision and use***

A range of responses were provided by respondents in relation to energy provision and use on the basis that this could result in savings for the Council in the longer term. Respondents felt that more use of renewable energy should be made in Council buildings, with biomass heating or heat pumps. Ways to save energy were suggested, such as giving staff incentives to waste less energy, installing insulation in houses and introducing better heating and lighting controls in buildings.

It was noted that all new buildings should be built to high energy efficient standards and that the Council should invest in energy-efficient street lighting. Some respondents suggested energy saving measures relating to transport, with shared transport by Council employees or the provision of electric or dual fuel Council vehicles.

Some respondents believed that the Council should invest more in renewable energy generation, building more wind turbines and installing solar panels on roofs of schools and public buildings. It was noted that this would generate income for the Council. A respondent reported that mainline gas should be available in more Highland areas.

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### ***Housing***

Some respondents noted that more Council houses should be built, which would reduce the amount of money paid to private landlords. It was reported that the Council should maintain their stock better, with regular inspections of the fabric of blocks of flats. One respondent proposed charging Council tenants who do not look after their properties.

### ***Council estate***

#### ***Building maintenance and renovation***

Maintenance of buildings such as schools was considered important, with the annual upkeep of school roofs, windows and gutters mentioned in particular. A respondent suggested that old schools were renovated instead of being mothballed. It was noted that this would provide investment in the construction industry, which would create jobs and apprenticeship opportunities, giving people more money to spend in communities.

#### ***Combining schools and departments***

Some respondents supported the merging of schools, noting that this would be more cost effective for pupils and staff. Other respondents advocated combining Service Points with other facilities such as libraries, Post Offices and police offices, believing that this would save on heating and staff costs since staff could multi-task. It was also suggested that Council departments could be centralised to save on maintenance costs. One respondent proposed investing in key Council buildings and selling others.

#### ***New Council buildings and locations***

It was suggested that older Council properties in town centres should be sold, and buildings constructed in areas where properties are less expensive and job opportunities more welcome. One respondent proposed that the Council should build more efficient Council buildings, selling inefficient properties that are costly to maintain. However, another respondent believed that the Council should concentrate on maintaining its assets rather than providing replacements.

### ***Care and social services***

Respondents felt that the Council should look after children within the Highlands rather than using other Local Authorities, and it was suggested that more support should be given to foster parents to facilitate this. One respondent noted their enthusiastic support for £1m being spent on Children's Services over the next three years.

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One or two respondents reported that residential accommodation should be upgraded, and respondents from HUG suggested running a women's only B&B, providing temporary accommodation as an alternative to a refuge. It was reported that this would create job opportunities. Respondents from People First noted that, with the provision of the right housing and right support, money would not have to be spent on residential care for people with learning difficulties.

Members of HUG highlighted the importance of preventative spend for mental health, noting that services should be adapted to assist people to stay well for longer. It was reported that safe houses for people with mental health issues were very valuable, allowing them to avoid admittance to hospital or contact with the police. HUG members felt that, if all agencies understood mental health better, issues would not escalate and these organisations would make financial savings.

One respondent reported that money should be spent on provision for the elderly, while another believed that work should be done to tackle domestic violence.

### ***Promoting health and fitness for young people***

Respondents reported that children should be encouraged to participate in sports through the continued provision of health and leisure facilities and regular physical education classes in schools. One respondent noted that physical education teachers should be employed rather than sports co-ordinators, as the latter tend to organise events that not all children are able to attend or pay for.

Respondents also suggested that young people should be educated about living healthy lifestyles. It was hoped that young people would continue participating in sport as they got older, which would help to reduce obesity, stop them getting into trouble due to boredom and help to promote discipline, which would be valuable to future employers.

### ***Technology***

Some respondents suggested that money should be spent on improving the Council's IT infrastructure. It was proposed that paperwork related to areas like Council Tax should be provided electronically.

