

a STRATEGY for Sutherland



OVERARCHING AIM FOR SUTHERLAND

Positively influencing population change in Sutherland to achieve, over time, a vibrant, viable and revitalised population that enjoys a high quality of life

Sutherland's main theme and seven strategic objectives for the next 5 years

PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

WELCOMING TALENT

strengthening our communities

DEVELOPING OUR STRATEGIC
SETTLEMENTS

GROWING OUR ECONOMY

MAKING PARTNERSHIP
MORE EFFECTIVE

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

THE SUTHERLAND PARTNERSHIP: 2005 - 2009

Contents

Section	Title	Page
1	Acknowledgements	2
2	Foreword	3
	Strategy for Sutherland...an overview a diagram between pages 3 and 4	
3	Introduction	4
4	A strategy for Sutherland	5
	Priorities for Sutherland...in Context a diagram between pages 12 and 13	
5	Seven strategic objectives including 3 pages of tables 15a, 15b and 15c between pages 15 and 16	15
6	Measuring progress and reporting results	16
	Annex	22
	Best and Worst Case Scenarios	

Acknowledgements

This strategy framework document was commissioned from David Pirnie of **pirnie limited** by the Sutherland Partnership in March 2004.

The content is *directly* influenced by a three month consultation process involving representatives of communities throughout Sutherland as well as professional representatives of each of the main public bodies and voluntary organisations operating in Sutherland, and some elected members of the Highland Council. The process involved one-to-one meetings, workshops and focus groups with clusters of professionals working in the fields of community, health, the environment, economic and business development, and tourism.

We gratefully acknowledge the sustained support and encouragement of many people who generously devoted their time and ideas to the process that led to the production of this framework document.

The Sutherland Partnership also acknowledges the continuing support of its Partners, who are listed below, and those who have contributed to the funding of this strategy.

- EU Community Economic Development Fund
- Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- The Highland Council
- Communities Scotland
- NHS Highland
- Forestry Commission Scotland
- Scottish Crofting Foundation
- Voluntary Groups East Sutherland
- North Highland College
- Association of Sutherland Community Councils

Foreword

Sutherland Soaring to Success is the brand adopted by the Sutherland Partnership and it, like our last strategy – *A Strategy for the New Millennium* – has served Sutherland well over the past three years. But nothing stands still, even in Sutherland, with its striking natural features and powerful sense of heritage and unchanging landscape. However wild and magnificent, appreciated equally by visitors and our own people, Sutherland is about more than natural environment. Our priority, and the focus of this strategic framework, is first and foremost the people of Sutherland - our main asset whose needs and interests we urgently need to nurture, not only for today, but for the benefit of future generations.

Our new strategic framework is built around the theme, of **strengthening our communities**. This is not a 'soft' and over-socially orientated option or simply a theme 'lifted' from Highlands and Islands Enterprise's strategic objectives contained in its *A Smart, Successful Scotland – the Highlands and Islands dimension*. It is based on our ever-deepening understanding of what makes the difference: between more and less sustainable communities; the role of individuals, families and businesses within communities; and the nature of the relationship between people, communities and the organisations that provide their services. There is a close relationship between this strategy and the new pan-Highland Community Plan which the Highland Wellbeing Alliance has developed – and our thinking has been shared as that plan and our strategy have been prepared, in parallel.

Deeply worrying projections of the consequences of demographic change presented at a population summit, hosted by the Highland Council on 12 May, 2004, has focused our thinking – at all-Highland and Sutherland levels. These projections reinforce our belief that our people should be at the heart of our strategy. Sutherland needs to retain, attract and grow able and incentivised citizens, living safe and fulfilled lives, within strong and confident communities. This lies at the heart of the purpose of this strategy. We have selected its objectives with care as we accept that we cannot do everything nor will we satisfy every community of interest in Sutherland. We have, however, focused on where we think partnership action could be most effective and in the best interests of Sutherland over the next 5 years – the timescale we have set for this strategy.

To this end, the Sutherland Partnership – a partnership of equals - should be seen as the interface between public services and voluntary organisations, and those for whom their services are planned and delivered: the community of Sutherland. The Partnership has worked well over the past three years but we need to work harder at 'partnering' to bring all of the organisational and human resources available to us to work together, more effectively, in the interests of Sutherland.

Councillor Rita Finlayson
Brora and Helmsdale Ward
Chair of the Sutherland Partnership

July 2004

STRATEGY *for Sutherland...* AN OVERVIEW



Introduction

Publication of this document represents **a commitment by the Sutherland Partnership – and each of its Partners, individually** - to pursue agreed objectives, in order to achieve specific outcomes, which are considered necessary for the future well being of Sutherland and its community.

The document has been prepared with two main purposes in mind:

- First, to share with members of the community within Sutherland, a considered view of what the Sutherland Partnership believes – after consultation – to be the key issues that need to be addressed in order to maintain a high quality of life for Sutherland’s citizens, and to ensure a progressive and viable future over the next 5-10 years.
- Second, to remind each member of the Sutherland Partnership of what they, individually, have signed up to, and will pursue, both through their own organisation’s activities, and, where appropriate, jointly with other Partners.

There are three main sections, following this introduction.

- **A strategy for Sutherland.** Why a new strategy is now required; the priority issues that will most influence Sutherland’s future success and growth and why focusing on them will make a difference; where the new strategy ‘fits’ with the Community Plan for Highland and national priorities; why the Partnership will sharpen its focus and how it will do it. (*page 5*)
- **Seven strategic objectives.** The main objectives of the strategy that will guide the Sutherland Partnership and the actions of its Partners over the next 5 years; the key drivers that will influence change; the planned outcomes (results) of effective action; the main partners who will be involved in implementation. (*page 15*)
- **Measuring progress and reporting results.** How the Partnership intends to monitor, measure and assess the achievement of its objectives; how it plans to maintain an effective reporting and consultation process with the community. (*page 16*)

In addition:

Annex

- **Scenarios.** Best and worst case scenarios for Sutherland over the next 10 years are described by four ‘Financial Times columnists’ – hypothetical perhaps, but thought provoking and challenging. (*page 22*)

A strategy for Sutherland

Challenge and opportunity: why is a new strategy needed now?

In December 1999 the Sutherland Partnership reviewed and updated its first strategic framework document *A Platform for Growth*, which had been published in 1997. Much has happened since then, politically, economically, socially and environmentally: in Sutherland, across Highland and Scotland – as well as across the wider European and international scene. Sutherland may be one of the more remote and thinly populated areas of Highland, and Europe, but it is not disconnected from the opportunities, influences and impact of ‘the big issues’ that apply elsewhere – and undoubtedly the big issue, across Europe, is **population decline and an ageing demographic profile**.

A Strategy for the New Millennium, the current strategy, was published in 2000. It aimed to provide the basis for an action plan that ‘will strive to improve the quality of life for all residents of Sutherland.....(it) aims to marry economic and social growth with a recognition of the outstanding quality of the landscape of Sutherland and its rich natural heritage. Above all, it aims to be socially inclusive and to promote and encourage participation from the communities it serves.’ It would be difficult to disagree with its sentiment or sense of purpose or its 7 strategic objectives – each of which has the merit of being founded in evidence of need and expressed in straightforward terms. Indeed, there is so little to argue about in any of them that a case could be made for simply retaining them and ‘carrying on the good work’ - especially as it is agreed that, despite progress, there is ‘unfinished’ business in each field.

There are however 3 main reasons for *not* accepting the status quo. These are not the only reasons for a new strategy, but they are influential.

1. Responding to change

The need to recognize changes in the environment in which the Partnership operates. Significant changes in Sutherland include: increasing centralisation of services and a more strategic approach to prioritisation by major public service providers in Highland; growing recognition of the need to re-evaluate the role of voluntary organisations in service delivery; stark projections of unfavourable demographic change over the coming years, with Sutherland likely to be among the most severely affected. This suggests that the Partnership’s new strategy should focus on a small number of key objectives, which are linked, and where effective action will produce change. In other words, setting priorities and not trying to do ‘something for everyone.’

2. Better partnering

The need for stronger and more active forms of partnership between Partners in the Sutherland Partnership and a better understood relationship with the communities of Sutherland. Everyone agrees that useful progress was made over the past 3 years and that effective joint working has taken place at project level. There is however scope to improve partnership working at a strategic level and, in particular, on budget planning.

