

Minutes of Meetings

To be submitted to the Council

on

8 March 2018

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The Highland Council
No. 6 2017/2018

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 14 December 2017 at 10.35am.

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
A' Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr D Louden
Mr R Balfour	Mrs L MacDonald
Mrs J Barclay	Mr R MacDonald
Mr A Baxter	Mrs D Mackay
Mr B Boyd	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Bremner	Mr W MacKay
Mr I Brown	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Bruce	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs C Caddick	Mr S Mackie
Miss J Campbell	Mr A Mackinnon
Mrs I Campbell	Ms A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr C MacLeod
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr D MacLeod
Mr A Christie	Mr D Macpherson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs M Cockburn	Mrs B McAllister
Mr G Cruickshank	Mr H Morrison
Mrs M Davidson	Ms L Munro
Mr J Finlayson	Ms P Munro
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr C Fraser	Mr M Reiss
Mr L Fraser	Mr A Rhind
Mr R Gale	Mrs F Robertson
Mr J Gordon	Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr K Rosie
Mr A Graham	Mr G Ross
Mr J Gray	Mr P Saggars
Mr T Heggie	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Henderson	Ms N Sinclair
Mr A Jarvie	Mr C Smith
Ms E Knox	Ms M Smith
Mr R Laird	Mrs K Stephen
Mr B Lobban	Mr B Thompson

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	Depute Chief Executive/Director of
Director of Development & Infrastructure	Corporate Resources
Director of Care & Learning	Director of Community Services

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Allan, Ms K Currie, Ms P Hadley, Mr W MacLachlan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr N McLean, Mr I Ramon and Mrs C Wilson.

2. **Declarations of Interest** **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

The Council **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 10(vi) – Mr A Baxter and Mr A Graham (both non-financial)
Item 15 – Mrs A MacLean (non- financial)

3. **Confirmation of Minutes** **Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais**

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 26 October 2017 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

4. **Minutes of Meetings of Committees** **Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean**

There had been submitted for confirmation as correct records, for information as regards delegated business and for approval as appropriate, the Minutes of Meetings of Committees contained in Volume circulated separately as undernoted:-

Ross & Cromarty Committee, 31 October
Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee, 8 November
Badenoch & Strathspey Area Committee, 14 November
Corporate Resources Committee, 15 November
Caithness Committee, 21 November
Audit & Scrutiny Committee, 23 November
Sutherland County Committee, 29 November
City of Inverness Area Committee, 30 November
People Committee, 6 December
Nairnshire Committee, 7 December
Isle of Skye & Raasay Committee, 11 December

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded were, except as undernoted, **APPROVED** – matters arising having been dealt with as follows:-

Ross & Cromarty Committee, 31 October

***Starred Item: Item 5: PP. 339-341: Housing Performance Report**

It was **AGREED** that the Policy Development Group of the People Committee should consider the recommendation that the Scheme of Delegation be reviewed to give Local Committees the power to review the Housing Policy, particularly in relation to inspection regimes, garages and fences, taking into account the impact any proposals would have on resources.

Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee, 8 November

***Starred Item: Item 3ai: P. 348: Urgent Additional Item: Establishment and/or Appointment of Working Groups, Boards and Outside Bodies – Harbours Management Board**

It was **AGREED** that Ms K Currie should be appointed to the Harbours Management Board in place of Mr C MacLeod.

Sutherland County Committee, 29 November***Starred Item: Item 8: PP. 397-398: Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report - 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017**

In regard to the Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report, and specifically Project CAL15131: Dornoch Sports Centre, it had been agreed to recommend that the Council should proceed with urgency to legally commit to this project for the reasons stated within the Minutes of the Meeting.

At this point in the meeting, the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources advised that in order to make an informed decision on this matter, the Council would require to have sight of a full Business Case which set out the justification for the project and outlined the full financial implications (in terms of both capital and ongoing revenue). Also, there was currently no funding allocated within the Capital Programme for this particular project. It was the intention of the Administration that a review of the Capital Programme would be undertaken at the Special Meeting of the Council on 15 February 2018 and that would be the appropriate time for detailed consideration of priorities in this regard.

Thereafter, Mrs L Munro, seconded by Mr H Morrison, **MOVED** the recommendation from the Sutherland County Committee as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, the Convener, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, moved that no action should be taken on this recommendation following the advice which had been received from the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 4 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 36 votes, with 16 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes cast having been as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mrs L Munro; Mr H Morrison; Mrs I Campbell and Mr R Gale.

For the Amendment:

Mr B Lobban; Mr A MacKinnon; Mr G Adam; Mrs J Barclay; Mr R Bremner; Mr J Bruce; Mrs C Caddick; Miss J Campbell; Mr A Christie; Mr G Cruickshank; Mrs M Davidson; Mr J Finlayson; Mr M Finlayson; Mr L Fraser; Mr J Gordon; Mr K Gowans; Mr A Graham; Mr J Gray; Mr T Heggie; Mr A Henderson; Mr W MacKay; Mr S Mackie; Mrs A MacLean; Mr D MacLeod; Mr D Macpherson; Mrs B McAllister; Mr M Reiss; Mr A Rhind; Mrs T Robertson; Mr G Ross; Mr P Saggars; Mr A Sinclair; Ms N Sinclair; Mr C Smith; Mrs K Stephen and Mr B Thompson.

Abstentions:

Mr B Boyd; Mr I Brown; Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair; Dr I Cockburn; Mrs M Cockburn; Mr C Fraser; Ms E Knox; Mr D Loudon; Mrs L MacDonald; Mr G MacKenzie; Mrs I MacKenzie; Mr C MacLeod; Mr R MacWilliam; Mrs P Munro; Mrs F Robertson and Mr K Rosie.

It was therefore **AGREED** that no action should be taken in relation to the recommendation from the Sutherland County Committee in respect of Project CAL15131: Dornoch Sports Centre.

***Starred Item: Item 4: PP. 401-402: Inverness Business Improvement District Ballot for New Term from March 2018**

It was **AGREED** that support be given to the new 5 year term for the Inverness Business Improvement District.

People Committee, 6 December

***Starred Item: Item 13: PP.10-11 of Supplementary Paper: Corporate Parenting**

It was **AGREED** that there should be an exemption from Contract Standing Orders to enable the continued use of spot-purchased placements for Looked After Children.

**5. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board
Co-Bhòrd Luachaidh na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean Siar**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Valuation Joint Board held on 22 September 2017 (approved by the Board on 24 November 2017) which were **NOTED**.

**6. Community Planning Board
Bòrd Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Community Planning Board held on 28 June 2017 (approved by the Board on 4 October 2017) which were **NOTED**.

**7. Recruitment Panel – Depute Chief Executive
Pannal Fastaidh – Iar-Ard-Oifigear**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Recruitment Panel (Depute Chief Executive) held on Wednesday, 1 November 2017 which were **NOTED**.

**8. Membership of Committees, etc
Ballrachd na Comhairle**

It was **NOTED** that Mr C MacLeod had confirmed that he was now non-aligned.

On that basis, the political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

Independent – 30/SNP – 20/Scottish Conservatives – 10/Liberal Democrat – 9/Labour – 3/Green Party – 1/Non-Aligned – 1

It was also **NOTED** that the formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committee remained as 10/7/4/3/1.

The Council also **AGREED** the following –

Corporate Resources Committee – Mrs L MacDonald to replace Mr C MacLeod
 Corporate Resources Committee – Mrs M Paterson to replace Mr A Baxter
 Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee – Ms K Currie to replace Mr C MacLeod
 Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee – Mr R Laird to replace Mr N McLean

Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee – Mr A Rhind to replace Mr M Finlayson

Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee – Mr K Gowans to replace Mr J McGillivray

People Committee – Mr A Baxter to replace Mrs M Paterson

Audit & Scrutiny Committee – Mr T Heggie to replace Mr A Baxter

Audit & Scrutiny Committee – Mrs J Barclay to replace Mr J McGillivray

Pensions Committee – Mrs C Caddick to replace Ms L Munro

Pensions Board – Ms L Munro to replace Mrs C Caddick

Commercial Board – Mr L Fraser to replace Mr A Baxter

Redesign Board – Mr K Gowans to replace Mr A Baxter

Valuation Joint Board – Substitute Member – Mr D MacKay

North Planning Applications Committee – Substitute Member – Mrs P Munro (Ward 6)

South Planning Applications Committee – Substitute Members – Mr J Bruce (Ward 20) and Mr B Allan (Ward 21)

Chair of the People Committee

It was **NOTED** that Mr A Christie had tendered his resignation as Chair of the People Committee with effect from 15 December 2017.

On that basis, it was **AGREED** that Mr A Baxter should now be appointed as Chair.

Vice Chair of Corporate Resources Committee

It was **AGREED** that Mr M Reiss should replace Mr A Baxter as Vice Chair.

CoSLA Executive Board – AGREED as follows -

Health & Social Care – Ms K Stephen to replace Ms N Sinclair

Children & Young People – Mr A Baxter to replace Mr A Christie

Environment & Economy – Mr K Gowans to replace Mr R MacDonald

9. Question Time Am Ceiste

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance in terms of Standing Order 42 –

(i) Mr C Smith

To the Leader of the Council

“What engagements have you and your Administration had with Her Majesty’s Government and the Devolved Scottish Administration since the last full Council?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and in regard to the Leader’s meeting with Damien Green MP on 9 November 2017, Mr Smith queried as to whether this meeting had contributed to the decision of the UK Government to invest directly in Local Authorities to implement broadband in rural areas and also if there would be any further developments for the area. Also, in respect of the list of meetings on the website, he queried as to whether more detail could be provided of the meetings being held.

In response, the Leader confirmed that the outcomes of meetings were sometimes difficult to define. However, her diary on the website had been reviewed and consideration would be given to including the purpose of meetings where possible.

(ii) Mr G Cruickshank

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“It was recently highlighted that this Council is being charged £55,000 to upgrade Internet Explorer on its computers. That amount of money is equivalent to two full time salaries for a whole year.

Can I ask how such an extortionate charge for free software has arisen so early in the new IT contract and how many more scenarios like this can we expect to see for the remainder of this contract?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Mr Cruickshank queried as to why the cost of installing free software was so high.

In response, the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee confirmed that a meeting could be arranged with Mr Cruickshank following the meeting to discuss this issue more fully.

(iii) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of the People Committee

“Between the 2015/16 and 2016/17 years, the number of FTE equivalent of ASN teachers declined from 293.6 to 198.6. I have been told there was a change in the recording that year to exclude the approximately 40 teachers working in special schools, now only to count the ASN teachers in mainstream schools, however, this is still a significant reduction. Can you tell me the reasons for staff leaving and the number of staff recorded within each category?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Mrs MacKenzie queried as to whether a detailed breakdown of the reasons why ASN Teachers had left the Council during the last year could be provided.

In response, the Chair of the People Committee confirmed that advice would be sought on whether or not this information could be provided on the basis of confidentiality.

(iv) Mr S Mackie

To the Leader of the Council

“Following the announcement by Visit Scotland to close over a third of their staffed locations within two years, can you outline what your Administration is doing to provide resilience in the Highland's tourism economy and provide certainty for those working in the sector in Thurso, Durness, Drumnadrochit and Fort Augustus whose offices are earmarked for closure?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Mr Mackie welcomed the roll-out of Wi-Fi enabled towns and villages and praised the Council for doing so. However, bearing in mind that tourism was becoming increasingly vital as the community became less reliant on nuclear industry and offshore opportunities, he queried as to whether the Leader agreed that no digitally enabled application or website could provide the quality of local knowledge which would be lost following the closure of the Visitor Information Centres.

In response, the Leader agreed and recommended that communities begin a dialogue with building owners about potential future opportunities.

(v) Ms M Smith

To the Leader of the Council

“What has been done to review and strengthen the Council’s internal procedures in respect of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, ensuring that people can raise concerns directly and in confidence to an appointed person or person(s), who will be available and approachable by anyone wishing to make a confidential complaint?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and in terms of the importance of having more than one appointed person (both male and female) on a geographic basis to make it easier for staff to raise concerns, Ms Smith queried as to whether (as part of the review) consideration could be given to having appointed persons for Highland.

In response, the Leader agreed and confirmed that an update would be provided in due course.

(vi) Ms K Currie

To the Chair of the Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee

“What involvement have you had in the working map for the UNESCO designation in Sutherland?”

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(vii) Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“Could you please provide me with a list of posts, noting grades and department, of where the Council engages Agency workers?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Mrs Campbell-Sinclair queried as to whether the transactions listing from 1 April to 14 December 2017 relating to the supply of agency staff could be provided.

In response, the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee confirmed that the Administration Budget Team continued to challenge the use of agency staff and reiterated the offer previously made to meet Mrs Campbell-Sinclair or arrange a confidential briefing with Heads of Service.

(viii) Mr R MacWilliam

To the Leader of the Council

“What guidance or training has specifically been given to Highland Council employees to ensure that they deal efficiently and sensitively with citizens who engage with the Council’s services as a result of bereavement?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Mr MacWilliam requested that the Leader meet with him and the Chief Executive to consider an improvement plan across a range of affected services to ensure those suffering bereavement were provided with the respect and dignity they deserved.

In response, the Leader agreed to this request.

**10. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid**

The following Notices of Motion had been received in accordance with Standing Order 10.1 –

(i)“There is continuing interest in the investment in and construction of small scale Hydro schemes yet many never get past the planning stage. Thousands of pounds are spent only to find that access to the grid is denied or what is offered is insufficient for the idea to become a viable reality.

Innovative projects could be connected to the scheme to directly address issues of employment or alleviate fuel poverty.

The Council is asked to encourage these enterprises to find ways to use the power generated by local schemes in their local communities.”

Signed: Mrs T Robertson Mr J Gray Mr B Lobban Mrs M Davidson

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- hydro schemes and windfarms, together with emerging technologies such as wave and tidal power energy, were helping the country to meet its commitment to provide increased amounts of energy from renewable sources;
- however, it was felt that many small scale hydro schemes were not able to go ahead because access to the grid was insufficient;
- it was important that encouragement was given to hydro schemes as once in place, they were sustainable for the long term;
- in terms of the localism agenda, it had to be possible to have energy produced and used in ways which benefitted local areas;
- locally produced power could be used to heat schools, homes and businesses and lead to the production of goods and services;

- it was imperative that action was taken to make the Highlands a stronger and more resilient region in future;
- utilisation of local knowledge and expertise was essential to take projects forward;
- it would also be important to work with energy companies to understand the possibilities and limitations of using power generated by local schemes;
- lessons could be learned from other successful local models in place elsewhere in the country; and
- consideration should be given to setting up a Working Group to allow this issue to be taken forward by Members.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

(ii) This Council expresses its concern at the proposed merger of the British Transport Police (BTP) with Police Scotland. Since its inception, the new force has been fraught with difficulties, it is clear there are an abundance of issues at the core which still need addressed, the very last event it needs to handle right now is further expansion of its remit by absorbing the BTP.

A report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) criticised the plans for showing no 'due diligence' and that the ambitions are 'wholly political'. A recent case of a vulnerable woman boarding a train in Preston, subsequently being met by BTP officers in Glasgow only stresses the need for a single, specialist and cross border force.

The Highland Council resolves that the Leader of the Council will write to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to express these concerns and to urge a rethink.

Signed: Mr A Jarvie Mr A Sinclair

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that HMICS had criticised the plans for this merger and believed that a detailed Business Case was required as a matter of priority, not least to examine the potential advantages/disadvantages together with an analysis of cost;
- it had to be questioned as to whether Police Scotland currently had sufficient capacity to take on this extra responsibility;
- the unique structure of the British Transport Police made it a very different organisation from Police Scotland and as such the scope and scale of the complexity of this merger could not be underestimated;
- the statistics across a range of issues proved that British Transport Police had moved forward very positively in recent years and it was vitally important that this was continued;
- it did not appear that account had been fully taken of the specialist and complex work undertaken by the British Transport Police and this was a major concern for the future, not least in regard to safety issues in particular in the Highland area;
- it was imperative that a full and detailed risk assessment was undertaken as a matter of priority and for the Scottish Government to be asked to pause and reconsider this proposal;

- it was understood that the merger had in fact already taken place so the proposal to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice at this stage was questioned; and
- if this merger went ahead, it had to be appreciated that the current specialism and knowledge of the British Transport Police could be lost and this would be counterproductive and detrimental for all concerned.

Thereafter, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr A Sinclair, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Mr D Louden, seconded by Ms M Smith, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, that no action should be taken on this matter.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 37 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 18 votes, with 4 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr A Jarvie; Mr A Sinclair; Mr D Macpherson; Mrs M Paterson; Miss J Campbell; Mr G Ross; Ms K Stephen; Mr G Cruickshank; Mr J Gordon; Mr H Morrison; Mrs J Barclay; Mr H Fraser; Mr M Finlayson; Mrs T Robertson; Mr R Gale; Mr G Adam; Mrs L Munro; Mr P Saggars; Mr J Bruce; Mr D MacLeod; Mr M Reiss; Mrs F Robertson; Mrs I Campbell; Mrs A MacLean; Mrs C Caddick; Mr A Graham; Mr C Smith; Mr S Mackie; Mrs I MacKenzie; Mr B Lobban; Mrs M Davidson; Mr A MacKinnon; Mr A Christie; Mr J Gray; Mrs N Sinclair; Mr A Henderson and Mr B Thompson.

For the Amendment:

Mr D Louden; Ms M Smith; Mr K Rosie; Mrs P Munro; Ms E Knox; Mr C MacLeod; Mr K Gowans; Mr I Brown; Mr R MacWilliam; Mr C Fraser; Mr B Boyd; Mrs L MacDonald; Mr J Finlayson; Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair; Mrs M Cockburn; Dr I Cockburn; Mr G MacKenzie and Mr R Laird.

Abstentions:

Mr R MacDonald; Mrs H Carmichael; Mr A Baxter and Mr R Bremner.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

(iii)'The Highland Council welcomes the proposal by the Scottish Government to establish a national not-for-profit energy company; believes that Highland customers do not always experience the benefits of the energy produced in our communities; and therefore agrees to make the case for the proposed company to be based in the Highlands.'

Signed: Mr R Laird Dr I Cockburn

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- whilst welcoming the establishment of the national not-for-profit energy company, and on the basis that the Highland area was the home of UK energy (including renewable energy), it was hoped that early discussion could be undertaken with the Scottish Government in a bid to ensure that this new company was based in the Highlands;

- in agreeing with the terms of the Notice of Motion, it was hoped that the following additional sentence could be included – ‘To this end, the Council calls upon all Highland MSPs to publicly state they will support the case to locate the proposed company in the Highlands’; and
- the mover and seconder of the original Notice of Motion confirmed that they would accept this additional sentence with the proviso that the Council recognised that MSPs within the Scottish Government are bound by Cabinet collective responsibility.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed – subject to inclusion of the following additional sentence as suggested and agreed at the meeting – ‘To this end, the Council calls upon all Highland MSPs to publicly state they will support the case to locate the proposed company in the Highlands’.

(iv) ‘The Highland Council believes that loans from offshore trusts should be treated as income in the hands of any and all UK recipients and therefore calls upon the UK Government to change the law to enable this.’

Signed: Mr D Louden Dr I Cockburn

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- loans from offshore trusts could not be classed as ‘loans’ as in effect they were not paid back. In this regard, they had to be viewed as ‘income’ and taxed accordingly;
- currently, there were plans to address this issue and there was therefore a need to call on the UK Government to implement them as a matter of urgency;
- this was a loophole in the current tax system which was often exploited by the highest earners and as such it had to be closed as soon as possible;
- on the basis that it was understood that HMRC had published policy papers on this matter (with new rules coming into force on 6 April 2018), it was suggested that no further action should be taken on this Notice of Motion; and
- there was an alternative understanding that any new rules would not be brought in until 2019 and therefore there was a need to proceed with the terms of the Notice of Motion.

Thereafter, Mr D Louden, seconded by Dr I Cockburn, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr P Siggers, seconded by Mr A Jarvie, moved that no further action should be taken on the terms of the Notice of Motion.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 30 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 13 votes, with 15 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr D Louden; Dr I Cockburn; Mr K Rosie; Mrs P Munro; Ms E Knox; Mr C MacLeod; Mr K Gowans; Mrs M Paterson; Miss J Campbell; Mr G Ross; Mr I Brown; Mr R MacWilliam; Mr C Fraser; Mr B Boyd; Mrs L MacDonald; Mr H Morrison; Mr J Finlayson; Mrs J Barclay; Mr L Fraser; Mr M Finlayson; Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair;

Mrs M Cockburn; Mr G MacKenzie; Mr B Lobban; Ms M Smith; Mr R Laird; Mr A Christie; Mr J Gray; Mr R Bremner and Mrs N Sinclair.

For the Amendment:

Mr P Sagers; Mr A Jarvie; Mr G Cruickshank; Mr J Gordon; Mr G Adam; Mrs L Munro; Mr A Sinclair; Mr J Bruce; Mr D MacLeod; Mr C Smith; Mr S Mackie; Mrs I MacKenzie and Mrs H Carmichael;

Abstentions:

Mr D Macpherson; Ms K Stephen; Mr R MacDonald; Mrs T Robertson; Mr R Gale; Mr M Reiss; Mrs F Robertson; Mrs A MacLean; Mrs C Caddick; Mr A Graham; Mrs M Davidson; Mr A MacKinnon; Mr A Baxter; Mr A Henderson and Mr B Thompson.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

(v)The Highland Council recognises the global interest in Universal Basic Income as an alternative to complex systems of benefit support and will approach the Scottish Government with a proposal to pilot a UBI scheme in the Highlands.

Signed: Mr R MacWilliam Mrs M Cockburn

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that there was interest in a number of countries on this issue and that trials were currently being undertaken;
- as such, the Highlands could offer a unique perspective and, whilst there were many variations on the same theme, it was important to begin consideration at an early date;
- it was considered that Universal Credit was currently causing considerable difficulties for many people on a number of levels and that if Universal Basic Income was successful, the social effects could be revolutionary;
- at the very least, there was a need to discuss and allow debate on this ambitious international project of research;
- the disproportional impact that Universal Credit was having in the Highland area had to be included in any future discussion;
- whilst accepting the sentiment of the Notice of Motion, there was a need for more detail and in this regard it was suggested that the wording should be amended to read as follows – ‘The Highland Council recognises the global interest in Universal Basic Income as an alternative to complex systems of benefit support and will submit a report to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee to allow an investigation of the proposals and a review of the impact that this may have on individuals, Councils and other organisations. The finding of this exercise will then inform any future decisions that the Council may wish to make on this matter’;
- specifically, there was a need for more detail on the potential associated costs of any future UBI scheme in the Highlands;
- the timescale for taking this forward was particularly important as a number of other Councils had already shown interest and it was important that Highland Council did not delay and therefore rule itself out of any future proposals from the Scottish Government; and
- the proposal to include this on the agenda for the next meeting of the Corporate Resources at the end of February was welcomed.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** an amended Notice of Motion as follows – ‘The Highland Council recognises the global interest in Universal Basic Income as an alternative to complex systems of benefit support and will submit a report to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee to allow an investigation of the proposals and a review of the impact that this may have on individuals, Councils and other organisations. The finding of this exercise will then inform any future decisions that the Council may wish to make on this matter.

Declarations of Interest - Mr A Baxter and Mr A Graham declared non-financial interests in the following additional urgent item (vi) on the grounds of owning a Village Post Office and having a family member employed by Royal Bank of Scotland respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

(vi)‘The Highland Council expresses its deep disappointment at the news of further branch closures by the Royal Bank of Scotland. This will cause real difficulties for many customers and small businesses.

