

Agenda Item	8
Report No	HC/35/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Highland Council

Date: 29 October 2026

Report Title: Towards a Future Growth for Highland

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council has considered a number of reports over the last two years relating to the development of a strategic approach that seeks to maximise the economic opportunities which Highland is well placed to deliver, whilst ensuring that the benefits arising from investment and development create a lasting legacy for current and future generations.
- 1.2 This report provides Members with an overview of a number of these areas of current and future activity and seeks agreement to move to the next stage of delivering the public-private sector partnership approach that the Council has established. It proposes a programme of engagement with both the Scottish and UK Governments to shape a future Growth Deal for the Highland region. This represents a critical opportunity to influence future investment and funding decisions at a time of significant current and anticipated economic activity, the near completion of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal, and ongoing discussions regarding the Programme for Government and wider Public Sector Reform proposals.
- 1.3 The report identifies a number of potential areas for future joint investment, building on the work already being carried out through Invest Highland, the Highland Investment Programme, the Highland Wealth Fund, the Highland Social Value Charter and related regional initiatives. Taken together, these provide a strong platform from which to develop a coherent future Growth Deal proposition. Members will recognise **Appendix 2** which summarises key growth opportunities for Highland. Earlier versions of this appendix have been discussed in more detail at briefings with all Members.
- 1.4 The report seeks Member approval to engage further with the Scottish and UK Governments, alongside key public, private and third sector partners, in shaping a future Growth Deal for Highland that supports sustainable economic growth, strengthens communities, improves infrastructure and secures long-term prosperity across the region.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the significant economic opportunities emerging across Highland and the strategic work undertaken by the Council and its partners to maximise their long-term benefit;
- ii. **Note** the progress made through Invest Highland, the Highland Investment Programme, the Highland Wealth Fund, the Highland Social Value Charter and related programmes;
- iii. **Note** that this work may have a link to ongoing discussion in Scotland and UK wide on Public Service Reform;
- iv. **Agree** that there is a strong strategic case for developing a future Growth Deal proposition for Highland;
- v. **Agree** that the Council should engage formally with the Scottish Government and UK Government to shape a future Growth Deal for the region;
- vi. **Agree** that officers develop an initial strategic proposition, investment framework and programme of priority interventions for further consideration by Members; and
- vii. **Agree** that a further report will be presented to Council updating on outcomes of that engagement setting out a draft investment framework and growth deal programme for Highland.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - Initial development of the Growth Deal proposition and engagement with partners and Governments will be undertaken within existing resources. As the proposition develops, dedicated programme capacity and specialist support may be required as well as asks of partners outside of the Council. Any additional financial or staffing implications will be identified and reported to Council in future updates.
- 3.2 **Legal** - There are no direct legal implications arising from approval to commence engagement. Any future partnership agreement, funding package, governance model, procurement arrangement or delivery vehicle will require legal review and appropriate Council approval.
- 3.3 **Risk** - There is a risk that Highland does not secure an appropriate share of future national investment if it is not positioned early with a clear, credible and partnership-backed proposition. There is also a risk that an overly broad programme lacks focus or deliverability. These risks will be mitigated through early Government engagement, transparent prioritisation, robust business cases, clear governance and alignment with established regional and national priorities. Other risks may emerge as the public sector reform proposals progress and take shape.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process or people)** - There are no direct implications arising from this report. Health and safety implications associated with individual projects will be assessed through the relevant project governance and approval processes.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no implications.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on the engagement around a programme for growth with the screening concluding that in the main, it has the potential for positive impacts and full assessment is not required. Conclusions of the screening are summarised below, and Members are asked to consider **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.1

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	No impact / Positive Impact
Socio – economic	Positive Impact
Human Rights	Positive Impact
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	Positive Impact
Island and Mainland Rural	Minor Differences
Climate Change	No significant adverse climate impacts identified at this stage
Data Rights	No personal data will be processed

