

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	CPPB/1/26



Highland
Community
Planning
Partnership

Com-pàirteachas
Dealbhadh
Coimhearsnachd

na Gàidhealtachd

Highland Community Planning Partnership Board – 10 March 2026

Title of report - Future Operating Model Programme Update

Report by - Karen Chisholm, Programme Manager

Report Classification (tick as appropriate):

Strategic Priority: People Place Prosperity

Cross-Cutting Theme (tick all that apply):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Connecting People and Places | <input type="checkbox"/> Employment / Employability |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Whole Family and Community-Based Approaches | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shared Approaches to Commissioning | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Wealth Building |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Aligning Partnership Practices | |

Report Purpose (tick as appropriate):

For Noting For Approval For Decision

Recommendation(s)

The Board is asked to:

- i) Note the progress to date of the Future Operating Model Programme
- ii) Note the next steps

Executive Summary

- To provide the Highland Community Planning Partnership Board with an update on the Future Operating Model Programme, outline progress to date, to note the next steps including governance, recruitment, and continued project mobilisation.
- On 30th October 2025, Highland Council approved the move from the definition phase of the Future Operating Model Programme into the delivery phase

The programme is an exciting and major step in transforming how we deliver services across the region. This programme is about working together to strengthen our culture,

and working together in partnerships to make services accessible, efficient and equitable for our whole community.

- The programme brings together a range of collaborative, operational and asset projects designed to:
 - Enhance service delivery
 - Embed new ways of working
 - Drive efficiency and collaboration across the Council and with partners
- Since moving into the delivery phase, the Programme has been driving forward 4 key streams of work:
 - Engagement
 - Governance
 - Recruitment
 - Project Mobilisation
- It has been an intensive period, and a lot of work has been done to build structure, awareness and pace of the programme. An inclusive approach to working with partners for quick wins in the short term and medium/long term plans has been a focus and engagement has been well received and is being tracked.

1.	Resource
1.1	A £0.500m recurring revenue funding was approved in March 2025 by Council when agreeing to support the delivery of the Future Operating Model, including through demonstrator sites / projects. Enabling better services will deliver future efficiencies and support the Council's ongoing commitment to financial sustainability.
1.2	A request for Further investment of £0.500m is being taken to Council on 5 March 2026. It is recommended that this be used to support the delivery of a mobile service delivery unit and key staff roles required to accelerate the delivery and engagement for the programme.
1.3	<p>The investment will empower the programme to continue to drive forward and implement a mobile service delivery unit, which would improve access, equity, and deliver early intervention by bringing key Council and partner services directly across Highland. It will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to essential support by offering face to face help with housing, council tax, benefits, and welfare checks without requiring long travel. • Strengthen prevention and early intervention by spotting issues such as financial hardship or risk of homelessness earlier and connecting people quickly to the right support. • Reduce inequalities by tackling digital exclusion and other barriers faced by vulnerable groups through consistent, local, and accessible service delivery. • Provide joined-up support via a single front door for triage, signposting, and warm handovers between Council services and third sector partners.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build community resilience through themed sessions, outreach at local events, and a visible presence across communities throughout the year. • Enhance communication and trust by maintaining regular in-person engagement to better understand local needs. • Increase flexibility and efficiency by responding to local demand, reducing failure demand, and lessening reliance on fixed buildings.
1.4	Resourcing is reported through the Communities and Place Committee, and more detailed control is carried out through the new Future Operating Model Working Group, now in place.
2.	Implications
2.1	<p><u>Legal</u></p> <p>The Future Operating Model continues to be developed with reference to relevant legislation, such as Employment Law and Health and Safety legislation, and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.</p>
2.2	<p><u>Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)</u></p> <p>The Future Operating Model will be developed with reference to Health and Safety legislation and appropriate guidance.</p>
2.3	<p><u>Gaelic</u></p> <p>The Future Operating Model of Highland Council will strengthen communities, including areas of linguistic significance for Gaelic.</p>
3.	Background
3.1	<p>The paper on 30th October asked Members the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the work and progress undertaken to date. • Agree the definition, vision, and design principles for the Future Operating Model. • Approve the Future Operating Model Assessment Framework for service delivery and change. • Note related policies updated since 2024 to support Future Operating Model delivery. • Note the appointment of a Programme Manager and creation of three dedicated teams supported by approved funding (£0.500m). • Agree the initial series of sites and projects for Future Operating Model. • Note initial performance metrics for governance and scrutiny.
3.2	<p><u>Engagement</u></p> <p>On 3rd November 2025 the Programme Manager commenced mobilisation and started off a series of introduction and engagement meetings with staff and with partners, such as Scottish Futures Trust, NHS Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Hub North and</p>

	<p>Police Scotland. The engagement activities were to identify understanding of the programme from internal staff, discuss gaps in provision and identify opportunities for collaborative working.</p>
<p>3.3</p>	<p><u>Governance and Staffing</u></p> <p>In addition to the engagement activities, the Programme Manager has also been developing, defining and implementing the governance structure (Working Group, Operations Group, Programme Brief, Assessment Framework Scoring and project mandates for the 32 projects in the plan, the Communications and Engagement Approach and required programme trackers).</p> <p>Phase 1 of recruitment is underway, with 4 posts advertised on 10th February 2026, and there has been a high level of interest to date.</p>
<p>3.4</p>	<p><u>Progress on Projects</u></p> <p>Progress on projects</p> <p>Several projects have also commenced since 3rd November. An overview of some of these are below:</p> <p>Community Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The continuation of engagement with the Council's Public, Passenger and School Transport Teams, Community Transport Operators, D&E and NHS Highland, as well as commencing engagement with Scotrail and Scottish Ambulance Service which is underway. - A Working Group has been put in place and meeting monthly to progress/complete actions and build a model for the delivery of Community Transport going forward. - We facilitated an Operators workshop in Lairg on 3rd December, where presentations on Social Value Toolkit were provided by Community Transport Association and HIRTRANS provided an overview of the Moove flexi booking app. D&E also confirmed that Operators could use their depot in Inverness for charging electric vehicles (prebooking required). - The next workshop is being planned for 13 March 2026, and we have invited Scotrail, NHS Highland and members of the Poverty and Equality Commission to come along to attend and present. <p>There are significant opportunities for enabling savings for our NHS Highland partners, as well as increasing wellbeing within our communities, addressing poverty and enabling residents to utilise the transport for needs other than health appointments; these could be for attending interviews, screening, adult education and community volunteering.</p> <p>Smarter Working</p> <p>The Smarter Working project is a joint project with Property (Strategic Asset Management Plan) and the Future Operating Model programme. This is an asset, HR and service delivery-based combination of initiatives that will support and enhance the</p>

way we work and use our spaces every day. Scottish Futures Trust are supporting us in providing a best practice implementation.

The main elements to this are:

- Flexible Working Approach and toolkit – a toolkit and agreement to assist managers and staff in when, where and how they will use Council sites. This has an output-based methodology, to discourage presenteeism and encourage maximum efficiency for team output. It will align with the existing Flexible Working Policy (approved by Corporate Resources Committee 5 June 2025) and enhance and bolster the current ways of working.
- Space booking system – analysis on what we have and use already, what problems we need to solve and what options are available for us to solve them, whether this is process driven at a local level or a single digital solution for space booking across the Council sites. Consideration to how partners will be accessing spaces in Council sites in the future will also be taken.
- HQ Smarter working space – Block A in HQ is being used as a pilot to support a smarter working approach, with the focus on how space can be used for collaboration, supporting onboarding, hot desking and touchdown. Use and feedback will inform future smarter working spaces across the sites.

Workshops with the senior leadership teams and staff on smarter working will commence in February 2026, facilitated by Scottish Futures Trust, at no additional cost, and these will initiate and support the journey to an effective and equitable approach to how we use our spaces and how our teams work together.

Enterprise Car Club

Working with Enterprise and NHS Highland to ensure NHS Highland can access and use the Highland Council Enterprise Car Club. This is a big step forward in maximising use and bringing in income to support a shared fleet approach.

NHS Highland have been running a pilot of the Enterprise Car Club for the last 6 months at their Raigmore and National Treatment Centre sites. They see significant benefits in being able to use the Highland Council Car Club, which is well established across Highland, at other locations, as this will deliver cost savings to them by reducing hire cars delivered out with Inverness area, which can be expensive, and also the availability of vehicles when they need them. A Service Level Agreement has been drafted and is being reviewed before sharing with NHS for signing.

