

Performance Examples and Case Studies Report 2021/22

Highland Council has a statutory duty under the Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) to deliver Best Value in the provision of its services. The Accounts Commission has a statutory power to define the performance information that Councils must publish to demonstrate their delivery of Best Value. Accordingly, the Accounts Commission issued The Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) Direction 2021 which covers reporting up until the financial year ending 31st March 2026.

The Audit Direction covers a wide range of activity and has a focus on partnership working and how Councils work with their communities. The Council's approach to meeting this is detailed in Table 1. This report aims in part to fulfil all the requirements of SPI1 and the final requirement of SPI2 on engaging with and responding to diverse communities.

Table 1

	Requirement	Approach
SPI1	Performance in improving local public services, provided by the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPIs (CP-LGBF and LPIs) • Corporate Plan Annual Report • Performance Examples and Case Studies Report (strategic and area committee reports, press releases)
SPI1	Performance in improving local public services, provided by the Council in conjunction with partners and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPIs (CP-LGBF and LPIs) • Performance Examples and Case Studies Report (strategic and area committee reports, press releases)
SPI1	Progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Examples and Case Studies Report (strategic and area committee reports, press releases, CPP, NHS Integration, Children's Services...)
SPI2	The Council's assessment of how it is performing against its duty of Best Value, including self-assessments and service review activity, and how it has responded to this assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BVAR Improvement Plan • Service Plans – covering report • External Audit Annual Report on BV
SPI2	Audit assessments of its performance against its Best Value duty, and how it has responded to these assessments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BVAR Improvement Plan • Annual External Audit Report and Response/ Action Plan • Internal Audit reports relevant to BV
SPI2	Assessments from other scrutiny and inspection bodies, and how it has responded to these assessments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Examples and Case Studies Report • Partnership Reports to Strategic and Area Committees

The report that follows provides case studies and examples to better illustrate Highland Council's performance during 2021/22. These are not meant to be exhaustive, rather a selection of case studies demonstrating the breadth and depth of Council activity during 2021/22.

All Council corporate performance reports are published on the Council's website at:

www.highland.gov.uk/performance. These include:

- The annual report on the Statutory Performance Indicators
- Infographics of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicators (a link to the [mylocalCouncil](#) website is also promoted)
- The annual Performance report based on the Corporate Plan
- The annual Performance and Attitudes Survey

Performance in improving local public services provided by the Council

These examples highlight performance in improving local public services provided by the Council during 2021/22:

Council Programme

The Council's Programme, "Our Future Highland 2022-2027" was published in 2022 and documents the Council's key strategic priority outcomes. There are five main themes: A Fair & Caring Highland; Resilient & Sustainable Communities; Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes; A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy; and A Resilient and Sustainable Council.

Corporate Plan

In December 2022, The Council approved its draft [Corporate Plan](#). This provided the framework required to deliver and monitor the Council's Programme and was finalised in March 2023. The Council's Corporate Plan sets out how we will achieve these priorities, with a set of approximately 137 performance indicators and actions.

The Annual Performance report 2021/22 for the period 01 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 went to committee in March 2023. 63% of indicators (63 out of the total 100) were performing on target or within the performance threshold. For 27 indicators targets had not been achieved, and for 2 no target had been set for 2021/22. For a further 6 indicators data was not yet available to report performance.

Dial-a-Bus Service

Wheels in Nairnshire (WiN) and Highland Council's Transport Co-ordination Unit have worked in partnership to create a visionary project to deliver demand responsive transport to Nairnshire communities, with the reintroduction of the Dial-a-Bus service to the area. The Highland Council is understood to be one of the first local authorities in the UK to have a fully electric, wheelchair accessible vehicle MPV (Nissan e-NV200) which will be used by WiN to deliver the service.

Building and Refurbishing Schools

This financial year saw the completion of a number of school build and refurbishment projects and plans for future works, as part of a significant capital investment programme to improve the school estate across Highland.

- A total of 82 construction projects were taken forward to support the delivery of the ELC programme, many of which also included other essential improvements to school buildings. Although progress was disrupted by the pandemic, 59 projects were completed with a further 15 due to be completed by the end of December 2021.
- The former nursery building at Bun-Sgoil Shlèite was replaced with a new two classroom nursery unit to accommodate both English and Gaelic Medium children along with an outdoor learning shelter and additional parking and drop-off areas. The new building is registered for up to 28 children and will support the delivery of the increased entitlement of 1,140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) per year. The project was delivered by the Council's in-house Property teams with James MacQueen Building Contractors Ltd. as the Principal Contractor.
- Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal officially opened Alness Academy and as part of her visit toured the first-class facilities being enjoyed by pupils, staff and the local community. The school, which provides a modern 21st century learning environment that reflects the quality of the teaching staff and aspirations of the young people, has been delivered by the Highland Council working in partnership with Hub North Scotland and Kier Construction.

- New Nursery Building at Kyle Primary School: The project saw the replacement of a dilapidated modular unit with a new building that fully meets the requirements of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) expansion programme. The former schoolhouse, which has been vacant for some time, was demolished as part of the project to allow the new building to be sited in a more suitable location.

Trading Standards Responds to Covid Safe Air Scam

In April 2021 the Performance and Governance Trading Standards team responded to a scam which involved Highland Businesses receiving letters advising them of a change in law in relation to Covid safe air purifying requirements. This communication compelled businesses to purchase specific devices or face a £5000 fine. The letter claimed to be from COVID Task Force, part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and carried its logo. The scam was to con businesses out of money and obtain personal information by asking for company details. Businesses were advised to dispose of the letter, ensure they are only accessing advice from trusted sources and to contact Trading Standards for guidance if in doubt.

New Welfare Guide

In May 2021, a new welfare guide was published on the Council's website to highlight the range of financial support and guidance which is available to people across the Highlands. The guide provides information on Pension Credit, Best Start Grants, Best Start Foods, financial support for individuals who are required to self-isolate following a positive result for COVID, and grants which are available to young carers. Along with all partners, the Council is working to ensure the guide is widely accessible, and also spreading the word through community councils and the third sector.

Enhanced Business Start-up Programme Launched

Aimed at helping new businesses get off to a flying start, start-up entrepreneurs are now able through the Council's Business Gateway service to:

- access impartial and free advisory support
- secure awareness and training support on all aspects of starting and running a business
- £500 financial support to assist in getting off the ground

New Active Travel Link Opened

A new walking, cycling and wheeling link from Raigmore Interchange and the Golden Bridge was officially opened to enable a safe, traffic free option for those wishing to access Raigmore Estate, Inverness Campus and the Eastfield Way Retail Park.

New Homes Completed in 2021/22

- The completion of thirty new flats at Mart Road, Dingwall significantly enhanced the town centre and provided much needed affordable, quality housing. The flats will provide tenants with warm, affordable and energy-efficient homes within easy walking distance of all the town's amenities.
- Sixteen new affordable homes for rent were built on the site of the former Primary School in Maryburgh and a further ten new homes at Kinellan in Strathpeffer.
- Thirty-two new homes were built in Tain, offering energy-efficiency at an affordable rent consisting of a range of one, two, three and four-bedroom properties. This includes six fully-accessible wheelchair properties, along with twelve properties which are suitable for those with varying needs.

Comprehensive Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results

Every three years the Highland Council carries out a comprehensive tenant satisfaction survey. This is a questionnaire focussing on the key indicators from the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This was due to be carried out in 2021 and was completed in May. A telephone interview was conducted on our behalf by an independent market research company, and their full report can be viewed on the Highland Council web site https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/23939/tenant_satisfaction_survey_2021

The results from the Scottish Housing Regulator indicators for Highland Council show considerable improvement compared to the Council's previous tenant satisfaction survey undertaken in 2018:

- Overall satisfaction with the services provided by Highland Council has increased, from **78% to 86%**
- The proportion of tenants who were of the opinion the Council were good at keeping them informed has increased, from **69% to 93%**
- Satisfaction with opportunities to participate has increased from **56% to 94%**,
- Satisfaction with the quality of the home has not changed significantly, rising slightly from **75% to 77%**
- Satisfaction with Highland Council's contribution to the management of the neighbourhood has increased, from **68% to 88%**
- The proportion of tenants who were of the opinion the rent for their property represents good value for money has not changed significantly, rising slightly from **88% to 89%**

Highland Council's 2021 survey results were also compared with the ARC 2019/2020 Local Authority average, showing that Highland Council are performing above the LA average across five indicators, most significantly with regards to satisfaction with opportunities to participate (14% points above average) and are underperforming with regard to just one indicator, the quality of the home, where Highland Council's satisfaction level is 77% compared to a LA average of 81%.

COP26

In October 2021, the Highland Climate Change Conference took place, bringing together delegates and people from across and beyond Highland to discuss the climate and ecological emergency ahead of COP26. The main themes explored energy, land and sea. It gave people an opportunity to learn about the innovative work happening in Highland and a reminder of how precious our planet is and how cooperation to accelerate shared goals has never been more time critical. Thereafter, members and officers from the Climate Change team attended the COP26 event to represent the Highland Council with the purpose of networking and attending various events and zones. COP26 brought together leaders in the innovation field to exhibit and discuss opportunities and challenge. Staff from the Climate Change Team presented at key events taking place during the summit which reflects the reputation the Highland Council has for taking a leading role when it comes to looking to the future and addressing challenges.

Gaelic

The Highland Council is a leader in terms of the Gaelic Learner curriculum. Nationally, 61% of Gaelic Learners in secondary schools are in Highland Schools and this number has grown faster than the national rate in the last three years. Attainment has likewise improved at a fast rate across the board over the same period. There are 20 GME primary schools located in The Highland Council area, accounting for one third of all GME primary school provisions in Scotland. Within this primary GME provision, The Highland Council has 3 standalone GME schools and 2 Gaelic schools with English Medium provision. Additionally, Highland has 20 secondary schools in total which are currently providing Gàidhlig for fluent and/or Gaelic learners.

Eco-Schools Green Flag Award Status

Four schools across the Highlands were awarded with an Eco-Schools Green Flag by Environmental charity Keep Scotland Beautiful. The International award recognises nurseries and schools which have demonstrated a commitment to the Eco-Schools programme and over two years have engaged their whole school community in local environmental action. Through the programme, Keep Scotland Beautiful aims to make environmental awareness and action to tackle climate change an intrinsic part of the life and ethos of schools, for both pupils and staff. The programme provides a framework to engage the wider school community in action and support aligned with the purposes of the Curriculum for Excellence for Learning and Sustainability.

Performance in improving local public services provided by the council in conjunction with partners and communities

These examples highlight performance in improving local public services provided by the Council in conjunction with partners and communities during 2021/22.

Highland's young people participate in Scottish Parliamentary Election

Young people from Highland secondary schools and further education settings were offered the opportunity to be employed by the Council, playing an important role in the successful delivery of the Scottish Parliament 2021 election by working as Postal Vote Assistants, COVID-19 marshals in polling places, counting staff and reception staff at count centres. This encouraged participants to be a part of the democratic process going forward.

HI-BIKE Scheme Launched

HI-BIKE, the new electric bike share scheme was introduced in Inverness. The first phase of the scheme saw 30 electric bikes being made available for hire in the city, with three docking stations in different locations. With partners HI-TRANS the scheme is continuing to expand.

My Future My Success

The objective of the My Future My Success project is to support sustained destinations for children and young people in Highland. The programmes of work aim to improve outcomes and positive destinations for some of the most vulnerable children and young people across the Highlands through:

- Developing a bespoke Highland model for mentoring and coaching
- Developing Modern Apprenticeship (MA) schemes for the most vulnerable school leavers
- Expanding training skills and learning opportunities, delivered in partnership with University of Highlands and Islands/Skills Development Scotland
- A place-based delivery model of youth hub social enterprises and school social enterprise projects
- Work placement programme linked to the public sector

Reported impact of this project is heartening, with previously disengaged pupils returning to study in various capacities, engaging with elements of the project providing support to fit their needs, and finding a path to move forward to future careers – indicating they are now experiencing things they didn't feel were possible and their future seems brighter. Parents have also reported reduced behavioural issues, leading to less stress in the home and better relationships.

Returning young people to Highland

The Placement Service's Change Programme in Children's Services was developed in 2018 to return young people to Highland from expensive Out of Area placements. The aim of the programme is to deliver better educational and emotional wellbeing outcomes for young people, as well as financial savings. The work continued throughout 2021/2022, resulting in the lowest level of Out of Area placements since we started collecting data in FY 15/16. In July 2021 only 19 children were placed outside of Highland. The money saved by the programme has been invested in local services, such as a newly built bespoke residential unit which opened in May 2021

Green/Eco Cities Hydrogen Challenge

Second year pupils in Highland with an interest in a career in green energy were given an amazing opportunity to take part in the 7-Cities Hydrogen Challenge, funded by Scottish Power, ITM Power and Arcola Energy. The Hydrogen Challenge is a hands-on "design, build, race, repeat" team exercise in which participants are tasked with creating the most

energy efficient hydrogen fuel cell vehicle using LEGO components and miniature (yet fully functional) hydrogen technology. Workshops were also specially adapted to include location specific content, informing pupils of the projects taking place around them and inspiring the next generation of renewable energy engineers. The hydrogen challenge was delivered in partnership with local Universities, with students, alumni and lecturers delivering and facilitating workshops, and was intended to allow pupils the chance to discuss Higher Education with those directly involved, finding out about their area of study and where they expect their careers to lead once they leave university.

Joint Transformational Programme with NHS Highland

Following work in 2019/20, in October 2020 the Highland Council and NHS Highland set out a new approach to transform service delivery in terms of the existing integration partnership agreement. The change included the creation of a new Project Board, comprising senior officers from both partners, as well as a Project Team to carry out an agreed Transformation Programme. The Programme objective was to deliver improved outcomes, as well as savings and efficiencies, both in adult care services and integrated children's services.

A savings target of £3m for year 2021/2022 (year 1 of the programme) was to be achieved by focusing on cost efficiencies in the entire Adult Social Care budget. As of February 2022, it was expected that the savings target for year 1 will be exceeded. Approximately 90% of those savings were non-recurrent. Although the Board has now been disbanded the transformation work continues and is reported to the Joint Monitoring Committee. That work is focussing on the delivery of a Shared Lives Programme, Housing Solutions and a Community Led support approach which will be consistent with the Strategic Plan for the partnership expected to be in place by April 2023.

Trading Standards and the Nationwide "Shut Out Scammers" Campaign

In April 2021 the Performance and Governance Trading Standards team, along with Police Scotland's Highlands and Islands Division, participated in the nationwide "Shut Out Scammers" campaign. The purpose of the campaign was to raise awareness of doorstep crime and rogue trading scams. The campaign ran for one month and included a series of prevention advice messages on social media. Trading Standards advised on the two main types of doorstep criminals; those offering overpriced and/or substandard home maintenance improvements or works and those who invite themselves into the home under the pretence of being from organisations such as the council, police, market researchers or utility companies, with the purpose of obtaining personal details. These messages provided advice, guidance, and reassurance along with a means to report concerns in a variety of different ways.

New Integrated Children's Services Plan

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill places duties on public bodies to coordinate the planning, design and delivery of services for children and young people with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes. The first Highland Integrated Children's Services Plan completed its cycle during 2020, but due to the pandemic was extended to April 2021. In May 2021 the next iteration of the Plan was presented to the members, and it was formally signed off by the Highland Community Planning Partnership Board in June 2021. The Integrated Service Plan 2021-23 is ambitious and presents a shared vision between the Council and its partners. The plan provides for collaborative working with the Highland Community Planning Partnership, public agencies, third sector organisations and other key community groups to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. It also sets clear indicators for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of children's services.

Environmental Health

Following the easing of lockdown restrictions in April 2021 and with the majority of businesses re-opening, Highland Council's Environmental Health team with assistance from

Police Scotland undertook joint visits to premises throughout the Highlands. Visits were intended to help raise public confidence in businesses protecting public safety, ensuring they were adhering to Scottish Government Guidelines and also to provide any assistance and advice that businesses required. Environmental Health acknowledged that the reopening of pubs, bars and restaurants was great news for businesses and the Highland economy but issued a reminder that COVID-19 had not gone away and still posed a considerable public health risk, therefore called on all premises to keep in mind their responsibilities, and also that members of the public take personal responsibility to follow any COVID-19 controls put in place by businesses.

Flow Country World Heritage Site BID

After successfully passing the Technical Evaluation stage in early 2020, The Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland became the UK's official candidate site for world heritage site inscription. Seven areas, amounting to a total of 199,510 ha would form the new site. In 2021 the nomination was in the process of being put together by The Flow Country Partnership, which includes Highland Council. In addition to recognising the quality and value of The Flow Country, world heritage site status could bring significant social, cultural and economic benefits to Caithness and Sutherland. If successful, it will be Scotland's first natural world heritage site and the world's first peatland world heritage site. The Flow Country is widely considered the best example blanket bog in the world. Its peatlands are seen as internationally important from a habitat perspective, but also in recognition of the remarkable amount of carbon stored in the peat. A decision is expected in 2024.

The Haven Centre

In May 2021, the Corporate Resources Committee approved £250,000 of capital funding towards a dedicated, multi-purpose facility in Inverness called The Haven Centre, which supports children and young people up to the age of 30 with multiple disabilities and complex needs. The project was developed by The Elsie Normington Foundation with the new facility being located on land owned by the Council in Murray Road, Smithton. The Scottish Government confirmed funding up to £1.7m, alongside other funding secured by the project including £1.1m from The National Lottery. The project has now secured full funding towards the estimated £4.1m capital project cost. The Corporate Resources committee supported the much needed facility and acknowledged that the project would create jobs during the construction phase and in the day-to-day work of the centre when operational.

Growing our Future

In February 2022 Members approved the "Growing our Future – Highland Community Food Growing Strategy", designed to inspire, empower and support communities to grow their own foods. It was felt that lockdown and the associated restrictions resulted in an increased focus on food supply and demand as well as an increase in the desire to "grow your own". This strategy supported the Community empowerment approach, Health and Prosperity Strategy and achieving net zero targets. Key elements of the strategy include identifying land and providing guidance for community groups to help them develop food growing projects with information on the best sources of support to achieve their goals. The Council's vision for the strategy is that in partnership, by 2027 Highland communities will be resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food.

Visitor Management Plan and Seasonal Access Rangers

Many projects were undertaken to improve local tourism, infrastructure and accessibility, including:

- enhanced waste collection service
- new Comfort Schemes

- building improvements to Council run public conveniences
- operational support for the new Storr toilets
- support for a community group running portaloos, car park and other road improvements
- additional motorhome waste facilities
- enhancements to visitor management infrastructure in Aviemore
- a pilot public transport scheme in Skye

The Seasonal Access Rangers successfully worked with other services and partners to provide a co-ordinated approach to visitor management. Positive feedback was received from all parties including local communities and visitors.

During the summer of 2021 the Council's Seasonal Access Ranger team patrolled much of the Highland Council area and helped reduce the impact of thousands of visitors on local environments and communities. The Access Rangers have welcomed and engaged with nearly 20,000 people, informed them about the area and available services and advised them of responsible behaviour. They encountered 8,600 tents and 24,500 motorhomes and identified and removed the remains of 3,500 fires, 4,200 toileting sites and over 2,000 bags of dropped litter.

GO-HI App Fort William

The GO-HI app, a ground-breaking new app designed to make it easier for residents, tourists and business travellers to access the information they need to make greater use of public transport and car sharing and to decide when cycling is an option, launched in June 2021. HITRANS, the regional transport partnership, developed the App in partnership with a leading technology firm to provide instant access to information on buses, trains, taxis, car hire, car clubs, bicycle hire, air travel and ferries, allowing users to plan their journeys, find, book and pay for all modes of transport in one place. Participating transport providers will be able to access data about the demand for their services, helping them to better understand the needs of people in the region and to make more informed decisions about the provision of services.

Rosebank Primary & Dalneigh Primary receive prestigious Rights Respecting School Award by UNICEF

Rosebank Primary & Dalneigh Primary were awarded the Silver Rights Respecting Schools Award. The school received their accreditation following recognition by UNICEF UK.

Achieving Silver: Rights Aware means there is evidence the schools are:

- Explicitly embedding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in its policy, practice and culture.
- Promoting knowledge and understanding of the Convention throughout the school community.
- Putting into action and developing the plans outlined on their Action Plan for Silver
- Beginning to see the positive impact of these actions on children and young people, staff, and on the school's ethos, practice and environment.

Beginning to see children and young people as rights respecting global citizens and advocates for fairness and children's rights, both locally and globally.

Ground-breaking Housing Project Wins National Award

A pilot scheme by The Highland Council to develop housing provision that sits as a "stepping stone" between living entirely independently in the community and living as a resident in the

Telford Centre Care Home in Fort Augustus has picked up a top prize at the 2021 SURF Regeneration awards.

The Telford Centre housing development pilots a new type of house – a flexible, adapted property designed to support residents with increasing need to stay at home and live independently for longer, whilst being close enough to the Care Home to seek support. Residents can then either “Step Up” and become a resident of the Home if their need increases, or “Step Down”, back to a mainstream house should need decrease.

Progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities

These examples highlight progress against the desired outcomes agreed with the Council's partners and communities during 2021/22.

Transformation The Old Man of Storr

'The Old Man of Storr' project is "for the community, in the community, by the community" working closely with communities and with continual local Member involvement, to celebrate Gaelic and to demonstrate engagement and partnership working, with a direct link to the place-based plan, Skye and Raasay Future (SARF). The developments at the Storr are an excellent example of supporting key Council's aims in the Future Highlands – Health and Prosperity Strategic Partnership Plan.

Achievements and progress include:

- Appointment of 2 full time equivalent posts for improved visitor experience and site management
- Installation of welfare facilities for the on-site staff
- Development of digital solutions including a logo, website, and social media, with prominent Gaelic throughout
- Successful funding application of £440k to the IIF approved for the installation of a retail unit (awaiting planning permission approval) and EV chargers on site.

The focus on Community Wealth Building is strong, as the community will benefit from economic development both directly and indirectly. The retail unit plans to showcase local suppliers by selling products made in Skye and to create employment opportunities, both in the shop and with local contractors and suppliers.

Trainee Mental Health Officer Scheme

In Summer 2021 the Highland Council introduced a new Trainee MHO Scheme to re-establish a clear pathway towards MHO practice for interested social workers. This was a proactive response to challenging circumstances and was designed to address the statutory requirement placed on local authorities to recruit an adequate number of qualified MHOs. Social Workers recruited to the Scheme are now fully supported to complete the MHO Postgraduate Certificate with the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. In Year 1, 3 Social Workers were recruited into the Scheme, with plans to recruit more in Year 2. The Social Workers recruited into the Scheme started their training in Autumn 2022.

Teacher recruitment and probationer teachers

The DLITE (Distance Learning Initial Teacher Education) and RLTT (Rural Learn to Teach) PGDE graduates worked hard for eighteen months, with the added pressure of working through a global pandemic, including during lockdown which caused schools across the country to close. This made a challenging programme of study even more demanding. Completion of this programme meant that each of the four areas in Highland now have sixteen new 'home grown' local teachers, alleviating Highland's teacher recruitment challenges.

Council's ICT Transition Programme

Actions were identified to update the Council's ICT Strategy that supported bringing ICT back in-house from Wipro, aiming to 'Build a digital centre of excellence for the Council and partners, within the Council'. This complex programme aims to see ICT services transferred to a new in-house team by 31 March 2024, enabling the Council to use technology to modernise and transform the way Council services are delivered. This ambitious plan supported a move away from over 20 years of contracted-out ICT, bringing greater benefits

in terms of value for money, quality of service and flexibility to meeting changing business demands. The new in-house ICT team should increase from the current 49 FTE to 120-130 FTE, protecting much needed skilled employment in the Highlands. The transfer of Wipro staff into the Council under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) rules was only possible due to very effective joint working between Council ICT, HR and Payroll staff, Trade Union representatives, Wipro HR and the employees themselves.

FY 21/22 saw four significant key milestones achieved:

- 1st October 2021 – Go-live of in-house Field Services team
- 1st October 2021 – Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) of Wipro Field Services team into the Council
- 1st November 2021 – Go-live of in-house Service Desk
- 1st November 2021 – TUPE of Wipro Service Desk team into the Council

Community Learning and Development Plan 2021-24

The development of this plan evidenced that the council was improving at being community led from young to old, ensuring better links with the Community Planning Partnership and being embedded across relevant teams. This plan has been designed to be dynamic and evidence achievement. The impact evidence base is being gathered by sharing a pro-forma across partners – a joined-up approach to gather information for future reporting and committees, and the team are also doing an annual feedback survey. Actions supporting this Plan, and the NIF annual reporting (below), are included in the Directorate's Service Plan, ensuring it continues to be embedded within Education.

Top Property Award for Merkinch Primary School and Family Centre

Merkinch Primary School and Family Centre won the Development of the Year for a Public Building at the Scottish Property Awards. The first phase of the project, comprising a new school building, opened in October 2020. The new building includes 14 classrooms, ancillary teaching areas, a three-room nursery to support the delivery of 1,140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare, nurture rooms, and a games hall.

Work on the second phase was completed in November 2021, which saw the refurbishment of the original school building to provide new kitchen and dining facilities for the school and accommodation for Merkinch Family Centre.

Public toilets, comfort schemes and waste collection

Visitors to the Highlands are benefiting from over £240k investment by The Highland Council on public toilets and comfort schemes (£360k) and increased waste collection at key visitor sites (£180k). Communities and Place Committee Chair highlighted that "The Highland Council is doing all that it can to welcome visitors to our region. Our Visitor Management Plan strives to support visitors to have a good experience, benefiting local economies, while leaving no trace on our magnificent environment". Officers are continuing to seek more sources of external funding to improve and extend the public toilet and waste collections services. The Council is also carrying out property surveys of previously closed public toilets should future funding secured enable any to be reopened. The enhanced waste collection service has seen the employment of 8 additional season staff who are mobile and responsive to reported waste-related issues. Also, over 60 organised community litter picks have been supported by the Council's waste team since April this year. Groups can request litter-picking sticks, bags and arrange for the waste to be collected by the Council after organised events through their local Area Waste Management Officer.

National Improvement Framework (NIF) annual reporting

The NIF for Scottish education is a strategy to help children achieve their full potential as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors, and a revised NIF report supporting future planning is published each year in December.

The report for Highland mentioned developing a measure for wellbeing in partnership with pupils, this work has been in development within the team and now feeds into the Stretch Aims agreed with Education Scotland with targets of June 2023.

Community payback scheme

One of the Council's Performance Indicators regarding the Criminal Justice Service is the percentage of Payback Order Unpaid Work beneficiaries who feel the service was of benefit to them. This indicator has consistently achieved its target of 100%. An example of how communities benefited from the scheme in 2021/2022 were projects carried out in Inverness. The clients were involved in tidying up of the local nature reserve - Merkinch Nature Reserve UPW. As well as the usual litter pick and cutting back of foliage, this included painting the ticket office and construction of a seating area at the back of the office. They also supported a local foodbank, Inverness Foodstuffs, with a weekly collection of food and clothing. Other projects benefited local community centres, where vegetable gardens were constructed and fenced.

Highland Council and Strategic Timber Transport Scheme (STTS) Partnership Road Improvements

Over £750K of road improvement works on the B9090 from Clephanton in Inverness area through Cawdor and on B9091 in Nairnshire have been completed. Widening, edge strengthening and drainage improvements have been carried out to 1km of the B9090 to provide for two-way operation. A further 3km of structural strengthening and new surfacing have also been laid along with road safety measures including: road signage, electronic speed indicator signs, road markings, and the reduction of the speed limit to 30mph in Cawdor and 50mph on the B9090 east of Cawdor.

Inverness West Link Completion

The West Link project has delivered greatly improved infrastructure to support the future development, growth and prosperity of Inverness and the Highlands. Improvements include:

- The completion of the link from the Southern Distributor Road at Dores Road to the A82 including crossing the River Ness on the new Holm Mills Bridge
- New sports facilities at Canal Parks including synthetic pitch and clubhouse
- A relocated golf course.

This tandem swing bridge arrangement allows for the free flow of vehicle traffic on the A82 to continue, while boats pass through one or other of the open swing bridges.

Redesign of The Highland Council

The Programme has a focus on 9 key priorities to help delivery of approved budget savings, wider efficiencies, cost mitigation and cost avoidance. In total, £3.686m is being invested in these key projects over 2 years, with a forecast to generate £18.659m cashable benefits for the entirety of the Programme. The Transformation programme recruitment and resourcing process was nearly complete by Aug 21.

Additional work was undertaken by the Programme Management Office (PMO), included the development of a Transformation Hub providing project management, assurance and real-time information for the whole programme, its projects and workstreams accessible in web-based format across mobile and fixed devices. In addition, the PMO Team has investigated the full range of functions available within the Council's existing ICT provision to positively support the delivery of the Transformation Projects, driving innovative practice and the use of ICT to support efficient working methods. As detailed in their Service Plan, the key aim of the new PMO was to support Performance Improvement and Business Change initiatives across services – providing advice, guidance and resource (programme/project management, business change and business analysis).

Highland Council's BSL Education 1+2 pack being used by other local authorities

The Council's Highland Deaf Education Service (HDES) developed a pack to enable schools to deliver BSL within the curriculum without the need for a signing tutor to be present. This unique digital pack is flexible, affordable and meets the needs of pupils and staff by including lesson plans, signed video clips, resources, activities, games, and more. This pack has been used successfully in Highland, by sharing knowledge gained from having had BSL as a mainstream subject in Dingwall Academy for the last 30 years. Profits from the digital pack orders have been reinvested into the enhancement and further development of BSL delivery in schools.

Digital Development in Schools

The Highland Council is in the fortunate position that its previous decisions and investment in digital learning, including deployment of Chromebooks over the last 7 years, investment in network infrastructure and the training and resources have placed Highland Council in a unique position in comparison to many other Local Authorities in Scotland. The Highland Council were supported in 2020 by Connecting Scotland, a Scottish Government grant funded programme, which the council invested in additional Chromebooks, connectivity, and support systems. Planning work took place to ensure the refresh of 22,000 devices during the next year, as the licences were due to expire. The refresh was required no later than March 2023. A permanent support team (the Digital Education and Learning Team) liaises with ICT Services, manages Google for Education Workspace & provides support to schools across Highland. The increase in the size of the Chromebook estate in the future with the allocation of 1:1 devices for all primary schools aged pupils, pledged by the Scottish Government will need to be factored into any future ICT and financial strategies. The Education & Learning Digital Strategy sits under the umbrella of the Highland Council Digital Strategy and the Education & Learning Service Plan. This ensures consistency across services, with planned service improvement. The Digital Learning & Education Team ensures strategic delivery of a whole systems approach to digital learning, development & service transformation in our schools, special schools and ELC settings.

Nature Walks – More than 30 members of staff employed by Highland Council completed training to deliver 'Buggy Walks' and 'Happy Little Feet' toddler walks, promoting socialisation, learning and positive physical and mental health. These Community Early Years Practitioners, who work directly with children and families alongside Health Visitors, have been supported by Paths for All, Think Nature Health Walks, P4W Walks and NHS Highland. The walks, which were free of charge, took place throughout the Highlands every week. Staff have been trained to positively engage infants and make the walks interactive through pointing out and identifying different types of trees, leaves, flowers and insects.

Nursery mealtimes - project to improve experience

Staff, supported by local Excellence and Equity leads, began looking at the lunch experience through the eyes of their children. They then contacted a fellow Equity and Excellence lead in Falkirk, who was also working to develop the 'marvellous meals project' within several Falkirk nurseries. The Marvellous Meals initiative made lunchtime a more a positive experience for Highland children and the staff, with quality interactions taking place at each table and much more food being eaten.

Partnership focus led by EDL staff supporting mental health and wellbeing

The Caithness Cares concept enabled the Caithness Community to collaborate with statutory bodies to improve services and identify gaps in provision to aid good mental health and wellbeing. The early stage of the project was based on a needs analysis whilst running short-term pilot work in parallel to help those services already in place. The long-term plan was to facilitate community empowerment and enable the community "...to support public

service providers to work together and with local communities via community planning to shape and deliver better services”.

This work was then tailored for use in Lochalsh, Skye, and Badenoch, following a desire for a consistent approach and to ensure best practice sharing with other areas of the region. The focus in Skye and Lochalsh was on Young Carers, providing support and advocacy as required through schools, with a Seasons for Growth and open door policy for members and ex-members. The aim was to help with coping skills and better relationships with others. During Covid lockdowns, support was provided online and the team delivered activity materials to homes as they were unable to take those engaged with the project out for activities. These projects evidence good collaboration of all agencies, supporting a Whole Systems Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Assessments from other scrutiny and inspection bodies, and how it has responded to these assessments.