While acknowledging the changing nature of banking and the rapid growth of digital banking services, there are many for whom this is neither a practical option nor one they are comfortable with. So it is vital that they have access to physical face-to-face banking services.

The Council therefore calls on the UK Government to ensure communities, particularly vulnerable customers and small businesses, have access to day to day banking services by establishing and enforcing a guaranteed minimum level of service provision for essential banking services.’

Signed: Mrs M Davidson Mr C Smith Mr R Laird Mr B Lobban

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was noted that the Leader of the Council was to meet with the Northern Manager, Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), on the following day and would raise all local issues which had been identified;
- there was serious concern about the scale of what was being proposed and the lack of consultation, not least in terms of the events connected to RBS in recent years;
- if these proposals went ahead, RBS would have closed almost half of all their branches in Scotland;
- the Council had called on the UK Government to intervene and it was a matter of regret that this had been refused;
- the Northern Manager of RBS had already had some local meetings and it was clear that there was no real understanding of local arrangements and how this would impact on smaller Highland areas in particular;
- mobile banking had been proposed as an alternative by RBS but they had failed to recognise that many mobile banks did not have disabled access or waiting rooms and were often only available once a week at best and dependent on people being able to travel to their locations;

- these proposals would have the most detrimental effect on vulnerable and elderly members of the Highland population, as well as many small businesses;
- RBS had also failed to realise that many people in the Highlands were still not able to receive broadband connections;
- RBS had also suggested that use could be made of Post Offices but again this was not possible as RBS currently had no agreements in place to allow this to happen;
- there was general agreement that contact should now be made with Post Office Limited at a national level to discuss this situation and any possible arrangements which could perhaps be put in place for the future;
- it was clear from these proposals that RBS did not have the interests of Scotland at heart and as such it was hoped that people would now seek alternative banking arrangements in future;
- it was regrettable that in many cases these decisions had been taken to close branches with no consideration of local circumstances;
- one of the branches which had been listed for closure was located in Tain where internet banking was not available and there were no viable alternative premises which could be used for banking by local residents;
- it had to be recognised that previous branch closures by RBS had had extremely detrimental effects on the areas concerned;
- there was real concern about the false information currently being provided by RBS to their customers in terms of future use of Post Offices as an alternative as this was simply not true;
- removal of the last remaining cash machines from local areas would cause serious difficulties for not just local residents but also tourists in the area;
- there had previously been calls for the UK Government to make the Post Office a Universal Bank and it was regretted that this opportunity had been missed;
- there was a serious risk that businesses could be lost to the Highlands as a result of this programme of closures;
- no detailed statistics had been made available by RBS to back-up claims of under-use of local branches;
- there was a need to petition the remaining banks in smaller areas across the Highlands to stay open and not to consider future closures; and
- in relation to the concerns of the current RBS employees in the areas identified for branch closures, it was imperative that Union representatives entered into discussion with RBS at a national level, not least to ensure that their current programme of recruitment in the UK and elsewhere (which was ongoing) would take account of their current employees in the first instance in order to redistribute work (thereby keeping branches open) and avoid and/or minimise redundancies in all cases.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

11. Local Fire & Rescue Plan for Highland Plana Smalaidh & Teasairginn Ionadail

There had been circulated Report No. HC/46/17 dated 5 December 2017 by the Deputy Assistant Chief Officer John MacDonald.

In this regard, the Plan had been circulated separately.

As part of a presentation at the meeting by Mr R Middlemiss (Local Senior Officer), it was confirmed that the Plan, which had a focus on local outcomes, set out six local priorities which had been informed by a review of the current Local Fire and Rescue Plan, the opinions of the public and partners which had been collected from a series of engagement events across the Highland area and feedback from an online survey.

In this regard, detailed and specific information was also provided on the methodology used in development of the Plan and included a list of consultation outcomes, including comments made by Members at the full Council meeting on 7 September.

During discussion, Members welcomed the significant progress which had been made over recent years, with particular reference to improved travel times, recruitment, new vehicles, the adoption of a more flexible approach and measures taken to ensure the retention of rural stations.

Reference was also made to the current joint working arrangements with NHS Highland and the programme of home visits – both of which were considered to be working well.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED** the new Local Fire & Rescue Plan for Highland as circulated.

12. Budget Update Cunntas as Ur mun Bhuidseat

There had been circulated Report No. HC/47/17 dated 4 December 2017 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to Officers for submission of this report in what were extremely challenging circumstances;
- it would be important for Members to prioritise services as part of the forthcoming budget discussions but it was recognised that this would be very difficult;
- both the Leader and Councillor MacKinnon were to travel to London in early January to discuss with Ministers the possibility of write-off of the historical housing debt and a report back on this would follow in due course;
- there was a need for further clarity on the Capital allocation from the Scottish Government;
- confirmation from the Scottish Government that a recommendation from the Barclay Review of Business Rates (for the proposed end to charity relief for Arms-Length External Organisations) was not to be implemented was welcomed;
- further clarification of undeliverable prior year savings was required and it was disappointing that they could now become budget additions in the coming year;
- it would be important for any changes/reductions in the Capital Programme to be phased in wherever possible in order to minimise the impact on communities across the Highlands who were expecting current projects to be delivered;

- it would be helpful if future opportunities identified through the new Commercial Board could be implemented in as quick a timescale as possible;
- it was noted that nearly 200 ideas had been generated by staff in relation to the budget gap and as such further information in this regard was required from a financial perspective;
- stark advice had been received from the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources in relation to the affordability of the current Capital Programme and very difficult decisions therefore lay ahead for Members in terms of future priorities to be identified;
- in regard to the Capital Programme, it was noted that current priorities for the Administration included schools, roads, bridges and flood schemes;
- in terms of the review of the Capital Programme, it was recognised that the Council would have to spend less and in this regard there would have to be a greater focus on obtaining value for money through procurement and building processes in relation to capital projects;
- whilst the current communication with staff was welcomed, it had to be about more than just asking for budget saving ideas and as such it was imperative that all staff were fully briefed on the current budget situation so that they could be fully informed prior to decisions being made in February;
- it would be important for all Members of the Council to agree the final budget and also to agree the priorities to be taken forward;
- in terms of future discussion on the Capital Programme, it was vital that there was a clear rationale for the projects to be maintained and also for those which might have to be removed;
- the input to date from the Opposition Groups was welcomed and it was hoped that this consensus could be continued with the final budget proposals in February;
- in terms of future borrowing, it was important to highlight that currently low interest rates were not likely to continue in the long term and this would have implications for the Council;
- there was concern in relation to how budgets were built and specifically vacancy monitoring (which often led to vacancies being frozen with a resultant negative effect on services) and it was hoped that consideration could be given to changing this approach if possible in the future;
- it was of major concern that, using a flexible approach based on a number of key assumptions and the scenario of a 3.5% reduction in Scottish Government funding, a budget gap of £159.2m was forecast over the next five years;
- it also had to be highlighted that areas where there was limited or no scope to reduce budgets included teachers' salaries, adult social care, key contractual commitments, loans charges, direct ring-fencing of budgets and council tax;
- communication of the current position was vital as it was recognised that the most vulnerable people across the Highlands would be affected most by any withdrawal of current services; and
- representations should be made to the Scottish Government whenever possible for the allocation of funding to allow the production of multi-year budgets which would greatly help with future planning of vital services across the Highland area.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** that there were no changes to the anticipated budget gap at this time.

The Council also **NOTED** the progress to date in tackling the budget gap.

13. **Redesign of Highland Council – Progress Report** **Ath-dhealbhadh Chomhairle na Gaidhealtachd – Aithisg Adhartais**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/48/17 dated 5 December 2017 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, and following a summary of progress to date, Members raised the following issues:-

- in response to a query as to the timescale for completion of the various strands of work currently being undertaken, it was confirmed that it was envisaged that the work of the Board would continue indefinitely;
- in this regard, the work being undertaken represented a change of culture across the Council and this would take time;
- it was noted that links would be made between the Redesign and Commercial Boards of the Council in terms of outcomes;
- there were concerns about non-payment of invoices in certain areas, including music tuition and school meals, and in this respect it was noted that a report on music tuition was to be presented to the Redesign Board in the following week;
- in relation to car parking, it was stressed that any proposals for future charging arrangements had to be submitted to Local Committees in the first instance for initial consideration;
- the work and involvement of staff in the Redesign Board had been exemplary and this had to be acknowledged; and
- future actions included work to support more community run services (linked to developing localism) and all Members of the Council were therefore invited to participate in this work as it was recognised that it would vary across different areas of the Highlands.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- (i) the Board's growing programme of reviews, with five peer reviews underway, a new peer review to be undertaken and new areas for Lean reviews. Recommendations from current peer reviews would be made by early 2018 and in time to feed into the budget process;
- (ii) that Board workshops were open to all Members to attend and that Members could propose areas for review to the Board;
- (iii) the positive engagement with staff in the 16 local briefings carried out between October and December. Nine Board members including trade union representatives and two further members participated. Over 500 staff took part in the briefings and generated nearly 200 ideas and issues to explore. These were being considered in the relevant budget theme groups as well as the Redesign Board. Feedback to staff was being arranged; and
- (iv) the Board had begun to develop its communication plan and this would continue over the next few months.

14. **Corporate Plan 2017-22** **Plana Corporra 2017-22**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/49/17 dated 4 December 2017 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to Senior Staff, and in particular the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager, for compilation of the report and the terms of the Corporate Plan;
- it should be noted that, although this was a 5 year Plan, this was just the start of a process and there were some very short dates (1 year to 18 months) for bringing issues back for discussion;
- it had to be highlighted that this was the beginning of a true programme of change as it was anticipated that the Council would evolve very quickly over the next five year period;
- a Seminar would be arranged for March 2018 in order to allow full consideration of a range of issues, including localism proposals, area boundaries, future budgeting (including the raising and retention of funds in local areas where possible), etc and also the final outcomes from the Commission on Highland Democracy report;
- it was imperative that steps were taken across the Council to fully understand and work more closely with local communities in future;
- further more detailed information/clarification was required in terms of the themes/priorities (and associated measures/actions) which had been listed in the report, most particularly in terms of improvements which could be implemented in each case;
- it would be important for detailed consideration to be given to the relationship between Area Committees and budgets in order to resolve issues related to how and where charges were raised and whether funds received could be retained within specific areas;
- it would be important to refine some of the measures highlighted in the report in order to ensure that lives were being improved across the Highland area wherever possible;
- the stated theme of partnership working in order to deliver future services was welcomed;
- whilst welcoming the proposals to regenerate town centres, it had to be accepted that this would be extremely challenging;
- high standards had to be maintained as a priority;
- the provision of superfast broadband across the Highland area was imperative;
- this had to be viewed as a 'living document' which was capable of being changed and reviewed over time as necessary; and
- it would be important to maintain a focus on the work being undertaken through the Gaelic Strategy Implementation Group.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **APPROVED** the Corporate Plan for 2017-22 as circulated;
- (ii) **NOTED** that the Plan would support the delivery of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan;
- (iii) **NOTED** that the Plan would be the subject of an Annual Performance Report in September of each year; and
- (iv) **NOTED** that the Plan was normally reviewed following the Annual Performance Report to Council and any changes would be submitted to the Council for approval.

**15. Proposals for Changes to the Governance of Education
Ath-sgrudadh Riaghladh Foghlaim**

Declaration of Interest – Mrs A MacLean declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of a family member being a Head Teacher but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/50/17 dated 4 December 2017 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the priority had to be a focus on what was best for children in terms of the provision of education and as such there was no evidence that a change in governance led to improvements in attainment levels;
- there had to be an increase in resources in classrooms before any significant improvements could be achieved;
- the Cabinet Secretary had already stated that he was satisfied with the arrangements in the Highland area and it was therefore questioned as to why the area should have to follow the proposals for change;
- it had to be highlighted that the Highland area was different from the rest of Scotland and it was definitely not the case that ‘one size fits all’;
- future inspection arrangements should be undertaken by a separate independent body;
- the proposals represented a further increase in responsibilities for Head Teachers and a lessening of the role of Local Authorities in the education system in Scotland and this was regretted;
- the creation of an additional layer of bureaucracy was causing concern amongst teachers and this could only worsen the current recruitment difficulties in the area;
- there was concern about the costs of setting up any new arrangements at a time of severe budget constraints in the Highland area;
- further detailed information was required in regard to the setting up of Regional Improvement Collaboratives, particularly in the Highlands;
- in contrast to the issues which had already been raised, it was felt that the tone of the report was unduly negative and that it lacked balance in terms of the presentation of the new proposals;
- it had to be appreciated that this was a consultation period which allowed concerns to be discussed and debated before publication of a final report;
- there was much to be welcomed in the Cabinet Secretary’s proposals, including a shared ambition to improve education and the life chances of all children and young people;
- it was felt that Regional Improvement Collaboratives would allow more direct access to professional educational support when needed;
- it had been stated in the report that Head Teachers had not expressed support for the proposals and had raised a number of concerns but this had to be viewed under the management of change and issues addressed in that regard;
- it was a concern that the People Committee had not yet had a chance to consider the terms of this report;
- this was a consultation period and as part of that there was a need for a request to be made to the Scottish Government to pause and reconsider issues such as the potential removal of local accountability and scrutiny;

- as had been stated earlier, there was a need to submit responses in the first instance and wait until the consultation period had finished before taking a stance on the final proposals;
- the provision of additional powers for Head Teachers and Schools had been sought in the past and this was what was now being proposed by the Scottish Government;
- in considering the detail of the proposals, it had to be acknowledged that the Highland Council had a poor track record to date in relation to children in care; and
- as part of the consideration of the proposals, there was a need to recognise the outstanding work currently being undertaken by Teachers across the Highlands.

Thereafter, Mr G MacKenzie, seconded by Mr R Laird, **MOVED** that the Council should be asked to 'note' (as opposed to 'endorse') the approach and conclusions set out at the end of the report and that (following consultation with partner authorities in the Northern Alliance and at CoSLA) the response should be finalised at the meeting of the People Committee in January 2018.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, moved the recommendations as detailed in the report.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 16 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 47 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr C Fraser, Ms E Knox, Mr R Laird, Mr D Louden, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs P Munro, Mr K Rosie and Ms M Smith.

For the Amendment:

Mr G Adam, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mr G Cruickshank, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr A Jarvie, Mr B Lobban, Mr R MacDonald, Mr D MacKay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D MacLeod, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Mr P Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Ms N Sinclair, Mr C Smith, Ms K Stephen and Mr B Thompson.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the proposals within the report;
- (ii) **AGREED** to endorse the approach and conclusions set out at the end of the report; and
- (iii) **AGREED** that the Council's response should take account of further consultations, including with Partner Authorities in the Northern Alliance and at CoSLA, and be finalised by the Strategic Chair in consultation with the Council Leader and the Chief Executive.

16. Tourism Development Aithisg Suidheachadh Turasachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/51/17 dated 4 December 2017 by the Director of Development & Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- whilst the considerable benefits of tourism in the Highlands were welcomed, it had to be acknowledged that there was a disconnect between tourist spend and the cost of services being provided;
- in light of the above, and in line with other locations (both nationally and internationally), the proposal for the introduction of a Transient Visitor Levy (TVL) based on bed nights to grow revenue for infrastructure investment was welcomed;
- it had to be noted that introduction of a TVL of £1 could represent an additional £10m for the Highlands and this could be spent on infrastructure projects for the benefit of all;
- it was hoped that this issue could be further discussed with the Scottish Government and that the Leader could also raise the matter at CoSLA;
- it was hoped that proposals for a TVL could be taken forward as a matter of urgency as it was imperative that the best possible experience could be provided for tourists;
- the setting up of the proposed Tourism Working Group was also welcomed and it was suggested that Group Leaders should be consulted in the first instance on the composition of this Group;
- there was however concern that the introduction of a TVL might deter tourists, not least if it was increased over time;
- there was a need to reassure communities that a percentage of the TVL would be reinvested locally;
- there was a role for the Federation of Small Businesses in these proposals and it was hoped that they would enter into discussions with the Council and partners in future;
- above all, the additional funding raised from a TVL (which required to be seasonally and locally appropriate) could provide significant improvements to infrastructure in the area and this could only enhance the visitor experience.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the significance of tourism to the Highland economy and welcomed the levels of growth witnessed in recent years;
- (ii) **AGREED** to identify Council resources to provide financial support that allowed Event Scotland and their partners to bid for future major international events to be hosted in Highland;
- (iii) **APPROVED** the setting up of a Tourism Working Group within the Council to take a strategic overview of and set priorities for the Council's contribution to addressing the issues described in the report; and
- (iv) **AGREED** that Group Leaders would be consulted on the composition of the Working Group.

17. Talent Attraction, Retention and Returns Aithisg Taladh Talaint

There had been circulated Report No. HC/52/17 dated 4 December 2017 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- congratulations should be conveyed to Officers for the work undertaken on this report at short notice and to Councillor K Currie for raising the issue at a recent meeting;
- the loss of young people from the Highland area was a major issue and as such the strategic approach to workforce planning which had been highlighted in the report was welcomed, not least in relation to the collation of data which would aid forward planning;
- it was imperative that good quality opportunities were made available to young people to encourage them to remain in the area as statistics proved that at present the percentage of people aged between 18-34 who were living and working in the Highlands was significantly below the national average;
- the emphasis on the Community Planning Partnership was also welcomed as all stakeholders in the Highlands had a role to play in the retention of young people;
- regular communication had to be maintained with UHI in this regard and it was suggested that regular updates/presentations to the Council might be helpful in future; and
- in addition to the focus on the retention of young people, a clear message should also be conveyed to EU nationals who were currently living and working in the area in order to make them aware that they were both valued and welcomed in the Highlands.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- (i) the workforce sustainability challenges facing the Council;
- (ii) the importance of collaboration with partners to develop a Talent Attraction, Retention and Returns Strategy and Action Plan; and
- (iii) the requirement to prepare for the workforce challenges presented by Brexit.

18. Scheme of Delegation and Administration to Strategic Committees and Sub Committees and to Officers Raòn Ughdarrais agus Rianachd gu Comataidhean Ro-innleachdail agus Fochomataidhean agus gu Oifigearan

The Council **AGREED** inclusion of the following wording within Part IV - Powers Delegated to Officers – Chief Executive's Office - Corporate Governance – Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 – Part 5:-

'Section 144 – to revoke a rent suspension order (i) if an HMO (house in multiple occupation) licence has subsequently been granted to the owner of the living accommodation concerned, or (ii) if satisfied, on the application of any person, that the living accommodation concerned is no longer an HMO, or (iii) in the case of a rent suspension order made in respect of breach of an HMO licence condition, if satisfied that the condition is no longer being breached or that the living accommodation concerning is no longer an HMO' – delegated to the Head of Corporate Governance and Principal Solicitor (Regulatory Services).

19. Deeds Executed
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

It was **NOTED** that a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 26 October 2017 was available in the Members' Library and on the Council's Website.

The meeting ended at 4.55pm.

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The Highland Council
No. 7 2017/2018

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 15 February 2018 at 10.30am.

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
A' Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr B Lobban
Mr B Allan	Mr D Louden
Mr R Balfour	Mrs L MacDonald
Mrs J Barclay	Mr R MacDonald
Mr A Baxter	Mrs D MacKay
Mr B Boyd	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Bremner	Mr W MacKay
Mr I Brown	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Bruce	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs C Caddick	Mr S Mackie
Mrs I Campbell	Mr A Mackinnon
Miss J Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr C MacLeod
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr D MacLeod
Mr A Christie	Mr D Macpherson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs M Cockburn	Mrs B McAllister
Mr G Cruickshank	Mr J McGillivray
Ms K Currie	Mr N McLean
Mrs M Davidson	Mr H Morrison
Mr J Finlayson	Ms L Munro
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs P Munro
Mr C Fraser	Mr M Reiss
Mr L Fraser	Mr A Rhind
Mr R Gale	Mrs F Robertson
Mr J Gordon	Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr K Rosie
Mr A Graham	Mr G Ross
Mr J Gray	Mr P Saggars
Mr T Heggie	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Henderson	Ms N Sinclair
Mr A Jarvie	Mr C Smith
Ms E Knox	Mr B Thompson
Mr R Laird	Mrs C Wilson

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	Director of Care and Learning
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources	Director of Community Services
Director of Development & Infrastructure	

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms P Hadley, Mrs M Smith, Mrs M Paterson, Ms K Stephen and Mr I Ramon.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

The Council **NOTED** the declarations of interest as set out in Appendix 1 to these Minutes.

**3. Membership of the Council
Ballrachd na Comhairle**

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, warm tributes were paid to the late Councillor Billy MacLachlan who had been an extremely hard working and dedicated Member of the Council and especially in his Caol and Mallaig Ward where he would be greatly missed by all who had known him.

In this regard, the condolences of the Council were conveyed to his family and friends.

It was also noted that a By-Election for Ward 11 (Caol and Mallaig) had been arranged and would be held on Thursday, 5 April 2018.

**4. Revenue Budget 2018/19
Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2018/19**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/1/18 dated 7 February 2018 by the Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources which outlined the budget gap of £15.146m facing the Council in 2018/19 and introduced the Administration Group's proposals for meeting this gap and delivering a balanced budget.

The report also made proposals for Council Tax rates in 2018-19.

In presenting the report, the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that the Council faced a continuing squeeze on its finances and over the past seven years £132m of budget savings had been needed in order to balance the budget. For the financial year 2018/19, a budget gap of £15.146m had been identified and this had required to be met by making savings or increasing income. As such, the work done to close this gap had focused activity on five key areas, namely prioritisation, efficiency, income, commercialism and redesign (with the area of increased income being given a high priority).

As part of the Scottish Government Revenue Grant, the Council had received £443.833m and once new expenditure commitments (required as part of the settlement) had been excluded, this broadly equated to a flat cash settlement. Whilst this settlement figure had been welcomed as a significant improvement on the previously assumed position, it had to be noted that a flat cash settlement at a time of significant cost increases (most notably round pay) did still leave the Council with a requirement to make a number of savings. Also, the timing of the Scottish Government's budget announcements had not given ample time for planning for the new financial year and one year only settlements did not assist with medium term financial planning. As such, a request would be made to the Scottish Government for greater clarity over future financial settlements in future in order for a more balanced approach to budgeting to be taken.

In relation to Loans Charges and Capital Expenditure, it was confirmed that, in the financial year 2017/18, the loans charges budget was £56.7m which represented 10% of the Council's overall revenue budget. Once financing costs included in other

budget lines were added, the Council's overall borrowing costs as a proportion of net revenue budget increased to over 13% which was the fifth highest in Scotland. As such, and in his capacity as the Council's Section 95 Officer, the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources advised Members not to increase the budget available for loans charges in order to ensure continued compliance with CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance. A revised Capital Programme would be brought to the next Council meeting in March and it was suggested that Members should agree to the principle of this Programme being affordable within the current loans charges budget.

Information was also provided at this point on the specific proposals for meeting the budget gap of £15.146m as follows –

Already Agreed Savings - £1.260m
3% Council Tax Increase - £3.448m
New Income Generation Proposals - £3.059m
Service Savings - £5.129m
Redesign Savings - £2.250m

In regard to the staffing impact of the budget proposals, it was confirmed that the level of reductions was considerably lower than had been anticipated. However, due to the uncertainty around the funding settlement in early January, Council Officers had implemented their obligation to initiate statutory collective compulsory redundancy consultation with Trade Unions and the stress of this situation was acknowledged. In this respect, representations were to be made to the Scottish Government that, whilst the last minute increases to funding levels had been welcomed, the current national budget process had had a hugely negative effect on the wellbeing of Highland Council employees.

