HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Redesign Board**

Date: 23 March 2021

Report Title: **Amenities Project**

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities & Place

1.   Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   This report provides an update on the re-setting of the amenities review follow the presentation delivered to Redesign Board workshop on the 27th November 2020. The report contains in Section 6 an overview of the project objectives and Appendix 1 contains the project timeline.

1.2   The amenities review initially commenced towards the end of 2019, with some progress made before work was halted due to the global pandemic Covid-19. As part of re-setting of the amenities review, the project team have reviewed work done to date, progress is noted in Section 7 of this report against the project objectives.

1.3   The project team will undertake a review of information gathered pre-covid: Caithness place-based workshop including SWOT analysis from both members and staff. This place-based model will be reviewed and tailored to suit other areas. There may be a requirement to revisit information captured pre-covid to reflect the Council's current position. Financial and data gathering work previously undertaken as part of the project will need to be refreshed. Lessons learned during Covid will be incorporated into the project.

1.4   The Council's continued Covid response prioritising essential work, the continuance of 2nd lockdown and potential staff absence due to self-isolating or contracting Covid may impact on estimated project timescales. The service will require to follow direction from the Scottish Government in relation to: lockdown, restrictions and priorities.

2.   Recommendations

2.1   Members are asked to NOTE:

(i)   the re-setting of the amenities review as a project, as per presentation on 27th November 2020 and the inclusion of any learning from Covid;

(ii)   the 6 project objectives and the progress made to date, with the project overseen by the Redesign Board;

(iii)   the anticipated project timescales and estimated date for completion;

(iv)   Covid is an ongoing factor which may impact on the projects progress against estimated project timescales, as a result slippage in any agreed timescales could occur or tasks could be paused.

3.   Implications

3.1   <u>Resource implications</u> – The project will consider all the resourcing issues including workforce, plant, materials, income generation and community capacity for sustainable proposals to be developed for Members to consider. The project will look to identify areas of spend currently outsourced that could be delivered through in-sourcing/in-house via the Amenities Services. Additional/new work in-sourced could lead to greater service demand and increased workforce requirements. Alternatives to Glyphosate are considerably more expensive. The partial ban continues and some alternative methods of weed control will be trialled and costs will be quantified. Costs include product and plant costs as well as the number of staff needed for an increased number of applications, if all other grass cutting and maintenance standards remain at the same level.

3.2   <u>Legal implications</u> – Ministers may make regulations for the management of burial grounds in the Burials and Cremations (Scotland) Act 2016 and these would be considered as part of the review. Out with burial grounds amenity services are not statutory. However, where they are provided, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 are the principal legislation that needs to be complied with.

3.4   The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 outlines control measures that the Council must take to protect the Health and Safety of its employees and members of the public when using chemicals such as weed killer. Any changes to current practice will incorporate the appropriate control measures. Glyphosate use is licensed only until December 2025.

3.5   Play areas are not a statutory service; however, where they are provided, we must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 for employees and members of the public attending play areas. We must also comply with our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Fairer Scotland Duty. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and participate in a wide range of cultural, artistic and cultural activities.

3.6   <u>Community implications (Equality, Poverty and Rural)</u> – the project will consider equalities impacts and the Fairer Scotland Duty. The project will also consider workforce implications, including groups of staff with relatively low pay. The project would also consider known community involvement and proposals for further involvement, supporting our place-based approach.

3.4   <u>Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications</u> – the project will consider the implications for the Council's carbon footprint and other environmental impacts, particularly on

biodiversity. It will contribute to the Transformation Project for Climate Change through the work package on community food growing.

3.5 <u>Risk implications</u> – the project will ensure that the Council's exposure to legal and reputational risk is addressed.

3.6 <u>Gaelic implications</u> – there are no known Gaelic implications.

4.   Project Initiation

4.1   The amenities project has been established in accordance with project management principles. The project will be managed using work packages. Work packages will be created linked to each project objective.

