

**The Highland Council
No. 13 2019/2020**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held **REMOTELY** on Thursday, 30 July at 10.35am and continued on Monday, 3 August 2020 at 9.00am.

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

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mrs D Mackay
Mr B Allan	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Balfour	Mr W MacKay
Mrs J Barclay	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Baxter	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr B Boyd	Mr S Mackie
Mr R Bremner	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr I Brown	Ms A MacLean
Mr J Bruce	Mr C MacLeod
Mrs C Caddick	Mr D MacLeod
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Macpherson
Miss J Campbell	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mrs B McAllister
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Christie	Mr N McLean
Mr I Cockburn	Mr H Morrison
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr C Munro
Ms K Currie	Ms L Munro
Mrs M Davidson	Ms P Munro
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr M Finlayson	Mr I Ramon
Mr C Fraser	Mr M Reiss
Mr L Fraser	Mr A Rhind
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	Mrs C Wilson
Mr A MacInnes	

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	
Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place	Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing
Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning	Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance
Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance	Executive Chief Officer, Transformation & Economy

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr I Ramon (30 July) and Mr I Brown (3 August)

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

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

- Item 10 (i) – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial)
- Item 10 (ii) – Mr J Gordon and Mr L Fraser (Non-Financial)
- Item 10 (iv) – Mr G Adam (Non-Financial)
- Item 10 (v) – Mr K Rosie (Non-Financial)
- Item 12 – Mrs F Robertson, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Christie, Mr A Jarvie, Mr R Bremner and Mr K Rosie (all Non-Financial)
- Item 13 – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial)
- Item 14 – Mrs F Robertson (Non-Financial)
- Item 16 – Mr A Henderson (Non-Financial)
- Item 19 – Mr K Gowans, Ms L Munro, Mr T Heggie and Mr A Jarvie (all Non-Financial)
- Item 22 – Mrs B McAllister (Financial)
- Item 23 – Mrs H Carmichael (Non-Financial)
- Item 24 – Mr K Gowans (Financial)

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Convener confirmed that, unlike other Councils, Highland Council had continued meetings throughout the month of July and therefore there had been no Recess in the current year. As such, thanks were conveyed to both Members and Officers who had continued working throughout this period.

3. **Membership of the Council – By-Election** **Ballrachd na Comhairle**

The Council **NOTED** that a By-Election for Ward 12 (Aird and Loch Ness) had been arranged and would be held on Thursday, 5 November 2020.

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

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 12 March 2020 and of the Special Meeting of the Council held on 25 June 2020 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED** – subject to the following:-

Highland Council – 25 June 2020 – Item 6 - Annual Accounts 2019/20 and Revenue Budget 2020/21 – agreed to delete the wording 'Deferred Consideration' in respect of recommendations (v) and (vi) within the Decision section of the Minutes and replace with wording which made it clearer (within the Decision section) that these specific recommendations had not been discussed as the meeting had not agreed to suspend Standing Orders in that regard.

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**.

**6. Tourism Committee
Comataidh na Turasachd**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Tourism Committee held on 16 July 2020 for approval – which were **APPROVED**.

**7. Recovery Board
Bòrd Ath-shlànachaidh**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meetings of the Recovery Board held on 18 June and 15 July 2020 – which were **APPROVED**.

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

It was **NOTED** that Mr Andrew Baxter had confirmed that he was no longer a member of the Independent Group and wished to be referred to as a ‘Real Independent’ with immediate effect.

In this regard, it was **NOTED** that membership of the Council was now as follows:-

Ind – 26/SNP- 21/Cons – 10/Lib Dem – 9/Labour – 3/Green –1/Sutherland Independent – 1/Real Independent- 1/Non-Aligned – 1/Vacant - 1

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

The Council also **AGREED** the following:-

Gaelic Committee – Mr C Munro to replace Miss J Campbell

Economy & Infrastructure Committee – Mrs M Davidson to replace Mr A Baxter

Wellbeing Joint Sub Committee – revised membership – Mrs M Davidson, Miss J Campbell, Ms N Sinclair, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr K Rosie, Ms E Roddick, Mr B Boyd, Mr A Christie, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr C Smith and Mr J Gray.

Brexit Working Group – Mr D Louden to replace Mr R MacWilliam.

**9. Question Time
Am Ceiste**

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance:-

(i) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“What discussions did the Council have with high street retailers and other business organisations before the re-introduction of charges in council-owned car parks? Please publish the economic assessment the Council undertook on the likely impact on our high streets as they begin the current recovery phase following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions”.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why, when High Streets were struggling and would continue to do so, no economic assessment was being undertaken when car parking charges could have a major impact as Town Centres attempted to recover.

In response, the Leader undertook to ask the responsible Executive Chief Officer if he could consider undertaking economic impact studies on issues such as car parking in the future.

(ii) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“What discussions have you had with Government Ministers and Officials as to how the revenue allocated to the Highland Council from the Scottish Crown Estates is to be used to bring benefit to our coastal communities and when will the Council publish the plan for the allocation of funds and what criteria will it be based on?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis of having written to the Leader of the Council on 10 October and 4 February asking when a definitive timetable for the allocation process would come to Full Council, and as the Council had known about this for some time and had been ready to prepare, it was queried as to why there was still a continuous delay.

In response, it was confirmed that Covid 19 had impacted on this situation and also that there was a need to undertake consultation with Members which was intended to take place in August. In the meantime, a letter had been sent to the Cabinet Secretary to seek additional money and the amount had increased from £1.2m to £3m. In this regard, discussions would take place with Area Chairs followed by a Members' Seminar.

(iii) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“What criteria do you use when considering whether an individual item of Council expenditure is value for money for the Council taxpayer?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why £936 per day for one agency worker was considered value for money but allowing overtime to be paid for the emptying of overflowing bins in town centres, villages and beauty spots at weekends was not considered good value by the Administration.

In response, it was confirmed that the issue of overtime was complicated but that a response would be provided in due course.

(iv) Mr S Mackie**To the Leader of the Council**

“Will you outline the following: What guidance was used to determine the Council’s omission from the UK Government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Furlough) and whether dialogue and / or confirmation was sought from HMRC, Scottish Government and COSLA on scheme eligibility? And whether this decision was reviewed by either Officer or Political Gold, in light of public announcements from across the UK that Councils were actively pursuing and successfully furloughing staff in the months of May, June and July?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether, when CoSLA appeared to have taken a different view, the Leader would enquire why Scottish Local Authorities had missed out on the furlough process when other similar Unitary Organisations elsewhere in the UK had helped to meet their budget shortfall through using the UK Government’s Furlough Scheme.

It was confirmed that further enquiries would be made and added to the explanation which had already been provided as to why the Council had not used the Furlough Scheme.

(v) Mr S Mackie**To the Budget Leader/Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee**

“Can you outline the Highland Council’s annual financial contribution to the Caithness and North Sutherland Partnership (CNSRP) programme per year since the creation of the partnership in 2007?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, on the basis of the transition of the Dounreay site back into the control of the UK Government and as ongoing uncertainty with MOD Vulcan was crystallising the need for regeneration, it was queried as to whether the Budget Leader would commit to review the Council’s involvement with the C&SRP to date and explore where the Council could contribute and influence positive change in both Caithness and North Sutherland.

In response, it was confirmed that the Budget Leader was happy to commit to having a review and would discuss this with the Chief Executive and Councillor Mackie in due course.

(vi) Mr R MacWilliam**To the Leader of the Council**

“How many times have Highland Council employees availed of the whistle-blowing procedure in the past 12 months?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader of the Council believed that whistleblowing should be encouraged or discouraged.

In response, the Leader confirmed that a whistleblowing process should be available for all and that the Trade Unions were content with the existing Council policy in this regard.

(vii) Mr P Sagers

To the Budget Leader/Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“Many Wards are finding a low number of applications to their Supporting Community Resilience funds. Has consideration been given to changing the criteria and the maximum sums available for awards under the scheme and what is the final destination of any unspent money when the scheme closes?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether there was a case for the scheme being reviewed earlier than September and whether clarification on any unspent money could be provided.

In response, it was confirmed that the scheme would be reviewed in September and that further discussion on this issue could be continued offline with Councillor Sagers.

(viii) Mr P Sagers

To the Budget Leader/Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“The UK Government has made significant sums of money available to Scotland as a result of the Barnett formula. How much of this money has been received by the Highland Council to date, how much has been spent and on what and how much more is expected to be received as a result of measures already announced by the UK Government?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that £4.5bn had been made available to Scotland under the Barnett consequential formula and that the Highland Council had received just under £12m to date, it was queried as to what lobbying had been undertaken with local MSPs and the Scottish Government to ensure that the Council received funding appropriate to its needs.

In response, it was confirmed that the Leader, Depute Leader and Budget Leader had regular meetings with MSPs and MPs regarding funding and this would be continued.

(ix) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

“Can you provide details of benchmarking against the enactment, use, scope and broader Member involvement of emergency powers and strategic decision making between the first Gold meeting on 19/03/20 and resumption of political governance on 25/06/20?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis of having been asked for benchmarking information by another Local Authority, it was queried as to why the Council had not asked for a copy of the report which had been compiled or undertaken the same exercise.

In response, the Leader confirmed that she would speak to Officers on this issue with a view to establishing whether any improvements in practice were required.

(x) Mr A Jarvie

To the Budget Leader/Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“What assessment has been undertaken to ascertain the number of employees whose salary or costs are either wholly or partially met by revenue which is not from the core Government grant?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why the furlough scheme had been ruled out before the essential criteria test had been undertaken in regard to the Council’s suitability.

In response, it was confirmed that there had been specific conditions that Councils had had to adhere to and this had been made clear in the recent report to the Corporate Resources Committee.

(xi) Mr A Jarvie

To the Chair of the Education Committee

“What plans are in place to continue education provision to children who either now, or with any possible future restrictions, are medically unable to return to school?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that teachers who were currently teaching remotely could reach all pupils but when they returned to classrooms there would be no-one available to teach children who were not able to attend school, it was queried as to what plans were in place to address this situation.

In response, it was confirmed that the individual circumstances of every pupil who could not attend school would be assessed and the necessary support put in place, taking into account the nature of any illness and the capacity of pupils to engage with learning. As such, local schools were best placed to do this in conjunction with parents and carers and with support from relevant professionals, including Additional Support Needs and health professionals.

(xii) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of the Education Committee

“Approximately 60 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and Recently Qualified Teachers (RQTs) in the Highlands, who were apparently guaranteed substantive posts, are stuck with temporary posts or left on the supply list at best. The Depute First Minister announced on 23 June that the Government would work with Councils to ensure NQTs

and RQTs had secure jobs this year. When will the Council offer this security to these Teachers?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to how much funding the Council had applied for from the Scottish Government, how many teaching posts would this create and when would the recruitment process start.

In response, it was confirmed that, in a change to the original announcement, the Deputy First Minister had now stated that whilst the funding was not ringfenced for a specific group of teachers, he was keen that Newly Qualified Teachers be employed. The Council's share of the £50m was £1.3m and it was intended to target this additional resource towards supporting numeracy, literacy, health and wellbeing and closing the attainment gap. Officers would be working with Head Teachers and area staff to establish the most effective way to deploy the resource and more information would be reported to the Education Committee on 6 August.

(xiii) Mr J Bruce

To the Leader of the Council

“What plans does the Council have in place should there be a localised flare up of Covid-19 within the Highlands and what is its role as a lead public agency partner in implementing any area specific lockdowns?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that the Council had a joint health protection plan in place with NHS Highland and Argyll and Bute Council which had been reviewed and reported on at the EDI Committee in January 2019, it was queried as to whether any review had been undertaken since that time.

In response, it was confirmed that information would be sought as to whether there had been any further review of the joint health protection plan (since January 2019) in light of current circumstances. It was also confirmed that how the Council dealt with any outbreaks was very much part of its Recovery Plan.

(xiv) Mr J Bruce

To the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee

“Across the Highlands, the vast majority of recycling centres are now open with the notable exception of Grantown and Kingussie. These appear to be the only sites which do not have a target reopening date. What is the particular issue in reopening these sites and is a target date available?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether it would be possible to maintain savings of £40k within Grantown and Kingussie Recycling Centres once they re-opened.

In response, it was confirmed that a tentative date had been set for the end of August for the re-opening of the Grantown and Kingussie Recycling Centres and that more

information would be sought from the Executive Chief Officer (Communities and Place) regarding the forecast savings at those locations.

(xv) Ms M Smith

To the Leader of the Council

“Will you agree that any monies left over from the individual Ward Covid-19 budgets should continue to be spent locally, decided by Local Members, to aid the economic recovery?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether Local Members could review individual Ward Covid-19 budgets and also whether it was intended that these budgets might end up, along with ward discretionary budgets, being used for other purposes by the Council.

In response, it was confirmed that it was anticipated that a clearer picture of the budget would be available by September and that it was not currently possible to confirm any further detail at this time. It was also confirmed that over the coming weeks the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee would ask community groups how they would like the Council to use ward discretionary budgets.

**10. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid**

Declarations of Interest –

Item 10(i) – Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and, having received advice from the Monitoring Officer/Head of Corporate Governance, confirmed that he would not now be seconding the Motion or taking part in the discussion and as such he would leave the meeting by turning off his camera and microphone during the debate.

The undernoted Members declared non-financial interests in the following items 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:-

Item 10(ii) – Mr J Gordon – on the basis of having a family connection to a business in Portree.

Item 10(ii) - Mr L Fraser – as the user of a Council owned car park.

Item 10(iv) – Mr G Adam – on the basis of a family connection to a glamping business.

Item 10(v) – Mr K Rosie – as the Chair of a local Broadband Liaison Committee.

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

(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

(At this point, Mr A Christie left the meeting and it was confirmed that Mr D Rixson would now second the motion).

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was suggested that the easing of lockdown measures could perhaps have been dealt with differently in the Highlands in view of the mortality statistics in the area although it was recognised opinion was currently divided on this issue;
- in light of the above, it was felt that consultation should be undertaken in relation to allocating more responsibility to Councils and local NHS Boards in this respect;
- it was also suggested that the national and multi-agency approach taken by the Scottish Government had been extremely effective and had saved lives which had to be the paramount consideration;
- the proposal within the Notice of Motion could have the effect of adding an additional layer of complexity to this situation which would not be helpful;
- it had to be appreciated that the Highland area did not exist in a 'bubble' and the lack of detail as to how any new proposals would work was concerning; and
- there was a widespread view amongst communities that following current Scottish Government guidelines had helped to save lives and this was the most important factor to be taken into account.

Thereafter, Mr G Adam, seconded by Mr D Rixson, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Ms M Smith, seconded by Dr I Cockburn, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the status quo should be retained in relation as to how lockdowns were managed on the basis of having confidence in the approach being taken by the Scottish Government.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 22 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 32 votes, with 13 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

G Adam, C Caddick, I Campbell, J Campbell, H Carmichael, M Davidson, J Finlayson, R Gale, J Gordon, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, D MacKay (Mrs), W MacKay, A MacKinnon, A MacLean, R MacWilliam, L Munro, M Reiss, D Rixson, T Robertson, and B Thompson.

For the Amendment

B Allan, A Baxter, B Boyd, R Bremner, G Campbell-Sinclair, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, K Currie, M Finlayson, C Fraser, L Fraser, K Gowans, P Hadley, E Knox, B Lobban, D Loudon, L MacDonald, A MacInnes, G MacKenzie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, N McLean, H Morrison, P Munro, M Paterson, A Rhind, F Robertson, E Roddick, K Rosie, G Ross, N Sinclair and M Smith.

Abstentions

R Balfour, J Bruce, A Henderson, A Jarvie, D MacKay (Mr), I MacKenzie, S Mackie, D

Macpherson, C Munro, P Saggars, A Sinclair, C Smith and C Wilson.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to retain the status quo in relation to how lockdowns were managed on the basis of having confidence in the approach being taken by the Scottish Government.

(At this point, Mr A Christie returned to the meeting).

(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

In relation to the above Notice of Motion – it was advised that a suspension of Standing Order 35 would be required in order to allow discussion.

On that basis, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, **MOVED** the suspension of Standing Order 35.