Also, and in relation to the focus which had been given to proposals which did not have staffing implications, it was suggested that the Council could no longer continue to protect frontline services in future at the expense of professional support services which had already been significantly reduced in previous years. As such, it was highlighted that continued reduction of these professional support services would represent a high risk in terms of non-compliance and lack of governance over future projects.

A key message from Audit Scotland had been the need for Councils to have in place 'robust medium term financial strategies and effective leadership to deliver them' and as such it was intended that work should commence immediately to develop a medium term financial strategy for Highland Council which could be in place for the period 2019/20 to 2021/22. This strategy would align with broader Council strategies and plans (including the Corporate Plan, the Workforce Strategy and Asset Management Plans), and would consider key financial items, including borrowing and reserves.

Specifically in relation to Reserves and Balances, it was advised that, based on the Quarter 2 monitoring position, a year-end balance of £8.674m was forecast for the un-earmarked General Fund reserve. This represented just over 1.5% of the annual Revenue Budget and was expected to reduce further once the Quarter 3 monitoring was finalised. It was considered that such a low level of balances would leave the Council exposed to any significant risk events in 2018/19, give little ability to support future developments and offer little opportunity to mitigate any 2018/19 budget savings not delivered. As such, it was stressed that replenishing reserves had to be a priority (rather than an option) in the following year.

Finally, and whilst no decision had yet been reached on pay awards for Council employees, it had been considered prudent to budget for a pay award in line with that proposed by the Scottish Government, namely a 3% rise for those earning up to £36,500 with a 2% rise for those earning in excess of that amount, capped at a maximum award of £1,600. In addition, the Council required to budget for the full year effect of the 2017/18 2% pay award for teachers. The total anticipated cost of these pay awards was £9.360m and, whilst the constraints which had been applied to staff pay in recent years were recognised, the requirement to fund a pay award of this magnitude did place considerable strain on the Council resources.

The Budget Leader expressed thanks to the Chief Executive, the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and his staff, the other Directors and the budget team for the considerable work undertaken and the support provided in regard to the budget process.

It was felt that the proposals from the Administration represented a positive response to the current financial circumstances and left the Council in a much better position than had been anticipated. However, whilst the additional funding which had been provided by the Scottish Government was welcomed, this had been a very unsettling period for all concerned and the Council would continue to lobby for multi-year budget settlements in future (as opposed to the current one year settlement) and for earlier notification of grant settlement figures.

Representations would also be made to both the UK and Scottish Governments for additional capital funding and bringing reserves and balances up to a more satisfactory level remained a priority, along with the exploration of commercial and other income generating opportunities.

The priority given to Roads, Winter Maintenance, Care & Learning and frontline staff was highlighted and it was again reiterated that staff were the Council's greatest asset. Avoidance of compulsory redundancies was particularly welcomed and it was confirmed that vacancies would continue to be monitored as and when they arose and redeployment opportunities offered where and when necessary. Along with the implementation of the Workforce Strategy Plan, a zero based budgeting exercise would now be undertaken which was expected to provide further efficiencies over time.

At this point, the Budget Leader confirmed that he was moving the recommendations within the report as a fair and balanced budget for all and this was seconded by the Depute Leader of the Council.

The Depute Leader of the SNP Group expressed disappointment at the theme of recent press statements by the Administration and also the narrative within the budget report which appeared to place blame on the Scottish Government (despite the additional funding which had been received which equated to a flat cash settlement).

Also, there appeared to have been blame directed towards Council Officers and specifically the Director of Care & Learning in regard to the presentation of initial savings proposals (despite these having come forward from a political level as opposed to an Officer level) and the SNP Group (who had been accused of scaremongering when in fact they had been exercising their rightful scrutiny role as the largest Opposition Group on the Council).

Whilst welcoming the avoidance of compulsory redundancies and the proposals for implementation of a zero based budgeting exercise, it was however contended that

responsibility for the overall budget process and the current budget gap lay with the Administration (and not the Scottish Government) and leadership was required in terms of dealing with this situation now and in future years.

It was also regrettable that, despite previous confirmation that it would be submitted to this meeting for consideration, the Capital Budget had now been delayed until the March meeting of the Council which continued the uncertainty for many people and businesses across the Highlands.

The Leader of the Scottish Conservative Group conveyed thanks to all those involved in the fair and balanced budget which was being presented and considered that his own Group had been a positive influence in what was their first budget, not least in the protection of frontline services which had always been a high priority. Particular thanks were conveyed to Officers for the time and patience given to Group Members to enable them to feed into proposals to save the Council money and pursue more commercial endeavours. Specifically, proposals in regard to mental health provision and the new MOT Test Centre had been provided by the Group, along with proposals in respect of foster carers, looked after children, burial charges and refuse collection authorisations.

Despite the Scottish Government focus on community empowerment and localism, it appeared that Local Government was still being asked to do more for less and in this regard it was suggested that development of further areas of taxation (as an alternative to the current Council Tax system) had to be developed at a national level, along with the provision of multi-year budget settlements for Councils in future.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group made reference to the current budget setting arrangements and in particular the notification of the grant settlement figure from the Scottish Government which was invariably not received until late in the year and subject to further change thereafter (as had been the case this year). As such, the budget process within Highland Council had once again been a direct consequence of what happened elsewhere and this was not beneficial for anyone, not least because the Council had had to plan for every eventuality which had caused concern for many in the interim. Also, and as had been stated by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources, the Council would have needed a 2.7% increase in the grant figure just to 'stand still' and this had not happened.

In addition to the constraints which the previous Council Tax freeze had placed on Councils, a current one year settlement figure did not allow for medium or long term planning which again was to the detriment of Council Services. As such, there appeared to be little evidence that Local Government was a priority for the Scottish Government and whilst the budget proposals which were being presented were considered to be the best options available to the Council, there was concern that once again the most vulnerable members of society would be most disadvantaged. It was therefore imperative that all Members of the Council pursued fair and equitable funding for the provision of services in the unique Highland area in future.

During general discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that a 'flat cash settlement' for the Highland Council was actually a 'cut' in real terms and this budget was the best which could be presented under these circumstances;
- the freezing of Council Tax over recent years had meant a loss of income for Councils and this had caused considerable problems;

- earlier notification of the grant settlement figure and the opportunity for multi-year budgets to be considered would be ideal and would help not just the Council but also partners across the Highland area;
- it should be noted that Highland Council was currently one of the top 10 Councils in terms of funding in Scotland and this compared very favourably with the situation for Councils in England and Wales;
- it had been identified that the cost of living in rural areas of the Highlands was 40% higher than elsewhere in the area and this proved that funding was not sufficient;
- it would be helpful if all political groups within the Highland Council could be fully involved in the budget process;
- the poor condition of roads across the Highland area was of particular concern, not least in terms of the potential detrimental effect on tourism in future;
- there was an acknowledgement that difficult discussions had been held within the Administration in regard to the Capital Programme but it was hoped that final decisions could be reached following debate at the next meeting;
- the leaking of early budget proposals to the local media had caused considerable and serious distress to many people throughout the Highlands, not least because many people did not fully understand the budget process, and this was very much regretted;
- the grant settlement was a very complicated and complex process which many experienced Council staff often struggled with in terms of final figures and this was not a good situation for anyone. Also, there had been no mention within these figures of the cost to the Council of just 'standing still';
- there had been mention of budget consultation being undertaken by the Council but many people (within and outwith the Council) had been unaware of this consultation; and
- it was almost impossible to challenge the figures presented as part of the budget process whilst looking for an alternative approach, mainly because of the complexities of the current financial journal system, and it was hoped that this could be updated or amended to make this easier in future (perhaps through a system of zero based budgeting with accurate/updated information).

At this point, and prior to consideration of Booklet A – Summary of Proposed Budget Savings – the Council **AGREED** a 3% increase in Council Tax as detailed in Section 8.4 of the report.

Thereafter, specific Service related issues were raised by Members as follows:-

Care & Learning

CL6 – Family Teams – Reduce Staffing in Family Teams – suggested that this proposal would disproportionately impact rural and vulnerable groups across the Highland area and lead to a diminution of service.

CL8 – Other Leisure Services – Reduction in Eden Court Funding – suggested that this reduction in funding should be re-considered as Eden Court was a much needed resource for the whole of the Highlands and beyond and was open to everyone, including those with disabilities and the vulnerable. Also, it was felt that the Council had a duty to support and encourage the creative outreach programme for young people in particular and this could be put at risk if this proposal went ahead.

CL10 – Services for Adults – Reduce budget for Adult Support Services – suggested that the 10% reduction for Women’s Aid groups would place more pressure on Family Teams at a time when their staffing was also being reduced (as above).

Also, the report stated that the reduction of funding to Blindcraft of 10% would involve a ‘slight impact’ on service but it was suggested that this was questionable and that the impact could in fact be considerable.

CL17 – Childcare and Early Learning – Reduce financial support to childcare providers – suggested that early intervention was crucial and this proposal would be detrimental for all concerned and could also lead to the withdrawal of services by partners.

Chief Executive’s Office

CEO1 – Operational Management Areas – Reduce residual Ward Discretionary Budget by 50% - it was noted that a proposed amendment had been received for the inclusion of a qualifying clause that Sutherland Wards 1 & 4 should be exempted and that each should retain the previously agreed amount of £31,798 – with the revenue cost to the Council being £31,798 (and compensatory funding coming from the Capital budget). (This amendment was not seconded at the meeting)

CEO2 – Policy & Reform – Reduce Community Council grants – it was noted that a proposed amendment had been received for the inclusion of a qualifying clause that Sutherland Community Councils should be exempted from this proposal and that they should retain their previous full amount of funding – with the estimated revenue cost to the Council being £6,000 in the coming financial year (and compensatory funding coming from the Capital budget). (This amendment was not seconded at the meeting).

Corporate Resources

CR2 – Customer Services – Efficiency Savings – the report had stated that there was scope to manage the workload across the Service more efficiently which would be enabled by ‘fit for purpose IT’ but this was questioned in terms of the operation of the current system and the issues which had been experienced. Also, there was mention of the ‘effective management of vacant posts’ and the ‘scope for new partnership working’ but both of these issues had been contained in previous reports in previous years and it was suggested that more specific detail was now required in terms of implementation.

CR3 – Service Wide – Efficiencies across the new enlarged Service delivered by process improvements including the more effective use of IT – as with CR2 above, it was suggested that more specific detail was required in terms of how this particular saving would be achieved.

Community Services

CS1 – Amenity Services – Review of all Play Areas – suggested that there were real issues with the proposal to remove play equipment which was no longer considered to be ‘fit for purpose’ and the way in which this was to be undertaken. Specifically, there was a real possibility that many communities across the Highlands would now be left with no provision whatsoever and this would severely impact young people in particular in those areas. Also, the proposed removal of 2 FTE posts would prevent the replacement of any equipment as new equipment required to be regularly inspected.

It had been stated that a more strategic approach to providing outdoor play facilities was being developed and that discussion was being undertaken with the Care and Learning Alliance, Highland Third Sector Interface and other third sector partners to explore opportunities. In this regard, it was suggested that this should be completed before any further action was taken.

CS5 – Car Parks – Charging for Parking and Services – suggested that an economic impact study should have been undertaken in relation to this proposal in the first instance, as well as discussion at Local Committee level, as there were real concerns about the potential impact on rural communities in particular and also the effect on the Nairn BID and Nairn Town Centre where it was vital to encourage and maintain local trade (not least in view of the forthcoming By-Pass which it was feared could have a detrimental effect on shopping in Nairn). In addition, two of the identified car parks were not in fact in the ownership of the Council and it was hoped that they could be removed.

In terms of the proposed saving of £1.407m, there had been discussion and consideration of this issue by the Redesign Board and through the Peer Review process but to date no detailed proposals had come forward. As such, there was concern that this target saving was being passed to the Redesign Board which would considerably change the remit of the Board.

Overall, there was a need for further consultation and detailed analysis of local area circumstances (including Nairn, Dingwall and Alness) before any further action was taken on this proposal. In this regard, the commitment which had been given for all selected sites to be subject to more detailed review and consultation prior to implementation was welcomed.

It was however highlighted that charges were currently already being levied in some parts of the Highlands and this proposal would introduce tariffs which were very competitive compared to both the private sector and other similar facilities provided in the Highland area and nationally.

CS9 – Environmental Health – Uplift current Environmental Health Fees & Charges by 10% - suggested that the proposed uplift in current fees and charges, specifically in relation to Fish Export Certificates, could cause considerable difficulties for local companies and as such there was a need to reconsider this proposal in order to remain competitive. Specifically, the increases which had already been introduced in this regard in the previous year had been contentious with customers within the industry and had led to representations being made to the Council, MPs, MSPs, Council Members and Trade Organisations and a repeat of this situation would be detrimental for all concerned.

CS15 – Integrated Transport Services – New Charges – Establish an MOT Test Centre – suggested that the proposed income figure should be increased by £10k with this additional sum being put towards the supply of grit bins.

CS16 – Lighting Services – Communities to provide their own Christmas Lights – suggested that this proposal (which equated to a saving of £35k) would impact on communities across the Highlands. Also, other savings proposals in relation to reductions in the Ward Discretionary budgets and Community Council grants would mean that it would now be more difficult for communities to access funding from those budgets as an alternative. As such, there should be consultation at Local Committee level before any further action was taken on this proposal.

CS17 – Public Conveniences – Review of Public Conveniences – whilst it was acknowledged that a review of public conveniences was required, it was suggested that this particular proposal did not fit with the aims of localism and community empowerment which had previously been agreed by the Council. If this proposal went ahead, it would particularly impact remote and rural areas (not least in terms of tourism) and as such there should have been meaningful and constructive engagement with local communities in the first instance.

It was also suggested that consideration should be given to the potential transfer of public conveniences to local ownership where this was feasible.

CS32 – Flood Alleviation – Reduce Flood Alleviation Budget – there was real concern about the impact on properties at risk of flooding and on rural communities in particular in relation to reducing this budget (thereby leaving little budget available for flood alleviation works). Also, it was being proposed that works identified through watercourse inspections would require to be funded from the Area Roads Budgets or (if significant) through the Capital Programme which was not considered to be acceptable.

Development & Infrastructure

DI3 – Flood Risk Assessment – Reduce revenue budget for flood risk management – suggested that the proposed revenue reduction of £140k (leaving an annual budget of £24k which would be augmented by the Flood Risk Management Plan budget line in the proposed Capital Programme under Flood Protection) represented a major risk, particularly in relation to any potential future increase in project costs.

DI11 – Energy & Sustainability – Increase in Renewable Heat Incentive budget to reflect current income and new projects – suggested that more detail was required in terms of this savings proposal.

DI12 – Service Wide – Deletion of vacant posts and vacancy management – suggested that further detail was also required in terms of this savings proposal.

Redesign – Corporate Target

In regard to the corporate savings target of £2.250m which had been allocated for redesign, it was suggested that more detail was required in terms of this particular proposal. Specifically, there was concern that this would change the ethos of the Redesign Board process and that this figure would in fact be unachievable within the required timescale.

Thereafter - and on the basis that the Budget Leader, seconded by the Depute Leader of the Council, had already **MOVED** the recommendations within the report –

Mr R Laird, seconded by Mr D Loudon, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that determination of the savings proposals in Booklets A/B and in Paragraph 9.2 of the report should be deferred to enable alternatives to be produced and the implications to be properly considered. Also, that determination of the loans budget for loans charges should be deferred to enable it to be considered alongside the Capital Budget.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 47 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 19 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr A MacKinnon; Mr A Christie; Mr D Macpherson; Mr R Balfour; Miss J Campbell; Mrs C Wilson; Mr G Ross; Mr L Fraser; Mr T Heggie; Mrs B McAllister; Mrs D MacKay; Mr A Jarvie; Mr G Cruickshank; Mr J Gordon; Mr R MacDonald; Mr H Morrison; Mr J Finlayson; Mr B Thompson; Mr M Finlayson; Mr R Gale; Mr G Adam; Mr A Graham; Mr D MacLeod; Mr P Saggars; Mr J Bruce; Mr W MacKay; Ms N Sinclair; Mr D MacKay; Mr M Reiss; Mrs F Robertson; Mrs I Campbell; Mrs J Barclay; Mrs C Caddick; Mrs A MacLean; Mrs T Robertson; Mr C Smith; Mr S Mackie; Mrs I MacKenzie; Mr A Sinclair; Mr B Lobban; Mr A Henderson; Mrs H Carmichael; Mrs M Davidson; Mr A Baxter; Mr J Gray; Mr J McGillivray and Ms L Munro.

For the Amendment:

Mr R Laird; Mr D Loudon; Mr R Bremner; Ms K Currie; Mr K Rosie; Mr K Gowans; Mr C MacLeod; Mr R MacWilliam; Mr B Boyd; Ms E Knox; Mrs P Munro; Mrs M Cockburn; Mr C Fraser; Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair; Dr I Cockburn; Mrs L MacDonald; Mr G MacKenzie; Mr B Allan and Mr N McLean.

Following further discussion, it was also **AGREED** to accept a proposal from Mr G Cruickshank, seconded by Mr C Smith, that the proposed income figure in relation to establishment of an MOT Test Centre should be increased by £10k with this additional sum being put towards the supply of grit bins. In this regard, it was noted that additional income would not be achievable until 2019/20 so in order to achieve this proposal in 2018/19 the cost would be met from increasing saving CR 9 (Insurance Fund) as an additional one-off contribution.

At this point in the meeting, and in response to earlier comments in relation to the Council's financial procedures and the lack of available information in order to identify alternative budget savings, both the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and the Leader of the Council provided full assurance that the Council had sound financial management in place and this had been confirmed over previous years by the Council's External Auditors and had been specifically mentioned by Audit Scotland in a recent Annual Report. In addition, the Council had performed extremely well in regard to national performance indicators.

Whilst it was acknowledged that it had been difficult for alternative savings proposals to be identified by individual Members due to the complexity of the financial information and the fact that income and expenditure did not always follow a specific pattern, it was highlighted that discussion with both Budget Holders and Accountants could be undertaken in future in order to be fully informed on specific cost centres and that it was expected that further clarity could be provided as part of the forthcoming zero based budgeting exercise.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **AGREED** a 3% increase in Council Tax as detailed in Section 8.4 of the report;
- (ii) **AGREED** the specific proposals for additional income and reduced expenditure as per the savings proposals outlined in Booklet A and detailed in Booklet B. It was also **AGREED** that in relation to CS15 (Integrated Transport Services – New Charges – Establishment of an MOT Test Centre), the proposed income figure should be increased by £10k with this additional sum being put towards the supply of grit bins – in this regard, it

was noted that additional income would not be achievable until 2019/20 so in order to achieve this proposal in 2018/19 the cost would be met from increasing saving CR9 (Insurance Fund) as an additional one-off contribution;

- (iii) **AGREED** to no increase in the revenue budget for loans charges, thereby limiting capital spend to that which could be financed from the current loans charges budget of £56.7m; and
- (iv) **NOTED** the delivery of the savings approved in previous years as outlined in Paragraph 9.2 of the report.

5. **Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Estimates 2018/19** **Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais – Tuairmsean Teachd-a-steach 2018/19**

It was noted that, at its meeting on 25 January 2018, the People Committee had agreed to make recommendations to the Council in relation to the Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Estimates 2018/19.

In this connection, an Extract from the Minutes of that Meeting had been circulated.

During discussion, and on a day of recognising the hard decisions and many challenges facing the Council, it was confirmed that being able to limit the increase to 0.5% for Council House rents in 2018/19 was good news for residents and the Highlands and compared very favourably with the rest of Scotland.

Also, the Council was able to invest more in housing stock, particularly in terms of repairs and maintenance, and there was a need to highlight and welcome the allocation of £28m from the Scottish Government to Highland Council for the Affordable Housing Programme, specifically in terms of this allocation being the second highest in Scotland.

There was also a need to congratulate the staff concerned in the work processes which had helped to facilitate this modest increase and also in relation to the estimated HRA surplus of £4.722m in 2018/19 which would be applied as Capital from Current Revenue to fund HRA capital investment. Overall, this highlighted the possibilities which existed for the Council should it be able to have greater control over its own revenue in future.

It was also suggested that if the current issues with both housing debt and housing legislation could be resolved then it would considerable help with solving the current housing crisis in the Highlands.

Finally, and in relation to the proposal that the next review of the Scheme of Delegation should consider the delegation of the setting of garage rents to Local Committees, it was suggested that the relevant Policy Development Group should also give consideration to the delegation of the whole housing rent scheme to Local Committees at the same time.

Decision

The Council **AGREED**:-

- (i) a 0.5% increase for Council House rents for 2018/2019;
- (ii) that the above percentage increase (0.5%) be applied to all residential HRA rents and service charges and to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches;
- (iii) that rents for garages and garage sites be increased by 3%;

- (iv) that non-HRA rents for leased property should increase as stipulated in existing contracts;
- (v) that the estimated HRA surplus of £4.722m in 2018/2019 be applied as Capital from Current Revenue to fund HRA capital investment; and
- (vi) that proposals on delegation of functions on setting garage rents to Local Committees be included as part of the next planned review of the Scheme of Delegation.

At this point in the meeting, the Leader of the Council thanked the Budget Team for the considerable level of work which had been undertaken in very difficult circumstances. In this regard, and in confirming that the budget process would now begin again for the following year, she expressed the hope that discussions could be undertaken on a cross Chamber basis as much as possible for the good of the Highlands.

In addition, she conveyed her deep concern and anger at the leaking of early and draft budget information in recent weeks which had caused a high level of unnecessary distress for children, families and communities across the Highland area and stressed that this should not be repeated in future.

Finally, and with regard to the Scottish Government Revenue Grant, she highlighted the need for earlier notification to Councils of grant settlement figures in future if possible in order to allow time for planning for the new financial year.

6. **Membership of Committees, Sub Committees, etc** **Ballrachd air Comataidhean, msaa**

It was **NOTED** that Mr J McGillivray had left the Independent Group and would now be a Sutherland Independent Member. In addition, Mr K Gowans had left the Independent Group and would now be Non-Aligned.

On that basis, the political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

Independent – 28/SNP – 19/Scottish Conservatives – 10/Liberal Democrat – 9/Labour – 3/Green Party – 1/Sutherland Independent – 1/Non-Aligned – 2

It was further **NOTED** that the formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees remained as 10/7/4/3/1.

The Council also **AGREED** the following changes of membership: –

Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee – Mr M Finlayson to replace Mr K Gowans

Audit & Scrutiny Committee – Mr D MacKay to replace Mr K Gowans

Redesign Board – Mr L Fraser to replace Mr K Gowans

Valuation Joint Board – Ms M Smith to replace Mr W MacLachlan

Valuation Joint Board – Mr A MacKinnon to replace Mr K Gowans

Valuation Joint Board (Substitute) – Mr D Macpherson to replace Mr A MacKinnon

CoSLA – Mr S Mackie to replace Mrs A MacLean (with effect from 15 May 2018)

CoSLA Executive Board (Environment and Economy) – Mr D Macpherson to replace Mr K Gowans

Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee (Substitute Member) – Mr J Gray to replace Mr K Gowans

The meeting ended at 3.05pm.

