

**The Highland Council
No. 11 2019/2020**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 12 March 2020 at 10.35am.

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

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr D MacKay
Mr R Balfour	Mr W MacKay (v/c)
Mrs J Barclay	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr R Bremner (v/c)	Mr S Mackie
Mr J Bruce	Mr A Mackinnon
Mrs C Caddick	Ms A MacLean
Miss J Campbell	Mr C MacLeod (v/c)
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr D MacLeod
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Christie	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr I Cockburn	Mrs B McAllister
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr J McGillivray (v/c)
Mr G Cruickshank	Mr N McLean (v/c)
Ms K Currie	Mrs M Paterson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr I Ramon
Mr J Finlayson	Mr M Reiss
Mr M Finlayson	Mr A Rhind
Mr L Fraser	Mr D Rixson
Mr R Gale (v/c)	Mrs F Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Graham	Ms E Roddick
Mr J Gray	Mr K Rosie
Mrs P Hadley (v/c)	Mr G Ross
Mr T Heggie	Mr P Saggars
Mr A Henderson	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Jarvie	Ms N Sinclair (v/c)
Mr B Lobban	Mr C Smith
Mr D Louden (v/c)	Ms M Smith
Mrs L MacDonald	Mr B Thompson (v/c)

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment
Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place	Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance	Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing
Executive Chief Officer, Health & Social Care	

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs I Campbell, Mr C Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Ms E Knox, Mr A MacInnes, Mrs D MacKay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Munro, Ms P Munro and Mrs C Wilson.

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

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

Item 12 – Mr S Mackie (Financial)

Item 13 – Mr A Christie (Financial)

Item 14 – Mr A Christie (Financial)

Item 14 - Mrs A MacLean (Non-Financial)

Item 18 – Mr A Henderson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr A MacKinnon, Mr J Finlayson, Dr I Cockburn, Ms M Smith, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr B Thompson, Mrs F Robertson and Mr A Christie (All Financial)

Item 18 – Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial)

Item 19 – Mr A MacKinnon (Financial)

Item 22 – Mr A Jarvie and Mr D Macpherson (Both Non-Financial)

3. **Presentation - Microsoft**

A presentation was undertaken at the meeting during which the advantages of adopting the Cloud Navigator programme to underpin the aims of an ambitious, sustainable and connected Council were highlighted.

In this regard, it was stressed that this was now a fast paced digital world in which conversations were happening in unexpected places on a digital level and there was therefore a need for organisations to have the capability to build on current arrangements in order to realise and deliver on the opportunities for future innovation.

As such, digital transformation was building the capability to innovate every day and in this regard the three most important stages were confirmed as innovating, building and modernising.

In summary, the Cloud Navigator approach represented eight weeks of Microsoft investment to shape a programme of interventions to accelerate business change and as such represented a multiple step approach for organisations.

During discussion, information was provided on ownership of new 'digital tools', how quickly the Council could move towards the Cloud Navigator programme, the sharing of information between Local Authorities in future, the current and future arrangements for hardware in schools, required security regulations around moving to any new system and the potential for Data Centres to be located in the Highlands in future.

Decision

Having thanked the Microsoft representatives for the extremely detailed and informative presentation, the Council otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the presentation as detailed.

**4. 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 9 December 2019 and the Minutes of the Special Meetings held on 13 February and 5 March 2020 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately - which were **APPROVED**.

**5. 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 which were **APPROVED** – subject to the following:-

Housing and Property Committee, 29 January
Communities and Place Committee, 26 February

Economy & Infrastructure Committee, 6 February - Starred Item - Stromeferry Working Group

The Council **AGREED** that, in order to ensure consistency, the membership of the Working Group should continue unchanged as the Council moved forward with its new Committee Structure - Mr A Henderson, Mr H Morrison, Ms T Robertson, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr M Reiss, Ms I Campbell, Dr I Cockburn, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D MacLeod.

Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, 11 February
Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, 12 February
Caithness Committee, 19 February
Lochaber Committee, 19 February
City of Inverness Area Committee, 20 February
Sutherland County Committee, 24 February
Corporate Resources Committee, 30 January

Education Committee, 27 February - Starred Item - Stoer Primary School - Lochinver Primary School

The Council **AGREED** that education be discontinued at Stoer Primary School and its catchment transferred to that of Lochinver Primary School.

Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee, 2 March

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

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Community Planning Board held on Wednesday, 18 December 2019 (which had been approved by the Board on 28 February 2020) - which were **NOTED**.

**7. Climate Change Working Group
Buidheann-Obrach Atharrachadh na Gnàth-shìde**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Climate Change Working Group held on Friday, 28 February 2020 - which were **APPROVED**.

**8. Brexit Working Group
Buidhean Obrach Brexit**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Brexit Working Group held on Thursday, 23 January 2020 - which were **APPROVED**.

9. Recruitment Panel – Executive Chief Officers

There had been circulated Minutes of Meetings of the Recruitment Panel held on 8 January and 14 February 2020 - which were **NOTED**.

**10. Membership of Committees, etc
Ballarachd Chomataidhean, msaa**

The Council **AGREED** the following:-

Highland Licensing Committee/Highland Licensing Board

It was **NOTED** that Mr B Thompson had confirmed his intention to step down from the Highland Licensing Committee and Highland Licensing Board with immediate effect. On that basis, nominations had been sought from Wards 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 20 and 21 for the vacant place but there had been no nominations received.

Wellbeing Joint Sub Committee

It was **AGREED** that the Wellbeing Joint Sub Committee should be a Sub Committee comprising 14 Members from some or all of the following Committees of the Council: Education; Health, Wellbeing and Social Care; Communities and Place; and Housing and Property. In addition, Substitute Members should be allowed and the Sub-Committee itself should be politically balanced.

In this regard, the Council **AGREED** the membership which had been as tabled at the meeting.

Redesign Board

It was **AGREED** that the new Redesign Board should comprise 16 Members, along with the current 2 Trade Union representatives. In addition, Substitute Members should be allowed and the Board itself should be politically balanced and appoint its own Chair and Vice Chair.

In this regard, the Council **AGREED** the membership which had been tabled at the meeting.

Tourism Committee

The Council **AGREED** the membership of the Tourism Committee as follows:-

Mr B Lobban, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Henderson, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs M Paterson, Mr H Morrison, Mr R Bremner, Mr C Fraser, Dr I Cockburn, Ms M Smith, Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Mackie, Mr G Adam and Mr D Rixson.

Gaelic Committee

The Council **AGREED** the membership of the Gaelic Committee as follows:-

Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Paterson, Mr A Henderson, Miss J Campbell, Mr J Gordon, Mr R Bremner, Mr A MacInnes, Ms E Roddick, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr D MacKay, Mr A Sinclair, Mr D Rixson and Mr G Adam.

The Council also **AGREED** the following changes as tabled at the meeting:-

Corporate Resources Committee – Mr J Bruce to replace Mr D MacLeod.

Climate Change Working Group – Mr J Gordon and Mr D Macpherson to replace Mr M Finlayson and Mr T Heggie.

11. Question Time Am Ceiste

The following Question had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance –

Mr K Gowans

To the Leader of the Council

“As we now approach 3 years of the Independent/Lib Dem/Labour Administration of this Council, SNP Members still have no representation on external bodies where Members are appointed in this Chamber. Surely you acknowledge that the SNP group are the second largest group and the largest political group in this Council and as such should have representation on external bodies or boards in a way that reflects the membership of Highland Council. By disallowing SNP membership, the position undermines local democracy.

Will you consider this anomaly and bring forward a review of the Council’s representation on external bodies and boards to better reflect the democratic wishes of the Highland people?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether, given that the Best Value Audit Report had placed an emphasis on the need for the Council to be more communicative, inclusive, integrated and informed, the Leader could explain how her response accorded with the ethos of that report.

In response, the Leader confirmed that it was her opinion that the current Administration was open, sharing and inclusive and that Mr Gowans should contact her directly if he had a particular issue which he wished to discuss directly with her.

12. Notices of Motion Brathan Gluasaid

The following Notices of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance –

(i) Council notes that during the 2019/20 budget setting, members agreed that a waste policy would be drafted to the following statement:

“There would be a restriction on vans, trailers and other large loads of waste containing construction and demolition wastes”.

This was due to a problem with specific type of waste being disposed of by some commercial operators at domestic recycling centres.

On 15 August 2019, the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee agreed a policy in response to this. However, there has latterly been confusion and ambiguity around what was agreed. Section 5.2.2 of the report outlined the proposed restrictions on sizes of trailer, van and types of vehicle, anything over this would be prohibited from using any recycling centre regardless of the type of waste it contained. However, section 5.2.3 immediately after stated:

“Other household waste (e.g. household furniture, electrical appliances or garden waste) will not be affected by the quantity restrictions imposed on construction and demolition waste detailed above”

The ambiguity of this gave many people the impression that household waste, including garden waste, would not be affected by the restrictions.

The policy allows multiple trips with smaller quantities of waste, making any revenue saving by reducing to overall quantity of waste disposed of questionable. Furthermore, taking vehicle multiple journeys to dispose of a quantity of waste which could be disposed of in one, it is difficult to align this with Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency.

Taking into consideration all of the above points. Along with the fact that in many areas of the Highlands, the Council is the only provider of waste services, this Council agrees with the policy's original intent; to impose a restriction on vans, trailers and other large loads of waste containing construction and demolition wastes. However it proposes that there should be flexibility for oversize trailers belonging to private householders disposing of domestic waste such as household furniture, electrical appliances and garden waste. Individuals disposing of building waste should be restricted to the existing policy.

Signed: Mr A Jarvie Mr P Saggars Mrs C Caddick

In line with Standing Order 12 – the following financial impact had been identified by the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) in relation to the above Notice of Motion - there would be a financial impact arising from this proposal but within the timescale it had not been possible to accurately determine the value.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- the submission of this Notice of Motion had followed a number of complaints about the ambiguity of the current policy in relation to disposal of household and garden waste which appeared to have a detrimental impact on rural areas in particular;
- there was concern that if this situation was not resolved, it could lead to increased instances of fly tipping across the Highlands and this had been witnessed in recent days;
- it was suggested that it would perhaps be advisable to accept the terms of the Notice of Motion and also review this policy again at the time of the next budget setting process;
- steps had to be taken to resolve a situation whereby private householders were being penalised because they were not using the correct type of 'conveyancing' as judged by Council Officers;

- it was imperative that a solution was found to this issue in the short term and until a more suitable arrangement could be put in place;
- a suggested compromise was that the Council could provide double axle trailers larger than 2 x 4 metres access to household waste recycling centres with 4 free permits per year in 2020/21 to dispose of household waste;
- it should be highlighted that there was a mixed economy in the Highlands in relation to refuse collection and other services for collection were available, along with composting where possible;
- there was serious concern that a suggested amendment to the budget, which had only been agreed in the previous week, was now being proposed;
- it was imperative for the Council to be a 'listening Council' and to take account of the concerns which had been expressed on this issue by members of the public, particularly in rural areas where a brown bin collection service was not in operation;
- it had been stated that there was a mixed economy for refuse collection in the Highlands but there were no alternatives published on the Council's Website for the information of the general public;
- in relation to Climate Change, the suggestion that there should be smaller trailers with a consequence of perhaps more journeys could not be supported in terms of the risk of increased carbon emissions;
- the group most affected by the Council's policy in this regard were the Recycling Team who had to enforce it and who often came in for unacceptable levels of abuse and it was felt that approval of the Motion could perhaps make this situation worse;
- in terms of a contrary view, it was suggested that the current Council policy had many unintended consequences and this put recycling staff under even more pressure;
- there had been similar issues with recycling in the past which had given rise to complaints from communities across the Highlands and it was felt that better communication was needed in future;
- there was a strong feeling that support could not be given for any proposal, such as contained in the amendment, which limited Council services which were paid for by the general public;
- the Council policy contained an emphasis on 'reduce, re-use and recycle' and it was suggested that this would not be fully supported if the terms of the Motion were carried;
- the dangers and costs associated with potential fly-tipping across the Highlands had to be acknowledged;
- consideration should be given to any scheme which would enable composting at a local level for those people who could not do this on an individual basis;
- it was queried as to whether it could be possible in future for items to be taken away from recycling centres to be re-used; and
- as well as reviewing the current policy, there was a need to thank and pay tribute to current recycling staff for the work undertaken across the Highlands.

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

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Henderson, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, moved that the Council should provide double axle trailers larger than 2 x 4 metres access to household waste recycling centres with 4 free permits per year in 2020/21 to dispose of household waste.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 28 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 26 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the

votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

A Jarvie, P Saggars, K Currie, R MacWilliam, R Balfour, J Campbell, L Fraser, A Sinclair, C Smith, L MacDonald, C Caddick, D MacLeod, J Bruce, I Ramon, Mr D MacKay, K Gowans, G Campbell-Sinclair, K Rosie, G MacKenzie, S Mackie, M Smith, I Cockburn, P Hadley, C MacLeod, M Cockburn, D Louden, R Bremner and N Sinclair.

For the Amendment

A Henderson, A MacKinnon, D Macpherson, M Paterson, G Ross, T Heggie, A MacLean, B McAllister, G Cruickshank, J Finlayson, M Finlayson, G Adam, T Robertson, M Reiss, F Robertson, J Barclay, D Rixson, A Graham, B Lobban, H Carmichael, M Davidson, A Christie, J Gray, B Thompson, R Gale and Mrs D MacKay.

Abstention

Mr A Rhind

Decision

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

(ii) The Highland Council call upon CoSLA to set up a policy forum specifically related to developing policies and policy adjustments aimed at supporting serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families in accordance with the commitments made by all Scottish Local Authorities in support of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Signed: Mr C Smith Mrs C Caddick Mrs M Davidson Ms E Roddick Mr R Balfour

In line with Standing Order 12 – the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) had confirmed that there was no financial impact in relation to the above Notice of Motion.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was anticipated that the setting up of a policy forum would help to develop policies which could be implemented across Scotland and ensure that the Armed Forces community could access services in a consistent way, irrespective of where they chose to live or settle;
- when entering the civilian community, the structures that soldiers were used to were not always in place due to the different approaches taken by Local Authorities and this could make it difficult for them and their families;
- a unified policy and approach would be a welcome development for members of the Armed Forces who sought to settle out with the area in which they served and it was anticipated that there would be many Veterans' Champions within Local Authorities who could sit on policy forums;
- since signing up to the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant, the Council had been recognised as having demonstrated best practice in its approach to working with members of the Armed Forces and their families and this had to be highlighted;
- the cross-sector work undertaken by organisations within Highland and Moray, which had particularly focused on education, employment, health and housing, had been exemplary;

- policies existed in other areas in Scotland which ensured that veterans and the serving military were both treated equally and, in some respects, given preferential treatment;
- the establishment of a policy forum would ensure best practice across Scotland and an aligned approach across all Local Authorities;
- the work that had gone into the Covenant in Highland had been substantial and Officers were commended for the support they had provided;
- in addition to writing to CoSLA, it was suggested that raising the profile of the proposed policy forum and increasing press coverage should be considered;
- in signing up to the Covenant, the responsibility was incumbent on Councils to support veterans;
- in highlighting the number of new houses being built in Inverness, it was suggested that there was still a lack of housing specifically allocated to military personnel; and
- it should be noted that military personnel were highly trained and could deliver a high level of professional service in any community.

Decision

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

(iii) Responding to the Climate Emergency, Highland Council agrees that all householders, except those in listed buildings and/or conservation areas, can replace existing glazing with double or triple glazing without having to apply for planning permission.

Signed: Mr D Louden Dr I Cockburn

In line with Standing Order 12 – the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) had confirmed that there was no financial impact in relation to the above Notice of Motion.

The Council **NOTED** that the above Notice of Motion had however now been withdrawn.

(iv) Highland Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency.

The Public expect Highland Council to follow that declaration with practical measures.

Highland Council manages a substantial Council House building programme. Building in a Highland environment is expensive and all budgets are tightly controlled. Highland Council may prove reluctant to try new technology such as District Heating Systems because of their perceived risk.

Accordingly, Council directs the CEO and appropriate HC officers to prepare and make a submission for 50% costs towards a District Heating System under the 'Heat Networks Early Adopter Challenge Fund'

Suggested first site: Phase 2 of HC's proposed development on the Blar Mhor by Fort William since this will involve over 100 new houses with, eventually, a new hospital and a new UHI/WHC building.

Signed: Mr D Rixson Mrs T Robertson

In line with Standing Order 12 – the following financial impact had been identified by the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) in relation to the above Notice of Motion - there would be a financial impact of 50% of the costs associated with this proposal but the overall costs were not available and it was therefore not possible to determine the cost to the Council.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- it was now proposed that the original Notice of Motion should be amended to read as follows – Highland Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. The public expect Highland Council to follow that declaration with practical measures. Highland Council manages a substantial Council house building programme. Building in a Highland environment is expensive and budgets are tightly controlled. Highland Council welcomes the potential support that might be offered by the Scottish Government’s ‘Heat Networks Early Adopters Challenge Fund’ and agrees to explore the opportunities for assistance with future projects. Council also agrees to explore the possibilities of a District Heating System in connection with Phase 2 of the Blar Mhor development by Fort William – with a report coming back to Council’;
- District Heating Systems offered far greater efficiencies than individual heating systems and could generate heat from a variety of renewable energy sources;
- the potential benefits of installing a single centralised heating system included a reduction in fuel poverty, improved air quality and the removal of fossil fuels;
- whilst District Heating Systems were not suitable in remote areas where there was only a scattering of houses, an increasing number of people lived in or near larger settlements within the Highlands;
- current heating systems were not considered to be climate friendly and energy costs were at a premium in the Highlands;
- the West Coast had experienced a particularly stormy winter recently and as houses could not be hermetically sealed, wind-chill was an issue for buildings as well as people;
- the Council’s strategic vision included the provision of affordable homes for young families to rent and heat;
- consideration, including an options appraisal, should be made of the use of a District Heating System for Phase 2 of the Blar Mhor development and all other housing developments in the future;
- the Scottish Government’s recently published Heat Networks Bill would provide a regulatory framework for the development of heat networks in Scotland and aimed to create more efficient heat networks running fully from renewables thereby lowering emissions and reducing fuel poverty;
- there was an opportunity to apply for up to 50% capital funding towards a District Heating System under the Heat Networks Early Adopter Challenge Fund;
- carbon based heating systems contributed considerable amounts of particulates into the air and atmosphere and replacing these with renewable forms of heating would improve air quality and reduce carbon output;
- the Council had embarked on a substantial house building programme and there was potential through this programme to explore renewable forms of heating which would contribute towards achieving the target of becoming carbon neutral by 2025;
- District Heating Systems could help to alleviate fuel poverty as they provided a higher efficiency of heat generation;
- research had shown that low or medium temperature networks based on heat pumps offered the greatest Co2 savings potential;

- support for this Motion would show that the Council continued to make the climate emergency declaration integral to its plans for the future of Highland communities;
- the Blar Mhor site would be an appropriate location to install a District Heating System given the number of houses planned, the proposed new hospital and University of the Highlands and Islands/West Highland College building;
- District Heating Systems had the potential to remove the need for boilers and heat pumps within new housing developments but it was imperative that they were well designed; and
- In drawing attention to some housing developments in Aviemore which had experienced problems with centralised heating systems, the importance of ensuring that district heating systems were correctly installed in the first place was emphasised.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the following amended Notice of Motion: -

Highland Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency.

The public expect Highland Council to follow that declaration with practical measures.

Highland Council manages a substantial Council house building programme. Building in a Highland environment is expensive and budgets are tightly controlled. Highland Council welcomes the potential support that might be offered by the Scottish Government's 'Heat Networks Early Adopters Challenge Fund' and agrees to explore the opportunities for assistance with future projects. Council also agrees to explore the possibilities of a District Heating System in connection with Phase 2 of the Blar Mhor development by Fort William – with a report coming back to Council.

Declaration of Interest – Mr S Mackie declared a financial interest in the following item (v) as the Chair of the Dounreay Stakeholders Group which was a Council appointment 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.

(v) Women in Nuclear is an organisation that exists to improve diversity and gender balance within the nuclear industry which, like STEM disciplines overall, is significantly under-represented by women. An award-winning branch (WiN UK Highland) has been established to represent the Dounreay and Vulcan sites and has recruited members from across the Highland Council area.

Given the importance of the nuclear industry to Caithness, North Sutherland and the wider region and the pressing need to improve the gender balance, the Highland Council therefore agrees to sign the Women in Nuclear (WiN) industry charter.

Signed: Mr S Mackie Ms L Munro Mr H Morrison

In line with Standing Order 12 – the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) had confirmed that there was no financial impact in relation to the above Notice of Motion from signing the Charter unless it placed a financial obligation on the Council.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- the workforces at both the Dounreay and Vulcan sites were highly skilled and

- valued and there was an aspiration to increase female representation;
- WiN UK Highland had been fantastic ambassadors of upskilling the existing workforce at Dounreay and Vulcan through its promotion of the opportunities available within the industry and its proactive engagement with the local community;
 - the WiN industry charter strived to remove potential barriers for women and all other under-represented groups from entering the nuclear industry;
 - given the importance of the industry to the region and the Council's clear commitment to gender balance, equality and removing barriers to under-represented groups, it would be fitting for the Council to become the first unitary Local Authority to sign the Charter, which included a list of regulators, contractors, businesses and the trade union movement;
 - if the terms of the Motion were carried, the Chair of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group would extend an offer to the Council Leader to join him on site at the earliest opportunity to sign the Charter in person and to meet those involved in WiN UK Highland;
 - it was suggested that an amendment be made to the Motion to include the following wording – 'the Highland Council positively supports opportunities for women in all industries';
 - Dounreay and Vulcan were the lifeblood of the North Sutherland and Caithness areas of the Council and the expertise and benefits provided by both sites to the Council as a whole was emphasised;
 - Police Officers, who protected the site of Dounreay and its contents, and their families living in the area contributed to local life in Caithness and North Sutherland in many ways;
 - the nuclear industry provided an important role in both the local and national economy at a time when decommissioning of a number of sites was taking place elsewhere; and
 - WiN UK's promotion of improved gender balance within the nuclear industry, particularly in STEM, was commended.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the following amended Notice of Motion: -

Women in Nuclear is an organisation that exists to improve diversity and gender balance within the nuclear industry which, like STEM disciplines overall, is significantly under-represented by women. An award winning branch (WiN UK Highland) has been established to represent the Dounreay and Vulcan sites and has recruited members from across the Highland Council area.

Given the importance of the nuclear industry to Caithness, North Sutherland and the wider region and the pressing need to improve the gender balance, the Highland Council positively supports opportunities for women in all industries and agrees to sign the Women in Nuclear (WiN) industry charter.