As an **AMENDMENT**, the Convener, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, moved that Standing Order 35 should not be suspended.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 33 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 37 votes and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

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

For the Amendment

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

Decision

The Council having not agreed the suspension of Standing Order 35, the Notice of Motion in respect of Parking Charges was therefore not discussed at the meeting.

(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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there were concerns about the current arrangements and specifically any fear on the part of employees about coming forward in certain circumstances. As such, it was felt that contracting the services of an external provider would deliver a robust procedure which was the mark of a good organisation;
- it was known that other Councils used external providers and the potential savings as a result could be significant;
- protection and security for staff was of key importance and it was felt that this could be delivered through the terms of the Motion;
- contact had been made with Trade Union representatives and they had confirmed that they were content with the current arrangements in place within the Council;
- it was suggested that Trade Union representatives should be asked if they also agreed that the best possible policy was one which involved an external service;
- the terms of the proposed Motion should be seen as an enhancement to what was already in place and would be beneficial for all concerned;
- the confidence of staff in using any process had to be the key consideration;
- it was suggested that one possible alternative option would be for another Council to take control of the whistleblowing process but all alternatives should be considered before any decision was finally taken;
- current legislation placed a responsibility on Councils in this regard and the value of having this process 'one step removed' was recognised; and
- it had to be highlighted that the Audit & Scrutiny Committee had already reviewed the current process and the results were still awaited. It was therefore suggested that those results should be scrutinised in the first instance before any final decision was taken.

Thereafter, Mr R MacWilliam, seconded by Ms K Currie, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Council should continue with the current process in order to allow Internal Audit staff to conclude their review and process to set up a confidential helpline within Internal Audit, alongside further consultation being undertaken with Trade Union colleagues before a final decision was taken.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 24 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 43 votes and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

B Allan, A Baxter, B Boyd, R Bremner, G Campbell-Sinclair, K Currie, C Fraser, J Gordon, P Hadley, A Jarvie, E Knox, D Loudon, L MacDonald, A MacInnes, D MacKay (Mr), S Mackie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, R MacWilliam, N McLean, P Munro, E

Roddick, N Sinclair and C Smith.

For the Amendment

G Adam, R Balfour, J Barclay, J Bruce, C Caddick, I Campbell, J Campbell, H Carmichael, A Christie, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, M Davidson, J Finlayson, M Finlayson, L Fraser, R Gale, J Gordon, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, A Henderson, B Lobban, D MacKay (Mrs), I MacKenzie, A MacKinnon, A MacLean, D Macpherson, B McAllister, H Morrison, C Munro, L Munro, M Paterson, M Reiss, D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, K Rosie, G Ross, P Saggars, N Sinclair, M Smith, B Thompson and C Wilson.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to continue with the current process in relation to employee whistle-blowing in order to allow Internal Audit staff to conclude their review and process to set up a confidential helpline within Internal Audit. Also, further consultation was required with Trade Union colleagues before a final decision was taken.

(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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- progress had now been made on this issue and in this regard thanks were conveyed to both the Scottish Government and Council Officers for the actions which had already been taken. However, this was a public health issue and as such there was a need for further emergency support to be put in place and for this to be classed as a 'Covid-19 emergency';
- this was 'unnecessary and dirty' camping which had been witnessed across the Highlands and it was important that the Scottish Government took action alongside the Council to eradicate it as soon as possible;
- immediate action had to be taken on road traffic orders for recognised 'beauty spots' which were now under severe pressure and in this regard it was highlighted that a review of this had been promised in 2013 but had yet to be delivered;
- with reference to specific issues in Skye and Raasay, real problems were currently being experienced as a result of wild camping and it had been noted that the profile of many people visiting/camping in the area was very different from previous years;
- tourism was recognised as being key to the Council's Recovery Plan and as such it was vital that the Scottish Government worked alongside the Council in supporting local communities in every way possible in terms of the allocation of resources where needed and empowering/providing confidence for local communities to deal with these situations;

- education, infrastructure and enforcement were key and had to be implemented as a matter of urgency;
- it would be important to recognise that the majority of people who were visiting the area were acting responsibly but a significant number were not and (a time of limited resources) consideration should be given to use of Ward Discretionary Budgets;
- in terms of detailed suggested addition to the Notice of Motion, it was noted that this included reference to the marketing campaigns and guidance from the Scottish Government for those people choosing a 'staycation' in the Highlands and the actions currently being implemented by the Council and Community Policing Teams/Police Scotland; and
- it was also suggested that the Council should undertake an urgent investigation into how best to encourage private hosting of campervans and caravans by crofters and smallholders and widely publicise the results of this study.

Decision

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

It was also **AGREED** to include the following wording:–

Visitors to Highland have been asked to respect the environment and the destination that they are visiting, and this message has been raised repeatedly by the Tourism Minister and his Scottish Government colleagues, Visit Scotland, Police Scotland and communities. It is very sad that the actions of a minority are having an impact on the rest of the law abiding people.

The Scottish Government have dedicated marketing campaigns and guidance for people looking to enjoy the outdoors or a “staycation” safely, including compliance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC). This, of course, is staple to maintaining and enjoying the beautiful landscape and sights that we all enjoy across our region.

The Council has put into place certain initiatives such as increasing bin collections or assessing Byelaws to stop vehicles from parking at certain hot-spots. Also, there have been assurances that the Community Policing Teams are taking these matters very seriously indeed. They do have powers under the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 to issue on-the-spot fines (fixed penalty notices) to people who are behaving in antisocial ways.

We therefore acknowledge the good work of the Highland Council and Police Scotland in dealing with the minority of visitors who are ignoring the rules.

It was further **AGREED** that the Council should urgently investigate how best to encourage private hosting of campervans and caravans by crofters and smallholders and publicise the results of this study widely.

(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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- broadband provision had never been more important for the Highlands and there was an urgent need to be as ambitious as possible for the area which was why the proposal was being brought forward in respect of fibre to premises;
- there was also an urgent need for a Workshop/Seminar to be arranged for all Members in order that all issues could be fully discussed in this regard;
- there was now a massive increase in home working which was likely to continue for some time but this was proving problematic for those with poor connectivity and as such a solution had to be identified as soon as possible;
- it had to be highlighted that this was one of the most important issues for the Highlands and action was needed now, especially in rural areas;
- this was also a vital issue for young people living and working in the area and also for school children as had been highlighted in recent months; and
- in supporting the Notice of Motion, it was suggested that the Council should also commit to writing to the Governments and Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) to insist on an extension to the £300 instalment voucher scheme for the Highlands and recognise the further financial contributions made by the Scottish Government. It was also suggested that the Council should work with HIE to identify Officers to actively contact households with broadband speeds around or under 1MB with a view to organising satellite or other first class connection as soon as possible using the voucher scheme.

Decision

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

It was also **AGREED** to include the following wording:-

The Council commits to writing to Governments and HIE to insist on an extension to the £300 instalment voucher scheme for the Highlands. The Council also recognises the further financial contributions made by the Scottish Government of vouchers to families with children undergoing the blended learning who need upgrades on their broadband.

Highland Council will work with HIE to identify Officers to actively contact those households with broadband speeds around or under 1Mb with a view to organising satellite or other first class connection as soon as possible using the voucher scheme.

11. Employee Engagement and Wellbeing Survey

There had been circulated Report No. HC/14/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to both Members and Officers for the work which had been undertaken and the responses received;
- it had to be highlighted that listening to staff was of paramount importance;
- it was noted that the responses had predominantly come from female members of staff and as such consideration had to be given to alternative ways of reaching out to male staff members wherever possible;
- the response from the Council in terms of ensuring the health and safety of staff during the pandemic had made a huge difference at a critical time;
- there was a need for further information as to why the responses were so heavily weighted in relation to Education staff (54.42%);
- the overall response rate to the survey was impressive but there was a need to focus on those members of staff who did not feel that they were currently effective;
- it was noted that over 70% of respondents were aged 40+ and this highlighted issues in relation to future workforce planning which needed to be considered;
- the Council had a role in supporting any employee who identified issues in relation to mental health and this had to be taken forward wherever and whenever necessary;
- it was a concern that a significant percentage of staff who had responded to the survey did not want to identify their pay grades and there was a need for a review of the reasons in this regard;
- in terms of the response from the Education Service, there should be a focus on individual lines of service and a report submitted to a future Education Committee;
- there was concern in relation to those staff members who had confirmed that they were not coping and needed further support and it was suggested that pastoral care in this regard should be considered alongside other support measures as this was not a sustainable position;
- it was noted that a range of methodologies would be used to engage with staff and a further report submitted to the Health & Social Care Committee in due course, alongside disaggregated data being shared with Strategic and Area Chairs and the circulation of updated statistics to all Members following the meeting.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the headline messages from the Employee Engagement Wellbeing Survey;
- (ii) **NOTED** the proposed engagement strategy; and
- (iii) **AGREED** that action plans should be reported to the next Corporate Resources Committee meeting.

12. Review of COVID-19 Services Ath-sgrúdadh air Seirbheisean COVID-19

Declarations of Interest

The undernoted Members declared non-financial interests in this item as follows 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:-

Mrs F Robertson - on the basis of work undertaken for Blythwood Care.

Mr K Gowans - on the basis of a family member being employed by High Life Highland.

Mr A Christie – as a non-Executive Director of NHS Highland.

Mr A Jarvie – as a Director of High Life Highland

Mr R Bremner – as Chair of Thrumster Community Development Association

Mr K Rosie – as a member of Thurso Community Development Trust Board

a) Humanitarian Assistance and Food Supply

Taic Daonnachd agus Solar Bidh

There had been circulated (pp. 37-45) Report No. HC/15/20 dated 21 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need to express the thanks of the Council to local communities and community groups, as well as Officers, for the work which had been undertaken over recent months;
- it would also be of vital importance to listen to and engage with communities in order to assess what had worked well and what needed to be improved for the future;
- the resilience of local communities had been outstanding and reassuring and needed to be commended as part of any future review;
- it was acknowledged that the most severe impact had been felt in relation to health, deprivation and the economic downturn and there was concern as to the potential levels of unemployment when the furlough scheme was ended. As such, all measures available had to be taken in terms of job retention wherever possible;
- it was stressed that helplines had to remain available for the foreseeable future;
- it had to be pointed out that some communities had not received a positive initial response from the Council when they had offered help in certain areas and it was hoped that lessons could be learned in this regard for the future;
- empowerment at local levels would be crucial if there was a second wave of the virus in the coming months as had been predicted;
- digital connectivity was still very poor in some areas of the Highlands and it was vital that this was addressed wherever possible in the coming months;
- retaining community group action for the future was imperative as part of the 'new normal' across the area;
- community groups in Caithness had not waited for approval from the Council but had just gone ahead with local action and in this regard further clarification as to when an Executive Chief Officer would be in place for this area was sought;
- there was also a need to convey thanks to local stores who had adapted very quickly to the situation and had become community hubs which had been very beneficial for local residents;
- it was wrong to speak about 'recovery' in the past tense as the virus had not gone away and it was very possible that cases would rise again as part of the predicted second wave in the coming months; and
- it was suggested that Members' Workshop should be arranged to allow detailed discussion of lessons learned and how any improvements were to be taken forward.

Decision

Members:-

- (i) **NOTED** the scale and reach of the Council's humanitarian assistance to date and the important contribution made by community bodies;
- (ii) **NOTED** that the Scottish Government had made an offer of grant of £651k to enable ongoing support;
- (iii) **AGREED** that there needed to be a managed withdrawal of key staff from current arrangements and a move to a more sustainable model of assistance designed around the principles of targeting support to those who needed it most, supporting the place-based approach and helping people to help each other and do more;
- (iv) **NOTED** the new arrangements as set out in Paragraph 6.9 and that these would be reviewed towards the end of September when there should be clarity on any further Government funding and the Council's budget position; and
- (v) **NOTED** the ongoing engagement and involvement planned with community bodies, third sector representatives and community planning partners.

**b) Review of Keyworker Childcare Provision in Highland
Cùram-chloinne do Phrìomh Luchd-obrach**

There had been circulated (pp. 46-51) Report No. HC/16/20 dated 20 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the correction to the date in Paragraph 5.1 was noted in that it should in fact read as '10 August';
- the statement in the report that it 'was not appropriate or practical to undertake a formal review of Council keyworker childcare hub provision at this time' was welcomed but it was queried as to why the previous report had recommended that this should be ceased;
- there was concern about the potential for 'volunteer fatigue' as the virus had not gone away and as such it had to be acknowledged that further lockdowns were a very real possibility. As such, these hubs were of vital importance and there had to be a contingency arrangement for their continuation if this proved necessary in the months ahead;
- further and more detailed clarification was needed in terms of the reference in the report to no additional funding being made available by the Scottish Government for the provision of childcare for keyworkers but that the Council had instead been given flexibility in the use of a number of Scottish Government funding streams in relation to its Covid-19 response, including ELC 1140 hours funding amongst others;
- the wording 'amongst others' as above was also queried and further information was requested in this regard;
- in terms of the information which had been provided, it was queried as to whether there had been an underspend situation (whereby a sum of £5.2m had previously been vired to allow a response to this situation to be undertaken) and if so whether that also needed to be reflected in future reports on this matter; and
- it was suggested that a further report to provide clarification on the issues which had been raised during the meeting should be submitted to the next full Council

meeting on 10 September.

Decision

Members:-

- (i) **NOTED** the current position regarding the Council keyworker hub provision;
- (ii) **NOTED** the context as set out within the report and the latest Scottish Government directions regarding provision;
- (iii) **NOTED** the proposed next steps with regard to provision and ongoing review; and
- (iv) **NOTED** that any review would await further clarity from the Scottish Government and the return of schools in August to allow assessment of implications.

13. Budget Impact of COVID-19 – Understanding the Gap COVID-19 – Buaidh Ionmhasail agus a' Tuigsinn a' Bheàirn sa Bhuidseat

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

There had been circulated Report No. HC/17/20 dated 15 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the work undertaken on what was a very fluid situation;
- the details which had been provided on the report were based on no future regression;
- whilst this was an extremely challenging situation, there were also opportunities for all Members of the Council to work together to address the extremely difficult issues which lay ahead;
- there was relief that the projected budget gap figure had now reduced but concern over the original figure which had led to concerns from both Members and Officers and also the wider public;
- there was therefore a need to closely monitor and scrutinise the current budget gap figure and in this regard it was queried as to whether this figure took account of the additional £5.2m which had been received from the Scottish Government;
- clarification was also needed in respect of whether it was anticipated that there would be staff reductions across Council Services and also the current situation in regard to previous Service underspends and over achieved income;
- there was also a need for future information on the details which had been provided in the report in regard to Ferries, Reduced Expenditure and Use of Reserves;
- it was suggested that the Council should release for all Members the returns which had been previously submitted to CoSLA;
- there was concern at the current 'freeze' on Council budgets, with particular reference to roads, and it was felt that this could store up problems through

work not being undertaken. As such, an alternative to this situation was suggested whereby a percentage of the respective budgets across the Council could be subtracted for the Covid-19 situation and spend then recommenced as required;

- there was concern at some of the negative statements which had been made in the meeting as it had to be accepted that this was a budget forecast for the Council which could never be completely accurate under the current extraordinary circumstances;
- it was expected that future budget forecast reports would have more specific and detailed background information in order to allow full Member scrutiny;
- there had been requests from Members for further information in relation to the furlough scheme but this was still awaited;
- it had to be highlighted that the same level of service delivery could not be achieved if staff numbers were to be decreased in the future;
- there would be discussion undertaken with CoSLA in the near future in relation to funding levels for staffing and schools;
- there was a need to review the format of budget reports to ensure that they were as clear and transparent as possible in relation to the information being provided for Member scrutiny;
- it was considered that Appendix 1 within the report should relate to the previous reports submitted to the Corporate Resources Committee, including the relativity of variables, but this did not seem to be the case;
- it was of concern that there was no financial report being submitted to the Education Committee in the following week;
- further and more specific budgetary information was required in relation to the Corran Ferry and also in regard to Car Parking Income;
- more detail was also needed in a future report in relation to agency costs across the Council;
- it was hoped that Members would not learn of future budget information/proposals from the local media in future;
- information on financial control measures across the Council had to be regularly available for Members at all time and it was stressed that this should be a priority;
- it was suggested that the Audit & Scrutiny Committee should review the previous returns/data submitted to CoSLA and also the minutes from the political GOLD Covid meetings which had been undertaken;
- there was a need for all Members of the Council to work together in order to address the issues around the current budget gap;
- the Budget Leader highlighted that he was content with the current levels of governance in place and was disappointed with the tone of the debate in this regard; and
- it was noted that discussion would be undertaken with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in order to take forward the proposals in relation to the CoSLA returns and the minutes of the political GOLD Covid meetings with a further report in this regard to be submitted to the full Council thereafter.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the revised budget gap figures as reported to COSLA in June 2020.