4.2   A project plan has been produced detailing tasks, timescales and resources. The project manager will maintain the project plan. This plan will be regularly updated to monitor progress against each project objective. The project plan is a living document and will be updated in response to project objectives. Timescales are noted at Section 9 and an overview of the project timeline can be found at Appendix 1.

4.3   The project will be delivered on a staged approach. Towards the end of each stage the Project Team will meet to agree the tasks to be actioned during the next stage of the project. The project manager will prepare an end stage report on progress to date, overall project situation and the next stage plan. The report will be presented to the project board for approval to authorise the next stage of the project.

4.4   The Project Team is formed of 10 officers. It is recognised that the composition of the Project Team will change through time and will be dependent on the products being delivered. Project Team Members:

Role	Service Functions
Project Manager	Transformation
Head of Performance and Resources	Communities and Place
Amenity Services Manager - South	Communities and Place
Amenity Services Manager - North	Communities and Place
Services Support Officer 2	Communities and Place
Amenities Officers	Communities and Place
Amenities Officers	Communities and Place
Amenities Officers	Communities and Place
Operational Support Officer	Communities and Place
Operational Support Officer – (vacant post)	Communities and Place

4.5   It is important to note there may be slippages or delays in the delivery of project outcomes due to the Council's ongoing response to the pandemic.

5.   Background

5.1   As reported to Redesign Workshop on 27th November 2020, the services provided by amenities include:

- Grounds maintenance in open space owned by the Council – grass cutting, sports pitches (Inverness) weed killing, shrub maintenance, flower beds

- Grounds maintenance on sites we don't own – historical
- Burial ground maintenance
- Play parks and equipment maintenance
- Tree / arbor work
- Support roads, winter gritting
- Advice and guidance to other HC services and communities

5.2   The project will review current practices, understand local priorities using:

Place-based Approach
- map what is being delivered locally; consider what can be prioritised and what is possible locally; recognise the varied growing season within Highland; learn from Covid experience; engage Members, staff and community bodies locally.

Strategic Approach
- quantify and describe our Highland assets, resources and costs; support other Council objectives; and understand external markets and our competition/other providers.

Redesign Approach
- Using the options appraisal model developed by the Redesign Board identifying 10 options for Service delivery.

5.3   Pre-covid the project team had commenced work on a number of strategic areas and place-based workshops were held in Caithness, where staff (cross services) and members were brought together. This work requires revisiting and for the place-based model to be refined for other areas.

5.4   The amenities review was paused during lockdown and grounds maintenance services were reduced as staff effort focused on:
- prioritising burials and the advance preparation of lairs;
- play parks reopening with very little notice; and
- a late start, staff absence of the permanent workforce (down 35%), supporting waste teams in April and May and 50% less seasonal staff recruited.

5.5   As the service continues to respond to Covid, prioritising essential work within the 2nd lockdown, there is a risk that project delivery may be delayed or paused. This risk relates to service disruption from lockdown requirements and potential staff absence from Covid as well as increasing and new demands on the service. This was described in the report to the Communities and Place Committee on 24th February 2021 on Covid impacts and adjustments.

6.   Project Objectives

6.1   Objective 1 – (services delivered in-house)

6.1.1   Where services are delivered in-house, they will articulate clear standards of service, demonstrate efficiency and continuous improvement, based on an understanding of our assets (property/people/finances) and savings to be delivered. Proposals on how the amenities function can support the Council's objectives of jobs and career paths will be developed.

6.2   Objective 2 – (in-sourcing and commercial opportunities)

6.2.1   Commercial opportunities, including in-sourcing work, will be explored with business cases developed to identify how to generate more income and to market Council services more widely. We will also review all current service level agreements.

6.2.2   Project objective 2, will be divided into 3 workstreams with separate work packages created for the workstream:
1. in-sourcing;
2. commercial opportunities; and
3. service level agreements.

6.3   Objective 3 – (partnership)

6.3.1   Shared, partnership or integrated service delivery will be tested initially in Lochaber with transferable learning identified.

