

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	7
Report No	RDB/08/25

Committee: Redesign Board

Date: 28 August 2025

Report Title: Amenities Review and Roads Improvement Project 2 - Budget Monitoring & Progress Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 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. The Highland Council Roads Redesign Project – Phase 2 builds upon the foundational work of Phase 1, focusing on modernising service delivery, enhancing operational efficiency and improving stakeholder satisfaction.

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.

- 1.2 This report provides the Redesign Board with an update on progress of project delivery, including financial, performance, risk and general information on the following Projects:-

- Amenities Review and Roads Improvement Project 2

- 1.3 The content and structure of the report is intended to:-

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

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **consider** and **note** the updates on each of these projects

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – The Amenities 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. Resources required for outcomes from the Roads Redesign Project will be determined at a later date.
- 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. The Council also has a duty to maintain the road network to a reasonable standard and to manage risk effectively.
- 3.3 **Risk** – There are no risk implications arising as a direct result of this report. Project/Programme risks are identified via the Council risk management process and monitored through the Portfolio Boards and are reported by exception only in paragraphs 5.5 and 6.4.
- 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 a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Amenities Review

- 5.1 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. 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.

To deliver the project at pace and as members of Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), the Chief Officer approached them to provide an appropriate Associate to be the Project Manager for this review. The Associate has completed work with the project team, the first draft of the report has been received on 14 August and Officers are working through comments to return with a view to the final version of the report being available for mid-September. The draft report covers the objectives identified in the paper from 5 June 2025.

5.2 Overall Project RAG Status

The overall RAG status of the Amenities project is Green as it is on track to deliver on time by end of March 2025. The final report expected from the APSE Associate is due in September 2025 and is expected to cover the full scope of the review as agreed. The project is currently being delivered within the allocated budget.

5.3 Key Milestones & Requests for Change

The APSE Associate has just provided a first draft of his report, officers are considering the report and making comments to discuss with him and a final version of the report is expected mid-September.

The project is progressing on target. There are no requests for change.

5.4 Financial Summary

Amenities Review

- i) 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.
- ii) Investment – spend on consultant for APSE is £15,000

Roads Improvement Project 2

As the various projects are developed, any additional investments will be determined and, if required, will be reported to committee at a later date.

5.5 Key Risks

There are no significant risks at present.

5.6 **Forward Plan**

The final report is expected from the APSE Associate in September. An update will be provided in the next report to this board.

6 **Roads Improvement Project 2**

6.1 When available, the RAG status from the project will be included in future reports.

6.2 **Key Milestones and Requests for Change**

A Project Manager has now been appointed for a period of 23 months. This means that the additional people resources required to support the ongoing transformation of the Roads Service have now been secured.

Phase 2 of the Roads Redesign Project includes AI Cameras for Roads Monitoring, Route Optimisation for various activities and Digitisation of Job Cards. For each of these projects identified as priorities, scoping is currently taking place. This involves:-

- Market research, both within the Service, and in collaboration with other organisations (Triple Value Impact and suppliers) is ongoing.
- Engagement has taken place with other Councils who have adopted similar solutions, to understand how they use these systems and to gather lessons learned from their experiences. Further engagement session scheduled for 21 August.
- Workshop with Roads Operations Managers (ROMs) was held on 24 July, to ensure a 'bottom up' understanding of priority requirements.
- One to one engagement with ROMs programmed for September and a subsequent workshop planned for mid-October.
- Engagement with additional stakeholders such as ICT, Transport and Logistics and Procurement colleagues to ensure inclusion and awareness, as well as obtaining the necessary approvals.

Additionally, Abnormal Load and Traffic Regulation Order software is being implemented for the Service to improve the customer journey and enhance service delivery by enabling more efficient internal workflows.

There are currently no requests for change.

6.3 **Financial Summary**

As the various projects are developed, any additional investments will be determined and, if required, will be reported to committee at a later date.

6.4 **Key Risks**

There are no significant risks at present.

6.5 Forward Plan

The work described in section 6.2 will continue on all projects throughout the next reporting period, to ensure that a robust understanding of both the market and our own requirements is fully developed across each workstream. This will improve the Service's ability to effectively engage with the market during the procurement phase of each project.

7 Joint Review Approach

- 7.1 With Amenities and Roads being under the Operations and Maintenance Service these projects will be aligned to progress together with some progress being made on joint initiatives.
- 7.2 Managementors are consultants who have been appointed to look objectively at the Roads and Amenities operations. The focus for their review will be the Inverness and Ross and Cromarty Areas to provide a mix of the operations. This work will be carried out throughout August, starting with interviewing key managers, then working with delivery teams from week commencing 11 August starting in Inverness from 11 to 15 August and in Dingwall with the Ross and Cromarty teams from 18 to 22 August. Weekly update meetings are being held with the Chief Officer to update on initial observations from each Area. A final session is booked for 3 September to provide final analysis feedback and present proposals.
- 7.3 Other projects to be progressed together will be the Asset Management System, which will be fit for purpose for both Amenities and Roads functions and the digitalisation of the manual job card process. A cross-service workshop on the job card process is being arranged by the Project Manager to include representatives from both Services and Business Support will be held in October.
- 7.4 The Project Manager is developing a programme of works and will provide monthly update reports on progress to the Head of Roads and Transport and Chief Officer.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 12 August 2025

Author: Debbie Sutton, Chief Officer Operations and Maintenance
Tracey Urry, Head of Roads and Transport
Elizabeth Maciver, Principal Engineer
Brian Robertson, Project Manager

Background Papers: Road Improvement Project [Report](#) – June 2025

Appendices: None