Tigh na Sgìre

Development is underway by Property at Tigh na Sgìre Service Point and Registration Office in Portree, and this is due to be completed in November 2026. The Future Operating Model programme is at early stages of engagement with the Property team to ensure that the use of the site is maximised. Community engagement will commence

	<p>from April 2026. The programme has engaged with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) around their plans for Portree. Whilst SFRS are at a different stage in their Capital Investment Plan, SFRS have confirmed they are committed to ensuring a partnership approach to place-based improvements and collaborations in service delivery in our communities and engagement between Highland Council and SFRS will continue.</p> <p>Touchdown Points</p> <p>We are starting to work with Property colleagues on the touchdown points being developed across Highland. The touchdown points will enable staff to use their most appropriate sites and enable wellbeing facilities for staff, as well as partners being able to use the sites too. The touchdown sites we have started to investigate are Kinlochbervie/Lochinver, Ullapool, Mallaig, Beaully and Tornagrain.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <p>In 2026, the programme must maintain the momentum and increase engagement across the Council services and begin focussed Member and Community engagement. A Communication and Engagement Approach has been drafted and will be available once agreed with the Working Group. This will clearly lay out the approach and considerations the programme will take, and it will be reviewed annually, to ensure the programme is doing what it said it would, and whether the approach is still effective.</p> <p>The immediate next steps for the programme are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch the first Working Group (January – completed, next one scheduled for March) and the Operations Group (February). • Recruitment – phase 1 (January–March 2026). • Recruitment - phase 2 (May – July 2026). • Communication and engagement plan implementation. • Incorporation of the Future Operating Model Assessment Framework into the Integrated Impact Assessment. • Continued mobilisation of demonstrator projects for 2026/27. • Planning beyond 2026/2027 horizon. • Continued collaboration with NHS Highland and other partners. • Driving forward and monitoring of the actions under the Local Transport Strategy. • Benefits tracking.
3.6	<p>The success of the programme depends on strong collaboration with existing programmes, projects, operational teams, and committees across the Council and working with Community Engagement Teams, Education and Social Care colleagues. Working transparently and constructively together will be essential to establish clear boundaries, avoid duplication, and identify gaps in service where the programme can add value and provide support.</p>

3.7	The programme seeks your ongoing active collaboration and constructive feedback
4.	Risks and Mitigations
4.1	<p><u>Risk</u></p> <p>Any risks associated with this programme are being monitored through the governance of the Future Operating Model Working Group and the Corporate Portfolio Board.</p>

Impact Assessment

Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) Summary

An IIA screening was undertaken for the Future Operating Model. At this stage of the programme, no changes to the original assessment have been identified. The proposal is expected to deliver positive outcomes, particularly in relation to socio-economic inclusion and children's wellbeing. Specific impact assessments will be carried out for projects within the Future Operating Model as they develop. The conclusions previously reviewed and approved by the relevant managers are:

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion Of Screening
Equalities, Poverty and Humans Rights	Positive
Children's Right and Well-Being	Positive
Data Rights	No Impact
Island and Mainland Rural	No Impact
Climate Change	Positive

A comparison of the Future Operating Model Assessment Framework and the Integrated Impact Assessment has identified a small number of changes required within the IIA to fully align it with the Future Operating Model Assessment Framework. Implementing these changes would enable a fully integrated and consistent approach. Work is currently underway to secure agreement on the proposed amendments and to develop an implementation plan.

Author(s): Karen Chisholm

Date: 23/02/2026

Appendices:

- 1- Terms of Reference Working Group**
- 2- Team Roles**
- 3- Developing a Future Operating Model for the Highland Council paper 30th October 2025**

Appendix 1 - Terms of Reference Working Group

Future Operating Model Working Group - Terms of Reference

1. Strategic Context

On 30th October 2025, The Highland Council Committee agreed; the definition, vision and design principles for the Future Operating Model, approved the Assessment Framework for assessing service delivery and service change to ensure alignment with strategic objectives, and approved an initial series of demonstrator sites and projects for the Future Operating Model Programme to support and drive forward the required change.

The programme will deliver transformational change, will be embedded throughout the strategic delivery of services and will enable savings across services. This programme will deliver more person-centred, integrated, and digitally enabled services, it will be aligned with the Customer Experience Model, Digital Strategy and the Local Transport Strategy, Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP), the Operational Delivery Plan, the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) and People Strategy.

The programme has close alignment to 6 key workstreams but these will not be the only ones it touches on:

- Shifting the Balance of Care
- Community-Led Service Delivery
- Strategic Asset Management Plan
- My Council programme
- Data and Digital Solutions
- Hybrid working
- Single Public Estate

The Future Operating Model responds to:

- Financial sustainability challenges.
- Community expectations for more localised and efficient services.
- National policy drivers including the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.
- Climate change and the Council's Net Zero commitments.
- The need for a more agile, empowered, and place-based workforce.

The programme will:

- Lead with purpose
- Collaborate across boundaries
- Deal with ambiguity
- Align with priorities
- Deploy diverse skills
- Realise measurable benefits
- Bring value

2. Programme Purpose

The Future Operating Model Programme seeks to:

- Implement and support transformation in how services are delivered across Highland communities
- Be embedded across all council projects by use of the assessment framework
- Build close inter-relationships with all services
- Be transparent in approach and work closely with trade unions
- Deliver income generation and reinvestment opportunities
- Drive efficiencies and enable savings across services by delivering organisational structure change and working with partners
- Identify continuous improvement opportunities
- Integrate services locally through Points of Delivery (PODs) and sustain greater use of local facilities
- Empower staff and communities through devolved decision-making
- Support the rationalisation of the Council's estate and delivery of improved digital access and developing touchdown points
- Deliver towards Net Zero

- Provide remote and mobile service support to rural communities
- Consider Gaelic significance in communities
- Support and deliver the approved demonstrator projects and commitments made in the Council report that will test and enable refinement of the model
- Be resilient and trusted to deliver

3. Group Purpose

The Future Operating Model Working Group will act as a strategic and operational advisory body to ensure the programme continues to align and promote these core principles:

- Incorporate people's views, especially those in poverty and with seldom heard voices.
- Be more responsive and person-centered in delivering local services with partners.
- Have a slimmer central model and deliver services through more integrated teams.
- Harness innovation and be effective in implementing change (technological, environmental).
- Have fewer leaders and managers, leading more complex local services.
- Have a sustainable asset base, with clear strategic prioritisation for future capital spend.
- Have an efficient approach to hybrid working that enables productivity.
- Enable future workforce development and high levels of staff skills and specialism.
- Be actively changing to achieve Net Zero.
- Enable local economic development to address population change issues and sustain communities.

by

- Guiding the development and implementation of the Future Operating Model
- Ensuring alignment with Council priorities, community needs, and partner contributions
- Providing oversight, challenges, and support to the Programme Manager and delivery teams
- Facilitating cross-service and cross-sector collaboration

4. Scope of Responsibility

The Working Group will:

- Review and provide advice on the Future Operating Model Programme's design principles, assessment framework, and delivery plan
- Support the ongoing identification, prioritisation and development of demonstrator, current and future projects
- Promote integration across services, partners, and locations
- Ensure that community engagement and co-production are embedded
- Monitor risks, dependencies, and interlinkages with other strategic programmes (e.g., SAMP, HIP, Digital Strategy).
- Champion the Future Operating Model across the organisation and with external stakeholders.

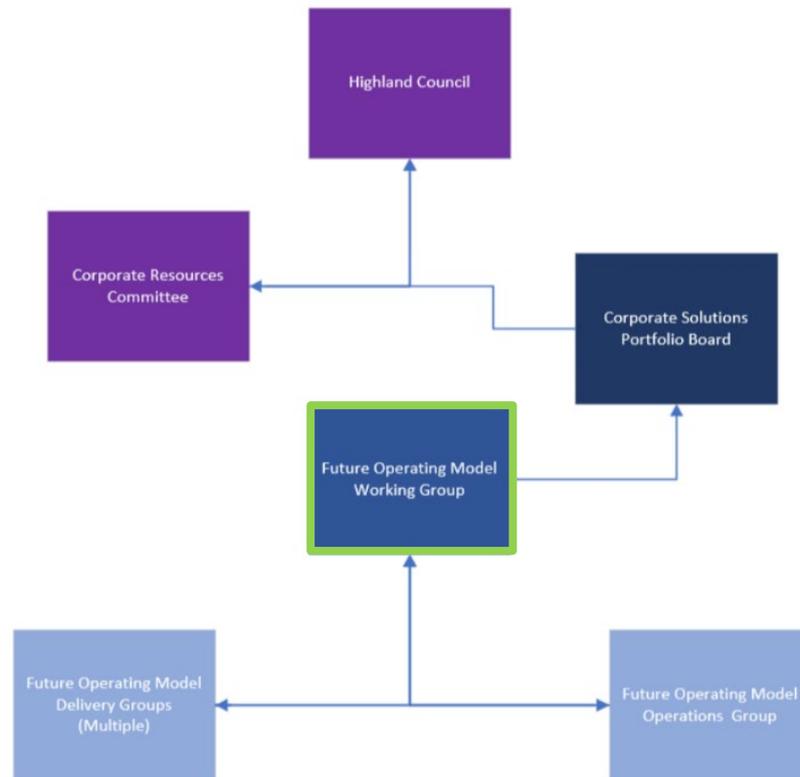
5. Financial Management

The Working Group will not hold direct budgetary authority but will:

- Receive regular updates on programme budgets and financial performance
- Support the Programme Manager in ensuring value for money and financial transparency
- Advise on funding opportunities, including joint investment with partners
- Monitor the use of the £0.500m recurring revenue funding and other allocated resources
- Ensure financial decisions align with the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan and sustainability goals

6. Governance & Board Management

The Working Group will report into the Corporate Solutions Portfolio Board, and the Corporate Resources Committee, ensuring members are kept up to date. The governance processes will align with the existing processes across the Delivery Plan and will report updates through the Performance and Risk Management System (PRMS). The programme will utilise the Managing Successful Programmes principles (as listed in section 1) in line with the Portfolio Management Office and project governance framework.



7. Membership

To enable the Working Group to operate efficiently and maintain momentum, the number of regular attendees has been streamlined. Each project within the Programme will have its own Delivery Group, which will provide updates to the Programme Manager. The Programme Manager will then report these updates to the Operations Group, ensuring that all key information—such as progress, issues, and risks—is escalated to the Working Group as required.

Table 1 outlines the core members of the Working Group and their respective roles.

Table 2 in the appendix lists the core members of the Operations Group, who may be invited to attend the Working Group when necessary. Please also refer to Table 3 RACI matrix in Section 12 of the Appendix for further details on roles and responsibilities.

Table 1 – Working Group

Name		Position	Role
Allan Gunn	AG	Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate)	Programme Sponsor - Executive
Paul Reid	PR	CO Facilities & Fleet Management	Senior Responsible Owner – Senior Supplier (Chair)
Ruth Fry	RF	CO HR and Communications	Senior Responsible Owner – Senior Supplier (Vice Chair)
Elaine Barrie	EB	Head of HR	Responsible Owner – Senior Supplier HR
Karen Chisholm	KC	Programme Manager	Programme Manager

Debbie Sutton	DS	CO Operations and Maintenance	Senior User – Operations and Maintenance
Dan Scott	DS	Strategic Lead Improvement and Performance	Senior User/Supplier – Improvement and Performance
Allan Henderson (ICT)	AH	Strategic Lead – Digital Innovation	Senior Supplier/User - Digital Innovation
Bernadette Martin-Scott	BMS	CO Education (Primary and Early Years Education)	Senior User - Primary Education
Alison Clark	ACI	CO Housing & Communities	Senior User - Housing & Communities
Dianne Henderson	DH	Strategic Lead (Care and Support)	Senior User – Care and Support
Carolyn Pieraccini	CP	Strategic Lead Finance – Place	Senior Supplier - Finance
Scott Dalgarno	SD	Service Lead – Asset Management and Commercial Property	Senior User – Strategic Asset Management Plan
Douglas Wilby	DW	HLH – Director of Corporate Performance	Senior User – HighLife Highland

In addition to core members, specific subject matter experts and advisors will be invited to attend the Group as and when required:

Additional members of Council services (e.g., Health & Social Care, Education, Property, Digital, HR, Procurement)

Trade Unions

NHS Highland and other public sector partners

Third sector and community representatives

Investors In People

8. Key Responsibilities

In line with the referred to Scope of Responsibility, the Group will have the following responsibilities:

- Contributes their expertise in discussions, promoting collaborative team working and accountability.
- Be forward looking and lead with purpose, taking decisions to maintain pace and momentum to ensure the successful delivery of expected Programme outcomes and benefits
- Promote the Programme
- Be transparent and share updates, risks and issues

9. Frequency

The Working Group will meet monthly, with additional meetings as required throughout the period of programme start up. This frequency may change over the course of the programme as it matures, and the network of project Delivery Groups develop.

Sub-groups may be formed to focus on specific themes (e.g., community engagement, digital, estates).

10. Standard Agenda

The standard agenda will be as follows:

1. Welcome and Apologies

2. Programme Updates

- Programme Manager's report and progress against key milestones (Programme Manager)
- Updates from demonstrator projects (Project Delivery Leads)
- Interdependencies with HIP, SAMP, and other portfolios

3. Strategic Items for Discussion (examples below) (Programme Manager/Senior Management)

- Policy or governance developments
- Community engagement and co-production updates
- Workforce and organisational development
- Digital and data integration
- Net Zero and sustainability alignment

4. Financial Overview

- Budget update and spend to date
- Funding opportunities and joint investment
- Value for money and efficiency tracking

5. Risk and Issues Log

- Review of current key programme risks and mitigations
- Escalations or decisions required

6. Evaluation and Performance

- Review of KPIs and metrics
- Feedback from staff, partners, and communities
- Lessons learned and continuous improvement

7. Communications and Engagement

- Internal and external communications
- Member and partner engagement plans

8. Forward Planning

- Upcoming milestones and deliverables
- Planning for next phase or demonstrator activity

9. Any Other Business

10. Date of Next Meeting

11. Quorum

The **minimum number of members required to be present** for the meeting to be valid and for decisions to be made is 4. The Future Operating Model Programme Manager or nominated chair or vice chair must be present for the meeting to be quorate.

Members are expected to attend all scheduled sessions unless they are out of the office. If unable to attend, apologies must be submitted in advance. Regular non-attendance may result in removal from the group.

Meeting papers will be distributed five days prior to the meeting, and it is expected that participants review these documents beforehand to ensure informed discussion.

Appendix 2 - Team Roles

1. Facilities Development Officer

Purpose:

Manages and develops Council facilities and assets under the Future Operating Model, ensuring operational readiness, compliance, and alignment with strategic plans (SAMP, HIP). Acts as the local point of contact for clients, members, and end-users.

Key Responsibilities:

- Oversee building safety, compliance, and operational readiness, working closely with any RPOs in place.
- Identify any gaps needing an implemented solution and implement any required change.
- Coordinate space usage for hybrid working and service co-location.
- Support estate rationalisation and sustainability goals.
- Conduct asset mapping, audits, and infrastructure reviews.
- Liaise with Facilities, Catering & Cleaning teams and external agencies.
- Ensure adherence to health & safety legislation and Council policies.
- Working with and supporting programme team colleagues to deliver requirements.

2. Business and Finance Officer

Purpose:

Leads financial and business components of Future Operating Model projects, ensuring robust financial planning, reporting, and benefits realisation to support transformation.

Key Responsibilities:

- Manage programme budgets, procurement, and financial reporting.
- Analyse and implement simplified budget structures
- Support business cases, funding, investment planning, and cost-efficiency modelling.
- Track spend against delivery outcomes and prepare committee reports.
- Monitor benefits realisation (income, savings, cost avoidance).
- Operate change and risk management processes.
- Work with and support programme team colleagues to deliver requirements.

3. Community Engagement Officer

Purpose:

Facilitates engagement and co-design with communities to embed Future Operating Model principles locally, build capacity, and strengthen partnerships between public, third sector, and community groups.

Key Responsibilities:

- Deliver engagement activities for Future Operating Model projects and demonstrators.
- Build local networks and support community capacity development, ensuring close relationships with community-based colleagues.
- Coordinate workshops, consultations, and co-design sessions.
- Provide analysis for place-based planning and monitor benefits.
- Produce reports and briefings for committees and stakeholders.
- Implement service change in the community – fixed and mobile assets
- Work with and support programme team colleagues to deliver requirements.

4. Family and Education Link Worker

Purpose:

To support the development and sustainability of family and education services within the Future Operating Model, ensuring statutory responsibilities are met and promoting integrated, community-based delivery.

Key Responsibilities:

- Embed family and education services in demonstrator sites for early intervention and wraparound support.
- Work with schools, early years, and care services to identify gaps and improve provision.
- Lead strategic planning for family support and poverty prevention in the area.
- Strengthen multi-agency collaboration across education, health, social care, housing, and welfare.
- Support local Childcare & Family Resource Partnerships and funding bids.
- Provide reports and professional advice to elected members, partners, and committees.
- Work with and support programme team colleagues to deliver requirements.
- Work closely with education and Social Care colleagues.

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Appendix 3 - Developing a Future Operating Model for the Highland Council paper 30th October 2025

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Highland Council

Date: 30 October 2025

Report Title: Developing a Future Operating Model for The Highland Council

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

1.	Executive Summary
1.1	<p>Highland Council is developing a progressive approach to how it delivers services with its key partners. We need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be more person-centred and joined up, so that people can easily find the service they need.• Make better use of technology, so that our people have more time to spend where it's needed.• Become more devolved, with integrated teams working locally with partners as best suits their communities.
	<p>In future, every local area will benefit from a network of services, as well as physical hubs where citizens and staff can connect. More services will be available online, at any time of day or night, with more intensive support for people who need it the most. Teams will be empowered to manage common budgets and to innovate, with more income generated re-invested locally, and we will work with partners to deliver services in new ways. This approach is the Future Operating Model (FOM).</p>
	<p>The FOM is not a standalone project. It reflects an evolution and alignment of work already in motion, is key to the Council's Operational Delivery Plan, and aligns with the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP).</p>
1.2	<p>This new approach will inform how the Council tailors its services and modernises assets for communities, particularly, but not exclusively, through the new generation of community facilities (Points of Delivery, or PODs) being planned for development within the Highland Investment Plan (HIP).</p>
1.3	<p>This report sets out the case for change, followed by the three phases of the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phase 1: What we will deliver: defining the Future Operating Model.• Phase 2: How we will deliver the Future Operating Model.• Phase 3: Next steps: rolling out the Future Operating Model.•
1.4	<p>Progress so far is reflected in the positive external audit reports received, which confirm that public consultation is influencing service delivery; that there is a clear vision and drive for improvement; and that Highland Council is at the forefront of innovation and transformation. Through the FOM and other Delivery Plan programmes, we are looking to deliver the council of the future.</p>
2.	Recommendations

2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Note the work and progress undertaken to date; ii. Agree the definition, vision and design principles for the Future Operating Model (FOM) as detailed in section 7; iii. Approve the FOM Assessment Framework for assessing service delivery and service change with alignment with the FOM as detailed in section 7 and Appendix 4; iv. Note the range of related-policies as detailed at Section 8 designed and updated since 2024 to support the delivery of FOM; v. Note the appointment of a Programme Manager and that three dedicated teams will be created and located across Highland supported by the funding (£0.500m) approved by Members on 6 March 25; vi. Agree the initial series of sites and projects for FOM as detailed at Section 8; vii. Note the initial performance metrics as detailed at Section 9 to support project evaluation, governance and scrutiny and that these will continue to be reviewed as informed by the ongoing engagement and delivery of FOM.
3.	Implications
3.1	<p>Resource: £0.205m one-off revenue funding was approved in February 2024 to support the delivery restructuring savings across the Council, which delivered £1.155m savings in 2024/25 and is forecast to deliver a further £0.415m in 2025/26 and £0.100m in 2026/27. In addition, this funding has supported the engagement, learning and research into the FOM which is discussed later in the report.</p> <p>A further £0.500m recurring revenue funding was approved in March 2025 by Council when agreeing its budget to support the delivery of the FOM including through demonstrator sites / projects. These will enable better services, which will help to deliver future efficiencies and support the Council's ongoing commitment to financial sustainability.</p>
3.2	<p>Legal: The FOM will be developed with reference to relevant legislation, such as Employment Law and Health and Safety legislation, and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.</p>
3.3	<p>Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island): The FOM of The Highland Council is being established for the purpose of finding more intuitive and responsive ways to meet the needs of communities and the people within them, across the diverse locations of the Highlands. It aligns with and is informed by the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) and aims to sustain greater community use of local facilities.</p>
3.4	<p>Climate Change / Carbon Clever: The FOM will operate within the parameters of Highland Council's Net Zero planning and its ongoing work to reduce energy consumption. It is anticipated that the provision of touchdown spaces for staff will help with the coordination of services and reduce duplication and commuting.</p>
3.5	<p>Risk: The risks associated with this innovation have been previously articulated as part of the budget setting process and are articulated within the Operational Delivery Plan Annual report 2024/2025, presented in May 2025.</p>
3.6	<p>Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people): The FOM will be developed with reference to Health and Safety legislation and appropriate guidance.</p>
3.7	<p>Gaelic: The FOM of Highland Council is being established for the purpose of strengthening communities, including areas of linguistic significance for Gaelic.</p>

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	<p>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.</p> <p>(Ruth add line on individual assessments)</p>														
4.3	<p>Integrated Impact Assessment – Summary</p> <p>An IIA screening has been undertaken for the Future Operating Model (FOM). At this stage of the programme, no negative impacts have been identified. The proposal is expected to deliver positive outcomes, particularly in relation to socio-economic inclusion and children’s wellbeing. The conclusions have been reviewed and approved by the relevant managers. Members are asked to consider the summary below and further details in Appendix 1.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="135 878 1294 1294"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="135 878 799 918">Impact Assessment Area</th> <th data-bbox="799 878 1294 918">Conclusion Of Screening</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="135 918 799 958">Equalities, Poverty and Humans Rights</td> <td data-bbox="799 918 1294 958">Positive</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="135 958 799 999">Children’s Right And Well-Being</td> <td data-bbox="799 958 1294 999">Positive</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="135 999 799 1039">Data Rights</td> <td data-bbox="799 999 1294 1039">No Impact</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="135 1039 799 1079">Island and Mainland Rural</td> <td data-bbox="799 1039 1294 1079">No Impact</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="135 1079 799 1120">Climate Change</td> <td data-bbox="799 1079 1294 1120">Positive</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="135 1120 799 1294"></td> <td data-bbox="799 1120 1294 1294"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion Of Screening	Equalities, Poverty and Humans Rights	Positive	Children’s Right And Well-Being	Positive	Data Rights	No Impact	Island and Mainland Rural	No Impact	Climate Change	Positive		
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Equalities, Poverty and Humans Rights	Positive														
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Data Rights	No Impact														
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Climate Change	Positive														
5	Background: the case for change														
5.1	The Best Value Audit Scotland Report of 2020 on Highland Council highlighted concerns that the Council was not financially sustainable or demonstrating Best Value. The report also urged better partnership working to deliver community empowerment and locality planning obligations.														
5.2	<p>In response, between November 2023 and February 2024, the Council undertook a widespread engagement exercise to help inform its future direction. Over 3,500 separate responses were received from the public which, in summary, said:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign our services - including reducing management, joining up teams and working with partners to reduce duplication, better use of existing staff rather than outsourcing. • Change how we manage our buildings - including that we should operate fewer vehicles, better use school space/ halls/ libraries to deliver services, close schools with low numbers. • Generate more income - including increasing income generated from tourists, energy production and that we should increase council tax and fees. • Be more efficient in how we do things - including that we should enable people to do more online and invest in prevention to support people to stay independent. 														

	<p>This shaped the budget agreed in February 2024, including an investment of £0.205m to review our operating model, and the Operational Delivery Plan agreed in May 2024 and updated in May 2025.</p>
5.3	<p>Progress against the Delivery Plan so far is evidenced by two Audit Scotland reports. The April 2025 Best Value Audit report welcomed progress including financial sustainability and commended the Council’s ambition. The August 2025 Best Value report on the theme of transformation highlighted a strong culture of innovation and found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear vision and plan for transformation. • Engagement with communities to influence transformational activity. • Good governance, performance and risk management. <p>Nevertheless, the March 2025 Budget Report stated that ‘there does however remain the risk and challenge that funding levels in future years will not keep pace with costs of service delivery, and savings, cost reduction and service redesign will continue to be essential to achieve financial sustainability.’ The FOM is instrumental to this transformation change aligning strategies with the service delivery. Ongoing engagement with communities is imperative and remains a major driver for change.</p>
5.4	<p>These drivers relate to the Council as an organisation. They are accompanied by significant national and global drivers for change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging communities and youth migration, prompting a need to bolster remote communities and localised delivery. • Funding constraints and customer expectations, compounding the move for a single public estate and better digital services. • An increasing emphasis on equality and accessibility, requiring services to be inclusive and, increasingly, co-produced. • Climate change, driving sustainability and Net Zero. <p>These factors are compounded in the Highlands. According to Scottish Government Research (<i>Rural Planning Policy to 2050: research findings</i> 5 The Challenges Facing Rural Scotland - Rural Planning Policy to 2050: research findings - gov.scot) if nothing happens to change current trends, sparsely populated areas will lose 28% of their population by 2046, shrinking the working age population by 33%. It is imperative that we provide jobs to support remote communities, and that we develop a service model which embraces co-delivery to care for our older and younger Highlanders.</p> <p>Climate change will see increasing severe weather events and coastal erosion, meaning residents in rural and coastal areas will need support to build resilience. Commuting to work will become increasingly unpopular, as a younger, more digitally-enabled workforce expect flexible roles, and green travel options.</p> <p>Analysis of drivers for change is included at Appendix 2. Without the Future Operating Model, not only our services but also our communities are at risk of becoming unsustainable.</p>
6	Governance
6.1	<p>The FOM sits under the Corporate Solutions Portfolio within the Council’s Operational Delivery Plan and reaches across a number of other key workstreams and programmes in the six Delivery Plan Portfolios. The FOM aligns with a number of projects such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting the balance of care

- Community-led service delivery
- Single public estate
- Strategic Asset Management Plan
- My Council programme
- Data & digital solutions
- Hybrid working

An FOM project board was established and includes trade union and High Life Highland representatives as well as representatives from a range of Services across all 3 Clusters. This project Board reports into the Corporate Solutions Portfolio Programme Board.

Progress reports are presented to the Corporate Resources Committee outlining progress on the Corporate Solutions Portfolio and, as agreed by Members at Highland Council, annual reports on the Delivery Plan overall are also reported to Highland Council.

6.2

FOM shares a number of close inter-relationships with other workstreams across the Council such as detailed in the diagram below.



Led by the Chief Officer – Business Solutions, the Programme Management Office (PMO) for the whole Operational Delivery Plan also helps to ensure the various interdependencies across all 6 Portfolios and various projects are identified and managed.

7. Phase 1 – What we will deliver: defining the Future Operating Model

7.1 Progress and Strategic Engagement

Alongside a review of local and national plans, strategies and research, significant engagement has taken place with partners and senior leaders, enabling functions, suppliers including HubNorth Scotland (our default supplier to the HIP, as approved by Council in May 2025), and frontline services to shape the development of the FOM. A summary of research and engagement is available in Appendix 3 and this activity was managed by a dedicated project manager for FOM to lead the first phase of work including engagement.

	<p>In order to deliver the FOM, a series of roadshows to Council staff has provided a platform to test the concept of the future operating model for Highland Council, and to co-design the principles that will underpin the future operating model framework.</p> <p>In Phase 2, these will be extended to include communities, Community Planning Partnership, other partners and the third sector. This builds on current and ongoing engagement on specific related projects; for example, with community transport providers, and charities which support children and families.</p> <p>There has been a very positive staff response to generating a new operating model, which is more integrated and local responsive, with colleagues across areas and teams recognising the clear vision of Highland Council for the future and a need for significant change.</p> <p>At the Members Workshop on the Operational Delivery Plan held on 23 May 25 detailed updates on the 6 Portfolios were presented including an update on the initial progress on FOM.</p> <p>This engagement work has helped to inform the following definition, vision, and design principles:</p>
7.2	<p>Definition</p> <p><i>The FOM is Highland Council's strategic blueprint for transforming how services are designed, managed, and delivered providing an adaptive, collaborative, and community-driven organisation.</i></p>
7.3	<p>Vision</p> <p><i>To build a connected, empowered, and resilient Highland through integrated, locally driven services provided by a people-first organisation.</i></p>
7.4	<p>Design Principles</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incorporate people's views, especially those in poverty and with seldom heard voices. 2. Be more responsive and person-centred in delivering local services with partners. 3. Have a slimmed central model and deliver services through more integrated teams. 4. Harness innovation and be effective in implementing change (technological, environmental). 5. Have fewer leaders and managers, leading more complex local services. 6. Have a sustainable asset base, with clear strategic prioritisation for future capital spend. 7. Have an efficient approach to hybrid working that enables productivity. 8. Enable future workforce development and high levels of staff skills and specialism. 9. Be actively changing to achieve Net Zero. 10. Enable local economic development to address population change issues and sustain communities.
7.5	<p>Assessment Framework</p> <p>The FOM Assessment Framework (Appendix 4) is a practical governance tool for assessing service delivery and service change with alignment with the FOM. It brings together insights from lived practice, strategic planning, and community engagement. It is aligned to the Integrated Impact Assessment of the FOM, and the scope of this report.</p>

Delivery of the FOM requires clear alignment with key corporate strategies and programmes, including the HIP, the HOIP, the Learning Estate Strategy, ICT, Digital & Data Strategies, the Council's Delivery Plan, and wider service transformation initiatives.

To support this, the framework is **recommended for approval as a cross-cutting assessment tool** to be applied at the outset of all relevant service design, planning, and implementation processes. Its use will ensure that the FOM is not a stand-alone project, but a unifying model embedded in the Council's core ways of working. It is proposed that officers look to align this with the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment and an assessment tool developed for the SAMP, which already considers the FOM design principles.

In parallel, these principles are being actively considered in major capital projects such as the Tain Academy and Nairn Academy developments, to assess how the Council's latest investments reflect and demonstrate the practical delivery of the FOM. It will also be a key consideration in shaping emerging options for the review of the Council's HQ estate, providing a catalyst for the modernisation and consolidation of constituent services and how they operate from the Council's central office.

7.6 The resulting model is intended to increase the empowerment to our employees, integrates services locally and align with the HIP, SAMP and the Single Public Estate Strategy. The HOIP report also on the agenda today evidences the close alignment of the FOM with the wider direction of travel across all the Highland Community Planning Partnership, and we will be building on this shared agenda going forward.

Engagement with key stakeholders such as NHS Highland and other public bodies to review service delivery for our communities is a key component of the FOM, as is engaging with communities and third sector to improve services in each of our areas throughout the Highlands.

7.7 **Workforce Data**

The FOM relies on an engaged workforce and aims to support people to work closer to their homes and communities, spending more of their time using their expertise and less time on travelling and administrative tasks that could be digitised. The FOM will deliver better services and efficiencies by motivating and empowering teams to do their best work.

Data held in the HR and Payroll system indicates that around 97% of employees are attributed to postcodes which lie within Highland, with 1% within Moray. Other postcode distributions each account for less than 1% and 1.3% of home postcodes are not available. Maintaining accurate data to inform this work is critical and cleansing of this data forms part of associated projects such as HR and Payroll and Data Foundations.

As we build a modern, people-first Council, we need:

- A clear picture of where our staff are, and where they should be.
- Better local presence through hybrid working and community-based PODs, especially in rural areas.
- Improved data so decisions reflect real working patterns.
- Smarter commuting options that reduce travel and support work-life balance.

Further work to establish a baseline for hybrid working is planned as is continuing to roll out Investors in People supporting the Council's ambition of effective engagement with our staff.