Declarations of Interest – Item 2

The following Members declared **non-financial** interests in relation to this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion and voting (on the basis that they would leave the room should there be any detailed discussion on the specific item in which they had declared an interest):-

Mr G Adam – Board Member of Eden Court Theatre
Mr R Balfour – Director of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau
Mr B Boyd – Friend of Eden Court Theatre
Mrs I Campbell – Board Member of Eden Court Theatre
Miss J Campbell – Board Member of Eden Court Theatre
Mr A Christie – General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and Director of Highland and Islands Society for Blind People
Mrs M Cockburn - Director of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau
Ms K Currie – Board Member of Blas
Mr T Heggie – Director of High Life Highland
Mr A Jarvie – Director of High Life Highland and Director of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau
Mr R Laird – Director of Merkinch Enterprise and Chair of Merkinch Partnership
Mrs L MacDonald – Family member an employee of Blind Craft
Mr R MacDonald – Director of Skye and Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau
Mrs D Mackay – Director of East Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau and Director of Voluntary Group East Sutherland
Mr W MacKay – Director of Caithness Citizens Advice Bureau, Director of Caithness Horizons, Director of Caithness Mental Health Support Group and Director of Caithness Voluntary Group
Mrs I MacKenzie – Board Member of Inverness Women's Aid
Mr D Macpherson – Director of High Life Highland, Friend of Eden Court Theatre and Member of the Blas Festival Committee
Mr M Reiss – Director of Caithness Citizens Advice Bureau and Director of Caithness Mental Health Support Group
Mr K Rosie – Director of Caithness Horizons
Mr P Saggars – Director of Nairn Citizens Advice Bureau
Ms L Munro – Director of High Life Highland
Mrs A MacLean – Chair of Ross Shire Women's Aid

The following Members declared **financial interests** in relation to this item and confirmed that if there was any specific discussion in relation to specific lines within the budget proposals on the following issues (in which they had either a personal or family connection) they would leave the room:-

Mr I Brown – employee of NHS Highland
Mr A Christie – Non Executive Board Member of NHS Highland
Mr Ken Gowans – previous business relationship with Women's Aid, family member an employee of High Life Highland and child attending After School Club
Mr A Jarvie – family member an employee of CALA and Direct Child Care
Mr W MacKay – family member an employee of High Life Highland

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in Caol Community Centre, Glenkingie Street, Caol, Fort William on **Wednesday, 17 January, 2018 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr B Allan
Mr A Baxter

Mr A Henderson

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Area Inspector, I Campbell, Police Scotland
Police Constable, K Duncan, Prevention and Intervention, Police Scotland
Ms M Cameron, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager (South), Community Services
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Community Services
Mr M Macleod, Head of Planning and Environment, Development & Infrastructure Service
Mr T Stott, Principal Planner, Development & Infrastructure Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr A Baxter - Chairman

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B MacLachlan, Mr N McLean, Mr I Ramon and Mr B Thompson.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declaration of interest:-

Item 8 – Mr B Allan – Financial

3. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìre

There was circulated Report No. LA/1/18 by the Area Commander for Police which provided an update on the progress with reference to the objectives outlined in the Highland Policing Plan 2017-20.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Prevention and Intervention Officer's role had been central in welcoming the Syrian refugees to Kinlochleven last year and the role had been a very

important part of the community liaison in this respect. The Officer's work had been very much appreciated by the families concerned.

- Appreciation was expressed to the work of the two Police Officers on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, whose work went above and beyond the call of duty. Their work was commended and much appreciated by the community they served and was a great example of community policing.
- In relation to an incident in Claggan, Fort William, a separate briefing on this would be provided to Councillor A Henderson;
- In light of recent press publicity of online fraud in Drumnadrochit which was linked to a specific cash machine, it was queried what approach would the Police take to deal with online fraud within the Lochaber area. In response, it was advised that there had not been any large scale multi victim incidents of online fraud in Lochaber to date. Social media had been used by the Police to issue prevention guidance and this issue was discussed regularly by the Police at team meetings and there were specialist resources available to the Police to combat and detect online fraud.
- There had been instances locally of anti social behaviour problems caused by employees from outwith the area who had been working on infrastructure projects in Lochaber. It was queried what action could be taken by the Police to try and prevent this happening in future. It was explained that the Police would take a proactive approach to this, by talking to contractors to establish a single point of contact who had access to all the relevant people on the site, to get the message across that anti social behaviour would not be tolerated. The Police would welcome information from Ward Members of any developments taking place in their area, so that the Police could raise awareness with contractors on the issue of anti social behaviour.

Thereafter, the Committee **Scrutinised** and **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20.

4. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Dèanadais Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No LA/2/18 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 September 2017.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Given Lochaber's remote and rural area, targets for housing repairs were difficult to meet, but performance was overall good;
- In relation to the increase in the number of void properties in Lochaber, it was felt that people were being more selective on where they wanted to live and that there were more housing options available to them e.g. new builds;
- Rent arrears had increased in Lochaber due to the continued roll out of Universal Credit.
- It was noted that rent arrears in 2016/17 had been considerably lower than in 2015/16 and this was due to the area team prioritising rent arrears; raising court actions; identifying tenants who may be eligible for benefits, and ensuring those who were in receipt of benefits, received all the benefits they were entitled to.

- It was noted that there had been a long term trend of an increase in homeless presentations in the Lochaber area, but this trend had levelled off recently. It was felt that the roll out of Universal Credit would increase the number of homeless presentations.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017.

In accordance with Standing Order 18, with the consent of the meeting, items 8 & 9 on the agenda were taken at this point.

8. **Street Naming** **Ainmeachadh Sràide**

Declaration of Interest - Mr B Allan declared a financial interest in this item as Chief Executive of Lochaber Housing Association but as Ward Members had previously considered and made a decision on this item, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/5/18 by the Head of Policy and Reform which set out a request from the Chief Executive's Office for the re-naming of two redundant buildings which will accommodate new Council Offices and partner services. It also set out requests from the Corporate Address Gazetteer team to create new street names for two separate housing developments consisting of 2 properties in Kinlochleven and six properties in Duror. All developments lie within Ward 21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan).

In order to allow the developer to progress in a timely manner the naming request was considered by Ward Members earlier, resulting in this report coming to the Committee for homogation.

The Committee **Homologated** the decision of Ward Members naming of two buildings under redevelopment located in Achintore Road, Fort William and two street names serving new housing developments located in Kinlochleven and Duror, namely Charles Kennedy Building, Alexander Ross House, Hostel Brae and Kirk Side.

9. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 4 October 2017 which were approved by the Council on 26 October 2017, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

Arising from the Minutes, the following matters were raised:-

i the Lochaber priorities were to have been refined and progress reported to this meeting of the Committee. However, further time was required to discuss the priorities with Community Planning partners, and the report on priorities would now be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee, in April 2018;

ii it was advised that Parent Councils were discussing the proposals for changes to the Governance of Education, and it would be interesting to know their views on this

matter. Parent Councils were encouraged to respond to the Scottish Government consultation and write to their MSP with their views.

5. Roads Maintenance Programme 2018/19 Prògram Càradh Rathaidean airson 2018/19

There was circulated Report No. LA/3/18 by the Director of Community Services which detailed the proposed 2018/19 Roads Maintenance programme for the Lochaber area.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The submission of the report at an early stage in the year was welcomed, as previously it had been submitted in the new financial year when decisions on the programme of works had already been made.
- It was advised that once the Council had agreed its budget for 2018/19, the Service could then determine how much of the Roads Maintenance Programme could be achieved within the budget allocated for this purpose;
- It was requested that for future reports the Work Programme be updated to include the cost per project, as it was felt that the public did not know how expensive it was to repair roads and it would be helpful to Members to be able to explain to their constituents why particular projects had been considered a priority;
- That for future reports, projects that did not make it onto the priority list be included in order that Members could have the flexibility to determine the priorities.
- It was requested that the total cost in backlog road maintenance repairs for the Lochaber area be provided for Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i **APPROVED** the proposed 2018/19 Roads Maintenance Programme for Lochaber Area;

ii **NOTED** that Ward Members would be notified at a future Ward Business Meeting of the projects contained in the Works Programme that could be progressed following the Council's decisions on the budget at their meeting on 15 February, 2018;

iii **AGREED** that for future reports the Works Programme be updated to include the cost per project and projects not included in the priority list, and the revised version be sent to Ward Members;

iv **AGREED** that Ward Members be provided with the total cost of the backlog in road maintenance repairs for the Lochaber area.

6. Winter Maintenance Obair-glèidhidh Geamhraidh

There was a verbal report by the Roads Operations Manager on the Service's performance in relation to this year's Winter Maintenance Programme. It was advised that the winter conditions experienced to date in Lochaber had been very challenging. While the performance and winter conditions was similar to that in other areas in Highland, in Lochaber some aspects of the Programme had worked

better, such as there had been virtually no sickness absence in the workforce; working relationships between local services had gone well, and there had been assistance from the Community Payback team.

However, there had been issues affecting performance such as vehicle/plant breakdowns and solutions to this were being looked at. Sub contracting snow clearing work was also being looked at to help in adverse conditions.

Sustained snowy conditions did put a strain on the Winter Maintenance Budget and this was being monitored. It also put a strain on resources, such as the provision of salt and drivers who required to work within drivers' hours regulations. The fact that there had been virtually no sickness absence throughout the winter period was commended.

Communication to the public on raising awareness of adverse winter conditions was really important and the Council continued to look at how best to do this, such as using social media.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was advised that the 5am start for winter gritting had been used in the Lochaber area, such as on the Kinlochleven road and this had made a big difference;
- It was queried why there was not more use of staff within Community Services to assist with winter maintenance, such as Community Wardens, Housing Repair staff and would this be practicable. It was advised that the redeployment of staff had been considered and may happen in future. It was requested that the redeployment of staff within Community Services during winter conditions be incorporated in the Winter Maintenance Plan 2018/19;
- It was queried if there was an ongoing problem at the Strontian Depot where salt stocks remained uncovered and did this result in faults developing on the spreader mechanisms on the Gritters. It was confirmed that it had caused problems with the spreader mechanisms and solutions to this were being looked at, and covering the salt heap would help with this. A cover for the salt heap at the Strontian Depot was planned and was a priority.
- Given the challenging winter conditions experienced, the Service had coped very well in the circumstances;
- Members were reassured that salt stocks would not run out and that vehicles/plant not being used in areas, would be moved to other areas most in need during adverse winter conditions.
- There were plenty of volunteers who were willing to spread salt and clear pavements in winter conditions, but what was needed was a volunteer co-ordinator to enable this;

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i **NOTED** the update provided in relation to Winter Maintenance; and

ii **AGREED** that a proposal for the redeployment of staff within Community Services during winter conditions be incorporated in the Winter Maintenance Plan 2018/19.

7. WestPlan – Update Plana an Iar – Cunntas às Ùr

There was circulated Report No. LA/4/18 by the Director of Development & Infrastructure which provided an update on progress with the preparation of the West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (West Plan).

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was queried when the decision was made to pause the preparation of the West Plan until the next cycle of Local Committees. It was advised that the decision had been made prior to the Christmas break, and had taken account of a range of factors, particularly the work being undertaken on the likely implications of the proposed significant investment at the Lochaber Smelter site. It was important to have as much information as possible in the preparation of the plan and the short delay was felt worthwhile given the reasons for this as detailed in the report.
- It was queried if there was any risk in delaying the West Plan beyond the next Committee date in April, 2018 and whether there was any risk of a legal challenge as a result of the delay. It was advised that there was no risk on either point and that Officers would continue to work on the Plan and would brief Members on progress. In this respect, it was suggested that Members be briefed at a future Ward Business Meeting.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the progress with the preparation of the Plan, and that Ward Members would be briefed on the Plan at a future Ward Business Meeting; and
- ii **NOTED** that it was intended to report on representations received along with any Plan changes (if appropriate) to the next cycle of relevant Local Committees which will finalise the Council's position prior to the Plan being sent to Scottish Government for Examination.

The meeting ended at 12.05 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **People Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 25 January 2017 at 10.05 am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter (Chair)	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr B Boyd	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Christie	Mrs B McAllister
Mrs M Cockburn	Mrs P Munro
Ms K Currie	Mrs M Paterson (Substitute)
Mr J Finlayson (Vice Chair)	Mrs F Robertson
Mr A Graham	Mr G Ross
Mr A Jarvie	Mr A Sinclair
Ms E Knox	Ms N Sinclair (videoconferencing)
Mr B Lobban (Substitute)	Mr C Smith
Mr D Mackay (Substitute)	Ms K Stephen (Vice Chair)

Religious Representatives:

Ms S Lamont
Mr A MacLean
Mr K Weidner

Youth Convener:

Ms M Roberts

Non-Members also present:

Mr G Adam	Mr J Gray
Mrs J Barclay	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr R Bremner (videoconferencing)	Mr J McGillivray (videoconferencing)
Mrs M C Davidson	Ms M Smith

In attendance:

Mr B Alexander, Director of Care and Learning
Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Mrs B Cairns, Head of Additional Support Services, Care and Learning Service
Ms S Campbell, Head of Children's Services, Care and Learning Service
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Community Services
Mr A Gunn, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Corporate Resources Service
Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager, Community Services
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager, Corporate Resources Service
Mr B Northedge, Management of Schools Programme Manager, Care and Learning Service
Mr J Maybee, Principal Officer (Criminal Justice), Care and Learning Service
Ms L Lallah, Technical Business Analyst, Corporate Resources Service
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms G Newman, Highland Children's Forum (Third Sector)

Ms S Blyth, Highland Parent Council Partnership
 Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
 Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Mr Ian Murray, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
 Mr Douglas Wilby, Head of Performance, High Life Highland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr T Heggie, Mr R MacDonald, Mr W Mackay, Mr R MacWilliam, Ms J Macdonald, Ms M Newdick and Prof H van Woerden.

2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 7 – Mr A Christie (non-financial)
 Item 8 – Mr A Christie (non-financial)
 Item 10 – Mr A Christie (non-financial)
 Item 11 – Mr A Christie (non-financial)
 Item 15 – Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Macpherson and Mr G Ross (all non-financial)
 Item 16 – Mr A Graham (financial)

3. Outstanding Achievements
Coileanaidhean Air Leth

At this juncture, the Chairman paid tribute to Mr Christie for his chairmanship of both the People Committee and, prior to the Council elections in May 2017, the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee. Congratulations too were expressed to Mr G Mackenzie who had recently become a grandfather.

Returning to Service Achievements, there had been tabled a list of outstanding achievements by people and groups.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outstanding achievements; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the relevant Service Director write to all those involved in recognition of their success.

**4. Housing Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – 1 October to 31 December 2017
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais – 1 Dàmhair gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2017**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/01/18 dated 15 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the revenue budget position for 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the projected revenue surplus associated with savings on loan charges be applied as additional Capital From Current Revenue.

**5. Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Estimates 2018/19
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais – Tuairmsean Teachd-a-steach 2018/19**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/02/18 dated 15 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was reassuring that tenant concerns had been taken into account during the consultation process;
- delegating the setting of garage rents to Local Committees was welcomed. In relation to increases in garage rents being used to repair some of the garages and their approach roads it was clarified that this decision too would be delegated to the Local Committees;
- staff were congratulated for the work processes that had helped to facilitate a modest increase in rent of 0.5%;
- ongoing supported communication between the Council repair and maintenance teams and tenants was urged;
- although loan charges were still considered to be high, their reduction was welcomed;
- assurance was sought, and provided, that a substantial programme of repair and maintenance would be implemented for the housing stock; and
- Highland remained one of the best Local Authorities in Scotland as regards keeping rent increases to a minimum.

* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND**:-

- i. a 0.5% increase for council house rents for 2018/2019;
- ii. that the above percentage increase (0.5%) be applied to all residential HRA rents and service charges and to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches;
- iii. that rents for garages and garage sites be increased by 3%;
- iv. that non-HRA rents for leased property should increase as stipulated in existing contracts;
- v. that the estimated HRA surplus of £4.722m in 2018/2019 be applied as Capital from Current Revenue to fund HRA capital investment; and
- vi. that proposals on delegation of functions on setting garage rents to Local Committees be included as part of the next planned review of the Scheme of Delegation to Committees for approval by the Council.

6. Housing Revenue Account Capital Plan 2018/19 Plana Calpa HRA 2018/19

There had been circulated Report No PEO/03/18 dated 15 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Housing staff were thanked for their work, with particular reference to the improvements undertaken in the Bught area of Inverness;
- details of the HRA Capital Programme budget 2018/19 for the Inverness area were sought;
- the £23m budget for Council house building was welcomed; and
- the use of local contractors for local work was urged where Procurement rules permitted.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the allocation of resources to local area levels as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the investment priorities as set out in section 4.2 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed HRA Capital Programme 2018-19 as set out in Appendix 2 of the report;
- iv. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme would continue to be provided through ward briefings and at Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee; and
- v. **AGREED** that a detailed breakdown of Council house building and mainstream investment in the Inverness West Ward be provided to local Members.

7. Housing Performance Report – 1 October to 31 December 2017 Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Dàmhair gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2017

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item as General Manager of Inverness and Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No PEO/04/18 dated 15 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- with around 81% of Council tenants in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) being in arrears with their rent, it would be helpful if rent arrears as a result of UC could be reported separately; and
- as there appeared to be a regular spike in homeless presentations in Quarter 4 of each year, it would be prudent to anticipate higher demand for homelessness services for the last quarter of 2017-18.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April to 31 December 2017;
- ii. **AGREED** that the possibility of breaking down rent arrears figures to show the arrears associated with Universal Credit separately be explored; and
- iii. **AGREED** that homelessness trends and issues be reported to the Committee on a regular basis.

8. Response to Scottish Government Consultation on Fuel Poverty Freagairt do Cho-chomhairle Riaghaltas na h-Alba mu Bhoichdainn Connaidh

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item as General Manager of Inverness and Badenoch and Strathspey CAB but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No PEO/05/18 dated 16 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- many people were not aware they were in fuel poverty and it was essential that frontline staff understood what this was so they could provide appropriate advice and support. It was suggested that awareness-raising be implemented and that it would be helpful to include home carers and officers who carried out home fire safety checks;
- concern was expressed that the proposed new model showed such a drastic reduction in fuel poverty, particularly in rural areas where heating was predominantly by oil or LPG, which were considerably more expensive than mains gas. The model was not a true reflection of the position in Highland or any other rural area. In response, the Chair confirmed that several Members of the Poverty and Inequalities Working Group had made that point during a video-conference with Scottish Government officials;
- whilst it was acknowledged "island-proofing" legislation would serve island communities well, it was necessary to keep reinforcing that remote and rural communities were just as disadvantaged;
- concern was expressed that people were having to choose between heating their home or having a meal, and the importance of identifying households in fuel poverty and doing as much as possible to help was emphasised; and
- it was essential that the Council made the best decisions for its tenants and was not contributing to fuel poverty by installing heating systems that were expensive to run. In that regard, Members questioned whether, rather than carrying out blanket new for old heating replacements, where it was known that tenants could not afford the heating system in their home, the HRA maintenance budget could be utilised to replace it with a less expensive system. It was confirmed that this could be possible and the Chair urged Members to contact the Housing team when they were approached in that regard by residents.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the Council's response as detailed in Appendix 1;

- ii. that updates on the Fuel Poverty Strategy and forthcoming legislation by the Scottish Government be reported to the Poverty and Inequalities Working Group, whose minutes were submitted to this Committee; and
- iii. that awareness-raising in relation to fuel poverty be implemented for frontline staff.

9. Care and Learning Revenue Budget Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Cùrain agus Ionnsachaidh

There had been circulated Report No PEO/06/18 dated 15 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, attention was drawn to the 2017/18 savings proposal to reduce the teaching staff allocation in secondary schools by 1%. Reference was also made to recent comments in the press that education staffing had been protected and an assurance was sought that this would be borne in mind when considering staffing proposals for secondary schools in the coming budget. The Chair confirmed that was the case.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the forecast budget outturn for 2017/18; and
- ii. **AGREED** the RAG (Red-Amber-Green) status of the 2017/18 budget savings.

10. Children's Services – Performance Report Seirbheisean Chloinne – Aithisg Coileanaidh

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No PEO/07/18 dated 12 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the reduction in the percentage of Looked After Children attaining qualifications in any subject at level 3 or above, particularly English and Maths. In response, the Chair reminded Members that an Improvement Plan in relation to the education of Looked After Children had been agreed at the previous meeting of the Committee; and
- concern was also expressed regarding the increase in the time taken between a child being accommodated and a permanency decision, and the significant impact this had on the child in terms of stress. It having been suggested that more foster carers were needed to address the issue, it was explained that the indicator in question related to permanent placements with, for example, adoptive parents. In addition, it was important to know the context - if a placement had taken some time it was often a child or siblings in a challenging situation and was, in fact, a success story.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. both the performance information and the new reporting template at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. the information provided on quality improvement.

11. Children's Services – Assurance Report Seirbheisean Chloinne – Aithisg Barantais

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No PEO/08/18 dated 12 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the data and issues raised in the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that comments would be incorporated into a report to NHS Highland as part of the agreed governance arrangements.

12. Criminal Justice Social Work Obair Shòisealta Ceartas Eucoireach

James Maybee, Principal Officer, gave a presentation on the establishment of the Highland Community Justice Partnership, the plan for community justice in the authority, and current issues in relation to criminal justice social work.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair urged Members to attend the public protection event on 26 January, if possible, and suggested that information be circulated to all Members for the benefit of those who were unable to attend;
- there were many examples of community payback projects that benefited a lot of people in the community and Members commended the contribution of Community Payback Officers, who had a challenging role;
- many low level offenders suffered from mental health problems and it was necessary to take a multi-agency approach and address the root cause or the cycle of offending, prison and release would continue. In addition, concern was expressed that, upon release from prison, offenders with drug or alcohol misuse issues were housed in the city centre amongst their peers, thereby increasing the likelihood of relapsing and reoffending. It was confirmed that the issues raised were being considered and that Members' comments would be fed back to the Community Justice Partnership;
- information was sought on whether there was an opportunity to repeat the "Small Change for Justice" event, which had showcased the inspirational Third Sector projects taking place in Highland and provided an opportunity to think about expanding and developing that work; and
- Members had previously sat on the Inverness Prison Visiting Committee, which had been a useful way to keep up-to-date with any issues and find out what could be done to help.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation; and
- ii. **AGREED** that information from the public protection event on 26 January 2018 be circulated to all Members for the benefit of those who were unable to attend.