### ***The environment***

It was reported that the Council should invest in recycling by improving recycling facilities or educating young people about this. One respondent suggested that the Council's recycling contract should be changed, so that more materials can be recycled. This would help to minimise waste, which was considered important by

## ***Infrastructure and Resources***

another respondent. A further respondent proposed turning rural Council land into forestry developments.

### ***Improving travel links***

Respondents felt that travel links should be improved, making it easier to commute to Highland's main towns. A cycle lane from Nairn to Inverness was proposed, and one respondent suggested lobbying the Scottish Government to build good quality roads from Inverness to Fort William and from Inverness to Thurso. It was noted that this would encourage more tourism and greatly reduce the number of road traffic accidents.

### ***Council staffing***

A small group of respondents felt that money could be saved by making Council staff redundant or reducing the number of Councillors. One respondent noted that redundancy payments for staff should no longer be required. Another respondent advocated the further training of staff, and developing the leadership skills of managers.

### ***Supervision of contracts and work***

One or two respondents stated that Council staff should manage contracts more closely, by, for example, ensuring that Fujitsu deliver projects on time. A respondent reported that, if service providers have to carry out remedial works due to, for example, problems with road surfacing, the Council should insist that these are not rebilled. It was noted that the Council should make sure that Private Finance Initiatives are working for the good of the Council and the providers.

### ***Supporting communities***

It was suggested that the Council should do more to support community ventures and development. One respondent proposed a fast-track service for Community Councils and other community groups who ask for advice or action from the Council.

### ***Ground maintenance and parks***

A small number of respondents believed that the Council should invest in public areas and parks. One respondent suggested that janitors should be used in schools and hospitals to maintain green areas, with a one-off spend required on equipment. They believed that this would allow for cheaper and more effective service provision than with contractors.

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### **Benefits**

It was suggested that money should be spent to tackle poverty in families, with one respondent noting that it was important for people to get all of the benefits that they are entitled to. They suggested that appropriate funding of Citizens Advice Bureaux would facilitate this.

### **Greater consultation**

A respondent suggested that more consultation should be carried out locally to avoid undertaking projects which may later prove to be counter-productive.

### **Additional suggestions**

Additional suggestions that respondents provided for preventative spend were:

- Planning for bad weather to limit workplace and school closures;
- Bringing in external auditors to help the Council to run more efficiently;
- Supporting people with an alcohol addiction;
- Employing enforcement officers;
- Having more flexibility between capital and revenue expenditure;
- Investing in tourist attractions, which would generate income in the long term.

### **Reservations about preventative spend**

One or two respondents believed that preventative spend would not be effective.

One respondent felt that it was a good idea in principle, but thought that there would not be enough money to provide for everything that could be covered by it.

### **Citizens' Panel Comments**

470 responses were received from the Citizens' Panel for the question *Do you have ideas on what other areas we could spend money on now, that may reduce spending in the longer term?*

Although some themes were similar to those in the main consultation, such as road repairs, employment opportunities and education, respondents from the Citizens' Panel placed much more importance on provision of services for the elderly than respondents to the main consultation. Citizens' Panel respondents placed less emphasis on spending on construction work than respondents to the main consultation and, unlike respondents to the main consultation, some Panel members believed that individuals should be encouraged to support themselves rather than receiving assistance from the Council.

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### **Road maintenance and Council parking arrangements**

As in the main consultation, many Citizens' Panel respondents stated that road maintenance was an important area for preventative spend. In addition to the considerations mentioned in the main consultation, Citizens' Panel members noted that utilities companies should work on structures like pipes, cables and drains before repairing roads and pavements. It was reported that this would prevent the digging up of relatively newly laid roads. One or two respondents proposed that the Council should take back responsibility for poorly maintained roads such as the A82. A respondent noted that full stretches of road should be upgraded, rather than only potholes being filled in. It was reported that Council employees should be encouraged to report problems that they notice when travelling to work.