13. The Highland Council Best Value Assurance Report 2020

Declaration of Interest – Mr A Christie declared a 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 him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/3/20 dated 27 February 2020 by the Chief

Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- there was a need to recognise all the contributions which had been made to the Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) which had been a useful exercise for self-reflection and which had provided not only reassurance of the elements being done well but also the positive vision for moving forward;
- issues in relation to public health and climate change had to be given absolute priority in all that was being undertaken as the Council moved forward;
- the Council was experiencing a period of unprecedented change and the savings made over the past decade had to be viewed as extraordinary and a significant challenge. However, there was a need in the future to ensure that necessary changes were implemented at a quicker pace;
- the current year's budget was very positive and included actions to ensure the replenishment of reserves and, whilst moving into medium and long-term planning, credit had to be given to the staff and the Chief Executive for efforts in this regard. It was also highlighted that communities were becoming more involved and more influential in terms of input to the budget than had been the case in the past;
- there was a view however that collaboration between the Administration and the Opposition Groups within the Council could be improved in future in terms of budget planning/consultation. As such, it was suggested that consultation in particular should be undertaken at a much earlier date in the year;
- there was a real emphasis on improving scrutiny in future and this was welcomed ;
- it was noted that issues in relation to Education and Children's Services had slipped in recent years but had improved in the last year and this was welcomed;
- there were concerns about performance against the national benchmark and deterioration over a five year period in areas including, but not limited to, financial sustainability, meeting budget gaps and obtaining best value. In this respect, it was suggested that Members needed to make better use of quality performance information and collaborative leadership was required;
- it was highlighted that Members required consistent and regular training and attendance at such training was crucial for better understanding of various issues in the long term;
- there was a need to recognise the significant pressure and lack of financial support in the third sector in terms of involvement in the delivery of locality plans and as such it was stressed that there was a limit to the 'good will' within Volunteer Boards. In order to achieve goals across the Community Planning Partnership, and whilst supporting the localism agenda, local areas needed to have the same importance and treatment as a City; and
- the Best Value Audit report had focused on the continuous improvement and maintenance of best value, with common themes focusing on improvement, a transformational agenda, stability, long term planning, engagement between all Members, staff and communities and Member engagement in the scrutiny process.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the key findings of the report;
- (ii) **APPROVED** the BVAR Improvement Plan provided as Appendix 2 to the report;

- (iii) **NOTED**, as outlined in Section 8, the improvement actions that were already in place and being implemented to address the historic issues identified in the BVAR;
- (iv) **NOTED** the relevance of the Accounts Commission report, 'How Councils Work, Safeguarding Public Money: Are You Getting It Right', in supporting Members' scrutiny role in the context of Best Value (Appendix 3); and
- (v) **APPROVED** the Terms of Reference for the Community Planning Partnership at Paragraph 8.7 of the report as agreed by the CPP Board to strengthen governance, accountability and performance of the Board in order to improve outcomes.

14. Local & National Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) 2018/19

Declarations of Interest – Mr A Christie declared a 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 him from taking part in the discussion.

Mrs A MacLean declared a non-financial interest as a Director of the Ross & Cromarty Citizens' Advice Bureau 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/4/20 dated 25 February 2020 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was emphasised that it had never been more important to be connected via broadband and for the system to function well and as such it was hoped that the voucher scheme would be launched earlier than in the summer as had been originally planned and for it to be launched in Highland where there were currently many 'unconnected' areas;
- there were concerns however that once broadband did arrive in rural areas, it could attract multiple users and this could cause a subsequent decrease in speed and functionality which would have an effect on lines and supplies;
- it was suggested that there needed to be a significant improvement in future in asset suitability;
- road services did not appear to be a realistic indicator on how the roads were performing and it was suggested that local indicators would be more useful and valuable for the Council;
- in response to concerns about carers feeling unsupported, it was noted that a joint action plan was being completed, which included care solutions for transformation in adult social care and involved those with a track record in delivering adult social care transformation in other parts of UK. New governance was also to be put in place for Members of the Council and NHS Highland in terms of monitoring transformation;
- the sickness and absence rates of teachers was highlighted as a concern and it was suggested that this could be due to a lack of funding, as well as issues with morale and the long term reduction of resources for ASN and PSA's. Violence and aggression in schools was also very worrying. In this respect, it was disappointing that 80% of the quartiles had not shown improvement but it was noted that a new Education Improvement Team was working with schools in order to identify and implement improvements;

- in regard to looked after children being placed out of area, the target goal was 20 by March 2020 and in this respect an update was provided to confirm that there were currently 30 looked after children out of the area which was down from 39 and the Council was therefore set to meet the target by the end of the year;
- in future each Strategic Committee would be required to evaluate its own performance once a year and would be doing so against relative targets in this report. As such, it would be important to prioritise the most important changes and improvements; and
- it was essential to highlight that there were many areas in the report where the Council was performing well and in future there would be a need to focus on the areas that most impacted lives across the Highlands.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **SCRUTINISED** the performance of SPIs for 2018/19 against their targets and their national benchmark position and the initial analysis of areas for improvement in Appendix 4 of the report and the commentary and planned improvement actions;
- (ii) **NOTED** that Service Plans would be presented to Strategic Committees early in the new financial year and that Members should expect the opportunity to scrutinise plans in response to the information contained in this report at that time; and
- (iii) **NOTED** the corporate improvement actions in place in response to the performance related findings of the Council's BVAR which had been outlined in Paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 of the report.

15. Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Statement 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No. HC/5/20 dated 28 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Finance and Resources.

During discussion, and in response to queries from Members in relation to whether other external avenues had also been considered for future borrowing, it was confirmed that there was currently no requirement for any assessment of the financial position of the Council or detailed consideration of the rate to be charged when a loan application was made through the Public Works Loan Board. In this regard, it was suggested that this might not be the same elsewhere and as such would not be as advantageous but the position was being kept under constant review.

Also, in relation to the potential for future borrowing through the bond market, it was confirmed that any borrowing in this respect would have to be at a significant level but again this would be kept under review and the position reviewed as necessary.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED** the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Statement for 2020/21 and the Prudential Indicators as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

16. Bus Partnership Fund – Highland Opportunities

There had been circulated Report No. HC/6/20 dated 3 March 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment.

There had also been tabled Additional Paper by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- there was a need to thank all the Officers who had been involved in the proactive work on this issue from an early date;
- it should be highlighted that in addition to the major congestion in Inverness, this was also a problem in rural areas across the Highlands and this also met the criteria which had been identified for the Fund;
- the application from the Council not only met the criteria but also had a vision for the area and this was warmly welcomed;
- it was important to note that a lifeline bus service in Wester Ross had just been drastically curtailed due to a lack of appropriate funding and it was hoped that this could be addressed in future along with other similar issues in the Highlands;
- this represented a bus priority infrastructure fund and there would be opportunities available in future and as such it was vital that the Council ensured that match funding was in place wherever necessary;
- encouragement of future 'park and ride' schemes, including at Inverness Airport, could be very beneficial for Highland residents;
- it would be essential to ensure that all opportunities for future infrastructure projects, including procurement, were closely examined;
- it was vital that communities across the Highlands were involved at all stages in order to ensure future success;
- any opportunities to submit bids in relation to electric and/or hydrogen buses had to be pursued;
- the aim of having a proper rural network with appropriate infrastructure had to be a priority for the Council as part of this initiative; and
- it was considered that there could be many benefits for the City, not least in addressing some of the issues arising from climate change, and the Local Development Plan would be key in this regard in future.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the current position and the opportunity that was available with this significant funding commitment;
- (ii) **NOTED** the work already underway as detailed in the report; and
- (iii) **AGREED** to continued work with COSLA on ensuring that the fund had enough flexibility to support measures more relevant or practical to rural/remote areas.

17. Redesign Update

There had been circulated Report No. HC/7/20 dated 20 March 2020 by the Chief Executive.

In this regard, there had also been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Redesign Board held on 17 December 2019.

Decision

Members **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Redesign Board meeting held on 17 December 2019 as circulated and **NOTED** progress on Council redesign work as detailed in the report.

18. Governance Review

Declarations of Interest – Mr A Henderson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr A MacKinnon, Mr J Finlayson, Dr I Cockburn, Ms M Smith, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr B Thompson, Mrs F Robertson and Mr A Christie declared financial interests in this item as the recipients of Special Responsibility Allowances as detailed in the report and left the Chamber prior to discussion.

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Chair of the Highland Licensing Committee 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. HC/8/20 dated 2 March 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance.

Decision

Members **AGREED**:-

- (i) the minor adjustments to the Scheme of Delegation set out in Section 4;
- (ii) the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) set out in Appendix 1;
- (iii) that a report would come back to the Council in May 2020 with recommendations on the role of non-elected representatives on Council Committees;
- (iv) the changes to Standing Orders set out in Section 7; and
- (v) the arrangements for the establishment of the Wellbeing Joint Sub-Committee in Section 8 and Appendix 2.

(At this point, the Members who had left prior to discussion returned to the meeting).

19. Scottish Crown Estate Net Revenues Allocation

Declaration of Interest – Mr A MacKinnon declared a financial interest in this item as a Director of Organic Sea Harvest Limited and left the Chamber prior to discussion of the item.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/9/20 dated 3 March 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers involved in this work which had resulted in a very welcome outcome for the Council;
- consideration should be given as to whether 25 March was the most suitable date for a Members' Workshop or if another date could be arranged instead;
- it would be especially important to enable communities to become involved in the consultation process; and
- this was a substantial sum of money and it was therefore imperative that the

Council moved forward quickly in terms of supporting 'game changing' projects for the Highlands.

Decision

The Council **AGREED**:-

- (i) to continue to work with COSLA and the Scottish Government regarding future allocations;
- (ii) to roll forward the 19/20 Crown Estate Net Revenues Allocation to 20/21 using the current Scottish Government allocation formula to distribute to Council areas;
- (iii) to a Members' Workshop to determine the preferred funding management options; and
- (iv) that a finalised funding distribution model, details of the scheme eligibility, support services required for the administration of the fund and governance arrangements would be reported to the Council in May 2020 for approval and immediate implementation.

(At this point, Mr A MacKinnon returned to the Chamber).

20. 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 9 December 2019 was available in the Members' Library and on the Council's Website.

21. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Council **AGREED** to resolve that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

22. River Ness Hydro Scheme

Declaration 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 interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/10/20 dated 17 January 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment.

There had also been tabled to Members only at the meeting Supplementary Report dated 12 March 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment.

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

The meeting ended at 4.06pm.

**The Highland Council
No. 12 2019/2020**

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Highland Council held REMOTELY on Thursday, 25 June 2020 at 10.30am.

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure &
Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place	Environment
Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning	Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
Executive Chief Officer, Health & Social Care	Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing
	Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance
	Executive Chief Officer, Transformation

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

20

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr I Brown, Mr I Ramon, Mr A Rhind and Mrs C Wilson.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 4 – Mr D Macpherson (Non-Financial)

Item 5 – Mr T Heggie, Ms L Munro, Mr A Jarvie and Mr D Macpherson (all Non-Financial)

Item 5 – Mr K Gowans (Financial)

Item 6 – Mr T Heggie, Mr A Christie, Ms E Knox, Ms L Munro, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Louden, Mr D Macpherson and Mrs M Paterson (all Non-Financial)

Item 6 – Mr K Gowans (Financial)

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Convener, along with Members of the Council, paid warm tribute to the late Councillor George Cruickshank, specifically in relation to his extremely knowledgeable approach to Council business and his welcoming and inclusive collaboration with his Ward colleagues and other Council Members.

3. Membership of the Council/Committees, etc Ballrachd na Comhairle

It was **NOTED** that, following the By-Election held on 12 March 2020, Mr Calum Munro had been elected as a Member of Ward 10 (Eilean a' Cheò).

The membership of the Council was therefore now as follows:-

Ind – 27/SNP- 21/Cons – 10/Lib Dem – 9/Labour – 3/Green –1/Sutherland Independent – 1/Non-Aligned – 1/Vacant - 1

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees remained as 7/5/3/3.

Economy & Infrastructure Committee

It was **AGREED** that Mr C Munro should replace Mr J Gordon.

Redesign Board

It was **AGREED** that Mrs M Cockburn should replace Dr I Cockburn.

The Council **AGREED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Redesign Board held on Wednesday, 10 June 2020 as circulated.

Recovery Board (Membership)

The Council **AGREED** membership as follows - Mr A Christie (Chair), Mr B Lobban, Mrs M Davidson, Mr A MacKinnon, Mr J Gray, Dr I Cockburn, Mr K Gowans, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs C Caddick, Mr A Jarvie and Mr P Siggers.

Non-Voting Staff Members – Mrs D Manson, Mr M MacLeod and Mr A Gunn. Non-Voting Union Representative – Mr J Gibson (UNISON).

4. Decisions Made Using Delegated Powers

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Macpherson declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director 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 his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/11/20 Dated 15 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- clarification was sought and provided on how/when powers under the Civil Contingency Act had been invoked;
- it was felt that there had been a change of message to communities in terms of action which could be taken during the early part of the lockdown and this had caused some confusion in specific areas;
- there was a need for further detail to be provided for Members in relation to the appointment of the post of Executive Chief Officer (Education);
- there was a perception amongst some Members that from the start of the lockdown period they had not been kept fully informed of action being taken;
- there was a need for a Member led review of both the Scheme of Delegation and the Emergency Plan (2013);
- it was hoped that, if a similar lockdown situation was repeated in future, all Members of the Council would be included in decisions taken at that time;
- clarification was sought and provided on the current position in relation to Non Domestic Rates billing procedures;
- there was a need for an update to be provided on the use of glyphosate during recent months;
- it was noted that a further report on the Longman Site would be provided for the July meeting of the Council;
- any future discussion on emergency measures to be taken during a lockdown period had to be cross-party in order to involve as many Members of the Council as possible;
- it had to be acknowledged that this had been an unprecedented set of circumstances and as such all emergency actions had had to be implemented quickly and efficiently. It had never been the intention to exclude any Member of the Council from this process but it was always the case that communication could be improved and lessons had been learned which would be carried forward;
- there was a need to focus on the positive aspects of the report and in this regard the thanks of the Council were conveyed to all staff for the exceptional work which had been and continued to be undertaken, including the use of new technology for the holding of meetings;
- there was a need for lessons learned to be discussed and reviewed by all Members of the Council in order to improve procedures for the future if this was necessary;
- it was noted that an external review of actions taken during the lockdown period was currently being undertaken and would be reported to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in due course; and
- the thanks of the Council should be conveyed to communities across the Highlands for the outstanding actions which had been undertaken during the lockdown period.

Decision

Members:-

- (i) **HOMOLOGATED** the decisions as set out in Appendix 1;
- (ii) **NOTED** the progress that had been made in resuming the Council's governance structures; and
- (iii) **APPROVED** the resumption of Council approved policies and services to pre-Covid arrangements in line with Government guidelines and Public Health advice.

It was also **AGREED** that a Member led review of the Scheme of Delegation and the Emergency Plan (2013) should be undertaken.

5. Recovery Action Plan

Declarations of Interest

Mr T Heggie, Ms L Munro, 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 interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest on the basis of a family member being employed by High Life Highland but confirmed that, having applied the test, he would remain in the meeting.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/12/20 dated 15 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Transformation.

In this regard, there had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Recovery Board held on Thursday, 4 June 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- thanks should be conveyed to all concerned for this complicated and unique work which was having to be undertaken with pace and urgency and in partnership with other organisations as and when necessary;
- on the basis that this represented a completely new way of working which could be determined by a number of factors, the development of a Risk Register would be essential;
- it would be important to take account of any implications arising from the Brexit process at the end of the year;
- further and more detailed information would be required in terms of the specific budget headings to be managed by each individual Executive Chief Officer in the Council;
- the references to procurement within the report were welcomed and it was stressed that it would be imperative for best practice to be identified, along with benchmarking, and for shovel ready projects to be available when needed;
- this was a dynamic piece of work and as such it was hoped that all Members of the Council would be involved;
- in relation to governance measures, it would be important to ensure that any future actions did not impact on the charitable status of organisations, such as High Life Highland, in future;

- highlighting the importance of the third sector was vital and this included an acknowledgement of the services which they currently provided with very limited resources;
- also, in relation to the third sector, there was concern that there had been a marked increase in demand for services but no related increase in funding to accommodate such requests and this came at a time when significant levels of income had already been lost as a result of the pandemic;
- in light of the above, there was a need for a further report on the role of the third sector, including proposals for how organisations could be supported in future;
- it was suggested that staff across the Council should also be asked for their views on how efficiencies could be achieved in future;
- it was vital that the Council listened to communities and supported them as they moved forward from this point and that this should include updating the Council Programme as and where necessary, including in respect of climate change;
- it had to be accepted that there would be future job losses in the Highlands and as such there would need to be a focus within the Recovery Board work on retaining employment and supporting both families and businesses wherever possible, including the identification of re-training opportunities;
- as part of any future work, there had to be strong focus on health and wellbeing;
- as part of the Financial Recovery Strategy, it was suggested that there was an urgent need to bring forward work on benchmarking if possible;
- there was also a need to review the use of UK and Scottish Government Schemes, such as the Furlough Scheme, and assess what was being offered to Local Authorities;
- there was a need for a stronger emphasis on and support for Teachers and Teaching Staff (including PSAs) and a recognition of the remarkable contribution which had been made by them in recent weeks and months;
- it would be helpful if the Minutes of the Scottish Cities Alliance meeting (which had been referenced in the report) could be circulated to all Members;
- in respect of the current financial position, there was a need for further information on why Highland Council had not furloughed staff as it was understood that this had been done in other Local Authorities;
- there was a need to take account of the stress on employees, including Teachers, at the time of returning to normal duties/work practices and provide support as and when necessary;
- it would be imperative that the Council provided a focus on income maximisation in future, along with accessing any available funding streams;
- the issues facing the tourism sector had to be highlighted and it was felt that the key words in future would be 'economic retention';
- it would be helpful if the Audit & Scrutiny Committee could take forward work on benchmarking as a priority;
- it was noted that a report on the Capital Programme would be discussed initially by the Budget Recovery Group and then submitted to the full Council for consideration; and
- information should be circulated to all Members of the Council on previous discussions undertaken at Members GOLD Covid meetings in relation to the Furlough Scheme.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **APPROVED** the Terms of Reference for the Highland Council's Recovery Board;
- (ii) **APPROVED** the Highland Council Recovery Action Plan;
- (iii) **NOTED** the programme approach to recovery;

- 24
- (iv) **NOTED** the work undertaken to align the Recovery Action Plan, the existing Change Programme, Transitions Programme, Service-specific Reviews and Savings Programmes and Projects;
 - (v) **NOTED** roles and responsibilities; and
 - (vi) **NOTED** the composition of the Transformation team.

It was also **AGREED** that information should be circulated to all Members on previous discussions undertaken at Members GOLD Covid meetings in relation to the Furlough Scheme.

6. Annual Accounts 2019/20 and Revenue Budget 2020/21

Declarations of Interest

Mr T Heggie, Ms L Munro, Mr A Jarvie and Mr D Macpherson declared non-financial interests in this item (v) 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 interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

Mr A Christie (Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland), Ms E Knox (Trustee of Children in the Highlands Information Point), Mr D Louden (Director of Home Start, East Highland) and Mrs M Paterson (Board Member of the Highland Football Trust and Board Member of the Puffin Pool) all declared non-financial interests but, having applied the test, confirmed that they would remain in the meeting.

Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest on the basis that a family member was employed by High Life Highland but, having applied the test, confirmed that he would remain in the meeting.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/13/20 dated 15 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer.

Prior to discussion of this item, the Convener, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, **MOVED** the suspension of Standing Order 35 in order to be able to consider Recommendations (v) and (vi) within the report on the basis that they had been the subject of a decision by the Council within the previous six month period.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Ms M Smith, seconded by Dr I Cockburn, moved that there should be no suspension of Standing Order 35 and therefore no discussion of these recommendations at the meeting.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 33 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 28 votes.

However, the Motion failed to receive the necessary 2/3 of the votes cast and Suspension of Standing Order 35 was therefore not carried - the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr G Adam, Mrs J Barclay, Mr J Bruce, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss,

For the Amendment

Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Ms P Hadley, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr D Louden, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr N McLean, Mrs P Munro, Ms E Roddick, Mr K Rosie, Mr P Siggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr C Smith and Ms M Smith.

During a summary of the report, the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee/Budget Leader emphasised that there could have been no prediction of the unprecedented events which had occurred since March as a result of Covid-19 and as such the Council, local communities, business sectors and individuals across the Highlands had had to face extreme circumstances. In this regard, thanks were conveyed to Members, Officers and communities in all areas for the outstanding effort which continued to be made in dealing with the pandemic.

In relation to the financial performance for 2019/20, thanks were highlighted to the Chief Executive and her staff, along with all Members, for the work which had been undertaken and which had resulted in the reporting of a very positive financial position for the period, including the delivery of £20m of savings and an overall underspend of £7.6m which had enabled reserves to be replenished. However, this had now been overshadowed by the financial impact of Covid-19, along with the impact on the whole economy which would be severe and cause major uncertainty in the months ahead. In addition, income streams would be slow to recover and this would be further overshadowed by the potential for future outbreaks of Covid-19 during the Winter period and possible implications arising from the Brexit process.

Alongside the expected increased demand for services, it was also considered that key partners would be seeking financial support and as such only assumptions could be made at present in terms of the future budget position, along with an assessment of the likely scenarios in the medium and long term. It would be imperative to ensure that expenditure was matched to income if a balanced budget was to be delivered in the current year and whilst the additional funding from the Scottish Government was warmly welcomed, there would still be a need to continue to lobby for more funding in the weeks and months ahead. It was therefore extremely important that the message was conveyed that the Council could only commit to essential expenditure at present and on that basis the recommendations within the report - with the exception of recommendations (v) and (vi) – would be moved at the appropriate time.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Members were being asked to agree – in recommendation (ii) – ‘the assumptions used and budget gap figures’ but the recent announcement by the Scottish Government in relation to the re-opening of schools had now altered the position. It was therefore suggested that this particular wording should be removed and replaced with ‘note the potential mitigating actions for 20/21 and

bring forward further details on budget gap figures to the next full Council meeting;

- there was concern that some Members had only learned of the potential budget deficit figure for the Council through media reports and this was very disappointing;
- there was also a need for more detail and clarity in terms of the budget deficit figure;
- whilst accepting that there was now a need to review the financial strategy, it was not accepted that this should be undertaken alongside a re-opening of the budget which had been previously agreed in March;
- there was disagreement with the recommendation to cease all Covid-19 response services at the end of July and also the recommendation that all DSM balances held at the end of 2019/20 should be used to mitigate the financial gap and amendments to those recommendations would be put forward at the appropriate time;
- whilst the recommendation for a budget update to be presented to every full Council meeting in the current financial year was welcomed, there was a need for clarity on whether this would be a budget against reports together with a variance analysis and also whether there would be a comparison made between May 2019 and May 2020;
- there was also a need for a more detailed report to be presented in relation to the projected deficit figure as the current information which had been provided did not indicate a sustainable position for the Council;
- with specific reference to the loss of income streams, further information was required as to why the Council had not utilised the Furlough Scheme in mitigation;
- there was a perception among some Members that it had been very difficult to obtain detailed information during the past three month period and it was hoped that this would be improved if the Council faced a similar situation again in the coming months;
- in terms of the recommendation to cease all Covid-19 response services at the end of July, it was suggested that more detail was required in relation to what was currently being provided and also that this particular recommendation should perhaps be reviewed in the first instance as the survival and wellbeing of communities across the Highlands had to be paramount in the weeks and months ahead;
- there had been statements in the media in relation to the potential need to reduce staff numbers across the Council and this was regretted as there had not been any detailed discussion with all Members on this issue and it could have a detrimental effect on staff morale at a time of major concern generally;
- the press coverage of the budget deficit figure had been alarming as there had been no update for Members beforehand and it was suggested that the first course of action had to be discussion with the UK and Scottish Governments as a priority followed by consideration through the Recovery Board and it was hoped that this would be the approach followed in the future;
- in relation to the unaudited Annual Accounts, it was suggested that there should be a full review of the Inverness Common Good Fund with a full report to be considered by the Trustees and an amendment to the recommendation in the report in this regard would be put forward if necessary;
- in regard to the Inverness City Region Deal, there was a need to work with the UK and Scottish Governments to undertake a review to identify which projects

were fully committed and whether there were opportunities to realign due to new economic priorities;

- consideration should be given to establishing the Crown Estate Fund as a 'pivot fund' for tourism businesses in coastal communities to help them to meet future demands;
- there was a need to have more detail on the budget deficit figure which had been quoted, specifically in relation to monies received from the Scottish Government for Covid-19 response services and expenditure;
- every effort was being made to save jobs in light of the importance to the Highland economy;
- regular briefings had been arranged for all Members of the Council during the past three months and Officers were always available to respond to queries on any service at any time;
- detailed clarification was needed in respect of the future of the Covid-19 Helpline in particular as there had been varying reports in this respect;
- it would be helpful if further information could be provided on discussions undertaken by the Members GOLD Covid Group in relation to the budget deficit figure which had been quoted in the media;
- it had to be highlighted that the £96m budget deficit figure had been based on a worst case scenario whereby there was a need for a very long lockdown; and
- it had to be accepted that the Council required to be both agile and flexible when dealing with the current budgetary situation as the situation had completely changed since the start of the year. Most importantly, there were some very difficult decisions which would have to be made at future meetings in order to save as many jobs as possible.