More effort will now be applied to guiding and supporting the processes of partnership working and the core staff resource of the Partnership will provide capacity to support Scottish Executive projects such as Community Transport, New Futures, Working for Families, Geoparks, Adult Literacy and social inclusion.

The requirement for effective partnership working is no longer optional and, since the Local Government Scotland Act of April 2003, working together is now a statutory obligation on all public sector partners who are members of the Highland Well being Alliance. The Sutherland Partnership will continue to support this endeavour.

3. Measuring achievement – reporting results

The need for a clear basis for measuring the effectiveness of the Partnership and reporting what it has actually achieved to the community of Sutherland. Each of the 7 strategic objectives of the present strategy – *A Strategy for the New Millennium* - is accompanied by indicators against which progress can be measured. These are mainly quantitative output measures and coincide closely, if not exactly, with those of the Partnership's main public sector partners – notably, the Highland Council and Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE). This begs an important question: is the overarching measure of the Partnership's achievement to be (mainly) an aggregate of the quantifiable outputs of its Partners? Clearly the answer is no – it must be more than that to justify the purpose and added value the partnership represents.

The new strategy addresses this directly by proposing three distinct areas of measurement – which are elaborated later in this document:

- **against the 4 principal goals of community planning**
- **against the planned outcomes of 7 strategic objectives** which the Partners feel confident they can support collectively and through their individual policies, strategic objectives, activities and budgets.
- **against measures of community** – that is to say, defining what distinguishes a 'well-functioning' community and assessing the extent of the Partnership's influence on increasing the overall number of well-functioning communities in Sutherland, over the lifetime of the strategy.

These issues are covered in section 6 of this document (Measuring progress and reporting results) which proposes a framework managed by the Sutherland Partnership, working closely with communities of interest.

Population: the overarching issue for Sutherland

Unsurprisingly, the issue of population change and projections of demographics for Highland as a whole, and Sutherland specifically, has been the subject of much recent attention. The essential question to ask of what has been widely agreed during the consultation process as *the* overarching issue for Sutherland is this: **what can the Sutherland Partnership actually do about it?** It is a legitimate question that invites debate about the type of strategy that could influence population change in Sutherland; how interventionist should a Partnership of public bodies, agencies and representatives of the voluntary sectors be; and what targets should be set for the results of intervention?

The topic of population provoked intensive discussion throughout the process of developing this strategy; the following statement captures the essence of what most people think is a worthwhile aspiration.

Positively influencing population change in Sutherland to achieve, over time, a vibrant, viable and re-vitalised population that enjoys a high quality of life.

A Highland and Scottish issue

The view of Sutherland on the importance of this issue mirrors both all-Highland concerns and a national Scottish priority. This results from the Scottish Executive's projection that:

- the total population of Scotland will fall from just over 5 million in 2002 to 4.8 million in 2027; the number of people of working age will fall by 8 percent and the number of people of pensionable age will rise by 25 percent over the same period.
- 'If this decline is not stemmed then our economy will suffer, there will be severe strain on our public services as an ever ageing population struggles to cope with the challenges of the global economy, and our cultural life will be diminished. If Scotland is to achieve a balanced economy, with a stable tax base to support strong public services, then we must boost the working age population, particularly the 25 - 45 age group.' *"I believe in-migration into Scotland can play an important role in helping our economic future."* (First Minister).

Population: facts, projections and implications

The most recent estimates of population change in Highland and projections for the period 2002 – 2008 suggest that net in-migration has slowed and the number of deaths now exceed the number of births. There is continuing evidence of low fertility with the prospect, as time goes on, of a smaller number of children than parents which, in turn will result in fewer parents for the next generation. Improvements in life expectancy will result in a progressively ageing population. From the point of view of the economy and maintenance of current levels of public service, the prognosis is disturbing, including: **a marked decline in the number of those in the 15-29 age group** as they move away, generally not to return, to obtain higher education and early stage employment elsewhere.

One of the highest projected levels of change in overall demographics is predicted in the **significant loss of those in the 30-44 age group**. This is the prime age of family formation and, in most cases, the period during which the most rapid growth in earned income and spending occurs - as a result of career development; promotion; moves to a third, fourth or fifth job. In other words, Highland – and to an even greater degree Sutherland - seems likely, if these projections prove to be correct, to lose valuable human assets that it needs to retain and attract. This does not mean, however that those over 45 years are regarded as less valuable or less productive - far from it; for example, those in this age group are viewed as the mainstay of the voluntary sector in Sutherland.

Reducing the outflow & reversing the trend

The Sutherland Partnership's strategy aims to tackle this trend by **focusing the attention and resources of its Partners on a small number of 7 strategic objectives** of which six are directly concerned with **population**: both the existing population of Sutherland and prospective in-migrants. These objectives have been selected for their potential to reduce the projected outflow of Sutherland's human capital, and hopefully stabilise it – and, over time, reverse the projected trend. The seventh objective is the **promotion of environmental benefits** – with a focus on achieving the goals of sustainable development. The selection of objectives based on population and demographics issues has been influenced by the following factors.

Returns

Expectations that **'returners'** will have a significant and beneficial impact on demographics may be insufficient – at least if Sutherland conforms to the profile based on the in-migrant study carried out by Highland and Islands Enterprise in Wester Ross, Skye and Raasay. This does not mean that their value should be discounted but rather that **expectations of the impact this group might have should be moderated**, and the volume and value of resources expended on attracting them allocated accordingly.

Young people

Expectations of the likely **retention of young people in the 15-29 age group** must also be moderated in the light of current demographic projections. Commonsense recognizes some truth in the observation that *"The young will always go where the fun and the money is. It is foolish to try and stop them."* This is nonetheless a group that justifies highly focused strategic thinking and a concerted effort by key Partners to provide levels of opportunity and facilities in education, employment, social and leisure activities that makes it not only unnecessary to leave, but provides a positive incentive to stay. Access to well paid jobs with genuine opportunities for career development and progression will be influential. The Highland Council, through its education, culture and leisure services, has a major role to play in this field, in partnership with the UHI Millennium Institute, the small but important network of local learning centres, Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise and a range of voluntary organisations that focus on the needs and ambitions of young people.

Retention of the young will be one of Sutherland's most critical success factors – although, because of habit and human nature, it will be one of the hardest to achieve.

The self employed

The **incidence of self employment** is significant to rural communities. It is likely to become even more so as an increasing number of experienced professionals and trade specialists opt out of corporate and urban environments and make positive lifestyle choices - to live and work in the kind of quality rural environment that Sutherland offers. The main development implication of this is the need to ensure that sufficient professional and commercial services, property (business and domestic) and communications (including transport infrastructure) are available to support new start and early stage enterprises as well as mature businesses and services. Here again, a concerted and co-ordinated effort by the Highland Council working in partnership with Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE) will be required.

Net contributing in-migrants

Attracting **newcomers who are capable of making a net contribution in economic terms** to Sutherland represents a challenge to the Partnership which it cannot, and must not avoid. There are three main target groups:

- first, individuals, whose experience and skills can add *immediate* value to the economy through their engagement as employees of established businesses that require these assets to grow;
- second, individuals who make a *considered life-style choice* – and have the assets to support it (attitude; capacity; capital; skills; experience) to locate a new or established self-employed business in Sutherland – the self employed group, described above;
- third, ‘*newcomer*’ businesses, *re-locating businesses and inward investors* who have satisfied themselves, *before moving*, that there are positive and researched advantages in choosing Sutherland as a business location.

Naturally, the primary responsibility for promotion and support in this area rests with CASE, working in partnership with the Highland Council.

Within this category there is also scope for the Sutherland Partnership to exploit the Scottish Executive’s **Fresh Talent Initiative** which aims to encourage ‘*people to consider coming to live and work in Scotland, as well as supporting efforts to retain indigenous people who wish to begin or further, their careers here.*’ Other than indigenous people – ie those already living in Sutherland - there are two main targets:

- those from other parts of the United Kingdom who are economically active
- those from continental Europe – principally citizens and family units from the new member-states of the recently expanded European Union.

The fundamental needs of in-migrants from other parts of the UK and elsewhere are in most respects similar to those of the indigenous/resident population: employment opportunities and housing. For those coming from a different cultural background, special provision to support cultural assimilation will be required and this will provide a specific challenge to the Sutherland Partnership as a whole, as well as individual Partners with responsibilities in the field of social infrastructure.

Families

At a strategic level, measures to attract, support and retain families will be important for the long term future of Sutherland. Families *contribute* socially and economically and, importantly for the maintenance of services in rural areas, *consume* the widest possible range of services.