6.4   Objective 4 – (Highlife Highland - HLH)

6.4.1   The working relationship and resources involved with HLH will be documented along with an understanding of the amenity services HLH provides. This will help us to understand whether our working relationship with HLH delivers Best Value for amenity services and whether work on a Council owned company for amenity services should be explored further.

6.5   Objective 5 - (community involvement)

6.5.1   For community involvement in the range of amenity services we will focus on localised solutions working with local Members, staff and community bodies. This will include identifying the supports required to incentivise and sustain volunteer effort in maintaining and improving local amenity. We will also seek to agree a transparent offer of service that is sustainable. We will also support community food growing, contributing to climate change and community planning objectives. We will also learn from:
a. where this already works well;
b. our Covid experience;
c. the new approach to play areas; and
d. new connections with community bodies and volunteers.

6.5.2   Project objective 5, will be divided into 3 workstreams with separate work packages created for the workstream:
1. community involvement – play areas, implementing the Council decision in January 2021 and with local discussions commencing in March 2021;
2. community involvement – community food growing, linked to the Transformation Project on climate change; and
3. community involvement – supporting our place-based approach.

6.6   Objective 6 - (biodiversity)

6.6.1   We will identify practical ways to support the Council's biodiversity objectives. This will include learning from Covid on areas set-aside, working with biodiversity forums and the ecology and climate change team. This will also identify where demand for amenities

services can be reduced or adjusted. Up to date information on alternatives to glyphosate use will be reported. This will include latest national guidance and any new national direction expected or reported. It will also involve some trials of alternatives with costs quantified so that recommendations on weedkilling can be made.

6.6.2   Project objective 6, will be divided into 2 workstreams with separate work packages created for the workstream:
1. weedkilling; and
2. biodiversity.

7.   Project Objectives – progress update

7.1.1   <u>Objective 1 – (services delivered in-house)</u>

7.1.1   The project requires to understand the service's current assets, by recording and mapping: people/property/finances. This includes creating maps of the land maintained by amenity services: land the Council owns and land the service maintains on behalf of other organisations.

7.1.2   In late 2019 work commenced to capture this information. Data was obtained on spend within amenity services and lists of plant and equipment; this information will need to be refreshed as part of the project re-setting.

7.1.3   It was agreed that the project would take a place-based approach to mapping the land maintained by amenity services; each area would be mapped, and the information would be used at workshops/engagement sessions as part of objective 5: community involvement.

7.1.4   It was agreed that the first area to trial a place-based approach would be Caithness, as there is already an established relationship in Caithness between community bodies/volunteers and amenity services. Land maps were created using GIS software of the land maintained by amenities and an asset register created containing details on current maintenance routine. This information was used at two workshops in Caithness, noted at Section 7.5.1 of this report.

7.1.5   Due to the country going into lockdown shortly after this workshop, feedback on updates required to the local maps has not been completed. In recent weeks some work has taken place to create local maps for Lochaber, this work supports objective 3: partnership.

7.1.6   The team resource for GIS mapping was redeployed to support with Covid response work. Recruitment is planned to continue the production of area maps.

7.1.7   This work is fundamental to the project, it will form the basis for discussions on each area and it will contribute towards: development of area maintenance plans; support service planning and workforce planning: right people, right posts, right size of workforce.

7.1.8   Continuous improvement is part of this project objective and for the service to work towards continuous improvement, in-line with this the service have adopted APSE model of performance reports and indicators. This will enable the service to compare performance with other member Councils throughout the UK.

7.2   <u>Objective 2.1 – (in-sourcing)</u>

7.2.1 An outline business case was approved at Resources and Risk Governance Board on the 29th January 2020 for in-sourcing of:
- Tree maintenance in Inverness and Ross-shire;
- Play Area Inspections; and
- Grass cutting in Lochaber and Skye.

