

Agenda Item	9
Report No	HC/2/22

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: The Highland Council

Date: 10 March 2022

Report Title: Future Highlands Strategic Partnership Priority 3: People – Living Healthy, Thriving and Inclusive Lives

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following Members' support for the development of the "Future Highlands" strategy at the Council meeting in September 2021, this report provides an overview of the direction of travel on the third priority of the Strategic Partnership Priority (SPP) "People – Living Healthy, Thriving and Inclusive Lives".
- 1.2 The report illustrates the work which is currently taking place with our partner agencies. The intention is to build on this initial work through collaboration with our key partners to develop integrated workforce planning strategies to address skills gaps, attract and develop key workers, to create opportunities for young people to study in the Highlands and encourage young people to return to the Highlands.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the progress on the direction of travel for key strands of the 'People – Living Healthy, Thriving and Inclusive Lives' Strategy; and
 - ii. Note further updates will be brought to committee.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – there are no immediate resource implications arising from this report.
- 3.2 Legal – there are no implications.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – the report highlights the positive contributions the initiatives will make for equality, poverty and rurality by the creation of employment opportunities, support to people with disabilities, health and wellbeing, IT connectivity and promoting healthier lifestyles.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – there will be a positive impact on climate change and carbon omissions relating to new working practices as hybrid arrangements are adopted by employers.
- 3.5 Risk (including H&S issues) – no specific risk presented in the report.
- 3.6 Gaelic – there are no implications.

4. Background and Context

- 4.1 One of the key strands of the Christie principles is the workforce. As reported in September 2021, The Future Highlands Strategy takes a proactive collaborative approach to capitalising on the unique and natural assets available in the Highlands. Encouraging economic stability, recovery and growth to revitalise Highland communities and towns must have the workforce at its heart.
- 4.2 The third priority of the strategic partnership ‘People – Living Healthy, thriving and Inclusive Lives’ identifies a number of key issues to focus on such as repopulation, developing sustainable communities, recruitment and retention, investing in our young people, connectivity and healthy lifestyles. This report illustrates the collaborative work which is currently taking place and future actions to develop integrated workforce planning strategies with our partners.

5. Key initiatives - Living Healthy, thriving and Inclusive Lives

5.1 Recruitment and Retention

- 5.1.1 New Working Practices - The COVID-19 lockdown offered unprecedented opportunities for employers to trial working from home on a large scale. As a result, many organisations are now working through the implementation of a more flexible approach to work which, for many traditionally office-based workers, will involve the introduction of a hybrid work model.

The development of hybrid approaches will modernise working practices and breakdown traditional barriers to improve services delivered in the Highlands. New work practices which are being embraced will provide an enhanced and supportive environment for staff that improves productivity, work-life balance and increase job satisfaction. Changes to hybrid work practices will provide an attractive option and open up a wider talent pool including improved opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This approach will also support climate change through reduced travel and carbon omissions throughout the Highlands.

- 5.1.2 Partnership with Blue Light Services – The Council is working in partnership with blue light services (Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Scottish Ambulance Service) to develop sustainable jobs in local areas which are full time and comprise responsibilities from each of the 4 organisations. This Multi-Agency Community Safety Officer role aligns with all four organisations in relation to

protection, prevention and response, providing a unique and innovative approach to community safety matters, identifying and targeting issues collaboratively.

North West Sutherland has been proposed as a pilot, due to it being one of the most remote and rural areas and that it would benefit greatly from this mobile resource. Blue light services are submitting an initial paper to their joint Resources Committee Group with high level supporting statement from each of the four organisations outlining the required outcomes from the proposed job role.

Next steps include:

- securing 25% funding from each organisation
- defining the job description and person specification for the joint role

The initial project will operate for 12 months, with an additional training period of 8-10 weeks prior to the commencement of the duties.

5.1.3 *Improved process with partners* - The Council has strengthened joined up working with partners including offering NHS the opportunity to advertise adult social care vacancies on the national recruitment portal My Job Scotland, alongside Council vacancies. This enhances and increases the reach of vacancies at a time when there are acute recruitment issues in the social care sector. The Council has also worked with HLH to provide access to Council opportunities which has retained staff in the workplace.

