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| Agenda Item | 5         |
| Report No   | RBD-01-26 |

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Redesign Board

**Date:** 19 March 2026

**Report Title:** My Council Programme - Budget monitoring & Progress update

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

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Delivery Plan 2024-27 consists of 57 projects/programmes, managed through 6 Portfolio Boards. Each project is reported to a relevant committee for consideration and scrutiny in terms of the Portfolio Reporting Cycle agreed at Council on 9 May 2024. Exceptions to this general rule may apply when for example circumstances merit a standalone project/programme report to either committee or council. If exceptions apply this report will signpost to where the relevant reporting can be found.
- 1.2 This report provides financial, performance, risk and general information on the following Delivery Plan projects/Programme:
- My Council Programme
- 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:
- i. Note the updates against the My Council programme
  - ii. Note the launch of the new website on 17 February 2026.

## 3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource: There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. The project remains on target to deliver on budget. Project Sponsors manage the resource commitments required for the successful delivery of their projects from a corporate perspective, ensuring targeted deployment of resource for the effective redesign of Council services in line with the Council's priorities.
- 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. There are

no direct legal implications arising from this report. Project Sponsors seek legal advice and take appropriate action as required in respect of their projects.

- 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 paragraph/s (see Section 5.8).
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people): There are no direct Health and Safety implications arising from this report. Project Sponsors will consider any specific relevant Health and Safety implications as part of the management and delivery of their projects.
- 3.5 Gaelic: There are no specific Gaelic implications arising from this report. All projects will ensure the Council's bilingual policy is appropriately applied.

#### **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. My Council Programme**



- 5.1 The Programme Brief was approved at the 28 November 2022 Redesign Board, and from this, the summary purpose and objectives of the Programme are as follows:-  
  
Purpose: To review, improve and create a joined-up customer contact experience at the Highland Council, including the opportunities to further utilise digital approaches to support improved outcomes for our citizens, our staff, and the Council. By developing the use of technology, resources are released to better support customers who need it the most.
- 5.2 The aim of the My Council Programme is to review and create a joined-up customer contact experience at the Highland Council, including the opportunities to further utilise digital approaches to support improved outcomes for our citizens, our staff, and the Council. By developing self-service digital options for those who can use it, resources are released to better support customers who need it the most. The focus

of the project is putting the citizen at the centre of customer engagement at the Highland Council, to improve our process and approach for all contact methods (digital, telephony, face to face) and to provide a seamless customer experience. The outcomes of this data-driven and customer focused project will drive cost-saving efficiencies (financial benefits); reduce failure demand (greater efficiency); and increase internal/external customer satisfaction (improvement).

Following changes in the programme structure, delivery is now being managed through 3 core projects:

- Project 1 - Customer Contact Strategy
- Project 3 - MyHighland (formerly “End-to-end Customer Journey”)
- Project 4 - Customer Contact Methods (Including Website Redesign)

Project 2 was covering data and business intelligence. This has now been subsumed within the Data Foundations project, one of the constituent projects within the Delivery Plan Corporate Solutions portfolio.

5.3 The Redesign Board Members assigned to this Project are Cllrs Jackie Hendry and Bill Boyd.

5.4 **Progress across several key areas has been made during this reporting period and the programme remains green:**

5.5 **Project 1: Customer Contact Strategy**

- Customer service standards for five service areas have been published on the new Highland Council website. Confirmation has been given by these services that reporting against the standards will be available to publish in July 2026.
- Planning the development of reporting against the remaining 12 service areas has been detailed in the Project Closure Report to be considered at the MCP Board on 18 March 2026
- Ownership for the standards reporting, and mandatory Customer Experience strategy staff training, will be with the Service Lead for Housing Policy and Customer Service – Housing & Communities.

5.6 **Project 3: MyHighland:**

- The project status changed from **Green to Amber** as agreed by the MCP Board 21 January 2026, due to the delivery milestone date being reviewed.
- The project implementation plan has been developed in collaboration with the technical implementation and business change teams. As a result, the project is proposing to replace the current milestone with new ones that reflect the plan for delivery and implementation. The purpose of splitting the milestones is to allow the board visibility of progress as the project moves forward. The MCP Board will be asked to approve a change in the project RAG status from **Amber to Green** on 18 March 2026 that reflects the new project plan.

5.7 **Project 4: Customer Contact Methods - Web Redesign**

The new Highland Council website successfully launched as planned on Tuesday 17th February 2026 – a major milestone for the project and culmination of a

significant amount of work. This was supported by a strong internal and external communications strategy.

The new website delivered:

- **Design** – the agreed design was delivered successfully before launch, with all user acceptance testing completed.
- **Content** – the agreed content, in line with the customer first principles, was delivered successfully before the launch of the new website. User acceptance testing with Services and Members was completed.

Initial feedback has generally been very positive, with comments coming in from the public, members and staff. Local media reports how the new website had improved accessibility and mobile compatibility, offered clearer and more consistent information that is easier to find with a stronger search function.

Comments can be submitted via a feedback option available on most of the pages on the website and those received to date have helped to prioritise “snagging” after the go-live. In future, this function will help to ensure that the website is responsive to the changing needs of Highland citizens.

It is recognised that the new search functionality, although powerful and easy to use, will take a while to fully bed in. The search is provided by Google and will continue to improve the more it is used, but at the time of writing this report was still returning some results relating to the old website.