It was also **AGREED** that the returns submitted to CoSLA by the Council should be released to all Members.

It was further **AGREED** that discussion should be undertaken between the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in respect of reviewing the returns submitted to CoSLA and the Minutes of the Members' GOLD Covid meetings with a further report to the full Council thereafter.

14. Recovery Action Plan: Progress Report to 30 June 2020
Plana-gníomha Ath-shlánachaidh – Aithisg Adhartais gu 30 Ógmhios 2020

There had been circulated Report No. HC/18/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Transformation and Economy.

Declaration of Interest – Mrs F Robertson declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis of undertaking work for Blythswood Care 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 discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- this was an excellent report and the new style in terms of presenting information was welcomed;
- the issues being considered were part of a fast moving workplan and as such it was suggested that a Seminar to which all Members could be invited would be beneficial;
- in terms of the expected forthcoming announcement from the Chancellor, there was a need for more detail on the Capital Plan as soon as possible, specifically in terms of whether all currently listed projects were to proceed (with particular reference being made to the Tain 3-18 project);
- in regard to the restoration of political governance across the Council, there was concern that only four of the reports on the agenda required the agreement of Members and as such it was suggested that more detail on this issue should be provided in a further report;
- whilst it was welcomed that schools would be returning in the near future, there could not be complacency in this respect as the indications appeared to suggest that a second wave of the virus was a very real possibility and as such this had the potential to be a rapidly changing situation;
- there was a need for clarification on the number of 'shovel ready' projects across the Council in order that there could be confidence that any future avenues of funding could be accessed immediately;
- discussion should be undertaken with Group Leaders in the first instance re proposals for the restoration of political governance; and
- it was essential that all Members of the Council were advised as to the current management situation within the Education Service and given the opportunity to highlight their concerns and it was expected that this would be arranged for the next meeting of the Education Committee in the coming few days.

Decision

Members **NOTED** the progress of the Council's Recovery Action Plan to 30 June 2020.

15. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (OHSW) Policy and Guidance
Slàinte agus Sàbhailteachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/19/20 dated 15 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need for more detail on the issue of stress management, specifically there had been reference in the report to 'excessive pressure' but this would be a subjective judgement and as such required to be refined;
- from references within the report, it appeared that it might now require to be updated in certain aspects, such as the lockdown situation;
- there was a need for consultation with staff who were working from home to ensure that they had the correct equipment on a daily basis;
- it was expected that shielding and self-isolating would continue to be issues for some staff members over the next 18 month period in particular;
- as part of Infection Control, there was a need to review the number of diseases and conditions included, particularly in relation to Schools;
- it had to be highlighted that there were issues associated with extended periods of use of laptops/display equipment, etc. This was particularly relevant in terms of the considerable length of some meetings and as such should be evaluated as part of future work patterns;
- clarification was needed on whether Health & Safety training was mandatory across Council Services; and
- there was a need for further information on the resource implications for the health and safety issues which had been contained within the report and also highlighted at the meeting, specifically in relation to the current budgetary situation.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED** the updated policy and plan as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively within the report.

16. Decision of Standards Commission for Scotland - Hearing
Toradh Choimisean nan Inbhean

Declaration of Interest - Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as Chair of Hi-TRANS 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/20/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Head of Corporate Governance/Monitoring Officer.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the decision of the Standards Commission of Scotland as detailed in the report.

17. 2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Highland Council

There had been circulated Report No. HC/21/20 dated 20 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there were major concerns at the unequal way in which representation across the Highlands had been viewed and specifically issues of rurality and poverty which had not been acknowledged;
- in light of the above, there was a need for urgent political lobbying in advance of a response being provided by the Council;
- with reference to the Caithness area in particular, it was clear that there had been a woeful lack of understanding of the vast geography of the area, the fact that Caithness was one of the most under represented areas in Highland and the need for measures to be taken to address population decline which required more (and not less) representation in future;
- the proposals for areas such as Caithness, Sutherland and Skye were utterly unacceptable and were being viewed as 'punishment' for those areas in contrast with what was being proposed for more urban areas of the Highlands;
- the serious lack of understanding of the geography of the area had the potential to cause serious and lasting damage and this had to be resisted;
- as part of the consultation, it would be important to also include all Community Councils and External Agencies/Boards across the area wherever and whenever possible, along with local communities;
- these proposals were not fair, equitable or representative and it should be highlighted that population numbers, and not the Electoral Roll, had to be of paramount consideration;
- this was being viewed as an attack on already fragile areas and it was queried as to how this would be viewed alongside the Islands Bill;
- whilst not disagreeing with the proposals to set up a cross-Council Working Group to analyse the proposals, it was suggested that this would not include those Members who were not part of any political group and this was unfair;
- a wide selection of Members from across the Highlands was needed to consider these proposals so an additional recommendation should be added to the report to strengthen this new Working Group as had been suggested;
- as part of the Council response, it should be highlighted that these proposals from the Boundary Commission were not addressing problems in the Highlands but making them worse; and
- it was imperative that structures were put in place across the Highland area which worked effectively for each type of community and met local priorities wherever possible and as such these proposals were being viewed as an insult to democracy and had to be robustly challenged.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** that consultation would be undertaken with Members at Ward level, the outcome of which would be reported to the next full Council meeting on 10 September;
- (ii) **AGREED** to establish a cross-Council Working Group to analyse the proposals and bring forward comments to the next full Council meeting on 10 September;
- (iii) **AGREED** to strengthen this cross-Council Working Group by taking

account of those Members who were not part of any political group on the Council; and

- (iv) **AGREED** that the Leader of the Council should be immediately empowered to make the displeasure of the Council known in respect of the proposals which had been presented from the Boundary Commission.

18. Appointments – CoSLA Boards

Cur an Dreuchd Ballrachd – Co-chruinneachadh Ùghdarrasan Ionadail na h-Alba

It was noted that the following revised arrangements were being proposed by the Administration in regard to appointments to CoSLA Boards -

Health and Social Care Board – Ms L Munro (Sub- Mrs I Campbell)
 Community Wellbeing Board – Mr B Thompson (Sub – Mrs M Paterson)
 Environment and Economy Board – Mrs T Robertson (Sub – Mr D Macpherson)

In this respect, the following amendments were proposed by the SNP Group –

Health and Social Care Board – Mrs M Cockburn (Sub-Ms E Roddick)
 Community Wellbeing Board – Mrs M Cockburn (Sub – Mr B Boyd)
 Environment and Economy Board – Mr K Gowans (Sub – Mr D Louden)

In respect of the Health and Social Care Board, and following a roll call vote, it was confirmed as follows –

Votes for Ms L Munro (Sub – Mrs I Campbell) (33)

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

Votes for Mrs M Cockburn (Sub – Ms E Roddick) (28)

A Baxter, B Boyd, R Bremner, I Brown, J Bruce, G Campbell-Sinclair, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, K Currie, C Fraser, K Gowans, P Hadley, A Jarvie, D Louden, A MacInnes, D MacKay (Mr), G MacKenzie, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, R MacWilliam, E Roddick, K Rosie, P Saggars, A Sinclair, C Smith and M Smith.

In respect of the Community and Wellbeing Board, and following a roll call vote, it was confirmed as follows –

Votes for Mr B Thompson (Sub – Mrs M Paterson) (35)

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

Votes for Mrs M Cockburn (Sub – Mr B Boyd) (24)

B Boyd, R Bremner, G Campbell-Sinclair, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, K Currie, C Fraser, K Gowans, P Hadley, A Jarvie, D Louden, A MacInnes, D MacKay (Mr), G MacKenzie, S Mackie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, R MacWilliam, E Roddick, K Rosie, P Saggars, A Sinclair, C Smith and M Smith.

Abstention (1)

A Baxter

In respect of the Environment and Economy Board, and following a roll call vote, it was confirmed as follows –

Votes for Mrs T Robertson (Sub – Mr D Macpherson) (36)

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

Votes for Mr K Gowans (Sub – Mr D Louden) (25)

A Baxter, B Boyd, R Bremner, I Brown, G Campbell-Sinclair, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, K Currie, C Fraser, K Gowans, A Jarvie, D Louden, A MacInnes, D MacKay (Mr), G MacKenzie, S Mackie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, R MacWilliam, E Roddick, K Rosie, P Saggars, A Sinclair, C Smith and M Smith.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** as follows:-

Health and Social Care Board – Ms L Munro (Sub – Mrs I Campbell)

Community and Wellbeing Board – Mr B Thompson (Sub – Mrs M Paterson)

Environment and Economy Board – Mrs T Robertson (Sub – Mr D Macpherson)

**19. Appointment - High Life Highland
Cur an Dreuchd do Chompanaidhean – High Life na Gàidhealtachd**

Declarations of Interest

Mr T Heggie, Ms L Munro and Mr A Jarvie 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 non-financial interest on the basis of a family member being employed by High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion and voting.

It was noted that it had been proposed that Mr B Thompson should replace Mr D Macpherson on High Life Highland.

In this regard, it was also proposed at the meeting that this position should be filled by Mr S Mackie.

On a vote being taken, it was confirmed as follows:-

Votes for Mr B Thompson (33)

G Adam, R Balfour, J Barclay, C Caddick, I Campbell, J Campbell, H Carmichael, A Christie, M Davidson, J Finlayson, M Finlayson, L Fraser, R Gale, J Gordon, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, A Henderson, B Lobban, D MacKay (Mrs), A MacKinnon, A MacLean, D Macpherson, B McAllister, H Morrison, C Munro, L Munro, M Paterson,

D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, G Ross and B Thompson.

Votes for Mr S Mackie (26)

B Boyd, R Bremner, J Bruce, G Campbell-Sinclair, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, C Fraser, K Gowans, P Hadley, A Jarvie, D Louden, A MacInnes, D MacKay (Mr), W MacKay, G MacKenzie, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, E Roddick, K Rosie, P Sagers, A Sinclair, N Sinclair, C Smith and M Smith.

Abstention (1)

A Baxter

Decision

The Council **AGREED** that Mr B Thompson should replace Mr D Macpherson on High Life Highland.

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 12 March 2020 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 should be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6, 8 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

22. School and Public Bus Contracts

Declaration of Interest – Mrs B McAllister declared a financial interest in this item on the basis of having a family connection to one of the organisations mentioned in the report and left the meeting during discussion.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/22/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

23. Project Dòchas
Pròiseact Dòchais

Declaration of Interest – Mrs H Carmichael declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis of having a family connection to one of the organisations mentioned in the report 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 the discussion and voting.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/23/20 dated 10 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

**24. Property Purchase
Ceannach Seilbhe**

Declaration of Interest – Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item as an employee of Inverness College/UHI and left the meeting during discussion.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/24/20 dated 14 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations as circulated.

Having been adjourned on Thursday, 30 July at 6.15pm, and resuming on Monday, 3 August at 9.00am, the meeting ended at 12.25pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held in the Tain Council Chamber, Tower Street, Tain on Thursday, 20 February 2020 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Finlayson
Mr D Louden
Ms P Munro
Mr A Rhind

Ms F Robertson
Ms M Smith
Mrs C Wilson

Officials in Attendance:

Mr J Holden, Housing Manager (North)
Ms L Third, Education Quality Improvement Manager
Mr I Moncreiff, Roads Operation Manager
Ms H Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER
Ms J MacLennan, Principle Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Inspector J Rice, Police Scotland

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

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 Chair** **Cur Cathraiche an Dreuchd**

Having been duly nominated and seconded, Ms F Robertson was unanimously appointed Chair of the Easter Ross Area Committee.

The Committee also **AGREED** to appoint a Vice Chair to which Mr A Rhind was unanimously appointed, again having been duly nominated and seconded.

4. **Police – Area Performance Summary Report** **Aithisg Phoileis**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/01/20 dated 13 February 2020 by the Chief Inspector Jamie Wilson, Area Commander.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- a spate of recent antisocial behaviour in Ainess and Invergordon was causing unrest and distress for local residents. This projected a negative image to visitors to the area and it was essential this was addressed. Some progress had already been made but co-operation with the local schools, the youth work at the Joss Street Hall and High Life Highland was important. Attendance at school assemblies by Police Officers was also welcomed and a plea was made for this to continue. The limited resources at the disposal of the Police were acknowledged but schools were often able to provide local knowledge and information about any family dynamics involved;
- the recent sizable seizure of drugs and money found in woodland near Fyrish was applauded. However, there were numerous reports of drug dealing openly taking place in Ainess and this was causing frustration in the local community. Members were assured that cognisance was taken of all information received by the Police and that this helped them to build a picture. In addition, it was pointed out that the Highland Council could take action against any Council House tenant convicted of drugs offences from their house as this was a contravention their Tenancy Agreement;
- care experienced children were often purposely recruited by criminals; and
- it was disappointing that there was a reluctance with some businesses to train staff to spot shoplifters.

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

5. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2020/2021 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No ERA/02/20 dated 6 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- possible options to rationalise garages and garage sites were explored including demolition to create dedicated storage units or house sites. Prior to a report being brought back to Committee it would be beneficial to explore other possibilities with Members;
- it was important to maximise income streams and it was confirmed that there was a waiting list for garages. To date, the process had not been adequately managed but, as it was now properly resourced, these issues would be addressed;
- the availability of garages for rent from the Council was not widely known and more needed to be done to promote this;
- a list of garages and garage sites in each Ward was requested; and
- the Housing Manager was reminded that, in relation to Housing Arrears, that Members had requested, if possible, a breakdown of the proportion that were as a result of Universal Credit.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. a 3% rent increase to apply to Easter Ross Garages and Garage sites;
- ii. a list of garages and garage sites be prepared for both Wards; and
- iii. a detailed report be submitted to a future Committee with a range of options as to how best to use garages and garage sites.

6. Area Roads Capital Programme Report 2020-21 Aithisg Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2020-21

There had been circulated Report No ERA/03/20 dated 21 January 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- the 2020/21 capital budget for roads maintenance had not yet been determined so to provide a working budget meantime the allocation for the Easter Ross Area had been based on the 2019/20 budget taking into account that it had 23% of the road length of the former Ross and Cromarty area. However, Members highlighted that the methodology used in calculating the formula took account of other factors and it was unfair to bases this solely on mileage;
- the Easter Ross Area had a higher population than many other areas and the heavy traffic using the infrastructure caused more wear on the roads;
- the poor road conditions caused damage to cars;
- it was vital that Members highlighted the importance of the Area's requirements being properly addressed, reference being made to the apportionment of road maintenance staff compared to other areas;
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to how resources were allocated when emergency situations arose;
- it was unsatisfactory to leave works unfinished, especially where it tied up equipment;
- whilst there were benefits to redirecting the workforce to cutting back bushes and drainage the priority had to be making roads as safe as possible and a reappraisal of priorities was called for. It was felt the general public would be tolerant if they saw resources being directed to filling potholes and ensuring roads were safe to drive on;
- the maintenance of roads within Council housing schemes fell within the remit of the Housing Service;
- reference was made to Kiltearn Community Council who had decided to use community benefit funding received from windfarm developments to resurface a stretch of road. This was a good example of community empowerment; and
- in future, where appropriate, it would be useful to have officers from Waste Amenities and Roads attend where there were issues around shared services.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to reprioritise the Roads Maintenance Programme for Easter Ross to address patching and potholes in the area; and

- ii. to have representatives from Waste, Amenities and Roads attend meetings where there are issues around shared services.

**7. Education Scotland Activity in South Lodge Primary School
Com-pàirteachas Foghlaim Alba le Bun-Sgoil na Loidse a Deas**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/04/20 dated 7 February 2020 by the Area Education Quality Improvement Manager Mid.

Since the initial inspection it was confirmed that the management team at the school had changed and the enthusiasm and ethos of the staff and pupils was welcomed.