13. Management of Schools Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Rianachd Sgoiltean

There had been circulated Report No PEO/09/18 dated 16 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

In relation to the expansion of early learning and childcare to 1140 hours, the Director explained that funding levels had not yet been announced for 2019/20 and 2020/21, and constructive discussions were ongoing with the Scottish Government, CoSLA and all local authorities in that regard. However, a national figure of £52m had been announced for 2018/19 and, although discussions were ongoing about how it would be allocated, it was clear that the objectives set out in the Highland Delivery Plan would not be achievable. A revised plan was therefore required and it was proposed that this should involve moving to 1140 hours in one step in a very small number of centres from August 2018. A mapping exercise was underway and approval was sought for the following set of principles:-

- 1140 hours should be available first to those children who would benefit most – ie those living in areas of disadvantage, including rural disadvantage.
- There needed to be space and capacity.
- Centres should not be in locations where parents already paying for wraparound care were likely to transfer from other centres, thus making those less viable.
- There should be representation from across the authority, including childminder, local authority and third sector providers.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the pragmatic approach to the expansion of early learning and childcare was welcomed. However, the additional provision set out in the original delivery plan had been eagerly anticipated by local communities and disappointment was expressed that it would not be implemented;
- if the Scottish Government had been open and transparent about the amount of capital and revenue funding available from the beginning, local authorities would be in a far better position;
- in relation to the proposed principle that centres should not be in locations where parents already paying for wraparound care were likely to transfer from other centres, there could be families whose financial circumstances had changed and it was necessary to take that into account;
- the prioritisation of children in deprived areas was welcomed and information was sought as to how such areas were identified;
- the move to 1140 hours of early learning and childcare was one of the biggest challenges the Council faced, not only in terms of staffing but in terms of accommodation. In that regard, the requirement for a planning application for change of use should not be a barrier to utilising empty school buildings such as former janitors' houses. In addition, the need for creative solutions, particularly in rural areas, was emphasised and it was necessary to minimise the associated bureaucracy;

- with regard to the roll-out of Chromebooks, an assurance was sought that the necessary infrastructure was in place in terms of network capacity and bandwidth. In relation to secondary schools in particular, it was understood that there were issues in terms of capacity being taken up by pupils' personal devices and it was queried whether discussions had taken place with Wipro regarding reserving capacity solely for Chromebooks so they could be fully implemented;
- in relation to Facilities Management (FM), which it was recognised had transferred to the Development and Infrastructure Service, it was important to ensure that there was engagement with Head Teachers and a common approach across an Associated School Group with a flexible timetable that Head Teachers could feed into. The Chair referred to the positive engagement that had taken place in Lochaber and urged Members to invite FM Managers to Ward Business Meetings or Area Committees; and
- with regard to management structures and school groupings, information was sought on whether the engagement template was working well and had made a difference.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the progress being made in the delivery of the management of schools programme; and
- AGREED** the principles of a revised plan for the roll-out of 1140 hours early learning and childcare, as detailed in paragraph 4.4.2 of the report and expanded upon by the Director.

14. Response to the Consultation on the Provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill Freagairt dhan Cho-chomhairle mu Sholar Bile an Fhoghlaim (Alba)

There had been circulated Report No PEO/10/18 dated 12 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

The Chairman reminded Members of previous detailed discussions at both full Council and People Committee meetings of this issue and that this was the last opportunity for comments to be raised prior to the submission of the response to the Scottish Government by the deadline of 31 January 2018.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in terms of local and democratic accountability, the length of time taken for the Education (Scotland) Bill to be discussed as an item on a People Committee agenda was disappointing;
- at present, concerns raised by Education Scotland were not highlighted directly to Elected Members but to the individual establishment and the school itself. Consequently, there was merit in the proposals for powers to engage more fully with learning, teaching and finances resting with individual Head Teachers and Senior Management Teams;
- the Council's negative view of the proposals had been questioned and, while there was an acceptance that the proposals were ambitious, there was little evidence of engagement with the Scottish Government as to how issues might be addressed;
- the letter to staff and parents encouraging participation in the consultation should have been sent much earlier;

- the one size fits all approach to address perceived shortcomings in some local authorities was an attempt by Scottish Government to ensure equity and fairness of provision;
- the flexibility to have different arrangements for various elements would resonate with many;
- in converse to the comments raised, reference was made to a statement made by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills where he had stated that, while he could not tolerate weak or poorly performing education authorities, Highland was not one of these. As a result, it appeared that Highland was being punished for the failings of other authorities;
- the educational outcomes for pupils was paramount in this debate and there was no evidence to suggest that changing the governance structure would improve education;
- improvements in educational attainment and outcomes would be achieved if additional resources were provided by Scottish Government to target the interventions needed to ensure pupils received the best learning and teaching support and so local authorities would not have to consider these areas for cuts when setting budgets;
- during the first round of consultations, the proposals had been overwhelmingly rejected by Parent Councils, Head Teachers and Teaching Unions and they had been disappointed at the lack of cognisance taken of their views. The Scottish Government should be encouraged, in this round of consultation, at the level of participation and to take on board comments expressed;
- the consultation document still lacked detail and until such time as this was provided only limited engagement could take place;
- CoSLA's response had supported much of what Highland's response contained;
- it was important to generate debate of this issue in communities and with Parent Councils;
- Head Teachers in Highland already led learning and teaching experiences and had control over devolved budgets. Head Teachers would not want the additional responsibility for areas such as cleaning, janitorial services, school meals, school transport etc; and
- the aim was to give young people in the Highland the best start in life and the debate was in no way meant to be Political in nature.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the Council's response to *A Consultation on the Provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill* as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

15. Council Redesign: Review of Music Tuition Services

Ath-dhealbhadh Comhairle: Ath-sgrùdadh air Seirbheisean Oideachadh Ciùil

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Jarvie and Mr D Macpherson declared non-financial interests in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

Mr G Ross also declared a non-financial interest in this item as a former employee of the Service now known as High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No PEO/11/18 dated 15 January 2018 by the Head of Revenues and Customer Services (Review Team Leader). The Music Tuition services redesign report had been circulated separately as Booklet A.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to the Head of Revenues and Customer Services and his team for the work that had gone into the review;
- the review had been the subject of considerable discussion at the Redesign Board and there had been substantial cross-party support for the recommendation which would not only deliver savings but would potentially improve the service and lead to more music tuition being delivered throughout Highland;
- music tuition had a significant impact on young people's lives and it was suggested that, should it be transferred to High Life Highland (HLH), the term "commercial" should not be used in reference to pricing structures for children learning instruments;
- HLH had been delivering traditional music classes at Charleston Community Complex for a number of years and the benefits were remarkable;
- HLH was a unique organisation and was well-placed to deliver music tuition throughout Highland. It had successfully delivered everything the Council had previously asked it to and the position could be reviewed periodically;
- with the existing service, it appeared that there could be occasions where there was somewhat of a lottery as to what instruments were available in a particular school and it was hoped that the transfer would lead to greater choice for pupils. In addition, it was hoped that, in the future, there would be opportunities for intergenerational work and that paying adults might subsidise the service to allow for greater expansion;
- the assurance that existing music tuition staff would transfer to HLH was welcomed;
- there was a possible risk of a disconnect between those studying music academically and those studying practical music through HLH and an assurance was sought that the links with academic teachers that had been developed over the years, as well as those with the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra and the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music in Plockton, would be maintained and developed; and
- some Members expressed concerns regarding commercialisation, uncertainty about funding and what SQA music students would be asked to pay for fees that they were currently exempt from. It was suggested that it was the wrong time to be making such a decision and that it be deferred until budgetary decisions had been made. In addition, the report outlined perceived failings in the running of the in-house service and it was suggested that the first step should have been to seek to improve it.

The Chair commented that many other Councils were looking to make savings in their music tuition service and, whilst noting the comments regarding uncertainty, not proceeding with the transfer to HLH could lead to greater uncertainty. It was clear from the discussion that Members cherished the musical opportunities that existed in Highland and by proceeding with the transfer the Council was safeguarding the service for young people and creating opportunities for expansion.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the findings set out in the Music Tuition services redesign report; and
- ii. **AGREED** the recommendation of the Redesign Board that Music Tuition services should transfer from The Highland Council to High Life Highland with effect from 1 April 2018.

16. Statutory Consultation – Gaelic Medium Catchment Proposals for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar
Co-chomhairle Reachdail – Molaidhean Sgìrean Sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig airson Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Graham declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of being an employee of Bord Na Gaidhlig and left the Chamber during discussion of the item.

There had been circulated Report No PEO/12/18 dated 4 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal appended to the report.

17. Year of Young People 2018
Bliadhna Dhaoine Oga 2018

There had been circulated Report No PEO/13/18 dated 11 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members were encouraged to participate in events taking place during 2018. The Year of Young People (YoYP) provided an opportunity to demonstrate the great work of young people in Highland within schools, communities and clubs and to celebrate the difference they could make;
- the level of preparation and identification of goals by the Interim Planning Group was welcomed;
- the Chairman linking with Youth Ambassadors would provide an opportunity to see how work was progressing. In addition, it was suggested that Youth Ambassadors should be involved with Community Partnerships as it would provide an opportunity for them to promote activities;
- it was hoped that funding to organisations supporting these young people could be maintained;
- the YoYP provided an opportunity to build intergenerational links; and
- wherever participation took place, it must be inclusive of children and young people with Additional Support Needs.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on the Year of Young People 2018; and
- ii. **AGREED** to give full support to the stated aim, “to inspire Scotland through its young people, celebrating their achievements, valuing their contribution to

communities and creating new opportunities for them to shine locally, nationally and globally”.

18. Complaints Review Committee Outcome **Toradh Comataidh Ath-sgrùdaidh nan Gearanan**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/14/18 dated 10 January 2018 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Care and Learning.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. that the Complaints Review Committee met to consider the case, and the findings; and
- ii. that there were no recommendations made by the Complaints Review Committee.

19. Minutes **Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Strategy Group – 13 June 2017;
- ii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group – 5 September 2017;
- iii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Child Protection Committee – 26 September 2017;
- iv. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Community Justice Partnership – 27 September 2017;
- v. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Strategy Group – 28 September 2017;
- vi. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Adult Services Development and Scrutiny Sub-Committee – 1 December 2017; and
- vii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Poverty and Inequalities Working Group – 11 January 2018.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Ross and Cromarty Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on Wednesday, 31 January 2018 at 10.30am.

Present:

Ms I Campbell	Mr A MacKinnon
Dr I Cockburn	Ms P Munro
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs M Paterson (Vice Chair)
Mr D Louden	Mr A Rhind
Mrs A MacLean	Mrs F Robertson (Chair)
Mr G MacKenzie	Ms K Stephen
Mr D MacLeod	

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Mr R Bain, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Community Services
 Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Ms S Wood, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Mr C Alves, Community Resilience Facilitator (North), Scottish Ambulance Service
 Chief Inspector I MacLelland, North Area Commander, Police Scotland
 Mr M Bardelli, Area Manager, Transport Scotland
 Mr S Urquhart, Traffic Safety Engineer, BEAR Scotland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Preliminaries

The Chair congratulated Dingwall Academy on winning the schools team event at the recent Strathpuffer 24 Mountain Bike Endurance Event and also for entering the first all-female schools team in the Quad section at the same event.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr G Adam, Mrs J Barclay, Mr C Fraser, Ms M Smith and Mrs C Wilson.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 9 – Mrs A Maclean (non-financial)
 Item 10 – Ms P Munro (non-financial)
 Item 12e and 13 – Mrs F Robertson and Mr A Rhind (non-financial)

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the last meeting which had been held on 31 October 2017 and had been approved by the Highland Council on 14 December 2017.

4. Scottish Ambulance Service Seirbheis Charbadan-eiridinn na h-Alba

Mr Chris Alves, Community Resilience Facilitator (North) gave a presentation on community resilience and community support for the Scottish Ambulance Service.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the potential for the Scottish Ambulance Service to undertake more joint working around community resilience with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service volunteer staff in remote and rural areas;
- the Service be commended on the quality of training provided in the use of the defibrillators and reference to the fact the equipment was simple to use and self-explanatory;
- the aim going forward should be for a defibrillator to be provided in all premises used by the community in the area;
- confirmation was sought and provided that first responders benefited from similar flexibility as volunteer fire fighters in terms of being granted time off by their employers;
- the potential for more joint working to be undertaken with community planning partners with the aim of delivering more equipment and training across the area;
- it was important to highlight that many Members had helped to fund the purchase of defibrillators and training in the area through their ward discretionary budgets; and
- following a presentation by the charity Lucky2BHere to the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee in March 2017, it had been considered that the new Council should aim to ensure all schools in Highland were provided with a defibrillator and the relevant training, and the Chair referred to the importance of this being progressed going forward.

Thereafter, having thanked the Community Resilience Facilitator for his attendance, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No RC/1/18 dated 8 January 2018 by the North Area Commander for Police Scotland.

Arising from the report, the Chief Inspector noted that Police Scotland had previously offered a presentation for Members on public protection and that this could be provided to a future meeting, if required.

During discussion, Members raised a number of issues including the following:-

- a point as to whether the number of offences for not possessing a MOT had increased following changes to the notification system. The Chief Inspector encouraged the public to use the free reminder service offered by the DVLA;
- concern was expressed that vulnerable people were particularly susceptible to online scams which could result in financial harm and debt;
- concern was also expressed that the whole community was vulnerable to online scams and therefore it would be helpful if Police Scotland's online safety leaflet and advice to the public on this matter could be promoted and circulated as widely as possible;
- clarification was sought and provided in regard to Police Scotland's input in terms of making recommendations to the roads authority for signage along the North Coast 500 route;
- it was disappointing to note there had been an increase in the number of speeding detections and drink/drug driving offences but it was encouraging that members of the public were reporting issues in the area;
- concern was also expressed at the increase in the number of thefts by housebreaking and shoplifting;
- a point in regard to the number of drivers being observed ignoring the no right hand turn at the traffic lights onto the High Street, Dingwall and also jumping the red lights in this location;
- the potential to replicate in Scotland a scheme operating elsewhere in the UK, whereby drivers caught speeding had the option to undertake training as an alternative to a fixed penalty;
- there was a need to continue to raise public awareness that driver behaviour such as speeding or using a mobile phone was not acceptable and could have serious or fatal consequences;
- it was requested that the Committee's thanks be extended to Area Inspector David Ogilvie for his services to the area on the occasion of his forthcoming retirement;
- concern was expressed at a recurring problem in Alness with young people vandalising cars and complaints being received from local residents on this matter. The Chief Inspector reported on the provision of additional resources to the local policing team to undertake more patrols and other measures to deal with this anti-social behaviour.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**, following scrutiny, the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April - 30 November 2017.

6. 20mph Speed Limit Implementation Buileachadh Casg Astair 20msu

There had been circulated Report No RC/2/18 dated 16 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

Arising from this item, concern was expressed at the poor condition of and lack of investment over a number of years in the roads infrastructure in Ward 5:

Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh and the serious concerns of local communities and community councils on this matter, given the impact on tourism and the local economy. In this regard, a local campaign was being initiated which sought to involve all community councils in the area, and the local MP and MSPs. It was acknowledged the local authority was operating under financial constraints but it was suggested there was a need as a priority for the Council, Scottish Government and UK Government to work together to improve the condition of the road network in the area.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- concern was expressed at the level of resource to be invested over the next five years to support the introduction of 20mph limits at a time when the priority should be improving the condition of the road network;
- it was reported that the local Members fully supported the introduction of the speed limit in Dingwall on road safety grounds;
- it would be helpful if the introduction of 20mph limits could be robustly enforced by Police Scotland through more policing of those routes;
- the opportunity for a coordinated approach to reduce speed limits to 40mph on roads passing through some of the more rural communities located on the North Coast 500 route; and
- the proposals for Alness and consultation undertaken with local Members was welcomed and particularly the inclusion of some housing schemes which it was suggested would help to address problems with speeding in those areas.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed Road Traffic Regulation Order for the following 20mph speed limits:
 - Alness
 - Dingwall
 - Invergordon
 - Tain
- ii. **AGREED** that Officers implement the scheme in the event there were no sustained objections; and
- iii. **NOTED** that a further report would only be brought back to Committee in the event of sustained (relevant) objections.

7. Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Cur an Gnìomh Parcadh Dì-eucoirichte

There had been circulated Report No RC/3/18 dated 10 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, it was confirmed that in consultation outline proposals had been developed to deal with the specific issues at Dingwall Primary School and also a solution to address some of the local residents issues. The Principal Traffic Officer confirmed that following initial consultation with the School, a specific update on the proposals would be provided to Members, the Parent Council and local residents later in February 2018.

Thereafter, reference was made to the need to follow up on the initial yellow lining works undertaken previously in Tain and specifically to remove lines in areas where they were not required and to provide them in locations where they were considered necessary. In addition, reference was made to the fact the relevant signage had yet to be erected and disappointment was expressed that to date there had been no enforcement undertaken.

In response, the Principal Traffic Officer provided an assurance that the relevant contractor would be undertaking lining works in Tain early in the spring to resolve the issues which local Members had highlighted. In addition he would arrange for officers to issue formal warning notices in advance of the implementation of full parking enforcement.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the potential to extend the existing yellow lines in Evanton in specific areas would be investigated in consultation with local Members;
- an assurance was sought and provided that officers were fully aware of the commitments provided in terms of the lining works to be undertaken in Gairloch;
- a point in regard to the action that could be taken to prevent the public parking in front of shops and businesses in Dingwall for lengthy periods in view of concerns this may impact on the viability of those businesses;
- an assurance was sought and provided by the Principal Traffic Officer that there would be no delay in progressing the TRO for Dingwall and this was considered as being in the top tier of priorities;
- a general point that the making of all the Traffic Regulation Orders in the Ross and Cromarty area should be considered a priority and progressed without delay; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that in response to the concerns expressed by local Members, the Principal Traffic Officer and colleagues would report back to Members in relation to a fit for purpose traffic management solution for Dingwall High Street.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the update on the rollout of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement to Ross and Cromarty.

8. Transport Scotland Còmhdhail Alba – Taisbeanadh

Mr M Bardelli, Area Manager, Transport Scotland and Mr S Urquhart, Traffic Safety Engineer, BEAR Scotland were present to provide information and to respond to any concerns raised by Members, particularly in relation to junctions under their responsibility within the Ross & Cromarty area.

In discussion, it was suggested there was a need for an investigation to be carried out in relation to the number and frequency of accidents at the Asda junction on the A9 to the south of Tain, and, albeit to a lesser extent, at the junction to the north of Tain near the Lidl store. It was also reported that signage on the Tain bypass which had fallen down was not being picked up timeously. There were also significant issues with surface water and associated

debris on the Tain bypass in the Moss Road area and also at Morangie Cottages. It would be helpful therefore if feedback could be provided to local Members on the above issues.

The Area Manager undertook to follow up on these matters and explained that investigations had been ongoing in relation to both junctions at Tain and the Traffic Safety Engineer provided details of the initial analysis carried out to date. In addition, a study was also being undertaken in relation to the stretch of the A9 between the Nigg and Dornoch roundabouts.

Thereafter, it was suggested the A835 junction at Conon Bridge was also a major concern in terms of road safety, reference being made to the number of serious accidents and near misses at this location over the years. The main issue was that the filter lane was too short for the volume and speed of traffic in this location and also the road markings were not clear. The Area Manager advised that potential options were being considered for this junction albeit surveys had not identified speed as an issue and the number of serious accidents was considered low in terms of the prioritised list for action. On this basis his road safety colleagues were not persuaded that investment in a video survey could be justified given the significant costs involved, but that discussions on this matter were ongoing. He confirmed that works would be carried out to improve the road markings at the junction.

In discussion, it was also highlighted that Members had ongoing concerns in relation to the junction at Tomich on the A9 particularly with the increased volume of traffic using the North Coast 500 and potential development activity in the Invergordon area. The extra signage provided at the junction had been useful but was not sufficient and it was suggested the filter lane was too short and the preferred option would be for a roundabout. It would therefore be helpful if further discussions could be held with local Members on this matter. The Traffic Safety Engineer advised that the number of serious accidents at the junction was considered low in terms of the criteria for the prioritised list for action and there were no current commitments in relation to the junction. Thereafter, reference was made to the potential to secure developer contributions in respect of this junction going forward.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it would be helpful if Members were provided with details of a contact person for BEAR Scotland;
- concern at the capacity of the filter lane on the A9 at the southern entrance at the junction at Evanton with traffic finding it difficult to exit onto the A9. The Area Manager confirmed that he would feedback on the priority status of this junction;
- reference to specific drainage problems on the A835 both on the approach to Garve and near to the Garve Hotel and further details were provided in this regard. The Area Manager provided details of a drainage scheme to be undertaken within the village and advised that he would raise the other matter with BEAR Scotland;
- a request that clarification be provided on responsibility for the maintenance regime for the cycle path between Tore and Maryburgh;

- clarification was sought on responsibility for undertaking repairs to bollards at junctions. The Area Manager undertook to follow up on any specific concerns Members had on this matter;
- clarification was also sought on any proposals to improve the Craigrory junction, in response to which it was noted there were no commitments in respect of this junction in the current financial year;
- there were also issues with traffic exiting the Artafalie junction and at other locations, particularly in the dark. The Area Manager explained it was not policy to light all junctions, the focus being on minimising street lighting in rural areas, and that all signs and road markings were reflectorised;
- a query in regard to the progress being made in securing developer contributions to undertake improvements to the Munlochy junction. The Area Manager and Traffic Safety Engineer advised there would be consultation with Members, letters circulated to all local residents and a press release issued on the improvement works to commence on 18 February 2018; and
- a point that Killearnan Community Council had complained that a sign at the Tore roundabout was impacting on visibility when exiting right from Tore Primary School.

The Chair thanked both representatives for attending meeting, and requested that they feedback to the local Members on the specific issues raised as detailed above.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

9. Education Scotland Reports Sgrùdaidhean le Foghlam Alba

Declaration of Interest - Mrs A Maclean declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that a family member was the Head Teacher at Tore Primary School and took no part in the determination of this item.

There had been circulated Report No RC/4/18 dated 19 January 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

In discussion, Members welcomed the positive reports received in respect of Ardross and Tore Primary Schools

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports.

10. Street Naming – Multiple Sites Ainmeachadh Sràide - Leasachaidhean Ùra Taigheadais

Declaration of Interest - Ms P Munro declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that the properties in Alness were to be named after her father in law and took no part in the determination of this item.

There had been circulated Report No RC/5/18 dated 6 January 2018 by the Head of Policy and Reform, Ward Management.

The Chair advised that in line with the recommendation of Muir of Ord Community Council, the new development was to be named Old School Court.

The Committee **HOMOLOGATED** the naming of the new development of:-

- i. 10 flatted properties in Alness as Alastair Munro Court;
- ii. 10 flatted properties in Muir of Ord as Old School Court;
- iii. 54 housing properties in Muir of Ord as MacRae Park and Westfield Gardens; and
- iv. 20 housing properties in Munloch as Belmaduthy Gardens.

**11. Ross and Cromarty Sports Council
Comhairle Spòrs Rois agus Chromba**

Having been duly nominated and seconded, the Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms I Campbell, Mr D Macleod and Mrs M Paterson to the Ross and Cromarty Sports Council.

**12. Common Good Funds
Maoin Maith Choitichinn**

There had been circulated Joint Reports Nos RC/6/18 – RC/10/18 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and the Head of Policy and Reform/Ward Management which provided information on the following Common Good Funds:-

- a. Cromarty Common Good Fund RC/6/18
- b. Dingwall Common Good Fund RC/7/18
- c. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund RC/8/18
- d. Invergordon Common Good Fund RC/9/18

Declarations of Interest – The Chair and Mr A Rhind declared a non-financial interest in item 12e and 13 on the grounds that they were the Secretary and a member of the Tain Initiative Group respectively and they both left the Chamber for the remainder of the meeting.

Thereafter, Mrs M Paterson proceeded to take the Chair for the remaining items.

- e. Tain Common Good Fund RC/10/18

In discussion, it was confirmed that while the monitoring statement indicated a surplus of £86,950 by the end of the financial year, this included the receipt from the sale of the mussel boat (£119,879). It was explained the income from this sale would be shown next year separately under the Usable Revenue Reserves as agreed by Members. Excluding this income the anticipated out turn was a deficit of £32,929 which was a more accurate picture of the position.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the updated information provided in relation to each Fund and **APPROVED** the proposed Fund budgets for 2018/19 as shown in Appendix 2 of each report.

