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| HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND  REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS  22 JUNE 2022 | AGENDA ITEM REPORT No HLH/ /22 |

## **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. Seek to continuously improve standards of health and safety. 2. Commit to the Scottish Government’s zero carbon targets and maintain the highest standards in environmental compliance. 3. **Use research and market analysis to develop and improve services to meet customer needs.** 4. **Increase employee satisfaction, engagement and development to improve staff recruitment and retention**. 5. **Improve the financial sustainability of the company.** 6. **Value and strengthen the relationship with THC.** 7. Develop and deliver the HLH Corporate Programme and seek to attract capital investment. 8. **Use research and market analysis to develop and deliver proactive marketing and promotion of HLH and its services.** 9. Initiate and implement an ICT digital transformation strategy across the charity. 10. **Develop and strengthen relationships with customers, key stakeholders and partners.** 11. **Deliver targeted programmes which support and enhance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the population and which contribute to the prevention agenda.** |
| **2.**  **2.1** | **Chief Executive Update**  **Area Visits** |
| 2.1.1 | The Chief Executive has conducted visits to over 30 sites in May and June, with sites in the North, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey, Lochaber and Skye visited to date. The visits have been focused on staff wellbeing and to discuss the support offered by HLH during and after the Pandemic. Staff have been universally positive about the support that has been provided, especially with regards to communications, which was consistently raised as a positive. As we recovered from the Pandemic, our customer-facing staff felt safe. Moreover, at every site the opportunity to thank staff for their efforts and brave approach to the job was taken. As reported at the last board, staff webinars have been both well-attended and positively received, the next webinar is scheduled for 30 June, with quarterly events scheduled thereafter. |
| **2.2** | **Budget Planning with THC** |
| 2.2.1 | THC has asked HLH to engage in its strategic budget planning process at officer level with the focus being on building/property related services with THC indicating a desire to take a joint approach to property rationalisation/efficient service delivery. The engagement with THC has been positive with there being a recognition for the need to set the discussion within the context of a positive vision for community services, joining services together where possible, with there being a range of previous examples to draw on from small projects such as combining a library and Council service point through to large joint school and community facilities. |
| 2.2.2 | The context of the success of HLH - with it having increased customer visits from 2.3m to 8.9m over the ten years of its existence, while at the same time reducing reliance on Council funding from 79% to 50% - is understood. There is also a wider understanding that HLH is delivering Council services and that there is a contractually agreed savings formula between the two organisations with longer-term planning requiring a joint approach. |
| 2.2.3 | The work is at an early stage, and it is likely that the next steps will involve interactive Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and work on a shared vision between HLH and THC. It has already been agreed that the budgets for HLH properties held by the Council will be considered together with HLH budgets meaning that both sides of the equation will be taken account of in any future planning. |
| 2.2.4 | This comes at a good time for HLH with it having worked successfully to develop and protect the services entrusted to it by the Council by increasing income and reducing costs, particularly with it looking likely that it will become more difficult to do that in future because of the cost-of-living crisis, high inflation and predicted increases in staff wages. |
| **2.3** | **Partnerships** |
| 2.3.1  2.3.2  **2.4** | HLH has been represented on the Inverness City Steering Group by the CE. The group is led by Drew Hendry and is a collaboration of partners including: Highland Council, HIE, UHI and private sector partners to work collaboratively to create a City vision under the banner of ‘Inverness 2035’.  A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between HLH and the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU) on 9 June. The MoU formalises the commitment by both organisations to develop and promote grassroots and club rugby across Highland communities and support pathways to elite level for athletes. HLH Sports Officers have led the initiative, supported by sport**s**cotland as the primary partner in the Active Schools Programme. Discussions are at a well-developed stage with the Camanachd Association, with a similar agreement likely in the near future.  **Visitor Attraction Charging Review** |
| 2.4.1  2.4.2 | IPW Consultants have been commissioned to conduct a review of charging arrangements at the Highland Folk Museum and Inverness Botanic Gardens.  A draft report has been received and the consultants are currently working with the HLH team to review and test the key assumptions and potential scenarios as customers return in the wake of the pandemic.  Entry will continue to be by donation until the end of the season to allow the impact of the recently introduced “tap to donate” service to be evaluated. A full report with recommendations informed by the season’s financial performance will come to the December Board for consideration. |
| **2.5** | **Archive Service – National Accreditation** |
| 2.5.1  2.5.2  2.5.3  2.5.4 | High Life Highland’s Archive Service has been nationally recognised for its work by being awarded accredited status by the National Archives.  Accreditation is the national quality standard which recognises good performance in all areas of archive service delivery with the accreditation panel commending the Service saying its archive centres are “of high quality, providing robust standards of protection for the collections” and provided “enviable facilities for public services”.  The Service adapted to the challenges of the pandemic by developing innovative ways of engaging with customers, increasing engagement in and knowledge of its diverse collections along the way.  The Archive Service Accreditation assessors also commended the “strong relationship that existed between the archive service and its parent organisation and they particularly admired the innovative solutions implemented by the service to meet local recruitment challenges in rural areas. |
| **3.** | **Inverness Castle Project** |
| 3.1  3.2  3.3 | The exhibition design team, Mather & Co, are continuing the process of preparing the concept designs for the visitor experience.  Since their initial concept framework presentation, they have been developing themes and content based on the feedback received, including concepts for each room and how the interactive device and app will work together.  The focus of their design development has been on the castle grounds, South Tower and West Tower.  Work on the designs for the North Tower will begin when the Whisky Experience Partner for the North Tower has been appointed.  The tender for the Whisky Experience Partner has closed and is being evaluated.  Spirit:360, the commissioning scheme for Highland-based or originated artists for small-scale commissions supported by Creative Scotland, continues with most of the final outputs complete. The commissioning programme has supported the development of new work by 66 artists across the Highlands.  The completed 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.  Work is underway to develop the terms of reference for the new Inverness Castle Artwork Programme, with an application for funding support from Creative Scotland now in train.  In partnership with VisitScotland, the Spirit of the Highlands and Islands project continues to make 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. The project will work in an inclusive and collaborative way to showcase the natural and cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands through the stories of the area. Spirit of the Highlands and Islands 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 and Islands.  Over 350 stitchers from across the region have signed up to be involved in this major community arts project |
| **4.** | **Levelling Up Fund** |
| 4.1  4.2 | The Project Teams have been progressing work to prepare the designs for the developments at both Northern Meeting Park and the Bught Park for the purposes of submitting their planning applications.  The designs have been developed in collaboration with the stakeholders of each venue and the proposed plans will be presented for public consultation on 21 June.  Thereafter the planning applications will be submitted and the appropriate procurement mechanisms agreed.  At the same time work to establish the feasibility of building the waste-water energy centre in Castle Street continues.  The Under Parliamentary Secretary of State for Scotland, Iain Stewart MP, will visit Inverness on Friday 10 June to hear an update on progress and to meet schoolchildren from two local primary schools for a photo shoot. |
| **5.** | **Implications** |
| 5.1 | Resource Implications – there are no additional resource implications arising from this report. |
| 5.2 | Legal Implications - there are no new legal implications arising from this report. |
| 5.3 | Equality Implications – there are no new equality implications arising from this report. |
| 5.4 | 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: 13 June 2022

Author: Steve Walsh, Chief Executive