Referring to discussion earlier in the meeting, the Area Education Quality Improvement Manager undertook to invite representatives of Police Scotland to meetings of the Alness and Invergordon Associated School Groups.

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

**8. Invergordon Common Good Fund - Quarter 3 Monitoring and 2020/21 Budget Setting Report
Sgrùdadh Cairteal 3 agus Aithisg Suidheachadh Buidseat 2020/21 Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/05/20 dated 28 January 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Quarter 3 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund;
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed 2020/21 budget for the fund; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the Invergordon & District Development Trust's Business Case for Invergordon Town Hall be submitted to the Committee's next meeting.

**9. Tain Common Good Fund - Quarter 3 Monitoring and 2020/21 Budget Setting Report
Sgrùdadh Cairteal 3 gus Aithisg Suidheachadh Buidseat 2020/21 Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/06/20 dated 11 February 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance, and Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Quarter 3 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed 2020/21 budget for the Fund.

The meeting ended at 11.20 am

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held remotely on Monday 3 August 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner	Mr A MacKinnon
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs A MacLean (substitute)
Mr J Gordon	Mr C Munro
Mr A Henderson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A MacInnes	Mr D Rixson
Mr D Mackay	Miss E Roddick
Mr G MacKenzie	

Non-Members also present:

Mrs M Davidson	Mr K Rosie
Mr J Finlayson	

In attendance:

MS D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance

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

The representative of the Head of Corporate Governance was in the Chair at the start of the meeting.

In terms of Standing Order 9, the Committee **AGREED** to take Items 2 and 3 first.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr G Adam and Mr A Sinclair.

3. Declarations of Interest

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

Item 5 – Mr C Munro (financial and non-financial)

Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in any item which might relate to his connection with the following organisations: Caithness & Sutherland Provincial Mòd, Caithness Branch of An Comunn Gàidhealach, Melvich Gaelic Choir, Atomaig Piseag (Gaelic Choir) and the Local Organising Committee – Mòd Ghallaibh 2010

1. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

Mr A MacKinnon, seconded by Mr A Henderson, proposed Mr C Munro as Chair. There being no other nominations, Mr C Munro was elected unopposed and took up position.

The Chair then called for nominations for the post of Vice Chair. Mr C Munro, seconded by Mr A Henderson, proposed Mr A MacKinnon as Vice Chair. Again, there being no other nominations, Mr A MacKinnon was elected unopposed.

At this juncture, the Chairman, together with the Chair of the Education Committee, played tribute to Ms Norma Young, Area Care and Learning Manager, who had retired recently after 40 years working for Highland Council. Reference was made to her leadership and contributions to Gaelic Medium Education, both Highland wide and nationally. Ms Young began her career with Highland Council as a class teacher but, over the years, had worked in various roles and her work ethos and dedication to Gaelic was to be commended. She had helped bring the National Mod to Highland through her no nonsense approach and energy. Members wished her well for the future.

Members also offered their congratulations to both the Chair and Vice Chair on their appointment and hoped their profile would promote the Gaelic Language and Culture.

4. Role and Remit – Gaelic Committee

There had been circulated Report No. G/1/20 dated 14 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance.

Members were informed that the Scheme of Delegation, approved by the Council in December 2019, had set out the specific remits for all of the new strategic committees. The remit for the Gaelic Committee had yet to be included in the Scheme to enable the new Committee members to consider and agree what this should be. The following consequently set out proposed general and specific responsibilities for discussion and approval.

General

- To promote and support the indigenous Gaelic language, heritage and culture of the Highlands and to oversee the implementation of the Council's Gaelic Language Plan.

Specific

- To monitor, scrutinise and promote the implementation of the Council's Gaelic Language Plan, including the delivery of Gaelic education.
- To liaise with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on the strategic development of Gaelic language.
- To work with Gaelic development agencies in promoting, developing and sustaining the Gaelic language, heritage and culture in the Highlands.
- To work with the Scottish Government and Parliament in relation to legislation relating to Gaelic language.

- To monitor the implications of legislation in respect of Gaelic language and advise the Council of its impact across the Highlands.
- Budget monitoring and scrutiny of *Gaelic specific* funding, grants and expenditure.

Governance

- The Committee minutes will be reported to Full Council.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the loss of the previous Gaelic Implementation Group was disappointing but the formation of this Committee would strengthen Gaelic in Highland Council;
- a series of engagement sessions with internal and external stakeholders was proposed to discuss and agree priorities for the Committee and information was sought as to who these stakeholders would be;
- it was important not to underestimate the importance of taking Gaelic forward to a stronger position in the Council but there would be resource implications to do this;
- there would be positive community implications if Gaelic was placed at its heart and Members had a role to encourage and make Gaelic visible in such locations;
- the report contained a list of areas where it was proposed the Committee would consider in the future and these were likely to throw up other challenges;
- the Committee needed to concentrate on working with Gaelic development agencies in promoting, developing and sustaining the Gaelic language, heritage and culture in Highland and this would require better communication;
- it was important to strengthen the relationship and work collaboratively with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to promote the Gaelic Language;
- the 2021 Census would determine the focus and funding of Gaelic going forward, particularly in relation to the Scottish Government and Parliament, and it was important work collaboratively with other local authorities, particularly Argyll and Bute and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar;
- the work of the Committee could quite possibly require the formation of Working Groups and the involvement of other Elected Members would only strengthen its profile and role;
- Highland Council received specific grants from the Scottish Government for the delivery of Gaelic and the Gaelic Team were commended for their successful attempts to ingather sources of funding. It was important to build on this;
- the excellent work taking place at Sabhal Mor Ostaig (SMO) in developing Gaelic was highlighted and the opportunity was there for Members to see this for themselves; and
- fellow Members were encouraged to attend Gaelic Language classes.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the general reporting requirements set out in Section 4 of the report; and
- ii. the specific remit as set out above.

5. Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 3 – 2018-23

There had been circulated Report No G/2/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance. This was augmented by an overview by the Interim Head of Education of what had been taking place in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) since the Covid 19 outbreak, the planned return to schools and the plans to increase the number of Gaelic speakers in Highland.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- Members had received the Agenda and Papers in both English and Gaelic and this was to be welcomed;
- the Gaelic Team was small but they did a phenomenal amount of work. Looking to the future, it was important to assess their structure, identify exactly what they did and their ability to deliver with a view of strengthening the Team and incorporating them into all areas of the Council. This was particularly important following the retirement of Ms Young and the possible need for a Gaelic Development Manager;
- in response to a query, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance would have ultimate responsibility for the Gaelic Committee;
- the resource implications were not only the funding that the Council could secure but the level of funding Highland Council was willing to identify itself;
- Members to the Gaelic Committee with no previous involvement with the Gaelic Strategy Implementation Group or Gaelic Implementation Group were encouraged to read the Gaelic Language Plan 3 (GLP3);
- the delivery of the themes of the GLP3 remained a challenge. For example, there needed to be a consistency and continuity of delivery of GME. At present, many parents could send their children to Gaelic Nurseries and Gaelic Medium Primary Schools but there was difficulty in providing Gaelic Medium secondary education through a lack of teachers. This remained a disappointment to Members given the GME opportunities for tertiary education and careers involving Gaelic. There would be significant resource implications for the Council to address this but, meantime, it was important to lobby for additional resources to be specifically targeted at this;
- better collaboration with other agencies was needed to deliver the 6 themes of GLP3 as was clearer quantification of how the Council was delivering on these;
- for parents of children in GME it was important that they had, at least, an awareness of the language. Gaelic television had an important role to play in educating learners at all levels and it was hoped there would be opportunities for Members and staff to learn the language. Ulpán classes had proved effective in the past and it was disappointing they were no longer available. However, intensive week long courses at SMO had also proved useful. These could perhaps be delivered through MS Teams;
- there were many good projects taking place but which Members were unaware of. In particular, attention was drawn to the series of shinty videos produced by Iomain Cholmchille, supported by the Gaelic Team, providing Gaelic language resources for pupils in GME and pupils learning Gaelic. Such projects brought shinty and football to a real living vibrant language and needed to be promoted and, by working with Argyll and Bute Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, greater benefit of such initiatives would benefit all; and

- there was much engagement activity taking place which was to be commended in areas such as education, the arts and sport.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the report; and
- ii. to bring an update back to Committee Members details of the structure of the current Gaelic Teams together with their roles and remits.

The meeting concluded at 3.35pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Thursday 6 August 2020 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr T Heggie (Vice Chair)
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	Mrs F Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr G Ross
Mr A Graham	Mr A Sinclair

Religious Representatives:

Ms S Lamont
Mr W Skene

Non-Members also present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr D Mackay
Mr A Baxter	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr B Boyd	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R Bremner	Mr D MacLeod
Mrs C Caddick	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mrs B McAllister
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr J McGillivray
Mr I Cockburn	Mr C Munro
Mrs M Davidson	Ms L Munro
Mr J Gray	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr B Thompson
Mr B Lobban	

In attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
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

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair emphasised the importance of the meeting given recent Scottish Government announcements relating to a full-time return

to school. The following week, schools would begin to open and many pupils would return for the start of a new session, with all pupils being back at school by 18 August.

The meeting also coincided with SQA results week which, despite some controversy nationally, showed the positive work taking place in Highland schools and provided an opportunity to celebrate the work of pupils, teachers and parents.

The agenda reflected the work that had taken place during lockdown and the journey to get back to school, and updated Members on the plans that had been put in place and what stage they were at. It also provided an update on this year's exam results and how Highland attainment had improved during the last year. When priorities had been discussed over a year ago, improving attainment had been the main priority along with closing the attainment gap, which it was recognised would have widened during lockdown.

The content of the Committee papers was an opportunity to celebrate the work of schools, staff and young people, as well as those who supported schools, and the Committee would hear from Head Teachers from across the authority. He thanked the Head Teachers for attending the meeting to personalise their experiences which, he was sure, would reinforce how well Highland had done in terms of national comparisons during lockdown and how the Council had been benchmarked in the top quartile for its approach to blended learning and planning for the return to school.

It was hoped that today's Committee would be a positive meeting which recognised the achievements, hard work and resilience of Highland's young people, parents, schools and Education Improvement Team (EIT). He also thanked Members for their input and support across Highland's many diverse school communities.

He concluded by expressing best wishes and support to Aberdeen as it re-entered some phases of lockdown, news of which added a sobering element to the discussions.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms E Knox and Ms N Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

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

3. Return to Schools

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 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.

Mrs B McAllister declared a non-financial interest on the grounds that two family members were involved in education 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 involvement in the discussion.

A. Education Improvement Strategy

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10A/20 dated 22 July 2020 by the Head of Education.

The Chair welcomed Head Teachers from Dingwall Academy, Portree High School, Thurso High School, Kingussie High School and St Clement's Special School and thanked them, as representatives of all Head Teachers and school staff, for their hard work in recent months, both in terms of supporting pupils using blended learning and in preparing for a return to school.

He reiterated the challenging times everyone had lived through and how schools had been expected to deliver education in a blended manner, support staff and pupils, and adapt to using sometimes inconsistent technology. In addition, Area Care and Learning Managers and the EIT had been expected to support schools with learning and a health and wellbeing agenda, work together to plan for the different return to school scenarios and prepare information and gradings for the SQA. It had been a huge ask but staff and pupils, supported by parents, had stepped up to the mark.

The Vice Chair also commended pupils and teaching staff for their achievements in what had been a unique and difficult time. However, he hoped that the outstanding results would not be overshadowed by the debate on moderation, which he suggested should take place at another time. Pupils whose results were lower than they expected had the option to appeal and he was sure there would be further positive developments. He went on to speak about his experience of working as a setter and marker for the SQA and the rigorous moderation and benchmarking that took place. There was always a debate about standards, consistency and fairness and there were often anomalies that needed to be analysed. He reiterated that this was a time to celebrate success, reinforce the excellent achievements of staff and pupils, and wait for the final outcomes of the appeals process to be analysed.

The Opposition Spokesperson for Education, Councillor Graham MacKenzie, concurred with the comments made by the Chair and Vice Chair, particularly in relation to moderation. Disputes arose every year, and there was a robust, open and transparent appeals process which it was hoped would resolve the majority of concerns. He added his congratulations to everyone in the education sector for what had been achieved over the past few months. The work to support pupils, present assessments and provide evidence had been done remarkably quickly, which was testimony to the professionalism of staff. Attainment had not only improved but had improved over and above the national trend, which had also increased. He particularly welcomed the progress in numeracy and literacy and in schools that had received Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding,

emphasising that it was now necessary to build on this success. He concluded by recognising the contribution of parents, many of whom had become teachers overnight and had encouraged and developed children during what had been a hugely traumatic time.

Thereafter, following an introduction by the Head of Education, the Head Teachers in attendance spoke in detail to the work taking place in their school communities, particularly in relation to the three key themes of improvement vision; communities and wider partners; and growth, courage and parent partnerships.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members commended the inspirational contributions by Head Teachers, which demonstrated the pride they had in their schools; a clear degree of vision; a diverse, innovative and comprehensive approach; and an understanding of their communities and young people;
- improvements in attainment did not happen overnight, and were the result of years of tracking and monitoring;
- concern was expressed regarding the health and wellbeing of pupils who had not achieved the results they had hoped for. It was important to listen and understand and it was hoped that the SQA would take into account the views of teachers who had worked with the pupils and knew what they were capable of. It was also important to remember that there were other pathways available through UHI;
- the ability to problem-solve and innovate would be of huge value going forward. It was necessary to reimagine the Highlands and prepare pupils for jobs in both traditional and non-traditional industries;
- attainment increased when learning was made relevant to pupils;
- degree graduates had not been able to have a graduation ceremony this year and thanks were expressed to the Provost of Inverness for agreeing to illuminate Ness Bridge and Inverness Castle to celebrate their success;
- the way in which schools had adapted quickly to ensure learning continued in what was a challenging time was commended. In addition, thanks were expressed to pupils who had had to learn in a different way, and to parents who had had to home-school their children;
- it was requested that a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee to assure Members of the transparency and validity of the SQA appeals process. The Chair confirmed that a report would be prepared following the appeals process, adding that it was important to get Head Teachers' reflections. He also confirmed that the Head of Education would send information to Members on where they could direct queries regarding appeals;
- whilst welcoming the contributions from Head Teachers, their schools were not representative of all schools in Highland. It would be helpful to know more about what was happening in the Inverness City Area as it had the largest schools, particular reference being made to Millburn Academy;
- it would be helpful to receive feedback from pupils on how they had been managing;
- it was useful to hear direct from Head Teachers, and it was exciting that Highland was on an upward trajectory in terms of attainment;

- the system needed to change based on recent experiences, it being necessary to emphasise to pupils the importance of prelims and that they might inform their final results should such a situation arise again;
- concern was expressed that pupils' grades had been marked down based on their school's past performance. Significant improvements had been made in Highland and it was important to ensure this was reflected in the final grades. It was necessary to review as much information as possible, including case studies of pupils who had been marked down, from a cross-section of Highland schools, and as many appeal results as possible to ensure pupils got the grades they deserved and Highland got the average marks it deserved;
- concern was expressed regarding the impact of the evaluation process on the results in respect of Inverness High School;
- whilst society placed a high value on education, the system was desperately under-resourced;
- there was going to be a quantum leap in the number of SQA appeals. Concern was expressed that the system would be overstretched and it was suggested that communication take place with the SQA in that regard;
- the appeals system had to work as young people's futures depended on the outcomes;
- the innovative way in which Pupil Equity Fund monies had been used was commended and it was hoped that the Council would support the continued provision of PEF funding to Thurso High School;
- whilst it was important to be proud of the high achievers, the reference by Head Teachers to supporting the remaining 80% of pupils was welcomed;
- the work taking place at Kingussie High School in terms of engaging with young people and giving them opportunities was exemplar and the introduction of 30 new courses was welcomed. However, it was questioned whether the number of new courses was contributing to a deterioration in the traditional skills of reading, writing and arithmetic;
- in relation to digital learning, some of the more remote communities in Highland had connectivity issues and it was important this was addressed;
- education was for all and the emphasis on inclusion was welcomed;
- the views of Head Teachers were sought on whether teachers required special training on how to conduct distance learning and whether this should be given greater emphasis by the education authority in future;
- the need for flexible funding, with decisions being made by local practitioners based on local need, was emphasised;
- positive destinations had historically meant different things in different places. A university first approach could sometimes be detrimental to pupils and the value of apprenticeships and vocational learning was emphasised. Reference was made to Thurso High School's dialogue with local employers, which was putting in place the building blocks for pupils to get the skills and attributes they needed to grow as people, and giving them the best possible start;
- local solutions were the way forward and it was necessary to enable Head Teachers as much as possible to make that a reality;
- concern was expressed regarding the disparity in terms of attainment and achievement in areas with the lowest Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) scores compared with the least deprived areas, and a number of

statistics were quoted. It was not a fair or equitable system, and it was hoped it could be improved upon in Highland;

- the report referred to the empowerment of staff and the views of Head Teachers were sought in that regard. Empowering staff was to be welcomed provided it was meaningful and not just a token gesture. It was necessary to listen and value the expertise, knowledge and abilities of staff;
- in relation to the refurbishment of Inverness High School, concern was expressed that the wrong ovens had been installed and that, by not admitting that a mistake had been made, the Council was discriminating against pupils from what was one of the most deprived areas in Highland by not providing them with the opportunity to take part in national certification. The mistake had been pointed out as far back as October 2019 and there was an opportunity to rectify it while the contractors were still on site, thereby giving staff the basic equipment they needed to help pupils raise their attainment and achieve positive destinations. It was hoped that a quick and satisfactory solution could be reached to enable pupils to be all they could be, and that the aspirations in the report also applied to Inverness High School. It was added that the school had been operating as a building site for years, and pupils and teaching staff had had to contend with that. Whilst it was recognised that it was a capital project and therefore outwith the remit of the Education Committee, it was important to provide the right environment for education to take place and a request was made that the project be completed before or as soon as possible after the return to school date;
- it was important to get the foundations of literacy and numeracy right in primary school but it was necessary to be more creative and vocational when children reached secondary school. Many young people were not academic but were not mature enough to leave school in S4. They still needed the nurturing environment that school provided and should be encouraged to stay on and explore other avenues;
- inspirational and dedicated teachers that made a difference to children's lives were the Council's biggest asset and it was necessary to invest in them;
- it was heartening to hear how well the young people at St Clement's Special School had responded to online learning, and of the parental partnerships that had been established. The home learning environment had helped some children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) to flourish and it was necessary to look at how to build on that so that the benefits were not lost when children returned to school;
- the "Gaelic with Granny" initiative at St Clement's Special School was commended, and showed what could be done with support;
- it was important to recognise that improving education was a team effort, and the contributions from Head Teachers in terms of what was happening with teachers, parents and pupils were a welcome addition to the report;
- in relation to the priorities set out in section 4.1 of the report, it was hoped that more detail on the expected outcomes and opportunities for monitoring progress would be provided in a future report;
- in relation to the secondary school attainment meetings described in section 4.2 of the report, information was sought on what training EIT members had received and what involvement Education Scotland had had in supporting that training;

- the school inspection process had changed significantly in recent years and a request was made that Education Scotland representatives be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to give a presentation in that regard. The Chair confirmed that this would be taken forward;
- today's meeting had demonstrated the benefits of hearing direct from teachers and it was suggested that, in future, when embarking on new initiatives, the views of Head Teachers be collated via the Highland Secondary and Primary Head Teachers Groups and expressed to the Committee. The Chair confirmed that he had always encouraged Head Teachers and staff to attend the Committee and that would continue;
- in relation to section 4.6 of the report, it was questioned where the funding was going to come from;
- in relation to the engagement work described in sections 4.7 and 5.2 of the report, there was no reference to engagement with Members and it would be helpful to see how it was going to be incorporated;
- tribute was paid to all staff involved in putting together the online learning model that had been used during lockdown. The quality was exceptional, and it had allowed some teachers to excel in a remote situation. However, in relation to pupils that had not participated, information was sought on how what they had missed would be measured and how this would be addressed;
- the work that had taken place in respect of transitions was commended;
- in relation to SQA results, when the estimated grades had been put together pupils should have been entitled to know what they were;
- in relation to the working groups that had been established, it was necessary to work in partnership and it was suggested that they should not only be led by EIT members;
- in relation to health and wellbeing, the way in which schools had looked after and maintained contact with their pupils was commended;
- it would be helpful, at a future meeting, to recap the education improvement agenda and the associated goals and timelines;
- it would be interesting to have an overview of the findings of the staff survey;
- it was queried whether, in the event of another lockdown, senior pupils could be kept on track in some way so their academic learning did not stall;
- in relation to young people with conditions such as autism, information was sought on what steps had been taken to identify need and develop bespoke ways to help them cope. It was added that it might be necessary to identify extra resources as the need could be significant;
- the former Change Team, now part of the newly formed EIT, had been established on a temporary basis and it was queried whether it was intended to make the EIT a permanent part of the education management structure. If so, it would be necessary to identify a budget for the team. In addition, the schools whose Head Teachers were involved in the Change Team/EIT currently had acting Head Teachers and needed clarity regarding the direction of travel for their school; and
- information was sought on who was involved in the EIT; what groups were included in school communities; the current position in respect of the Northern Alliance, including who the Council's representative was; what issues there had been in terms of digital support; when school inspections would resume; how pupils would be assessed when they returned to

school; the current position in Highland in terms of the Curriculum for Excellence; what support was being put in place for teachers, who would be under significant pressure when schools returned; what plans had been put in place to recommence face to face music lessons and make them as safe as possible; what plans had been put in place to monitor and evaluate the return to school; what plans were in place to continue digital learning for pupils on reduced timetables, some of whom had thrived during lockdown; and how it was intended to get pupils who had not engaged in online learning to engage in the event of a second lockdown.

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

- a report on the four key themes being focused upon over the next year, and the associated outcomes, would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee;
- officers would liaise with Area Committee Chairs with a view to devoting significant time, during the next round of Area Committees, to exploring the collaborative and collegiate partnership approach being taken and the good practice taking place. Education representatives would provide detailed information on a number of the points raised during discussion including school inspections, staff survey findings, and the experiences of young people and staff during lockdown and on returning to school; and
- restructure papers would come forward, as quickly as possible, throughout the new school session.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the external validation from Education Scotland of the good practice that was emerging in the Highlands regarding curricular recovery, digital learning, health and wellbeing and Gaelic provision, and the positive feedback from Education Scotland regarding local delivery planning and the return of schools;
- iii. **AGREED** to recognise the progress that had been made in bringing key leaders together in taking a collaborative approach to the improvement of education within the Highlands, and **NOTED** the importance of this continued focus;
- iv. **AGREED** that a report on the SQA appeals process be presented to the September meeting of the Committee; and
- v. **AGREED** that consideration be given to inviting representatives of Education Scotland to a future meeting of the Committee to give a presentation on the school inspection process.

B. Schools Reopening 12 August 2020

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10B/20 dated 3 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

The Chair paid tribute to all school and council staff who had supported the return to school agenda which had changed on an almost daily basis and had been effectively supported by the Return to School Project Board and 11

subgroups. He referred to the work happening at school level in terms of risk assessments and planning for three scenarios as well as all the other areas relating to cleaning, transport, communication etc.

He also thanked non-teaching staff such as cleaners, school catering staff, Facilities Management (FM) staff, refuse lorry drivers and staff, amenities personnel etc as preparing to return to schools was a massive task and was truly a team effort.

He emphasised that as the Council discussed recovery and moving forward, it was important to ensure that it was in partnership with valued third sector organisations as well as children and families and communities. The tremendous work done across all organisations during the pandemic needed to be recognised and acknowledged; many organisations had been working hard supporting children and families and he thanked them for all they had done. It was clear that it was not a Highland Council recovery plan that was needed but a Highland recovery plan developed and informed by views across all sectors and with the voices of children and families being heard. It was about true partnership and co-production as only by working together would the best outcomes be achieved for Highland communities as children returned to school.

Gillian Newman, Highland Children's Forum, then spoke about the Letters from Lockdown competition which had resulted in 185 letters from children and young people that would become an educational resource. A report in that regard would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee, and it was hoped that some of the prize winners could attend. The competition had highlighted a number of positives that it was necessary to build upon. However, the children that had taken part had probably had a better experience of lockdown than those who had not engaged.

She went on to explain that, throughout the pandemic, the third sector had been delivering the Council's priorities in terms of supporting young people and families. However, communication between the Council and third sector organisations had not always enabled that, particular reference being made to CHIP+ who were funded by the Council to deliver the statutory obligation to inform parents about the Additional Support for Learning Act and had found it difficult to get information during lockdown. Many families had an increasing level of anxiety and did not want to return their children to school as they were not confident in, or were not aware of, the arrangements that had been made. A paper by Bernadette Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist, on transitions for young people with ASN was welcomed. However, not everyone had had the same experience and reference was made to feedback from a parent support group which indicated that a large proportion of children with ASN going back in to mainstream education had no transitions plan in place.

The Young Carers team had been working with young carers to help them develop their own transitions plans and, whilst the young people were looking forward to returning to school to see their friends and get some respite from their caring duties, they also had concerns about being penalised for not keeping up with their work, taking infections home to family members who were shielding, and being late for school, particularly given the stringent entrance/exit arrangements that would now be in place.

Some families would have had to deal with stresses such as relationship or financial difficulties, domestic abuse and job losses and young people who had not previously been vulnerable might now be. However, it was reassuring to know that it had been noticed who had not engaged. Concern was expressed regarding young people with complex conditions that had deteriorated, and how that would affect their education. In addition, services such as the Neuro Developmental Assessment Service had not been operating so there were vulnerabilities in that regard.

Overall, there was a real opportunity to listen to children and young people and build on their experiences. They were citizens in the making who were interested in what was going on and how they could contribute. She concluded by referring to the various implications set out in Committee reports. The Scottish Government was keen to see a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment on all policy documents, and it would be helpful if this was included in future Council reports. The Chair confirmed that this could be taken forward.

Following an introduction by the Chief Executive, discussion took place during which the following issues were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to Gillian Newman for her important contribution, as well as to Bernadette Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist, and Toni Macartney, Head Teacher, St Clement's Special School, for their work with children with ASN;
- the anxiety of children, parents and teachers about the return to school were recognised;
- it was requested that consideration be given to a Highland Wellbeing Week in schools, culminating in a Covid-19 Hygiene Certificate. The Chair welcomed the idea and confirmed that it would be taken forward;
- FM teams had worked tirelessly to get schools to ready to reopen and it was necessary to seek their feedback and consider what lessons could be learned. It was suggested that there should be a bottom up and top down approach and it was hoped that systems could be put in place that were easier for FM staff to manage;
- it was hoped that the hygiene measures that had been put in place would mean there would be no instances during the coming winter of schools being closed due to other viral infections such as Norovirus;
- it was important to acknowledge the efforts of teaching staff, who had had to quickly adapt to delivering education in ways they were unfamiliar with;
- behavioural traits, as yet unknown, would manifest as a result of the pandemic. They would be amplified in children with ASN and information was sought on what plans were in place to support not only children with ASN but their parents. It was likely that there would be an increased demand for ASN support and the Council needed to be in a position to cope;
- communications from schools regarding the return to school had been variable and it was necessary to look at the reasons for that;
- it was queried whether the necessary support was in place for staff, parents and children, and whether there were sufficient quantities of PPE in schools;

- if the virus could not be eradicated there would continue to be outbreaks and the factors that had led to the current lockdown in Aberdeen were no different to Inverness. It would help to alleviate the anxieties of parents and young people returning to school if more information could be provided on what would happen in the event of an outbreak and what the criteria would be for locking down individual schools;
- reference was made to a study in the USA that challenged the earlier thinking regarding the transmission of Covid-19 amongst children;
- public health was the greatest challenge, and Members reiterated the call for public health representatives to attend the Committee to discuss how they were feeding in to what was happening in terms of education and the intense support that was going to be required over the coming months;
- concern was expressed that schools would not open as smoothly as they usually would and it was queried whether staff could be redeployed into schools to deal what could potentially be a deluge of enquires from parents and to ensure that support services were on hand to react as quickly as possible;
- it would be a sensible health measure to ensure that the maximum number of children were outside the school building at any one time and information was sought on what had been done to ensure that outdoor learning opportunities were maximised;
- information was requested regarding the fitting of protective screens on buses used by pupils and members of the public; the use of face coverings by secondary school pupils on buses and in school; the potential to carry out random temperature checks on pupils on a daily basis; and whether breakfast and after school clubs for working families would operate as usual;
- there was ample information available to respond positively to parents' questions in terms of how likely it was that their child would contract Covid-19 from going back to school, how ill they were likely to get and how likely they were to transmit it to family members. The risks were very low and information was sought on what steps had been taken to explain this;
- thanks were expressed to all staff involved in preparing for the return to school;
- whilst school buildings were being deep-cleaned before staff and pupils returned, cleaning needed to be ongoing and it was hoped that sufficient time had been scheduled for the stringent regime that would be required;
- parents were concerned about the money they had paid out for school trips and whether this would be reimbursed. The Chair confirmed that this matter would be considered at the forthcoming Corporate Resources Committee; and
- new research indicated that 16-18 year olds were a high risk group and it was queried whether the Council could facilitate extra vigilance for this group. In that regard, it was suggested that any Wards with Covid funding remaining could purchase electronic thermometers for schools; and
- whilst appreciating the comments regarding the low risk in Highland, chances should not be taken, and reference was made to the long-term health implications coming to light.

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

- Head Teachers had been asked to ensure that local Members were included in any communications regarding the return to school;
- the latest guidelines from the Education Advisory Group would be circulated to Members; and
- drop-in sessions would be offered to Members over the next couple of weeks to provide reassurance in terms of any issues being raised by teachers or constituents.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the context as set out within the report, and the latest Scottish Government Direction regarding education provision and return to school;
- AGREED** that the opportunity to return to school would be in place for all Highland children by 18 August 2020;
- NOTED** the ongoing additional support and infrastructure provided by partners and central Council services would require ongoing review as children and young people were educated in school settings from August onwards; and
- AGREED** that consideration be given to a Highland Wellbeing Week in schools, culminating in a Covid-19 Hygiene Certificate.

4. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Update

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/20 dated 3 August 2020 by the Head of Resources.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the Chairman explained that this report built on the decisions and discussions from the last Education Committee around ELC and gave additional information including further guidance and advice from the Scottish Government. He emphasised that this was about ongoing expansion to 1140 hours across the authority, not if, but when. Unlike some other local authorities Highland Council was not rolling all settings back to 600 hours but instead were maintaining hours at what they were before lockdown. He took the opportunity to mention the importance attached to the support and input received during lockdown from partner providers and many third sector organisations;
- disappointment was however expressed at the lack of progress. Highland Council had been lagging behind many other local authorities in Scotland with many nearby either having met, or being close to, meeting the 1140 hours requirement. Last year the underspend in this budget had been £5.262m and, although £800k had been used to provide emergency childcare during lockdown, there was still over £4m unspent. This year's budget was £31.37m and, at the end of Quarter 1, £25.71m was still to be used;
- a much quicker approach was needed to support parents and children. Parental expectations had been raised and it was estimated that the savings per child per annum was £4,500, money which could be in the local economy. It was acknowledged that the universal statutory requirement to provide 1140 hours had been removed in recognition it couldn't be provided everywhere but it was not intended to halt progress;
- the money should be ringfenced, not set against other costs and used to address budget deficits;

- the provision of 1140 hours involved jobs, at a time when jobs were at a premium;
- the lack of progress would impact negatively in the most deprived areas of Highland where parents were unable to access this provision. There were, in fact, some areas of deprivation, such as Wick, which had no provision of 1140 hours whatsoever despite a local provider making preliminary arrangements to expand. As a result of the delay it now looked like the Council had backtracked. It was questioned what difference it would make to the Education budget to provide 30 nursery places to 2 year olds at 1140 hours from a deprived area, living in poverty, balanced against their ability to play, learn, have a hot meal and the opportunity to start school at the same development stage as their peers and the opportunities this would give them;
- many Highland centres and partner agencies would be able to move to 1140 hours and should be allowed to do so. Where not, some clarity should be provided;
- it was widely recognised that GME pupils had suffered more than their English Medium counterparts due to the lack of interaction and 1140 hours should be targeted at them with a degree of urgency;
- some communities had raised funds towards the provision of ELC and it was important the Council was supportive of such communities by opening such facilities, recognising their endeavours;
- it was unfair to compare Highland Council with other often more urban areas where the rollout of 1140 hours would have been easier; and
- the Chairman suggested that, given the previous discussion about the need to review the result appeal process and Members were seeking an urgent review of the provision of 1140 hours, the Education Committee scheduled for 3 September be moved to be 30 September to allow consideration of both these matters.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update information provided in relation to ELC and plans for provision as part of the wider return of school and ELC settings from August 2020;
- ii. **NOTED** the update on a setting by setting basis as per Appendix 1 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** that an urgent review of the proposed 1140 hours delivery be undertaken with the report on that review being brought to the next Committee which includes an assessment of which providers are ready to deliver 1140 hours, assesses the impact of Covid-19 on the ability to implement the roll out of 1140 hours, what options are available to address this and a proposed detailed timetable; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Education Committee scheduled to take place on 3 September be re-scheduled to Wednesday 30 September 2020.