Strategic settlements

Economically active people and in-migrants tend to cluster around main settlements and transport hubs. This provides a compelling case for the strategic development of Sutherland's main settlements, perhaps using Dornoch and Durness as benchmarks of success from which lessons about the factors that influence these flourishing and self-confident communities can be learned, and applied elsewhere in Sutherland. Some communities have not yet fully engaged in the community planning process; steps will now be taken to ensure that they are both encouraged and enabled to do so. Every community has a range of assets upon which it can build. Our efforts over the period of the new strategic plan will endeavour to help communities to identify what these assets are and how they can build upon them.

Strong and confident communities are fundamental to Sutherland's future viability and these qualities result from more than a buoyant economy, a diverse range of well paid jobs with career prospects and a choice of housing. Feeling good about where you live and 'looking good' are also functionally important – specifically, the built environment in which people live, work, shop and engage in social and leisure activities. The appearance as well as the functionality of the built environment is important to the local population and equally to in-migrants, business re-locators and inward investors.

Sensitive planning and genuine community engagement in this process, at a very local level, has an important role to play if the inappropriate 'urbanisation' of settlements is to be avoided – with the loss of local and natural habitats. Some feel that service providers in Highland, and in Sutherland, tend to put engineering solutions before anything else – for example, the utility suppliers and telecoms operators – and that more effective design solutions should be sought. These are matters of detail but the overriding issue is the need to recognize the contribution that an appropriate built environment solution can make to the growth of strong, confident and successful communities – provided the community has been directly involved in contributing to decisions that affect it. A network of strong, successful and confident strategic settlements throughout Sutherland is another key critical success factor for the future of Sutherland, the wellbeing of its community and its prosperity.

Promoting environmental benefits

Sutherland's physical environment, for many, sets it apart. The overall quality of life of those who choose to live, work and invest in the area is enhanced by the richness, diversity and quality of its natural environment, heritage and culture. But this is not simply a matter of passive appreciation. It is active acknowledgement that **a sustainable community – which lies at the heart of this strategy for Sutherland – requires a healthy environment as well as a prosperous economy and social wellbeing.**

Protecting and enhancing **bio-diversity** remains a key target for the Sutherland Partnership and for a range of public sector and voluntary members of its Biodiversity Group. Promoting the **experience and understanding of landscape** provides a platform for the innovative proposals of the North West Highland Geopark Steering Group – another theme-based group contributing to the agenda of the Sutherland Partnership. An understanding of the highly competitive nature of **tourism** and the need to provide ecologically sustainable, high quality, diverse and innovative tourism experiences to ever-more demanding consumers, focuses the minds and endeavours of the Partnership's Tourism Forum. Collectively, much is already being done to protect, promote and increase engagement with the environment – in its widest sense – and to enjoy **environmental benefits**. Scottish Natural Heritage is a key player in this field, working with land managers, a variety of groups and partnerships to pursue its strategic objectives, and to help, guide and support others to achieve *their* goals.

Crofting tenure is widely regarded as playing a significant role in minimising population loss in remote areas of the Highlands and Islands, including Sutherland. Consultations leading to the preparation of this strategy indicate sympathy and support for crofting on a variety of grounds: social, economic and environmental. These include: crofting, where it gives access to land and housing, contributes to the sustainable development of rural communities; crofting promotes non-intensive methods of farming; crofting provides a platform for mixed economic activities - including 'cottage' industries; crofting provides a link between Sutherland's heritage and culture and a contemporary activity that is economically and socially important, *and* of value to the environment.

Strengthening the links between people and their environment is an important goal. Positive community-led schemes to widen enjoyment of environmental benefits are in place and new schemes sponsored by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission and other partners are under development.

A clear and evidence-based link has been established between a good tourism experience of Sutherland and the decision by some people to return to settle, and, in some instances, to make a business investment. The main focus of *Smart, Successful Scotland* in the Highlands and Islands, and locally, is on developing high value, high skill jobs, with a strong research base and involvement in product development. This ambition is expressed in a (proposed) national 'green' jobs strategy, through expansion into new markets such as **renewable energy, recycling and resource efficiency**. Sutherland's ambitions are closely aligned with the Scottish Executive's goals for 'green' industries in rural areas and the policy priority the Executive has given to support for rural economic development.

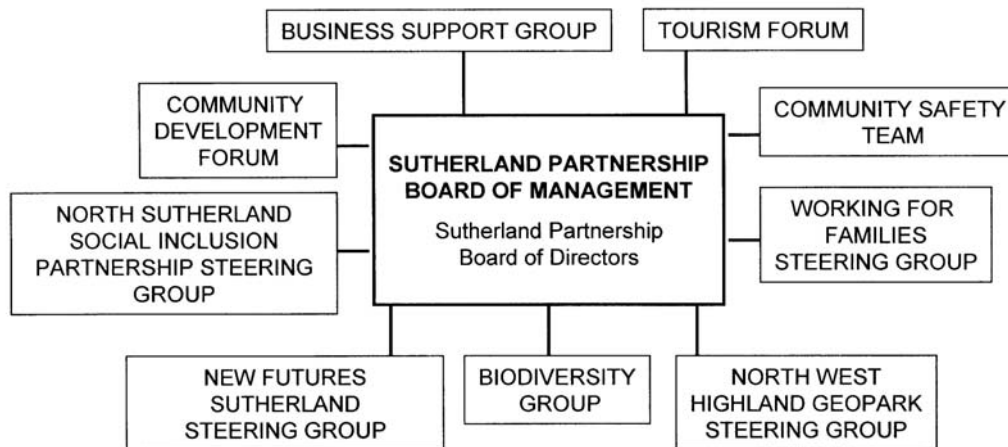
It would be difficult to claim that, compared with some other areas, Sutherland suffers other than minimally, and in very specific locations, from the adverse **ecological impacts** of waste and pollution. By most standards, the record of protection and enhancement of the natural environment, its wildlife and biodiversity is good.

For all of these reasons, and more, **promoting environment benefits** – viewing 'environment' in the widest sense - provides a further and challenging strategic objective for our strategy.

But what about...housing, health and transport...?

In the Foreword, we said that there is a close relationship between this strategy and the new pan-Highland Community Plan, which the **Highland Wellbeing Alliance** has developed, and to which each of the 9 partner-members of that alliance has signed up – 7 of these are main public sector bodies and the other two represent the private sector and the voluntary sector. All but one of the public bodies has area-based representation in Sutherland – or Caithness – and each is responsible for a range of mainstream services appropriate to its field. For example, the Highland Council is the key partner on housing and transport, NHS Highland on health services, Scottish Natural Heritage on a wide range of issues relating to the natural environment, from peat lands to biodiversity and renewable energy.

The Sutherland Partnership provides these bodies with a Sutherland focus for their strategic objectives and local activities. Sometimes this occurs through joint planning and collaboration on services. Sometimes it occurs through participation in theme-based groups whose ideas, initiatives and proposals feed-in to the thinking of the Sutherland Partnership's Board of Management – as illustrated in the following diagram.