5.2 Investing in Our People

5.2.1 *Employment Opportunities* - The Council's Employability Team is a member of the Highland Employability Partnership working in collaboration with other Council services and partner organisations to deliver No One Left Behind. The partnership is developing a three-year Delivery Plan which aims to offer a flexible, person-centred "all-age" employability service to clients across the Highlands to provide pathways into fair and sustainable work.

The Highland Council has adopted the national five stage Employability Pipeline for the design and delivery of employability services and aims to develop a menu of diverse activities and interventions to enable engagement with priority clients including young people; long term unemployed and parents. Employability support includes:

- **Key worker Service:** clients have someone they can talk to, who will help them work out what support and skills they need as they prepare for the jobs that are (and will become) available. This includes identifying and sourcing appropriate employability activities, skills development training, volunteering, work experience opportunities and/or specialist support.
- **Work Based Learning:** development of a suite of "work-based learning" volunteering and training placements within public sector organisations and/or third sector organisations.
- **Employer Recruitment Incentive:** support to assist SMEs to recruit employees who have been unemployed and have other barriers to employment.

This approach aims to retain people within the Highlands in order to:

- become active contributors to community wealth building;
- meet emerging labour market priorities; and
- tackle in-work poverty.

5.2.2 Progress on Modern Apprenticeship provision within the Council was reported to the Corporate Resources Committee on 26 January 2022 which highlighted the excellent progress being made in creating and recruiting MAs, graduates and interns. This demonstrated the Council's commitment to developing apprenticeships opportunities to help retain young people in the Highlands. Apprenticeship week is taking place 7-11 March and this will be actively promoted in the Council.

5.3 Connectivity

5.3.1 Digital Workforce - Priority 4 "Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities" report to the full Council in December 2021 contained detail of digital connectivity being critical to the development of the Highlands as a place to live, work and visit. Delivery of the infrastructure to provide superfast broadband to the Highlands is an essential building block for a strong economy and thriving future for the workforce of the Highlands and our communities.

The Council is fully committed to digital transformation with a report being approved by the Corporate Resources Committee in August 2021. The Digital Transformation project is concerned with developing the Council's approach to digital transformation as well as its implementation, this includes projects to improve access to services online, modernise the workplace and leverage the Council's investment with key suppliers such as Microsoft.

Modernising the workplace through engagement and working with all stakeholders including those on the front line can ensure that systems already in place, future systems and products are meeting the needs of those who use them daily and most importantly our customers.

A plan for a Digital Workforce, revising the Digital Strategy, updating the Data Strategy and reviewing the service delivery model for delivering Digital Transformation will all be taken forward as part of this project. To this end the Council has carried out its second Digital Maturity assessment with the Scottish Government Digital Office (previous one undertaken in 2018). Staff were surveyed in Dec 2021/Jan 2022 with support of UHI. Following on from this the aim is to produce the Digital and Data Strategy for the council by summer 2022.

This new assessment will provide an opportunity to benchmark against the earlier assessment and other Scottish Local Authorities. This will enable the Council to move forward with digital transformation and by developing digital skills for the workforce and our communities, this will be a place for existing and prospective workforce of the Highlands to thrive.

5.4 Healthy Lifestyles

5.4.1 Local Resilience Partnership - The Council is an active participant in this group which oversees local work by groups co-ordinating the four themes of the UK's strategy for countering terrorism. Themes are: Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare.

As part of the Protect and Prepare themes, a senior management training session was held on 21 February. This was conducted jointly by the Council's Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing Manager, the Resilience Team and a Police Scotland Counter Terrorism Security Adviser. The Session covered CONTEST, including the Graduated Security Plan and the upcoming Protect Duty which will place additional responsibilities on some Council Services. With the proposed Protect Duty, Councils will be expected to manage and protect their premises but also have plans and arrangements in place to ensure the public are safe at publicly accessible locations: this will include the grey space between buildings, including roads, pavements, paths etc.

Further training will be available (both online and face to face) for Council staff to access to ensure new and existing staff have a consistent awareness of potential threats and how to deal promptly and safely with such threats.