5. Teacher Recruitment - Update

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/20 dated 3 August 2020 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the Chair commended all the staff involved in teacher recruitment. With the Scottish Government about to announce additional funding to assist with education recovery, he looked forward to additional teachers being recruited;
- it had been understood that Head Teacher posts were to be filled during the summer period but this had not happened. In response, it was confirmed that interviews had taken place but, for various reasons, appointments were not made. Nevertheless, the filling of these posts remained a priority; and
- it was important that the money attributed to filling teaching posts before the summer recess in schools was ringfenced and would not be resourced from the new Scottish Government funding.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the position regarding the appointment of main grade primary and secondary teachers to date;
- ii. the position regarding the planned recruitment activity to be undertaken during August; and
- iii. the initial plan for the use of proposed additional funding for the recruitment of teaching and support staff to assist with education recovery, subject to the confirmation of grant funding.

6. Education Committee Seminars/Workshops

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/20 dated 31 July 2020 by the Head of Education.

The Chair explained the purpose of these was to keep Members informed. Education professionals and Head Teachers would be brought in with the aim of facilitating more casual, but focused, discussion and, as already agreed, now that the Education Committee had been rescheduled, the original date of 3 September could be used as a seminar date. It was suggested that the seminar proposed to consider ASN in October could also be moved so the Committee could consider the matter of ASN at an earlier stage. However, it was explained there was considerable work ongoing with major stakeholders and time was needed to complete this given the importance of ASN.

The Committee **AGREED** that confirmation of the dates of the first phase of workshops from August to December 2020 be circulated to Members.

The meeting concluded at 3.30 pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held remotely on Thursday, 13 August 2020 at 10.30am.

Present:

Miss J Barclay	Mrs L MacDonald
Mr R Bremner (substitute)	Mr A Jarvie
Miss J Campbell	Mr D Mackay
Mr A Christie (substitute)	Mrs A MacLean
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs F Robertson
Mr C Fraser	Ms E Roddick
Mr L Fraser	Mr P Saggars
Mr A Graham	Ms M Smith
Mrs B McAllister	Mr B Thompson

Non-Members also present:

Mr B Boyd
 Mr J Finlayson
 Mr A Henderson
 Mr B Lobban
 Mr D Louden
 Mr D Macpherson
 Mr J McGillivray

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing
 Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Housing and Property
 Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy & Investment Manager, Housing and Property
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Mr S Taylor, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

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

Mr B Thompson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair and Mrs L Munro.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Items 3,4,5, 6 and 7: Mr R Bremner (non-financial)
 Item 5: Mr A Christie (non-financial) and Mr L Fraser (financial)
 Item 6: Mr A Christie and Mrs A Maclean (non-financial)

Declaration of Interest: Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in items 3,4,5,6 and 7 below as a Board Member of Albryn Housing Society Ltd 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.

3. An introduction to the Corporate Landlord Model Ro-ràdh do Mhodail an Uachdarain Chorporra

There had been circulated Report No HP/05/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing.

The Chair welcomed the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing to his first meeting of the Committee.

In discussion, Members welcomed the report and raised the following main issues:-

- the potential for Council owned buildings which were falling into a state of disrepair and redundant areas of land within communities to be released sooner to allow community asset transfers to be progressed;
- confirmation was sought and provided that it was for Members to take a view on whether common good land should be included in the Corporate landlord role;
- the potential for private sector companies currently renting Council buildings to purchase these assets and the opportunity to co-locate third sector organisations within buildings;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the proposed approach would involve collaboration with communities and services at a local level, while at the same time aiming to achieve a level of consistency across the Council through a centralised management model;
- the approach to be taken to the strategic listed buildings within the Council's ownership that required significant levels of investment and acted as a barrier to community transfers;
- the Corporate landlord and strategic asset management approaches would deliver value for money and enable the Council to maximise the use of its assets in a more holistic way by services, communities, residents and partners;
- clarification was sought and provided that garages and garage sites were held on the Housing Revenue Account and therefore would be assessed as part of the strategic asset management approach;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the key strategic benefits it was envisaged the Model would deliver going forward as a measure of its success;
- a workshop involving all Members on the Corporate Landlord Model be arranged in consultation with the Chair and Chairs of the Communities and Place Committee and Economy and Infrastructure Committee and relevant Executive Chief Officers;
- the introduction of the Model would empower Area Committees in terms of the management of Non HRA assets and provide them with a more substantial role going forward and the opportunity for this to be discussed in more detail at the workshop; and
- the Corporate landlord approach would have a positive impact in terms of the Council's ability to address climate change.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report and commented accordingly;
- ii. **AGREED** the principle that the operational management, maintenance of, and investment in the Council's non HRA buildings and assets should move from being the responsibility of individual service areas within the Council, and be transferred to a new Corporate Landlord Model, to include relevant budgets;
- iii. **AGREED** the more detailed scoping out of a formal policy/strategic Corporate Landlord approach, for further discussion and development, and for reporting to, and approval from, future Housing and Property Committees; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a workshop for all Members on this item be arranged in consultation with the Chair and Chairs of the Communities and Place Committee and Economy and Infrastructure Committee and relevant Executive Chief Officers.

4. **A Strategic Asset Management Approach to Buildings and Assets** **Dòigh-obrach Rianachd So-mhaoin Ro-innleachdail do Thogalaichean is So-mhaoin**

There had been circulated Report No HP/06/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing.

In discussion, Members welcomed the report and raised the following main points:-

- the potential for the Council or an interested third-party developer to redevelop vacant buildings to increase the supply of housing in response to demand;
- the potential for a separate approach to be taken to the assessment of the Council's listed buildings, some of which were a financial drag on the Council in terms of upkeep and running costs. The Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing confirmed the Council's legal obligations and social value of listed buildings had also to be taken into account as part of the assessment and undertook to investigate a separate approach further;
- the benefits of a partnership approach being taken in relation to investment in listed buildings, specific reference being made to the Council building in Fort William;
- the benefits the strategic asset management approach would bring to community asset transfers by identifying the overall costs associated with each asset;
- the need for a strategic review to be undertaken in relation to the number of void properties in Caithness which impacted on the Council's overall housing performance. It was requested that special consideration be given to Caithness being a pilot area for the strategic asset management approach, and consideration also given to the challenges around garage and garage sites in the area;
- the Chair suggested rather than a pilot, Caithness be prioritised so as not to precede the necessary Committee approvals in relation to development of this approach. He confirmed that he would have further discussions with Mr R Bremner on the successful approach taken in relation to garage and garage sites in Lochaber and the potential in Caithness in this regard;
- the report referred to the need to design and implement a fair and equitable approach going forward to enable better governance and control over the Council's investment needs for its buildings. A holistic approach across the Corporate entity was therefore required before prioritising any particular area,

and in terms of Caithness, it had to be first demonstrated a special focus on this area would best benefit the Council as opposed to other areas;

- an assurance was provided that the need for a strategic review of the void housing stock in Caithness formed part of the wider development plan considerations in the area;
- the opportunities to use garage and garage sites flexibly including the potential to generate income for the Council; and
- clarification was sought and provided that the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing had overall responsibility for the ongoing management and delivery of capital projects, with specific reference to schools.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report and commented accordingly;
- ii. **AGREED** the principle that decisions in relation to the future investment needs of Council buildings generally should be informed by the principles set out within the report and summarised in sections 5.4 and 5.8; and
- iii. **AGREED** the more detailed scoping out of a formal policy and Asset Management Strategy for further discussion and development, and for reporting to, and approval from, future Housing and Property Committees.

5. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais

Declarations of Interest:- Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau 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 L Fraser declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds he undertook work 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 him from taking part in the discussion on the basis this work was so remote and minor it would not impinge on his work on the Committee.

There had been circulated Report No HP/07/20 dated 20 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing.

In discussion, Members conveyed their thanks to Council's Housing staff for their hard work and commitment in dealing with the challenges during the Covid-19 period both timeously and professionally and for helping the most vulnerable customers.

Thereafter, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Service's staff be commended on the level of performance achieved during the emergency period and on the volume and speed of the emergency repairs completed;
- concern at the impact of the national moratorium on evictions being lifted and the importance of discussions continuing with mortgage lenders and other RSLs on this issue given the burden which might fall on the Council given its statutory obligations around homelessness. It was confirmed that an announcement extending the national moratorium was anticipated, the details of which the Head of Housing would share with Members. There were also national measures to

increase the duty of prevention for landlords and mortgage lenders and the impacts would continue to be kept under review;

- in relation to the Capital Programme, it was confirmed the grant income received from the Scottish Government applied to the Council house building programme. The Head of Housing advised that he was unaware of any clawback of this grant, and would discuss this matter further with the Head of Development and Regeneration and respond directly to Mr D Loudon on this issue;
- the importance of tracking universal credit and other rent arrears, particularly given the economic outlook going forward, and undertaking modelling on the potential impacts on the HRA;
- the potential for a report to be presented to the Recovery Board on the basis there was a need to include within the Council's Recovery Plan, the additional pressures that might be placed on the available accommodation arising from increased homelessness due the economic impacts of the pandemic;
- an increase in mental health issues had been observed during Covid-19 and the potential to organise a joint seminar on mental health in conjunction with the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee and NHS Highland to consider holistic solutions; and
- clarification was sought in relation to performance on aids and adaptations prior to lockdown and as to whether currently only emergency cases were being considered. The Head of Housing advised that he would discuss any specific concerns with Miss J Campbell outwith the meeting, noting that during lockdown many clients requiring works had been in the shielding category.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020;
- ii. work that had been undertaken to continue priority housing services during the Covid-19 emergency; and
- iii. initial impact of the emergency on key housing indicators and the challenges likely to be faced during the recovery phase.

The Committee **AGREED** that the potential to organise a joint seminar on mental health in conjunction with the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee and NHS Highland be explored.

6. Homelessness and Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan Dith Dachaigh: Plana Eadar-ghluasaid airson Gluasad Grad gu Taigh Ùr

Declarations of Interest:- Mr A Christie as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau, and Mrs A Maclean as a Director of Ross-shire Women's Aid declared non-financial interests in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HP/08/20 dated 30 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern at the prioritisation of rapid rehousing applicants over other housing needs groups, including those with medical issues, particularly in rural areas;
- there was a need to capture the financial implications to the Council of delivering the policy changes set out in the report. It was confirmed that once Scottish Government funding ceased, it was anticipated the costs would have to be mainstreamed in core budgets and that further information would be brought to Members on the budget issues;
- concern at issues of antisocial behaviour in relation to the ability of some clients with multiple/complex needs, mental health, and drugs and alcohol issues to successfully sustain a tenancy and act as good neighbours;
- the potential for the Council tenants to be consulted in relation to the policy changes going forward;
- further information be provided on how the shared tenancy scheme worked in practice. It was confirmed that Members would be circulated with a briefing note on the scheme;
- confirmation was sought and provided that while there might have been some slippage on the Council building programme due to the shutdown in building works, it was anticipated that overall the programme would be delivered;
- the proposed changes to the local connection test and referral arrangements might result in an increase in homeless presentations to Highland and the Scottish Government be asked for additional funding given the lack of accommodation in some areas to meet demand. It was explained a key issue was that housing pressures and therefore the potential impact on sitting tenants was different across the Highlands, and this added complexity in addressing the policy changes;
- the potential to include an additional column in the action plan on risks and consequences in response to the concerns being expressed by Members. An assurance was provided that the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan actively sought to manage those risks; and
- future reports on homelessness cover the main policy and financial implications associated with the changes set out in the report, noting that some policy reviews had commenced.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. **NOTED** progress on the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan;
- ii. **NOTED** the implications for the Council in respect of the extended Unsuitable Accommodation Order due to come into force in October 2020;
- iii. **NOTED** the recommendations arising from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group;
- iv. **AGREED** that future reports on homelessness to the Committee cover the main policy and financial implications associated with the changes set out in the report; and
- v. **AGREED** that Members be circulated with a briefing paper on the shared tenancy scheme.

7. **Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2021/22** **Prògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No HP/09/20 dated 30 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

In discussion, confirmation was sought and provided that there was a rigorous liaison process with tenants to ensure access for works, and that arrangements were made to include in future projects any properties where there had been opt out from a previous contract. In addition, it was confirmed that reports would be submitted to Area Committees prior to the Committee making decisions on the capital programme.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** a one-year HRA Capital Programme for housing stock improvements of £15.667m for 2021/22
- ii. **NOTED** that further work was taking place to develop the next 5-year HRA Capital Plan;
- iii. **NOTED** that reports would be presented to local Members seeking approval for 2021/22 capital projects; and
- iv. **NOTED** that Capital Monitoring Reports would continue to be provided to report on progress.

The meeting ended at 1.00pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 19 August 2020 at 11.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Bremner (Substitute)	Mr D MacLeod
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Gale	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr J Gordon	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Henderson (Chair)	Mr I Ramon
Mr B Lobban	Mr A Rhind
Mrs L MacDonald	Mrs T Robertson

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mrs A MacLean
Mr B Boyd	Mrs B McAllister
Mrs I Campbell	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Christie	Mr C Munro
Mrs M Davidson	Ms N Sinclair
Mr D Mackay	Ms M Smith
Mr W MacKay	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Also in attendance:

Ch Supt G Macdonald, Police Scotland
Mr D Wilson, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr C Fraser, Mr R MacWilliam and Ms P Munro.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 4i – Mr A Baxter (non-financial)

Item 8 – Mr D Macpherson (financial)

Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest as Chair of HITRANS. However, it was not anticipated that there would be any discussion in that regard.

3. Presentation: Burial Ground Maintenance Taisbeanadh: Cumail Suas Chladhan

Local Members, Councillors Raymond Bremner and Willie MacKay, and John Mackay, Amenity Services Manager, gave a presentation describing the work of volunteers in maintaining burial grounds in Caithness, the difference it had made locally, the assistance from the Council and how else the Council could support this community action.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed the presentation and commended all those involved in the initiative, which was a good news story;
- reference was made to volunteering work in other areas – eg Dingwall Men’s Shed, Dingwall in Bloom and Muir of Ord Cemetery. However, the extent of the work in Caithness was truly outstanding and Members asked that their appreciation be passed on to the volunteers;
- there was a lot of work to be done in other cemeteries and it was suggested that the presentation be circulated to Members so they could share it with their local communities with a view to establishing similar initiatives throughout Highland. It was confirmed that the presentation would be modified to a more suitable format and shared with Members;
- there had been a change in mindset over the past year, with the Council and community groups working much more closely together because resources were scarce, and officers enabling groups to do work in cemeteries that they had not been able to do before, which had made a huge difference;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the provision and maintenance of equipment and whether community groups that carried out substantial works had to carry out risk assessments;
- reference was made to local landowners and businesses providing their services/equipment free of charge, not only in Caithness but in other areas, and the need to continue to work collaboratively was emphasised. If local people saw that volunteers were carrying out the work they were more likely to come forward, rather than viewing it as the Council’s job, and see the community spirit and joy that the volunteers were getting from improving their community;
- the presentation should also be shared with every Community Council in Highland;
- the difference in the before and after photographs of the cemeteries in Caithness was transformational;
- the value of the third sector was emphasised, and it was also necessary to harness the voluntary sector and community volunteers;
- the initiative was localism in action, and it was necessary to find a mechanism to roll it out to other communities because they would embrace it; and

- grounds maintenance staff had a challenging role given the limitations in terms of both equipment and time resource, and the collaborative working in Caithness had allowed them to achieve what they had not been able to achieve in a long time.

