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| HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND  REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS  13 DECEMBER 2021 | AGENDA ITEM REPORT No HLH/ /21 |

## **CHair/chIEF EXECUTIVE’S UPDATES - Report by Chief Executive**

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| **Summary** The purpose of this report is to provide Directors with information and the opportunity to discuss issues affecting HLH and its work at an early stage.  It is recommended Directors comment on and note the updates. | |
| **1.** | **Business Plan Contribution** |
| 1.1 | This report supports the highlighted Business Outcomes from the High Life Highland (HLH) Business Plan:   1. Sustain a high standard of health and safety, and environmental performance 2. **Implement the Service Delivery Contract with THC** 3. **Improving customer engagement and satisfaction** 4. **Improving staff engagement and satisfaction** 5. **Enhance the positive charity image** 6. Be a trusted and effective partner 7. Achieve sustainable growth across the organisation 8. **Develop health and wellbeing across Highland communities** 9. **Develop and promote the High Life brand** |
| **2.** | **Chief Executive Update** |
| 2.1 | The Chief Executive has conducted a number of webinars open to all staff. The agendas have included a strategic update to staff and an opportunity for employees to pose questions to the CE, questions could either be written confidentially in advance or live during the event. The first two webinars were attended by c170 staff with questions ranging from terms and conditions of service to COVID regulations. Feedback has been positive, and regular events are planned, with the next event scheduled for 15 December. |
| 2.2 | The SG Programme for Government contained a pledge to provide Music Tuition for free, removal of charging appears as a corporate risk elsewhere on the agenda. High Life Highland is the only ALO that delivers Music Tuition on behalf of a Local Authority in Scotland. Prior to removal of charges earlier this FY, an annual income of c£1.2m was generated. The SG has given assurances that lost revenue from the removal of charges will fully compensated in future years, however, no detail is yet available. To date, THC have been lobbying SG via COSLA on behalf of both parties (HLH and THC). Given the pressing nature of the issue, the intention is for the Chief Executive to directly engage with local politicians with Ministerial portfolios, to seek support by raising the potential impacts should sufficient funding not be made available. |
| **3.** | **Partnerships** |
| 3.1  3.2 | The Highland Council recently conducted a review of its capital programme. HLH submitted a number of Outline Business Cases that focused on joint funding initiatives with **sport**scotland. Although the new 15-year capital programme does not include any major sports or leisure infrastructure projects, at the time of writing this report, the following text is expected to be included:  ‘***sport****scotland has indicated that it will be moving away from its traditional grant application-based facility funding model, to instead working strategically with the Highland Council to support it in achieving its objectives, particularly where projects support inclusion and equality. A number of positive discussions have taken place and most recently the Chief Executive of* ***sport****scotland has presented to the Council’s November 2021 Education Committee outlining the strategic partnering approach.*  *“This capital strategy therefore includes a clear commitment to continue to work in partnership with* ***sport****scotland and take forward a strategic approach to working with* ***sport****scotland and High Life Highland to maximise external capital funding including* ***sport****scotland investment. The combination of the Council’s own capital investment in school and sports & leisure projects, alongside strategic investment from* ***sport****scotland, provides the opportunity to enhance the sport and leisure provision within the Highlands, and improve support in relation to accessibility, wellbeing, inclusion and equality.”*  The Chief Executive is in discussions with THC to improve partnership working with respect to the development of a net zero strategy. THC is in the process of establishing an officer-led Net Zero Strategy Group in order to provide an appropriate governance structure and resource to prepare a THC corporate strategy. HLH currently accounts for 17% of THC utility costs, it is therefore in the interest of both parties to collaborate. The aspiration is for HLH to be represented at the appropriate level within the Council’s net-zero programme in order to leverage economies of scale and factor in the HLH property portfolio early in the planning process. |
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| **4.** | **Inverness Castle Project** |
| 4.1 | The contractor for the enabling works, Compass, completed this work as planned in June 2021. No major site abnormals were detected and the works finished on time and within budget. All statutory planning consents have now been approved, and action continues to ensure that the conditions associated with these applications are met. The main construction contract is currently going through the tender evaluation process. Four tenders were received on the return date of Friday 24 September. It is anticipated that the evaluation process will be complete and a contractor appointed before the end of 2021. |
| 4.2 | The exhibition design team, Mather & Co, were appointed in July and are in the process of preparing the concept designs for the project. The first concepts were presented to the Inverness Castle Delivery Group on 3 December. The project has been successful in securing funding from Bord na Gaidhlig to appoint Gaelic Cultural Advisors to work with Mather & Co and the wider Project Team to integrate Gaelic language and culture into the design of the visitor experience. |
| 4.3 | The initial awards (up to £1,000) to Highland-based artists for small-scale commissions through the Spirit 360 programme were announced in September, with 66 creative professionals from across the region benefiting from the scheme. The Spirit:360 programme was established to support the creation of new work inspired by stories reflecting the theme of the ‘Spirit of the Highlands’. When complete, the commissions will be showcased on a new online platform as part of the ‘Spirit of the Highlands’ project, alongside the original story which has inspired the work. Some of the commissions may go on to be developed as part of the exhibitions within the castle and in its grounds. |