5 Background

- 5.1 Highland has entered a period of substantial economic change. Investment associated with renewable energy, electricity transmission, ports, the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, housing, digital connectivity, workforce development, transport and public infrastructure has the potential to reshape the regional economy. The central challenge is to convert this activity into sustained local prosperity, stronger communities and a legacy that endures beyond the individual construction programmes.
- 5.2 This region of Scotland has the capability to make a significant contribution to the delivery of the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and Scotland's Green Industrial Strategy.
- 5.3 Members are already aware of a number of key decisions taken by the Council over the last two years that have helped position the region to benefit from future public-private funding opportunities. Some of these are listed below:-
- **Highland Investment Plan** (based on Council Tax precept to raise £2b for investment over the next twenty years, with £750m committed in the next five)
 - **Highland Housing Challenge** (based on Council led Housing Needs and Demand Assessment) to promise 25,000 homes in the next ten years based on private sector commitments
 - **Highland Social Value Charter for Renewables** is led by Highland Council on behalf of the CPP has seen £6b of investor pledges so far and is targeting to leverage £10 billion as a whole

- **Highland Wealth Fund** (led by Highland Council on behalf of the wider economic partnership and CPP) will funnel such future investments on a regional, area and local place basis
- **The Highland Adapts Partnership** has established a need for a clear alignment between actions towards Climate Mitigation and Adaptation to provide solutions for 29 vulnerable communities (covering 60,000 Highland residences)
- **Workforce North** is an innovative partnership between Scottish Government, SDS and Highland Council, commits £3.2m of public funds for the purpose of developing a Highland Construction and Energy sector supply chain – this is unique in Scotland and has the potential to scale up to become a national funding approach to skills co-investment with private sector partners
- **Poverty and Equalities Commission for Highland** published its report, Essential Elements last June, with actions in response being brought forward. This is the only such piece of work to have been carried out by a local authority in the past five years. Independently authored, it charts a pathway to creating a poverty-proofed environment in the Highlands
- **Creative Highland** is a board which spans institutional and cultural partners, including individual artists and which is curating the development of the Highland Arts, Heritage and Culture Strategy and the UK City of Culture Bid for Inverness and Highland.

- 5.4 These innovative strategic developments are unique in Scotland and have been developed over the past three years by Highland Council, leveraging key supports from national and local agencies within the partnership.
- 5.5 The Inverness and Highland City Region Deal has provided an established model of collaboration between the Council, Governments and delivery partners. With that programme now maturing, focus is needed on the next phase of regional investment and to the interventions required to unlock current and anticipated opportunities. A future Growth Deal would therefore represent a response to a new set of opportunities and challenges, rather than simply an extension of previous arrangements.
- 5.6 The timing is important. Both Governments are considering future spending priorities, economic growth, infrastructure delivery and reform of public services. Highland therefore needs to articulate a clear proposition which demonstrates national significance, regional coherence, deliverability, additionality and a strong return on public investment.
- 5.7 A future Growth Deal should not be treated as a stand-alone funding bid. It should provide an organising framework through which existing Council and partner programmes can be brought together, gaps identified, investment sequenced and public funding used to leverage private and other sources of finance.
- 5.8 The proposed approach is founded on partnership. The Council has a convening and democratic leadership role, but delivery will depend on sustained collaboration with Governments, public agencies, business, investors, communities, the third sector, education providers and land and infrastructure interests.
- 5.9 Any future Growth Deal is being discussed within the context of wider Scotland and UK wide Public Sector Reform and engagement on a Growth Deal for Highland may overlap with parallel engagement on reform of services across the public sector.

6 Foundations of a future deal

6.1 A number of established or emerging programmes provide the foundations for a future Growth Deal. These should be aligned rather than duplicated, with the Growth Deal focused on the strategic interventions that require joint action or cannot be delivered through existing funding routes alone. The illustration set out within **Appendix 2** indicates the potential value of that public and private sector funding of anywhere between £10-£16b over the next 25 years.

6.2 **Invest Highland** - provides a route to promote Highland as a location for investment and to present strategic, regional and local opportunities in a coherent way. It can support the Growth Deal by identifying investable propositions, improving visibility and connecting projects with potential public and private funders.

Highland Investment Programme - provides the Council's framework for planning and prioritising capital investment. Alignment will be essential to ensure that Growth Deal proposals support agreed priorities, are affordable over their whole life and complement the Council's asset and service plans.