Some respondents stated that the Council should provide adequate drainage and dredge rivers, streams and ditches to prevent flooding of roads and other areas. One respondent suggested that the need for road maintenance could be reduced if a parking charge was introduced for Council employees or a rebate given to those who did not use the car park at work. It was believed that this would discourage employees from driving to work, reducing congestion and the need for road repairs.

### **Support for the elderly**

A number of respondents noted that the Highlands had an aging population and that facilities should be provided to cope with this. Several respondents suggested building new nursing homes or taking over privately owned care homes. It was reported that this would lower private care costs, release hospital beds, provide local employment and help the local economy through use of local suppliers. One respondent suggested selling shares in care homes to fund building costs.

Several respondents felt that home care services for elderly people should be increased, especially in rural areas, with training provided for home carers. It was noted that this would prevent long-term care home admission. One respondent suggested that provision should be available to allow elderly people to die at home. A respondent noted that, although a move to care at home might reduce the need for Council facilities in the short term, these were still likely to be needed in the future. The respondent felt that existing care facilities should be maintained as building these from scratch in the future would be more expensive.

Some respondents supported spending on community groups and clubs for elderly people. It was suggested that exercise groups, lunch clubs and social gatherings should be arranged, with transport to these provided by the Council or members of the community. One respondent suggested providing advice on nutrition to elderly people, while another proposed that hot meals should be delivered to those unable to attend lunch clubs. It was noted that a community hall could be used once a month to provide facilities like a meals, showers and haircuts for elderly people.



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A respondent suggested encouraging people over 80 to get an annual check-up from their GP, noting that this may help to prevent falls or other emergency situations.

### **Social and care services**

Several respondents believed that money should be spent on social and care services. It was noted that sufficient, early support must be given to carers, with adequate respite care made available. A respondent suggested that more money should be paid to family carers, and another proposed the creation of a carer buddy scheme.

A number of respondents noted that support services should be provided for people with drug and alcohol addictions, noting that alcoholism in particular was a big problem in the Highlands. It was felt that more follow-up care or dry houses should be provided for people who have been treated in centres such as Beechwood and then return to their own communities. One respondent noted that parents with drug and alcohol addictions sometimes spend their money inappropriately. They proposed that food and clothing deliveries could be made to these families, instead of giving them a lump sum of money.

Some respondents stated that money should be spent on services for people with mental illnesses, particularly those developed in older age, such as dementia and Alzheimers. It was noted that more local support should be given for people diagnosed with mental illness, before they are admitted to psychiatric hospitals. Drop-in centres for people affected by mental health issues were considered important. A respondent reported that many mental health professionals could learn from the Rag Tag „n“ Textile charity, which trains people with mental health problems.

Support for children in care was mentioned, with a suggestion that the adoption and fostering processes should be simplified to allow vulnerable young people to be placed more quickly. A respondent reported that young people moving from foster or institutional care to independent living should be supported.

A befriending service for isolated individuals was suggested, along with the provision of a phone service to check on elderly or vulnerable people in the evenings. It was felt that the Council should provide support for disabled people, with a respondent suggesting the development of cluster housing for people with disabilities. It was noted that more disabled parking spaces should be provided on main streets.

A respondent believed that home visits by health visitors, nurses and GPs should be supported, as these are often helpful in understanding people’s home conditions and family life.

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### **Young children and families**

Several respondents suggested providing parenting classes for new parents, or having facilities for parents to meet and share views and skills. The importance of educating parents about healthy eating and economical cooking was mentioned. Support through playgroups and carers was considered important, with a respondent suggesting facilities for very young children, where they can play ball games and learn to relate to others. „Friends to children“ and „friends to families“ services were suggested, to provide support other than through social workers.