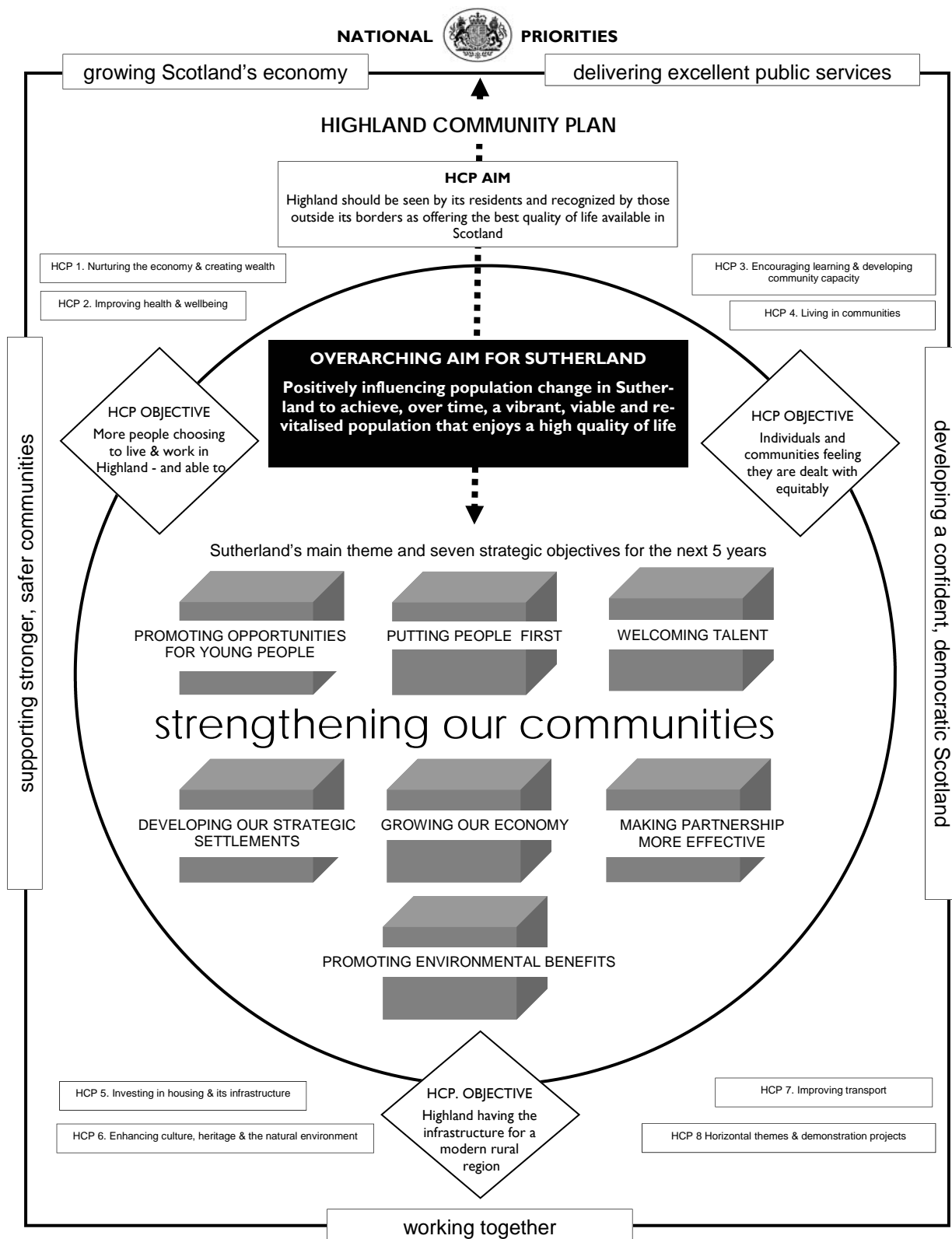


The Highland Wellbeing Alliance – the community planning partnership for Highland - is an informal grouping of public sector agencies designed **to improve joint working and strategic planning**. Since April 2003, the Local Government Act requires the Alliance to (1) make sure that people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions on public services which affect them; and (2) secure a commitment from organisations to work together, not apart, in providing better public services.

To create the new Community Plan for Highland, the Highland Wellbeing Alliance consulted widely during the autumn of 2003 and, as a result of this process, identified an **overall aim, 3 strategic objectives and 8 themes**. These are shown in the diagram on the following page. The fields of housing, health, the natural environment, culture and heritage, the economy, community capacity building, health, transport and infrastructure are all incorporated as themes for partnership action across Highland. They will be incorporated in the **mainstream activities** of each of the public sector Partners. **For this reason, we have not felt it necessary to repeat these themes in our strategy.**

PRIORITIES *for Sutherland...* IN CONTEXT

This diagram shows the **overarching aim, main theme and 7 strategic objectives for Sutherland**. They are located within the overall aim, 3 strategic objectives and 8 themes of the new **Highland Community Plan (HCP)**. In turn, these are located within the overall framework of 5 **national priorities** of the Scottish Executive.



The Sutherland Partnership and its role

The Sutherland Partnership is more than a microcosm or ‘local forum’ of the Highland Wellbeing Alliance. Since its formation, its primary role has been to facilitate the community planning process in Sutherland by:

- identifying and prioritising Sutherland’s needs
- maintaining an open line to the community on priorities and reporting-back
- focusing Partners’ attention on measures necessary to address priority needs
- influencing Partners’ policies and budgets to provide resources to support change
- coordinating Partners’ responses to improve service delivery & joint working
- identifying capacity gaps and finding new ways of filling them at community and Sutherland level

The Partnership is its Partners and all signed-up members share responsibility *equally* for the Partnership’s decisions and actions – and for its achievements and failures. There is only *one* tier of membership, and, during the lifetime of this strategy:

- **the role and contribution of the voluntary sector will be viewed as equal** to that of the statutory bodies that have, hitherto, been viewed as more influential members of the Partnership.
- **vigorous efforts will be made to engage the private sector** in the activities of the Partnership – hitherto, the private sector has been noticeable by its absence from involvement in debates on community planning priorities, which it has seen as secondary to its preoccupation with business survival and growth.

It is also important to see where the strategy for Sutherland ‘fits’ both within the framework of the Scottish Executive’s national goals and, regionally, within the framework of the Highland Community Plan. The diagram on the preceding page illustrates this. It is also important to understand that our strategy for Sutherland has been developed on the assumption that:

- **mainstream activities** (housing; health; education; environment; culture; heritage; etc) *will* be pursued by the Partners, supported by appropriate resources, and that Sutherland will benefit from them.
- the **7 strategic objectives for Sutherland** contained within this document *will* influence the way in which these mainstream activities and resources are delivered by public sector partners, within Sutherland.

Flexible response – and ‘light on our feet’

Strategies are published in print (or on websites) and, in this form, can seem to have a quality of ‘permanence’ that may, in practice, be far from the reality. This strategy sets out our aspirations for Sutherland – and the context – but we expect changes to occur, over time. Some of these will result from changes in the political and economic scene over the coming years and may influence what we can achieve.

While being very clear *now* about our priorities and direction, the Partnership will also organise and manage itself in such a way that it can respond to important issues and events *as they arise* – including, if need be, amending our strategic objectives or even introducing new ones.

More emphasis on influence, advocacy and coordination

The Sutherland Partnership is administered by a small executive office, supervised by a manager and five project-based staff. This structure has very efficiently supported the Partnership while initiating and managing a number of new Partnership-badged projects - and successfully identifying and leveraging funds to support them. It is however important that our determination to promote Sutherland and pursue 'branded' projects, does not distract our attention – or that of our Partners and the community – from the *greater* purpose of community planning: that is **promoting joint working and planning by the main public sector, private and voluntary sector bodies to improve the delivery of customer-facing services to the community.**

For the purposes of the new strategy, therefore, **the core management resource of the Partnership will increase its involvement in the functions of influence, advocacy and coordination** and reduce involvement in non-strategic projects. By this means we aim to further improve the scope and depth of joint working by our Partners and will give greater prominence to *their* achievements, on behalf of Sutherland.

The Sutherland Partnership is a vehicle of change and we aim to make it even more effective in this role over the lifetime of this strategy.

Seven strategic objectives

Introduction

The Partnership's strategy is organised around what members of the community, communities of interest, and public bodies have agreed are important issues for Sutherland. Our strategy concentrates on **7 strategic objectives that, if successfully pursued, will, over time have a positive influence on population change in Sutherland.**

The 7 strategic objectives cluster around **strengthening our communities**, which we have adopted as our central theme. We use the term 'communities' both in the **geographic sense** of settlements and related clusters of dwellings and '**communities of interest**'. By 'communities of interest' we mean groups in Sutherland that can be identified according to their interests and purposes, as well as simpler differentiations by age, gender and social circumstance.

The time frame of our strategy is the next five years: 2005 – 2009. Not too short, to see evidence of progress and results. Not too long to lose sight of what we are trying to achieve – while also, as time goes by, accommodating the inevitable environmental changes, political and economic, as well as the genuinely unpredicted events that will occur between now and 2009.

There is one further important point to make: **this is a strategic framework, not an action plan.** It identifies needs and prioritises a range of strategic objectives which, if used by the Partners of the Sutherland Partnership to direct and shape their action plans, should achieve beneficial outcomes.