5.4.2 Community Food Growing – Supporting communities to be resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food is the aim of the Council's Food Growing Strategy *Growing our Future*, which was agreed at the Communities and Place Committee on 23 February 2022. Community food growing includes allotments, community gardens, pockets orchards, school growing and a range of scales in projects from a small cluster of fruit trees on a roadside verge to a social enterprise run garden feeding dozens of families.

Delivery of the strategy is rooted in partnership with our communities and the Highland Good Food Partnership from access to land, development of peer support and learning networks and access to resources.

The benefits of community food growing are considerable from improving health and wellbeing, diet and nutrition, reducing the environmental impact of food, increasing biodiversity, increasing social connections and sense of connection to place, as well as skills development and education on all of these matters.

The awareness and interest in the benefits of community food growing within the community has been gathering momentum over the last few years and this has gathered pace as a response to the pandemic with local food growing linked to the resilience response and local food tables and food larders. It is an opportune time to build support and to expand community food growing initiatives.

5.4.3 Amenities Review – the amenities review encompasses a range of work which seeks to improve our amenity services are provided leading to improved open spaces for our communities. A key aspect of this is community involvement and building on existing learning and approaches to develop local solutions for working in partnership with community bodies. This will include identifying the supports required to incentivise and sustain volunteer effort in maintaining and improving local amenity spaces. This links closely to the identification of open space and supporting communities to take forward food growing projects but also contributing to climate change and community planning objectives.

5.4.4 Active Highland Strategy – the Community Planning Partnership Active Highland Strategy sets out a framework of outcomes and commitments for promoting opportunities around physical activity and sport in our population. The overarching aim of this work is to reduce inequalities and in physical activity terms, this not only

means increasing accessible opportunities, but also using physical activity and sport to promote and nurture a culture of inclusion and participation.

The role of the natural and built environment, and of established and new facilities, is critical to the success of the strategy. This involves making the best use of the natural assets of the Highlands and ensuring access for all; utilising our planning processes, regulations and guidelines to create built environments that improve health and increase connectivity; and maintaining existing and new facilities to a standard that inspires uptake and ownership among users.

The outcomes for the strategy include encouraging activity throughout life, developing physical and mental confidence and wellbeing, maintaining and improving our active infrastructure including the natural environment and improving opportunities to participate, progress and achieve in sport.

5.4.5 Volunteering – volunteers and volunteering is an essential part of community and community life, which has been exemplified over the course of the pandemic. There are considerable benefits to volunteering both personal benefits, to the individual related to confidence, developing skills and giving something back, to wider societal benefits of third sector and community bodies providing and supporting service provision.

The pandemic has seen a shift in the approach to volunteering. Whilst an overwhelming volunteering effort was seen in response to the pandemic, many community organisations and the Highland Third Sector interface are reporting lower levels of volunteering and associated challenges being experienced by community groups.

Recognising the challenge, the Community Planning Partnership has commitment to encouraging and supporting volunteering opportunities and volunteering across our communities and within our staff groups. A campaign to support and encourage volunteering is currently being developed but a further strand is to focus on our staff groups. From a Council perspective it is proposed to review and update the Council's existing volunteering policy recognising the wider health and wellbeing benefits volunteering can bring to the individual staff member but also the wider community benefits. This clearly supports the connected strand of the Council's strategic aims. Supporting our Highland Third Sector Interface.

5.4.6 Mental Health and Wellbeing – supporting and promoting good mental health and wellbeing is one of the core outcomes and priorities of the Council and of the Community Planning Partnership. It is key to ensuring the people are supported and able to live healthy lives.

The impact of COVID has led to increased levels of social isolation and loneliness and some deterioration in population mental health and wellbeing. Intelligence would suggest that certain groups – young people, people on low incomes, people with existing mental health conditions – were at greater risk. In response to the issues identified by communities and community resilience groups, CPP work during this period has focused on supporting communities to identify and signpost individuals to key resources and support.

Further partnership work has also focused on suicide intervention and prevention, a key challenge within Highlands. A partnership training programme has been developed in recognition that everyone within our communities can have a role to

play in preventing suicide and this sits alongside a Prevent Suicide Highland App which aims to help prevent suicide through developing a safety plan and key connections to sources of support when feeling distressed.