Thereafter, and in respect of Recommendation (i), Mr A MacKinnon, seconded by Mr M Reiss, **MOVED** the recommendation as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Baxter, seconded by Mr A Jarvie, moved that the following wording should be added to this recommendation – 'and undertake a full review of the Inverness Common Good Fund with a full report to be considered by the Trustees'.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 34 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 32 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mrs D MacKay, Mr W MacKay, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Ms N Sinclair and Mr B Thompson.

For the Amendment:

Mr G Adam, Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr J Bruce, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Ms P Hadley, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr D Loudon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D MacKay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr J McGillivray, Mr N McLean, Mrs P Munro, Ms E Roddick, Mr K Rosie, Mr P Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr C Smith and Ms M Smith.

28

In respect of Recommendation (ii), Mr A MacKinnon, seconded by Mr M Reiss, **MOVED** the recommendation as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr G MacKenzie, moved that the following wording – ‘assumptions used and budget gap figures’ – should be removed and replaced with the following – ‘note the potential mitigating actions for 20/21 and bring forward further details on budget gap figures to the next full Council meeting’.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 33 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 30 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr G Adam, Mrs J Barclay, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mrs D MacKay, Mr W MacKay, Mr A MacKinnon, Mr D Macpherson, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Ms N Sinclair and Mr B Thompson.

For the Amendment:

Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr J Bruce, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Ms P Hadley, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr D Loudon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D MacKay, Mr S Mackie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr J McGillivray, Mr N McLean, Mrs P Munro, Ms E Roddick, Mr K Rosie, Mr P Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr C Smith and Ms M Smith.

In respect of Recommendation (vii), it was **AGREED** to change the wording within this recommendation as follows – replace ‘agree to cease’ all additional Covid response services with ‘agree to review’ all additional Covid response services.

In respect of Recommendation (viii), it was **AGREED** to include additional wording within this recommendation as follows – ‘agree to work with the UK and Scottish Governments to review the Inverness City Region Deal to identify which projects were fully committed and whether there were opportunities to realign due to new economic priorities.

In respect of Recommendation (ix), Mr A MacKinnon, seconded by Mr M Reiss, **MOVED** the recommendation as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr G MacKenzie, moved that this recommendation should be removed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 35 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 31 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr G Adam, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mrs D MacKay, Mr W MacKay, Mr A

MacKinnon, Mr D Macpherson, Mr J McGillivray, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Ms N Sinclair and Mr B Thompson.

For the Amendment:

Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr J Bruce, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Ms P Hadley, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr D Loudon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr N McLean, Mrs P Munro, Ms E Roddick, Mr K Rosie, Mr P Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr C Smith and Ms M Smith.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **RECEIVED** the unaudited Annual Accounts for the Highland Council, Highland Charities Trust, Highland Charitable Trust and the Highland Council Pension Fund for the year ended 31st March 2020 and **NOTED** that these would be presented to the Appointed Auditor by the prescribed date of 30th June 2020;
- (ii) **NOTED** the assumptions used, the budget gap figures, and the potential mitigating actions for 2020/21;
- (iii) **AGREED**, in light of (ii) above, that the budget set in March 2020 needed to be reviewed, with recommendations coming forward in June, July and September 2020;
- (iv) **NOTED** the use of stringent budget controls, adopting a prudent approach to spend whilst recognising the need to deliver essential services and agreed the continuation of these controls until a clear plan for addressing the budget gap was identified;
- (v) **DEFERRED CONSIDERATION** of this recommendation - that the full value of planned investment fund for rural transport be repurposed in the financial year 2020/21 to help reduce the sizeable budget deficit facing the Council;
- (vi) **DEFERRED CONSIDERATION** of this recommendation – that, in light of the current crisis, the approved rebuilding of balances by £4.909m should not take place with that money instead used to mitigate the 2020/21 budget gap;
- (vii) **AGREED** to **REVIEW** all additional Covid response services, unless directly funded by Government, at the end of July;
- (viii) **AGREED** to lobby UK and Scottish Governments as appropriate for:
 - additional funding;
 - flexibility in the use of funding to help address the budget gap;
 - a relaxation of the restrictions around the income from second homes Council Tax with flexibility in 2020/21 to use this income to help reduce the pressure on the general revenue budget;
 - to apply a holiday to interest payments for all PWLB loans; and
 - agreed to work with the UK and Scottish Governments to review the Inverness City Region Deal to identify which projects were fully committed and whether there were opportunities to realign due to the new economic priorities.
- (ix) **AGREED** that the DSM balances held at the end of 2019/20 be used to mitigate the financial gap.
- (x) **AGREED** to request that the Scottish Government give early notification on funding levels for 2021/22 and beyond to allow future years' financial planning;

- (xi) **APPROVED** the award of contracts for the capital projects as outlined in Appendices 5 and 6; and
- (xii) **AGREED** that a budget update be presented to every Council meeting in the financial year 2020/2021

7. Timetable of Meetings (Revised)

There had been circulated Revised Timetable of Meetings for the remainder of 2020.

In this regard, there had also been circulated further Updated Timetable which took account of additional meetings which had been added since the agenda/reports for this meeting had been issued.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED** the Updated Timetable as circulated.

The meeting ended at 4.45pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, High Street, Dingwall on 25 February 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam, Mrs J Barclay, Mr C Fraser, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs A MacLean and Mrs M Paterson.

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager (Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth), Chief Executive's Office
 Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager (Skye, Ross and Cromarty), Community Services
 Mr J Holden, Housing Manager (North), Community Services
 Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Funds Officer
 Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector J Wilson, Area Commander (North), Police Scotland
 Mr M Rogers, Executive Chief Officer - Housing and Property

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 Senior Ward Manager took the Chair pending the appointment of the Chair of the Committee at item 3 below.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Leisgeulans

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Items 5 and 7: Mrs A MacLean (non-financial and financial respectively).

3. Appointment of Chair

Cur Cathraiche an Dreuchd

The Senior Ward Manager invited nominations for the Chair.

Mrs M Paterson seconded by Mr C Fraser, nominated Mr G MacKenzie as Chair of the Committee.

Mrs A MacLean, seconded by Mrs J Barclay, nominated Mr G Adams as Chair of the Committee.

Following a vote by roll call the votes were cast as follows:

Mr G MacKenzie

Mr C Fraser, Mr G MacKenzie and Mrs M Paterson.

Mr G Adam

Mrs J Barclay, Mr G Adam, Mrs A MacLean and Mr MacKinnon.

The Committee therefore **AGREED** to appoint Mr Gordon Adam as Chair of the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee and Mr Adam took the Chair.

The Chair thanked Members for the privilege of Chairing this new area committee. The communities of this area are closely linked and there are exciting opportunities for this Committee to tackle issues which are local priorities. The Highland Council is committed to more locally based decision making, as well as developing budgets so that some spending decisions are genuinely influenced by local concerns. He looked forward to moving ahead with innovative ideas in the interests of strengthening local democracy when difficult funding decisions had to be made.

4. Appointment of Vice Chair Cur Iar-Chathraiche an Dreuchd

The Senior Ward Manager invited nominations for the Vice Chair.

Mr G Adam, seconded by Mrs M Paterson nominated Mr G MacKenzie as Vice-Chair of the Committee. Mr G MacKenzie declined the appointment of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Mr G MacKenzie, seconded by Mrs A MacLean nominated Mrs M Paterson as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The Committee therefore **AGREED** to appoint Mrs M Paterson as Vice-Chair of the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee.

Mr A MacKinnon congratulated Mr Gordon Adam on his appointment and expressed his shock and sadness at the tragic death of Mr Adam Reid on Friday, 25 February, a young man in his prime and a respected member of Frank Nicol's Farm and Garden Machinery company. The Committee expressed their condolences to the family, friends and work colleagues of Mr Reid.

Condolences were also extended to the family and friends of the four people who had died in a car crash in Lochaber on the 20 February.

The police and emergency services had a harrowing time and their professionalism was to be commended.

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

Declaration of Interest – Mrs A MacLean declared a non-financial interest with a reference in the report to Women’s Aid as she was a Director of the Dingwall Women’s Aid. 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 BIDS/001/20 dated 13 February 2020 by the North Area Commander, who expressed his sadness at the loss of Mr Craig Reid. The tragedy had tested the ability of the Police and emergency services to self-manage and continue to deal with the incident during the eight hour road closure.

He highlighted the following points:

- in relation to the first priority, Road Safety and Road Crime, Mr Wilson had been appointed as Chair of the Highlands and Islands Road Casualty Reduction Group with a priority to reduce the number of accidents and in particular fatalities. At the fortnightly meetings he would connect with Murray Blair, Road Safety Scotland and then he would engage with the Area Commanders in each of the different sub-divisions in Highlands and Islands;
- a keep left scheme in relation to the NC500 and Highland roads provided reminders that we drive on the left, a wristband was provided and a flag for the windscreen. Flags would also be posted along the NC500 and other routes on the left-hand side to remind drivers to drive on the left;
- Driver Engagement North – there was a driving simulator which monitored driving participants reactions. He looked to improve the reporting process undertaken by doctors, families and concerned people around individuals and their ability to drive; and
- anti-social behaviour monitoring with checks on licensed premises and engagement with people within licensed premises.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was a continued number of very large heavy goods vehicles using Old Evanton Road in Dingwall to travel to Evanton and this was a major concern as the road had both a height and weight limit that was being ignored;
- the large number of missing people was a concern, Members were pleased at the involvement of football teams in helping to locate these people; and
- it was requested and confirmed that the figures for the festive drink driving campaign would be broken down into age groups.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-2020 Year 3, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 1 April 2019 - 31 December 2019.

6. Roads Maintenance Programme 2020/21 Prògram Càradh Rathaidean 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/002/20 dated 13 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment. Prior to the replacement of the Ross and Cromarty Committee with the three new area committees, a draft capital budget for 2020/21 had been drawn up, based on the 2019/20 Ross and Cromarty budget allocation. As the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth area had a total of 28% of the road length in the former Ross and Cromarty area, the proposed capital programme is based on 28% of the 2019/20 Ross and Cromarty Area Capital budget and equates to an allocation of £306,125. Should this figure be amended the programme would be reviewed as appropriate. #

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question on timings, members were advised that it depended on various things including the road, whether a Roads Order was required and when the technical drawing could be undertaken; and
- there was a need to look at innovative methods of repairing roads.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2020/21 Roads Maintenance Programme for Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth.

7. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2020/21 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21

Declarations of Interest – Mrs A MacLean declared a financial interest as her husband rented a Council garage 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 is circulated Report No BIDS/002/20 dated 13 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Housing and Property.

The Committee is invited to agree a level of rent increase to apply to Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth garages and garage sites.

The Committee also discussed the condition and usage of Council garages within the Ward acknowledging the run-down condition of garages and the investment required to re-condition them. Members have asked officers for a detailed report to come to a future committee providing options surrounding the future of Council garages in Wards 8 and 9.

The Committee **APPROVED**:

- i. a level of rent increase to garages and garage sites in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh of 3%; and
- ii. that a detailed report come to a future committee providing options surrounding the future of Council garages in Wards 8 and 9.

8. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

There had been circulated Report Nos BIDS/004/20 – RC/006/20 dated 13 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Community and Place and the Executive Chief Officer – Resources and Finance on the following Common Good Funds:-

- a. Dingwall Common Good Fund BIDS/004/20
- b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund BIDS/005/20
- c. Cromarty Common Good Fund BIDS/006/20

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the updated information provided in relation to each Fund.
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed 2020/21 budget for the Fund;
- iii. **AGREED** the Dingwall Common Good Fund contribute £8,000 towards the Town Centre Fund Property Project.

9. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund: Proposed lease of Fortrose camp site to existing tenants ath Coitcheann na Cananaich agus Ros Maircnidh: Aonta màil ga mholadh airson làrach campachaidh na Cananaich dhan luchd-màil làithreach

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/007/20 dated 13 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer - Resources and Finance.

The Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council had requested that the decision on the lease be deferred, but as their concerns had been addressed in the report Members saw no reason to defer to the next meeting.

The tenants required a long lease to give them confidence to develop the site and their investment.

The lease could be surrendered at any time during the lease but it would be in the tenants best interests to assign the lease to another party and the Council had the ability to approve the new assignee. Should the assignee wish to carry out work of any significance, the assignee would require permission.

Members requested that the lease commence immediately following Sheriff Court consent.

Mr G Adam, seconded by Mr C Fraser, **moved** that the application be approved.

The Committee therefore:

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposal to grant a 30 year lease of Fortrose Camp Site (which is located on Common Good land) to the existing tenants subject to the consent of the Sheriff Court being obtained; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the 30 year lease would commence once the consent of the Sheriff Court is obtained.

Mr G Mackenzie indicated that he wished his abstention to be recorded.

The meeting closed at 12.30 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Chamber, The Courthouse, High Street, Nairn, on Wednesday 11 March 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mr T Heggie

Mrs L MacDonald
Mr P Saggars

In attendance:

Mr W Munro, Interim Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Community Services
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager (South), Community Services
Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer, Community Services
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Area Inspector V Tough, Police Scotland (Item 4)

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 T Heggie in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair advised that the press would be allowed to record the meeting since it was a committee meeting held in public and was not webcast.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 7: Mr L Fraser (non-financial)

3. Presentation: Nairn BID Update Taisbeanadh: Fios às Ùr mu Sgìre Leasachadh Gnothachais Inbhir Narann

The Committee was informed that Nairn BID was not yet ready to present this information and the Ward Manager would confirm whether this would be presented to a future Ward Business Meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** that this item be deferred.

4. **Police Scotland – Area Performance Summary** **Poileas Alba – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No. NC/01/20 dated 25 February 2020 by the South Highland Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- Further information was sought on how many of the eleven drink drivers reported in the South Highland Area were from Nairnshire;
- Confirmation was provided that there was no awareness of organised crime in respect of goods supplied to the Council;
- Further information was sought and provided in regard to recruitment of specialists; and
- The report emphasised the extensive range of skills required of Police officers and the broad variety of activities they undertook. Overall the results of the performance report were very positive and the Committee expressed their appreciation to Police Scotland for their work.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20 Year 3, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2019 - 31 December 2019.

5. **Roads Maintenance Programme 2020/21** **Prògram Càradh Rathaidean 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No. NC/02/20 dated 24 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- The Committee welcomed the news that the Roads Maintenance Programme would be allocated additional funding. Further information was sought on which additional works would be prioritised as result of this and it was emphasised that the funds should be spread as widely across the Nairnshire area as possible. In addition, it was felt that capacity within the team was limited and news that additional support was being sought was welcomed. It was requested that if a new member of staff was appointed they be invited to attend a future Ward Business Meeting;
- It was queried how the communities of East Nairnshire, particularly in Ferness, could implement speeding restrictions and it was confirmed that another survey was planned for this area;
- Confirmation was sought and provided that Winter Maintenance would be on budget;
- It was requested that investigations be made into the feasibility of undertaking the necessary repairs to the road East of Kingsteps and obtaining developer contributions towards this. It was further highlighted that the Auchnacloch – Milhill – Drumduan road was also in a poor condition; and
- There was also a need for individual drivers to take responsibility, driving safely and within the designated speed limits, which would help to preserve the longevity of the roads.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed 2020/21 Roads Maintenance Programme for the Nairnshire area; and
- ii. **AGREED** to investigate the feasibility of obtaining developer contributions to undertake the necessary repairs to the road East of Kingsteps and that if the appointment of a new member of staff came to fruition they be invited to attend a future Ward Business Meeting.

6. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2020/21 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No. NC/03/20 dated 12 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing.

During discussion it was confirmed that, in accordance with Council policy, Council tenants were prioritised in respect of the allocation of garages and that VAT had been included within the rental income set out in paragraph 6.2 of the report.

The Committee **AGREED** a 3% rent increase be applied to Nairnshire Garages and Garage sites.

7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2019 to 31 December 2019 Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2019 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2019

Declaration of Interest: Mr L Fraser declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Sub-Contractor for the Housing Service in Nairn 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. NC/04/20 dated 27 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- It was queried whether the new Contractors Framework would impact on emergency repairs. And although still within target, the time for emergency and non-emergency repairs had risen very slightly and the reason for this was queried;
- A lot of work was being undertaken proactively within the area by the Maintenance Officer which was positive and was also helpful in terms of ensuring prudent and effective spending;
- The work of the local Tenant Participation Officer was praised for their engagement and positive involvement with tenants; and
- Further information was sought and provided on the reasons for the delays to the Capital Programme in respect of the Kitchen Replacements and Rewires work contracts.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 December 2019.

8. Nairn Common Good Fund – Budget Setting for 2020/21 and Quarter 3 2019/20 Monitoring Report
Maoin Maitheas Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Suidheachadh Buidseit airson 2020/21 agus Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteil 3 2019/20

There had been circulated Report No. NC/05/20 dated 28 February 2020 by the Acting Head of Policy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- It was queried whether separate Common Good Fund insurance cover was necessary and whether this could instead be provided by the Council's self-insurance fund;
- It was queried and confirmed that costs for the Common Good Funds Officer were allocated according to time worked on individual area funds. The Chair further reported that Nairn Common Good Fund generated the highest officer costs for the Highland area;
- It was suggested that the line under Income showing Contribution – Links development (Team Hamish) should be removed from Appendix 2 – Quarter 3 monitoring as it should be assigned to financial year 2020/21 only. Monies anticipated in financial year 2019/20 were now going to be received during 2020/21 and should be accounted for accordingly; and
- It was indicated that the value of assets within the Nairn Common Good Fund were unlikely to increase in future and it was recommended that the Committee, as Trustees, should have cognisance of this. It was further reported that work was underway to ensure that the the level of developer contributions were increased which would cause the land value to reduce further. In addition, the UK was one of the very few countries whereby all the planning gain went to the land owner, i.e. no contribution to the local authority. There had been press speculation that this might change and if so the value of the land would reduce rapidly. The complexities of the situation were therefore recognised along with the need for future analysis to determine how the fund assets could best be utilised.

Following discussion, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Nairn Common Good Fund budget for 2020/21 detailed within the report;
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the position of the Nairn Common Good Fund as shown in the Quarter 3 Revenue Monitoring Statement against Budget;
- iii. **AGREED** to:-
 - a. obtain clarity on whether local Common Good Funds could utilise the Council's self-insurance fund or whether they required their own separate insurance policy; and
 - b. investigate whether the Team Hamish allocation of £110,000 should be assigned to financial year 2020/21.

9. Minutes of Previous Meeting
Geàrr-chunntas na Coinneimh Roimhe

There had been circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 27 November 2019, which were approved by the Council on 9 December 2019.

The meeting concluded at 11.40am.

**The Highland Council
Corporate Resources Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee held remotely on Wednesday 3 June 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner	Mr B Lobban
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Louden
Mrs C Caddick	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr S Mackie
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr A Mackinnon
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr M Reiss
Mr R Gale	Mr D Rixson
Mr T Heggie	Mr P Saggars

Non Members also Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Baxter	Mr C Munro
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs F Robertson
Mr A Christie	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J Finlayson	Mr K Rosie
Mr K Gowans	Ms M Smith
Mr A MacInnes	Mr B Thomson
Ms A Maclean	

Officials in attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
 Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer – Resources and Finance
 Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance
 Mr E Foster, Head of Finance and Commercialism, Corporate Resources Service
 Ms L Johnstone, ICT and Performance Manager, Corporate Resources Service
 Mr G Mackay, ICT Project Manager, Corporate Resources Service
 Mr I Street, ICT Officer (Communications), Corporate Resources Service
 Ms R Clelland, Corporate Communications Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms J MacLennan, Democratic Service Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms C Maragh, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms M Zarvella, Clerical Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

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 Mackinnon in the Chair

Preliminaries

The Chair confirmed that the meeting would be filmed and subsequently archived for public access on the Highland Council website. Thereafter, he read out the terms of the online meeting protocol for Council/Strategic Committee business to be followed at the meeting.

COVID-19

The Chair advised he was aware of the challenging position faced by the Council due to the COVID-19 crisis and how unsettling the current circumstances were for people in the Highlands. He paid tribute to the Chief Executive and her team, staff and Members for their hard work as the Council made every effort to continue to serve the communities in the Highlands. He thanked the Council's ICT Service for their sterling work as the demand for IT services had increased exponentially over recent weeks. This had highlighted issues with broadband coverage in some locations and therefore it was an appropriate time to lobby Highland MPs and MSPs for improved coverage in the area. He indicated that going forward it was important the Committee and Council worked together to meet the needs of the people in the Highlands.

The Chair continued that he was conscious many people in the Highlands had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and he recorded heartfelt sympathy to all those who had suffered bereavements, compounded by the restrictions on attendance at funerals, which had been sorely felt in Highland communities.

The Chair then, on behalf of all Members, expressed his deepest condolences to the family of Mr George Cruickshank, a fellow councillor and friend, who had recently passed away.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 5: Mr T Heggie, Mrs A Maclean and Mr D Macpherson (non-financial) and Mr K Gowans (financial).

3. Near Final Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report for 2019/20 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Iar-Dheireannach Teachd-a-steach Corporra airson 2019/10

There had been circulated Report No RES/09/20 dated 20 May 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Finance and Resources.

The Chair advised the near final outturn position reflected the improved financial governance and tight budget controls which had been put in place. He thanked the Chief Executive, Executive Chief Officer – Finance and Resources and the Head of Finance and Commercialism for their sterling work on the budget and the staff for embracing the challenges throughout the year to deliver an improved financial position.

In discussion, Members raised the following main issues:-

- regular updates be provided on the Council's financial position and shared as widely as possible with Members given the dynamic nature of the current situation and unpredictable timeline;
- more detailed information be provided on how the underspend on the Care and Learning budget had been achieved, concern being expressed this might have impacted on some services/interventions;
- more detailed information be provided on the HRA and specifically the variance between grant income received and Council house building, and on loan charges;
- representatives from Eden Court and High Life Highland be invited to attend the Budget Recovery Group so both organisations were connected into the ongoing financial resilience work;
- an explanation be provided for the carrying forward of unfilled vacancies at Nairn Academy. The Chair indicated that the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning would respond directly to Mr P Saggars on this matter;
- an explanation be provided on the reductions in unitary charges and Non-Domestic Rates appeals for the PPP schools. The Chair confirmed he would respond directly to Ms M Smith on this matter;
- concern at the continued reliance on vacancy management to achieve savings and the need for more detailed discussions at the Budget Recovery Group on staffing levels;
- confirmation was sought and provided that provision had been made for the anticipated Equal Pay Award, the risk to the reserves being if costs proved to be higher than the budgeted figure;
- further information be provided on the Council's cashflow position and potential impact on reserves during the COVID-19 period. The Head of Finance and Commercialism reported he would have further discussions outwith the meeting with Mr D Loudon and Mr R Bremner on this matter; and
- the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's balances and reserves going forward was currently unknown and if external Government funding was not received and the budget gap could not be bridged then reserves might have to be utilised.

During further discussion, the Executive Chief Officer – Finance and Resources advised that the outcomes set for budgets were being achieved with reduced spend due to the improved governance arrangements which had been put in place.