Investing in the promotion of children’s health was considered important, with the provision of free school meals and free healthy drinks and snacks at breaks suggested. One respondent suggested that children should be prevented from leaving school at lunchtime, noting that this had been effective in Finland. Another respondent suggested reopening the Janny’s Hoose in Merkinch to provide advice on child and family health, while a further Panel member proposed introducing dentists in schools.

Help with childcare costs was suggested, especially for single parents. One respondent stated that more facilities should be provided free to young people, with no charge made for transport, care or education for people under 12. The creation of a drop-in centre to provide essentials like nappies for families and vulnerable children was proposed.

Although several respondents suggested that money should be spent supporting families, one respondent noted that single people should also be given early help.

### **Activities and support for young people**

Several respondents stated that services should be increased for young people, with the provision of after and before school activities such as sport, craft and music groups. Free tickets for school children to attend ballets and concerts were proposed, along with outdoor activities like camping trips. It was suggested that a meeting place, such as a church hall, should be provided for young people. Respondents noted that this could be organised and staffed by volunteers. It was believed that providing leisure facilities and groups for young people would prevent problems like long-term unemployment, violent behaviour and drug and alcohol misuse. A respondent highlighted the importance of providing these facilities in rural, as well as urban, areas, and it was thought particularly important to provide activities for young people with behavioural, social or educational difficulties.

It was noted that youth workers should be supported, perhaps with the introduction of a youth drug worker to tackle early substance misuse. One respondent highlighted

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the importance of young people having a say in their communities, and stated that this should be encouraged.

However, a further respondent believed that young people had enough money spent on them and that the Council should concentrate on the older generation.

### **Education**

Education was considered an important area for preventative spend, especially support for pupils with additional support needs. It was noted that staff should be given more training to support these children and that educational opportunities should be diversified to cater for young people's various learning styles. An outreach service to assist pupils was also suggested, with the aim of reducing exclusions and preventing problems as children grow older. One respondent suggested a „middle ground“ school for children who struggle to cope in mainstream schools but are not ready for specialist schools. An increase in classroom assistants was also suggested for younger pupils.

Respondents mentioned a variety of areas in which they felt young people should be educated to prevent problems escalating further: litter, vandalism, the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse, sex education and family planning. One respondent suggested that a set of films should be made on these issues, to be shown in primary and secondary schools. As in the main consultation, some respondents suggested that finance classes should be provided for young people.

The importance of investing in good quality teaching staff was mentioned by some respondents, with one stating specifically that nursery education should be invested in.

It was felt that school children should be provided with free trips to surrounding areas and free music tuition, which one respondent noted would benefit tourism in the Highlands.

### **Encouraging employment and supporting local businesses**

As in the main consultation, respondents believed that the Council should encourage apprenticeships and job opportunities, particularly for young people and in rural areas. It was noted that the Council should work with the Scottish and National Governments to achieve this and that business owners could be encouraged to train young people or offer apprenticeships with the use of grants or business rate reductions. One respondent suggested that older people should be encouraged to retire to give young people the opportunity to build up skills. Respondents felt that increasing the number of people in work would mean that less Council resources need to be used and that deprivation in the Highlands would be reduced.

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Several respondents noted that tasks such as street cleaning, litter picking and basic repairs should be carried out by people earning benefits or undertaking unpaid Community Service. It was noted that this would save money for the Council and allow individuals to gain skills and experience for future employment. One respondent proposed that incentives should be given to unemployed people to do this.

It was suggested that the Council should support new and local businesses in the Highlands, and that they should reduce rents for retail areas to provide more economic opportunities. A respondent proposed that the Council provide financial support and general advice to Highland businesses.

### **Housing**

As in the main consultation, regular maintenance of Council housing stock was considered important, including the provision of double glazing and new doors. It was suggested that this should be done in-house by the Council, and that Council tenants should be taught to look after their properties, with the risk of losing them if they do not. Incentives were proposed for tenants who cared for their furniture and other goods well. A respondent noted that estate and garden wardens should be employed to live on Council estates and be given good powers to tackle issues. One respondent proposed introducing maintenance grants for owners of previous Council properties. It was noted that this would allow them to fix issues that the Council had not previously addressed and help to stop homeowners relying on social housing in the future.

Some respondents felt that more Council houses should be built to reduce overcrowding, especially as the cost of building and materials was likely to rise in the future. It was suggested that hostel-style accommodation should be provided for young single mothers, with crèche facilities allowing them to undertake further education, or that the Council should run their own H.M.O. residences, instead of paying private landlords for this.

One or two respondents made suggestions about how to free up Council houses, proposing that mortgages should be reduced if this allowed people to buy their own homes instead of using Council properties.

One respondent suggested including telehealth care in new homes, to allow residents' health to be monitored regularly.

### **Building maintenance**

As in the main consultation, spending on the maintenance of buildings like schools was considered important for a number of respondents. It was noted that buildings

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should be repaired and upgraded now to avoid major renovations or rebuilding later. One respondent stated that school janitors should be allowed to do perform routine maintenance tasks, such as putting up shelves, without the need for an outside contractor. Another respondent suggested that the Council could provide maintenance services such as plumbing and electrical services to private housing. It was noted that this would generate money, create jobs and help to maintain properties, requiring less Council assistance in the long run.

### **Community facilities and involvement**

A group of respondents believed that more facilities and groups should be provided for communities. The importance of sports and leisure facilities was mentioned, especially for rural areas. One respondent suggested the creation of free gyms in village halls, reporting that these could be unsupervised and used at people's own risk. Community skills-building and leisure classes for adults were suggested, along with financial support for unemployed people or those on low incomes to take part in activities like sport, dance and music.

Some respondents noted that community gardening initiatives should be set up, perhaps growing produce in schools, as at Inverness Royal Academy, or with the use of community allotments. It was reported that young people could be given apprenticeships to provide garden maintenance locally, with the incorporation of a composting scheme and provision for vegetables to be sold on by volunteers.

The importance of investing in community spaces was highlighted by some respondents. Respondents suggested that community assets could be developed through high-quality „placemaking“, an approach which involves close consultation with local communities. Incentives were proposed for young families to move into areas with low populations, and one respondent believed that the Council planning department should look carefully at planning applications to ensure that community sustainability is maintained.

### **Council staffing**

Some respondents noted that the Council should work on managing absence, perhaps by interviewing employees at an early stage to identify any help that they could be given. It was suggested that a pool of people should be created to provide emergency cover if there is a shortage of staff due to sickness.

While one or two respondents felt that some Council employees were unnecessary, others felt that the Council was understaffed and that more staff should be employed to minimise damage for the future. One respondent reported that some work should be better supervised to get the best out of employees, but another felt that staff should be encouraged to work in small teams or alone, perhaps after training.

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A respondent reported that a study should be carried out into flexi-time, to ascertain how much this was costing the Council.

### **Support of charities and local organisations**

It was believed that more grants and funding should be given to charities and local organisations that support people's wider health and wellbeing. One respondent suggested that core funding should be provided for community development trusts, while another proposed giving more powers to local organisations.

### **Health**

Spending on early intervention and support services related to health was considered important by some respondents. It was suggested that the Council should help to support GP practices, nurses and Community Psychiatric Nurses and to facilitate communication between them. A respondent believed that the Council should encourage doctors to move to the Highlands. One or two respondents noted that the Council should work with the NHS to spend more on preventative medicines and testing, meaning that less money would be spent on caring for and curing patients. Support for people leaving hospital and help for people to stop smoking was also suggested.

### **Environmental tasks**

It was reported that the Council could undertake an annual survey of trees, bushes and grass with a view to trimming them before they become a problem. Spend to prevent landslides was also supported.

The importance of spending on snow clearing and harbour repairs was mentioned. One respondent suggested that groups of residents should be encouraged to look after their own areas with tasks such as street cleaning.

