

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	6
Report No	RDB-05-25

**Committee:** Redesign Board

**Date:** 5 June 2025

**Report Title:** Amenities Review – Future Operating Model

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

## 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Amenities Review – Future Operating Model as agreed at the Full Council meeting on 6 March 2025. The report contains in Section 7 an overview of the project objectives and Section 8 contains the indicative project timeline.
- 1.2 An Associate from Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Synergy Limited has been appointed to be the Project Manager for this review.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
- i. **Note** the establishment of a project team;
  - ii. **Note** the appointment of an APSE Associate as Project Manager; and
  - iii. **Note** the anticipated timescales and estimated date for completion

## 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - 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.

A budget of £100,000 to be met from reserves was agreed at the Council meeting on 6 March 2025 to deliver this project: Grounds Maintenance development of a future operating model – project delivery.

- 3.2 **Legal** - 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.

- 3.3 **Risk** - the project will ensure that the Council's exposure to legal and reputational risk is addressed.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - 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 2026.
- 3.4.1 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.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no known Gaelic implications.

#### **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 an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

#### **5 Project Initiation**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 To deliver the project at pace and as members of APSE, the Strategic Lead approached them to provide an appropriate Associate to be the Project Manager for this review. The Associate has commenced work with the project team and will deliver the objectives as identified at section 7.
- 5.3 A project plan will be produced to detail 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 will be a living document and will be updated in response to project objectives.

- 5.4 This report should be read in close conjunction with the Roads Redesign Report on the same agenda of this Committee. As Members will be aware the restructure carried out for the Place Cluster has allowed much closer managerial and operational synergy between Roads and Amenities activity, and the two redesign projects will be taken forward in tandem, ultimately leading to much more joint working between teams. Many of the back office functions are similar in nature so any solutions identified will be service neutral and may well have application across other parts of the Council as we move forward.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 The core Amenities Project Team is formed of 9 officers but will be supplemented by officers from the roads service to ensure opportunities for wider efficiencies are delivered. 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:-

<b>Role</b>	<b>Service/Function/Area</b>
Project Manager	APSE Associate
Strategic Lead Community Operations and Logistics	Place, Amenities, Highland Wide
Amenity Services Manager – North	Place, Amenities, North
Amenity Services Manager – South	Place, Amenities, South
Service Support Officer	Place, Amenities, Highland Wide
Amenity Officer	Place, Amenities, North
Amenity Officer	Place, Amenities, South
Operational Support Officer	Place, Amenities, Highland Wide
Operational Support Officer	Place, Amenities, Highland Wide

## **6 Background**

- 6.1 The Amenities team wish to develop a future operating model that is based on reviewing the end-to-end processes within functions to identify commonality and synergies that will deliver a cost effective and responsive grass cutting service, regardless of which function carries it out.
- 6.2 The commonalities with other Services are within Housing and Education Facilities Management. With each Service having operatives undertaking similar activities such as hedge cutting, grass cutting, maintenance of planted areas, and weed control.

6.3 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; 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

6.4 There is a need to dispense with historical practices and for the Service to be driven by the agreed outcome specification, which must be equally applied to all areas, as a baseline to then make variations by usage and local issues, site specific (rain, excess growth etc). There is a need for equitable distribution of resource, to work as flexibly as possible.

6.5 Historically, practices have included budget amendments, resource allocation based on asset maintenance needs and asset types, and the development of a pan-Highland work plan with active work management. The objective is to align with the pan-Highland standard. Tracking and route management to identify areas where resources need to be rebalanced or where surplus capacity can be offered commercially.

## **7 Project Objectives**

7.1 Objective 1 – Management Systems

7.1.1 Reviewing current management systems, their appropriateness, limitations and opportunities. Offering a revised and improved system.

7.1.2 Reviewing compliance, adherence, and delivery to current service standards. Including provision within the new model to actively redirect resources to allow flexibility in addressing service issues identified by Members, residents, SLA clients, and from APSE inspections. These will be resolved within set times, as appropriate via the LAMS App and new key performance indicators (KPI's) reportable to Service Leads and as Ward Based Reports. This will allow for a rebalance of resources and priorities to deliver on defined standards.

7.2 Objective 2 – Extent of works

7.2.1. Confirming the remit of works Amenities undertake for third parties, both in house and external, considering the capability and local market for commercialisation opportunities. Reviewing service specifications and Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

7.3 Objective 3 – Service Integration

7.3.1 Efficiency determined by reviewing efficiencies such as staff integration and resource sharing. Integrated work, cross service between Amenities, Housing, Roads, Education, Highlife Highland and Facilities Management.

#### 7.4 Objective 4 – Staffing

- 7.4.1 Ensuring the staffing level meets the workload, including operational and supervisory staff, admin support and extend of works undertaken. Full time employment opportunities explored to offer flexibility of off season works for operatives.
- 7.4.2 The Service structure will need to incorporate scheduling, costing, contract management, performance, and quality control and the requirements of commercial contracts, factoring, and SLA's.

#### 7.5 Objective 5 – New Service Delivery Model

- 7.5.1 Identifying a new service delivery model which offers best value and alignment to service standards.

#### 7.6 Objective 6 – Performance Management

- 7.6.1 Identifying key performance indicators, gauging local feedback and comparing to other similar local authorities. Adoption and use of a new electronic asset management system.

#### 7.7 Objective 7 – Customer Services

- 7.7.1 Improved customer contact and responses, reporting times, website improvements and service standards.

### 8 Timescales and Governance

- 8.1 Exact timescales for each project outcome may not be known at the outset of the project.

The timeline provided by the Associate is detailed below:-

Action	Participants	Lead	Timescale
Remit of review agreed	Associate, Senior Officer	Associate	Week 1
Consider key contacts	Associate, Senior Officer	Associate	Week 1
Prepare materials	Associate	Associate	Week 2
Prepare interviews	Associate	Associate	Week 2
Meet Council Reps	Associate, Project Team	Associate	Week 2
Analyse Feedback	Associate	Associate	Weeks 2 - 7
Prepare report on findings	Associate	Associate	Week 8
Consider next steps	Associate, Senior Officer	Associate	Week 8+

- 8.2 The Amenities Review will be overseen by the Redesign Board.

8.3 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.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 15 May 2025

Author: Debbie Sutton, Strategic Lead - Community Operations and Logistics

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None