Thereafter, Members requested more detailed information on the outcomes set and achieved in relation to the Care and Learning budget to provide reassurance to Members, staff, and the public this had been achieved due to good financial management.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the near final 2019/20 financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets for 2019/20 and ensuing impact on reserves;

- ii. **NOTED** that more detailed information would be provided to the Budget Recovery Group including those issues raised by Members on the underspend on the Care and Learning budget, HRA and loans charges, and staffing levels;
- iii. **AGREED** that representatives from High Life Highland and Eden Court be invited to attend a future meeting of the Budget Recovery Group; and
- iv. **AGREED** that more detailed information be provided on the outcomes set and achieved in relation to the Care and Learning budget.

4. **Near Final Corporate Capital Monitoring Report 2019/20** **Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa Corporra 2019/20**

Declarations of Interest: Mr T Heggie and Mr D Macpherson as Directors of Highlife Highland, Mrs A Maclean as Chair of Ross-shire Women's Aid, Board Member of Ross and Cromarty CAB and a member of Sight Action Board declared non-financial interests in this item and Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds that a family member was an employee 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 interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No RES/10/20 dated 17 May 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Finance and Resources.

The Chair reported that the Capital Programme was under review due to the current COVID-19 situation and that an update would be provided to the Committee in August 2020.

In discussion, Members raised the following main issues:-

- confirmation was provided that it was intended to bring forward the Capital Programme to Members in August/September 2020;
- an update be provided on progress with the capital spend in respect of Early Years;
- further information be provided on investment in new house builds given the variance between the grant income received and the number of houses being built; and
- it was acknowledged the revenue budget had to be reviewed as a priority, however capital and revenue budgets were inextricably linked and therefore it was important the capital budget was taken forward timeously.

The Committee **NOTED** the near final 2019/20 financial position of the General Fund and HRA Capital Programmes and that a further report would be submitted to the next meeting which would include updates on Early Years and investment in new house builds as requested.

5. **COVID-19 Financial Resilience** **Buaidh Ionmhasail COVID-19**

There had been circulated Report No RES/011/20 dated 20 May 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Finance and Resources.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- early consideration be given to the impact on Council resources and services of the mid and worst-case budget gap scenarios set out in the report;
- in relation to Appendix 1 of the report, it would be helpful if more underpinning detail could be provided as a baseline going forward;
- staff be commended on the number of business grants which had been awarded in Highland during the COVID-19 period;
- the potential for financial information in graph form to be presented on a monthly basis showing expected income/expenditure in a typical year against the actuals during the COVID-19 period to allow early and sound decisions to be made on the budget;
- the suspension and review of all budgets provided the Council with an opportunity to consider a zero-based budgeting approach going forward;
- it was not yet known whether additional funding would be made available from the Scottish Government and the Council would continue to lobby on this matter;
- Members be provided with details of the additional spend incurred and savings generated during the COVID-19 period;
- the need to review all the services the Council provided, statutory and non-statutory, as well as the levels of spend;
- it should be recognised that some non-statutory services were considered to be of the highest priority in some communities;
- the opportunity to consider the role of Eden Court and High Life Highland going forward in relation to health and wellbeing and support for communities, including the most vulnerable;
- Members be cautioned against requesting officers to present financial updates on a frequent basis as these figures would largely be based on assumptions, and currently there were too many unknowns for such figures to be of any benefit;
- whether increasing fees and charges had been ruled out or was under active consideration by the Administration, and it's view on reimplementing charges such as car parking charges that had ceased due to the COVID-19 emergency given the substantial impact of the crisis on the Highland economy;
- an early meeting of the Budget Recovery Group be arranged and consideration be given to it being accessible to all Members and the public in the interests of transparency;
- the need for the Council to engage effectively with third sector partners and communities during the crisis and build on the current goodwill prior to decisions being made on services and the budget; and
- a report was to be submitted to the Recovery Board around volunteering, community capacity building, empowerment and resilience, on the basis that all these areas were key to recovery

The Chief Executive reported that Scottish Local Authority Chief Executives and Directors of Finance had met on a weekly basis from the start of the COVID-19 emergency. Information had been provided on the additional spend, loss of income and discussions held on the flexibility of funding for the year ahead. A smaller group of Chief Executives, Directors of Finance and COSLA officers had subsequently been formed in which she was involved, working together to benchmark income loss, flexible approaches to funding and additional costs. This information would be pulled together so there was a collective national statement

on the impact of COVID-19 on Council budgets. This information was being shared with Scottish Ministers on a weekly basis and it was hoped could be shared with Members as soon as possible.

At a Council level, and with the support of the Members Gold COVID-19 Group, an early decision had been made to suspend all budgets to allow time for assessment and thereafter Member decision making. A range of financial, monitoring and governance controls had been introduced and additional staff had been moved onto these tasks given the financial challenges faced. More detailed financial information would be provided to the full Council meeting on 25 June 2020, and she provided an assurance that Members comments would be taken into consideration going forward and any further areas they might wish to be explored. In conclusion, the Chief Executive thanked Members for their support during the COVID-19 emergency period.

The Chair confirmed he would ensure the Budget Recovery Group was convened at the earliest opportunity and consideration given to the potential for the Group to be accessible by all Members and the public. However, it was important Members recognised the main challenge in relation to the budget was that the situation going forward continued to be unknown and uncertain. He confirmed that all matters in relation to fees and charges were under active consideration and he was fully aware of the important role of the Council in the economic recovery of the Highlands.

Further comments from Members included that:-

- the importance of Councils, COSLA and the UK and Scottish Governments working in partnership going forward particularly in relation to the need for flexibility in funding through the COVID-19 period;
- the need to revisit with the UK Government the potential to reschedule the Council's loan payments or provide a loan holiday and to make a strong case for Highland in this regard;
- concern at the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector and jobs in Highland. The average wage in Highland was lower than the national average and there were issues of underlying poverty in the area which were of concern going forward; and
- this was an awareness raising report, and a further report would be brought to the full Council on 25 June 2020 on income and expenditure and the position with external Government funding.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the significant adverse impact COVID-19 was expected to have on the Council's budget in every likely scenario;
- ii. acknowledged and **NOTED** that a further report would be brought to the full Highland Council meeting on the 25 June 2020 outlining the Council's potential response to dealing with this financial impact; and
- iii. **AGREED** to make representations to Government that the Council might require significant further financial support or other intervention from Government in order to manage its budget in financial year 2020/21.

6. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Key worker Childcare Provision – Costs and Risks
Solar Cùram-chloinne Prìomh Obraiche Tràth-ionnsachaidh agus Cùraim-chloinne – Cosgaisean agus Cunnartan

There had been circulated Report No RES/12/20 dated 27 May 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern there was no stop date for this non-statutory function given the significant impact on the Council's budget if the Scottish Government did not allocate additional funding for this provision;
- the Council was being directed by the Scottish Government to provide this service and would continue to lobby for funding and/or adjustments to the current arrangements;
- there was a moral, political and reputational imperative on the Council to provide this support until at least the end of the summer holidays, and those volunteering to provide child care to free up key workers to deal with the pandemic be commended on their courage;
- concern at any prospect of ring fencing being removed from the Education budget to fund this provision;
- consideration be given to increasing provision and alternative ways of funding childcare as there would be a need for more child care once schools reopened;
- it was essential the Council supported private child care providers to allow them to continue in business particularly as they would be required to deliver 1140hours going forward;
- if the provision of this essential service resulted in a deferral of 1140hours then the Scottish Government would have to take this on board at a future date;
- the potential for the Council to review the onerous requirements on child care providers to evidence loss of income as a result of the pandemic; and
- it was not business as usual at the current time and there had to be a cognisance particularly within Education of the difficulties and challenges being faced. The focus should be on meeting immediate priorities before supporting what might be required in the future.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the significant estimated costs, in the region of £38,000 per week, associated with the use of private, voluntary and independent (PVI) partners in the provision of key worker childcare for children aged 0-5yrs;
- ii. **NOTED** the risks associated with not providing providers with payment;
- iii. **NOTED** that, following agreement at the Gold Member COVID-19 meeting on 21 April 2020, payments had been made to providers for the places provided to date, at a value of c£185,000;
- iv. **AGREED** that, in the absence of any funding coming forward from the Government, to fund providers for places commissioned and potentially up to break-even rate until the end of the summer holidays; the total minimum predicted cost being £799,235;
- v. **NOTED** the Scottish Government requirement to continue to provide childcare for key workers over the school holiday period and beyond; and

- vi. **AGREED** the Council continue to lobby for funding and/or adjustments to the current arrangements to reduce the financial liability to the Council.

7. COVID Staff Health, Wellbeing and Safety Impact
Buidh COVID air Slàinte, Sunnd agus Sàbhailteachd Luchd-obrach

The Chair reported that in consultation with the Convener this item had been withdrawn and would be presented to the full Council on 25 June 2020.

The Committee **NOTED** this item had been withdrawn.

8. Budget Recovery Group
Buidheann Ath-shlànachadh Buidseit

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the establishment of a Budget Recovery Group which would consider the budget related impact of COVID-19 and associated recovery requirements. The composition of the Group would comprise 11 members and would be established on the basis of political balance; and
- ii. **NOTED** that an early meeting of the Group was to be arranged and consideration given to the potential for the Group to be accessible by all Members and the public.

The meeting ended at 12.25pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held **REMOTELY via MS Teams** on **Monday, 29 June, 2020 at 2.00 p.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr I Ramon
Mr A Henderson	Mr D Rixson
Mr N McLean	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mr P Senior, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning
 Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
 Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
 Ms T Urry Head of Roads & Transport
 Mr R Gerring, Transport Planning Manager
 Mr M Bain, Project Manager, Corran Ferry, Community Services
 Mr A McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager
 Ms A Clark, Head of Policy and Reform
 Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Also in attendance:-

Chief Inspector I Graham, Police Scotland
 Inspector I Campbell, Lochaber Area Inspector, Police Scotland
 Ms F McKee, Voluntary Action Lochaber
 Mr A Nicolson, Area Manager, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
 Mr F Coupland, CEO of the Lochaber Chamber of Commerce

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

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:-

Item 5 iii - Mr A Henderson (financial)
 Item 6 – Mr A Henderson (non financial)

3. Police Scotland Report Aithisg Poileas Alba

The Chief Inspector and Inspector for Lochaber Area Police provided a verbal report on the Covid-19 response and other operational matters. Given the current

restrictions relating to Covid the Police were proactively managing this by way of enforcement, explanation and encouragement. The Police were still carrying out enforcement activity in the area and were still handing out enforcement penalties. The Police worked closely with the Council in terms of business premises or with persons who wished to set up a business premises and how they manage it. The Police were also following the phased re-opening in accordance with Scottish Government guidelines. There were still Police patrols in the area and they were receiving a significant number of calls in relation to concerns about people travelling to the area and these calls were acted upon mainly through explanation and encouragement of the travel restrictions currently in place due to Covid. Also, there were no racially aggravated incidents reported in Lochaber during the period of lockdown.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was queried if there had been any instances of people arriving in Lochaber from overseas and not observing the current 14 day quarantine period and what was the Police approach to enforcing this. It was advised that there had been some overseas visitors in the area, but not individuals having to go through quarantine in Lochaber and the Police had not been asked to carry out any checks by the Border Force as yet.
- It was queried if calls to 101 had declined and if this meant Police response times were improving. Further, there had been considerable local feedback about the length of time to get a response to 101 calls and it was appreciated that the Police were in an impossible position, but if extra resources could be devoted to this, this would be useful in order to restore confidence in the Police. It was explained that call volumes had remained static over the crises and routine calls relating to crime had dropped. Recently, routine calls relating to crimes/missing persons had returned to routine business. Concerns relating to 101 calls response times were acknowledged and would be fed back to the Police Command team to address.
- Recognition was given to the work of the local Police Force in Mallaig during the crises. This area had come under considerable pressure from people visiting the area and Police Officers faced the difficult if not impossible task of explaining, encouraging people to move on and taking enforcement action against individuals.
- There was local concern regarding the increasing prevalence of drugs and supply of drugs in the community. It was advised that there had been an increase in seizures of drugs in the area and the local Police were in a better position to proactively patrol the area as there were not the same demands on their time during the crises. The type of drugs available and prices changed regularly. There were intelligence reports of drugs being in the community which were acted upon and reference was made to a recent drugs enforcement operation carried out in the area.
- It was queried what measures could be taken to help deter irresponsible wild camping. It was advised that the local Police were carrying out regular patrols, particularly in the Glen Etive and Mallaig areas. If there were areas of significant problems then the Police would take part in a joint initiative with the Council to discourage wild camping, anti social behaviour and littering.
- Once lockdown restrictions are relaxed there may be an increasing prevalence in the area of wild camping. This was difficult to predict and people would not come to the area if the weather was poor. The number of people coming to the area would also be dependent on the easing of travel restrictions for going abroad, Calmac ferries and whether official campsites would be opened. Therefore putting advance plans in place to meet people before they set up

camp was difficult, but the Police would work with the Council and local landowners on this issue.

The Committee **NOTED** the Police Scotland update on the Covid-19 response and other operational matters and extended their thanks to the local Police Force in Lochaber for their efforts in recent months in challenging circumstances and the good community policing was much appreciated.

4. Return to School Update **Fios às Ùr mu Thilleadh dhan Sgoil**

The Executive Chief Officer (ECO), Education and Learning provided a verbal report on the reopening of schools in August.

The ECO explained that the Council along with partner agencies and schools would need to react and adjust plans in response to the Covid-19 requirement now, but also the expectation that schools in August would be fully open. There were a number of options that schools would be asked to work towards, with the 1st option being a 100% return to school with no social distancing measures. The 2nd option was a 100% return with 1m social distancing measures and the 3rd option the 50% criteria, maintaining social distancing at 2m and a blended model of learning.

The ECO had commissioned a programme to ensure the whole organisation involved in preparing schools was as ready as possible for August. This included 11 Sub Groups covering areas such as catering, transport and IT and the need for risk assessments and minimising the potential for risk. Following Scottish Government guidance last week, planning was now being made for option 1, a 100% return to schools.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Reference was made to pupils from the Small Isles and Knoydart currently staying in Mallaig High School hostel during the school week. It was understood that the hostel was to be closed at the beginning of the new term. One of the dangers was that if one child contacted Covid while in the hostel, then all the other pupils would have to also be isolated for 14 days. This scenario was a concern particularly for those parents whose child was in transition from P.7 to secondary school. Calmac were also on a reduced timetable this summer, which would affect the frequency of pupils returning home. It was explained that working with the local area planning committee and local area project group and Transport Officers the Service would look to identify bespoke solutions for this particular scenario. There were 203 schools in Highland and each school required a contingency plan in the event of a worst case scenario. An assurance was given that this scenario was on the list for consideration as part of the local plan for that area. It was requested that information on this issue would be circulated to all Members of the Committee and to include the School hostel at Ardnamurchan High School in Strontian.
- It was queried if the option of full home school learning should also be considered. Also, if options 2 or 3 were to be adopted, an assurance was sought that Lochaber Schools would have at least 50% available attendance. It was advised that Schools had already been working towards a scenario of blended learning, so if there was a need to revert to worst case scenario, schools would be ready for blended learning. Further, the ambition was that all schools reach the 50% available attendance and a bridging the gap assessment had been undertaken in the process of meeting this ambition.

- There seemed to be a high number of vacancies for Maths Teachers across Highland and given that there may be a requirement for even more Teachers depending on which school reopening option was used, it was queried how these vacancies would be filled. It was advised the HR team were leading on recruitment and there would be an assessment at the end of this week in terms of recruitment activity, how successful this had been and where the gaps were. Thereafter, there would be a plan of action to remedy the vacancies.
- Recognition was given to the work of Teachers over the last few months in the difficult circumstances of teaching pupils from home and Teachers would be vital for the recovery of our schools in the new term. However, a view was expressed that there was a lot of uncertainty and disarray in schools and this was leading to morale issues and teacher and parent concerns and in this respect, examples were given. In response, it was explained that there was an extensive comprehensive programme of communication and consultation that takes place with all schools, which allowed for concerns to be raised and addressed. Any specific concerns that Members were aware of should be shared with the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning who would ensure that local Area Managers would follow up with Head Teachers.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED:-**

i the update on return to School; and

ii that the local area return to school arrangements for pupils from Knoydart and Small Isles staying in Mallaig High School hostel and pupils staying in the School hostel at Ardnamurchan High School would be sent to the Local Committee Members.

5. Covid-19 Response Freagairt Covid-19

i The Highland Council Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

The Senior Ward Manager gave a presentation on the Highland Council response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The presentation covered the setting up of humanitarian assistance centres to support key groups in the community who would be vulnerable to Covid; the setting up of a Covid Helpline, Community Hubs; a distribution and virtual Hub. The types of support offered included providing support for food to shielding groups, Pharmacy deliveries, advice and guidance. Specific local arrangements and support for the Lochaber area were also highlighted. Arising from the Council's response to Covid, key lessons learned and opportunities were detailed. There would be a review of all Covid projects by the Council at the end of July.

The Council had also worked with communities and there had been an impressive Community response to the crises through volunteering. Just over £2.2m had been distributed to community groups in Highland.

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee thanked the Senior Ward Manager for her tremendous leadership and effort in responding to the Covid crises, along with appreciation to staff for their work, much of which had gone on unnoticed, but was crucial for members of the community in Lochaber.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation on the Highland Council Covid Community response.

ii Third Sector An Treas Roinn

Ms F McKee, Voluntary Action Lochaber was in attendance and gave a verbal report on the community response to Covid in Lochaber and the services that had been provided. Overall there had been a tremendous community response with up to 250 volunteers coming forward to help deliver a wide range of services from providing food to those that were shielding, to dog walking. There were many examples of families, friends and neighbours helping each other out. There had been positive partnership working and good will in the community and financial support had made this possible. While the number of Covid cases and infections had reduced it was important to keep in place the finance and structures in case there was another outbreak.

A point was made that Lochaber featured very well in terms of the amount of volunteer effort and compared favourably with the rest of Highland. Also, it was good to see the willingness of Community Councils to work together. Although we may have passed the worst of the Covid outbreak in health terms, the long term economic consequences were very concerning. A large part of the tourist season had been lost and for Lochaber, an area that was very dependent on tourism this was concerning, and it was felt there would be considerable financial hardship for some families.

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee thanked Ms F McKee and her colleagues in the Third Sector for the community response to Covid, particularly in providing services to fill gaps in service provision in communities. The Lochaber community had shown great resilience in facing up to the challenges faced by Covid.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation from Voluntary Action Lochaber on the Third Sector Covid response.

iii Private Sector An Roinn Phrìobhaideach

Declaration of Interest - Mr A Henderson declared a financial interest in this item as his spouse had a Bed and Breakfast business and therefore he took no part in the discussion for this item.

Mr A McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager, The Highland Council, Mr A Nicolson, Area Manager, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Mr F Coupland, CEO of Lochaber Chamber of Commerce were in attendance to provide reports in relation to the Private Sector response to Covid-19.

Business Grants

It was advised that the grant schemes were initiated at the end of March and within a few days the scheme was extended to in theory around 10,000 businesses in Highland being eligible to apply for £94m in grants. This showed the fast pace of change and scale of the problem that Council Officers had to deal with at a time when lockdown was commencing. The teams put in place to deal with the grant scheme were highlighted and amounted to around 40 Officers being involved in the administration of the scheme. Across Highland there had been a total of 6,363 business grants awarded to date across the different grant streams, totalling £65,872,000. The evolving nature of the scheme had meant significant challenges and the cross Service team dealing with the scheme had done a tremendous job in administering it. Businesses were still being encouraged to see if they were eligible to apply to the scheme through Press Releases and Business Groups.

Business Gateway Highland

The Business Gateway service in Highland during Covid-19 had to adapt its delivery model. Businesses were under immense stress, the self-employed facing significant hardship and a number of other associated issues.

The service in the last year had already moved a number of its support services online. Given that the businesses were working differently and we were offering a number of digital products it made sense to respond to their needs and allow a flexible engagement model. With the restrictions that Covid-19 brought, the digital model allowed the service to scale up its online offering, including core workshops, webinars, tutorials and digital surgeries.

In the Lochaber area the service directly supported 39 businesses, another 46 were channelled through the Business Gateway Highland website to book on workshops, digital surgeries, webinars etc.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was explained that people's personal circumstances were different which may affect their eligibility for business grants, but one particular problem area was self catering businesses that had started within the last 12 months. It was very difficult for them to demonstrate the bookings and income criteria set by the Scottish Government. Also, those who had recently started self employment had found it difficult to provide the relevant information set out in the criteria.
- It was queried what economic support the Council was aiming to give businesses in Lochaber in the period of recovery. Also, the Government had said that the money coming to the Council from the Crown Estate can also be used to provide grants for businesses that had fallen through the gaps from previous grant support. It was queried how this support could assist coastal communities. It was explained that there would be a multi faceted approach to recovery and keeping people in employment and helping people develop new skills to compete for employment was key. The money from the Crown Estate could be considered as one option to help businesses in recovery activities.

Thereafter, the Committee commended the work done by the Corporate teams involved in dispersing business grants.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

The economy had suffered an unprecedented shock due to Covid-19 and in Highland it had been disproportionately badly hit in the sectors affected by the lockdown i.e. hospitality and tourism. The furlough scheme had been essential in saving businesses and jobs. Tourism was beginning to commence again, but the area was unlikely to see the volumes of people coming to the area as would normally be expected. Businesses had made great progress in adapting to the new health and safety and social distancing requirements. Unfortunately, unemployment had risen and the public sector would need to respond to this issue and support young people in particular, whose options for employment would be considerably limited this year.

The Highland Council and HIE would be holding the first Highland Economic Recovery Partnership meeting next week to ensure there was a co-ordinated strategic response to the aftermath of the public and economic emergency. Financial support from resilience and hardship funds had also been provided to communities in the Lochaber

area. Also, HIE's Business Panel Survey was underway and would give a clear picture of the state of the economy in Highland.

In discussion, it was highlighted that one of areas of concern from the public was that we should not go back to the way things were before Covid and that the recovery should be greener. It was queried if HIE had ideas about how this aspiration could be achieved in Highland. In response, there were a number of ways to achieve this such as helping businesses adapt to a new way of working e.g. remote working, online meetings. Also, in terms of capital investment, HIE had been working with the Council to align capital funding plans, in order that the necessary infrastructure was in place to meet our net zero carbon emission aspirations.

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee thank HIE for the proactive work they undertook, in approaching community organisations regarding financial assistance.

Lochaber Chamber of Commerce

It was highlighted that collaboration and communication was essential in terms of the assistance from the Council to assist businesses with the economic recovery in Lochaber. The Lochaber Chamber of Commerce had tried to support businesses during the past few months in terms of what financial assistance was available and what they should be applying for and the communication and collaboration with the Council and HIE had been excellent during this process. There was a need to continue the communication with businesses for reassurance purposes as the business community tried to reopen.

In the recovery phase, the Chamber was planning ahead in relation to what its marketing plan for the area should be and working with businesses and the community on this. A business survey had been undertaken and an analysis of future bookings was being undertaken.

There was a concern that there would be a sudden significant increase in the number of people wishing to visit the area, which while welcomed, smaller accommodation providers might not be fully opened. In this respect it was queried if there was a capacity issue in terms of accommodation for tourists. It was confirmed that capacity issues were a concern for the business community and there was uncertainty about when various establishments could reopen.

One way to help the High Street would be a relaxation in licensing laws to allow pavement cafes and outdoor drinking and it was queried if this should be looked at for Lochaber. It was advised that there were discussions locally regarding the High Street and how businesses could be operated differently going forward. It was also pleased to see that the Council planned to support businesses and review licensing.

The Chairman thanked the CEO Lochaber Chamber of Commerce for attending the meeting and it was noted that the CEO had a meeting scheduled with the Leader of the Council in July.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation on the Private Sector Covid response from Highland Council; HIE and Lochaber Chamber of Commerce.