Highland Wealth Fund - is intended to capture and invest a share of the long-term value arising from development for the benefit of communities across Highland. The Fund can complement, but should not replace, Government investment in enabling infrastructure and strategic economic development.

Highland Social Value Charter - sets out expectations of investors and developers and supports a consistent approach to community benefit, employment, skills, housing and wider social value. Its principles should be embedded across the Growth Deal proposition.

Public-private partnership - provides the mechanism for shaping a proposition that is grounded in market evidence, supported by delivery partners and capable of aligning public intervention with private capital and operational expertise.

Community Wealth Building - provides an overarching framework for ensuring that economic growth translates into wider community benefit through local procurement, fair employment, community ownership, asset development and the retention of wealth within Highland. These principles should help inform the development of any future Growth Deal proposition.

6.3 Together, these foundations create a strong strategic platform. The next stage is to translate them into a focused proposition that identifies the constraints to growth, the interventions required to overcome them, the outcomes expected and the respective contributions of Governments, the Council and partners.

6.4 The scale of current and anticipated investment across Highland is unprecedented in recent decades. Renewable energy generation, electricity transmission, ports, housing, transport infrastructure and associated supply chain activity have the potential to deliver significant economic benefits. At the same time, they create additional pressures on infrastructure, housing, labour markets and public services.

6.5 Many of the barriers to sustainable growth cannot be addressed through private investment alone. Housing shortages, transport constraints, skills availability, infrastructure capacity, site readiness and wider community resilience issues require coordinated action across public and private sector partners

- 6.6 A key objective should be to secure a long-term legacy from the scale of investment currently taking place across Highland. While construction activity will generate significant short-term economic benefits, long-term success will depend on the extent to which jobs, skills, assets, investment capacity and economic value are retained within the region.
- 6.7 The Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport provides a particularly significant opportunity. As one of only a small number of Green Freeports across the UK, it has the potential to attract inward investment, strengthen supply chains, support innovation and create high-value employment. Realising these opportunities will require complementary investment in housing, transport, skills and supporting infrastructure across a wider Highland geography.
- 6.8 Housing has emerged as one of the most significant constraints on economic growth. Employers, developers and public agencies consistently identify the availability of housing as a barrier to recruitment, retention and inward investment. Addressing housing delivery at scale is therefore both a social priority and an economic imperative.
- 6.9 The scale of anticipated investment will also place significant demands on the labour market. There is a need to expand the availability of skills, training, apprenticeships and workforce development opportunities to ensure that local people can benefit from emerging employment opportunities and that employers have access to the workforce required to deliver growth.
- 6.10 The Council has consistently argued that nationally significant investment should deliver benefits at both a local and regional level. Future investment should therefore contribute not only to economic growth, but also to stronger communities, reduced inequalities and improved quality of life across Highland.
- 6.11 The case for a future Growth Deal is strengthened by the wider context of public sector reform, increasing pressure on public finances and growing competition for investment. Greater coordination between Governments, public agencies, infrastructure providers, communities and the private sector will be required if Highland is to maximise the opportunities arising from current investment and address the challenges associated with growth.
- 6.12 A future Growth Deal should not be viewed solely as a source of additional funding. Rather, it provides a potential framework through which Governments, agencies, communities, businesses and investors can coordinate activity around a shared set of priorities, ensuring that investment is targeted towards the areas of greatest strategic need and opportunity.
- 6.13 The Council is not starting from a blank sheet of paper. Through the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal, Invest Highland, the Highland Investment Programme, the Highland Social Value Charter, Community Wealth Building activity and the Highland Wealth Fund, substantial groundwork has already been undertaken. A future Growth Deal provides an opportunity to align these strands within a single strategic framework capable of attracting additional investment and accelerating delivery of shared priorities.

- 6.14 Taken together, these factors suggest there is a strong strategic case for developing a future Growth Deal proposition for Highland. The opportunity facing the region is not defined by a single project, sector or funding programme, but by the interaction between energy transition, infrastructure investment, housing delivery, workforce development and community resilience. The challenge now is to develop a proposition capable of bringing these strands together in a coherent and deliverable way.