The Chair having thanked those involved for the presentation, which highlighted the valuable work of volunteers and tied in with the work being undertaken by him, the Council Leader and the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place to support more joint working, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the presentation;
- AGREED** that the presentation be edited to enable further dissemination to Members and for local use; and
- AGREED** that the learning from the experience in Caithness would inform future approaches to supporting voluntary effort and joint working with the Council.

4. Supporting Community Involvement

A' Cur Taic ri Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd

- Community Asset Transfer Requests and Annual Community Asset Transfer Reporting to the Scottish Government**
Iarrtasan Gluasad So-mhain Coimhearsnachd agus Aithris Bhliadhnail Gluasad So-mhain Coimhearsnachd do Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Baxter declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Trustee of Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust and confirmed that he would take no part in any specific discussion regarding Ardnamurchan Lighthouse.

Mr B Lobban explained that, whilst he was a Member of the Northern Lighthouse Trust, Ardnamurchan Lighthouse was no longer owned by the Trust.

There is circulated Report No CP/05/20 dated 21 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In discussion, Members sought updates on specific projects, namely, the Cemetery Car Park Toilets at Gairloch, the tennis courts and pavilion at Kingussie and the Dingwall Men's Shed. In addition, in relation to whether or not the legal costs incurred were prohibitive, it was pointed out that Groups could often apply for support to cover this from sources such as the Scottish Land Fund.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- the sale of Acharacle Community Centre to Acharacle Community Company for £30,000, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.1 of the report;
- the sale of land at the former Torvean Golf Course, Inverness to Inverness Rowing Club for £1, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.2 of the report;

- iii. the sale of land and buildings at Rosebank Playing Fields and Pavilion to Wick Community Hub for £1, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 3.3 of the report;
- iv. the variation of the terms of the economic development burden within the previously agreed asset transfer of Ardnamurchan Lighthouse to Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust limiting it to 5 years in length, reflecting the level of discount applied to this decision;
- v. that the Chair of the Committee write to the Scottish Government seeking clarity on the use of economic development burdens to safeguard the discounts given to communities in community asset transfers and how the duty on Local Authorities sat alongside the requirements of bodies such as the Scottish Land Fund; and
- vi. the annual report on Community Asset Transfer for the Scottish Government set out at Appendix 1 of the report.

**ii. Developing a Framework for Participation and Involvement
A' Leasachadh Frèam airson Com-pàirteachas**

There had been circulated Report No CP/06/20 dated 3 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The summary which was to be provided to the Scottish Government of the lessons learnt and local experiences during the Covid-19 period was welcomed. However, it was important to recognise not only the impact the pandemic had had but the impact of lockdown. If a second spike occurred there would quite likely be another lockdown but it would be of a very different nature and it was important to communicate what Highland's perspective on that was. The Black Isle Partnership was carrying out its own survey looking at what should be done next and what the priorities would be, and this too could be fed back as part of the process. Turning to procurement for large projects that were pan-Highland, it was requested that a local delivery approach be considered, given that this encouraged local employment and individuals to take more pride in their local environment.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the context and the aim to utilise the learning from the covid-19 period to develop an ongoing framework for participation and involvement with communities;
- ii. **AGREED** the engagement framework outlined at Appendix 1 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** the learning gathered to date from early engagement with community bodies as set out in Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iv. **NOTED** the next steps and that an update report on outcomes from the various engagement strands would be presented to the next meeting of the Communities and Place Committee.

**5. Communities and Place Service Response to Covid-19
Freagairt Seirbheis nan Coimhearsnachdan is nan Àiteachan do Covid-19**

There had been circulated Report No CP/07/20 dated 10 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Chairman praised staff on how they had changed and adapted to ensure services continued, and the experience they had gained would, should a second wave of Covid-19 hit Highland, stand them in good stead. In response to the introduction provided by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place, it was questioned when the Gairloch Service Point would re-open, as the recruitment process had been stalled as a result of the pandemic. The Executive Chief Officer undertook to provide an update to the Local Member concerned.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED**:-

- i. the covid projects led in the service on running helplines, humanitarian assistance, working with community bodies, additional deaths planning, advice and support to business on complying with coronavirus regulations, and the Test and Protect programme;
- ii. covid pressures experienced in the service relating to resources, logistical support and uncontrolled camping;
- iii. the service disruption and adjustments made so far affecting the registrar service, service points and the service centre, grounds maintenance, bereavement services, public conveniences, waste and street cleaning services, environmental health services, stores and logistics and fleet;
- iv. the positive and challenging aspects of our covid response fed back from staff and the learning points for service design and development;
- v. the service's contribution to the Council's Recovery Plan with two separate reports on the Committee agenda for the community engagement workstream. Work was underway on the workforce planning and service redesign workstreams and this would include the lessons so far from our covid response.

**6. Performance against the Highland Local Policing Plan 2017-20
Coileanadh mu Choinneamh Plana Poileasachd Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd 2017-20**

Under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, the Local Authority has responsibility for monitoring and scrutinising performance of Police Scotland against the Local Policing Plan for their area. Each Local Plan must be approved by the Local Authority and reviewed every three years.

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/20 dated 1 August 2020 by the Highland Local Policing Commander, Chief Superintendent George Macdonald.

Following a summary by Chief Superintendent Macdonald, the following issues were raised in relation to the local performance report for the period April 2019 to March 2020:-

- reckless driving appeared to have increased since lockdown, and it was queried whether Operation Cedar was having an impact and whether members of the public should report the car registration number when they witnessed an incident;
- in relation to Operation Close Pass, the number of cyclists had increased significantly and concern was expressed that motorists did not give them the space they needed. In addition, it was queried whether there was some form of signage that could be used to encourage cyclists to use passing places to allow motorists to pass safely on single track roads;

- it was queried whether Police Scotland did anything to mark Missing Children's Day. In addition, reference was made to a presentation in 2017 when it had been reported that there had been 31 cases of missing persons in one weekend. Discussion had taken place on the associated pressure on Police resources, and an update was sought in that regard;
- the need for ongoing patrols on the North Coast 500 route was emphasised, and it was questioned why there was no reference to this in the report;
- it having been confirmed that there was a police presence in Inverness Town House, it was suggested that this should be customer facing as the offices on Burnett Road were not in the city centre;
- the strides that had been made in relation to the licensed trade, the work that had taken place to improve safety in Inverness city centre, and the national crime work taking place were commended;
- information was sought on the estimated cost to the Police and the public purse of a road traffic fatality. It was hoped that putting a figure on it would prompt the provision of resources from central government for measures such as speed cameras, better education and working with newly qualified drivers; and
- in relation to housebreaking, it was queried whether thieves were targeting specific items so that occupants knew what to be on guard for.

Chief Superintendent Macdonald responded in detail to the points raised, during which it was explained that Missing Children's Day might not have been marked this year due to the pandemic. However, he undertook to check the position and maximise opportunities for publicity going forward.

He went on to summarise the Local Police Plan 2020-23 (the Plan), as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, highlighting that it was a live document that could be updated. He referred to the issue of antisocial/irresponsible camping that had emerged in recent months due to circumstances linked to Covid and suggested this might be something that ought to feed into the Plan. He emphasised the need for partners to support each other and implement work to prevent such behaviour by what was a disappointing minority.

The Chair welcomed Chief Superintendent Macdonald raising the issue and suggested that it be included under the heading of environmental crime.

During further discussion on the Local Police Plan 2020-23, the following issues were raised:-

- people felt secure knowing that there was a Police Station in their area even if it was not manned full-time, and it was hoped that the stations listed in the Plan would remain; and
- it was a great economic driver to have low crime and high detected crime, and thanks were expressed to Chief Superintendent Macdonald and his colleagues for making Highland a safe place.

Chief Superintendent thanked Members for their support and robust and fair scrutiny during his time as Divisional Commander. He confirmed that the points raised would be captured and fed back to the new Divisional Commander, Conrad Trickett, and that an action plan would be put in place.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the local performance report against Highland Policing Plan Objectives April 2019 - March 2020; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the Highland 2020-2023 Policing Plan with the inclusion of local resilience planning with partners, including a continuing response to Covid-19 and, under the priority of antisocial behaviour, violence and disorder, action to deal with irresponsible camping and environmental protection.

7. Local Fire and Rescue Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Smàladh agus Teasairginn Ionadail

Under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, the Local Authority has responsibility for monitoring and scrutinising performance of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service against the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for their area. Each Local Plan must be approved by the Local Authority and reviewed every three years.

i. Performance against the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Highland 2017-2020 Coileanadh mu choinneamh Plana Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd 2017-2020

On behalf of the Local Senior Officer for Highland, Derek Wilson, there had been circulated the Local Performance Report for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2019 to March 2020.

Following a summary by the Local Senior Officer, the following issues were raised:-

- the home fire safety visit scheme was commended. However, concern was expressed that people might not ask for a home visit at present because of Covid;
- it was surprising that there had only been a reduction in false alarms in two areas, and it would be good to see a reduction in all areas;
- in relation to station availability, the figures of 96% (Dingwall 1st Appliance) and 74% (Dingwall 2nd Appliance) were welcomed;
- it having been noted that there were only 16 female firefighters in Ross and Cromarty as a whole and none in Dingwall, it was queried whether efforts were still being made to recruit females;
- reference having been made to the Grenfell Tower disaster, an assurance was sought that residents in multi-storey flats in Highland could feel safe and confident that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had the necessary equipment and resources to tackle a fire;
- in relation to deliberate fire setting, it was important to educate communities about the risks and the cost to the public purse, and the work being done in that regard was welcomed;
- reference was made to a recent fire in the Inverness South Ward, and the speed at which firefighters had been able to tackle it, thanks to their training, and prevent it spreading further;
- the immediate response to the major fire at Park Primary School in Invergordon and the fact that all teachers and pupils had been evacuated safely was commended;

- concern was expressed regarding fire and safety hazards in poor quality housing in some areas of Inverness – eg pre-war stairways made of flammable materials/dry wood, jammed doors, and cardboard boxes/old newspapers stored on stairways. Reference was also made to more modern flats where residents had wedged open fire doors, and it was requested that these matters be looked into;
- in relation to station availability and staff levels in Sutherland, there had previously been a policy in place in Lochinver whereby applicants could live 15/20 minutes away, as opposed to the usual 5 minutes, as this was still quicker than an appliance coming from Scourie or Achiltibuie. It was queried whether this policy was still in place as it would increase the chances of recruiting, staffing levels being low in both Lochinver and Tongue;
- Members paid their respects to former Station Commander, Derek Wilkie, and welcomed the tribute provided by his colleagues in the form of a guard of honour.

The Local Senior Officer having responded to the points raised, the Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Local Performance Report for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2019 to March 2020.

ii. **Review of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan** **Ath-sgrùdadh air Plana Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn Ionadail**

On behalf of the Local Senior Officer for Highland, Derek Wilson, there had been circulated the Local Fire and Rescue Plan Review 2020.

The Chair expressed his appreciation to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the work they did throughout the Highlands

The Local Senior Officer having confirmed that if Members had any comments following the meeting he would be happy to receive them by phone or email, the Committee **NOTED** the review of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan.

8. **Waste Disposal Strategy Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Ro-innleachd Cuidhteachadh Sgudail**

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Macpherson declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds that a relative owned one of the potential sites in Fort William, and confirmed that he would take no part in any discussion on that particular matter.

i. **Waste Projects Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Sgudail**

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/20 dated 11 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was questioned, when the original deadline banning sending biodegradable waste to landfill had been January 2021, why a feasibility

study on an Energy from Waste (EfW) was only now being undertaken. In response, it was pointed out that since March 2017, following a Redesign decision, a considerable amount of work had taken place in terms of identifying potential site, planning concerns etc;

- the EfW issue should be separated out from the matter of Waste Transfer Stations;
- it was queried if the tender for the Inverness Transfer Station incorporated a facility to feed directly into a EfW plant; and
- there was potential for an EfW plant to produce hydrogen and it was confirmed that all technologies, at this stage, were being considered.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the potential changes over the next five years arising from legislation and regulations as set out in Appendix 1;
- ii. that work had been tendered for the development of a new waste transfer station in Inverness and a further tender was expected to be issued this month for a new transfer station in Aviemore. A preferred site was being identified for the new transfer station in Fort William;
- iii. that the review of the capital programme priorities would consider waste infrastructure requirements alongside other capital projects;
- iv. that contract renewals or extensions were underway with three confirmed to date and within budget tolerance and provision;
- v. the feedback from consultants on the feasibility of an EfW plant in Inverness as summarised in Appendix 2 and as presented in Appendix 3;
- vi. that there were considerable preparatory works underway and required before the Council could take a decision on whether to proceed with an EfW facility, with current tasks to identify any wider socio-economic benefits and to understand grid connections and possibilities for the supply of energy generated; and
- vii. that updates would continue to be provided to future meetings of the Waste Strategy Working Group and to each meeting of this Committee.

**ii. Minutes of Waste Strategy Working Group
Geàrr-chunntas Buidheann-obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

The Committee **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 7 August 2020.

**9. Bereavement services update and the approach to Burial Ground Extensions
Cunntas às Ùr mu sheirbheisean call neach-gaoil agus dòigh-obrach a thaobh Leudachadh Chladhan**

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/20 dated 10 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the responsibility for gravestones which were in poor condition was queried;
- the capacity of Kishorn Burial Ground was causing concern locally and, while calculations suggested that it had some time yet before it was full, the situation on the ground suggested otherwise;

- the cost of upkeep and maintenance of burial grounds relative to the income received was questioned, and whether or not it was possible for this to be broken down for each burial ground and the crematorium;
- a tightening up of burial ground management rules was called for, especially around ornamentation which quite often hindered maintenance, grass cutting etc;
- the local meetings held in Caithness and Sutherland where burial grounds had been given a RAG rating had been well received;
- in some grounds SEPA had placed a 10 burials per year limit and the reasons were sought, and provided;
- it was questioned if the Council had the option of Compulsory Purchase Order for burial ground extensions. In response, it was confirmed that this option was available but only when other options had been exhausted;
- there was an increase in the number of home burials now taking place;
- it was queried if there were regional variations around the number of those attending funerals; and
- burial grounds played an important part in the Highland culture, particularly for the diaspora who were researching their genealogy, and it was therefore important they were well accessible and maintained.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the new infrastructure project established to reduce the risks around burial ground capacity, with 33 out of 268 burial grounds with an estimated capacity of less than 6 years;
- ii. **NOTED** the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development and the project mitigation in place;
- iii. **AGREED** that an annual report be presented for each Area Committee beginning in 2021 to allow monitoring of burial ground capacities and extensions proposed for each area;
- iv. **NOTED** the 5-year rolling programme of inspection planned for all memorials;
- v. **NOTED** the Lean review of burials administration would be reported to the Redesign Board on 1 September and the progress against all audit actions would be reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 24 September 2020;
- vi. **NOTED** the scope of the CMA investigation, that a provisional decision report was expected this month before the investigation concluded in March 2021 and that the implications of the provisional decision on the Council would be assessed and reported to Members;
- vii. **NOTED** the additional deaths planning undertaken for the Council's covid response; and
- viii. **AGREED** to bring back a report to the next meeting of the Committee on the review of Highland Council's cemetery (and crematorium) management rules.