At this point the meeting was adjourned for a short comfort break and it resumed again at 4.15p.m.

6. Corran Narrows Update Fios às Ùr mu Aiseag a' Chorrain

Declaration of Interest - Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Chair of HITRANS 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 discussion.

There was circulated Report No LA/11/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment which provided an operational update on the Corran Ferry. In addition, there was an update on the Corran Ferry Project (Outline Business Case) and the work being progressed regarding the future prospects of a Fixed Link Crossing.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Council had committed to a carbon neutral Highlands and it was queried what the options were for a clean energy solution for a replacement ferry. It was advised that Officers had met with Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd at their HQ, Port Glasgow regarding the Vessel and Infrastructure option and discussed using a modern hybrid vessel that could provide a 30% reduction in fuel consumption. However, there was evidence that some hybrid vessels had faced many technical issues. There may also be higher capital costs with a hybrid vessel. Reliability in a vessel was key and the current vessel provided a very high standard of reliability. In this respect, Orkney Islands Council were at the forefront of bringing hybrid vessels to Scotland and lessons would be learned from their experience.
- In relation to post Covid and opportunities for investment in terms of active travel, the role of a Fixed Link connection to provide a walking and cycling option for Corran Narrows has been recognised in the Fixed Link study.
- In moving forward looking at Fixed Link options, the importance was stressed of the need to consult with the community and establish their opinion on this option.
- Transport Scotland Officers working on the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 had shifted their focus to the Covid pandemic and were now working on the Transport transition plan. It was highlighted that there was an opportunity to lobby for investment and growth in the Scottish economy, particularly in Lochaber.
- In relation to the new ticketing system, it was explained that a business case had to be produced for new ICT investment and work on this was being undertaken. The business case would be considered by the ICT Board in August and if approved, money for it would require to be secured from within the Corran Ferry budget. This was a necessary investment for the operational efficiency of the vessel and the health, safety and wellbeing of the crew.

The Committee extended their thanks to Officers for their work on this project for the way it had been structured and the community involvement.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the report and generally supported the proposals in the following report – Corran Narrows Update Report on i Corran Ferry Project (Outline Business Case) and ii Fixed Link Crossing.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 19 February, 2020 which were approved by the Council on 12 March, 2020.

The meeting ended at 4.40 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held Remotely on Wednesday, 1 July 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr A MacInnes
Mr A Baxter	Mr D MacLeod
Mr B Boyd	Mr C Munro
Mrs C Caddick	Mr D Rixson
Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr P Saggars
Mr J Gray	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Henderson	Ms M Smith
Mr D Louden	

Non-Members also present:

Ms J Barclay	Mr B Lobban
Mr A Christie	Mr J McGillivray
Mr R Gale	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr A Graham	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Executive Chief Officer Environment and Infrastructure

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

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated from Mr W Mackay.

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

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

Item 4 – Mr A Henderson (financial) and Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

Item 6 – Mr C Munro and Mr D Rixson (both non-financial) and Ms M Smith (financial)

Item 7 – Mr A Henderson (non-financial)

Item 11 – Mr A MacInnes and Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

Item 12 – Mr A Henderson (financial) and Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair informed Members of a list of good news and outstanding achievements, which was **NOTED** by the Committee.

4. **National Planning Framework 4 and the Highland Development Plan Scheme** **Frèam Dealbhadh Nàiseanta 4 agus Sgeama Plana Leasachaidh na Gàidhealtachd**

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Henderson declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of being a Director of Mallaig Harbour Authority and indicated he would not take part in any debate around that issue.

Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust 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 discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/6/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A presentation was provided on Scotland's new National Development Plan, the emerging Highland Vision, the draft Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS) and the participation statement for the Development Plan Scheme. On this regard, Members were reminded that there was to be a workshop on 10 July 2020.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- officers were praised for their work, especially given the recent challenging Covid 19 crisis;
- it was important to capitalise on the uniqueness of the Highlands, to identify other areas for development and to attract inward and foreign investment, good quality jobs and affordable housing;

- a review of the Council's policies for hinterland development and housing in the countryside would be beneficial as some felt they were stifling much needed smaller housing developments in rural areas;
- concern was expressed about the percentage of land in Scotland (20%) and particularly in Caithness (50%) that was designated as wild land, which could stifle some types of much needed development, such as community-driven renewable energy projects. Consultation with local people on this was urged;
- reference was made to coordination between national energy targets and the Highland 2050 Vision, with reference to issues such as railway electrification, renewable energy, and hydrogen power projects;
- the wording around Highland being an exemplar could be strengthened;
- as soon as libraries re-opened it would be useful to put consultation documents back into them to widen the reach of consultation;
- economy and health were important issues and should be adequately covered;
- with particular reference to Mallaig, and the Mallaig to Skye route, further detail on key seaports and routes of economic importance should be included in the IRSS;
- the Inner Moray Firth Plan was amber due to Covid-related delays, and some deadlines might need to be extended;
- reference was made to the importance of identifying appropriate methodologies to, in turn, identify the best type of industries on which to focus, with an interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary and multi-layered approach;
- reference was made to the worrying trend for fossil fuels to be used to power hydrogen projects, and the use of wave and tide energy was urged;
- attention was drawn to opportunities such as high speed rail and the undergrounding of facilities, and the importance of investment and jobs to grow the population and economy, and to take advantage of the competitive advantages of the Highlands; and
- the workshop planned for 10 July 2020 would consider many of the issues raised in more detail.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to homologate the responses that were submitted to Scottish Government's NPF4 'Call for Ideas' at Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the update on the emerging Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS) for Highland and **APPROVED** the next steps of engagement for finalising the IRSS, including a Member workshop, as set out at paragraph 4.4 of the report and at Appendix 5;
- iii. **APPROVED** the 2020 Development Plans Newsletter at Appendix 6 of the report – including the Council's approach to engaging communities and partners while social distancing measures were in place - for publication, and submission to Scottish Ministers as the Council's 2020 Development Plan Scheme;
- iv. **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; and
- v. **AGREED** to add further detail into the IRSS on key seaports and routes of economic importance.

5. Spaces for People Raointean gu Daoine

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/7/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A presentation summarised the award of £752,954 on 25 May 2020, the timeline and details of activities undertaken, consultation feedback, and the Phase 2 bid for a value of £1,215,606 which was awarded on 30 June 2020.

During discussion the following issues were considered:-

- officers were thanked for their work, with particular reference to the speed at which it had been undertaken. The project was praised as a useful pilot to capture empirical data on traffic and pedestrian movements. It was disappointing some negative press had been received, given the challenging health crisis under which the project had been undertaken. It was pointed out that in response to concerns raised by businesses, amendments to the project had been made, for example changing the direction of the one-way system around the castle. Work would be undertaken with Sustrans following the gathering of data on phase one;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that if the Inshes over-bridge did not proceed, consultation would be undertaken with Sustrans on what to spend the funds on, noting the suggestion to widen nearby pavements by the removal of embedded stones, and to improve the Cradlehall junction;
- attention was drawn to the need to revisit the options for allowing the use of extended outside seating on Academy Street during the day, not only at night;
- Councillor Maxine Smith would be contacted outwith the meeting to discuss three projects - Evanton to Dingwall, Evanton to Invergordon, and the old A9 in a neighbouring ward – and Councillor Bill Boyd would be contacted in relation to the possibility of restricting inter-city buses using Academy Street, Inverness;
- the importance of engagement was emphasised, especially in relation to avoiding negative press reports;
- the health and environmental benefits of increased walking and cycling in the city centre were emphasised and it was hoped these projects would continue after the Covid crisis; and
- in response to support for the 20mph speed zones that had been introduced, it was explained that these had been 18 month temporary traffic orders, which would require a formal process to be made permanent.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress made to implement the initial Spaces for People Highland project;
- ii. **NOTED** the intention to submit additional funding bids for further interventions across Highland; and
- iii. **AGREED**, that as part of the Phase 3 bid, to revisit the options for allowing the use of extended outside seating on Academy Street.

6. Economic Recovery Ath-shlànachadh Eaconamach

Declarations of Interest:-

Mr C Munro declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Ionad Thròndairnis (the Trotternish Centre) 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.

Mr D Rixson declared non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

Ms M Smith declared a financial interest as an operator of a cruise tour business in Invergordon and, should discussion on that issue arise during discussion of this item intimated that she would not take part.

There is circulated Report No. ECI/8/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were considered:-

- information was sought, and provided, on possible Covid-related delays to town centre regeneration projects and whether funding would be affected;
- it was suggested that too little was known about the projects listed in the reports and a deferral for more information and Member-involvement was proposed. Other Members considered the officers' appraisal of the projects listed to be sufficient, noting they were all of benefit to the Highlands and, following discussion, it was decided that the submission to the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund stage one be noted rather than approved;
- officers were thanked for their work in submitting a bid for £13m of the total £50m fund, which would bring many Highland projects to the attention of the Scottish Government. A query was raised over the definition of deprived areas, and the value of the economic recovery taskforce was highlighted;
- the importance of having 'shovel ready' projects was emphasised and Members should urge communities to consider projects required in their areas and take steps to develop them. It was pointed out that community projects could be more challenging to instigate in larger urban areas, and that funding was usually required to prepare projects. Information on possible projects was being sought at Ward Business and Area Committee meetings;
- the need to help businesses as part of economic recovery was highlighted and attention was drawn to the ability of businesses to appeal against domestic rate decisions. This should be drawn to the attention of small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) which had been affected by Covid;
- information having been sought on the proposed use of Crown Estate monies, it was explained that a report on this would be presented to the Committee in due course;

- the value of Gaelic to economic recovery, not only in relation to tourism, education and culture, but across all aspects of the economy, was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Stage 2 application process;
- attention was drawn to three major economic challenges, the Covid recovery process, Brexit and Climate Change, and it was hoped the Council had adequate resources to continue seeking opportunities for development and diversification; and
- the important role of tourism in economic recovery was detailed, with particular reference to the NC500 and the cruise industry which had been badly affected. Many of these issues would be considered by the Tourism Committee on 16 July 2020.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work already undertaken across the Service to support economic recovery;
- NOTED** the submission of the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund stage one applications to Scottish Government; and
- AGREED** to ensure Highland SMEs were aware of the possibility of appealing domestic rates.

7. Corran Narrows Update Aiseag a' Chorrain

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Chair of HiTRANS 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. ECI/9/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A presentation provided included details on the Corran Ferry project and possible future Fixed Link Crossing, the requirement for a replacement vessel and slipways, funding issues and the time-critical nature of the decision required.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- officers were thanked for their work and the support that had been offered to Members and the local communities throughout the long process that had led to this stage;
- it was emphasised that the longer term solution was a fixed link crossing, but in the meantime a replacement ferry solution was urgently required due to the age and condition of the current vessel, the lack of emergency alternative solutions and the lifeline nature of the route;
- concern was expressed that transferring the service from the Council could affect reliability and fare structure;
- attention was drawn to the importance of considering the carbon footprint of the final vessel choice and the environmental impact of the choice of vessel should be considered by the Council's Climate Change Panel;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons new pier infrastructure was required;

- it was suggested that, in light of the high costs of naval architects, a tried and tested vessel type be sourced from elsewhere, for example Norway. However attention was drawn to the unique requirements of the geography and situation at Corran. Any vessel recommended would have a business case which would be the subject of consultation with Members, partners and local communities;
- it was important that work towards the fixed link was completed in a timely fashion, this being the preferred long term solution;
- support was voiced for transferring responsibility for the service to Transport Scotland if possible;
- if the ideal vessel was over 500 tonnes, it would be preferable to train the existing crew to deal with this size of vessel rather than accept a lighter vessel;
- reference was made to the consideration that had already been given to the project by the Harbour Management Board, and the urgent need to source a replacement vessel in the immediate future, with the fixed link being a much longer term initiative;
- in relation to the possible transfer of the service to Transport Scotland and concerns about fare increases, attention was drawn to the current review of Road Equivalent Tariffs, with an expectation that the future equivalent would offer more bespoke solutions for individual routes. A new plan for Scottish ferries was anticipated by 2023;
- attention was drawn to the excellent service being provided by staff at the Corran ferry as well as to the significant level of income the service generated; and
- reference was made to the need for transport resilience and the importance of a reliable ferry service given the huge detours in the event of a breakdown.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information in the following reports –
 - Corran Ferry Options Appraisal
 - Corran Ferry Project (Outline Business Case)
 - Ferry replacement Vessel and Fixed link Timeline
 - Fixed Link Crossing Up-date;
- ii. **APPROVED** that the Highland Council is content to ‘approach’ Transport Scotland regarding a transfer of responsibility based on the principles set out in the Scottish Ferries Plan;
- iii. **APPROVED** that a private operator running the service should be rejected for further consideration (as recommended at HMB 2020/02/25);
- iv. **APPROVED** the preferred vessel and infrastructure option (Roll-on Roll-off) with a view to reducing optimism bias and establishing greater cost certainty prior to any procurement (as recommended at HMB 2019/11/13);
- v. **AGREED** support the concept of a 5-year Ferry plan to ensure that the current model was sustainable. Costed items would be brought back to EDI committee seeking approval;
- vi. **APPROVED** the requirement for the setting up of a Corran Narrows Options Working Group, based on similar criteria used for the Strome ferry Options Working Group; and
- vii. **AGREED** the environmental impact of the choice of vessel be considered by the Council’s Climate Change Panel.

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Planning Applications Committees (PAC) for:-

- i. South PAC – 28 January 2020;
- ii. North PAC – 3 March 2020;
- iii. South PAC – 10 March 2020;
- iv. North PAC – 21 April 2020;

and, **APPROVED**:-

- v. Strome ferry Working Group of 21 February 2020;
- vi. Harbours Management Board of 25 February 2020.

9. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Committee **APPROVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act, the relevant paragraphs being shown.

10. Uig Harbour Redevelopment – Grant Funding and Contract Award Ath-leasachadh Caladh Ùige – Maoineachadh Tabhartais agus Duais Cunraidh

Paragraph 9

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/10/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Following discussion, Mr D Louden, seconded by Mr K Gowans, **MOVED** to defer this item to the most appropriate meeting of the full council for wider discussion in the context of the full capital plan.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mrs T Robertson, seconded by Mr J Gray, moved that subject to the review of the grant award from Transport Scotland by the ECO, Environment and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, the recommendations detailed in the report.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 6 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 9 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr K Gowans, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacInnes and Ms M Smith.

For the Amendment:

Mr R Balfour, Mrs H Carmichael, Mrs C Caddick, Mr J Gray, Mr A Henderson, Mr D MacLeod, Mr C Munro, Mr D Rixson, and Mrs T Robertson.

Decision

The Committee **APPROVED**, subject to the review of the grant award from Transport Scotland by the ECO, Environment and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, the recommendations detailed in the report.

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

Paragraphs 6 and 9

Declarations of Interest: Mr A MacInnes and Mr D Rixson declared non-financial interests in this item as a member of the working group in respect of Staffin Community Trust and the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association respectively 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 discussion.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/11/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

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

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

Paragraphs 6 and 9**Declarations of Interest:**

Mr A Henderson declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of being a Director of Mallaig Harbour Authority and indicated he would not take part in any debate around that issue.

Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association 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 to Members only Report No. ECI/12/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

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

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Thursday 2 July 2020 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Ms E Knox
Mrs I Campbell	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Christie	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr S Mackie
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr L Fraser (am only)	Mrs F Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr G Ross
Mr A Graham	Mr A Sinclair
Mr T Heggie (Vice Chair)	Ms N Sinclair

Religious Representatives:

Ms S Lamont
Mr W Skene

Non-Members also present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr A Baxter	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs C Caddick	Mr J McGillivray
Mr J Gray	Mr N McLean
Mr A Henderson	Mr C Munro
Mr A Jarvie	Ms L Munro
Mr B Lobban	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Louden	Mr K Rosie
Mr D Mackay	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
Mr P Senior, Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning
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

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 J Finlayson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 3 – Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie and Mr K Gowans (non-financial)

Item 4 – Mr K Gowans (non-financial)

3. The Phased Reopening of Schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Settings

Fosgladh Sgoiltean Mean air Mhean agus Suidheachaidhean Tràth-ionnsachaidh agus Cùraim-chloinne

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie and Mr K Gowans declared non-financial interests in this item on the grounds that they had children enrolled in primary or secondary school, specifically Kinlochleven Primary School in the case of Mr Baxter, 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.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/08/20 dated 22 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning.

Detailed discussion took place, during which the following issues were raised:-

- it had been a turbulent few months and some Members commented that the manner in which information had been provided by the Scottish Government had created difficulties for local authorities in terms of communication. Other Members commended the approach taken by the Scottish Government, commenting that the information provided had been reasoned, appropriate and guided by science in what had been a dynamic environment;
- many people were anxious about safety and it was necessary to emphasise that Highland was a relatively safe area in terms of COVID-19. It was suggested that it would be helpful to provide, in a user-friendly way, locally relevant statistics on the risks of contracting COVID-19 from going back to school. In addition, it was queried whether the Council had access to the specialised communications expertise that was required to put such information across in a way that was going to make an impact;
- Members praised Head Teachers and school staff for their commitment and hard work in what had been extremely challenging circumstances. The quality of work produced, in conjunction with IT, was commendable and the daily contact with pupils had been reassuring. Thanks were also expressed to officers for their cooperation throughout;
- whilst appreciating the additional workload in terms of property maintenance and cleaning, it was suggested that Head Teachers should have complete management of their school buildings over the holidays so that teachers could go in if they wanted to;

- there were a number of children who would have to continue shielding and information was sought on how this would be resourced;
- in relation to Plans A-C, whilst additional resource implications had been identified, the report did not set out how the various options would be implemented. It was questioned whether it was sufficient simply to identify need then defer it and, if not sufficient, what plans were being put in place to deal with a situation like the outbreak in Leicester. It was necessary to be very clear with parents and to have Frequently Asked Questions setting out exactly what would happen in the event of a virus spike and what the options might be for schools;
- parents and teachers were anxious about infection, not only in respect of coronavirus but, for example, norovirus and support was sought for an Infection Control Charter, working in conjunction with NHS Highland Public Health officers;
- the COVID-19 pandemic was a public health issue and, given that the Committee was considering the re-opening of schools in a matter of weeks, there should be public health representatives in attendance;
- a lot of emphasis was being placed on re-opening businesses but the economy was not going to function unless the public health crisis was overcome;
- concern was expressed regarding IT, both in terms of it being a barrier to holding democratic meetings over the past few months and it being insufficient to deliver high quality teaching and meet the education challenges that lay ahead. It was suggested that it was necessary to look at what was currently available and consider whether it was sufficient to meet outcomes for children beyond the start of the next academic year;
- the experience that young people had just been through would be the overriding memory of their childhoods and, whilst some would emerge more resilient, others would be suffering. Concern was expressed regarding mental health as well as widening wealth inequalities, and it was necessary to identify those in need and ensure they were supported;
- there was a strong possibility that government advice would change in the next few weeks if the virus could not be contained, and the Council was going to have to react far more quickly than it was able to in March;
- there were a number of very fragile communities in Highland and there was a need for a Highland-specific strategy;
- it was necessary to send a clear message to the UK government that furlough schemes should be implemented again if need be to ensure that public health was not put at risk for the sake of minor economic gain;
- the need for better communication between officers and Members was emphasised and it was suggested that Education Committee Members be appointed to the Schools Reopening Programme Management Office subgroups to ensure they had the opportunity to feed in the views of their communities;
- the scale of the impact on children's education was not yet known, and information was sought on what instruments of assessment had been created to evaluate the widening attainment gap, and what contingencies were in place to address this on a pupil by pupil basis. The complexities were emphasised and it was queried whether consideration had been given to blocks of children having to repeat a year to ensure they were equipped to carry on to the next level;
- it was very difficult to get children, particularly of primary school age, to engage online, and this was a source of stress for parents, many of whom did not have time to sit down with their children on a daily basis;
- whilst it was recognised that one size did not fit all, there was a need for a level of consistency in terms of the messages going out to parents from schools. It was

important to be clear that the decisions being made were based on science, and messages needed to be unequivocal;

- teachers and support staff had developed new skills in digital learning and it was important to ensure that the digital gains made were not lost;
- the health and wellbeing of young people was paramount and it was necessary to make a strong statement that recovery was not just about the economy;
- it was necessary to learn from the mistakes that had been made and to capture and communicate the positive work taking place. The Chair confirmed that it was intended that the report to the August Committee would include an evaluation of the work to date, including lessons learned and good news stories;
- in relation to section 3.5 of the report, clarity was sought as to what was meant by local level – ie area, ward or Associated School Group;
- in relation to section 3.10 of the report, information was requested on the key stakeholders, other than those mentioned, and what opportunities they had to be part of the conversation and develop policy;
- thanks were expressed to the many young people who had volunteered and carried out leadership roles during lockdown;
- it took a community to support a child, and the importance of working with third sector partners and community groups was emphasised. Particular reference was made to the work of High Life Highland, the Voluntary Youth Network, Eden Court and Fèis Rois;
- it was necessary to continue to develop the new Highland Youth Work Strategy, which had been coproduced with young people and third sector partners;
- information was sought on what support was being provided during the summer holidays to help children overcome their anxiety about returning to school, and build resilience;
- clarification was requested as to why the estimated costs in respect of School Transport and Schools PPE were greater for Plan A, which had no social distancing measures, than for Plan C, which had 2m social distancing;
- in the event of another lockdown, which was effectively Plan D, it was necessary to look at what materials pupils would be using, particularly in relation to closing the attainment gap;
- it was necessary to implement Plan A as clearly, quickly and efficiently as possible;
- in relation to section 1.8 of the report, a more detailed breakdown of the estimated costs of £10-12m was sought, and it was queried whether the estimate was an average across all three scenarios;
- in relation to recommendation iv, there needed to be clear communication with all Members if and when national directives changed;
- it was questioned how the measures described in section 3.2.2 of the report would be implemented in schools that did not have Facilities Management provision on site;
- concern was expressed regarding the arrangements surrounding school budgets, and that the announcement that they would be uploaded by the end of the week, which was the final day of term, was placing additional stress on staff;
- in the region of £8m (£5m underspend and £3m from Devolved School Management budgets) had been taken out of the Education budget in the current year, and it was hoped that the issue of school finances would be handled more effectively if such a situation arose in the future. It was added that the breakdown of the £5m underspend requested by Councillor Graham MacKenzie at the Resources Committee had not yet been provided;

- further information was requested on the flexibility of the offer to fund post-probationer teachers in the 2019/20 cohort;
- in relation to supply staff, flexibility would be required to cover staff absences due to sickness and stress/anxiety, and an assurance was sought that this was being looked at in conjunction with the teaching unions;
- it was queried whether discussions were taking place with teaching institutions regarding the possibility of fast-tracking people with the appropriate qualifications/background into the teaching profession;
- it was requested that the list of parental questions submitted by Members, and the answers, be published on the Council's website and communicated to Members. The Chair confirmed that this would be undertaken;
- information was sought on what happened if a school had to close due to an infection;
- returning 100% of children to school would lead to issues at break/lunch times in larger schools. Even if breaks were staggered, canteens would struggle to cope and it would not be possible to keep all children on site. Community engagement was crucial and information was sought on how it was intended to communicate with supermarkets, traders etc, Local Members potentially having a role in that regard;
- it was requested that the school estate status be refreshed and brought to the next meeting of the Committee;
- in relation to the need for enhanced cleaning, it was queried whether cleaners previously employed by the Council had been contacted;
- concern was expressed regarding compulsory transfers, and it was questioned whether consideration had been given to issues such as compensation, disputes, and how receiving Head Teachers would be consulted. In addition, a guarantee was sought that compulsory transfer would be a last resort, with more flexible recruitment options being explored first;
- information was sought on how it was intended to capture those pupils who had not engaged with online learning and what strategies would be employed. In addition, what would assessments look like, when would they take place, would online learning be included, and how would the results be used?;
- there was a particular issue in respect of high achievers and how they were supported;
- schools should be encouraged, on the in-service day, to think about transition from nursery to primary school, and P7 to S1;
- in relation to SQA results, a plea was made that pupils be informed of their estimated grade to help them plan any appeals necessary;
- the need for accurate data to enable Members to carry out their scrutiny role was emphasised and, concern having been expressed regarding high turnover of Pupil Support Assistants in some areas, up-to-date information on Additional Support Needs (ASN) allocation in schools was requested;
- in relation to secondary teacher staffing, confirmation was sought that permanent posts were now being advertised and that posts were being advertised externally so that Highland was not last in the queue in the Scotland-wide recruitment drive;
- it was queried what plans were in place to incentivise teacher training posts in Highland, and whether the fully funded posts currently available to STEM subjects would be extended to all subjects;
- Safer Routes to Schools and active travel had an important role in terms of the health and wellbeing of children, the pressure on school transport and the financial burden on parents, and it was hoped this would be taken into account

- when planning future responses. The Chair confirmed that was the case, and encouraged Members to have discussions with their local schools in that regard;
- in relation to ASN, many pupils would require increased support as a result of the change in environment, and information was sought on what was being done to address this;
 - information was sought on whether all school vacancies as at close of business today would be advertised or held until the new school term; what the Council was doing to support recently qualified teachers who were having to leave roles they would like to remain in, and what representations had been made to the Deputy First Minister on this issue; whether it was right that Head Teachers had had to use their personal credit cards to purchase supplies as their budgets had been frozen; and whether the range of applications on Chromebooks was reviewed frequently. The Chair acknowledged that Head Teachers having to use personal credit cards was not acceptable, albeit they would be reimbursed, and that it had taken time to upload the budgets. However, this had now been resolved;
 - concern was expressed regarding reports from teachers that they had been told by officers that they should not contact Councillors regarding concerns about education provision or resources in their schools, and a guarantee was sought that no such diktat was in place;
 - in relation to Kinlochleven Primary School, none of the current staff would be returning in the new school session. Whilst recognising the problems associated with workforce planning, children needed continuity and for them to return to a school without any familiar faces was disappointing;
 - Members questioned what the Council could do to begin to address the problems faced at the end of every school year in terms of staffing, and the turmoil teaching staff experienced;
 - returning in excess of 30,000 children to school was a huge task and it was important to recognise the complexities, particularly in relation to the communications coming from the UK and Scottish Governments. Different preventative interventions were continually being introduced – for example, facemasks were now mandatory in some settings but not in schools – and this was difficult for any local authority to manage;
 - workforce and curriculum planning, non-teaching staff interventions and communication with parents were critical. In relation to workforce planning, the Chair confirmed that a staffing briefing by the Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager would be circulated to all Members;
 - the fluidity of the situation made it difficult to plan, and information was sought on what additional support could be provided to Head Teachers so they felt confident and assured in planning for the various scenarios; and
 - on the point being raised, the Chair assured Members that the recruitment of Head Teachers was a priority.