7 An Investment Framework

- 7.1 The initial framework below is proposed as the basis for discussion with partners and Governments. It is deliberately strategic at this stage. Inclusion does not constitute approval of any individual project or funding commitment.

- 7.2 **Enabling infrastructure and connectivity** - investment in strategic transport, ports, roads, bridges, public transport, active travel, digital and utility infrastructure required to unlock development, improve resilience and connect people, communities and markets.

Housing and community sustainment - measures to accelerate housing delivery, address infrastructure constraints, support key workers, enable rural and island development, improve existing homes and create sustainable places capable of retaining population.

Energy transition and industrial opportunity - infrastructure and enabling activity that supports renewable generation, grid development, supply-chain growth, clean heat, storage, low-carbon industry and the retention of economic value within Highland.

Skills, workforce and fair work - a coordinated regional response to current and future labour demand, including pathways into employment, apprenticeships, construction and technical skills, leadership capacity and measures to widen participation in economic opportunity.

Business growth, innovation and inward investment - support for indigenous businesses, entrepreneurship, research and innovation, commercialisation, investment readiness and the development of propositions capable of attracting responsible inward investment.

Community wealth and social infrastructure - investment that strengthens local ownership, community capacity, town centres, community facilities, childcare, health-enabling infrastructure and locally delivered services, ensuring that growth translates into wider wellbeing.

Climate resilience, land and natural capital - investment in adaptation, flood and coastal resilience, nature restoration, biodiversity, land-based enterprise and approaches that protect communities and assets while supporting a just transition.

Culture, creativity and Highland identity – investment in culture, heritage, Gaelic language and the creative industries to grow the sector, create sustainable employment, support artists and creative businesses, strengthen community identity and celebrate Highland's distinctive cultural assets, traditions and contemporary creativity.

- 7.3 The final framework will require prioritisation. Projects should be assessed against agreed criteria including strategic fit, economic and social impact, contribution to inclusive growth, additionality, deliverability, affordability, climate impact, private leverage, community benefit and whole-life value.
- 7.4 The proposition should include a balanced portfolio of region-wide enabling investments and place-based interventions. Attention should be given to ensuring that communities hosting nationally significant infrastructure secure both direct local benefits and an appropriate contribution towards wider strategic investments that strengthen Highland's long-term resilience and prosperity.
- 7.5 Business cases will need to distinguish clearly between projects that are already funded, projects that require acceleration or expansion, and genuinely additional interventions that cannot proceed without Government participation.
- 7.6 The purpose of the framework is not to create an exhaustive list of projects. Rather, it is intended to provide a structure through which potential interventions can be assessed, prioritised and developed into an investable programme capable of attracting Government and partner support.
- 7.7 Priority should generally be given to interventions capable of delivering strategic impact, addressing recognised constraints to growth, leveraging additional investment and generating benefits that would not otherwise be achieved through existing funding mechanisms.
- 7.8 Consideration will also require to be given to the balance between projects of regional significance and those which respond to specific local opportunities and challenges. Maintaining this balance will be important in securing support across Highland while ensuring that investment delivers maximum overall benefit.
- 7.9 The framework will continue to evolve through engagement with Governments, public agencies, business interests, communities and other stakeholders. The final proposition presented to Members will include more detailed prioritisation criteria, potential projects and delivery arrangements.

8 Next Steps

- 8.1 Should Members agree with the approach set out in this paper, it is intended that further discussions at Member and officer level take place with both Governments to identify how joint propositions and business cases can be prepared over the coming months.
- 8.2 Development of these propositions should be overseen through a clear and proportionate partnership structure. The Council should retain democratic oversight while ensuring that business, public agencies, communities and delivery partners have a meaningful role in shaping priorities and testing deliverability.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 12 October 2026

Author: Malcolm McLeod, Assistance Chief Executive – Place
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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Funding Opportunities

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

About proposal

What does this proposal relate to? Strategy

Proposal name: Highland Growth Programme

High level summary of the proposal: The Highland Growth Programme provides a strategic framework for shaping the next phase of economic development and investment across Highland. It is being developed in response to the significant opportunities arising from renewable energy, electricity transmission, ports, housing, digital connectivity, workforce development and the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, together with the challenges these create for communities, infrastructure and public services.