7.2.2 Following the Council's recruitment process, play areas and arboricultural services teams were established in 2020.

7.2.3 The play areas team are currently undertaking inspections of all play areas the Council is responsible for maintaining. Information from initial inspections will inform future risk based routine inspection schedules and support local discussions on maintaining play areas.

7.2.4 Arboricultural services work is nearing completion on a tracker to record all tree work undertaken by the team. At present the team covers part of Highland, for areas not covered or where capacity is limited, this work will continue to be contracted out for the time being.

7.2.5 Amenity services have brought in-house grass cutting for Lochaber and Skye, this work was previously contracted out. The Service historically faced challenges recruiting seasonal staff on Skye; for 2020 season approval was obtained to recruit 2 FTE on fixed term posts.

7.2.6 Following on from season 2020, the service is being brought in-house for the 2021 season, following approval to recruit 2 permanent posts for Skye and 2 permanent posts for Lochaber and within the current budget.

7.2.7 It has been identified that cross-service working needs to improve, with amenity services involved at the early stages of future developments where the land will be handed over to the service to maintain, post completion. Amenities are currently working with the Housing Service to review housing plans for Financial Year 2021-22; maintenance standards and costings. Early engagement could lead to opportunities to in-source work on future developments through amenities, if amenities are involved in the early stages of development plans.

7.3 Objective 3 – (partnership)

7.3.1 Work is underway to explore partnership opportunities in Lochaber. In Lochaber amenity areas near one another are maintained by different service providers, resulting in inconsistent maintenance standards. It is hoped by agreeing a common standard of maintenance of amenity areas this will improve standards and the appearance of the area. If agreed with partners, the intention is to trial a partnership approach for the 2021 season. This could either be delivered by one service provider or shared responsibility across the service providers.

7.4 Objective 5.1 – (community involvement – play areas)

7.4.1 In January 2021 the Council agreed the approach to reviewing play areas and play area investment priorities by identifying local solutions through discussions at Ward or Area level.

7.4.2   An approach to engaging Members locally on choices around play areas was agreed with Area Chairs on 19.02.21. It involves the amenities staff engaging with local members, sharing information on condition, backlog maintenance and budget, and agreeing with Members what the priorities are for playparks in their areas. Seeking opportunities to access external funding will also be part of the work going forward. The engagement sessions begin week commencing 1 March with all ward meetings being attended by the end of March and work will continue throughout the year to deliver on the priorities identified by Members.

7.4.3   Budget proposals for 2021/22 to be considered on 4th March 2021 include additional place-based investment which, if approved, may also be used. This element of the Amenities Review will be taken forward as agreed at Council.

7.5   Objective 5.3 – (community involvement – place-based approach)

7.5.1   A place-based approach was trialled in Caithness in February 2020. The land maps created for Caithness, noted in Section 7.1.4 of this report were used at two workshops involving both staff and Members. It involved presentations of the land maps to confirm the areas maintained were correct, participating in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis exercise, Members' views on staff feedback and to consider and reflect on their experience of community involvement.

7.5.2   Due to the country going into lockdown shortly after this engagement session; feedback has not been fully reviewed to date and amendments have not yet been made to area maps in GIS.

7.5.3   A review of the feedback from Caithness and a review of the place-based approach taken for Caithness is required with the approach tailored to suit other areas. The review of Caithness feedback is scheduled to happen by the end of stage 1 as part of the re-setting of the amenities project. The maps will be updated when a resource with GIS skills is recruited.

7.5.4   The project will follow the original plan, with the next areas identified for workshops as Lochaber and Nairn. After each workshop the project team will meet up to reflect on the feedback obtained and update area data records including maps. Dates for these workshops are currently unknown as it is dependent on the recruitment of a resource to undertake this work. The project will need to consider how workshops could be delivered, if current Covid social distancing rules are still in place.