As reported to Members previously, the new website is the first stage of development that will include future improvements to online forms and payment processes as part of an overall review of customer online journeys.

### **Post Go-Live**

- **Hyper-Care Period** – between the go-live date and 1 April 2026 both the project and web development team are in a high support period, where issues raised by services and public feedback are expedited to ensure content meets the quality standards.
- **Resources** - As of 23 February 2026, the project resources have returned to the Web Development team to support capacity, embedding the change and wider TOM implementation. This will be delivered within Business as Usual.
- **Target Operation Model (TOM)** – interim processes and procedures have been put in place during the initial implementation period in order to maintain website quality during transition to the target operating model. Implementation of the TOM is supported by the online Customer Experience Working Group.
- **Online Customer Experience Working Group (OCE-WG)**  
The group has reviewed and agreed roles and responsibilities and has now begun carrying out its governance function as set out in its Terms of Reference. This includes oversight of TOM principles, approving changes to service standards, monitoring compliance, reviewing audit findings, identifying training needs, and agreeing development priorities.

5.8 As reported and agreed at the MCP Board on 21 January 2026, two of three projects in the programme are reporting green, with one changed to Amber whilst the planning delivery stage was under review, as detailed at section 5.6.

## 5.9 Key Milestones & Requests for Change

There has been one request for change of a milestone in the period, approved by MCP board and Solutions Portfolio Board. As noted above, all bar one milestone for the My Council Programme are now complete.

| MILESTONES                                   |   | CURRENT STATUS                     |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| <i>Starts Apr 24 /<br/>Completes Jun 24</i>  | My Council Programme: Customer Charter implemented with staff   | <b>M3 24/25<br/>Completed</b>      |
| <i>Starts Apr 24 /<br/>Completes Sept 24</i> | My Council Programme: Customer Contact strategy agreed          | <b>M7 24/25<br/>Completed</b>      |
| <i>Completed Q1 24/25</i>                    | Roll out new corporate telephony to support new ways of working | <b>Q1 24/25<br/>Completed</b>      |
| <i>Starts Apr 24 /<br/>Completes Mar 25</i>  | My Council Programme: Assessment of CRM                         | <b>M2 25/26<br/>Completed</b>      |
| <i>Starts Apr 24/<br/>Completes Oct 25</i>   | My Council Programme: Customer Service Standards published      | <b>M7 25/26<br/>Completed</b>      |
| <i>Starts Apr 24 /<br/>Completes Feb 26</i>  | My Council Programme: New redesigned website in place           | <b>M11 25/26<br/>Completed</b>     |
| <i>Starts Jan25 /<br/>Completes Jun26</i>    | My Council Programme: Council tax online implemented            | <b>M11 25/26<br/>Some Slippage</b> |

## 5.10 Financial Summary

Council tax online has a £20k per annum saving for years 2027/28 and 2028/29, achieved through implementing online facilities to enable council tax payers to access their council tax bills in digital format instead of receiving paper bills. Around 250,000 paper council tax bills and reminders are issued to council tax payers each year. Council tax online facilities will extend access for council tax payers, is a key element of the My Council programme, and may increase the number of council tax payments received by Direct Debit.

The current programme budget is £0.5m, funded from earmarked reserves. The table below shows the financial outlook. This funding has been sufficient to progress projects 1 (Customer Contact Strategy) and 4 (Customer Contact Methods), with this coming in on budget.

As previously reported, My Highland will be led by existing in-house resources to design and implement solutions. There may be one-off and/or additional annual recurring IT infrastructure costs to implement changes, and such will be informed by robust business cases including financial impact assessments, affordability and funding identified/secured as part of the process.

### My Council Programme financial outlook – **Based Jan 26 (Period 10) FY25-26**

|                                    |                |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Budget - Earmarked Reserves (EMR)  | £0.500m        |
| 24/25 Actual Spend                 | £0.226m        |
| 25/26 Forecast Spend               | £0.263m        |
| <b>Balance Forecast Q4 FY25-26</b> | <b>£0.011m</b> |

## 5.11 Key Risks

No new risks have been identified, no change to risk action RAG status as of last review date 24 February 2026.

| KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE   | CURRENT RISK RATING | RESPONSE |
|---|---------------------|----------|
| My Council Programme: Programme Resources and Affordability                     | 6                   | Treat    |
| My Council Programme: Competing Tensions between day job and change initiatives | 6                   | Treat    |
| My Council Programme: Scope and Scale of organisational culture change          | 9                   | Treat    |

- Programme resources are not sufficient to achieve all outcomes – mitigated by regular review and planning of resource utilisation and presentation of business cases for additional resources if required.
- Competing tensions between operations and project work – mitigated by resource planning and input as required from senior management to prioritise work.
- Scope and scale of organisational culture change required – mitigated by leadership from senior management and work at multiple levels to embed change within the Council.

## 6. Forward Plan

### Customer Contact Strategy

1. Project closed

### Web Transformation

1. Web Target Operating Model
  - a. New OCE-Working Group - Governance in place maintain the web standards
  - b. Transition plan to be developed for implementing the Target Operating Model
2. Moving to closure and business as usual

### MyHighland

1. Delivery stage commenced

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Date: 25-2-26  
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