

Agenda Item	10.
Report No	CP/11/25

The Highland Council

Committee: **Communities and Place**

Date: **22 May 2025**

Report Title: **Service Performance Reporting for Q4 January 2025 to March 2025**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - Place**

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The report details relevant performance monitoring information for the Communities and Place Service as follows:

- Corporate Indicators
- Contribution to the Corporate Plan
- Service Plan Progress

1.2 The content and structure are intended to: -

- assist Member scrutiny and performance management
- inform decision making to aid continuous improvement, and
- provide transparency and accessibility

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **scrutinise** and **note** the Service's performance information.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - The resource implications are detailed in the report.

3.2 **Legal** - This report contributes to the Council's statutory duties to report performance and secure best value in terms of; Section 1(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1992, and Section 1 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, respectively.

3.3 **Risk** - There is a significant risk to the budget in relation to core areas of overspend and delivery of unallocated savings. The service team are managing this through regular review and challenge and seeking solutions to reduce the current predicted overspend.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - There are no immediate health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no implications for Gaelic arising from this report.

4 Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Service Performance – Corporate Indicators

5.1 Service performance in relation to Absence, Complaints, FOIs, and Invoice Payments are set out in the following sub-sections.

5.2 Service Attendance Management

5.2.1 Staff absence is a nationally benchmarked indicator. Effective absence management supports staff, maintains productivity, and contributes to the Council's benchmarked performance.

5.2.2 Communities and Place

Average number working days per employee lost through sickness absence

Average Days Lost	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Communities and Place	3.80	4.27	4.38	4.31	4.21	4.41	4.99	5.14
Highland Council	2.48	2.08	3.35	3.48	3.24	2.54	3.42	3.95

5.2.3 There has been a gradual increase in absence within the Communities and Place Service over the last year. This is mirrored across the organisation and for both long and short-term absences. The upwards trend in FTE Days Lost for long and short-term absences has continued into quarter 4, with significant increase in the number of employees absent due to viral illnesses. Although the increase in viral illnesses is as expected in quarter 4, we are also seeing an increase in the number of viral illnesses throughout the year.

5.2.4 Across the Council, the People and Place clusters appear to be most affected by the increase in viral illnesses, with less of an increase in the Corporate cluster. This is likely to be attributed to the front-line nature of many of the People and Place cluster staff and, particularly in the Place cluster and Communities and Place in particular, the outside nature of these roles. A further factor may be that a number of posts in the Corporate cluster lend themselves to homeworking, which increases the likelihood that employees continue to work whilst recuperating at home.

5.2.5 Mental health related absences continue to appear within the top 3 long term absence reasons for all Clusters. It should be noted that employees often require multiple treatments and ongoing support which may extend periods of absence. Additionally, there continues to be long NHS waiting lists to access appropriate mental health services.

5.2.6 As a way of supporting stress/debility issues the occupational health, safety and wellbeing team have been hosting drop-in online sessions for staff who require wellbeing, mental health and stress management support. There has also been a focus on recruiting and training an additional 21 mental health representatives, bringing the total in the council to 91 reps. A new mental health and wellbeing helpline was launched in September, which provides easier access to the following mental health support services: EAP; NHS 24; Samaritans and mental health representatives.

5.2.7 Musculoskeletal reasons also continue to appear in the top three absence reasons for the service and managers are mindful of the largely manual workforce and the impact of those jobs on employee health and wellbeing. Therefore, occupational health and physiotherapy referrals are progressed as and when required. This is particularly important based on the aging workforce and the requirement to ensure staff receive the appropriate risk assessments, training and PPE to undertake their roles safely.

5.2.8 Reducing absence rates through a strong and consistent approach to attendance management is a particular focus for the service. Mandatory online and face-to-face training is available for managers and Attendance Support Officers continue to play a vital role in assisting both managers and employees. Managers are undertaking employee review and development (ERD) meetings with staff to identify any training and wellbeing requirements. The Employee Assistance Programme also provides staff and their families with access to a confidential counselling service and many other wellbeing services including legal and financial information, life coaching and health information.

Attendance Support Officers also continue to play a vital role in assisting both managers and employees.