7.6   Objective 6.1 – (weedkilling)

7.6.1   The Council undertakes weedkilling using glyphosate in some locations. In June 2019 the Council agreed a motion to ban weed killing products containing glyphosate in certain areas (all sports recreation facilities / play grounds and schools) and for a business case to be prepared on a complete ban on the use of such products, except for invasive species control and at dangerous road junctions where its use would be risk assessed on a case by case basis.

7.6.2   Since then a partial ban on the use of glyphosate has been implemented.

7.6.3   Alternatives to glyphosate were due to be trialled during 2020: Caithness was to trial strimming, other areas to try different methods as part of the review. Due to Covid disruption, trials on weed control alternatives in 2020 were paused. It is anticipated that trials on alternatives will take place during the 2021 season.

7.6.4   New national guidance on herbicide use is expected in due course. The project team will be working alongside officers in Infrastructure and Environment to review the latest guidance when it comes out and will work together to develop a policy on the use of herbicides for the Council.

8.   Project Objective – Interdependencies

8.1   It is important to highlight the interdependencies between some of the project objectives. This is where tasks against one project objective help support the deliverance of tasks in other project objectives.

8.2   There are interdependencies between some of the project objectives:

Project Objective	Project Outcomes
Objective 1	Establishing the baseline core data for the project is fundamental to delivery of some or all of the project's objectives. The work required to produce area maps at Objective 1 provides the detail which will support work required on some or all of the other project's objectives.
Objective 5	Information obtained through staff, member and community engagement will assist amenity services to identify areas suitable for biodiversity – project objective 6.

9.   Timescales and governance

9.1   Timescales for each project outcome may not be known at the outset of the project. The project will be delivered on a staged approach, noted in Section 4.3. An overview of the project timeline can be found at Appendix 1.

9.2   Stage 1 of the project up to 30.04.2021, will focus on the re-setting of the project. The project team will revisit the work undertaken to date including:
   - review work done pre-covid;
   - review the feedback from the Caithness workshops;
   - review and refresh datasets;
   - update the project plan and report progress; and
   - identify resources and schedule task for stage 2.

9.3   The current project plan identifies 5 stages, up to project completion at the end of financial year 2022-23. Due to Covid and the Council's ongoing responses to support communities, there may be slippages in the timescales.

   - In order to proceed with community involvement – place-based approach; area maps are required, once a resource is in post and up to speed work will commence on creating the maps and workshops will be planned for Lochaber then Nairn.

   - Objective 2.2 - commercial opportunities, work with our partners HLH and market research will determine the potential scope of commercial opportunities;

separate business case(s) will be required to proceed further, this work may extend beyond the current project timeline.

- Objective 6.2 – biodiversity, the project will work towards identifying set aside areas suitable for biodiversity, working alongside colleagues in Infrastructure and Environment. A separate business case will be required to proceed further, the business case will include initial setup costs, this work may extend beyond the current project timeline.

9.4 The amenities project will be overseen by the Redesign Board. Two Redesign Board members: Cllr Raymond Bremner and Paul MacPherson, will be Redesign Board leads for the project and members of the Project Board.

9.5 The Project Board is formed of officers and Redesign Board members. It is recognised that the composition of the Project Board will change through time to align with the project objectives, products being delivered. Project Board Members:

Project Board Role	Role
Project Sponsor	Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Lead Officer	Head of Performance and Resources
Project Manager	Project Manager
Redesign Board Members	Member Rep
Redesign Board Members	Trade Union Rep
Senior User	Amenity Services Manager - South
Senior User	Amenity Services Manager - North
Senior Supplier	Amenities Team (North)
Senior Supplier	Amenities Team (South)

9.6 Update reports will be provided to the Redesign Board, reporting the project's progress. Redesign Board Workshops may be required on some of the work packages where wider Member views will be helpful before finalising recommendations.

- Redesign Board recommendations will be made to Council and where these are agreed the Communities and Place Committee will scrutinise their implementation.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 3rd March 2021

Authors: Kathleen Urquhart, Project Manager

Appendix 1: Amenities Project Timeline