The programme seeks to build on a range of existing initiatives, including Invest Highland, the Highland Investment Programme, the Highland Wealth Fund, the Highland Social Value Charter and Community Wealth Building activity. Together, these provide a foundation for a more coordinated approach to investment, helping to align public and private sector activity around a shared set of priorities and outcomes.

The programme is intended to identify the infrastructure, housing, skills, workforce and community investments required to support sustainable growth and maximise the long-term benefits of development. A key objective is to ensure that economic opportunities translate into lasting benefits for Highland's communities through improved infrastructure, stronger local economies, increased community resilience and the retention of more economic value within the region.

At this stage, the programme remains strategic in nature. It establishes an investment framework and direction of travel rather than committing to specific projects or funding allocations. Further work will be undertaken with governments, public agencies, businesses, communities and other partners to develop detailed proposals, priorities and delivery arrangements.

The overall aim is to position Highland to secure future investment, address barriers to growth and create the conditions for sustainable and inclusive prosperity across the region.

Who may be affected by the proposal? Given the strategic nature of the Highland Growth Programme, the potential impacts are likely to be wide-ranging and affect a broad cross-section of Highland's population, businesses and communities. Groups who may be affected include:

All Highland residents.

People living in rural, remote and island communities.

Children and young people.

Working-age adults.

Older people.

People on low incomes or experiencing poverty.

People with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

Women, particularly those affected by barriers to employment, childcare provision or access to services.

Businesses, employers, investors and social enterprises.
Community organisations, development trusts and third sector bodies.
People seeking housing, including key workers and younger households.
Individuals seeking employment, training, apprenticeships or skills development opportunities.
Communities hosting major infrastructure, renewable energy and economic development projects.
Highland Council employees and partner organisations involved in programme development and delivery.

As the programme develops and specific projects or investment proposals emerge, more detailed assessment may identify impacts, both positive and negative, on particular groups or communities. At this stage, the programme is strategic in nature and is intended to support inclusive economic growth and improved outcomes across Highland as a whole.

Start date of proposal:

End date of proposal:

Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service? No

Does this relate to an existing proposal? No

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Sign off date: 2026-10-16

Equalities, poverty, and human rights

Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

Sex: Positive

Age: Positive

Disability: Positive

Religion or belief: No impact

Race: Positive

Sexual orientation: No impact

Gender reassignment: No impact

Pregnancy and maternity: Positive

Marriage and civil partnership: No impact

Protected characteristics impact details: The Highland Growth Programme is intended to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth across Highland. At this stage, it provides a strategic framework for future investment and partnership working rather than approving specific projects, funding allocations or delivery arrangements. No significant negative impacts on protected characteristic groups have been identified at this stage. Individual projects developed through the programme will be subject to further assessment, where appropriate.

Sex (Positive)

The programme has the potential to improve access to employment, skills development, housing and transport infrastructure. Investment in community infrastructure and measures that support participation in the workforce may help address barriers experienced by some groups and contribute to more inclusive economic opportunities across Highland.

Age (Positive)

The programme is expected to create benefits across all age groups. Young people may benefit from increased access to training, apprenticeships and employment opportunities, while older people may benefit from improved infrastructure, housing and community sustainability. Supporting population retention and strengthening communities are likely to have positive long-term impacts across generations.

Disability (Positive)

Investment in housing, transport, digital connectivity, community facilities and employment opportunities has the potential to improve accessibility and participation for disabled people. Accessibility considerations will require to be incorporated into the development and appraisal of individual projects as they come forward.

Religion or Belief (No Impact)

No specific impacts have been identified in relation to religion or belief. The programme is intended to support communities and individuals across Highland irrespective of faith or belief.

Race (Positive)

The programme seeks to increase access to employment, skills, housing and economic opportunity. These benefits have the potential to support equality of opportunity and contribute to positive outcomes for people from all ethnic backgrounds.

Sexual Orientation (No Impact)

No specific impacts have been identified in relation to sexual orientation. The programme is intended to benefit communities across Highland without distinction.