	<p>This will allow us to evaluate any shift in location of our workforce and to track and improve staff engagement through an internationally-renown framework.</p>
8	Phase Two – How we will deliver the Future Operating Model
8.1	<p>Developing Policy and Processes</p> <p>Appropriate policies enable activity and remove barriers to progress. Significant work has been undertaken since 2024 in designing and updating key Council strategies and policies.</p> <p>Policies updated to support the FOM include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Strategy and Ambition (approved by March 2024) • Employee Engagement Strategy (approved May 2024) • Corporate Charging Policy (approved December 2024) • Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy (approved March 2025) • Talent Strategy (approved March 2025) • Flexible Working Policy (approved June 2025) <p>The impact of these can already be seen. For example, jobs with the Council can now be advertised as based at any location within the Highland area.</p>
	<p>Other service areas that will be reviewed as part of the ongoing delivery of FOM include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management arrangements, including leadership models across teams and partner organisations. • Budget procedures such as rationalised budget models and profit-sharing policies. • Income generation policies relating to fees and charges for facilities, including concession policies in accordance with the Council’s Charging Policy agreed by the Corporate Resources Committee in December 24. • Policies concerning booking arrangements for facilities, with a simple, single process for users, which can enable ease of access. • Digital access arrangements for facilities, which incorporate layers of access and safe arrangements for users, including our staff. • Policies concerning staff and partner accommodation arrangements, including digital access, welfare arrangements and meeting arrangements.
8.2	<p>A Network Approach</p> <p>The outcome of Phase One engagement and research is the introduction of a polycentric network approach aligned to geographic areas, supporting more localised and responsive delivery.</p>
	<p>For staff, this will mean more availability of roles based across Highland, more flexibility in work base and touchdown spaces, more time to spend on their area of expertise with better support from technology, and more responsibility over local delivery.</p> <p><i>Example: roles across Highland.</i></p> <p><i>A recent recruit to the Council’s insurance team is based in Lochaber, following the role being advertised as available from any base in Highland. The successful applicant, a former Modern Apprentice, will report to a manager based in Inverness, and use facilities in her local area when needed.</i></p>

For communities, this means being able to access services more seamlessly, services better adapted to the local area, jobs to support the local economy, and support for community initiatives which contribute to wellbeing.

Example: co-located services.

In future, people may be able to use a POD for support to get online and complete a housing application, while taking advantage of childcare, welfare advice or a health check-up provided by partners in the same building.

8.3 Increasing the integration of local teams

The £0.500m recurring revenue investment will support the aim to increase the integration of service delivery local teams. This investment will engage and collaborate to explore how services can be delivered more seamlessly and efficiently across the Highlands. Three dedicated teams will be created, located across Highland, and assigned a geographical area. These teams will support demonstrator projects and co-ordinate contributory programmes and projects. They will also capture lessons learnt as part of the roll-out.

The teams will report to the Programme Manager who in turn will report the Chief Officer – Fleet, Facilities and Transport with the overall sponsor remaining the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate. This team will cover a range of functions, primarily being:

Community Development

- Facilitating meaningful engagement with communities to shape local services.
- Supporting place-based planning and partnership working across sectors.
- Driving inclusion, wellbeing, and regeneration initiatives.
- Leading stakeholder workshops and co-design sessions to embed local voice.

As reported at 7.1, building on the engagement in Phase 1 is vital to shape the FOM at local level and will be a key role for this team working with colleagues, Members, Partners and communities.

Members can expect to see engagement taking place with them and with communities in their wards, with the aim of identifying and taking forward at least one demonstrator project in each Area from 2026/27.

Facilities Management

- Overseeing the operational readiness, safety, and compliance of council buildings.
- Coordinating space usage to support hybrid working and service co-location.
- Supporting estate rationalisation and sustainability goals.
- Conducting asset mapping, building audits, and infrastructure reviews.

Members can expect to see at least three new digital touchdown/welfare facilities for Council and partner organisation staff to use along main transport corridors across the Highlands from 2026/27.

Business & Finance

- Managing programme budgets, procurement, and financial reporting.
- Supporting business cases, investment planning, and cost-efficiency modelling.
- Tracking spend against delivery outcomes and supporting funding bids.
- Supporting financial transparency, strategic resource planning and identifying streamlining opportunities in financial monitoring enabling increased efforts on financial management overall, including an enhanced understanding of value for money.

Members can expect to see at least one demonstrator project making use of joint funding opportunities from 2026/27.

Families and Social Work Services

- Embedding family support workers within demonstrator sites to provide early intervention and wraparound support.
- Strengthening multi-agency collaboration to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families.
- Supporting integrated service delivery including across education, health, social care, welfare, housing and other services.
- Promoting trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches in frontline practice.

Members can expect to see at least one demonstrator project with a focus on whole family wellbeing, working with external partners, from 2026/27.

A Programme Manager has been appointed to lead this work. Job descriptions for all other posts are being finalised. The Programme Manager will help shape the design of the remaining roles. Following this, recruitment for all other posts will be completed in line with the approved structure and budget.

This phased approach ensures that strategic leadership is in place early to inform effective team development and operational alignment. There is also considered to be an opportunity for staff to remain flexible across related workstreams such as HIP and asset management.

8.4 Piloting Activity

A large number of existing and future workstreams will contribute to the FOM, which will learn from and inform inter-related projects that propose new changes to the Council's estate and community facilities. However, a series of demonstrator projects are recommended for the teams' initial focus, chosen to represent a variety of communities, localities, and approaches.

While demonstrator projects can have multiple and overlapping priorities, they fall broadly into three categories:

Asset-based projects, with a focus on a building or buildings, co-locating services or rationalising our estate.

- **Thurso HIP:** The Council's Highland Investment Polan proposes an innovative new Community Point of Delivery (POD) in Thurso that aims to bring together the High

School in a new building, alongside services provided for and with the community. Partners will be encouraged to identify proposals that fit with FOM principles, as well as wider community planning and local community priorities. This will also act as a catalyst for the improvement of other public sector assets, housing opportunities and potential commercial income.

- **Tigh na Sgìre**, This new office and service point currently under construction in Portree is consolidating a range of assets into a new modernised office for the Council and public sector partners, and will be designed to embody FOM principles and working practices. It is also prompting a wider asset review to understand wider opportunities to reduce costs while improving services and unlocking housing and regeneration opportunities.
- **Dingwall HIP**: As part of the Highland Investment Plan proposals for Dingwall, the Council proposes to hold a workshop that reviews all public sector assets with partners where FOM principles will be a key test of the merits of different options for improvement.
- **Council HQ**: FOM principles will help services to understand how different options for the Council HQ can modernise, adapt and improve service provision. A Smarter Working Pilot will show how our office spaces can be used more flexibly to accommodate staff with diverse working patterns and locations.

Operational projects, redesigning services to improve local delivery.

- **Mobile delivery**: where remote communities and transport links make regular access to services challenging, the FOM could provide mobile services, such as welfare support, or housing advice, whether to support emergency response or on a regular basis.
- **Centralised stores**: by sharing stores and procurement of generic supplies with other public sector organisations public sector, savings could be made and store buildings rationalised.
- **Commercial workshops**: the Council’s vehicle workshops could provide repair and maintenance services on a commercial basis.
- **Shared fleet**: the Council could work with partner organisations to share vehicles and delivery routes.

Collaborative projects, supporting other organisations to deliver and engaging with communities to assess strengths and requirements.

- **Community transport**: by supporting community transport organisations from start-up to viability, the Council and other partners can improve connectivity, and potentially commission services which are better adapted to local needs.
- **Kinlochbervie**: working with NorthWest 2045 and other community organisations, a new masterplan for Kinlochbervie will use FOM principles to consider how best to shape Council and community facilities.
- **Merkinch**: working with local partners to simplify systems, improve access to facilities and increase income.
- **Lochaber**: working with Fort William 2040 and other community organisations to identify opportunities arising from the new Belford Hospital location.
- **Tain**: work already underway to assess opportunities against the FOM.
- **Nairn**: work already underway to assess opportunities against the FOM.

8.5 To support the identification of possible sites and projects, a range of criteria were used including:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with Net Zero and community sustainability goals. • Shift from building centric, to service and community-led thinking. • Integration of service delivery under one roof. • Accessibility, local relevance, and co-location opportunities. • Readiness of infrastructure and strategic alignment with the HIP.
	<p>These areas represent a range of different communities, including urban and rural, to allow projects to demonstrate how the FOM can flex to differing needs, strengths and priorities. The integrated teams will begin to engage with communities and co-produce demonstrator projects in these locations, expanding to include at least one in each Local Area by March 2026.</p>
	<p>Staff within each integrated team will work across traditional service lines, responding flexibly to the needs of the community. This includes finding ways to safely share data, referrals, and case planning to deliver support that wraps around the individual or family.</p>
	<p>The teams will embed community representatives and work closely with local partners to prioritise projects and shape services that are inclusive, culturally aware, and responsive. Their work will be informed by the knowledge and experience of our existing networks, wider public sector partners and Community Support and Engagement teams.</p>
	<p>In applying FOM to the existing priorities and projects across Highland we will bolster existing activity in these areas to ensure that the FOM principles are delivered and tailored to the opportunities, outcomes and aspirations of the Council, partners and communities in that area.</p>
	<p>Initially identifying and developing projects that will make a significant difference relatively quickly, each pilot team will also feed into a learning system that monitors performance, gathers feedback, and drives ongoing improvement refining what works. This, alongside other learnings such as the feedback from the Poverty Commission, will inform broader rollout across the Highlands.</p>
9	<p>Evaluation</p>
9.1	<p>The FOM is expected to contribute to higher customer and staff satisfaction, more efficient use of resources, a reduction in buildings and de-centralisation of services, more sustainable travel and buildings, and improved digital services. It is important that such ambitions are measurable and measured to support ongoing governance, transparency and Member scrutiny of progress and outcomes.</p> <p>Some of these improvements are already identified in current performance indicators. Some are currently securing a baseline position, such as the roll out of Investors in People accreditation. Others will be developed as the project evolves. Core metrics are expected to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of staff touchdown and welfare stations established • Number of demonstrator projects • Number of projects joint working with external partners <p>Examples of metrics to support evaluation are presented in Appendix 5 and that these will continue to be refined as part of the ongoing engagement and delivery of FOM.</p>
10	<p>Phase Three – Next steps</p>