- 5.4.7** *Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* – Highland-wide surveys from children and young people, service requests to specialist teams and suicide rates across areas, indicate that there are varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing across schools and communities, and there are gaps in services for more specialist interventions. Each area of Highland is unique, and the gaps in services and experiences of children and young people needs to be understood from within the lived experience of the child or young person in their local context. The Caithness Cares concept was established in January 2021 and enabled the Caithness Community to collaborate with statutory services to improve services and identify gaps in provision to aid good mental health and wellbeing in their area. The findings of the project were generated through a needs analysis whilst running short-term pilot work in parallel to help those in crisis. The Caithness community engaged with their community to gather the views and experiences of those in their local context and the collation of these voices and experiences created a long-term plan for the area. The 6 month project aimed to facilitate community empowerment and enable the community ‘to support public service providers to work together and with local communities via [community planning](#) to shape and deliver better services’ (Community Empowerment Bill, 2015). The final plan was handed to the Community Planning Partnership in June 2021 and the Sutherland Pathfinder was established which followed the format of Caithness. The findings from both Caithness and Sutherland will enable other CPP to lead mental health and wellbeing transformations in their local contexts.
- 5.4.8** *Partnership Mental Health Strategy* – as reported to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee May 2021, work is underway to develop a Partnership Mental Health Strategy for Highland. The aim is that the strategy will address the wide-ranging mental health needs of those within our communities, considering both universal services to the needs of those with more complex and serious mental health conditions and across the life stages. This is a key area of work for the CPP over the next year.
- 5.4.9** *Supporting Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing* – Mental Health continues to be the most prevalent reason for Council staff referrals to Occupational Health as regularly reported to the quarterly meetings of the Central Safety Committee. It is recognised that staff will continue to require support post COVID for Mental Health issues. Mental Health Representative play a key part and are trained to approach the person, offer assistance and to listen without judgement, enabling the member of staff to say how they feel and encourage them to get appropriate help. The network of MH representative is increasing and there have been many successful confidential interventions including staff approaching Mental Health representatives who have suicidal thoughts. The Council’s Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Spectrum Life provides staff and their families with counselling service and free health and wellbeing advice on a 24/7 basis 365 days a year. Spectrum Life also provide health promotion advice and guidance which complements the promotional guidance provided by the Council’s Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing team and Occupational Health provider International SOS. Recent examples published on the staff Intranet includes:
[Fatigue and tiredness](#)
[Accident prevention in the home](#)
[Working from home - Fatigue](#)

[Minding yourself at work](#)

[Heart Health](#)

[Winter Health](#)

The Council promotes Mental Health on significant dates such as World Suicide Prevention Day and Time to Talk Day which this year the Council in conjunction with NHS Highland selected to talk about mental health and our general wellbeing. The purpose of the day to talk to staff about mental health and general wellbeing. The purpose of time to talk was to contribute to changing the conversation and help break down mental health barriers, by reaching out to colleagues and checking in for a catch-up. We are working with See Me, the national programme to end mental health discrimination, to ensure that people do not experience stigma and discrimination if they're struggling with their mental health.

5.4.10 *Living with long term conditions* - The Council is a partner in the Lets Get on With it Together (LGOWIT) project. This project is managed by a partnership of public, private and third sector (voluntary) organisations and is hosted by the Highland Third Sector Interface. LGOWIT has been active for ten years, promoting and supporting the vision of self-management of health for those living with long-term conditions. In broad terms, self-management encourages and supports individuals to take greater responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and seek to live life to its full potential. It is about forging an equal partnership between the individual, health and other professionals and the community around them, to the mutual benefit of all.

The project has delivered self-management training for staff, some of whom have gone on to become self-management trainers and now deliver courses across the Highlands. Post-Covid, the project is looking at how to develop and deliver digital health and wellbeing solutions.

9. Future Action

Work will continue with our partners building on the range of initiatives outlined in this report and to explore developing integrated workforce planning strategies to address skills gaps, attract and develop key workers, creating opportunities for young people to study in the Highlands and encourage young people to return after studying outwith the Highlands.

Designation: ECO Resources and Finance

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Background Papers: