

Notices of Motion

(i) As a result of its unique remoteness and scattered population the Highlands have suffered a low incidence of Covid 19, with fortunately fewer fatalities than other areas of mainland Scotland. However, our fragile economy is likely to suffer disproportionately as a result of lockdown restrictions that are aimed at heavily populated areas.

Council calls on the Administration to consult urgently with NHS Highland, the Scottish Government and COSLA so in future Councils and local NHS Boards have more responsibility for deciding how lockdowns are managed, and tailoring measures appropriate to local circumstances.

Signed: Mr G Adam Mr A Christie

No financial or other resource implication arising from this motion.

(ii) Parking Charges

Council notes the struggles businesses of all sizes across the Highlands continue to face as they gradually and safely reopen. Any measures which improve accessibility and attractiveness to our now fragile High Streets and Town Centres will make a pivotal difference to their future contribution to Highland's economy and the jobs which depend on them.

Active travel isn't an option for many people due to either distance or ability. Looking collectively at the geography and needs of the Highlands, Council agrees to suspend parking charges and to keep suspension under continual review. Flexibility on this approach will be available to existing, high use on street bays and long term parking permits where it is agreed by the Area Committee membership.

Signed: Mr A Jarvie Mr A Baxter Mr S Mackie Mr L Fraser

There are financial and resource implications arising from this motion.

The budget for income associated with car parking is £3.3M. Loss of income because of COVID is estimated at £2M – £2.5M. These costs are identified within the overall council gap of £48M. Any decision to suspend car parking charges could eliminate the full £3.3M income budget and increase the gap already identified. If charging for car parking is suspended there would also be no income to support the car parking capital works that are planned to support the Highland economy and the tourism sector. These works would therefore not be able to proceed unless the council borrowed the funds to do so which would incur additional charges. This is also a change to the budget that was approved by Council in March 2020.

If a decision was made to temporarily reduce the rate to be charged this would result in a partial loss of income but also incur additional costs associated with the manual adjustment of the parking meters.

Parking wardens are employed to carry out this work and any change to current practice would result in a review of resource requirements.

(iii) That Highland Council agrees to contract the services of an external provider for the purposes of employee whistle-blowing.

Signed: Mr R MacWilliam Ms K Currie

The following financial impact has been identified by the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) in relation to the above Notice of Motion:-

There would be additional costs associated with contracting an external provider. It is not possible to determine the actual costs of this service without a tender exercise and the overall cost would also be dependent upon the number of whistle blowing instances and so on this occasion a competent financial assessment can't be made within the timescale.

A review of the current policy and practice of raising whistleblowing issues has been already been undertaken and we are in the process of transferring the management of the Whistle Blowing Policy to Internal Audit, with a confidential email and telephone number available for staff, agency workers and contractors to report any concerns of malpractice or wrongdoing. There will continue to be provision for reporting to prescribed organisations such as Regulatory Bodies, Audit Scotland, Health & Safety Executive, Scottish Environment Protection Agency if any individual feels that they have no option other than to report it outside of the Council. A benchmarking exercise has taken place with a range of Scottish Local Authorities which included larger authorities as part of this review, which demonstrated that none of those Councils use external resources to respond to whistleblowing.

Outsourcing is not necessary in order to manage issues in confidence, nor is it likely to be a cost-effective way to deal with whistleblowing issues. Additionally, it is important concerns of malpractice or wrongdoing are dealt with promptly and efficiently and with clear links to the suite of other HR policies to ensure issues are dealt with appropriately eg disciplinary, grievance processes.

Whilst formal consultation is not yet completed with the Council's trade union partners, initial indication from both GMB and UNISON is they are fully supportive of the proposal for Internal Audit to be responsible for the implementation of the whistleblowing policy. They also recognise this is an improved and more robust approach to dealing with serious concerns from employees.

When reporting concerns to Internal Audit, there is assurance this will be investigated in an independent manner and quickly route issues in the appropriate way for investigation. It is further intended to provide an annual report to Audit & Scrutiny on the number of whistleblowing complaints and anonymised outcomes, which is common practice in other Councils and will give further transparency, openness and level of scrutiny to Members.

(iv) Many areas of the Highlands are being adversely affected by a huge increase in uncontrolled camping. This may or may not improve with the opening of camp sites. Future demand from "staycationers" may well outstrip any possible supply of campsite spaces.

The public health risks from this increase in camping during a pandemic must be addressed with urgency. Steps that may be taken to reduce public health risks include increase waste collections, better traffic management, restrictions on alcohol consumption, and financial support for beach or countryside wardens, temporary toilet and handwashing facilities. Highland Council commits to use its resources where practicable and affordable to support such steps and calls on the Scottish Government and its agencies to work with us.

Signed: Mr B Thompson Mr A Baxter Mr J Finlayson Mr C Munro

Pressures being experienced across our beauty spots are heightened this year as more people coming out of lockdown holiday in the Highlands and as festivals are suspended. This, along with the need for enhanced hygiene to reduce covid risks, is creating a COVID emergency situation with public health, environmental and public conduct issues to address. Resources need to be urgently deployed to address this live situation. We are actively seeking funds from the Scottish Government to assist in this situation which extends to other areas beyond the Highlands. Any additional costs incurred by the Council will be reported within the COSLA return and included within the September Budget paper.

We will also continue to work with our local resilience partners to take this matter forward.

(v) The Corona Virus Crisis has highlighted the inequality in our communities around broadband provision. As Leader, I have written to Mr Wheelhouse, the Minister for Energy and Connectivity and urged the Government to reach a final position on their R100 role out. However, we need to be far more ambitious for the Highlands and as a vital part of our recovery, I am proposing we move forward by exploring and encouraging a joint UK Government and Scottish Government and Highland Council project to bring fibre to premises broadband to all of Highland. This will fit our region for the 21st Century.

Cross chamber support will strengthen our case and demonstrate the importance of the project

In the meantime, it is proposed that we also encourage Scottish Government to make its new voucher scheme available as soon as possible so that communities can at least make the best interim arrangements while they wait.

Signed: Mrs M Davidson Mrs T Robertson

Communicating with UK and Scottish Govt. will have no financial implication. However any successful projects may have a cost to the council if not fully funded by UK or Scottish Govt. At this stage this cannot be determined but Council would need to approve any future project.