On the next 3 pages we list and describe:

- 7 strategic objectives
- key drivers of change – factors that will influence and enable change to occur
- planned outcomes (positive benefits) that the strategy hopes to achieve
- main partners who will be responsible for actions, programmes projects

strengthening our communities



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	KEY DRIVERS	PLANNED OUTCOMES	MAIN PARTNERS
Promoting opportunities for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ involvement of young people - and their representatives in key planning fora and decision-taking ▪ education & training provision - type; level; access to facilities that are 'fit for purpose' ▪ diversity of employment opportunities available and wage/salary levels ▪ coordination and development of labour market initiatives ▪ opportunities for career progression within Sutherland ▪ attraction and retention of graduates ▪ cultural and leisure provision - and involvement of young people in planning, programming and management ▪ comprehensive health and wellbeing education, guidance and support and support 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make progress towards reversing the decline in the percentage of the population in the 15-29 age group as a direct result of improved opportunities for the experience of education, employment, career progression and higher earnings within Sutherland 2. A highly skilled and well-paid workforce of young people in Sutherland becoming home-owners and forming families 3. Younger people assuming leadership roles in business, community-based organisations and the management of local services 4. Low levels of drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy and deaths/serious injury arising from road traffic accidents among those below 20 years of age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Highland Council ▪ UHI Millennium Institute ▪ Careers Scotland ▪ Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise ▪ Northern Constabulary ▪ Highland & Islands Fire Service ▪ NHS Highland ▪ Scottish Natural Heritage ▪ The private sector ▪ The voluntary sector
Putting people first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ innovative approaches to housing development & ownership ▪ strategic settlement development ▪ strength of social infrastructure - covering the full age spectrum, from child care to support for senior citizens ▪ promotion of Sutherland as a 'family friendly' destination ▪ range, quality and accessibility of public services ▪ effective implementation of the Joint Health Improvement Plan ▪ community involvement in local environmental planning - built and natural environment ▪ standard and level of educational provision, and access to it ▪ transport infrastructure ▪ joined-up working by public sector agencies and the voluntary sector 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A happy, fulfilled, healthy, growing and well-housed community enjoying a good quality of life 2. A strong sense of community ownership where people feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area and the services they require 3. A reversal of the decline of those in the 30-44 age group - the prime period of family formation and the period of most rapid career development and income growth 4. A positive change in the ratio of births to deaths with a steadily increasing percentage of the population under 45 years of age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Highland Council ▪ Communities Scotland ▪ UHI Millennium Institute ▪ NHS Highland ▪ Scottish Natural Heritage ▪ Northern Constabulary ▪ Highland & Islands Fire Service ▪ The voluntary sector
Welcoming talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pro-active strategy for in-migration promotion ▪ housing - availability; location; affordability ▪ implementation of Government's Fresh Talent scheme ▪ public : private sector partnership on identification and promotion of labour market needs, opportunities and initiatives ▪ social infrastructure to welcome, support and coordinate integration - social and cultural ▪ graduate opportunities ▪ education and training provision - multi-level including re-skilling and re-accreditation of foreign qualifications ▪ language training (potentially) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A slow-down and gradual reversal in the overall decline of population and a positive increase in the percentage of the population of Sutherland - generally, and particularly those employed - below the age of 45. 2. Successful integration of newcomers, regardless of national or ethnic origin, with positive evidence of their cultural contribution to the indigenous community of Sutherland. 3. Successful formation and survival of new enterprises by in-migrants from areas outwith Scotland and the United Kingdom. 4. Over time, retention of second generation family members of in-migrants, in the 15-29 age group, establishing themselves in business and with families in Sutherland. 5. Welcome further talent into the services of the public and voluntary sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Scottish Executive ▪ Communities Scotland ▪ The Highland Council ▪ Careers Scotland ▪ UHI Millennium Institute ▪ Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise ▪ The private sector

strengthening our communities



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	KEY DRIVERS	PLANNED OUTCOMES	MAIN PARTNERS
Growing our economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improving the performance of the present business base - product; technologies; skills; profitability; levels of re-investment; recruitment and employment; wage levels ▪ provision for education, skills and learning - appropriate to the needs of the existing and planned business base ▪ promotion and support for key sectors: high-technology manufacturing & engineering; tele-service businesses; food/drinks manufacturing & processing; tourism ▪ attraction and retention of higher value-added businesses - requiring higher skills/qualifications and offering remuneration well above the Highland average ▪ utilisation of strategic sites (inc business parks); establishment of clusters and supply-chain networks within easy travel-to-work distance of strategic settlements ▪ sustainability of new business starts, beyond 3-years ▪ range, relevance and promotion of labour market initiatives ▪ opportunities for career progression within Sutherland ▪ attraction and retention of graduates ▪ promotion of self employment and support to new enterprises ▪ developing the potential of social enterprise ▪ appropriate exploitation of the natural environment for economic purposes - including leisure & recreation and renewable energy ▪ the maintained health of the community and its workforce ▪ transport and communications infrastructure ▪ developing activity-based tourism ▪ developing the potential of social enterprises 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A soundly based, competitive and growing business base offering diverse employment opportunities to a workforce paid above the gross Highland average. 2. High levels of employee and skills retention as a result of supportive employers , opportunities for career progression within Sutherland and work place locations within acceptable travel to work distances from strategic settlements. 3. Growing levels of business relocations and inward investment in Sutherland, creating more jobs in a wider span of economic activities. 4. An active, growing and profitable social enterprise sector providing opportunities, jobs and income to individuals and services to disadvantaged communities in Sutherland. 5. A vibrant self-employed sector based on increasing numbers of well qualified practitioners moving to Sutherland and providing viable alternative employment to members of the indigenous community. 6. National and international recognition of Sutherland's success and prosperity as a rural economy with a distinctive profile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The private sector ▪ The Highland Council ▪ Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise ▪ Communities Scotland ▪ Careers Scotland ▪ UHI Millennium Institute ▪ Scottish Natural Heritage ▪ Utilities & Communications providers ▪ The voluntary sector ▪ VisitScotland ▪ HOST - successor organisation ▪ NHS Highland
Developing our strategic settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ updating and revision of local plans ▪ targeted development of settlements ▪ community engagement at a significant level in planning and decision taking on the medium and long term development of each strategic settlement ▪ innovative housing solutions ▪ effective design solutions for the development of settlements and the built environment, providing sustainable buildings that meet the functional needs of physical infrastructure, and are-sensitive to the aesthetics, cultural, heritage and natural environment of each settlement ▪ concentrate co-terminus service delivery points and integrated service delivery on strategic settlements ▪ introduce shared or direct community-led management of local services and facilities, wherever feasible and viable ▪ transport and communications infrastructure 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confident and thriving settlements, each with a distinctive character, reflecting the needs and preferences of their contemporary communities, their heritage and exploiting the best features of their natural environments. 2. Accessible and quality public services designed to meet the needs and character of each strategic settlement - planned and where possible, managed by their own communities, working in partnership with main service providers. 3. Improvement within the health of the populations of settlements across Sutherland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The communities of strategic settlements ▪ The Highland Council ▪ Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise ▪ Communities Scotland ▪ NHS Highland ▪ UHI Millennium Institute ▪ Northern Constabulary ▪ Highland & Islands Fire service ▪ The private sector ▪ The voluntary sector ▪ Utilities providers ▪ Transport providers

strengthening our communities



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	KEY DRIVERS	PLANNED OUTCOMES	MAIN PARTNERS
Promoting environmental benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commitment to the goals of sustainable development and their practical application to policy, strategy, programme and project development processes. ▪ Collaboration between all stakeholders on defining and implementing measures that will have a substantial, positive and long-lasting impact on the management, use and promotion of the natural heritage of the area. ▪ Increased public and business community awareness of environmental issues and the economic value of the local environment, resulting from coordinated and sustained action by public sector partners, the educational sector and voluntary bodies. ▪ Improvement in provision and management of physical access to and within areas of the natural environment: for the purposes of public enjoyment and participation in outdoor activities; increase provision of ranger services. ▪ Effective management of traditional sporting practices that are environmentally beneficial and which deliver access and enjoyment. ▪ Encourage more active crofting by promoting the environmental benefits of low intensity agriculture. ▪ Achievement of key pollution, waste management and renewable energy targets. ▪ Successful development and promotion of the tourism product and maintenance of high levels of consumer satisfaction. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustainable development will provide the framework for integrating economic, social and environmental proposals by the main partners of the Sutherland Partnership. 2. A healthy and diverse environment in which natural capital remains unimpaired by economic development. 3. An efficient quality of life in which the highest possible levels of economic and social activity will be achieved from the lowest possible levels of use of materials and energy. 4. Community-led ownership, management and promotion of under-used land-based community assets - for the benefit of residents and for the pleasure and satisfaction of visitors. 5. Significant growth in environmental, cultural and heritage-based tourism resulting from successful promotion of a high quality, diverse and accessible product-base. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scottish Natural Heritage ▪ Forestry Commission ▪ Scottish Crofting Foundation ▪ Historic Scotland ▪ VisitScotland ▪ HOST - successor organisation ▪ Tourism Forum (SP) ▪ Biodiversity Group (SP) ▪ North West Highland Geopark Steering Group (SP) ▪ UHI Millennium Institute ▪ The Highland Council ▪ Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise ▪ NHS Highland ▪ The private sector
Making partnership more effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Justification - a clear understanding and agreement by the Partners that a Partnership is necessary and evidence that Partners share the overarching policy objective. ▪ A structure 'fit for purpose' that helps the Partners to work together towards mutually agreed goals ▪ Incentives that will encourage and enable Partners to be flexible over resource allocation and spending decisions - and sufficient delegated authority by those to whom they are accountable, to employ policy and budget 'bend' at local/area level. ▪ A culture, behaviour and leadership that encourages and enables Partners to work together effectively ▪ Customer focus - to ensure that proper account has been taken of the needs of the customers/consumer of services in designing public services for them. ▪ The targets (developed for the action plans) will be realistic and sustainable; lines of accountability will be clear and accepted; the Partners will be satisfied that they have the resources to achieve them, before committing to the targets. ▪ There will be an appropriate performance management and reporting system in place, from the beginning, capable of measuring achievement. ▪ A communications strategy will be in place to support partnership working and reporting progress and results to Partners 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An active Partnership of equals, collaborating in a transparent way, achieving common goals. 2. A high level of community satisfaction with the type, level, quality and accessibility of services provided 3. Reduced gaps in provision resulting from joined up working by Partners 4. Improved efficiencies in service delivery resulting from integrated service delivery by Partners, across organisational boundaries 5. Increase in knowledge and awareness of partner activities and strategic plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Highland Council ▪ Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise ▪ Communities Scotland ▪ Careers Scotland ▪ UHI Millennium Institute ▪ Scottish Natural Heritage ▪ Forestry Commission ▪ Scottish Crofting Foundation ▪ NHS Highland ▪ HOST - successor organisation ▪ Association of Sutherland Community Councils ▪ Northern Constabulary ▪ Highland and Islands Fire Service ▪ Voluntary Groups - East Sutherland ▪ Voluntary Groups - North Sutherland ▪ Historic Scotland ▪ The Scottish Arts Council ▪ Transport Scotland / HITRANS ▪ The private sector ▪ Utilities & Communications providers

Measuring progress and reporting results

Introduction

Providing greater opportunities for community participation in decision making about service priorities continues to be 'work in progress.' Over the next 5 years it will be an area in which the Sutherland Partnership will focus more attention and effort.

But increasing community participation is difficult if communities and individual citizens lack information in an accessible form. Sutherland is no different from any other area – urban or rural - in respect of the difficulty the average citizen will have in obtaining an accurate and reasonably comprehensive view of the needs of their area, the activities that are being undertaken by public and voluntary bodies on their behalf, and the outcomes (results) of these efforts.

There are many documents, reports, surveys, newsletters and other forms of publication that are produced by a large number of different bodies, covering differing and overlapping timescales and using different indicators of achievement. Some of these are, in themselves, of high quality and of great interest, but currently, there is no single source where an interested citizen can obtain a comprehensive, concise and easily understood summary covering Sutherland. Strengthening the communities of Sutherland (geographic and communities of interest) requires engagement and effective engagement requires accessible information.

- For this reason, the Sutherland Partnership's own *internal* resources will be responsible for compiling a digest of this kind. This will be as a **baseline for tracking future changes and as a tool of communication** with Partners and the wider community.
- By this means, **the objectives of measuring and reporting progress will be linked** – in ways that are manageable by the Partnership and accessible (and understandable) to the community.

Commitment to this process does not mean that the Sutherland Partnership will become a mini-research institute, absorbed with statistics and devoting an inordinate proportion of its staff resource to collection and collation. It does not mean that we shall either duplicate the information and performance measurement processes of our Partners – a pointless task. It *does* mean that **we shall be selective about what we measure, and concise and accessible – in style and language - in the way we report** on what we find.

On the following pages we outline how we plan to approach this task – a new departure for the Sutherland Partnership and one in which we shall be 'feeling our way', piloting methods and measures over the first year of our strategy. The task of monitoring will be shared with communities of interest in Sutherland.

Measuring progress

We plan to review and measure progress in 3 main areas:

- against the **goals of community planning**
- against the **outcomes of our seven strategic objectives**
- against **measures of a ‘well-functioning’ community**

In outline, the following tables indicate the main factors we initially plan to measure.

I. The goals of community planning

There are 4 overarching goals of community planning which are enshrined in the guidance of the Scottish Executive and consistent with the underlying goals of the Highland Wellbeing Alliance.

Area	Factors to measure
A Developing a shared vision for the geographic area and communities of interest in Sutherland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existence of a vision statement and strategic framework for Sutherland which results from consultation with the community/communities of Sutherland ▪ Extent of distribution ▪ Feedback from the community
B Providing greater opportunities for community participation in decision making about the service priorities of Sutherland, how they are delivered, and the strategic objectives and targets set by service providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Satisfaction of community representatives / representative bodies with the opportunities provided to participate in decision taking
C Promoting joined up working between organisations that are responsible for planning and delivering services to Sutherland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of projects undertaken by Partners that have involved joint working – with specific delivery outputs that have been achieved
D Encouraging more integrated service delivery across organisational boundaries, to achieve improvement in the quality of services provided and efficiencies in their delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of examples of integrated service delivery projects undertaken ▪ Evidence of service improvements achieved ▪ Evidence of customer satisfaction with service improvements ▪ Evidence of efficiencies gained

2. The seven strategic objectives of this strategy

Area	Factors to measure
1 Promoting opportunities for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proportion of population aged 15-29 ▪ Proportion of 15-29 age group in full/part-time education ▪ Proportion of 15-29 age group with career prospects in Sutherland ▪ No of young people in leadership roles ▪ Proportion of 15-29 age group satisfied with cultural and leisure provision and their ability to influence decisions on it. ▪ Proportion of 15-29 age group establishing families in Sutherland
2 Putting people first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of families satisfied with Sutherland as good place for family life ▪ Proportion of population aged 30-44 ▪ Increased birth rate ▪ Housing: availability; quality; affordability ▪ improved health ▪ Reduced demands: acute health services
3 Welcoming talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Net migration (working age) as a proportion of population ▪ Increase in the percentage of the population below the age of 45 ▪ In-migrants satisfaction with the welcome/support received ▪ Sustainable businesses established by in-migrants
4 Growing our economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GDP per head ▪ Proportion of the working age population in employment ▪ Proportion of those in employment undertaking training ▪ Remuneration levels above the Highland average ▪ Business investment – by established businesses & inward investment ▪ 3-year survival rate - new business starts ▪ Utilisation and expansion of business parks / clusters adjacent to strategic settlements
5 Developing our strategic settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of people who are satisfied with their community as a place to live and work ▪ Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions that affect their area ▪ Level of involvement by communities in the management of their local environment – natural & built ▪ Percentage of people who find it easy to access key local services ▪ Evidence of stability and growth of local populations resulting from strategies to develop strategic settlements ▪ Participants in arts and cultural activities and events

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>6 Promoting environmental benefits</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of new projects integrating economic, social and environmental issues that employed sustainable development planning principles, and the number of public/private sector partnerships involved ▪ Evidence of increased access to the natural environment measured by: number and type of new transport links; number of upgraded footpaths and trails, distance covered, and evidence of volume of users / visitors ▪ Number of new community-led environment-based projects and evidence of volume of use by targeted groups – eg young people; families; tourists; etc. ▪ Area of land dedicated to low intensity management projects – including ‘active’ crofting ▪ Achievement of key targets for pollution, waste management and renewable energy, where these can be met without significant adverse impacts on the natural and cultural heritage |
| <p>7 Making partnership more effective</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partners’ satisfaction with the Partnership – as an effective mechanism for planning, delivering and achieving change ▪ Evidence of community satisfaction resulting from reduction of gaps in provision, resulting from joined up working by Partners ▪ Evidence of Partner satisfaction with improved efficiencies in service delivery resulting from integrated service delivery, across organisational boundaries ▪ Specific evidence of policy and budget ‘bend’ and leverage, directly resulting from the influence and activities of the Partnership |

3. Measures of community

Some communities are more active, confident and successful than others – and there are examples of these in Sutherland. As strengthening our communities is the theme of our strategy, we shall, over time, investigate what constitutes a successful and ‘well-functioning’ community and endeavour to share and export good practice to communities where community capacity building is required. We are not yet ready to define the measures we shall use. However, drawing upon current work by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) we shall begin by exploring the following five areas – identified by the CDF.