Gender Reassignment (No Impact)

No specific impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment. The programme is intended to be inclusive and accessible to all members of the community.

Pregnancy and Maternity (Positive)

Improved housing, community infrastructure, childcare provision and access to employment opportunities have the potential to support pregnant women, parents and families.

Marriage and Civil Partnership (No Impact)

No specific impacts have been identified in relation to marriage or civil partnership status.

Mitigation

No significant adverse impacts on protected characteristic groups have been identified at this strategic stage. As the programme develops and specific projects or investment proposals are brought forward, further assessment will be undertaken where required to identify, avoid or mitigate any potential negative impacts and ensure that the benefits of investment are accessible across Highland's communities.

Poverty and socio-economic

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

Prospects and opportunities: Positive

Places: Positive

Financial: Positive

Poverty and socio-economic impact details: Prospects and Opportunities (Positive)

The Highland Growth Programme is intended to address a number of the factors that currently limit economic opportunity across Highland. Its focus on housing, skills, workforce development, transport and digital connectivity, and business growth has the potential to improve access to employment, training and career opportunities. In particular, it seeks to support workforce participation, address skills shortages and ensure that local people are able to benefit from existing and emerging investment across the region.

Places (Positive)

The programme recognises that both economic opportunity and economic disadvantage are experienced differently across Highland. Through its focus on housing, infrastructure, community sustainment and place-based investment, it has the potential to deliver positive outcomes for rural, remote and island communities, as well as areas facing population decline, infrastructure constraints or economic challenges. A key objective is to ensure that the benefits arising from major investment are shared more widely and contribute to the long-term sustainability of communities across Highland.

Financial Impact (Positive)

The programme has the potential to support improved economic outcomes through increased employment opportunities, skills development, business growth and inward investment. Over time, these measures may contribute to higher household incomes and improved economic resilience. Investment in housing, transport and other enabling infrastructure may also help address some of the wider pressures affecting households and communities. While specific impacts cannot be quantified at this stage, the overall direction of the programme is expected to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Mitigation

No significant adverse socio-economic impacts have been identified at this stage. As the programme develops, individual projects and investment proposals should continue to consider their impact on disadvantaged individuals, households and communities, with particular emphasis on ensuring that opportunities and benefits are distributed fairly and do not unintentionally widen existing inequalities.

Human rights

Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal?Article 14: Protection from discrimination

What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people?Positive

Human rights impact details: The Highland Growth Programme has the potential to support a number of human rights through its focus on housing, infrastructure, skills, employment and community sustainability. While the programme is strategic in nature and does not directly create or regulate individual rights, it is intended to help create the conditions for improved social and economic outcomes across Highland.

Article 8: Respect for Private and Family Life, Home and Correspondence (Positive)

Housing, community sustainment and access to infrastructure are central themes within the programme. Measures that support housing delivery, stronger communities and improved access to services and facilities have the potential to contribute positively to individual and family wellbeing.

Article 14: Protection from Discrimination (Positive)

A key aim of the programme is to support inclusive growth and ensure that the benefits of investment are shared across Highland. Its focus on employment, skills, connectivity and community benefit has the potential to improve access to opportunities and support more equitable outcomes for individuals and communities.

Protocol 1, Article 1: Peaceful Enjoyment of Property (Positive)

The programme seeks to support investment in housing, infrastructure and community development that strengthens the long-term sustainability and resilience of places across Highland. No elements of the programme currently propose any interference with private property rights.

Protocol 1, Article 2: Right to Education (Positive)

Improving skills, workforce capacity and access to training and employment opportunities is a key component of the programme. This has the potential to support learning, skills development and progression into employment, helping local people benefit from existing and emerging economic

opportunities.

Mitigation

No significant adverse human rights impacts have been identified at this stage. As the programme develops and specific projects or investment proposals are brought forward, further assessment should be undertaken where appropriate. This will help ensure that decisions are proportionate, evidence-led and informed by engagement with communities and stakeholders, and that the benefits of investment are accessible across Highland.

Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights? Positive impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Children's rights and wellbeing

What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people? The Highland Growth Programme has the potential to deliver positive outcomes for children and young people, primarily through its focus on housing, skills, education, employability, community sustainability and investment in infrastructure.

A central aim of the programme is to create the conditions for people to live, work and remain in Highland communities. Measures to increase housing supply, improve connectivity, strengthen local infrastructure and support community sustainability have the potential to improve outcomes for children, young people and families across the region.

The programme also places a strong emphasis on skills development, training, apprenticeships and workforce participation. This may help improve access to learning and employment opportunities for young people and support their ability to benefit from emerging economic opportunities within Highland.

The programme aligns with a number of children's rights and wellbeing outcomes, particularly those relating to development, education, wellbeing and an adequate standard of living. While any impacts are likely to be indirect at this stage, the overall direction of the programme is expected to support positive outcomes for children and young people.

No significant adverse impacts on children's rights or wellbeing have been identified. As the programme progresses and specific projects or investment proposals are developed, further assessment should be undertaken where required to ensure that children's rights and wellbeing remain a key consideration in decision-making and delivery.

Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal? You are working in the best interests of the child (Article 3), Children have a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development (Article 27), Children have a right to education (Article 28)

Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected: The Highland Growth

Programme has the potential to support a number of children's rights through its focus on housing, infrastructure, skills, education, employment and community sustainability. While the programme is strategic in nature and does not directly target children and young people, it seeks to create the conditions for stronger, more sustainable communities and improved opportunities across Highland.

Article 3 - Best Interests of the Child

A central aim of the programme is to support sustainable growth that delivers long-term benefits for communities. Measures to improve housing supply, infrastructure, access to services and economic opportunity have the potential to create more stable and supportive environments for children, young people and families.

Article 23 - Children with Disabilities

Investment in housing, transport, digital connectivity and community infrastructure may help improve accessibility and inclusion. As projects are developed, consideration should be given to ensuring that children and young people with disabilities are able to access and benefit from opportunities on an equal basis with others.

Article 27 - Adequate Standard of Living

The programme seeks to address a range of factors that influence quality of life, including housing availability, employment opportunities and community sustainability. By supporting economic growth and investment in essential infrastructure, the programme has the potential to contribute to improved outcomes for children and families across Highland.

Article 28 - Right to Education

Supporting skills development, training and workforce capacity is a key component of the programme. These measures have the potential to strengthen educational and employment pathways for young people and improve access to future opportunities.

Article 29 - Development of Personality, Talents and Abilities

The programme aims to create the conditions for people to develop, succeed and contribute within their communities. Investment in skills, education, employability and community development may help young people realise their potential and take advantage of opportunities arising from future economic growth.

Mitigation

No significant adverse impacts on children's rights have been identified at this stage. The programme establishes a strategic framework and does not approve specific projects, funding allocations or service changes. As individual projects and investment proposals are developed, further assessment should be undertaken where appropriate to ensure that children's rights and wellbeing are fully considered and that any potential adverse impacts are identified and addressed.

Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing? Positive impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Data protection

Will your proposal involve processing personal data? No

Data protection screening assessment

What change will there be to the way personal data is processed? No personal data will be processed

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Island and mainland rural communities

Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities? Yes

Could people in island and mainland rural communities be affected differently? Yes

How could the impact differ? The Highland Growth Programme is intended to support communities across Highland, but the nature and extent of the benefits are likely to vary depending on local circumstances, geography and existing infrastructure.

Housing Availability and Affordability

Housing pressures are often most acute in rural and island communities, where limited supply can affect population retention, workforce availability and the sustainability of local services. Investment that increases housing delivery may therefore have a particularly significant impact in these areas.

Transport and Connectivity

Many island and remote rural communities experience longer journey times, higher transport costs and fewer travel options. Improvements to transport infrastructure, public transport and digital connectivity could therefore deliver proportionately greater benefits by improving access to employment, education, healthcare and other essential services.

Employment, Skills and Workforce Development

The programme's focus on skills, training and workforce development has the potential to benefit communities across Highland. The impact may be particularly important in areas experiencing population decline, labour shortages or limited employment opportunities, where retaining and attracting working-age people remains a significant challenge.