Officers responded in detail to the points/questions raised, during which it was confirmed that:-

- in relation to children who were shielding, it had been announced that all newly qualified teachers would receive a contract which would be funded nationally. It was hoped that the additional resource would enable the development of a tutoring approach for the most vulnerable children in Highland and, as soon as the parameters of the funding were known, a policy would be developed and details provided to Members;

- guidance had been sought on flexibility of return to schools in terms of teachers requiring access over the summer, and on what responsibilities the Council would have in the event of a localised coronavirus outbreak, and this would be shared with Members as soon as it was available;
- in relation to infection control, officers would work with the digital and health teams, in conjunction with young people, to produce a video which could be distributed to communities to support the infection control agenda;
- consideration would be given to how to give regular updates to parents, Head Teachers and staff over the summer, and Members would be involved in all communications;
- the recent staff survey included questions relating to a number of the issues raised and would be a benchmark as to how staff were feeling, and the findings would be reported to Members; and
- whilst there was a line management protocol to be followed, there was no diktat in place in relation to teachers raising concerns with Councillors. Staff should seek to raise concerns with someone they knew or trusted, and the Chief Executive undertook to clarify that message when she responded to staff following the staff survey.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the recent national and local level developments in relation to the reopening of schools and ELC provision, representing contingency planning for implementation in the event of the conditions for full reopening of schools not being met;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Council would continue to work with all schools to support the re-opening of schools and ELC settings in a way that was safe and protected staff and pupils;
- iii. **NOTED** the risks and implications relating to the reopening of schools and ELC settings as set out within the report;
- iv. **AGREED** that the Chief Executive and the Executive Chief Officer for Education and Learning, if required, were to develop further planning options to support the safe and secure reopening of schools and ELC settings in August should national directives change during the period from 2 July to 6 August 2020;
- v. **AGREED** that the report to the August Committee should include an evaluation of the work to date, including lessons learned and good news stories;
- vi. **AGREED** that the list of parental questions submitted by Members, and the answers, be published on the Council's website and communicated to Members; and
- vii. **AGREED** that the staffing briefing prepared by the Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager be circulated to all Members.

4. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Tràth-ionnsachaidh agus Cùraim-chloinne

Declaration of Interest: Mr K Gowans declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that he had a child enrolled in primary school 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 EDU/09/20 dated 22 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the importance of working with partner providers was reiterated;
- although the Scottish Government had given flexibility there was still an expectation that the expansion of ELC to 1140 hours would take place as quickly as possible;
- a number of questions were raised including how confident the Administration were that the expansion would have been achieved by August 2020; details of the underspend in financial year 2019/20; the level of expenditure and the amount remaining in the current financial year; how much had been spent on emergency key worker childcare; what the funding originally allocated for the expansion of ELC would now be used for; a commitment for completing the project; and a request for a fully time-scaled report for completing the project to the next Committee. As a number of these required detailed responses from Officers, it was requested that these be shared with all Members of the Committee;
- a request was made that, before the next meeting of the Committee, details of all projects and their current status be provided. In this regard, it was also requested that information be provided as to which facilities would be providing 600 hours and which ones 1140 hours;
- there was concern that some key worker childcare hubs were to close and, if so, it was requested that information be provided as to their location. In this regard, it was disappointing that some key workers had been unable to access childcare provision;
- it was stated that, given the wider financial challenges facing the Council, no decisions in relation to ELC could be made without considering the wider financial impact and the need for the Council to carefully scrutinise any financial decisions in terms of affordability and ongoing sustainability. However, it was feared that this suggested that ELC monies would be repurposed and this would lead to parental uncertainty and worry;
- it was recognised that changes had taken place rapidly but an update on what new builds were proposed, which buildings were to be requisitioned and the costs involved was sought;
- it was acknowledged provision of ELC would vary between each local authority as well as within Highland itself and a one-size approach would not fit;
- if there was flexibility to use the funding originally ringfenced for the expansion of ELC, it was queried if there would be additional funding provided by the Scottish Government in the future;
- it was concerning that some parents, particularly in Gaelic Medium Education (GME), would not be afforded the opportunity to benefit from the increase in early learning and child care hours and it was questioned what work was being undertaken to increase the provision and the associated timeline;
- GME opportunities were available throughout Highland but any delay in providing Gaelic Medium ELC would have an adverse effect on those parents wishing to educate their children through the medium of Gaelic, especially in settings where 1140 hours were available in English Medium ELC but not in Gaelic;
- Parent Councils were expressing concern at the uncertainty and delay. This had a negative impact on those wishing to return to work, especially single parents,

- and equity of provision across Highland was required to ensure there was equality of employment opportunities;
- it was queried what flexibility the Council had been given in relation to the capital allocation and if this could potentially be used to assist with the expansion. Furthermore, the Scottish Government had given the Council additional funding to provide flexibility during the crisis for looking after the children of key workers and vulnerable children; and
 - it was questioned how many of the centres would be able to deliver 1140 hours, if the funding would cover any additional costs incurred this year and what support was being provided to them.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the recent national and local level developments in relation to ELC, the financial context and also the implications arising from COVID-19, as set out within the report;
- ii. **AGREED** that from August 2020 onwards, the Council would continue to fund existing ELC settings delivering 600 or 1140 hours, at those levels, to provide sustainability and allow settings to continue funding ELC funded provision as and when circumstances allowed;
- iii. **NOTED** that this would continue to support over 50% of Highland ELC settings funded to deliver the 1140 agenda, with actual delivery subject to permissible capacity and COVID-19 circumstances;
- iv. **NOTED** that a further report taking cognisance of the change to legislation regarding the expansion of ELC (that was invoked during COVID-19 lockdown) would be subject to discussion at the Education Committee in August once a complete impact assessment of the Council's financial position and the recovery programme was finalised;
- v. **NOTED** that the re-opening of ELC settings, Council and Partner/Childminders, was being taken forward as part of the Council's overall schools return programme, as detailed as a separate agenda item for this Committee;
- vi. **NOTED** that the Council would continue to engage with Partner Providers, Childminders, and Council staff, relating to ELC developments;
- vii. **AGREED** the design principles that had been prepared to shape the Council's planning around ELC, that had been set out in section 4.6 of the report; and
- viii. **AGREED** that responses to the points raised by Councillor Graham MacKenzie be circulated to all Members.

The meeting concluded at 3.15pm

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held remotely on Monday 6 July 2020 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie
Mr M Reiss

Mr K Rosie
Mr A Sinclair
Ms N Sinclair

Officials in attendance:

Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Mr P Senior, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning
Ms A Clark, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office
Mrs H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Inspector A Goskirk, Police Scotland
Mr A Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group

**1. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair
Cur an Dreuchd Cathraiche agus Iar-Chathraiche**

The Ward Manager advised of an amendment proposed in relation to this item. He invited nominations for the appointment of the Chair of the Caithness Committee. He also invited nominations for two Vice Chairs of the Caithness Committee, one proposed from each of the two County wards. This was on the basis the Vice Chairs would assume the reinstated civic roles of the Provost of Thurso and the Provost of Wick and that the appointees would have a civic role but that the roles and responsibilities would be taken back for formal agreement at the next Caithness Committee, scheduled for 22 October 2020.

Thereafter, Mr R Bremner seconded by Mr W Mackay moved that Ms N Sinclair be appointed as Chair.

On there being no other nominations, **Ms N Sinclair** was appointed as **Chair** of the Caithness Committee.

Mr K Rosie seconded by Mr M Reiss moved that Mr S Mackie be appointed as Vice Chair from Ward 2: Thurso and Northwest Caithness.

Mr R Bremner seconded by Mr A Sinclair moved that Mr W Mackay be appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee from Ward 3: Wick and East Caithness.

On there being no other nominations, **Mr S Mackie and Mr W Mackay** were appointed as **Vice Chairs** of the Caithness Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** that the Vice Chairs of the Committee would assume the reinstated civic roles of the Provost of Thurso and the Provost of Wick and would have a civic role and that the roles and responsibilities would be taken back for formal agreement at the next Caithness Committee, scheduled for 22 October 2020.

At this point, the Chair thanked Members for her appointment and indicated she was honoured to be given the opportunity to serve Caithness. She paid tribute to Mr M Reiss for serving as Chair for the past two years, and on representing Caithness's best interests within Highland Council. She hoped to build on that foundation by driving the Committee forward as a powerful and relevant forum for local decision-making. The Council had made a commitment towards localism and it was important to ensure that Members worked together to address the issues that mattered most to the community and ensure those issues were championed at a Highland level.

The Chair continued that she hoped to facilitate closer collaboration between the Members, local officers and partners, across county and party lines as the area emerged from the pandemic and sought to rebuild the economy and social structures. She was confident that the inspirational example set by the community could be harnessed to deliver meaningful progress.

Thereafter, Members congratulated the Chair on her appointment and raised the following issues:-

- the importance of the Committee having a strong voice within the Council on the matters of most importance to Caithness and was proactive in tackling the issues around housing, drugs and mental health, poverty and antisocial behaviour, economic factors and regeneration;
- as the area emerged from Covid-19, the Committee's role should be one of leadership and providing encouragement to the third sector and the general public in confronting the challenges facing the County;
- the potential to engage with the Faroe Islands to open up new opportunities for business and to learn from their air services, and also to accept the offer from Planet Youth in Iceland to explore in partnership the Icelandic model for substance use;
- there was a renewed sense of enthusiasm to take a different approach in Caithness and to represent the unique challenges and often different priorities to other areas within Highland; and
- the new roles and responsibilities provided a structure to support the Chair and also drive forward the ambitions and needs of the County going forward. It was important the Committee robustly put its case forward to the Council and nationally to the Scottish and UK Governments.

The Chair advised that a meeting of Caithness Members would be arranged to discuss the issues within Wards 2 and 3, and those affecting the whole area with a view to an action plan being developed as soon as possible.

2. Apologies for Absence Liesgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D Mackay.

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

Item 4: Ms N Sinclair (non-financial)

Item 6: Mr R Bremner, Mr W Mackay and Mr K Rosie (non-financial)

4. **Return to School Update** **Fios às Ùr mu Thilleadh dhan Sgoil**

Declarations of Interest: Ms N Sinclair declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that family members attended Newton Park Primary School and Nursery in Wick, 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.

During a verbal update, the Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning advised that the Council's whole ecosystem was working on the plans and preparations to ensure schools would be ready for reopening on 12 August 2020. He explained that Council services and schools had been working on a scenario-based approach with the primary focus on Option A (100% return with no social distancing) in accordance with the national guidance but that work continued on contingency plans (Option B - 100% return with 1m social distancing and Option C - 50% return with 2m social distancing). However, the primary concern was the safety and wellbeing of pupils, staff and communities and therefore risk assessments continued and mechanisms were in place to adapt the model dependent on circumstances and national guidance received. He had written to all Head Teachers thanking them and their staff for their efforts, flexibility, innovation and creativity in continually adjusting plans and processes. In addition, the Council's support services such as transport, catering, IT, facilities management should be recognised for their crucial role throughout this process.

Members recorded their thanks to head teachers, teachers and support staff for continuing in their roles and on taking on new roles during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example delivering digital learning and looking after the wellbeing and social elements of school. Staff had faced significant challenges associated with the changing guidance in relation to the return to school environment, however the focus in Caithness had always been on the welfare of pupils and ensuring the best educational experience.

In discussion, Members then raised the following main points:-

- the work ongoing in Caithness to comply with the social distancing guidelines for the different age groups of children taking into account the available space within school settings. It was confirmed that while the primary focus was to have a 100% return to schools with no social distancing measures, assessments had been undertaken and plans were in place in the event Options B or C had to be deployed, including a greater reliance on blended learning to bridge any gap;
- concern there would be insufficient capacity to provide the level of school transport required if social distancing measures had to be deployed, particularly as many public services were shared with schools. It was confirmed a transport sub group had been established involving transport providers and operators and was working to deliver flexible and creative solutions for example offering parent fuel vouchers and active travel solutions. There had also been engagement with the parent council partnership to ensure the co-design of any plans. In addition,

a local project board involving transport providers was overseeing the return to schools in the area;

- the potential for monies to be allocated to undertake works to improve facilities at Thurso High School, noting the underspend on the previous year's DSM allocation was being used to help bridge the budget gap. The Executive Chief Officer confirmed he would ensure any specific requests directed to him in relation to the School would be considered by the relevant officers in terms of priorities within the capital programme;
- whether an increase in home schooling was being observed given the anxieties of some parents around the return to school. It was confirmed there was anecdotal evidence home schooling may be on the rise and that plans were in place to communicate with parents and carers to help manage and alleviate anxieties, including a dedicated web page on returning to school which also included a frequently asked questions section and regular engagement between schools and parent councils;
- the opportunities to use renewable energies which was a key strength of the area to provide alternative forms of school transport in future; and
- the support being provided by the Council to head teachers and teachers in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. It was confirmed that the wellbeing of staff was a priority. The information generated by a recent staff survey would assist in targeting support. There was regular engagement and meetings with staff including the opportunity for one to one conversations.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated.

5. Police Scotland Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phoileas Alba

Inspector A Goskirk, Police Scotland provided a verbal update on performance in the area. In regard to road safety, the number of road traffic fatalities had reduced to zero, albeit it was important not to be complacent going forward. There had been a decrease in the number of detections for drink and drug driving, however in recent weeks there had been an increase in drug driving compared to the previous year due to the introduction of the new test swipes, details of which he provided. There had been a reduction in the number of speeding and other road traffic offences which he suggested was due to Police Scotland's level of enforcement in addition to the limited traffic volumes over recent weeks. In the previous year there had been an increase in the levels of violence, however since 1 April 2020 a decrease had been observed, and there having been a reduction in crimes in the area. There had been an increase in anti-social behaviour and disorder mainly related to the failure to comply with the Scottish Government's Covid-19 legislation introduced in March 2020 which had been applied 38 times, however this had resulted in only 2 arrests. In recent weeks the application of the legislation has tailed off as the Service returned to normal policing. He recorded his thanks to all the special constables who had been deployed during the Covid-19 period for giving up their time and providing reassurance to communities. There had been a reduction in dishonesty crimes, particularly housebreakings compared to the previous year, albeit most recently a rise in shoplifting had been observed.

Members recorded their appreciation to Police Scotland for keeping communities safe and providing reassurance during this challenging period. Inspector A Goskirk was also thanked for keeping local Members informed and the Caithness community commended on their high level of compliance with the Covid-19 legislation.

In discussion, reference was made to the partnership working being undertaken by Caithness Community Partnership and third sector interface in the area in response to issues of drug and alcohol misuse, social isolation, mental health and wellbeing in the area, and the need to get the message across to the community that their support was required as an integral part of this work on an ongoing basis. It was highlighted that at a seminar held in Caithness earlier in the year, it had been agreed to adopt the Icelandic model for tackling substance use in young people and Members looked forward to this being progressed.

In regard to the above, it was suggested that the agencies involved in the Caithness Community Partnership consider how to improve support services to tackle these issues and for this to be included in the actions plans for the County. There was a specific suggestion that the Council, Police Scotland, NHS Highland and communities work in partnership with the support of an independent facilitator.

In addition, there was a structural issue that needed to be addressed to ensure that calls about health issues which did not involve crimes were directed appropriately, concern being expressed that while it was the nature of the Police to respond, police officers were not experts in this field.

Inspector A Goskirk confirmed the evidence suggested that officers in the area were dealing with more urgent individual vulnerability calls than in the past. These were difficult issues and he welcomed the support of Members and the opportunity to have further discussions outwith the Committee.

Thereafter, Members raised the following main points:-

- issues around policing the Covid-19 legislation in rural communities where there may have been a consideration there was not the same level of risks as towns and cities;
- the special constabulary be commended for their important role and level of work during the Covid-19 pandemic;
- concern at the environmental impact of wild camping and the opportunity to have discussions with Police Scotland on whether their powers to tackle this issue needed to be enhanced;
- a point as to whether the Police carried out a risk assessment and background checks prior to homeless persons being allocated a Council house in the area. It was confirmed the Police shared information with the Council's Housing Service in this regard; and
- clarification was sought in relation to the drink driving cases reported in the press at the end of phase one of the lockdown period. It was confirmed these figures reflected both the proactive approach of the Police and also the level of reporting from within communities.

The Committee **NOTED** following scrutiny, the update.

6. Covid-19 Response Freagairt Covid-19

Declarations of Interest: Mr R Bremner as Chair of Thrumster Community Development Association, Mr W Mackay as a Director of Caithness Voluntary Group and Mr K Rosie as a Board Member of Thurso Community Development Trust 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.

i. The Highland Council Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

The Ward Manager provided a verbal report on the Council input to the Covid-19 pandemic in Caithness. He explained that humanitarian assistance centres (HACs) had been established as part of the emergency response to support key groups within the community that would be vulnerable to Covid-19. The presentation provided detailed information on the types of support that had been provided and the local arrangements that had been established; set out the key learning opportunities; outlined the next steps including how the Council would continue to work with local communities; provided financial information on the local funding for community support and how this had been distributed; and provided information on the Business Grant support that had been awarded to businesses across Caithness.

ii. Third Sector – Caithness Voluntary Group An Treas Roinn - Buidheann Saor-thoileach Ghallaibh

Mr A Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group (CVG) gave a verbal update on Covid-19 responses in Caithness on behalf of the Third Sector. He reported that at the outset lead anchor organisations had been identified in each community council area to organise and deliver support where required. There had been challenges in some areas and he thanked Thurso Community Development Trust and Thrumster Community Development Association for covering the gaps, and also Caithness Connections on its response. The lead groups, CVG, Members, Ward Manager, local Foodbank, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Dounreay representatives had worked in partnership to share information and ideas and try to solve any problems. The CVG had also sought to share best practice from the Highlands and also nationally. Procedures had been developed to ensure all the groups kept themselves and others safe. Leaflets and posters had been prepared to capture those not on social media, and goods such as hand sanitisers, activity boxes, and other activity items had been widely distributed to help improve wellbeing. CVG had worked with the community groups to help them obtain the funding outlined in the Ward Manager's presentation. Support had also been provided from the Citizens Advice Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, NHS Highland and others throughout the period.

Mr A Tait continued that resilience meetings continued to be held fortnightly overseeing the ongoing effort but also focusing more on recovery and preparing for future challenges such as the end of the furlough period. Resilience groups were being encouraged to work with those people they had been supporting to increase their independence and CVG would support this process. In conclusion, he advised that discussions had been held with the Highland Third Sector Interface in relation to

developing more capacity around mental health in Caithness through a partnership approach.

In discussion, Members acknowledged the tremendous response of the community, third sector and volunteers in Caithness to the Covid-19 pandemic and recorded their thanks for the work undertaken by the Ward Manager, Mr A Tait and Council officers during this period. This collective effort had brought an unprecedented level of support and reassurance to people in Caithness. It also provided a high level of confidence that the community would continue to be resilient through the recovery process and beyond. The funding organisations should be commended on their flexibility and on releasing monies expeditiously to provide resilience funding to communities. Members also recorded their thanks for the level of volunteer support in undertaking amenity works in the area.

Thereafter, and in response to questions, Mr A Tait reported that the partnership and team working and volunteering within the County had been excellent, and the third sector and community organisations in the area were stronger as a result of this work. The Ward Manager suggested there was now a firmer base on which to build the community partnership in Caithness.

A point was then raised in regard to how the Members could support the third sector through the period of recovery, advising it would be helpful to have an update on progress with the actions identified by third sector organisations. In this regard, Mr A Tait be invited to provide an update to the next meeting of the Committee in October 2020.

In response, Mr A Tait advised that as volunteers returned to work and groups assumed their normal roles, it was critical to work in partnership with the Council and to benefit from Member and officer contacts and expertise to continue to provide support and deal with the wide ranging issues that would arise in the recovery period. He confirmed he would welcome the opportunity to provide an update to the next meeting of the Committee.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Thurso Community Development Trust be congratulated on its vegetable garden initiative in Thurso town centre as part of its Thurso Grows project and the wider benefits of the initiative recognised. The Trust was also commended on its significant overall contribution to the community over the period;
- the opportunity for the Council to facilitate the continuation and expansion of Thurso Community Development Trust's lunch club service throughout the area, for example through the use of Council greenhouses;
- a follow up letter be sent by Mr S Mackie to the funding organisations expressing thanks for their support to date and asking that they continue to be considerate in terms of the qualifying criteria going forward;
- the need to consider the most effective level of Council officer support to be provided to the third sector and community partnership; and
- the need to ensure the excellent level of preparatory communication which had been achieved in the lockdown period was continued into recovery to keep communities informed.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the update and **AGREED** to invite Mr A Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group to the next meeting in October 2020 to give an update on progress with recovery.