10.1	<p>In conjunction with the HIP, and wider asset management projects, the FOM demonstrator projects will enable the development of systems and processes to support the roll-out of the FOM across the Highlands over coming years. This is likely to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding co-design and co-production of services with communities. • Exploring universal charging models across the Council and partners, to ensure consistency, increase footfall and reduce inequalities. • Improving digital access: teaching the skills and providing the technology people need. • Integrated technology, such as shared case management, communications and workforce planning. • Governance structures that support a locality focus and aligned decision-making. • Empowering teams with integrated local budgets and income streams. • Leadership and management development to support the new ways of working. <p>This aligns with work to redesign services in partnership with communities and to improve digital and data capacity, consolidating our estate into fewer, more flexible buildings that are better equipped and digitally enabled.</p>
10.2	<p>Further to section 6, progress reporting will follow established routes through the Corporate Solutions Board (chaired by the ACE - Corporate); and the Corporate Resources Committee, as agreed in the Operational Delivery Plan by Council in May 2024 and March 2025. In addition to the annual reports on the Operational Delivery Plan, The Highland Council will also receive reports on related activity including the Highland Investment Plan. Reports will also be taken through Area Committees on respective projects, demonstrators sites etc.</p>
	<p>Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate</p> <p>Date: 14 October 2025</p> <p>Authors:</p> <p>Allan Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate Ruth Fry, Chief Officer, HR & Communications Paul Reid, Chief Officer Fleet, Facilities and Transport Fiona Duncan, Chief Officer, Health & Social Care Elaine Barrie, Head of HR Stallone-Obaraemi Samuel, HR Business Partner /FOM Project Lead Scott Dalgarno, Service Lead - Asset Mgmt and Commercial Property Dan Scott, Strategic Lead – Improvement and Performance Allan Henderson, Strategic Lead – Digital Innovation Shelley Rennie, Business Manager</p> <p>Background Papers:</p>
	<p>Appendices:</p>

Integrated Impact Screening Summary

Future Operating Model – Highland Council

Equality, Poverty and Human Rights

The Future Operating Model (FOM) is designed to transform service delivery across Highland through integrated, place-based, and digitally enabled approaches. At this stage, no negative impacts have been identified for people with protected characteristics.

- Equalities and Human Rights:

The FOM embeds inclusive design principles and promotes equity across all communities. It does not disproportionately affect any protected group and is expected to enhance access to services, particularly for those in poverty or with seldom-heard voices.

- Poverty and Socio-economic Impact:

The screening identifies a positive impact on life chances and household resources. The model supports:

- o Localised service delivery through Points of Delivery (PODs)
- o Job creation in rural areas
- o Improved digital access and literacy
- o Career pathways and apprenticeships
- o Reduced transport and childcare barriers

These outcomes contribute to national objectives around tackling poverty and sharing opportunity more equitably.

Children's Rights and Wellbeing

The FOM is expected to have a positive direct and indirect impact on children and young people. It supports:

- Co-located education, health, and social care services
- Inclusive and trauma-informed learning environments
- Improved access to early years and family support
- Enhanced parental employment and wellbeing
- Digital inclusion for learning and development

The ambition is to provide children with the conditions to thrive and maximise their potential.

Climate Change

The FOM supports Highland Council's net zero commitments through:

- Reduced commuting via decentralised hubs

- Rationalisation of the estate to improve energy efficiency
- Digital transformation reducing resource consumption

Islands and Mainland Rural Communities

The FOM is designed to be flexible and responsive to geographic diversity. While no direct negative impact is identified, the model acknowledges the distinct needs of island and rural communities. Tailored approaches will ensure equitable outcomes across all areas.

Data Protection

At this stage, no significant change to current personal data processing is anticipated. The FOM builds on existing practices and seeks to optimise data use for improved service delivery. Any future changes will be subject to Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs), and existing safeguards remain in place.

Appendix 2: Drivers for change

1. PESTLE ANALYSIS

Political

- Scottish Government push for **Single Public Estate** and **localised delivery**.
- Legislative shifts promoting **community empowerment** and **inclusive education**.
- Increased scrutiny on **spending efficiency** and **transparency**.

Economic

- Constrained public funding, rising costs, and a capital funding gap.
- Reliance on **2% ring-fenced council tax** revenue to fund £2.1bn HIP over 20 years.
- Expectation to **leverage private sector** investment and match funding (e.g., Green Freeport, renewables).

Social

- Population decline and youth migration.
- Aging communities with distinct local needs.
- Pressure for services to be **trauma-informed, accessible, and inclusive**.

Technological

- Rapid rise of **AI, digital services**, and hybrid working.
- Need for **digital equity** and inclusion across rural communities.
- Demand for **modernised infrastructure** with built-in adaptability.

Legal

- Compliance with **Health & Safety, Education Acts**, and **Equality Duty**.
- HIP and FOM deliver statutory obligations around asset safety and service accessibility.
- Legal frameworks for co-location and statutory consultations (e.g. school mergers).

Environmental

- Commitment to **net zero**.
- Requirement to decarbonise the estate and reduce operational footprint.
- Environmental screening tied to all projects and capital spend.

2. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Strong vision alignment across HIP, Delivery Plan, and FOM.
- Backing from Chief Executive and CMT.
- Long-term financial planning (HIP) and governance structure being embedded.
- Real demonstrator hubs (e.g. HQ, Dingwall, Portree, Thurso) already emerging as evidenced by engagement with the Strategic Asset Management Team.

Weaknesses

- Complex internal structure; risk of **duplication and siloed delivery**.
- Variable **staff morale** and capacity.
- Limited digital maturity in some services.
- Risk of **over-reliance on internal funding** with insufficient contingency.

Opportunities

- Use of **MS365 Project Tools and other project management tools** to centralise portfolio governance.
- Strategic partnerships (e.g. Hub North Scotland, NHS, third sector).
- Position Highland as a **national leader in place-based transformation**.
- Unlock inward investment through visible demonstrator success.

Threats

- Budget volatility; council tax funding only secured short-term.
- **Stakeholder resistance**, including from communities and staff unions.
- Delivery risk due to capacity gaps and stretched resources.
- Possibility of **'white elephant' infrastructure** without adaptive use.

Appendix 3: Research and Engagement

Phase 1: Engagement

Date	Method	Stakeholder	Feedback
November 2023 – February 2024	Survey	Public, partners, third sector, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign our services with more local accountability. • Avoid duplication and support third sector to deliver. • Change how we manage our buildings: co-locate, reduce assets. • Employ more in-house instead of agency/contractors. • Reduce management. • Make more use of technology and automation. • Invest in prevention. • Prioritise the most vulnerable people. • Be more efficient in how we do things.
October 2024 - ongoing	Staff roadshows: a series of in-person and online presentations and meetings	Employees of Highland Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear vision and plan welcomed. Staff were enthusiastic about decentralisation, particularly in terms of a positive impact on jobs in more remote areas. • Hybrid working was broadly welcomed. • Concerns were raised around the availability of housing.
December 2024	Leadership workshops	Chief Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive of simplified processes and empowered local delivery, improved transport and connectivity. • Human centred customer service access key. • Need for on the ground delivery team and pilots.
March 2025	Site visit to North Lanarkshire	FOM team and colleagues from Property & Place, Child Health, and Education	<p>Visiting team saw:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of community engagement to ensure flexible spaces used outwith host services. • Importance of planning around local demographics. • Sustained engagement strategies critical.
April 2025	Engagement with East Lothian Council (Wallyford project)	FOM team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning around place-led development, long-term planning and post-occupancy evaluation. • Confirmation of the need for a system-wide approach and awareness of cultural change.

April 2025	Site visit to Merkinch Primary School and Family Centre	FOM team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the physical environment and cross-service collaboration were found to be delivering tangible benefits, enhancing pupil engagement, staff wellbeing, and service integration. • The modern design supports flexible learning and shared use by Social Work and Family Centre teams, while opportunities to optimise space, clarify and consolidate maintenance responsibilities, and secure sustainable funding present clear next steps.
May 2025	Leadership workshops	Strategic and Service Leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong appetite for devolved, community-focused models, while reinforcing the need for structured staff engagement. • Focus on establishing a consistent understanding of the FOM using demonstrator projects as examples and enhancing data quality and accessibility.
1 March, 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One to one meeting 2. Presentation 	HR colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger collaboration between the HR team and FOM team in integrating the FOM with the people Strategy in ensuring people-centred service delivery across the Council.
3 July, 2025	One to one meeting	People Development colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's plans for future jobs and training, such as apprenticeships and career pathways, can work even better when linked with the FOM. • By teaming up, we can make sure staff have the right skills for modern services, and that learning and development supports how the Council wants to work in the future. This means better opportunities for young people, and stronger support for health and care jobs.
21 August, 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One to one meeting 2. Workshop 	Property colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many council buildings and spaces aren't being used as well as they could be. • Agreed to test the FOM on a mix of real projects (demonstrator projects). We'll use shared tools to check how well each project supports things like staff wellbeing, energy efficiency, and community access.
11 July, 2025	One to one meeting	Education colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear pattern of strategic coordination, with one lead overseeing most developments and most sites designed for co-location of services, such as health and education, where appropriate.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This approach supports smarter use of public space, improves access to services for families, and reflects a long-term investment in integrated, community-focused learning environments. • While some projects still require clarity on additional services, the overall direction is consistent.
13 August, 2025	One to one meeting	Customer Services colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent experiences across contact channels and limited system integration. Evidence from service reviews, such as housing, licensing, and environmental health, showed gaps in CRM visibility, duplicated effort, and unclear timelines for residents. • There is a need to lead targeted improvements to standardise processes, to enhance tracking, and to deliver a consistent “One Highland” experience, ensuring residents receive clear, fair, and efficient service regardless of how they engage.
July 2025	Co-design and prioritisation workshop (Further detail from this workshop is available below)	Representatives from High Life Highland, ICT Services & Digital, Property & Facilities Management, Asset Management & Commercial Property, Customer & Registration Services, Transport & Logistics, Business Management (Performance & Governance), HR & Communication, Planning – Environment & Low Carbon Transport, Environment Development & Active Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dingwall – noted for readiness and co-location potential. Strong alignment with community needs, active investment, and potential for collaborative development. • Thurso - opportunity to test POD model in a rural context. High degree of community engagement and volunteering. • Ullapool - well-connected, strong local partnerships, and reliable transport links. Chance to create a sustainable, net-zero, develop digital tools, and build on existing cultural and library services.
13 August 2025	In person network launch	Community transport providers and partners, including NHS Highland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for collaboration and peer learning welcomed

19 September	In-person workshop	Programme board and other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on community input and co-production, being user-led. • Need to ensure staff understand and support redesign. • Emphasis on service design not necessarily always asset-based.
	Multi-platform events across a number of programmes	Dingwall, Ullapool and Thurso local partners	

Documents reviewed as part of the scoping exercise were:

- Area Place Plans
- Audit Scotland. (2020). Best Value Assurance Report: The Highland Council.
- Audit Scotland. (2025a). Best Value Audit Report – April 2025.
- Audit Scotland. (2025b). Thematic Report on Transformation – August 2025.
- Highland Council. (2024) Revenue Budget, Council Tax and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27
- Highland Council. (2024). Operational Delivery Plan 2024–2027. Approved May 2024.
- Highland Council. (2025a). Operational Delivery Plan 2024–2027 – Annual Update. Approved May 2025.
- Highland Council. (2025b). Highland Investment Plan (HIP).
- Highland Council. (2025c). Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP).
- Highland Council. (2025d). Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP).
- Highland Council. (2025e). Learning Estate Strategy. Inverness: Highland Council.
- Scottish Government. (2015). Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Edinburgh: The Stationery Office
- Scottish Government. Single Public Estate Strategy. Edinburgh

Appendix 4: Future Operating Model Assessment Framework

Principle	Description	Check/Metric
C – Collaborative & Co-delivered	Services must be designed and delivered in collaboration with partners, communities, and other departments to avoid duplication and drive impact.	Does this project involve multi-agency collaboration or aligned delivery?
O – Owned by the Community	Projects should reflect lived experiences and be shaped with local input, especially from people in poverty or seldom-heard groups.	Has the community contributed to this design? How have their views been used?
M – Maximized Access & Inclusion	Services and spaces must be accessible to all, with flexible hours, low barriers, and inclusive design that removes stigma.	Is this service truly accessible across physical, digital, and social dimensions?
M – Meaningful, Place-Based Design	Infrastructure and service design should be rooted in the local context, supporting pride, sustainability, and belonging.	Does this reflect the unique needs and assets of the place it serves?
U – Universal Equity & Inclusion	Interventions must promote equity by providing targeted support without stigma and actively reducing service inequality.	Who might be excluded from this approach, and how is that being addressed?
N – Net Zero Aligned & Future-Fit	Every project must contribute to sustainability, using low-carbon solutions, adaptive infrastructure, and circular economic principles.	Does this project support the Council's Net Zero and sustainability commitments?
I – Integrated & Intelligent Technology	Digital solutions should be intuitive, secure, and support smarter decision-making across services and locations.	Is technology helping improve delivery, access, or staff efficiency?
T – Transparent Roles & Agile Teams	Governance, roles, and reporting lines must be clear, with accountability and flexibility embedded.	Are responsibilities and decisions visible and responsive to change?
Y – Yielding to Change & Learning	Projects must demonstrate the ability to evolve based on feedback, evidence, and changing community needs.	How will this change over time? Is there a learning loop built in?

Appendix 5: Evaluation metrics

Existing performance plan actions relevant to FOM			
Administratio n Programme Priority Outcome	Commitment	Driver for change	FOM Principle
Fair and caring Highland	Promote fair access through co-located services across the Highlands	Emphasis on equality and accessibility	Responsive and person-centred, delivering local services with partners
Resilient and sustainable communities	Develop place-based plans that focus on quality neighbourhoods and direct local funding opportunities towards local priorities (Area Plans already developed and adopted)	Aging communities and youth migration	Enable local economic development to address population change issues and sustain communities
Sustainable Highland environment	Identify and commit to renewable energy investments to reduce the overall energy costs for the Council	Climate change	Actively changing to achieve Net Zero
Resilient and sustainable Council	Improve our response times in replying to enquiries/service requests from the public	Funding constraints and customer expectations	Harness innovation and be effective in implementing change
	Actively redesign service delivery in response to constrained budgets		
Existing SPIs relevant to FOM			
SPI	Driver for change	FOM Principle	
% procurement spent on local enterprises	Aging communities and youth migration	Enable local economic development to address population change issues and sustain communities	
Town centre vacancy rates			
Asset management % suitability	Funding constraints and customer expectations	Sustainable asset base with strategic prioritisation for future capital spend	
Council carbon emissions tonnes CO2	Climate change	Actively changing to achieve Net Zero	
Potential future metrics for evaluation			
Metric		FOM Principle	
% of staff hybrid working increases		Efficient approach to hybrid working	
Miles commuted by all staff annually decreases			
% of staff based outwith Inverness increases		Slimmed central model and integrated teams	
Number of buildings owned decreases		Actively changing to achieve Net Zero / Sustainable asset base	
Instances of co-location increase		Responsive and person-centred, delivering local services with partners	
Services delivered by third sector partnership agreements increases			
Instances of co-production increase		Incorporate people's views	
Online customer interactions increase		Harness innovation and be effective in implementing change	
Number of services available online increases			
Locations for public to access internet and support to get online increase			
liP accreditation achieved		Workforce development and staff skills	
Number of managers completing Management Connections increases			
% staff rating line manager as good in exit survey increases		Fewer leaders, more complex services	