**13. Tain Common Good – Tain Initiative Group Funding Application
Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich – Iarrtas Maoin Buidhne Iomairt
Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Joint Report No RC/11/18 dated 17 January 2018 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and Head of Policy & Reform.

In discussion, it was highlighted that Tain Community Council in their comments on the application had asked for additional information in respect of the application to be provided in relation to how the funding would be utilised and specifically a business plan, funding targets and more information on how the project would link with other groups.

During further discussion, Members expressed the view that the application be deferred pending submission of the additional information requested to include a business plan, funding targets, more information about how the project will link with other groups and the most recent set of audited accounts.

The Committee **AGREED** to defer the application pending the submission of the additional information requested.

The meeting ended at 12.55pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 1 February 2018 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr D MacKay
Mr R Balfour	Mrs I MacKenzie
Miss J Campbell	Ms A MacLean
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D MacLeod
Ms K Currie (by video conferencing)	Mr D Macpherson (Substitute)
Mr M Finlayson (Substitute)	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr C Fraser	Mr H Morrison
Mr J Gordon	Mr A Rhind
Mr J Gray	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Henderson	Mr A Sinclair (by video conferencing)
Mr R Laird	Mr C Smith
Mrs L MacDonald	Ms M Smith

Non-Members also present:

Mr B Boyd	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr R Bremner (by video-conferencing)	Mr P Sagers

In attendance:

Mr S Black, Director of Development and Infrastructure
 Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources, Community Services
 Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Community Services
 Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Mr B Porter, Head of Resources, Care and Learning Services
 Mr A Summers, Head of Environmental and Amenity Services, Community Services
 Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport, Community Services
 Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Mr A McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager (Community Services/Development and Infrastructure), Finance Service
 Ms N Wallace, Environment Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager (LEADER Programme), Development and Infrastructure Service
 Mr K MacInnes, Principal Economy Officer, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Miss J Mair, Graduate Planner, Development and Infrastructure Service
 Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service
 Mr S Taylor, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

Preliminaries

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs J Barclay, Mr K Gowans and Mr W MacKay.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 7 – Mr A Henderson (non-financial)

Item 20 – Mrs M Smith (non-financial)

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the items of Good News.

4. Development and Infrastructure Service Revenue Budget Monitoring to 31 December 2017 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Buidseat Seirbheis an Leasachaidh is a' Bhun-structair gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2017

There had been circulated Report No. EDI/01/18 dated 19 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- a year on year increase in Planning Fee Income costs was highlighted;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that the annual indexation for Public Private Partnership (PPP) contracts was dealt with by the Finance Service and that this arrangement had not changed following the transfer of PPP to the Development and Infrastructure Service;
- in relation to Catering, Cleaning and Facilities Management, there had been a shortfall in the income generated from school meals and confirmation was sought, and received, that measures would be taken to address this without increasing the cost of school meals; and
- following a suggestion that a decrease in uptake in school meals could be attributed to an increase in prices, a request was made for further information on the uptake of school meals over the previous three to four years. In response, it was confirmed that school meals were free to pupils up to and including Primary 3 and that there had been a drop-off in uptake from Primary 4. Therefore, ways of encouraging uptake of school meals from Primary 4 onwards would be pursued.

The Committee **APPROVED** the revenue monitoring position for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017 and the actions which had been put in place to manage the budget over the remainder of the financial year.

5. Capital Expenditure Monitoring to 31 December 2017 Sgrùdadh Caiteachais Chalpa gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2017

There had been circulated Report No. EDI/02/18 dated 23 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- in highlighting the reallocation of Scottish Government funding previously earmarked for the Tain 3-18 Campus, confirmation was sought, and received, that the subsequent reallocation of the funding towards the refurbishment of Inverness High School and the redevelopment of Merkinch Primary School had arisen from the funding criteria to identify projects which could be completed by May 2020;
- disappointment was expressed that improvements to Nairn Academy had not be considered for inclusion as part of Phase 4 of “Scotland’s School for the Future” Programme when reallocating the funding for the Tain 3-18 project. In response it was confirmed that Nairn was not at a stage where the project could be delivered on time to be eligible for funding from the Programme;
- a request was made for information on the Auldearn Flood Prevention Scheme;
- reassurance was sought, and received, that the White Bridge project would be retained within the capital programme;
- the refurbishment of Inverness High School and the redevelopment of Merkinch Primary School contained many factors other than the condition of the buildings which made the projects appropriate for the reallocated funding;
- in highlighting the condition of both Broadford and Beauly Primaries, disappointment was expressed that of the five projects contained within the capital programme within the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh (Ward 5), only three projects were confirmed to proceed and that two were currently on hold pending a review of the capital budget;
- reassurance was sought, and received, that information on the condition surveys undertaken at schools would be reported to a future meeting of Committee as part any consideration of future capital programme spending and that information obtained through community consultation surveys and the school estates review would also be included;
- in highlighting current roll pressures at Ben Wyvis Primary, it was emphasised that the Council should be more ambitious in its school building programme and that there was an opportunity for consultation with communities on what their ambitions were for future school development in the capital programme;
- the importance of providing Members with the outcome of school condition surveys prior to making any decision on future capital programme spend was emphasised; and
- concern was expressed that there was a lack of available funding to address issues surrounding capacity and condition issues within schools and that the opportunity for consultation with communities within an appropriate timescale could be limited due to a lack of resources.

The Committee **APPROVED**:-

- i. the projects listed at paragraph 5.5.3 of the report to address roll pressures in schools in 2018/19, subject to the confirmation of funding available on approval of the revised Council capital programme;
- ii. the purchase of a modular unit at Kilmuir Primary School; and
- iii. the capital expenditure monitoring position for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017.

6. Planning Performance Framework and Quarter 3 Performance Review Frèam Coileanadh Dealbhaidh agus Ath-sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Cairteal 3

There had been circulated Report No. EDI/03/18 dated 16 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- the performance of the Development Management, Building Standards and the Development Plans teams was commended;
- whilst it was acknowledged that the next Highland-wide Local Development Plan would not be adopted within the required 5 year period, this had been attributed to the preparation of a new Planning Bill and the prior completion of Caithness and Sutherland, and West Highland and Islands Area Local Development Plans for which, it was emphasised, Members in these areas had welcomed the opportunity to provide input to;
- there was an opportunity from Members to e-mail the service with their comments prior to the deadline for submission of a response;
- imposing fines on individuals who breached planning regulations could help to recover the cost to the service of investigating cases of planning violations in relation to new builds;
- earlier engagement with Members could help to reduce the average timescales for decision making in all development categories;
- in seeking funding to support development, the Council should try to identify what the optimum level of contribution should be from developers for infrastructure;
- a greater understanding was required of the unique issues encountered in the Highlands in relation to the sparse population and the geographical land mass in the context of the agreements arising from the Inverness and Highland City-Region deal;
- in highlighting the complexities of regional and local issues, it was emphasised that there was a need for a national strategy for planning;
- the Council's response to the Scottish Government should include comment on the concerns raised by communities regarding the planning process, in particular, the process for determining applications submitted to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA);
- the involvement of community councils during the submission of an application was highlighted. In particular, it was commented that community councils found it frustrating that an application could be refused by the Council and subsequently granted on appeal by the DPEA but that it was not possible to appeal a decision to approve an application;
- encouraging developers to look at the issues arising in relation to infrastructure and contributing towards improvements through the introduction of an infrastructure levy was highlighted;
- concern was expressed regarding applicants seeking retrospective planning permission and the additional work this created for the planning service; and

- concern was expressed that the speed of delivery in which some housing developments were being constructed could outstrip the infrastructure and that there should be a point in which the processing of applications was halted in order to address issues.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the performance updates for the Development Management, Building Standards and Development Plans teams; and
- AGREED** that a response be made to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee by the Director of Development and Infrastructure in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chairs, taking into consideration comments made by Members during discussion, and any subsequent comments provided by E-mail prior to the deadline for submission.

7. **Development Plans Newsletter** **Cuairt-litir Plana Leasachaidh**

Declaration of Interest

Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as Chair of Isle of Rum Community Trust Board but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDI/04/18 dated 18 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the 2018 Development Plans Newsletter at Appendix 1 of the report for publication and submission to Scottish Ministers as the Council's 2018 Development Plan Scheme; and
- NOTED** the timescales for Member and community input to documents that might be relevant or of interest to the communities and areas that they cover.

8. **Biodiversity Duty Report 2015-2017** **Dleastanas Bith-iomadachd**

There had been circulated Report No EDI/05/18 dated 12 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- in response to concern raised regarding the significant impact road verge maintenance could have on bees due to the pesticides used and whether the Council could inform bee keepers associations prior to undertaking any maintenance, it was suggested that Community Services could provide the relevant contacts details for the various associations to the species champions concerned;
- the report highlighted a need for the Council to collate data on the natural environment and provide a thorough analysis of its biodiversity duty and it

was suggested that this could potentially be in the form of update reports to the Committee;

- a request was made for confirmation as to how the Council's biodiversity actions had contributed positively to the following targets contained within "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity":-
 - 1.2 Use assessments of ecosystem health at a catchment level to determine what needs to be done;
 - 5.3 Support 'High Nature Value' farming and forestry; and
 - 4.3 Integrate protected areas policy with action for wider habitats to combat fragmentation and restore key habitats.
- confirmation was sought as to whether the Council was still represented on the Wester Ross UNESCO Biosphere. In response, the Committee was advised that, whilst it was unclear whether the position had been filled, if there was an opportunity to fill this post Members would be informed;
- in welcoming the Council's successful coordinated control of giant hogweed along the Wick River, River Nairn and on the Black Isle, it was highlighted that there were a number of other invasive species along the River Nairn, including Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam weed, which required further work to eradicate. It was suggested that the involvement of community groups such as Green Hive could assist in clearing these;
- in emphasising the importance of managing climate change and protecting the environment, further training on bio-diversity could help better inform Members of the potential negative impacts on the environment that could occur when taking decisions in relation to planning; and
- in highlighting the work undertaken in relation to creating wildflower friendly road verges, it was emphasised that biodiversity was integral aspect of the Highlands and it was important to raise awareness of this.

The Committee **HOMOLOGATED** the Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2015-17.

**9. Update on the Highland LEADER 2014-2020 Programme, including European Marine Fisheries Fund
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram LEADER 2014-2020, a' gabhail a-steach Maoin Iasgach Mara na h-Eòrpa**

There had been circulated Report No EDI/06/18 dated 15 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- Members were encouraged to promote this fund in their communities;
- with money yet to be spent it was important that the Environmental and Economy teams were retained; and
- the Programme supported initiatives outwith the city of Inverness and reference was made to a recent award to The Shielling Project in Struy, an off-grid learning centre.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the report.

10. Nairn Business Improvement District Roinn Leasachadh Gnothachais Inbhir Narann

There had been circulated Report No EDI/07/18 dated 16 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

Whilst welcoming the initiative and the benefits it could bring, there remained an outstanding issue regarding the three schools within the Business Improvement District (BID). It had not been demonstrated that any of the activities contained within the BID business plan would impact or benefit the schools and ideally the Council would prefer that they were removed.

The Committee **APPROVED** the assessment made in Appendix 1, relative to the Nairn BID Proposal and **AGREED** not to exercise the Council's right of veto, subject to the final BID Proposal not materially affecting the assessment made.

The Committee further **AGREED**, if upon receipt of the final BID proposal, it was considered that changes had been made which affected the assessment made in Appendix 1, to delegate authority to the Director of Development and Infrastructure in consultation with the Chair of Environment, Development and Infrastructure, to seek the necessary amendments to the final BID Proposal, failing which a further report would be brought back to the Council meeting on 8 March 2018.

11. Economy and Regeneration Eaconamaidh agus Ath-ùrachadh

There had been circulated Report No EDI/08/18 dated 17 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- a Smart Waste project was underway to use route optimisation software to create a better and more efficient approach to waste collection routes and it was hoped that this could be rolled out to other areas of the Service such as gritting. In this regard, it was asked if some route optimisation could be used on the NC500 to achieve better collection of rubbish;
- the scope of generating income by reasonable charging for some of the business development activities detailed in the report would enable the Council to continue to provide and develop them in the future;
- it was important to be clear as to what monies could be applied for, what match funding would be available and that opportunities were maximised to ensure not only European funding but other transition funding for projects was maximised;
- a list of projects funded from European monies would be useful as this could help identify projects in Members' Wards which might be eligible. However, in response, it was explained that LEADER funding might be more appropriate for smaller community scale projects; and
- disappointment was expressed that the village of Seater had not received landfill monies despite taking refuse from other Highland areas.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the confirmed availability of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) until at least until March 2021;

- ii. **AGREED**, subject to annual budget availability, to secure ESIF to provide additional services and investment within the Highland Council area; and
- iii. **NOTED** the report and the key developments highlighted during quarter 3 and emerging activity.

12. Community Services Revenue Budget 2017/18 – Monitoring to 31 December 2017
Buidseat Teachd-a-steach nan Seirbheisean Coimhearsnachd 2017/18 – Sgrùdadh gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2017

There had been circulated Report No EDI/09/18 dated 22 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- an update of the ongoing review of public conveniences, which had the aim of achieving a budget saving by either closing them or making them self sufficient, was requested;
- closing public conveniences in rural areas would have a negative impact, given the lack of alternative facilities;
- clarification was sought, and received, as to the anomaly that had arisen regarding information transferred from the previous service provider of cleaning services, VPS, relating to employees' working hours. This had generated a pressure of £463,000 and it was questioned how additional surplus hours would be addressed;
- clarification was sought, and received, as to which budget heading had been used to pay a recent compensation claim;
- an explanation was sought as to why the planned replacement of sodium lanterns with LED lanterns was contributing to a pressure of £200,000. In response, Members were reminded of the planned capital investment of £16m, which would have generated £512,000 of revenue savings. However, not all of the capital investment would be required and consequently the projected revenue saving would not be achieved;
- due to workload pressures, it had been necessary to employ an external contractor to install the new LED lighting in Maryburgh;
- the Community Services staff in Ross and Cromarty were commended for the work they had carried out, in some cases over and above their role;
- although the expectation was that the £2m overspend would be met from underspends elsewhere in the Service, it was suggested that it should be met from reserves instead so that other aspects of the Service would not be detrimentally affected. In this connection, the Chair informed Members that he had written to the Transport Minister stating the Council's case for any additional monies made available to assist local authorities with the costs incurred as a result of this winter's weather conditions;
- a timeframe was requested as to when the income from decriminalised parking enforcement would be included in the monitoring statement;
- given the pressures on budgets, an alternative way of working should be considered. For example, there was merit in examining how other countries treated their roads for snow and ice. Whilst the solutions used might be more expensive, they were effective at lower temperatures and instances of potholes were reduced; and
- a more proactive approach needed to be adopted for collecting fines for fly tipping, dog fouling etc.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the revenue budget monitoring position for 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the detail of the Car Parks budget heading, including income generated from car parking fines, would be circulated to all Committee Members.

The Committee broke for lunch from 1.20pm until 2.00pm

**13. Community Services Performance Report – 1 April to 31 December 2017
Aithisg Coileanaidh nan Seirbheisean Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No EDI/10/18 dated 1 February 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- assurances were sought, and received, that joint working arrangements were in place with Bear Scotland to maximise limited resources;
- it would be useful to know how big an issue potholes were in Highland as a whole;
- water overflowing from ditches exacerbated potholes;
- many of the potholes filled by the jetpatcher the previous year had reappeared. However, these issues had now been resolved and there was greater confidence with the jetpatcher's performance;
- the response from staff when potholes were reported had been excellent but there needed to be a public understanding that, given the numbers involved, potholes had to be prioritised and that patching at this time of year could only be temporary. Furthermore, potholes would not be filled individually but, to ensure greater efficiency, a stretch of road would be done. However, it was important that this information was reported to Area Committees given that Members were held accountable locally;
- many issues about the condition of the roads were a result of poor reinstatement, following works by public utility service providers. Frequently, it was the Council who had to undertake remedial work and it was important when this happened that costs were recovered. Reference was made to working arrangements on the continent where, with new developments, cabling, pipework etc were laid under slabbed footpaths instead of roads;
- Seafield Road, Inverness was in a particularly poor state and this could be attributed to the many heavy vehicles using this road. Ideally, this would be addressed by imposing some type of levy;
- the regime for claiming for damages to vehicles as a result of potholes needed to be clarified as, to the public, there appeared to be inconsistencies;
- the trial of the system for dealing with potholes and keeping the customer informed was welcomed. However, the link for reporting potholes on the Council's website was difficult to find. Also, it was questioned if a report was made in person, for instance at a Service Point, if that customer too would be kept informed, in addition to Local Members who also reported potholes;

- there had been difficulties using the Council's CRM system for reporting defects but a meeting was scheduled to look at possible solutions and it was hoped this could be fed back to Committee Members;
- significant progress had been made in reducing staff absences in 2016/17 but it was disappointing that this had risen again;
- it was important to be efficient in utilising resources and this included the use of vehicles and plant, together with proper maintenance of them;
- a request was made that the level of the workforce in Thurso and Wick be re-examined. In this connection, it was pointed out that a technician and inspector post had been held vacant and it was questioned how these posts would be filled;
- clarification was sought as to who had the responsibility for cycle paths. In response, it was confirmed that although cycle paths might have been provided by Transport Scotland, the responsibility for ensuring that they were kept clear of detritus was with the local authority; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that traffic bollards at trunk road junctions were not the responsibility of the local authority.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on Community Services performance from 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017.

14. Traffic Regulation Orders and Charging Policy for Events and Processions on the Public Road

Rianachd Thachartasan air an Rathad Phoblach/Òrdughan Rianachd Trafaig agus Poileasaidh Seàrsaidh airson Thachartasan is Siubhail-dhaoine

There had been circulated Report No EDI/11/18 dated 22 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- Community Services staff were commended for providing invaluable help and support to communities when road closures at events were required;
- the exemption from charges of Armed forces and Armistice Day events was welcomed;
- the introduction of charges was giving concern to event organisers at a time when budgets were reducing and the Council was asking communities to take more on board. The proposed charges could have a cumulative effect, arising in considerable expense and this would be further exasperated with the anticipated removal of Ward Discretionary budgets, one of the few sources of funding for such events. Consequently, prior to the charges being introduced, it was important that cognisance was taken of all the implications and for community consultation to take place;
- there was no information on the potential consequences of introducing charges and which type of events/processions would be expected to pay i.e. football victory parades, Christmas light switch-ons etc;
- the online form needed to be simplified;
- street events benefitted the local community and there was often an alternative route for vehicles;
- it was questioned if the charges would apply to developers who closed off roads when working on buildings;

- in contrast, it was argued that the public wanted to see the Council taking a more business-like approach and to seek full cost recovery. Furthermore, a review of the policy would take place after 12 months;
- there might be occasions where parades would take place against the will of Elected Members but which nevertheless complied with legislation. In the past the costs involved would have been incurred by the Council but these would now be the responsibility of the organisers; and
- discussions should take place with Police Scotland to establish if they could help mitigate some of the issues.

The Committee **AGREED** to defer the decision to charge for road closures to ascertain a full understanding of the implications of the proposal.

15. Winter Maintenance Aimsir Gheamhraidh

There had been circulated Report No EDI/12/18 dated 17 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

Prior to debate, the Chairman, on behalf of Members, commended the winter maintenance staff for their hard work. This winter had proved challenging and staff had worked non-stop to treat roads in accordance with Council policy. He also referred to the volunteers willing to assist with gritting locally but highlighted the need for co-ordinators who could direct assistance as and when required. He encouraged Members to identify such individuals in their communities who would also take a role in informing the Service when grit bins needed refilled.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- community resilience would be the most cost effective and practical solution and there was equipment available to individuals and community groups wanting to take part. However, there were difficulties in getting this message across. In the current climate communities needed to appreciate that they too had a responsibility;
- measures to address this might include having a centralised register of volunteers and leaving small stock piles of grit at road ends;
- reference was made to the poor condition of roads in the Assynt peninsula;
- it was argued, given the length of roads in the Wester Ross, that this area was poorly served. For example, out of a total of 42 footpath tractors, this area had only 1;
- there was general consensus that a review of the Winter Maintenance Policy should be undertaken, both at a strategic and local level. Among the factors that should be taken into consideration included the treatment of roads at weekends, if car parks should be included and the gritting of social housing areas (with costs being reclaimed). Furthermore, if the budget allocation for winter maintenance was insufficient to deal with weather conditions experienced since November, then this questioned how overspends should be dealt with. In summary, given the challenges to the budget, there was merit for this issue to be considered as part of the Council's redesign process;

- although the salt store in Inverness was covered, many other salt stores were not. Moisture content was critical and, as a result, there was a reduction in the effectiveness of grit which had been stored in the open;
- the treatment of footpaths by tractors was not always effective. In addition, it appeared that footpaths classed as “other”, including those in residential housing estates, were missed all together and, of all the concerns raised, the condition of pavements had caused most concern;
- the reduction in resources had resulted in a lack of capacity to deal with this year’s winter maintenance adequately. It was therefore essential that limited resources were used as efficiently as possible and, while details had been provided of the Council’s gritting fleet, this had not included the hours of operation as time would have been lost as a result of mechanical breakdowns to gritters and tractors. This information should be provided to Members at an Area level; and
- it would be interesting to see if Accident and Emergency admissions for fall injuries had risen.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the challenges faced by the service in delivering the winter maintenance service this year and the pressure on the budget due to increased requirement for staff overtime and salt;
- ii. **NOTED** the outcomes of the meeting with community representatives and the proposed ‘lessons learned’ meeting with staff; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a review of the Winter Maintenance Policy be undertaken by summer 2018.

16. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Planning Applications Committees (PAC), which had been circulated separately, for:-

- i. North PAC – 17 October 2017;
- ii. South PAC – 24 October 2017;

And **APPROVED**:-

- iii. the Harbours Management Board Minutes of 8 December 2017; and
- iv. the Education, Transport Review Sub-Committee of 19 December 2017.

17. Exclusion of The Public Às-dùnadh a’ Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

18. Land and Property Aithisg Ghnothachasan Fearainn is Cuid-seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. EDI/13/18 dated 23 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

The Committee **APPROVED** the recommendations contained within the report.

**19. Property Transactions Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. EDI/14/18 dated 12 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

The Committee **APPROVED** the monitoring statements for General Fund and Property Account transactions as approved by the Head of Development & Regeneration under delegated authority as well the Budgeted Sales for 2017/18 and Future Years Sales.

**20. Housing Development Initiatives
Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais**

Declaration of Interest

Ms M Smith declared a non-financial interest in this item as Company Secretary and a Board Member of Albyn Housing Society but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. EDI/15/18 dated 23 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

Having recognised the benefit of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal monies to communities outwith Inverness, the Committee otherwise **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm.

**The Highland Council
Pensions Committee and Pension Board**

Minutes of Meeting of the Pensions Committee and Pension Board held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 8 February 2018 at 10.30 am.

Present:**Pensions Committee**

Mrs H Carmichael
Mrs C Caddick
Mr C Fraser
Mr R Gale
Mr A Jarvie
Mr B Lobban
Mr D Louden
Mr P Saggars
Mr B Thompson

Pension Board

Ms L Munro, Highland Council
Mr G Cruickshank, Highland Council
Mr C Nicolson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Mr E Macniven, GMB
Mr M Murphy, UCATT

Non Member in attendance:-

Mr R Laird

Officials in attendance:

Mr E Foster, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism, Corporate Resources Service
Mr S Fraser, Joint Secretary (Employers Side)
Mr C MacCallum, Payroll & Pensions Manager, Corporate Resources Service
Mrs M Grigor, Finance Manager (Corporate Budgeting, Treasury and Taxation)
Ms C Stachan, Accountant, Corporate Resources Service
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Also in attendance:-

Mr R Bilton, Hymans Robertson
Mr J Boyd, Grant Thornton (External Auditor)
Mr K Ettles, AON Hewitt, Investment Consultant

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr R Gale in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKinnon of the Pensions Committee and Ms L Leonard, Ms L MacKay and Mr D Macdonald of the Pension Board.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. 2017 Actuarial Valuation Presentation
Taisbeanadh Luachaidh Actuaraidh 2017**

Mr Robert Bilton of Hymans Robertson was in attendance to give a presentation on the results of the 2017 Actuarial Valuation of the Pension Fund and the Funding strategy.

The valuation was undertaken in order to comply with legislation, set employer contribution rates, determine money needed to meet accrued liabilities, calculate the solvency level of the Fund, manage risks to the Fund and employers and to review the Funding Strategy Statement.

The 2017 valuation had been carried out in the background of strong asset returns, historically low interest rates, lower future growth expectations, local authority budget constraints, new benefit structure and increased employer engagement.

Key assumptions for the funding target for the Fund were explained and in terms of the Fund's solvency level, the Fund was in a strong place with a funding level of 101% as at 31 March, 2017.

To determine how to set funding plans in order that the Fund could meet its liabilities, there had been a need to determine funding targets, how long was needed to reach the target and how much risk could be taken to reach the target.

It was advised that compared to the 2014 valuation, funding levels were likely to be slightly higher; cash amounts of deficits were likely to be slightly smaller; contribution rates in the long term for secure employers would be frozen, and contribution rates for shorter term employers were likely to be higher due to lower growth forecasts. The final valuation report would be signed off by 31 March 2018.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was confirmed that the Pension Fund had no exposure to Carillion Plc that had recently gone into liquidation, as an employer in the fund;
- There were a few local authorities whose pension funds were performing better than Highland Council's Pension Fund and the reasons for this were queried. It was explained that there might be historical reasons for variances, such as higher contribution rates resulting in stronger performing Funds and other local authorities had different assumptions for their funding targets for the future. While comparisons were useful as a guide to how well your Fund was performing against other Funds, the main aim was for the Authority to have a funding strategy in place to pay the benefits to Members of the Pension Scheme;
- As part of the Valuation process, Employers contribution rates would be assessed to ensure that each Employer was making the right level of contribution rate;

- In terms of pooling of Pension Fund assets as happened in England and Wales to reduce fees and increase returns for Funds, it was still too early to tell what savings would be made by doing this, but it would be monitored;
- The 101% funding level was commended which was as a result of contributions to the Fund and investments performing well; and
- The combined employee/employer contribution rate to the Fund had increased from 16% to 19% over the last ten years. It was queried what the likely contribution rates for the next ten years would be. It was explained that this would depend on many uncertainties such as investment performance and economic background. The current rate was relatively low compared to other Local Government Pension Schemes.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation and that consideration would be given to issuing a press release to commend the 101% Funding Level of the Highland Council Pension Fund as at 31 March 2017.

4. Funding Strategy Statement Aithris Ro-innleachd Mhaoineachaidh

There was circulated Report No. PC/01/18 by the Director of Corporate Resources which sought approval on the proposed Funding Strategy Statement for the Highland Council Pension Fund.

The funding strategy set out how it was intended to set Employers' contribution rates to meet the liabilities of the Pension Fund.

Reference was made to a correction required in the strategy in respect of the effective date. The funding strategy would be effective from 1 March 2018, and not 1 April 2018 as detailed in the strategy.

The Committee **APPROVED** implementation of the Funding Strategy Statement with effect from 1 March 2018.

5. Responsible Investing Tasgadh Cunntasach

There was circulated Report No. PC/02/18 by the Director of Corporate Services which presented a report by the Fund's Investment Advisors, Aon Hewitt on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations. Mr Kenneth Ettles from Aon Hewitt was in attendance.

In discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- The Norwegian Government Pension Scheme had strong ethical standards and it was queried if this could be used as an exemplar for ESG considerations for the Highland Council Pension Fund;
- Investment Managers were employed to make investment decisions on behalf of the Pension Fund with the aim of achieving capital growth and investment income so the Fund could meet its liabilities. Funds had a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the investment policy was in the best interests of Pension Scheme Members. A view was expressed that the Fund should achieve the best possible investment returns and ESG

factors chosen for moral reasons should not be included in investment policy. Investment Managers were expected to base their decisions on factors which were relevant to performance of investments. If these factors fell within ESG parameters, then Managers would already be expected to consider these. Therefore, time and money could be saved by not having a formal ESG policy;

- It was expected that the Investment Sub-Committee would look at all aspects of investing and take decisions in the best interests of the Members of the Pension Scheme;
- It was felt that the Fund had the right balance with an integration of ESG principles, but that this was not the driving force when making investment decisions in the best interests of the Fund; and
- It was suggested that in addition to Investment Sub-Committee Members receiving training on ESG issues, Pensions Committee and Pension Board Members should also be invited to this training.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the report on ESG issues and **AGREED** that:-

- i. a training session on ESG issues be arranged for Members of the Pensions Committee, Pension Board and Investment Sub-Committee;
- ii. the assessment of ESG issues should be an ongoing issue; and
- iii. Members should continue to question the fund managers on ESG related issues when they presented to the Investment Sub-Committee.

6. Statement of Investment Principles Aithris air Prionnsapalan Tasgaidh

There was circulated Report No. PC/03/18 by the Director of Corporate Services which sought approval on the proposed Statement of Investment Principles for the Highland Council Pension Fund.

The Statement of Investment Principles was prepared as required by the Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) (Scotland) Regulations 2010 (No. 233).

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was noted that the proposed changes to the asset allocation would leave about one third of the portfolio in illiquid assets. It was advised that this was broadly in line with most similar pension schemes. There would still be sufficient liquid assets to meet any short term cashflow requirements;
- Returns from equity markets had been extremely good, but the risks to equity markets had changed. Therefore it was proposed to reduce investments in equities to lower the risk and increase diversification by investing in illiquid strategies and absolute return strategies where returns were expected to be broadly in line with equities but with lower risk;
- It was queried why it was proposed to still invest 12% of the Fund in Gilts when expected returns were poor. It was advised that this was to provide balance, protection and diversification within the portfolio as Gilts tended to rise in value when other asset classes such as equities dropped in value. They also provided income;

- It was queried what the expected movement in interest rates in the short to medium term and how would this affect the price of Gilts. It was expected that interest rates would rise modestly faster over the next five years in the region of 0.5% per annum;
- a point was made that while the exceptional performance of the Fund had been driven by asset classes such as equities, the Fund had also been extremely well managed. If the professional advice was ignored this could be to the detriment of the Fund and those scheme members who relied on it for their pensions;
- It was queried if the Fund had investments in the German stock market as this had seen significant gains in recent times. It was confirmed that the Fund had a passive equity allocation in European equities, some of which would be in German equities; and
- It was queried which equities would be sold within the portfolio. It was advised that the recommendation would be to sell the passive equities managed by Legal and General.

Following discussion, Mr R Gale, seconded by Mrs C Caddick, **MOVED** the recommendations detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr P Saggars, seconded by Mr A Jarvie, moved that the Statement of Investment Principles detailed in the report be amended by the deletion of paragraph 16.7 of the report, which stated:-

“Where it is consistent with its fiduciary duty, the Fund would follow the principles below:

- Incorporate ESG issues into investment analysis and decision-making processes – this would require to be done by the investment managers and monitored by the Fund.
- Be an active owner and incorporate ESG issues into ownership policies and practices - this will be mainly achieved by exercising voting rights and the engagement activity of managers.
- Seek appropriate disclosure of ESG issues by entities in which the Fund is invested - this will be achieved through investment manager engagement.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 7 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 2 votes with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mrs C Caddick, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr C Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr B Thompson

For the Amendment:

Mr A Jarvie, Mr P Saggars

The Committee **APPROVED** the:-

- i. Statement of Investment Principles; and
- ii. following changes to the strategic benchmark in order to increase the expected return and reduce volatility in the portfolio as follows:-

- reduce equities from 61% to 56%;
- reduce bonds from 20% to 12%; and
- reinvest the proceeds in illiquid and liquid alternative assets.

**7. Annual Audit Plan 2017/18 (External Audit Report)
Plana Sgrùdaidh Bliadhnail 2017/18 (Aithisg Sgrùdaidh bhon Taobh A-muigh)**

There was circulated Report No. PC/04/18 by Grant Thornton which presented their annual audit plan setting out the work they plan to undertake as part of the audit of the pension fund.

The report set out the overarching principles of the audit; audit approach and materiality and provided details of the risk based audit methodology to be used for the audit.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

**8. Risk Management Review and Update Report
Aithisg Ath-sgrùdaidh agus Ùrachaidh Rianachd Cunnairt**

There was circulated Report No. PC/05/18 by the Director of Corporate Services which provided an update on the Fund's risk register and compliance with the Pension Fund Regulator requirements on internal controls.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated risk register extract and compliance with the Pension Fund Regulator requirements.

**9. Pension Fund Contributions and Administration
Tabhartasan agus Rianachd Maoin Peinnsein**

There was circulated Report No. PC/06/18 by the Director of Corporate Services which updated Members on matters relating to the administration of the Highland Council Pension Fund.

The Committee **NOTED** the details of the report.

**10. Membership of Investment Sub-Committee
Ballrachd na Fo-Chomataidh Tasgaidh**

The Committee **APPROVED** the following change to the membership of the Investment Sub-Committee as follows:-

- Mrs C Caddick to replace Mr C Fraser.

**11. Investment Sub Committee: Minutes of Meeting
Fo-chomataidh Tasgaidh: Geàrr-chunntas na Coinneimh**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Investment Sub-Committee held on 1 December 2017 - the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

The meeting ended at 12.30 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in Talla nan Ros, King Street, Kingussie on 13 February 2018 at 10.30 am

Present:

Mrs M Cockburn
Mrs P Hadley

Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager (Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey), Chief Executive's Office
Mr O Bray, Head Teacher, Kingussie High School (Item 3)
Mr R MacLeod, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Community Services
Mr R Gerring, Transport Planning Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Mr G Miles, Head of Planning and Communities, Cairngorms National Park Authority (Item 4)
Insp M Middlehurst, Police Scotland (Item 5)

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Items 3 and 5 – Ms P Hadley (financial)

3. Presentations – Head Teachers – Kingussie High School and Grantown Grammar School Taisbeanaidhean – Ceannardan-sgoile – Àrd-Sgoil Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh agus Sgoil Ghràmair Bhaile nan Grandach

Due to the bad weather, the Head Teacher of Grantown Grammar School had been unable to attend the meeting and it was requested that this presentation be made to a future meeting.

A presentation was then undertaken at the meeting by the Head Teacher of Kingussie High School on the local delivery and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence, including performance of the school, and also on the drive to enhance links with other educational establishments to progress pathways to further education, training and employment.

The presentation also included an overview of general school statistics; outlined the approach to learning which was a technology rich environment blended with traditional learning methods; information and data comparators on Improving Attainment for all; and concluded by setting out future plans.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chairman expressed appreciation for the presentation which demonstrated the school's significant improvements which was beneficial for the community as well as the school and he credited this to the staff, pupils and parents;
- Further information was sought, and provided, on how the Council could support and facilitate improvement of the lowest attainment;
- Additional information was sought and provided on the impact that a reduction in teaching could have on the school, pupils and the feasibility to grow the Curriculum for Excellence;
- Assurance was sought, and provided, that potential employment and training opportunities for young people were being capitalised upon in view of the major construction works, i.e. the dualling of the A9, that were being undertaken locally;
- Confirmation was provided that the school had established positive links with the University of the Highlands and Islands and a number of projects had been established to facilitate different types of learning opportunities; and
- This was an excellent school model, which fitted with the Getting It Right for Every Child model, and was very progressive for the Highlands.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation on Kingussie High School and **AGREED** that the presentation on Grantown Grammar School be undertaken at a future meeting of the Committee.

4. Presentation – Local Development Plan 2020 – Main Issues Report Taisbeanadh – Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail 2020 – Aithisg Phrìomh Chùisean

Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Member of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board but in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission remained in the room to participate in the discussion.

A Presentation was undertaken at the meeting by Mr Gavin Miles, Head of Planning and Communities, Cairngorms National Park Authority, on the consultation currently underway on the Cairngorms National Park Authority Local Development Plan 2020 Main Issues Report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was highlighted that Badenoch and Strathspey was a straightforward commute to Inverness which would be further improved following the new construction improvements to the A9. There was a requirement to build where there was demand and houses were affordable, and in view of this, concern was expressed that not enough weight was being allocated to the Housing Needs Demands Assessment;
- A number of concerns were raised in regard to affordability. It was stressed that the homes that were currently being designated as affordable were too expensive in comparison to the local employment economy, which in Badenoch and Strathspey was a low wage economy, and further information/advice was sought as to whether there was scope for the definition of “*affordable*” to be better defined to be more realistic and reflect the local employment market;
- It was acknowledged that affordability was a difficult issue to resolve, particularly in Badenoch and Strathspey, and it was highlighted that if the statutory percentage of affordable homes was increased then this could discourage developers from building houses. However, if the UK Government was to write-off Highland Council’s housing debt then the Council would be able to build more truly affordable homes;
- It was highlighted that affordable housing was being purchased and then put on the open market for rental and the need for an affordable housing rental market was also highlighted. It was further explained that there was no control over Registered Social Landlords to retain the houses as affordable homes. Therefore, there were a number of cases whereby affordable houses were being sold by Social Landlords on the open market rather than being retained as an affordable home and consequently the number of affordable homes were reducing which was disappointing;
- Concern was expressed that insufficient land was being allocated for housing, particularly if one of the major sites which had already been granted planning permission failed to be developed and in order to mitigate against this more smaller flexible sites were also needed; and
- It was confirmed that there was still time for communities to contribute to the consultation process and they were encouraged to do so.

The Committee thanked Mr Miles for his attendance and **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Police – Area Performance Summary Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/1/18 dated 30 January 2018 by the Area Commander.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Appreciation was expressed for the improved attendance at Community Council meetings. The Committee was informed that Police Scotland would be conducting a pilot project with Police surgeries being held in Kingussie and Grantown on Spey, the dates and times for which would be circulated, and if successful at the end of the three month trial period these would be continued;

- Clarity was sought and provided in regard to how robberies were categorised and the associated data recorded;
- Concern was expressed at the increase in vandalism and it was queried whether any trend had been identified in regard to this;
- Disappointment was expressed at the increase in the number of people detected for drink/drug driving offences and it was queried whether there were any trends/explanations for this e.g. a reduction in policing. It was further queried as to whether any trend existed in regard to offenders and it was suggested it might be helpful to see a breakdown of this statistic by locals and tourists. However, it was felt that this level of information was immaterial and that focus should not be on who committed the offence but instead directed at reducing this statistic; and
- Concern was expressed at the increase in fatalities on the A9 within Badenoch and Strathspey and further information was requested in order to determine if there was a route cause.

Following discussion, the Committee:-

- NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highlands and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20 Year 1 (attached as Annex A to the report) for the period covering 1 April to 31 December 2017;
- NOTED** the forthcoming pilot project whereby Police surgeries would be held in Kingussie and Grantown on Spey, the dates and times for which would be circulated; and
- AGREED** that further information be sought from the Road Traffic Police to establish if there was a route cause for the increase in fatalities on the A9 within the Badenoch and Strathspey area.

6. Housing Performance Report – 1 April to 31 December 2017

Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2017

Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission remained in the room to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/2/18 dated 30 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

In discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Concern was expressed at the increase in reactive repairs and an explanation was provided for the reason for this and the strategies being adopted to reduce these in future;
- Further information was sought and provided on the impact that Universal Credit was having on Rent Arrears;
- Clarity was sought on installation of biomass boilers as it had been suggested that these were still being installed due to stock surpluses and further information was requested and provided on the alternative types of heating upgrade systems available and being advocated;
- Regarding tenants being tied to a few select energy providers, it was confirmed that the Council used SSE Plc as a supplier for void properties but

once re-let tenants were able to shop around for the best supplier in their area and were encouraged to do so;

- It was highlighted that there was a requirement for smart meters to be installed within homes by 2020 and it was queried whether this would be the responsibility of the Council or tenants; and
- The property re-let time was very good and this was welcomed by the Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period from 1 April to 31 December 2017 as detailed in the report.

7. Roads Maintenance Programme 2018/19 Prògram Càraidh Rathaidean 2018/19

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/3/18 dated 26 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

Following the presentation of the report, the Committee welcomed proposals to improve gateway signage and speed reduction signs at village entrances and it was suggested that a collective approach be taken to ensure all communities benefited. In addition, clarity was sought and provided on the Council's policy for maintenance and verge reinstatement in view of the importance of these to ensure safety.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed Roads Maintenance Programme for 2018/19 for the Badenoch & Strathspey Area as detailed in the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a request be made to the Community Council Forum to collectively consider gateway signage and speed reduction signs at village entrances to ensure that all communities across the area benefited from these improvements.

8. A9 Dualling – Dalraddy to Slochd Dà-fhillteachadh an A9 – Dail Radaidh gu ruige An Sloc

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/4/18 dated 21 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure and a verbal update was provided at the meeting on the liaison meeting with Transport Scotland and the Designer which took place on 30 January 2018.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Concern was expressed on behalf of the community of Aviemore at the proposed road alignment which moved the A9 closer to Aviemore rather than moving it towards the vacant space and an appeal was made to Transport Scotland to reconsider this aspect;
- Although the Committee welcomed traffic management measures, concern was expressed in regard to the potential for traffic diverting off the A9 through Carrbridge and Aviemore and re-joining the A9 at the Slochd entrance during the dualling construction period and it was requested that the response be amended to include these concerns; and

- Clarity was sought and provided on the difference between 20 mph speed zones and 20 mph speed limits.

Following discussion, the Chairman, seconded by Mrs M Cockburn, proposed that it be recommended that Highland Council should adopt a policy of introducing 20 mph speed limits in main built up areas throughout Badenoch & Strathspey in consultation with local communities.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report and the verbal update provided at the meeting following the liaison meeting with Transport Scotland and the Designer which took place on 30 January 2018;
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed response as circulated subject to the inclusion of the concerns raised regarding traffic diverting off the A9 through Carrbridge and re-joining the A9 at the Slochd entrance during the dualling construction period; and
- * iii. **AGREED** to recommend that Highland Council adopt a policy of introducing 20 mph speed limits in main built up areas throughout Badenoch & Strathspey in consultation with local communities.

9. Local Strategic Priorities Prìomhachasan ro-innleachdail Ionadail

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/5/18 dated 31 January 2018 by the Head of Policy and Reform.

The Committee:-

- (i) **APPROVED** the local strategic priorities for Badenoch and Strathspey;
- (ii) **AGREED** these be promoted with the wider Council membership and as part of the Council's Programme for 2017-22;
- (iii) **NOTED** that there would be opportunity, through the development of the local community partnership and engagement with community bodies and communities, to consider wider shared priorities over the Council's term; and
- (iv) **NOTED** that further work would be done in 2018 to identify how the local priorities agreed could be supported by staff and any other Council resources. This would include considering how best to measure progress. Some priorities were already well aligned to the Council's Programme.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 14 November 2017 which were approved by the Council on 14 December 2017.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held in Wick Town Hall, Bridge Street, Wick, on Wednesday, 21 February 2018 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr D Mackay
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie

Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie
Mr A Sinclair
Ms N Sinclair

Officials in attendance:

Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms A Donald, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer, Development & Infrastructure Service (by VC)
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector I MacLelland, North Area Commander, Police Scotland
Divisional Commander G Macdonald, Highlands & Islands, Police Scotland
Area Inspector M Macdonald, Police Scotland

**1. Apologies for Absence
Liesgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Police – Area Performance Summary
Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No CC/01/18 dated 8 February 2018 by the North Area Commander together with online safety campaign leaflet.

On hearing from the Chief Inspector, Members confirmed they would welcome a presentation from the Roads Policing Unit to the next appropriate meeting. The Chief Inspector advised that Police Scotland's online safety campaign leaflet had been circulated, and he encouraged Members to share the information contained therein as widely as possible.

During discussion, Members welcomed the new format of the report and raised the following issues:-

- it was disappointing that following a clear reduction in drink driving offences immediately after the introduction of the lower legal limit, there was now an upward trend in the number of recorded offences;

- it was suggested the above figures may also reflect more effective and robust enforcement and the fact the public were providing more intelligence to Police Scotland, which should be welcomed;
- a point that community councils in the area considered Police reports and attendance at meetings to be extremely helpful, albeit it was acknowledged there were constraints in terms of Police Scotland's resources in this regard;
- it was suggested there was less awareness and stigma within the community in relation to those who were driving under the influence of drugs than with drink driving and the need to consider how this issue could be addressed;
- the potential to launch a campaign in the area involving premises licence holders to target drink/drug driving. The Divisional Commander advised that he would give further consideration to the opportunities in Caithness in this regard;
- clarification was sought and provided on the figures shown for breath tests carried out relative to the number of individuals reported to the Procurator Fiscal. The Chief Inspector confirmed he would consider how this information was recorded in future reports;
- there was an ongoing problem with drugs in Caithness and further information was sought and provided in relation to the action being taken by Police Scotland to target this problem;
- it was noted the figures recorded for the supply of drugs had reduced while the number of drug related deaths in Caithness had increased, and it was suggested there was a wider issue in terms of the need for more openness and awareness in communities in relation to drug related activity;
- reference to a community safety event held in Thurso and the opportunities to continue to improve education and awareness raising amongst children, young people and adults in relation to the consequences of drink/drug misuse;
- Police Scotland be commended on their success in relation to a recent drugs seizure in Thurso;
- concern in relation to reports on social media of targeted theft whereby individual properties were being identified/marked for this crime;
- further information was sought and provided in relation to the development of third party reporting centres for sexual offences and their proposed location relative to Caithness;
- a point in relation to the importance of sexual crimes being reported by both victims and the community;
- concern at the significant time and resources Police Scotland had to invest in dealing with missing persons in the area, and the opportunity for the Council and NHS Highland to provide more assistance in this regard;
- concern in relation to speeding on the Forss straight on the A836 and the opportunity for a Police Scotland camera van to be deployed on this section of road as a deterrent, and for the Council to improve the signage in this location. The Chief Inspector advised that he had requested that a speed survey be carried out on this road. He also supported the deployment of the camera van in this location, and confirmed he would feedback to Members on progress with both issues;
- the attendance of three senior Police Scotland officers at the Committee be welcomed on the basis this demonstrated a commitment to localism;

- Police Scotland be commended on a recent example of decentralisation whereby a local senior officer had secured a new post which allowed him to continue to live in Caithness;
- clarification was sought on the potential to report on traffic offences by age group to assist with a targeted response in the community. It was explained that current software did not allow for a detailed breakdown but it was hoped this information could be provided in the future;
- it would be helpful to have local reporting on the number of road traffic collisions in Caithness and also in relation to those incidents which had involved a road closure given the impact on the local community. The Chief Inspector advised that Police Scotland were fully aware of the sensitivities around this issue, and advised that reporting of road closures was the responsibility of BEAR Scotland. In addition, there was a Highland wide Road Safety Group which reviewed all information in relation to each serious or fatal road collision and that this information was shared with the Council;
- the opportunities to undertake more awareness raising in communities of online scams particularly with the elderly and more vulnerable in the area; The Divisional Commander reported on the regular messages being issued by Police Scotland on this issue and national work ongoing in this regard. He also emphasised that the whole community was vulnerable to scams;
- a point in relation to the potential for the Caithness Members to have a vehicle by social media to share information locally, for example in relation to the online safety campaign; and
- in the event the Police were aware of any safety issues arising from the condition of the roads in the area, it would be helpful if these could be reported to the Council or BEAR Scotland as appropriate.

In conclusion of this item, the Chief Inspector and Divisional Commander emphasised that information and intelligence from the public should be encouraged on the basis it had been shown to achieve positive results, and that they would further discussions in regard to raising awareness of this issue in communities.

Thereafter, the Divisional Commander reported that the transition from the Police Control Room in Inverness to Dundee had now been completed. He advised that the feedback from operational staff in relation to the transition had been positive but that if Members were aware of any issues they contact either himself or the Area Inspector in the first instance.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** following scrutiny, the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2017- 31 December 2017; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Police Scotland's Roads Policing Unit be invited to provide an update to the Committee at the next appropriate meeting.

4. **Wick Associated School Group Overview** **Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**

There is circulated Report No CC/02/18 dated 14 February 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

Arising from the report, the Education Quality Improvement Manager reported that it had not been possible to include an additional column in the staffing table showing vacancies in the ASG as requested at the previous meeting on the basis she had been advised this was a Highland wide report template. However, she reported that currently the Wick ASG had 2.8 FTE class teacher vacancies and 2.8 ASN teacher vacancies. She advised that discussions were ongoing with colleagues in the Service on the recruitment challenges in Caithness and that a meeting was to be held with Head Teachers to discuss potential solutions to this issue, for example the appointment of more probationary teachers.

The Education Quality Improvement Manager also provided an update in regard to the Phase 2 of the implementation of the management schools programme in the Wick ASG, with specific reference to consultations undertaken with parents and staff and she provided a summary of the comments arising from the consultation to date. In terms of next steps, a Members seminar had been arranged for 2 March 2018, and a further consultation meeting was to be held with parents and staff during the week commencing 18 March 2018.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was clear from the consultation meetings that there were varying points of view and concerns in terms of acceptance of the management of schools programme and it was crucial that all issues were taken into consideration going forward to alleviate any perception locally that there may be a pre-determined outcome;
- it was important the information requested in relation to staffing and vacancies be included in future reports on the grounds that it highlighted the particular issues and challenges pertaining to the delivery of education in Caithness. Members therefore requested that the report template be amended to incorporate this additional local information;
- the management of schools proposals were likely to be controversial and therefore it was important that Members in their role in working with communities were provided with as much detailed information as possible on the proposed options in advance of the next meeting with staff and parents and in particular it was critical that costings were available; and
- it was important that the Service's officials who had attended the management of schools programme consultation meetings were present at the Members seminar on 2 March 2018 so that they could respond at first hand to Members questions and concerns on this issue.

The Manager confirmed she would feedback the above points to the appropriate officials within the Service.

During further discussion, Members expressed their concerns in relation to ASN provision on the basis it was considered that Caithness did not compare well in terms of the level of provision relative to other areas in Highland. In particular, concern was expressed that Members could not access the link to the report (ACS-33-12) which provided details of the model used to provide an appropriate level of ASN cover to each school within the ASG, which had been approved at the Adult and Children's Services Committee on 26 September 2012. It was suggested the model agreed in 2012 may no longer be fit for purpose given the demands on the Service in terms of ASN provision in the area, and therefore it was important that Members had full information on this matter. It was

acknowledged that ASN provision was a complex issue and could be a subjective matter, however it was suggested there was a need for the current model and processes to be reviewed given the unique challenges in Caithness and to achieve a fairer and more consistent system.

In responding to the points raised, the Manager advised that a review of the process around ASN provision was being undertaken by the Service and that she would feedback to the appropriate officials Members concerns in relation to the challenges around recruitment and ASN provision in Caithness.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to request that the report template be amended so that additional information be provided showing FTE posts advertised but not filled, and also in relation to the number of non-class committed teachers at each school.

5. 20mph Speed Limit Implementation Buileachadh Casg Astair 20msu

There had been circulated Report No CC/03/18 dated 24 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members welcomed the proposals and raised the following issues:-

- it was important the road safety aspects of the proposals be highlighted in response to any concerns which may be expressed by members of the public in connection with the proposed speed limit implementation;
- clarification was sought and provided on the measures to minimise as far as possible the signage required to support the implementation of the speed limits; and
- the fact the proposals did not include speed humps was welcomed on the basis that they had the potential to cause damage to vehicles and were also known to increase air pollution.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed Road Traffic Regulation Order for the implementation of a 20mph speed limit in Wick;
- ii. **AGREED** that officers implement the scheme in the event there were no sustained objections; and
- iii. **NOTED** that a further report will only be brought back to Committee in the event of sustained (relevant) objections.

6. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais - 1 Giblean 2017 to 31 An Dubhlachd 2017

There had been circulated Report No CC/04/18 dated 6 February 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

Arising from the report, the Principal Housing Officer advised that there were nine properties in Thurso and eighteen in Wick in respect of which there had been no expressions of interest, which represented a considerable improvement on previous figures.

In discussion, concern was expressed at the impacts of universal credit and rent arrears on tenants and the Council. It was reported that the key discussions between the Council and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on the impacts were taking place at a strategic/policy level and that a large volume of work had been undertaken on this issue to date. In this regard, it was requested that Members receive a briefing from the Housing Policy Team on the impacts of universal credit on the Council and its finances and their policy considerations on these matters both currently and in the immediate future.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Service's housing staff be commended on the compassionate, patient and supportive approach being taken in dealing with tenants affected by universal credit and rent arrears and for their prompt responses and actions in dealing with queries from Members on behalf of constituents on this and a range of other housing issues;
- concern was expressed at tenants who were experiencing fuel poverty and were struggling to heat their homes and a point that in terms of the capital programme, the replacement of kitchen/bathrooms which were in a satisfactory condition should not be prioritised ahead of the installation of affordable heating systems;
- it was requested that the Principal Housing Officer and Tenant Participation Officer also be invited to attend the next ward business at which housing maintenance and other housing issues in Caithness were to be discussed to ensure there was collaboration across all aspects of the Service and full knowledge of the issues was available to Members; and
- concern was expressed that the Council was installing air source heating systems which had to be serviced by external contractors at significant cost.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** following scrutiny, the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017;
- ii. **AGREED** that Members receive a briefing from the Housing Policy Team on the impacts of universal credit including on the Council and its finances and their policy considerations on these matters both currently and in the immediate future; and
- iii. **AGREED** to request that the Principal Housing Officer and Tenant Participation Officer attend the next ward business meeting at which housing issues in Caithness would be discussed.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated the Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 21 November 2017, which were approved by the Council on 14 December 2017.

Arising from the Minute, it was requested that responses be provided to Members on the actions detailed in the Minutes in relation to Croileagan Inbhir Theorsa's funding and free school meal uptake.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes; and
- ii. **AGREED** that arrangements be made for responses to be provided to Members on the actions detailed in the Minute in relation to Croileagan Inbhir Theorsa's funding and free school meals.

The meeting ended at 12.35pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Town House, Inverness on Thursday, 22 February 2018 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr J Gray
Mr B Boyd	Mr A Graham
Mr I Brown	Mr A Jarvie
Mrs C Caddick	Mr R Laird
Miss J Campbell	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr A Christie	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr G Ross
Mr K Gowans	Mr C Smith

Officials in Attendance:

Mr S Black, Director of Development and Infrastructure
 Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration
 Mr R Gerring, Transport Planning Manager
 Ms A Tanner, Inverness City Heritage Trust Project Officer
 Mr J Taylor, Roads Operations Manager
 Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector C Gough, Inverness Area Commander, Police Scotland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.

Mrs H Carmichael in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms E Knox, Mrs B McAllister and Mr G Cruickshank.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 5 – Miss J Campbell (non-financial)
 Item 6 – Miss J Campbell, Mr J Gray, Mr R MacWilliam and Mr R Laird (all non-financial) and Mr K Gowans (financial)
 Item 13 – Mrs I MacKenzie (non-financial)
 Item 16 – Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray and Mr R Laird (all non-financial)

3. **New Year's Honours** **Urraman na Bliadhna Ùire**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following individuals had been recognised in the New Year's Honours List:-

Stuart Christopher Rose, BEM
Dr James Patrick Vestey, OBE

4. **Police – Area Performance Summary** **Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/1/18 dated 2 February 2018 by the Inverness Area Commander which provided an update on progress with reference to the objectives outlined within the Highland Policing Plan 2017-20.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it would be helpful if a Briefing could be arranged for Members on the issues raised in the report, specifically the drink/drive figures, licensed premises checks, drug offences and statistics in relation to shoplifting;
- in relation to shoplifting, the increase in detection due to an increased Police presence in the City Centre was welcomed;
- interaction with Inverness BID in terms of the sharing of good practice and marshalling activities (leading to a quick and dynamic response in the reporting of crimes) was also welcomed;
- there was however concern about the increase in the level of drink/drive offences and speeding offences;
- both this report and the next report on Operation Respect City Centre proved that the City Centre was becoming safer and there was a need to convey the thanks of the Committee to all those involved for the marked improvement in policing;
- in regard to shoplifting statistics and the reasons behind this issue, consideration should be given to making this a standing item on future agendas in order to monitor the situation;
- there was surprise at the statistics in regard to use of a mobile phone whilst driving offence as it was not felt that this had lessened to any great degree;
- there appeared to be a close relationship between the increase in shoplifting, drug and alcohol offences and problems with Universal Credit and it would be helpful if more research could be undertaken and detail provided to inform the future Briefing for Members; and
- consideration should be given as to whether it might be feasible to implement a different form of policing for minor offences in future e.g. 'warning/advising' culprits as to their behaviour in the first instance as opposed to issuing Fixed Penalty Notices, such as for littering offences.

Thereafter, and having thanked the Area Commander for his presentation, the Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20 (attached as Annex A to the report) for the period covering 1 April – 31 December 2017.

It was also **AGREED** that a Briefing on the issues raised at the meeting as detailed would be arranged for Members of the Committee.

**5. Inverness Community Safety Partnership – Operation Respect City Centre 2017/18 Winter Festival Period Evaluation Report
Com-pàirteachas Sàbhailteachd Coimhearsnachd Inbhir Nis – Aithisg Mheasaidh Ùine Fèis Geamhraidh 2017/18 ‘Operation Respect’ Meadhan a’ Bhaile**

Declaration of Interest – Miss J Campbell declared a non-financial interest in this item as a member of the Inverness Community Safety Partnership but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Joint Report No CIA/2/18 dated 9 February 2018 by the Inverness City Area Manager and the Inverness Area Commander (Highland and Islands Division, Police Scotland) which provided an overview of resources, actions and evaluation of the multi-agency Operation Respect – City Centre for the Winter Festival 2017/18.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to all those involved with Operation Respect and who had contributed to such a successful outcome as detailed in the report;
- the information on trends and analysis which had been provided was welcomed;
- in acknowledging the excellent work which had been undertaken, there was a need to highlight that the multi-agency approach was working particularly well and that as a result there was a safer and more relaxed atmosphere in the City Centre;
- special mention had to be made of the outstanding role of the Street Pastors in view of the contribution which they were making to the City Centre; and
- it would be beneficial if this report could link with other initiatives currently taking place, including locality plans.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the evaluation available to date on the effectiveness of Operation Respect – City Centre for Winter 2017/18 as presented.

**6. Inverness City Heritage Trust Annual Report
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Urras Dualchais Baile Inbhir Nis**

Declarations of Interest – Miss J Campbell and Mr J Gray (as members of Inverness City Heritage Trust), Mr R MacWilliam (as a member of Inverness City Heritage Trust and the Academy Townscape Heritage Project) and Mr R Laird (as Chair of the Academy Street Townscape Heritage Project) declared non-financial interests in respect of this item as detailed but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest as an employee of Inverness College UHI but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/3/18 dated 30 January 2018 by the Inverness Heritage Trust Project Officer which provided information on the work of Inverness City Heritage Trust during the financial year 2016/17, with particular attention to the total grant allocation to projects in Inverness Riverside Conservation Areas to date and during 2016/17.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- whilst noting the achievements and performance which had been detailed in the report, it had to be highlighted that there was still insufficient funding to deal with issues relating to historical buildings in the City;
- also, whilst improvements were encouraged and the Council was working constructively with Historic Scotland in this regard, there were many issues, such as private ownership of buildings in need of repair, which were more difficult to tackle;
- work was currently ongoing in relation to projects in Academy Street and at the Midmills Building in Inverness and this was welcomed;
- there was also a need to acknowledge the funding and Officer support which had been received from the Inverness City Heritage Trust for such projects;
- there were however complex issues associated with buildings on Castle Street and High Street and solutions for these areas were still being sought;
- it was noted that a further report on the progress of the Academy Townscape Heritage Project in particular would be submitted to the next meeting with an update on further progress;
- it was suggested that consideration should be given to the siting of more blue plaques in the City if possible to commemorate famous persons who had lived and worked in the area; and
- there were frustrations where civic and commercial concerns were not aligned and where this then led to a delay in progress and action and as such it would be helpful if future legislation could address this issue.

Thereafter, Members **NOTED**:-

- (i) the contributions made by the Inverness City Heritage Trust in delivering a programme of conservation work funded by grant assistance in Inverness since 2005;
- (ii) the work carried out in partnership with the Traditional Building Forum for the Highlands and Islands to deliver conferences for building professionals/ practitioners. Also, the work with other building professionals to try and find realistic options for retention and repair of important city buildings and features;
- (iii) the current situation with regard to future funding from Historic Environment Scotland for Inverness City Heritage Trust; and

- (iv) that a report on the progress of project work, with an emphasis on the Academy Street Townscape Heritage Project, would be presented to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

7. Roads Maintenance Programme 2018/2019
Prògram Càraidh Sgìreil airson Rathaidean agus Dhrochaidean 2017/18

There had been circulated Report No CIA/4/18 dated 30 January 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that the recent Winter period had had a very detrimental effect on the road network across the City and surrounding areas;
- there was frustration that allocation of the roads maintenance budget was based on the distance of roads (as opposed to width and usage) and as such there was a significant disparity between the City of Inverness area and the rest of the Highlands;
- the continued provision within the wider Council budget for Winter Maintenance as a result of the recent budget was welcomed;
- there was a need for further more detailed discussion on the allocation of the roads maintenance budget (with particular reference to the City of Inverness Area) and it was suggested that this should be undertaken by the Provost in the first instance with the Chair of the Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee and the Director of Development & Infrastructure;
- it was also hoped that further clarity in this regard could be provided as a result of the forthcoming zero based budgeting exercise;
- in order to take this issue forward, and to seek a fair allocation for the area, it was suggested also that a unanimous recommendation from this Committee should be made to the full Council in March to review the allocation formula for roads maintenance to better reflect infrastructure design, usage and actual maintenance costs;
- it should be recognised that delays in surface dressing greatly increased costs over time;
- roads in industrial areas and the City Centre were very rarely given a high priority in terms of the current roads maintenance arrangements;
- there was a need to convey thanks to the roads maintenance and gritting teams for the considerable work which had been undertaken over recent weeks in particular;
- there was a need to recognise the impact on the surrounding roads adjacent to the successful West Link route;
- consideration also had to be given to the current poor state of trunk roads in the area;
- on an economic level, it was anticipated that there would be a considerable number of claims made to the Council for damage to cars as a result of the condition of some roads at present; and
- it would be helpful if a Briefing could be arranged for Members on disaggregation of the Roads Maintenance budget.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2018/19 Roads Maintenance Programme for the City of Inverness Area.

*It was also **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Council should review the allocation formula for Roads Maintenance to better reflect infrastructure design, usage and actual maintenance costs.

It was further **AGREED** that a Briefing should be arranged for Members of the Committee on disaggregation of the Roads Maintenance budget.

8. Lower Speed (City Centre) Study Sgrùdadh Astaran nas Ìsle (Meadhan a' Bhaile)

There had been circulated Report No CIA/5/18 dated 1 February 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- whilst acknowledging the regulations which were in place in relation to the siting of signage, it was suggested that further consideration should be given to the prominence of the signage at the gateways to the City;
- it would be helpful if further comparison statistics could be provided in relation to results before and after implementation of 20mph speed limits;
- increased awareness around this issue was imperative as it was a reality that slower cars were safer for all concerned and the focus had to be on safety above all else;
- there was a need to consider repeat signs where possible, along with additional road markings;
- priority had to be given to residential areas, and specifically those areas with School buildings;
- in terms of the responses which had been received and which had been detailed in the report, it had to be acknowledged that not everyone would be content with the final decisions taken;
- there was a need to consider the concerns expressed by cyclists in the City and their experiences to date, both good and bad;
- it had to be recognised that it would not be feasible to allocate a 20mph speed limit on all roads, such as Millburn Road;
- this was not just a City issue but also applied to village and more rural areas in the Highlands;
- it would be helpful to consult Local Ward Members in the first instance prior to the siting of any new signs;
- the current mix of 20mph and 30mph signs on the same road was causing confusion in parts of the City and this required to be changed;
- consideration should perhaps be given to the imposition of 20mph zones throughout the whole City area;
- more information was required in regard to the compliance threshold and the levels at which this was tolerated; and
- it would be important to involve Inverness BID in future consultations.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (i) **NOTED** the contents of the report and the supporting documentation;

- (ii) **NOTED** the aspects of the Inverness City Development Brief that were relevant to the actions set out in the final section of the Study Report;
- (iii) **AGREED** to endorse the key outcomes identified from the Individual/Social/Material Workshop: Users of streetscape feel safer: Inverness is more attractive: improved amenity and economy;
- (iv) **AGREED** to delegate to the Director of Development and Infrastructure to develop and implement a messaging campaign about lower speeds in Inverness City and other communities; and
- (v) **AGREED** to delegate to the Director of Development and Infrastructure to review the existing speed limit gateways and enhance them through improved signs and markings.

It was also **AGREED** that liaison should be undertaken with Ward Members on signage options.

9. Inverness City Active Travel Network (ICATN) Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Lìonra Chòmhdhail Ghnìomhach Baile Inbhir Nis

There had been circulated Report No CIA/6/18 dated 6 February 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, it was highlighted that road markings in relation to contraflow cycle lanes were causing confusion in certain parts of the City and this needed to be examined as a matter of safety.

It was also noted that the Scottish Government had announced plans for an increase to the budget for Active Travel Networks and this represented an opportunity for further bids for funding for the area which was welcomed.

Thereafter, Members **NOTED** the contents of the report and that reports would be brought back to Ward Business Meetings and the Committee as necessitated, such as the proposal for any statutory approvals such as Road Traffic Regulation Order.

It was also **AGREED** to appoint Mr B Boyd, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs C Caddick and Mrs I MacKenzie to sit on the Advisory Panel for the ICATN Programme.

10. Street Lighting Update Soillseachadh Sràide

There had been circulated Report No CIA/7/18 dated 9 February 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, and in welcoming the progress which had been made on the LED programme as detailed in the report, it was suggested that it would be helpful if further information could be provided at a Ward level in future if possible.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the progress and future programme for delivery of LED replacement lighting in Inverness.

It was also **NOTED** that a submission had been made for EU funding under the ERDF SMART Cities Programme for grant funding towards the provision of

Intelligent Street Lighting in Inverness and that development of the proposals would involve a consultation stage, including presentation at Ward Business meetings with a report back to the Committee later in 2018.

**11. Homologation of New Street Names
Aontachadh Ainmean Ùra Sràide**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/8/18 dated 8 February 2018 by the Inverness City Area Manager.

The Committee **HOMOLOGATED** the naming of new streets for new housing and flatted developments in Drumnadrochit, Lewiston and the Hill, Holm, Ness Castle and Crown areas of Inverness as detailed in the report.

**12. Inverness Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis**

**(a) Financial Monitoring
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/9/18 dated 7 February 2018 by the Inverness City Area Manager.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 31 January 2018 and that overall expenditure was within agreed budgets.

**(b) Grants and Capital Projects
Pròiseactan Tabhartais agus Calpa**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/10/18 dated 1 February 2018 by the Inverness City Area Manager.

The Committee **NOTED** the funds available for allocation and the current status of capital projects as detailed in the report.

It was also **NOTED** that there had been very positive feedback from visitors in relation to the recent Town House Open Days and that work was ongoing with High Life Highland in relation to arranging further Open Days in future.

**(c) Budget Setting for 2018/19 and Capital Programme
Suidheachadh Buidseit airson 2018/19 agus Prògram Calpa**

There had been circulated Joint Report No CIA/11/18 dated 7 February 2018 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and the Inverness City Manager which invited Members to set the revenue budget for the Inverness Common Good Fund for the financial year 2018/19.

It also clarified governance arrangements, anticipated income (primarily from tenancy rentals), the proposed expenditure, split into essentials (for the maintenance of buildings and the provision of basic services) and a number of additional items, action on the future investment of any

projected surplus funds and the structure of payments made to the Council for services rendered in support of the fund and how these services should be supported in the coming financial year and thereafter.

The Committee:-

- (i) **AGREED** the Common Good Fund budget for 2018/19 detailed within the report and appendices;
- (ii) **AGREED** to maintain a general reserve of £2m and reallocate the remaining uncommitted sum of £1.6m to a Property Investment Fund; and
- (iii) **NOTED** that Officers would continue to monitor projected cash flow for the Common Good Fund, in particular through the Capital Projects Monitoring Report, with an emphasis on the utilisation of surplus revenue either within projects or as an opportunity for investment.

It was **NOTED** that a report on the Victorian Market would be submitted to the next meeting in May.

It was also **NOTED** that further works were now being undertaken on the Steeple Clock and that it was hoped that it would be back to full working order soon.

Also, that active marketing of the vacant area in the top floor of 1-5 Church Street, Inverness was continuing.

13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

Declaration of Interest – Mrs I MacKenzie declared a non-financial interest in item (iii) as a member of the Victorian Market Stakeholder Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

The following Minutes had been circulated for noting or approval as appropriate:-

- i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 30 November 2017 – **NOTED** – subject to the following correction – Item 4 (Inverness BID Ballot for New Term) – to confirm that there had been recent incorrect references to the ‘Retail Park’ as the ‘Inverness Centre’ but these references had not in fact come from the ‘press’ as had been stated in the Minute;
- ii. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 29 January 2018 - **AGREED**; and
- iii. Victorian Market Stakeholder Management Group held on 6 February 2018 – **NOTED**.

**14. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail**

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**15. Inverness Common Good Account Sites and Premises Transaction Report
Aithisg Gnothachais Làraich agus Togalaichean Chunntasan Maoin Math Choitcheann Inbhir Nis**

There had been circulated to Members only Joint Report No CIA/12/18 dated 19 January 2018 by the Head of Development and Regeneration and the Property Manager (Estates).

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report as circulated.

**16. Lease Amendment
Atharrachadh Aonta Màil**

Declarations of Interest – Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray and Mr R Laird declared non-financial interests in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No CIA/13/18 dated 23 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Additional Urgent Item

Corporate Investment/Development Purchase Opportunity

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. CIA/14/18 dated 15 February 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 3.15pm.