Following on from the debate, the Committee also **AGREED** the following as proposed at the meeting by the Chair and seconded by Mr M Reiss –

“The Caithness Committee formally acknowledges the astonishing community and voluntary response to the coronavirus pandemic, which has been both inspirational and humbling. Local members – on behalf of the Highland Council – thank the community of Caithness and will work together to agree a formal, lasting tribute to the many people who have come together to get us through these difficult times.”

7. **Urgent Item** **Housing in Caithness**

The Chair **AGREED** the following item be taken as an urgent item to allow discussion on housing issues in Caithness in view of the fact the quarterly housing performance report was not on the agenda for this meeting.

It was reported that discussions had been held with the Chair of the Housing and Property Committee, Head of Housing, Housing Manager (North) and Principal Housing Officer. This related to the ongoing problem of void housing stock in Caithness and the fact there was a lack of material action to address the problem. This issue continued to impact on the Council’s housing performance despite the exhaustive efforts of the local housing team, and therefore there was a need for action and for this issue to be brought to the Council’s attention.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the following as proposed at the meeting by Mr R Bremner seconded by Mr K Rosie –

“The Caithness Committee recognises the ongoing challenges in Caithness in respect of void housing stock. It also recognises the commitment made from the new Chair of the Housing and Property Committee to meet the challenge by reviewing and implementing necessary action to reduce the impact that void housing has on the housing performance of Highland Council. The Committee supports and recognises the excellent work of the local housing team in achieving the level of service they are currently delivering.”

The meeting ended at 1.20pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held remotely on 7 July 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Mrs M Cockburn

Ms P Hadley
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance
Mr P Senior, Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning
Mrs C McDiarmid, ECO, Customer & Communities
Mrs A Clark, Head of Policy & Reform
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager (Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey)
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Mr M Tate, Chief Executive of Cairngorm Business Partnership
Ms K Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey

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

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. The Phased Reopening of Schools and ELC Settings Fosgladh Sgoiltean Mean air Mhean agus Suidheachaidhean Tràth-ionnsachaidh is Cùrainm-chloinne

During a verbal update, the Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning advised that the Council's whole ecosystem was working on the plans and preparations to ensure schools would be ready for reopening on 12 August 2020. He explained that Council services and schools had been working on a scenario-based approach with the primary focus on Option A (100% return with no social distancing) in accordance with the national guidance but that work continued on contingency plans (Option B - 100% return with 1m social distancing and Option C - 50% return with 2m social distancing). However, the primary concern was the safety and wellbeing of pupils, staff and

communities, therefore risk assessments continued and mechanisms were in place to adapt the model dependent on circumstances. Continuing, he advised that one of the key design principles had been co-production which involved a programme of engagement and consultation with key stakeholders such as Head Teachers, parents/carers and partner agencies. In terms of communications, he advised that a dedicated web page had been established on returning to school which also included a Frequently Asked Questions section and a bespoke version of this had been developed for specialist schools.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It had been reported at Education Committee that there would be recruitment, particularly for Head Teachers, over the Summer period and an update was sought on the teaching vacancies within the Badenoch and Strathspey area. It was reported that a communication giving an update on recruitment was due to be issued and the Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning would follow-up on this to ensure it was actioned;
- Further information was sought and provided in regard to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and it was suggested that communications needed to be issued on this as soon as possible to inform parents on the prospective timetable for delivery of 1140 hours of ELC;
- In addition to teachers, there were a variety of critical roles that contributed to school settings and it was most encouraging that the importance of these were being recognised with a whole ecosystem approach;
- The Scottish Government had given a commitment whereby counselling would be available in all secondary schools from April 2020. With the primary concern being wellbeing during these particularly unprecedented and challenging times, it was queried whether this initiative would still be delivered. It was further queried whether all staff had been advised of the Council's online counselling service that could be accessed; and
- It was highlighted that a significant number of pupils in Badenoch and Strathspey were transported to school by bus and an update was sought in regard to school transport arrangements and also whether pupils would be required to wear face masks on buses.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal report and **AGREED** to follow-up on the communications that was due to be issued on recruitment and ensure that this was circulated to Members.

4. **Cairngorm Business Partnership Com-pàirteachas Gnothachais a' Mhonaìdh Ruaidh**

There was a verbal overview provided by Mark Tate, Chief Executive of Cairngorm Business Partnership (CBP), on the current impacts on the local economy. Mr Tate advised that at the start of the pandemic, CBP had developed a strategy of 'stabilise, prepare and open'. He explained that the stabilisation phase continued and the massive impact of the situation on the

whole economy across Badenoch and Strathspey was recognised. Unfortunately, it was anticipated that the impact on the economy would continue for quite some time and an increasing number of redundancies was expected particularly as the furlough scheme was phased out. Although a number of businesses were starting to reopen and visitors were returning, this should not disguise the amount of work that still had to be undertaken to support businesses going forward. Mr Tate had been invited to attend the National Tourism Recovery Task Force on behalf of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and a report would be submitted to the Scottish Government in September 2020 advising on how to continue to support the tourism industry particularly through the winter. Over the past two months work had been underway on how to reopen the communities/economy and the whole of the Cairngorms National Park in a way which gave confidence to employees, communities and visitors. As part of this, there had been in depth stakeholder engagement and a framework for communications had been developed based on four key messages - Know the Guidelines; Plan Ahead; Be Flexible; and Be Kind.

Continuing, Mr Tate advised that a visitor survey had been undertaken the results of which indicated that visitors would return, and therefore businesses and communities needed to be enabled to be as prepared as possible. A new status website (<https://status.visitcairngorms.com>) had been launched which enabled visitors and communities to plan ahead to ensure a positive experience. A video had also been launched and had over 150,000 viewings as well as many shares on community forums. The local economy was reliant on tourism but there was a need to be prepared for visitors to return safely. In conclusion, Mr Tate expressed his appreciation for the support from the Council particularly in regard to distributing the business grants scheme and relaxation of the planning condition whereby lodges had to be closed over winter.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- A number of complaints had been received with regard to anti-social behaviour, e.g. littering from campers in the Grantown-on-Spey area and confirmation was sought and provided that the Ranger Service did not extend to this area. It was felt that there was a need to differentiate between leisure campers and wild campers;
- The visitor survey was welcomed and it was queried whether there had been any engagement with locals;
- Disappointment was expressed that Glenmore camping area would remain closed and there was a need for the Council to lobby for this decision to be overturned as the facility was vital to the whole infrastructure of the area;
- The economy of Badenoch and Strathspey was almost entirely reliant on tourism and further information was sought and provided on how to attract new businesses to the area. It was also further queried whether there had been any industrial promotion of the area. In addition, it was felt that there were people who were attracted to the area due to its rurality and high quality of life and it was queried whether any measures were being taken to capitalise on this;

- The public purse was under extreme pressure and it was queried what actions could be taken now, in the short term, without the need for any additional financial resource; and
- Members looked forward to welcoming visitors back to the area safely.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal report.

**5. Highland Council and Local Community COVID-19 Response
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus Freagairt COVID-19 na
Coimhearsnachd Ionadail**

i. The Highland Council Community Response

There was a presentation by the Ward Manager on the Covid community response. The Ward Manager explained that humanitarian assistance centres (HACs) had been established as part of the emergency response to support key groups within the community that would be vulnerable to Covid. The presentation provided detailed information on the types of support that had been provided and the local arrangements that had been established; set out the key learning opportunities; outlined the next steps including how the Council would continue to work with local communities; provided financial information on the local funding for community support and how this had been distributed; and provided information on the Business Grant support that had been awarded to businesses across Badenoch and Strathspey.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was requested that a copy of the presentation be circulated to all Members of the Committee;
- It was queried whether the financial Business Grant support that had been provided were grants and not loans;
- The phone support system that had been developed to provide technical support for both mobile phone and IT issues to members of the local community had been an excellent initiative and consideration should be given to continuing this service; and
- Staff were commended for the strong partnership working that had been demonstrated during the local community response.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that:-

- a copy of the presentation would be circulated to Members; and
- confirmation be provided on whether the Business Grant support was a grant or a loan.

ii. Badenoch & Strathspey Community Response

There was a presentation by Karen Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey (VABS), on the Third Sector and community response in the Badenoch and Strathspey area. During the presentation information was provided on the key community activities that had been provided; highlighted the positive impacts; set out how communities would be supported in recovery; and outlined the key learning points.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The support of the community volunteers had been overwhelming and demonstrated the strong community ethos and connectiveness across Badenoch and Strathspey;
- One of the key reasons Badenoch and Strathspey had been so successful in their response to the pandemic was due to having VABS which had been a great advantage. Members commended them for their role in leading the highly effective community response and felt that the structures that had been established would make Badenoch and Strathspey well placed to cope with any future coronavirus spike or second wave;
- Concern was expressed that demand for community food tables would be ongoing and it was queried how this support initiative could be sustained long term;
- The work of the volunteers was commended but it was highlighted that the lockdown period had occurred during Spring when there were no weather issues. It was therefore queried how the model could be developed to include winter resilience; and
- There was a need to have awareness that people's circumstances and needs would evolve at different times.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

6. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 11 February 2020 which were approved by the Council on 12 March 2020.

The meeting was closed at 12.12pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 7 July 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mrs J Barclay
Mr C Fraser
Mr G MacKenzie

Mr A MacKinnon
Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, ECO, Infrastructure and Environment
Mrs C McDiarmid, ECO, Customer and Communities
Mr P Senior, ECO, Education and Learning
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer - Housing and Property
Mrs A Clark, Head of Policy and Reform
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager (Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth), Chief Executive's Office
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Ms Rhona Fraser, HIE, Head of Strengthening Communities and Regional Development
Mr Peter Macphee, Emergency Planning Officer, NHS Highland
Mr Jon Palmer, Chair, Black Isle Partnership
Ms Shona Street, Community Support and Information (Ross-shire Voluntary Action)

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

A note of thanks was expressed to Mr Mark Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer - Housing and Property and his team for their involvement in a Christmas tree business and the related accommodation for workers undertaking vital tree husbandry which had saved a Black Isle company a considerable sum of money.

Councillor Margaret Paterson expressed sincere thanks to Mr Robbie Bain, Ward Manager for Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area and co-worker to Di Agnew, Ward Manager, Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth. Councillor Paterson said "I was very sad to hear that Robbie had left the Council. Robbie contributed significantly and worked across areas and a true gentlemen and I and my fellow Councillors wish him all the best for the future. His knowledge of the West Coast was second to none and after 17 years of service to the Council he will be sorely missed".

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulans

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 3: Mrs A MacLean (non-financial).

Item 3: Mrs M Paterson (non-financial).

3. Return of Schools Update Sgoiltean a' Fosgladh A-rithist

Mrs A MacLean and Mrs M Paterson declared non-financial interests in this item on the grounds that they had family members involved in schools, 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.

A verbal update was provided by Paul Senior, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning on the plans and preparations for schools reopening.

Paul Senior gave thanks to everybody involved in the work involved in preparing for the return to schools from parents, teachers and carers to colleagues in facilities management, catering and all support staff.

Option A was the preferred Scottish Government option with schools due to re-open fully in August 2020 with a 100% return to school and no social distancing. Other options available had been Option B for a 100% return to school with one metre social distancing and option C for a 50% return to school with two metre social distancing and a blended method of learning.

An intensive programme of engagement had begun with many consultation events. Eleven sub groups had been set up through the Programme Office covering transport, catering, facilities and local agencies to ensure school settings were ready for August. A webpage had also been created which included frequently asked questions (FAQs) for parents and carers at www.highland.gov.uk/backtoschool. This site would be updated as new information became available.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Information was requested and provided on which of the 11 sub-groups was to deal with our young people, modern apprenticeships and working with our third sector more closely and the people involved in these sub-groups;
- Following the Benny Higgins report (from an independent advisory group formed by the Scottish Government) information was sought and provided on apprenticeships and vocational qualifications;

- Information was sought and provided on the action being taken to address anxiety experienced by both staff and children returning to school;
- Information was sought and provided on the difficulties apparent if we were to revert to Option C;
- Information was sought and provided in relation to any requests received for ongoing home schooling;
- Information was sought and provided on whether there would be a targeted communications campaign for the return to school; and
- Further information was sought and provided on Covid-19 testing of teachers prior to school restarting by Mr Peter Macphee.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update.

4. Highland Council and Local Community COVID-19 Response Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus Freagairt COVID-19 na Coimhearsnachd Ionadail

i. The Highland Council's response to Covid-19

The Ward Manager provided a verbal report on the Highland Council's Local Community Hub. The Ward Manager explained that humanitarian assistance centres (HACs) had been established as part of the emergency response to support key groups within the community that would be vulnerable to Covid. The presentation provided detailed information on the types of support that had been provided; the local arrangements that had been established; the key learning opportunities and challenges; an outline of the next steps and how the Council would continue to work within the local communities; financial information on the local funding for community support and how this had been distributed; and information on the Business Grant support that had been awarded to businesses across the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth area.

It had been a true team effort with input and help from many volunteers from High Life Highland, The Highland Council, Community Councils, Community Resilience Groups, NHS, Social and Children's Services and school, Red Cross, CAB, RVA local businesses, Mid Ross Emergency Liaison Group and Community Partnership. The Ward Manager thanked all those involved.

The Chairman thanked the Ward Manager for her tireless work to bring everyone together and to give support to the community through the hubs.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update and presentation.

ii. Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) – Supporting Communities Fund and Business Grants

Rhona Fraser, Head of Strengthening Communities and Regional Development, HIE Inner Moray Firth Area Team provided a verbal report. Numerous conversations had taken place with Scottish Government and

assistance was up and running within a short timescale. HIE had a good relationship with the Ward Manager and with partner and local anchor agencies. At this time £1.8 m had been approved directly into the Highland region, within this there were 66 local anchor organisations with which HIE had a close working relationship to distribute the funds. Contact with the local agencies ensured there was no duplication and that money went where

it was needed most and Rhona outlined some of the support that had been given. Having worked with these agencies there was the possibility of a role going forward to continue working and supporting the community.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal report.

iii. **Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Community Response**

Jon Palmer, Chair, Black Isle Partnership and Shona Street, Community Support and Information Ross-shire (RVA) provided a verbal report. Jon Palmer outlined that support to the community was about pooling resources and expertise with other agencies. Existing groups had already provided assistance to vulnerable people and a simple expansion of their operations had been very efficient with an immediate and impressive response. 30% of the population of the Black Isle was over retirement age so the focus had been more on supporting businesses that had lost income and on people's wellbeing. Concern was expressed at the expected influx of tourists over the following weeks and a campaign had been initiated within the community with four key messages:- support local businesses, respect local needs, stay apart and keep connected. The key messages would be displayed on posters throughout the Black Isle area. Volunteer fatigue was a further concern if a second spike in infection was to occur. Going forward it would be helpful if financial support could be provided to employ people as community liaison officers.

Shona Street, Community Support and Information, Ross-shire Voluntary Action. The community support had been truly amazing. Food Share in Dingwall was an example of a request for funding. There were vast numbers of volunteers that still had to be utilised and this needed to be utilised going forward to share the burden and help avoid volunteer fatigue. Di Agnew's support was again commended.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- In the future there needed to be a way to harness funding requests from the community not covered in the existing funding provided; and
- This Covid experience had highlighted people who had thought they would never have financial difficulties and how these people required assistance moving forward to build their resilience.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal reports.

5. Recovery Phase Ceum Ath-shlànachaidh

- i. **Rebooting the Highland Economy** - THC Malcolm Macleod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment and HIE Rhona Fraser, Head of Strengthening Communities and Regional Development. Malcolm MacLeod stated that this had been a very challenging time and approximately £67 million had been given to approximately 6,000 applicants. Several businesses had fallen through the gaps in funding and work was continuing with HIE to recognise these businesses. A guide had been circulated to hospitality businesses on the use of outdoor places and how these could be utilised with licensing, planning and roads elements to allow the use of these spaces.

£1.9 m in funding had been received to implement the Spaces for People Programme to give our people the confidence to socially distance and to build on active travel. Preparation was also under way with Skills Development Scotland, DWP and HIE for the immediate unemployment challenges and to work to provide a co-ordinated approach for the immediate fall out.

The big challenge would be with the long term recovery. The working relationships between the agencies had been promising and an economic partnership had been set up to look at unemployment and local priorities.

Capital project funding was important and would be investigated and the three priorities for focus would be the low carbon agenda and active travel; digital inclusion and the technology advances made within the Council during this period; and partnership working with the benefits this involves.

Feedback from Members was sought with a prospectus of projects to bring forward from the Area Committee would be advantageous.

- ii. **Public Health Dimension** – Peter MacPhee, Emergency Planning Officer, NHS Highland.

There had been 281,000 tests across Scotland to date carried out through the NHS and UK government testing programme. Of these 18,300 had proved positive being a rate of approximately 6.5%. Within NHS Highland we had 375 positive cases. The timing of the lockdown had been to Scotland's and in turn Highland's advantage in terms of the lack of community disease prevalent at that time and what has been seen since. As the lockdown restrictions are lifted it is anticipated we are likely to see an increase in cases as tourists and other travellers come into our area and move through communities. Attention is now being focused on the test and protect scheme. The Health Protection Team and the additional staff trained will carry out enquiries and identify any close contacts whilst a person had been in the incubation period. These people would then be contacted and requested to isolate. People then having to isolate may provide challenges where tourists and people have come into the area. The prospect of a second wave of Covid had to be considered.

There had been a massive impact on routine health services. Every Board and Trust within the NHS had been under pressure to provide health care for Covid patients and there would be an inevitable backlog of cases to address. There were many issues, with concerns relating to health issues; families under increasing financial pressures; the inability of people who had suffered loss to grieve properly; staff fatigue and stress. Measures had been put in place to support staff.

Moving forward excellent opportunities had become apparent and advantages could be taken of new and alternative systems utilised during the Covid period whilst also reducing the carbon footprint.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Information was sought and provided on the timescales for widening the pavements;
- In relation to street spaces there was an email address (street.spaces@highland.gov.uk) where licensing, roads and environmental health picked up messages and measures would be put in place to make this information more prominent on the website;
- Information was sought and would be provided on whether carers could accompany patients in an ambulance and within patient transport provided for patients travelling to Inverness;
- Information was sought and provided on the planning service facilitating developer's providing digital connectivity and charge point connectivity;
- Jon Palmer asked and information was provided on the possibility of resilience being built in whereby businesses were encouraged to diversify into other areas and not rely solely on tourism;
- Information was sought and provided on whether we were looking to work with the UHI on the skills required by young people going forward; and
- Information was sought and was provided on Remote Health both in the home and within emergency services;

The Council had to work with all the partner agencies collaboratively going forward and Members thanked everybody for their presentations and attendance.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal reports.

6. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the minute of meeting of the Committee held on 25 February 2020 which was **APPROVED**, following a correction to Item 10 whereby Mr Mackenzie's dissention be amended to read abstention.

The meeting closed at 4.40 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing** held **REMOTELY** on Wednesday, 8 July 2020 at 12.30pm.

Present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mr W Mackay
Mr B Boyd	Mrs I Mackenzie
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs L Munro
Mrs M Cockburn	Mrs M Paterson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr M Reiss (substitute)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr D Rixson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie
Mr D Louden	Ms E Roddick
Mrs D Mackay	Mr C Smith

Non Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mrs B McAllister
Miss J Campbell	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr A Christie	Mrs A MacLean
Mr J Gordon	Mr D MacPherson
Mr A Jarvie	Mrs T Robertson
Mr B Lobban	

Officials in attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
 Mrs F Malcolm, Interim Head of Health
 Ms K Ralston, Head of Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms M Zavarella, Clerical Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Mr D Park, Chief Officer, NHS Highland
 Ms D Sutherland, YPeople
 Ms R Connelly, Connecting Carers

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

Ms Linda Munro in the Chair

Preliminaries

- The Chair welcomed representatives from new partners, YPeople and Connecting Carers, who would be attending all future meetings.
- Mrs M Cockburn spoke of the impact of Covid-19 on the Highlands, her sadness at the loss of lives, and thanked staff at NHS Highland, the Council, and third sector organisations, as well as volunteers in communities, for their hard work during challenging times.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Miss N Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 3 – Mr W Mackay (non-financial)
 Item 3 – Mrs I MacKenzie (non-financial)
 Items 3, 4, 5 – Mr A Christie (financial)
 Items 3, 4, 5 – Mr M Reiss (non-financial)
 Items 3, 4, 5 – Mr K Rosie (non-financial)

Declaration of Interests for Items 3, 4 and 5:

- **Mr A Christie** declared a financial interest in the remaining items in terms of being a non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test did not feel that his interest precluded his participation in the discussion.
- **Mr M Reiss** declared a non-financial interest in the remaining items in terms of being a Director of Caithness Mental Health Support Group 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
- **Mr K Rosie** declared a non-financial interest in the remaining items in terms of being Chair of the Caithness Drug and Alcohol Forum 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.

3. Adult Social Care Assurance Barantas Obair Shòisealta Inbheach

Declarations of Interest – Mr W Mackay declared a non-financial interest in this item in terms of being a voluntary member of Caithness Enable, and **Mrs I MacKenzie** declared a non-financial interest in this item in terms of having relatives resident in Care Homes 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.

There had been circulated Report No HCW/07/20 dated 12 June 2020 by the Interim Head of Health.

The Interim Head of Health introduced her report, highlighting key assurance issues, and the Chief Officer for NHS Highland gave a presentation, which included an update on Covid-19, recovery plans, Scottish Government guidance, testing, and care home issues, including an update on Home Farm future options.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the value of the NearMe project during lockdown was highlighted and gratitude was expressed for officers involved, noting the transformational impact of digital technology in the delivery of health services during the pandemic and for the future;
- second waves of the virus would most likely be localised and protocols had been developed;
- the vast majority of test results in Highland were negative, and most were received within 24 hours, against a target of 48 hours. In relation to antibody testing, this was a national issue and guidance would be adopted once issued;
- information was sought and provided on the measures in place for the provision of PPE to Care Homes;
- information was sought and provided on measures put in place to restrict Care Home staff moving between multiple Care Homes;
- in relation to the communication of test results, this remained the responsibility of the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland. Attention was drawn to issues of patient confidentiality, especially in small rural areas with few cases;
- all Care Homes had defined cleaning regimes in place following protocols that had been developed with the Council, NHS Highland, independent providers and the third sector;
- the supplementary report was from 24 April 2020 to demonstrate the plans that had been in place from an early stage. It was intended as supplementary to the main assurance report;
- communication measures were summarised and had included daily meetings, weekly briefings with Members, and officer representation at various NHS Highland groups. Ongoing high levels of communication were vital;
- information was sought and provided on lessons learnt about communication following the outbreak at Home Farm, on the Isle of Skye in terms of adequacy, timeliness and clarity. Issues of confidentiality and misinformation on social media were highlighted, and the matter was currently being dealt with by HC One, the Care Home operator, and the Care Inspectorate;
- it was welcomed that all staff in Care Homes had tested negative for the virus in Scotland. Residents were not routinely tested, but were tested when being discharged from hospital into a Care Home;
- given that ultimate responsibility for Adult Social Care (ASC) remained with the Council, a high level of scrutiny was required for the partnership agreement, in addition to regular assurance reports, to consider more than national indicators. It was suggested that this committee rather than a sub-committee should undertake this;
- the Chair reminded Members that training in ASC would be provided from August 2020;
- assurance was sought that dementia patients were not having their freedom of movement inappropriately restricted, noting that locking doors should be a last resort, restricted and time limited. The Chief Social Work Officer summarised policy and practice in this regard;
- concern was expressed about the impact the pandemic had on adults with learning disabilities and in response some of the challenges and solutions were summarised;
- in relation to infection prevention and control, it was helpful that ASC was being delivered by NHS Highland on behalf of the Council given that Public Health was part of the NHS;
- concern and sadness were expressed in relation to recent mental health incidents in Caithness, and a lack of emergency out of hour care for this type of incident, which had resulted in the establishment of the group, No More Lost Souls. The Chair explained that a seminar would be held on the key issues for Members and CPP members in

October 2020, with speakers anticipated from across Scotland to promote discussion and action;

- although confidentiality concerns were acknowledged and understood, it was important to provide as much information and data to the public as possible, to foster trusting relationships and encourage meaningful public participation. In particular, it was felt by some there had been insufficient communication on the Home Farm outbreak, although the Council response was praised, with local Members having worked together in a positive manner. Attention was drawn to the nuanced data available on the Scottish Government website;
- concern was expressed about the lack of publicity and information around mobile military-run testing in Caithness in recent weeks, which might have led to a lower uptake of the service;
- concern about support for vulnerable homelessness clients would be taken up with the homelessness team;
- the Chief Social Work Officer summarised the support that was being provided during the crisis for mental health and addiction issues, as well as longer term preventative measures;
- regular updates for Members on ASC issues were sought in future;
- concern was expressed about the lack of broadband/WIFI in some Care Homes, which made it more difficult for residents to keep in touch with their families;
- attention was drawn to the numbers of people who had been shielding, or too nervous to leave their homes, and the support they would require to regain their confidence;
- information was sought and provided on preparations for a possible second wave of the virus in winter;
- concern was expressed that some people were being discharged from hospital to their homes without care packages; and
- information was sought and provided on Care Home staffing resilience, with attention drawn to Care Home contingency plans, early mobilisation, the use of bank staff and the NHS escalation support team. Care Home and agency staff were tested every seven days. To increase staff availability in the longer term, a Care Academy was being developed.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** that assurance be provided to Cllr B McAlister that vulnerable homelessness clients were being fully supported.