Area	Factors to measure
A Level of people’s activity	Capacity of the local population to participate in community life: people’s ability to get on with each other and cooperate to improve the locality, directly by their own efforts and through mutual aid; participation in VCS and participation in governance.
B Community sector	Capacity of the community sector (groups and organisations) to play an effective role in the locality: to produce and sustain a sufficient number and quality of independent groups and organisations to give the population the variety of activities, interests and networks that it needs in order to participate, generate mutual aid, mobilise representatives and deliver public services.
C Social economy	Capacity of social enterprises and economic initiatives to contribute to the local economy, creating jobs, improving incomes or saving costs.
D Individual organisations	Capacity of individual community groups and organisations to deliver their chosen goals and develop increased scope and effectiveness.
E Support, infrastructure and dialogue	Capacity of the public sector and other key organisations to provide for community representation on decision making bodies and their responsiveness to community needs and views.

Reporting results

Maintaining a cycle of communication among our Partners and between the Partnership and the communities of Sutherland is important for three reasons.

1. **Effective communication among and between Partners** is essential for successful partnering. The pace of change in policies, targets, resource allocation and spending decisions by individual Partners continues to accelerate and it cannot be assumed that each will necessarily be as familiar as they would wish, with key information about the others.

ACTION:

We aim to review and improve our internal mechanisms for managing the Partnership – including the planning, agenda setting and organisation of meetings of the Partnership and will develop a communications strategy to support this goal.

2. **Engagement with the community** is the starting point for development and confirmation of a strategy that is intended to produce direct benefits in service improvement and in community capacity building – over time. It is therefore important that the community has access to a regular flow of information, in an accessible form, about progress against objectives and planned outcomes – and an opportunity to comment on this evidence.

ACTION:

A community and key stakeholder communications strategy will be introduced, based on a combination of **web-based information**, regularly updated; the publication of short, **six-monthly digests** which will be widely distributed in print (as well as being published on the web) to key community-based groups and organisations and the private sector, as well as to public libraries and educational institutions; an **annual progress report** will be published on the web, with a shorter version produced and distributed in print format. This material will be prepared internally.

3. **The Partnership will produce evidence to justify its continuing existence and to make this publicly available.** The Sutherland Partnership itself consumes resource: directly in terms of staff costs and general overheads associated with its management and day to day operations; and indirectly in terms of the resource costs associated with time allocated by individuals, officers and others to attending meetings of the Partnership, bi-lateral working sessions between Partners, and dealing with the associated logistics of travel, administration, document production and communications.

ACTION:

An annual review of the Partnership's work, costs, outputs and achievements will be prepared and published on its website – with a smaller number of copies in printed format available for distribution to Partners and their host organisations - where relevant - and other key stakeholders. This review will be undertaken on the basis of an external commission, and published with the approval of the Partners.

Annex

Scenarios

What do the people of Sutherland want Sutherland to be like in 10 or 20 years time? During the course of consultations, we asked people to share their vision and to describe how they would recognize success. In one form or another, a ‘high quality of life’ emerged as the predominant vision, with ‘successful, confident communities with stable populations’ living in ‘an affluent, crime free and healthy area’ supported by a ‘vibrant economy’ gaining widespread support.

To connect-up these visionary aspirations into a description of ‘the future’, we invited a small number of individuals to accept a challenge and write a ‘best’ and a ‘worst’ case scenario for Sutherland.

We asked them to imagine that they were visiting Sutherland in ten years time, as columnists, writing for the Financial Times. Their commission was to describe what they found, first in the form of a best case scenario, and then, a worst case scenario. The results are at the very least thought-provoking and sometimes challenging. There are some obvious themes that recur across all four scenarios – best and worst – and some very individual perspectives that may challenge preconceptions.

Hypothetical...yes...but perhaps much to agree with and some points to argue!

BEST CASE

Celtic Tiger, Highland Wildcat The rise and rise of the Far North

Touching down on the new runway at Dornoch airport is a heartening experience. The now-established Inverness-Dornoch airlink is working at full capacity this week, as Royal Dornoch hosts its first Open Golf championship. It is a fitting reward for an area which has shown the rest of the nation that sustained growth need not be at the expense of quality of life.

That SE Sutherland can sustain such a huge sporting event is testament to a massive investment in local infrastructure over the past ten years. Led by the relocation of the Scottish Executive’s Environment & Rural Affairs Department to the east coast town of Golspie in 2009, the area’s population increased by a startling 25% between 2001 and 2011. The relocation of AEA Technology’s UK Headquarters to Caithness in 2010 saw an expansion in the Company’s Sutherland-based projects. The business park in Golspie now provides employment for nearly 500 people, and is in its third phase of expansion. The establishment of a prototype health-care Contact Centre in Brora ten years ago has also mushroomed into a small but vibrant medicare campus, including the relocated National Headquarters of NHS 24. The Brora campus now employs over 200 people in highly specialised jobs.

It is, however, in the NW where the success story is most profound. The fishing communities of the NW effectively died in the aftermath of the 2007 closure of the North Sea and North Atlantic fisheries. But the Lochinver and Kinlochbervie of 2014 reveal communities more vibrant than ever. Following last year’s EU Summit agreement on community fishing quotas the future for these communities seems as bright as it has been for decades.

But the development of the UK's first experimental Tidal Power Station at Kylesku has shown that these communities are no longer tied to fishing. The plant, which is now nearing the end of its construction phase, has given work to over 400 construction workers, and by the end of its commissioning phase in two years time will employ 200 staff. If its generating capacity is reached then an additional 50 jobs may come to this remote corner of the country.

A community councillor in NW Sutherland observed "Ten years ago we saw no future for us or our children here. There were no jobs, more and more remote services and less and less people to use them. Today my daughter is a bio-tech graduate of the University of the Highlands and Islands, and has just secured a job at Kylesku at the power station doing highly-paid scientific work. Our house-building programmes mean she and her family will have somewhere to stay too."

Perhaps the tens of thousands of golf fans converging on Royal Dornoch would do well to reflect on the decade of recovery which has supported the wonderful spectacle they are enjoying.

Soaring to Success

Vibrant, young, confident, dynamic. These are not words that would historically have been associated with Sutherland. However a steady revolution has struck this hitherto sleepy part of the Northern Highlands and the results are obvious. Under the slogan 'Sutherland Soaring to Success', scattered communities have overcome challenges of remoteness and rurality to become confident units, achieving the most astounding results.

Each community knows what it is about. Each community has its own focus and almost all its residents are bought into it. Communities specialize in a variety of economic pursuits; elite tourism, golf, nature-based tourism, recycling, walking and cycling, living heritage. The list is endless. However, the communities all work together and each part of Sutherland has its own branding - Mackay Country, Geopark, Peatlands World Heritage site, Salmon Triangle and Royal Golf. These regional approaches are marketed and managed under one banner, that of the Sutherland Partnership. Through a variety of economic development initiatives which mostly go unseen by the visitor, resident or inward investor, Sutherland has been revitalized. The key has been the commitment to joint working by the agencies and communities, which has enabled a wide range of joint working, benefiting all aspects of the community. The result is a shining success story, in which businesses can escape the high crime and pollution of urban areas and flourish in possibly the highest quality natural environment in these islands.

Quality – the meaning of life

Having travelled the length and breadth of Sutherland, I was struck by the diversity and quality of life being experienced by its inhabitants. As a columnist based in terrorist-threatened London, I was particularly impressed by the numerous examples of cosmopolitan rural living based on the principles of community sustainability. But don't just take my word for it! In terms of the official UK Quality of Life league tables, Sutherland consistently comes out top in terms of providing a rich and rewarding balance of work, rest and play opportunities amidst unrivalled scenery. Like elsewhere in the Highlands, rural re-population has brought with it unbridled prosperity in a largely crime-free environment. EU enlargement earlier this century has helped to attract a well-qualified and motivated workforce drawn from countries such as Poland, Estonia and Lithuania who have contributed so much to a now buoyant economy linked to a new cultural diversity that works, literally! Skill shortages have all but disappeared within the County and there is little doubt that the Sutherland Fresh Talent/People Recruitment initiatives over the past 15 years are now paying dividends. So much so that the local economy is no longer reliant on European Structural Aid. On the contrary, the Highlands and Sutherland in particular is a net exporter of Community Fund contributions on account of its above average GDP levels.