Access to Services

Distance, geography and population distribution can make it more difficult to maintain access to services in rural and island areas. Investment in infrastructure, connectivity and community sustainability may help strengthen service provision and support the long-term viability of these communities.

Economic Growth and Community Sustainability

Communities hosting major infrastructure, renewable energy or industrial developments may experience the benefits and pressures associated with growth more directly than other areas. A key objective of the programme is to ensure that investment delivers lasting benefits not only to host communities but also to Highland more broadly.

Cost of Living and Economic Resilience

Many rural and island communities face higher costs associated with transport, energy, housing and service provision. By supporting employment, housing, infrastructure and wider economic opportunities, the programme has the potential to strengthen economic resilience and improve long-term sustainability.

Mitigation

A core principle of the programme is that investment should recognise the differing circumstances of urban, rural, remote and island communities. As priorities and projects are developed, consideration should be given to ensuring that investment is distributed fairly, reflects local needs and opportunities, and does not unintentionally disadvantage particular communities or geographic areas.

Have any negative impacts been identified? No

Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities? Minor differences

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Climate change

Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂e)? Yes

Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? Yes

Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate? Yes

Provide information regarding your selection above: The Highland Growth Programme has the potential to influence climate change outcomes, both through the type of investment it supports and the way future development is planned and delivered across Highland. Given its focus on housing, infrastructure, energy, transport, economic development and land use, there are likely to be implications for greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity and climate resilience.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The programme includes a number of areas that could support the transition to a lower-carbon economy, including renewable energy, energy infrastructure, active travel, digital connectivity and wider energy transition activity. Over time, these investments have the potential to make a positive contribution to reducing emissions and supporting national net zero objectives.

At the same time, some future projects may involve construction activity, infrastructure development and increased economic activity, all of which could generate emissions. The extent of any impact will depend on the nature and scale of individual projects and cannot be determined at this stage.

Environment, Wildlife and Biodiversity

The programme has the potential to support positive environmental outcomes through investment in climate resilience, natural capital, nature restoration and biodiversity enhancement.

Opportunities also exist to strengthen environmental stewardship and deliver wider landscape and ecosystem benefits.

However, future development and infrastructure projects may have implications for habitats, species and the wider environment. As no specific projects are being approved at this stage, these impacts cannot yet be assessed in detail. Any future proposals will require to be developed and assessed in accordance with relevant planning, environmental and regulatory requirements.

Climate Resilience and Adaptation

Supporting resilience to climate change is an important element of the programme. The proposed investment framework includes a focus on climate resilience, land and natural capital, recognising the need to ensure that communities, infrastructure and the economy are better prepared for the impacts of a changing climate.

The programme provides an opportunity to support investment in flood risk management, coastal resilience, nature-based solutions, resilient infrastructure and wider adaptation measures. These interventions have the potential to strengthen the long-term resilience of communities, assets and places across Highland.

Mitigation

No significant adverse climate impacts have been identified at this strategic stage. As the programme develops, climate change considerations should form a key part of project appraisal, prioritisation and business case development. Individual projects and investment proposals should assess their impact on emissions, biodiversity and climate resilience, with appropriate mitigation measures identified where necessary. The programme itself provides a strategic framework and does not approve specific projects or development proposals.

Climate change screening assessment

Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known? Yes

Is a Full Impact Assessment required?No

Socio-Economic Investment: Future Growth Plan



Highland Investment Plan

- A new generation of community facilities (PODs) will be created

Housing Challenge Action Plan

- 24,000 houses will be built (state & private sector) in the next 10 years

Local Community Place Plans

- Enabling investment solutions for community development

Community Transport

- Investment in Highland Council's Bus Co. will enable a renewed network

Investment Sources

Social Value Charter (Renewables)

- Strategic partnerships with renewables investors for legacy investments

ICF Green Free Port Investment

- NDR and NIC can fund skills development and infrastructure

Sustainable Tourism Strategy Plan

- Where is the source of investment for this?

Partnership Planning

Community Place Making

**£16-20
billion+
investment
in Highland**

£6.2
billion

£570
million

£X
million

£2.1
billion

£6-7
billion

£X
million

£X
million