| 4.4 | In partnership with VisitScotland, the Spirit:Journeys project has made significant progress towards developing digital assets which will re-position the region as a responsible tourism destination supporting the greater geographical and seasonal spread of visitors to the Highlands and Islands. As part of this, a new Senior Software Developer for the project was appointed in August 2021. Using these digital assets, the project will work to showcase the natural and cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands through the stories of the area. This forms part of the project’s legacy work to promote the economic and social benefits of tourism in local areas establishing tourism as a force for good within local communities. |
| 4.5 | The project team has also been in discussions with UHI, The DataLab, VisitScotland Insight Team and other key stakeholders, to consult on the development of a bespoke digital asset to track visitor behaviour in the Highlands and Islands, and to explore how a dataset can be developed to benefit the sector and to support post-COVID recovery of tourism to the region. Spirit: Journeys will also create the ‘Tapestry of the Highlands and Islands’ in which stitchers from communities across the region will portray stories from their areas in a virtual and physical interpretation of the ‘Spirit of the Highlands’. |
| 4.6 | New public tours of Castlehill have been on offer, giving an opportunity for people living in and visiting the area to look behind the hoardings to find out more about what has happened so far and what is yet to come. Stakeholder engagement continues as far as possible within the COVID restrictions. Plans continue to be developed to restart face to face engagement and to initiate a schools’ engagement programme at an appropriate time (potentially early 2022). A programme of media relations continues, with regular releases being issued to keep stakeholders up to date with project developments. |
| 4.7 | The potential to theme the outdoor planting regime in a way that establishes Scotland’s first Gaelic Garden is being explored, using around 40 native species and their use in medicine, food, folklore, religion and other areas. Roddy Maclean is providing specialist advice on this and the landscape architects are fully engaged. |
| **5.** | **Levelling Up Fund** |
| 5.1 | The Highland Council application to the Levelling Up Fund was successful, with an award of just under £20m. The application was to deliver the Inverness Zero Carbon Cultural Regeneration Project which combines three independent, complementary schemes that will drive the environmental, cultural and economic regeneration of Inverness. The schemes located along the river in the heart of the city, in areas of deprivation, will provide transformational opportunities for both residents and visitors at a local, regional and national level. |
| 5.2  5.2.1  5.2.2  5.2.3 | Three related culture-led initiatives with integrated renewable energy sources will deliver economic benefits to local businesses and help meet the Governments’ zero-carbon targets ahead of schedule.  **Project 1: Inverness Castle Hill –** in the city centre, creating a must-visit area for both residents and visitors. Key interventions:   * **Culture**: Redevelopment of Inverness Castle as a major visitor attraction. The introduction of an innovative Waste-Water Heat Recovery Energy Centre, also a visitor facility in its own right. * **Economy**: Bringing overnight and day visitors into the heart of the city, with over 500,000 visitors annually. Increased business activity and jobs, and private sector investment into the city. * **Net Zero:** Inverness Energy Centre 1: Waste-Water Heat Recovery Energy Centre for the Castle and scalable to supply other adjacent properties.   **Project 2: Northern Meeting Park –** historic location and largest green space in the heart of Inverness, home to the city’s Highland Games since 1864. The facilities require significant intervention to ensure continuity of provision to local communities:   * **Culture:** Redevelopment of the historic home of the Highland Games to allow celebration of the Games regionally and nationally. Development of new pavilion and event infrastructure (complementing Eden Court directly adjacent to the site) up to 10,000 capacity. * **Economy:** Maximising resident/community footfall to new cultural opportunities in the city centre; resulting in over 70,000 visitors annually. * **Net Zero:** Inverness Energy Centre 2: Ground Source Heat Ambient Loop providing heat energy for Northern Park Grandstand and Pavilion and scalable to supply other adjacent properties.   **Project 3: Bught Park Stadium Complex –** centre of a suite of sports and leisure facilities and home to the Highland’s indigenous sport – shinty. Currently the principal venue for commercially driven outdoor concerts and major events in the city. The facilities lack the infrastructure required to drive footfall and revenue and are in danger of becoming unavailable for use.   * **Culture:** Redevelop historic home of shinty with refurbished grandstand (incl. improved changing, spectator facilities), an interactive museum of shinty and event infrastructure to facilitate more large-scale outdoor events (up to 20,000 capacity). * **Economy**: Increasing range and number of annual major events in the city, resulting in over 180,000 visitors annually. * **Net Zero:** Inverness Energy Centre 3: Ground Source Ambient Loop providing heat energy to the Grandstand, Museum of Shinty, welfare facilities and scalable to supply other adjacent properties. |
| 5.3 | The bid sought to deliver three strategically aligned and complementary projects that significantly impact the regeneration and cultural offer in the city. |
| **6.** | **Implications** |
| 6.1 | Resource Implications – there are no additional resource implications arising from this report. |
| 6.2 | Legal Implications - there are no new legal implications arising from this report. |
| 6.3 | Equality Implications – there are no new equality implications arising from this report. |
| 6.4 | Risk Implications – there are no new risk implications arising from this report. |

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| **Recommendations** It is recommended Directors comment on and note the updates. |

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 2 December 2021