These examples highlight how Highland Council (in conjunction with its partners as appropriate) has engaged with and responded to assessments from other scrutiny and inspection bodies during 2021/22.

Developing PSIF in Highland – Responding to the 2020 BVAR Improvement Plan

The Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR), published January 2020, recommended improvements to The Council's approach to self-assessment. In response, in March 2020 we set out our BVAR Improvement Plan, including plans to review "...the Council's approach to self-assessment and implement a new corporate approach to support the Council's continuous improvement and efficiencies agendas." An update was provided to Council on 09 September 2021 marking the action as some slippage, due to the Council's prioritising the response to COVID-10. The Improvement Service briefed the Council's Executive (ELT) and Senior Leadership (SLT) teams during a workshop session on performance and self-assessment on 21st June 2021. Following this, a pilot assessment was undertaken between January and March 2022 with the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team in Communities and Place. This assessment received strong positive feedback from all participants involved and enabled the training of the staff in the corporate performance team in the assessment approach.

The Promise

An Independent Care Review, commissioned by the Scottish Government, took place between February 2017 and February 2020. It was driven by those with lived experience of the care system, and it was their experiences that shaped the conclusions (The Promise). In July 2021, a small-scale practice review was commissioned to determine how well services were able to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people, improve their outcomes and demonstrate their success. 70 members of front-line staff were involved in the review. Furthermore, a project manager, responsible for delivering on the Promise, was appointed in January 2022, which enabled the development of Engagement Sessions, recruitment of Trauma Champions and the initiation of Your Voice Matters project, which aim was to ensure that the VOICE of young people was captured and included in service re-design.

External Assessment from the National Registrars of Scotland

Registrars in the Highlands have been praised by achieving a positive external assessment from the National Registrars of Scotland in terms of records accuracy. Approximately 140,000 life events are registered in Scotland each year and Highland Council has the seventh highest number of events registered of 32 Councils in Scotland, with around 6,000 registrations normally recorded. Staff were also worried that they would not be able to offer the same service to bereaved families as NRS required registration to be carried out remotely and not face to face, but the real feedback has been very positive. People are now able to register a death from the comfort of their own home perhaps supported by loved ones, or from anywhere in the country or abroad using telephony and email where appropriate. Despite the changes to working practices staff adapted extremely well and continued to provide a service to their communities. As well as registering births, death and marriages, the team also undertake marriage and civil partnership ceremonies (usually around 700 a year), citizenship ceremonies (around 100 a year from people migrating from all over the world), facilitate first-time Passport Interviews and offer family history searches through use of the Scotland's People terminals in Inverness. The report to the Communities and Place Committee in May 2021 provided assurance about the quality of the Council's service, how well it adjusted to the changes needed through Covid and the plans for developing the service further.

The impact of financial inclusion initiative

Families have started to benefit from a financial inclusion initiative run by Highland Council's Health Visiting Service and Welfare Team. After a successful pilot in 2019/2020, the initiative has been rolled out to the whole of Highland. As part of the initiative all pregnant women and parents of young children are now routinely asked by their health visitor about money worries and are offered a referral to an advice service that is accessible and sensitive to their needs. The initiative gained two national improvement awards through the Children's Young People Improvement collaborative for the year 2021.

Education Attainment and the Alternative Certification Model

Following a challenging year for young people and their teachers, senior pupils across the Highlands achieved excellent qualifications, as secondary schools in Highland saw further improvement in attainment in S4, S5 and S6 SQA results from previous years. It was noted that results reflected the resilience and hard work of Highland's young people and their teachers as they delivered the Alternative Certification Model. The results reported showed improvements when compared to the 2019 and 2018 sessions when there was a full examination diet. In 2021:

- 38.37% of S4 candidates achieved A-C passes in 5 or more Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5 courses (National 5), up from 36.47% in 2019 and 37.03% in 2018.
- 70.13% of S4 candidates achieved 5 or more Awards at SCQF 4 or better, up from 67.94% in 2019 and 68.09% in 2018.
- 40.60% of S5 candidates achieved A-D passes at SCQF Level 6 (Higher level), compared to 40.11% in 2019 and 39.80% in 2018. The percentage of S5 candidates achieving 5 SCQF 6 Awards at Grade A is 6.36%, ahead of the 2019 figure of 3.46% and the 2018 figure of 2.69%.

There were also strong results in S6, with 36.87% of the cohort having cumulatively achieved 5 or more Awards at SCQF 6, compared to 34.12% in 2019 and 33.82% in 2018. Level 7 (Advanced Higher) attainment also showed improvement with 21.22% achieving at least one Award at this level, compared to 17.21% in 2019 and 19.95% in 2020.