4. Governance and Transformation **Riaghlachas agus Cruth-atharrachadh**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/08/20 dated 28 June 2020 by the Interim Head of Health.

In relation to transformation, attention was drawn to the improved working relationships, trust, knowledge and understanding between NHS Highland and the Council, in part brought about through the regular meetings that had taken place to tackle the pandemic. The report also detailed the planned programme management approach to governance, with proposed workstreams to better understand communities and work differently.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the tone of the report was welcomed, as were the plans for improved scrutiny, although concern was expressed about the role of Members on the project management board. Attention was drawn to the recommendation for two Members to be on the Project Board, one from the Administration and another to be discussed by the Chair and Vice Chair with the Group Leaders. Further detail would be included in the August report, following discussion with NHS Highland;
- in view of recent tragic incidents in Caithness, it was suggested mental health be added as a workstream to the report at section 7.2, especially given the inadequacy of out of hours care for mental health emergencies. A review of workstreams was required to take account of possible changes in priority as a result of Covid;
- Cllr Cockburn sought information on the role of school nurses in relation to infection prevention and control;
- across Highland, Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) were not running in an equitable manner, with some functioning better than others. Sutherland was highlighted as an exemplar CPP and had the formal commitment of a full-time member of staff from Police Scotland to assist with administration. The ECO Customer & Communities would be asked to meet with Cllr Deirdre Mackay and other interested Members to discuss continued community resilience and the role of the CPPs, and to consider reporting back to the next meeting of the Committee on 26 August 2020;
- re-enablement and succession planning required further attention, and the planned Care Academy was highlighted as part of this;
- timeframes were required for the Project Board;
- communities and volunteers were praised for their response to the pandemic and concern was expressed about the long term economic and health implications;
- it was suggested that in section 3 of the report there were potential resource, legal and risk implications, rather than none as stated. The Chief Executive clarified that this paper was primarily about the establishment of the Project Board but that the feedback would be passed onto the ECO Performance & Governance for future reports;
- it was important the workstream 'Review of the assessment model' was not diminished even if it was to be delivered differently in future. A summary was provided of the workshops with NHS Highland that had developed the model, more of which were anticipated before August 2020, at which point more information could be provided;
- reference was made to the Easter Ross CPP which had been awaiting fire service representation to replace the previous chair;
- attention was drawn to the importance of income maximisation and Member involvement on this was urged;
- communities and third sector partners had assisted with workforce planning during the Covid crisis but it was important to maintain a professional service and not to become reliant on volunteers and emergency solutions;
- the important role of development and community trusts, and community councils was highlighted, in addition to the CPPs. It was pointed out that the CPPs were a statutory function and that work was ongoing to properly capture all the functions that were being undertaken at local level including the resilience partnerships; and
- information was sought on the cost of Covid to the Council and this was being worked on via the Corporate Resources Committee and full Council. Attention was also drawn to the benefits that had been realised, with the example of staff learning.

The Committee **NOTED** the current position and the proposed approach and **AGREED**:-

- i. Group leaders meet with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee to discuss and agree recommendations for cross-party membership of the Project Board and to report back to the next meeting of the Committee on 26 August 2020 following discussion of the proposals with NHS Highland;
- ii. mental health be added to the list of the key areas of focus for the future delivery of adult social care (item 7.2 in the report), and the key workstreams be reviewed, having been agreed pre-Covid;
- iii. Cllr Muriel Cockburn be emailed with details about school nurse involvement in infection prevention and control; and
- iv. the ECO Customer & Communities meet with Cllr Deirdre Mackay and other interested Members to discuss continued community resilience and the role of the CPPs, and to consider reporting back to the next meeting of the Committee on 26 August 2020.

5. Partnership Arrangements with NHS Highland – Update **Ullachaidhean Com-pàirteachais le NHS na Gàidhealtachd – Cunntas às Ùr**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/09/20 dated 28 June 2020 by the Interim Head of Health.

In summary of the report, it was explained that although the Highland Integration Scheme had been due to expire in June 2020, a six-month extension had been granted as a result of the Covid crisis.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the Interim Head of Health was thanked for her work and contribution to improving working relations between the Council and NHS Highland;
- outcomes from the Covid crisis had demonstrated the value of the Highland's Lead Agency model and it was noted that only a review was required, with many aspects of the current agreement still being acceptable;
- attention was drawn to the significant issues included in the Integration Scheme and it was hoped that suitable timely solutions would be found for all challenging areas;
- the detail in the Implications section of the report was welcomed; and
- the approach going forward was to review key areas and have a reviewed scheme in place within six months. It was proposed a further update be brought to the Committee in August 2020 detailing areas that required further scrutiny, and the additional risks posed by Covid going forward, for example local lockdowns, virus spikes and the effect of the virus on communities and individuals.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the current position and the proposed approach; and
- ii. **AGREED** to consider a further update to the next meeting on 26 August 2020, taking into consideration the points made during discussion including areas of best practice and new areas of risk as a result of the pandemic.

The meeting ended at 3.45pm.

**The Highland Council
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held remotely on Thursday 9 July 2020 at 10.30am.

Present:

Ms K Currie

Mr R Gale

Mrs D Mackay

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Munro

Officials in attendance:

Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Mr P Senior, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

Ms A Clark, Head of Policy and Reform, Communities and Place

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Communities and Place

Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure and Environment Service

Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Station Commander J Gardiner, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Ms A Simpson, Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr J Johnston, Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra Community Council

Ms E Lindsay, Brora and District Action Group

Ms M Macdougall, North Coast Connections

Mr R Gale in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Item 7: Mr J McGillivray (non-financial)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Update
Fios as Ùr mu Sheirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

Station Commander J Gardiner, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, gave a verbal update on performance for Quarter 4, 2019/20 a copy of which had been circulated to Members. He advised the report reflected the significant amount of work carried out by the Service's community safety teams across Sutherland and the support given to the most vulnerable and high-risk households. He also provided an update on the resilience work undertaken by the Service in response to Covid-19.

In discussion, Members commended the Station Commander and his crews for the work undertaken in Sutherland, particularly with schools and during the Covid-19 period and raised the following main points:-

- the training of the Service's staff to drive ambulances was welcomed as an excellent example of cross agency working, noting that to date no formal

request had been received from the Scottish Ambulance Service to deliver such training in Sutherland;

- the recent successes in Sutherland in relation to recruitment was a good news story and reflected the level of work the Service had invested in the area;
- a point as to whether the problem with the automatic fire alarm at the Tongue station had been resolved. The Station Commander advised that he would arrange for a response to be provided directly to Mr H Morrison on the matter;
- in terms of station availability, clarification was sought on the reasons for the reduction in staff at Lochinver and as to whether a twenty minute response time continued to be applied as a measure to boost recruitment. The Station Manager confirmed he would arrange for a response to be provided directly to Mr H Morrison on both these matters;
- the opportunity for Members to have a demonstration of the goggles being used as part of Driving Ambitions, and commending the Service's input to the initiative; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Station Commander would investigate an incident at a Council property in Rogart which had involved a scrap vehicle, and report back to Mr J McGillivray in terms of any action taken by the Service.

The Committee **NOTED** following scrutiny, the update.

4. Return to School Update Fios às Ùr mu Thilleadh dhan Sgoil

During a verbal update, the Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning advised that the Council's whole ecosystem was working on the plans and preparations to ensure schools would be ready for reopening on 12 August 2020. The staff who serviced this ecosystem should be recognised for their efforts not only in schools and settings but in transport, catering, IT, facilities management and also parents and carers. He explained that Council services, schools and partners had been working on a scenario-based approach with the primary focus on Option A (100% return with no social distancing) in accordance with the national guidance but that work continued on contingency plans (Option B – 100% return with 1m social distancing and Option C – 50% return with 2m social distancing). However, the primary concern was the safety and wellbeing of pupils, staff and communities and therefore risk assessments continued and mechanisms were in place to adapt the model dependent on circumstances. It was also understood an announcement by the Scottish Government on school transport was imminent.

Continuing, the Executive Chief Officer advised that one of the key design principles had been co-production which involved a programme of engagement and consultation with key stakeholders such as Head Teachers, parents/carers and partner agencies. In terms of communications, he advised that a dedicated web page had been established on returning to school which also included a frequently asked questions section and this would be updated on a regular basis. Favourable feedback had been received from HMIE with regard to the report submitted on the

Council's approach, operational plans and risk assessments, details of which would be reported to the Education Committee.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the drive towards a 100% return to schools with no social distancing was welcomed on the basis it was important youngsters returned to normality as soon as possible;
- whether social distancing measures would be deployed on school transport, concern being expressed that if so there would not be sufficient capacity in terms of the available transport in Sutherland. It was confirmed the Scottish Government was due to make an announcement on social distancing and the wearing of face masks on school transport. The transport sub group had been considering measures such as fuel vouchers for parents and other creative solutions in the event that social distancing was required;
- the Committee's thanks be conveyed to Head Teachers and the teaching staff in Sutherland for the enormous amount of work undertaken preparing for the different return to school scenarios and on taking on new roles such as digital learning during lockdown;
- the flexibility within school timetables to provide additional hours to secondary school pupils whose learning may have been affected due to Covid-19. It was confirmed that an assessment of all learners would be undertaken and that all options to bridge any gaps in learning would be considered;
- concern that parents had received an instruction that pupils were not permitted to bring hand sanitisers on to school buses. The Executive Chief Officer advised he was not aware of any such instruction and confirmed he would follow this up with transport colleagues;
- the disparity in the quality of teaching and learning between different schools during the Covid-19 period and going forward the need to learn from the experience and develop a gold standard template for children who could not attend due to a pandemic or other issue, including children with a disability. It was confirmed that given the number of school settings and pupils in the Highlands it was inevitable there would be variable practice. However, there was a need to maximise learning to ensure that in the event there was a second wave of the pandemic the Council was ahead of the curve. A Highland gold standard bar in terms of quality of practice and equity of offer irrespective of where children attended school would be a key driver going forward; and
- clarification was sought on the plans for those children with underlying conditions to return to full time education. It was confirmed that individual risk assessments would be undertaken in respect of vulnerable children, recognising that pupils would need a phased approach or a bespoke programme.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

5. Covid-19 Response Freagairt Covid-19

i. The Highland Council Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

There was a presentation by the Ward Manager on the Covid community response. The Ward Manager explained that humanitarian assistance centres (HACs) had been established as part of the emergency response to support key groups within the community that would be vulnerable to Covid-19. The presentation provided detailed

information on the types of support that had been provided and the local arrangements that had been established; set out the key learning opportunities; outlined the next steps including how the Council would continue to work with local communities; provided financial information on the local funding for community support and how this had been distributed; and provided information on the Business Grant support that had been awarded to businesses across Sutherland.

ii. Community Response Freagairt na Coimhearsnachd

During a verbal update, Ms A Simpson advised that Highlands and Islands Enterprise had administered the supporting communities funding stream on behalf of the Scottish Government. The twelve anchor organisations in Sutherland had received £300,000 of funding towards the emergency response. This funding had supported information and communications, PPE for volunteers, purchasing food, fuel and essential goods, setting up and expansion of food larders, and delivering hot meals to vulnerable people in the community. It had also covered volunteer expenses, supporting new social support networks and befriending services. In terms of next steps, it was important to build on the lead taken by communities and the collaborative approach across Sutherland

Ms E Lindsay reported that the Brora and District Action Group was one of three organisations forming the Brora Community Anti-virus Group. Brora Community Council had assumed responsibility for organising and increasing the volunteer resource who helped deliver shopping and prescriptions and other forms of support, and also for supplying PPE to volunteers and setting up a helpline to assist with social isolation and mental health and a volunteers group on social media to provide for regular contact. Brora and District Action Group had taken responsibility for administration, communication of information, handling and distributing funding, and setting up of a Facebook page about the virus. The Group has organised the making and delivery of facemasks and worked with schools to provide Covid ready stationery packs. Brora Village Hub had developed its food parcel delivery service and had delivered over 700 food boxes. The next steps included a review of the food box and fuel poverty requirements. There was also a need to consider the lessons learned ahead of any potential second wave of the pandemic and how to harness volunteers into other village activities in future.

Ms M Macdougall, North Coast Connections reported that Kyle Centre staff had regularly contacted lunch club members, provided support, and signposted to other services. They had organised the delivery of a targeted hot meals service to reach the most vulnerable and those shielding. An appeal for more volunteers had been issued through social media and an excellent response received. The organisation had worked with the local health centre and local community transport organisation to deliver prescription medicines, and local businesses had set up a home delivery service for shopping. While not impacting on local businesses, the organisation was delivering a small number of food parcels to vulnerable households and those with financial difficulties. Activity packs had been provided for younger children and green health packs were to be distributed. Ms Macdougall advised the activities undertaken previously at the Kyle Centre had increased the resilience of the community to cope with the current circumstances, and links with the community transport group and local community council had ensured no duplication of effort. The links established with NHS Highland and the Citizens Advice Bureau provided confidence that the adverse impacts of the pandemic were being mitigated.

Note: Mr J Johnston, Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra Community Council was unable to join the meeting due to technical issues and confirmed he would arrange for his presentation to be sent to Members by email.

The Chair thanked the Ward Manager and community representatives for providing a full understanding of the community response. He paid tribute to the anchor and other organisations and communities in Sutherland for responding immediately in a positive, flexible and bespoke manner to support communities and vulnerable people across the County over what had been a difficult and challenging period. The cross agency and third sector working had been excellent and the impact community organisations could make across the board recognised. It was hoped to capitalise on the volunteer resource going forward and the Council's Recovery Board was looking to interact with voluntary and third sector organisations to ensure that in building recovery their thoughts and ideas were taken into consideration on the basis this would result in a more responsive Council. Highlands and Islands Enterprise should also be commended on their efficient administration of the supporting communities funding and the confidence this had given to the community groups.

In discussion, Members recorded their thanks to communities across Sutherland for their excellent work in distributing funding and reaching out to those who did not normally use services. There would be a need to revisit plans and locality plans which had been drawn prior to Covid-19 to ensure the actions were fit for purpose, and the local community partnership would continue to focus on supporting localities but also take a pan Sutherland approach going forward. To ensure these plans were robust as possible, there was a need to continue to work with community groups on the ground and to harness their energy and skills for the benefit of Sutherland through the recovery process as communities continued to feel the economic and social impacts of the virus.

The Committee **NOTED** the updates.

6. Sutherland Roads Update Rathaidean – Gníomhachd

There had been circulated Report No SCC/07/20 dated 26 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the main works activities which had not been carried out over the Covid-19 period due to the capital programme being on hold;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the priority works would be built into the capital programme going forward;
- clarification was sought on the works listed as road safety defect repairs in the report, and whether this included the installation of the new North Coast 500 road signs. It was confirmed the contract for the North Coast 500 signage, which was Leader funded, had been let separately by Headquarters and was being undertaken by an external contractor;
- in relation to a housing development at Bishopfield, Dornoch consideration be given to the improvement of the junction at Stafford Road/Grange Road being included in the capital programme;
- the Roads Operations Manager be commended on the level of work being undertaken in the area and Members thanks be conveyed to the members of staff who had retired;

- clarification was sought and provided that the Jetpatcher was due to return to the area in August/September, with the relevant training for operatives having been scheduled for next month;
- the need to allocate more staff to support the operatives on the ground with grass cutting, cemeteries, burials and other amenity works. It was reported the Service had limited resources in terms of the assisting with amenities which was now the responsibility of the Communities and Place Service. The Roads Operations Manager advised she would feed Members comments back to her Head of Service who was involved in ongoing discussions on cross service working;
- the Chair advised that it would be helpful to have the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place attend a future Committee to provide an update on amenities; and
- the potential for white lining works to be undertaken at Fountain Road Car Park, Golspie. It was confirmed that currently junctions were the priority for white lining for safety reasons, and there was no separate budget for car parks.

The Committee **NOTED** the works undertaken during the Covid-19 period.

7. **Dornoch Common Good – Applications for Funding** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich – Tagraidhean airson Maoineachadh**

Declaration of Interest: Mr J McGillivray declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds he was a Director of Dornoch Area Community Interest Company and took no part in the determination of the application for funding submitted by that organisation.

There had been circulated Joint Report No SCC/08/20 dated 9 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

In discussion, Members commended the Dornoch Heritage SCIO on their application and advised the expansion of the museum would allow more exhibits to be displayed and enhance the facility as visitor attraction.

In addition, the Dornoch Area Community Interest Company project was ambitious and would improve an area of derelict land, offer new facilities and be to the benefit Dornoch and surrounding area.

The Committee **APPROVED** funding of:-

- i. £27,365 to Dornoch Heritage SCIO for the Historylinks Museum Extension project – Phase 2; and
- ii. £39,760 to Dornoch Area Community Interest Company for the Project Curlew Masterplan Phase 1 Car and Coach Park, subject to match funding being in place

The meeting closed at 12.30pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 9 July 2020 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Mrs I Campbell
Dr I Cockburn

Mr A MacInnes
Mr D MacLeod

In attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, ECO, Property and Housing
Mr P Senior, ECO, Education and Learning
Mrs A Clark, Head of Policy and Reform
Jo Ford, Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

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

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Appointment of Vice Chair Cur Iar-Chathraiche an Drechud

The Chairman invited nominations for the Vice Chair.

Mr A MacInnes, seconded by Dr I Cockburn nominated Mr D MacLeod as Vice Chair of the Committee.

The Committee therefore **AGREED** to appoint Mr D MacLeod as Vice Chair of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee.

4. Schools Reopening Sgoiltean a' Fosgladh A-rithist

A verbal update was provided by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning on the plans and preparations for schools reopening.

Paul Senior gave thanks to everybody involved in the work involved in preparing for the return to schools from parents, teachers and carers to colleagues in facilities management, catering and all support staff.

Option A was the preferred Scottish Government option with schools due to re-open fully in August 2020 with a 100% return to school and no social distancing. Other options available had been option B for a 100% return to school with one metre social distancing and option C for a 50% return to school with two metre social distancing and a blended method of learning. However, reassurance was given that crucial work on risk assessments was being undertaken with operational plans should social distancing measures come back into force.

There were challenges and pressure points within the provision of school transport. With social distancing a bus that would normally carry 70 passengers would only be able to carry 14 passengers.

An intensive programme of engagement had begun with many consultation events. Eleven sub groups had been set up through the Programme Office covering transport, catering, facilities and local agencies to ensure school settings were ready for August and information was being received daily from the Scottish Government and CoSLA. A webpage had also been created which included frequently asked questions (FAQs) for parents and carers at www.highland.gov.uk/backtoschool. This site would be updated as new information became available.

The HMIE had given positive endorsement of the Highland plans for the return to school in their draft report. The finalised report would be issued later this month and reported to the HC Education Committee in August.

Members took the opportunity to recognise the huge contribution made to education in their communities by the Area Education and Learning Manager Norma Young who was due to retire this month. They praised her commitment, energy and work ethic, her exceptional knowledge and the very high respect she was held in across the whole area. Members wished Norma a happy retirement.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Information was requested on transport, John Finlayson and David Summers were currently working on a transport study and the results would be reported in due course;
- Information was requested and provided on a replacement Area Care and Learning Manager for the area and interim arrangements would be announced in the following week; and
- Information was requested and provided on previously proposed renovation work to schools during the summer recess.

Members thanked Paul Senior for his presentation and welcomed him to the Highlands.

5. Highland Council and Local Community COVID-19 Response Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus Freagairt COVID-19 na Coimhearsnachd Ionadail

i. The Highland Council response to Covid 19

The Senior Ward Manager provided a verbal report on the Highland Council's Local Community Hub. The Ward Manager explained that humanitarian assistance centres (HACs) had been established as part of the emergency response to support key groups within the community that would be vulnerable to Covid. The presentation provided detailed information on the types of support that had been provided; the local arrangements that had been established; the key learning opportunities; an outline of the next steps and how the Council would continue to work within the local communities; financial information on the local funding for community support and how this had been distributed; and information on the Business Grant support that had been awarded to businesses across the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area.

Due to the wide geography of the area, although the main hub was in Ullapool, deliveries were also made from vans in Gairloch and Plockton with further support from Kyle and across the geography. There had also been a water delivery for people who had no water.

Members paid tribute to Ward Manager Robbie Bain who had led the humanitarian hub for Wester Ross. Robbie's professionalism, knowledge, approachable manner, skills and excellent work over many years was particularly highlighted. Robbie, who had recently left the Council, worked very closely with all communities and councillors and played a pivotal role in making things happen.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Information was sought and provided on the withdrawal of support from Ward Management with their business as usual increasing with ward business meetings and committees, there would be no withdrawal of support for the hubs until a new structure had been arranged;
- In relation to the Ward Manager for Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh, Dot Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager would act as Interim Ward Manager until arrangements had been put in place, with support from the Assistant Ward Manager, Emma Tayler; and
- Information was requested and would be provided on the hubs in Dingwall for key workers from Strathpeffer as following re-application their requests had been refused.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update and presentation and **AGREED** that information be forwarded on the hubs in Dingwall for key workers from Strathpeffer.

ii. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Community Response

Jo Ford, Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations provided an update on the Third Sector and community response. The SLCVO did not cover Strathpeffer which was covered by Ross-shire Voluntary Action. The

community support had been truly amazing. In Lochalsh, the Community Trust had brought all Community Councils and groups together to work as one. A local help line was quickly set up and by working with the local Co-op they had redistributed £18,000 of food waste back into the community. Working to support mental health a community newsletter had been distributed to all homes and the community was looking at ways this support could continue in the future. In Ullapool the Community Trust had also set up a help line and voucher scheme and were now focussing on recovery. A recent survey promoted within the community had received 425 responses which highlighted people's fears, concerns about tourism restarting and their future and these responses were available on the SLVCO Facebook page.

GALE was the anchor organisation in SW Ross and Gairloch with local car schemes playing a very active role in delivering essential supplies.

Funding for all the organisations was an ongoing issue with key summer events no longer occurring they had to look to source financial assistance as a priority.

Members praised the work of volunteers and council staff for taking on such a vital and proactive role. The community support has been outstanding. To see so many people work together so well at a time of rapid change and great uncertainty has been truly inspiring.

6. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 11 February 2020 which were approved by the Council on 12 March 2020.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.