5.3 Service Complaints Response Times

5.3.1 Monitoring complaints provides important feedback which can facilitate decision making and service design. Services are responsible for responding to complaints which are issued on their behalf by the Customer and Resolution Improvement Team ('CRIT'). Performance for complaints during Q4 against a corporate target of 80% was as follows:-

Complaints - Communities and Place

Number of closed complaints and the % compliant with the legislative timescale

Frontline Resolution within 5 days

	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Communities and Place	64	97 %	37	92 %	36	89 %	57	82 %
Highland Council	159	92 %	132	78 %	150	80 %	189	76 %

Investigation Resolution within 20 days

	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Communities and Place	11	36 %	8	38 %	2	100 %	7	43 %
Highland Council	97	63 %	85	49 %	67	48 %	98	46 %

Escalated Resolution within 20 days

	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Communities and Place	8	75 %	4	75 %	5	80 %	4	75 %
Highland Council	32	50 %	32	41 %	28	57 %	34	35 %

5.3.2 Reflecting the frontline nature of many of the services Communities and Place deliver, the Service recognises the importance of this area. 28% of all frontline complaints for the organisation are for Communities and Place service and performance in responding to these is consistently meeting the Council target and is in line with organisational performance.

Whilst the overall number of complaints at investigation or escalated resolution level are small for the service, they are generally very complex and therefore require more time to respond. Performance remains below the Council target and the service continues to review any that fall out with the timescale to identify how to improve performance.

5.4 Service Freedom of Information ('FOI') Response Times

5.4.1 FOI requests are co-ordinated by CRIT in collaboration with the Service teams which may hold information relevant to the request.

The performance for FOI response times during Q4 against a corporate target of 90% was as follows:-

Freedom of Information Requests - Communities and Place																	
% FOIs Compliant - Communities and Place		Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
		63	90 %	58	95 %	56	95 %	103	87 %	103	89 %	82	79 %	92	79 %	96	79 %
% FOIs Compliant - Highland Council		Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
		399	84 %	333	88 %	338	89 %	548	77 %	511	81 %	479	76 %	568	73 %	616	71 %

Tables display the number of FOIs closed within the quarter and % of those that were compliant with the legislative timescale (20 working days) for the service and the Highland Council overall.

The Scottish Information Commissioner requires the Council to achieve a minimum compliance rate of 90%.

5.4.2 FOI performance across Communities and Place remains steadily above the Council average. Work continues to ensure delivery against the 90% corporate target.

5.5 Service Invoice Payment Times

5.5.1 Payment of invoices within 30 days of receipt is a Council Statutory Performance Indicator. The Council also monitors the number of invoices paid within 10 days of receipt.

The performance for invoice payment times within 30 days and 10 days during Quarter 4 against a target of 95% and 77%, respectively, was as follows:-

Communities and Place - Invoice Payments

Invoice Payment within 30 days	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Communities and Place	97.5 %	98.4 %	98.6 %	96.9 %	80.8 %	88.2 %	87.9 %	88.7 %
Highland Council	95.1 %	96.7 %	95.6 %	93.6 %	87.7 %	91.4 %	92.9 %	92.9 %
Invoice Payment less than 10 days	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Communities and Place	81.2 %	90.6 %	89.2 %	86.0 %	49.7 %	66.7 %	52.1 %	46.5 %
Highland Council	72.8 %	80.9 %	75.3 %	69.7 %	57.0 %	68.5 %	63.8 %	63.3 %

5.5.2 Performance against the Council targets for invoice processing has been tracking below the Highland average during 2024/25. Action is being taken within service management teams to focus on invoice processing and payment in order to improve performance.

6 Service Contribution to the Performance Plan

6.1 The following outlines Communities and Place performance indicators that contribute to the Council's Performance Plan. Overall, progress against the Performance Plan Performance Indicators and Actions are on target.

Communities and Place - PIs and Actions that contribute to Performance Plan

PIs/Actions in the performance Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Period	Data
Reduce Highland Suicide rate - 5 Yr Avg CP1.04	CY 2022	21.5	CY 2023	20.5	CY 2024	
No. HC workforce trained in supporting people with mental health and wellbeing concerns CP1.07	FY 22/23		FY 23/24	390	FY 24/25	
Involved Communities: Area Place Plans for each Council area CP2.04/CP3.07/CP4.03/CP5.06	Q2 24/25	On Target	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target
Street Cleanliness Score CP2.07 ENV3c	FY 22/23	96.10 %	FY 23/24	96.36 %	FY 24/25	
Continue partnership with ILM CP4.06	Q2 24/25	On Target	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target
% Household waste recycled CP4.06 ENV6a	FY 22/23	37.2 %	FY 23/24	36.0 %	FY 24/25	
Increase areas identified for food growing and ecological benefit CP4.11	Q2 24/25	Completed	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
ERDs being completed - CPL CP5.01	Q2 24/25	Some Slippage	Q3 24/25	Some Slippage	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage
The 'My Council' project CP5.03	Q2 24/25	On Target	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target
Supporting and engaging with Community Councils CP5.05	Q2 24/25	On Target	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target

7 Service Plan Progress

7.1 The following summarises progress against the indicators and actions for the Communities and Place service plan. Data is not yet available for 2024/25 for a small number of indicators.