### **Encouraging self-help**

Some Citizens' Panel respondents felt that people should be encouraged to be independent and help themselves, rather than relying on support from the Council. It was felt that the benefits system was often abused and that the Council should invest in investigating benefit fraud and taking more disciplined action against offenders. Respondents felt that people should be educated in their own responsibilities and taking care of themselves, rather than expecting hand-outs from the Council. One respondent believed that the Council spent enough money currently and should not invest more in preventative spend.

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### **Transport**

Respondents suggested that the Council invest in cycle lanes and footpaths, especially around schools, to encourage people to get fit and to reduce carbon emissions. The need for better road infrastructure and a good public and NHS transport service was noted. One respondent reported that the Council should provide a permanent solution to problems caused by the unsuitable Stromeferry bypass, while another suggested introducing a fleet of mini-buses and cars to transport children to school in a more cost-effective way.

It was also proposed that the Council review its transport arrangements for employees, by moving to electric cars, redeploying or consolidating its fleet or fitting tracking devices to Council vehicles to try to reduce unnecessary miles run.

### **Energy**

Some Panel members reported that preventative spend could be used for energy, for example by switching to more energy-efficient street lighting. It was noted that people should be encouraged to switch over from oil to gas and that better insulation and more effective heating should be installed in Council properties and housing.

### **Construction**

It was noted by a small number of respondents that the Council should invest in building high quality schools and Council houses so that they last for a long time. One respondent suggested that the Council should spend money building schools rather than using expensive Private Finance Initiatives.

### **Estate rationalisation**

As in the main consultation, a group of Panel members suggested that schools and Council buildings should be rationalised. However, there was less support for this from the Citizens' Panel than from respondents to the main consultation.

### **Finance and debt**

A small group of respondents reported that the Council should invest in more effective Council Tax recovery. It was also suggested that residents should be given help with Council Tax and that debt and financial advice should be provided. In relation to the Council's own finances, respondents suggested that it should spend money on implementing a risk management scheme or establishing a self-insurance fund.

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### **Waste and recycling**

Spending on waste and recycling was considered important by a small number of Panel members. It was suggested that more education should be provided about reducing waste and litter, particularly to school children and pet owners.

Respondents reported that recycling should be made less complicated and that opening hours should be extended at waste depots to make them more easily accessible. One respondent proposed that people should be allowed to remove items from the recycling centre for their own use, which would reduce the amount of recycling that the Council would need to dispose of.

### **Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour**

It was noted that the Council should support police strategies for early intervention around anti-social behaviour. Respondents suggested introducing more police on the streets, having a firmer approach to low-level crime and the installing CCTV to capture anti-social behaviour. One respondent recommended that the Community Safety Officer visit other areas to learn about successful strategies.

### **Procurement**

Panel members noted that the Council should ensure that they purchase goods and services of a high quality. It was suggested that the Council should form an Authorities Buying Consortium with other Local Authorities to create a manual of approved providers for goods and services. A respondent reported that all work subcontracted by the Council should be checked and signed off by Council staff.

### **Technology**

A respondent suggested starting to bring IT services back in-house before the end of the Fujitsu contract. It was also proposed that ICT services should only be in charge of infrastructure and that the Council should create a new organisation to manage systems and the up-skilling of computer users.

### **Rehabilitation of prisoners**

One or two respondents believed that the Council should spend money rehabilitating prisoners, both within prison and on their release.

### **Additional suggestions**

Additional suggestions for preventative spend made by Panel members were:

- Facilitating better communication between Council departments;
- Using stronger planning control to prevent financial loss in tourism;



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- Establishing a working group before starting projects to ensure that they will really be preventative;
  - Providing a service for people to raise concerns with the Council anonymously, such as a helpline;
  - Employing more public toilet supervisors to cut down on vandalism;
  - Encouraging people without children to leave legacies to their local community.
-