High levels of disposable income are slowly but surely transforming the local housing market. Well-designed, environmentally sound and eco-friendly dwellings with cutting edge renewable energy solutions are now mainstream and are replacing the 'Suburbiton' style, 'L' shaped villas that so characterized much of the landscape in the late 20th Century.

But the biggest technological breakthrough has to be the eradication of the humble midge. A Sutherland based R & D lab has pioneered a guaranteed solution to the scourge of the tourist season! With no midges, Sutherland is bound to top the list of world class visitor destinations rather than just feature in the top 10 as it has done up until now!!

Joined-up thinking Sutherland's key to success

A few years ago Sutherland, a large, remote, rural county in the Scottish Highlands, faced the prospect of another Highland clearance. The long-term prognosis for the area was of a rapidly declining population made up of people aged 65 years and over who could no longer sustain any form of community life. The communities were dying or so it was believed. Young people were leaving to gain a higher education, but not returning because of the lack of career prospects.

The “gloom-and-doom” scenario has been overturned thanks to effective partnership working of the public, private and voluntary sectors. They have worked together to make Sutherland an attractive place to live and work. They have attracted inward investment through the re-location of several public service departments and the promotion of “green” tourism. They have recognised the need for a strong and actively participative voluntary sector with a voice in the decision-making processes for community planning. Their local CVS's provide strong support to new and emerging voluntary sector activity and enterprise. The social economy has become part of the infrastructure.

Through the collective procurement of goods, training and services the Sutherland Partners have maximised resources. Through the sensitive promotion of the area with its natural and cultural assets, the partners have made Sutherland a successful green tourist destination of international renown. These two main initiatives have had huge spin-offs for related and allied job creation. School rolls have increased, dormant shops, petrol stations and Post Offices have re-opened. There is even a supermarket in the middle of the county which would have been unheard of five years ago. The Health Service has based a consultant and team at the local hospital with a small research programme into Alzheimer's disease. The economy is thriving, the population has increased and the quality of life is high. Joined-up thinking in Sutherland has reversed what appeared to be an irreversible trend.

WORST CASE

Ageing and dependent

Journeying north as many do to the oasis of Orkney, few think to spend time in the ancient county of Sutherland. The population is now in terminal decline; worse still the structure is severely unbalanced with the highest dependency ratio in the UK. The empty interior should be a playground for the bird watcher, mountaineer and sportsmen, but there are few facilities and a perception that local communities are not interested in catering for their needs or taking their euros. This may be unfair, as the vast majority of the residents are retired, many of whom simply wish to be left in peace whilst their communities and peers die around them. A second clearance is ongoing, not a forced one but due to natural causes.

The aging population makes any economic initiative unlikely to succeed. The area has been in a downward spiral for many years. The loss of European funding is blamed by many, but there are more local factors that should carry the can. There seems to be a disinterested attitude amongst development agencies. Under funded, heavily criticized and low in morale, few public sector development practitioners linger long.

Without drive from the communities or the agencies, the few successful private sector operators have relocated to economically more successful locations - Orkney, Skye, Mull in particular. Those communities have identified their strengths and sold them. Sutherland has been unable to sell any of its resources to tourists, developers or most crucially the young people of Sutherland. In their thousands they have left never to return and why should they?

Sutherland No More

The 21st Century Clearance

It is two hours NW of the UK's most northerly city, but it might as well be an arctic whaling station. Kinlochbervie High School stands empty, its classrooms deserted. Below it the once-thriving harbour area also lies silent. When the school closed in 2010 it signalled for many the end of this community, a return to the bad old days of kids travelling south just to go to secondary school. But this time rather than Golspie or Ullapool they have to board in Inverness, where the local authority has centralised its dwindling secondary-age students.

It came on top of the departure of the last whitefish boat from the port in 2007, and the closure of the NW's largest fish-farm the following year. It killed the community, and others like it in this corner of Scotland. Official unemployment here peaked at 28.8% in 2010, but has declined somewhat in the three or so years since. However, this is due to the numbers of economically-active people leaving the area, rather than a phoenix-like rise from the ashes. The bright lights of the Inverness conurbation have caused the population of Sutherland to fall by a startling 25% between 2001 and 2011. The knock-on effects have been spectacular. Sutherland's two hospitals have joined their northern sister hospital in Caithness on the scrapheap, leaving only the rump of an accident and emergency service in Golspie on the east coast. Anything more than a broken arm will mean a two to four hour round trip to Inverness. When the Scottish Parliament created its population change agency Growth Scotland in 2009 could it have imagined such an immediate crisis in the north?

Local economic development workers seem beaten: questions on the area's future are greeted with helpless shakes of the head, and vague promises of marketing the area's unique quality of life. But with the UK's ever-expanding cities competing against each other for a piece of the urbanisation pie, what next for our most remote communities?

One of the very few remaining residents of Kinlochbervie summed up the local sense of despair: "I came here in 1999 hoping to teach at a state-of-the-art secondary school in a community thriving on its fishing industry. Now we've nothing left except the people like me who are either too old or too poor to move away. In 100 years time will they be talking about Sutherland as the home of the second Highland Clearances?"

Soaring...no more

How can it be that Sutherland, ten years ago, a once vigorous and proactive area, now displays the worst excesses of rural interventionist policies.

Land reform – often cited as a panacea for rural ills – has proved to be an unmitigated disaster in many parts of Sutherland. Rather than fostering rural progress based on the principles of sustainable development, 'Community-led buyouts' have spawned a climate of mistrust at best and, at worst, accusations of financial irregularities/petty corruption fuelled by the need to allocate sites for affordable local housing.

As a consequence, community confidence is at an all time low, business start ups have all but dried up and local unemployment rates have soared beyond their mid 1990's levels. Seasonality is largely a thing of the past on account of the tourism sector being severely hit by the plethora of past their sell by date, wind farms rusting throughout the once scenic straths and glens. Not only that, the local job opportunities afforded by wind farm decommissioning has failed to materialize. The unskilled Dutch, German and Lithuanian itinerant migrant labour has seen to that. Finally, rural social services are all but paralyzed due to the profound demographic changes over the past 20 years. From a Sutherland perspective, "free care for the elderly" has a rather hollow sound to itself these days. In short the Sutherland logo once dubbed as "Soaring to Success" should be binned in favour of Sutherland "Sink or Swim".

Sutherland: death of a county

Few people who have visited Sutherland can deny that it is an exceedingly beautiful county. Its relative peace and tranquility has been an inspiration to writers, artists and those keen on outdoor pursuits such as ornithology, botany, hill walking, cycling or sailing to name but a few. Many visitors have been so impressed by the county that, on retirement, they have moved to the area.

The reality is that the small scattered and often isolated communities of Sutherland are dying. Young people leave to gain a higher education and do not return because of the lack of career opportunities, services and amenities. With a diminishing and increasingly elderly population it is proving difficult to deliver services in the locality. That important factor “critical mass” rears its head and the pronouncement is “not cost effective” or “not economically viable”. Many people have moved away, believing that they can give their children a better start in life through better schools and access to extra-curricular activities more easily available in Inverness or even further south.

Over the past 5 to 10 years Inverness has grown and prospered. It has been like a magnet attracting inward investment and migration at the expense of the rest of Highland, particularly Sutherland where there is no large township to concentrate economic activity. People have moved from Sutherland; the birth rate has fallen and the only inward migration has been from older retired people who eventually require support from health and social services to remain in their own homes.

The impact of these factors has been devastating. Many small primary schools have closed along with shops, banks, petrol stations and even village halls. The heart has gone out of the small villages of Sutherland. People have become used to the lack of local services and amenities. Those who remain are resigned to the fact of having to travel long distances for goods and services. The cost of living is high, much higher than the Highland average, as a consequence. It is a depressed economy and a depressed society that peoples this now under-utilised county.

HIE has commissioned an in-depth survey of the impact of Inverness on the depressed and de-populated areas of the Highlands and Islands, with particular emphasis on Sutherland, but is it too late to stop the downward spiral of a once-thriving and vibrant county?

Ends