7.2

Community Development and Involvement Approaches Q4 24/25						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/Update Date
Agreement of new Allotments policy	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q4 23/24
Involved Communities: Area Place Plans for each Council area CP2.04/CP3.07/CP4.03/CP5.06	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target		Due to complete Q3 25/26
Develop and implement a new integrated impact assessment tool	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q1 24/25
Develop a marketing approach to promote and increase civil ceremonies offering	Q3 24/25	Some Slippage	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage		Due to complete Q1 24/25
Development of Community Benefits Policy Procured and Voluntary Benefits	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
External Annual Examination by National Records of Scotland	CY 2023		CY 2024		98 %	annual update November
Implementation of new SPSO Child Friendly Complaints process – UNCRC	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	Completed		Completed Q4 24/25
Review of the Community Council Scheme	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target		Due to complete Q3 25/26
Undertake Review of Customer Services process/operations and implement changes	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25

7.3

Bereavement Services, Transforming Services for Significant Life Events Q4 24/25							
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan		Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/Update Date
Bereavement: Progressing Lean review of burials	Q3 24/25	Some Slippage	Q4 24/25	Completed			Due to complete Q4 24/25
Delivery of Burial Ground Projects	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target			Targets set in project plan
Develop an approach for refurbishment /modernisation of Inverness crematorium	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Completed Q4 23/24

7.4

Environmental Health Q4 24/25							
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan		Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/Update Date
95% of high risk private water supplies are inspected and sampled	FY 23/24	57 %	FY 24/25			95 %	annual update August
Business case to review resources re sampling private water supplies	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Completed Q4 23/24
Develop revised PI for food safety based on risk of premises	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Complete Q3 23/24

7.5

Transforming our Approach to Community Spaces Q4 24/25							
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan		Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/Update Date
Review playpark strategy	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Completed Q3 23/24
Develop community volunteering policy	Q3 24/25	Some Slippage	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage			Due to complete Q3 23/24
Progress the workstreams in the Amenities Review	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Completed Q2 23/24

7.6

Fleet Rationalisation [Sustainable Business Travel] Q4 24/25							
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan		Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/Update Date
Continue low emission approach for provision of heavy fleet	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Completed Q1 24/25
Design Sustainable Business Travel Approach and Action Plan	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Completed Q2 23/24

7.7

Waste Q4 24/25							
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan		Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/Update Date
Street Cleanliness Score CP2.07 ENV3c	FY 23/24	96.36 %	FY 24/25				annual update December
% Household waste recycled CP4.06 ENV6a	FY 23/24	36.0 %	FY 24/25				annual update September
Deliver RIF Project – Implementation [phased]	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target			Due to complete Q2 25/26
Deliver the Lochaber Waste Transfer Station Project	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target			Due to complete Q3 24/25
Delivery Bulky Waste Shredders	Q3 24/25	Some Slippage	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage			Due to complete Q1 24/25
Net Cost of Waste Collection per Premise ENV1a	FY 23/24	£ 97.86	FY 24/25				annual update November
Net Cost of Waste Disposal per Premise ENV2a	FY 23/24	£ 108.49	FY 24/25				annual update November
Net Cost of Street Cleaning per 1000 popn ENV3a	FY 23/24	£ 10,845	FY 24/25				annual update November
% adults satisfied - refuse collection ENV7a	FY 23/24	91.0 %	FY 24/25				annual update December
% adults satisfied - street cleaning ENV7b	FY 23/24	64.0 %	FY 24/25				annual update December
Undertake feasibility assessment into Energy from Waste Plant	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25				Completed Q3 23/24

7.8 Overall, progress against the Service Plan Performance Indicators and actions is very positive. There has been slippage for the following:-

- As reported to January Committee, there has been some slippage to develop a marketing approach for civil ceremonies which is reflective of the busy summer season for weddings. This has been progressed over the winter months and is on track to complete by June 2025.
- Work has been progressing on the development of a Community Volunteering Policy and Framework, following a change in staffing. A draft framework is in place and next steps would involve engagement with community groups to receive feedback and input.
- Environmental Health have undertaken additional recruitment to provide further resources to meet the private water supply statutory duties and in 2025/26 this will improve the performance for sampling of high-risk private water supplies and on the associated risk assessment process that must be done for each supply.
- Procurement is underway for the delivery of bulky waste shredders and are expected to be operational in June 2025.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 2 May 2025

Author: Sophie Stuart, Portfolio Manager

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None