10. Communities and Place Revenue Monitoring Report to 30 June 2020 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/20 dated 10 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

An application for funding had been made to the Scottish Government to help meet the costs of dealing with tourism related waste and it was queried if there was scope to use this to provide incentives so the Highland Comfort Scheme could be expanded. Unfortunately, to date, no response had been received as to the level of funding which

would be provided but Members would be kept informed of any developments. Whilst an expansion of the Comfort Scheme would be welcomed, this year, as a result of Covid-19, there was a reluctance by some existing operators to open.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the more detailed reporting of gross income and gross expenditure to improve scrutiny of net budgets as set out in the appendices to the report;
- ii. net spend at the end of quarter 1 totalled £9.389m;
- iii. based on the best available information to date, a service budget gap of £4.84m was forecast to end 2020/21;
- iv. almost every area of service relied on income to pay for services and this had been significantly disrupted this year because of covid impacts. A loss of income was the key driver of the service's budget gap;
- v. the budget gap might change positively or negatively depending on the application of expenditure and recruitment controls, adjusting services to meet budget savings agreed, in-year income recovery, identifying new income and procurement opportunities, drawing down any further Government grant support and any new recovery costs emerging; and
- vi. further adjustments would be made in future quarterly reporting to reflect the updated apportionment of costs and savings across the new Executive Chief Officer structure, improved monthly profiling of income and expenditure and any other resourcing issues emerging including Brexit impacts.

11. Approach to developing and improving customer and citizen contact and relationships

Dòigh-obrach do bhith a' leasachadh conaltradh is dàimhean le luchd-ceannaich is saoranaich

There had been circulated Report No CP/12/20 dated 11 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to the timescales within which Members could expect a response from officers, without the need to chase up, it was also queried if there was scope to consider the provision of casework software which could be used on tablets and smartphones, similar to that provided by other local authorities, to enable Members to report issues more expeditiously. This could take the form of a stand-alone app as opposed to something integrated to the Members' portal. In this regard, Member involvement in the development team was requested to help guide the selection of software;
- constructive criticism was to be welcomed;
- making information more easily accessible would cut down the number of Freedom of Information requests;
- the potential savings, improvement to services, increased customer satisfaction and management information which could be generated were considerable; and
- it was queried what criteria were used to determine if a Freedom of Information request was vexatious and/or unreasonable.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** current volumes of customer contacts, enquiries, complaints and FOI requests. The service centre handled over 240,000 calls annually and 2019/20 records showed services responded to 51,388 enquiries, 1725 complaints, 1840 FOI enquiries and subject access requests and 836 MSP/MP enquiries;
- ii. **NOTED** current under-performance in responding within timescales set, as shown in Table 2, and the need for improvement;
- iii. **AGREED** the approach to change and improvement as set out in section 6 of the report. This included reviewing the resourcing, cultural, process and systems changes needed with a view to:
 - a. making it easy for people to resolve enquires themselves using various internet and telephony methods;
 - b. where staff support is needed we resolve issues at the first point of contact wherever possible;
 - c. taking more care of people who need more support to access services;
 - d. dealing with written complaints and enquiries on time and courteously;
 - e. making it easier for Members to report constituent queries and track their progress;
 - f. valuing all contact as vital business intelligence. This will help us to understand how our operations need to respond and how we improve our communications and messaging. This means analysing the volume and nature of contacts and whether there are any patterns by place. This will help plan interventions; and
 - g. supporting staff to comply with timescales, help remove blockages and provide appropriate training, processes and systems; and
- iv. **NOTED** the work underway to identify a suitable replacement for the current Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, with a business case in preparation and to be subject to normal governance arrangements.

The meeting concluded at 5.10 pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Thursday, 20 August 2020 at 10 am.

Present:

Mr M Finlayson
Mr D Louden
Ms P Munro
Mr A Rhind

Ms F Robertson (**in the Chair**)
Ms M Smith
Mrs C Wilson

Officials in Attendance:

Alison Clark, Head of Policy
Nicky Grant, Head of Education Services
Derek Martin, Education and Learning Manager
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator
Andy McCann, Economy & Regeneration Manager
Carron McDiarmid, ECO Communities and Place
John Mackay, Amenities Services Manager
Iain Moncreiff, Roads Operation Manager
Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER

Also in Attendance:

Maria Dickson, NHS Highland
Rhona Fraser, Head of Strengthening Communities and Regional Development, HIE
Alex McKinley, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Maureen Ross, Seaboard Memorial Hall
Inspector Joanne Thomson, Police Scotland

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

1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

There were none.

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

The Chair summarised the tremendous and timely response to the Covid crisis from Highland Council staff, local community groups and individuals, NHS and

Highlands and Island Enterprise staff, businesses and other groups, and volunteers. Gratitude was expressed to all on behalf of the Committee.

Presentations were provided as follows:

Helen Ross, Highland Council

The set up of humanitarian assistance centres to support key groups within the community who would be vulnerable to Covid was explained. A summary was provided of the various Covid response activities and types of support that had been and continued to be offered. Key areas of learning were outlined, as were funding issues and next steps.

Andy McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager

Information was provided on business grants and the economy.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- Members praised the outstanding work of the business grants team which had performed well within a national context;
- some Covid-related support such as the helpline, remained in place, but the focus was moving back towards the usual work of the service such as business gateway and employability;
- information was sought on when further business support funds might be available to help the tourism and other businesses that would struggle during the coming winter months. While detail on further funding was awaited, it was explained that work was being undertaken to ensure a multi-agency approach to coordinate responses, and a business support workshop was intended for all partners to help facilitate this;
- it was pointed out that the business grants of £10k for smaller organisations and £25k for larger ones were not always equitable as sometimes the smaller organisations employed more staff than larger ones, and that there had been inconsistencies in evidence requirements for grants. It was explained that in an evolving situation different schemes had employed different criteria and the associated evidence requirements had become more scheme specific as time went on;
- information was sought on UK and Scottish government loan schemes, and it was hoped the forthcoming multi-agency workshop that was planned would help to bring information and initiatives together to ensure businesses were able to source the help that was available; and
- with Covid and Brexit affecting the economy, it was important to both support business start-ups and growing businesses.

Maureen Ross, Seaboard Memorial Hall

Full details were provided on the activities and support provided to the local community by volunteers, funding agencies and local businesses, with the organisation having become a hub for wider collaboration. Key activities had been support for foodbanks and the provision of meals on wheels

The Chair thanked Maureen Ross for her presentation and all the volunteers for their considerable efforts to help vulnerable people during lockdown.

Cllr Pauline Munro on the Cromarty Firth ward community response

Full details were provided on the provision of meals to vulnerable members of the community during lockdown, including information on funding sources and expenditure, and plans for the future.

Members thanked all the local volunteers who had helped with food preparation and distribution.

Rhona Fraser, HIE, on the support offered to community groups

Information was provided in relation to the Scottish Community Grant Fund, with examples of positive joint work which had been undertaken with various anchor organisations throughout the area (with four being in the Easter Ross area), and work being undertaken with the Scottish Government on possible funds for the future. Details of the work surrounding the Pivotal Enterprise Fund were also provided.

Maria Dickson, Area Manager, NHS Highland

A summary was provided of Covid activity in Easter Ross, particularly at Invergordon Hospital, and the importance of avoiding complacency in relation to preventative measures. NHSH staff were praised for their work during the crisis although staff absence rates, due to shielding or symptomatic staff, had been challenging. Issues in care homes had also been challenging, especially for example, reduced visiting. Public Health work was ongoing.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- information was sought on the number of tests being undertaken and while that was not available at the meeting, it was explained that testing for staff was being undertaken regularly, especially in care homes, and that the Highlands were performing well compared to other areas of the UK;
- it was hoped that visitors from outwith the area did not bring the virus with them and it was acknowledged that although track and trace was being undertaken, it was open to abuse with people leaving false contact details;
- NHSH was thanked on behalf of the Highland Council for their response to the crisis;
- some older people would emerge from the crisis healthier and safer, having come to the attention of public bodies or community groups able to help them; and
- food security and mental health were key learning points for any future pandemic.

The Committee thanked the presenters and **NOTED** the presentations.

4. Police – Area Performance Summary Report Poileas – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/07/20 dated 10 August 2020 by the Chief Inspector Jamie Wilson, Area Commander.

During discussion, information was sought on changes to regulations and procedures in recent months and it was explained that although the day to day

business was similar, there were higher levels of calls on environmental health type issues related to visitors, for example camping in appropriate places or leaving litter behind. Members thanked police officers for their efforts during the Covid crisis, and also for recent successful drug seizures.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the full reporting year Apr 19 - March 20 for Ross and Cromarty with Easter Ross where available; and
- ii. Q1 of 20/21 with Easter Ross where available.

5. Fire – Area Performance Summary Report Smàladh – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/08/20 by the Group Commander – Service Delivery, Highland North, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.

Attention was drawn to the reduction in dwelling fires in the area to nil, which went against the general Covid trend, with more people at home for longer periods of time than normal, and to the reduction in road traffic collisions, which was likely as a result of travel restrictions.

There had been a reduction in staffing levels in Balintore station, although it was explained there was no fixed volunteer rate and that availability rates for existing volunteers was good. Support from Members for volunteer recruitment efforts was sought, when talking to communities or through social media or other means of publicity, noting that both male and female volunteers were sought.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance report for quarter one 2020-21.

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

There was a verbal update from the Head of Education Services and the Area Education and Learning Manager on the plans and preparations for schools reopening.

The following issues were covered during the update:

- Schools had reopened fully from 18 August 2020, with a focus on health and wellbeing, and plans were in place for children with special needs;
- Transport, cleaning and catering issues were summarised;
- Schools were meeting the statutory requirement to provide free drinking water, when many water fountains were out of use due to Covid;
- SQA results were summarised, with early indications that the three secondary schools in the area had performed well compared to the previous year;
- A community health and safety survey was planned on 24 August 2020 with a two week completion window;
- Details were provided of positive lessons learned during the reopening of schools for pupils, parents and teachers; and

- Challenges for the future were summarised, with communication and building authentic relationships being key.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- Members thanked Education staff for resolving promptly any issues that had arisen following the reopening of schools;
- concern was expressed about possible overcrowding on public buses used by school pupils and the Education and Learning Manager would check this with the Transport Manager then inform Mike Finlayson;
- concern had been expressed by a parent group about the possible lack of free drinking water in school and it was clarified that all schools would meet their statutory requirement to provide free drinking water, although this was being undertaken by different means in different schools, the usual water fountains being out of use due to Covid-related hygiene concerns; and
- information was sought and provided on work being undertaken to improve and expand the playground at Invergordon Academy.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and **AGREED** the Education and Learning Manager would provide Mike Finlayson with any information about issues relating to the use of public buses by school children.

7. Road Maintenance Up-Date - April to July 2020 Cunntas às Ùr mu Chàradh Rathaidean – Giblean gu Iuchar 2020

There had been circulated Report No ERA/09/20 dated 7 August 2020 by Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, information was sought on current pothole repair activity and concern was expressed at the lack of manpower to undertake work such as filling potholes, emptying gullies, and verge cutting. It was felt that Easter Ross had suffered disproportionately from staff absence as a result of Covid shielding requirements and attention was drawn to other Areas of the Council which appeared to have more human resources and therefore less of a problem with outstanding work. Volunteers were assisting with some work but it was felt unfair to ask more of them. It was acknowledged that the budget situation was challenging with little prospect of increased resources, and that some communities benefited from external funds, such as community benefit from windfarms. Members also suggested that the problem was not lack of funds but the use to which the budget was put and further information was sought on the allocation of the roads budget across the Highlands. The ECO Communities and Place summarised the difficult budget situation and explained the Council had agreed the allocation method, which was a political decision, not one that officers could amend. Creative solutions were required to make the best use of the budget available and in relation to grounds maintenance, work was planned to engage more volunteers through a new programme of support to be developed. It was suggested that a monthly meeting with operational managers and Members would help to understand pressures better and to identify new potential solutions. The Chair offered to discuss the possibility of the roads budget allocation review with the Council leadership. It was pointed out that other Areas also felt they did not receive a fair allocation of the roads budget. In relation to

workforce resources, which might be affected by historic patterns and impacts of the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme, attention was drawn to a review currently being undertaken by the ECOs to map staff resources, this being due for completion by the end of September 2020, as part of the workforce planning agreed as part of the Council's Recovery Plan. Further information would be shared with Members when it was available.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** a summary of the responses from the Roads Operation Manager would be emailed to Members outwith the meeting due to technical difficulties with his connection to the meeting.

8. Amenities Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Ghoireasan

There had been circulated Report No ERA/10/20 dated 4 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

Members welcomed the work that had been undertaken to date and praised the Service's communication with Members and the community. Concern was expressed about illegal dumping of waste and who to contact about this, and about other Service issues.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the information provided in this report on the Amenity Service update on the response to the Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown;
- ii. that disruption to the service would continue for the rest of the season;

and **AGREED** that a list of Service contacts be provided to Members.

9. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/11/20 dated 31 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the Quarter 1 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund; and
- ii. the current position in relation to the Invergordon Town Hall.

10. Tain Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich

There had been circulated Report No ERA/12/20 dated 4 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance, and Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 1 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund.

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 20 February 2020.

The meeting ended at 1.26pm

**The Highland Council
Corporate Resources Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 20 August 2020 at 1.00pm.

Present:

Mr R Bremner	Mr B Lobban
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Louden
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr S Mackie
Mr A Christie (substitute)	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:

Mrs J Barclay	Mr C Munro
Mr A Baxter	Mrs P Munro
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs L Munro
Mr K Gowans	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Henderson	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie
Ms E Knox	Mr B Thomson
Mr J McGillivray	

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 A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Transformation
 Mr E Foster, Head of Finance and Commercialism, Resources and Finance
 Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources and Finance
 Mr B Porter, Head of Support Services, Education and Learning
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms M Zavarella, Clerical Assistant, Performance and Governance

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

Business

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair thanked Members for their understanding in relation to the cancellation of the scheduled meeting of the Committee, due to the IT issues experienced as a result of storms. He expressed relief that there had been no damage in the area.

The Chair then advised that the thoughts of the Committee were with the families of those who had lost their lives as a result of the train derailment in Stonehaven.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs C Caddick.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 4 – Mr B Thompson, Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie (non-financial)

Item 8 – Mr P Sagers and Mr A Christie (non-financial)

3. Corporate Resources Budget Sub-Committee Buidheann Ath-shlànachaidh Buidseit

There had been circulated Report No RES/14/20 dated 30 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

In discussion, concern was expressed at the proposal that meetings of the Sub-Committee would be held in private. It was appreciated that certain items required to be held in private but in the interests of the wider community it was felt that meetings should be held in public unless there were good reasons to agree otherwise. Therefore, an amendment was proposed to recommendation 4 set out in the report, removing the words '*to be held in private*'.

The Chair advised that meetings of the Sub-Committee were open to all Members of the Council. He was not in favour of any amendments to the recommendations as proposed and that if that was the case, he would ask that this item be recalled and reported back to the next Council meeting.

During further discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern that it was the duty of the Corporate Resources Committee to oversee budget, monitoring and outturn activities across the Council's revenue and capital budgets and in essence the report recommended this be removed from this Committee;
- it was unclear how the Sub-Committee would report to the Corporate Resources Committee and whether Members would have the opportunity to scrutinise the minutes of the Sub-Committee;
- why consideration of future Area Committee budgets could not be done in the open forum of the Corporate Resources Committee;
- concern at the list of those items set out in the report which it was stated should be considered in private;

- there was already a mechanism in place through the Local Government (Scotland) 1973 by which Members were asked on agendas of meetings to decide whether it was appropriate for the reports printed on pink papers to be considered in private. This provided Members the opportunity to challenge and vote accordingly.

The Chair advised that in his opinion and in his dealings as Chair and Budget leader he had been open, honest and transparent. However, in view of the debate he was recalling this item and advised that it would be referred to the Council for consideration.

FINANCIAL MONITORING SGRÙDADH IONMHASAIL

4. Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report to 30 June 2020 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 30 Ògmhios 2020

Declarations of Interest: Mr B Thompson, Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie declared a non-financial interest in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No RES/15/20 dated 4 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Chair thanked the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance and the Head of Finance and Commercialism and their teams for their work over the past few months in relation to the Council's finances. There was a significant degree of uncertainty in relation to the figures set out in the report and because of that officers had provided some different scenarios. The central case was for a budget gap of £28.259m, and it was acknowledged this position could improve as it was hoped additional funding would be received from Scottish Government. These additional funds could significantly reduce the gap, depending on the detail and if they were as substantial as hoped. However, the risk that the position could get worse had to be acknowledged, and a second lockdown had been modelled on that basis. In summary, the gap in the central scenario were reducing from the figures previously reported to the Council and the Committee, however it was important to be mindful as to how significant the risks were going forward. The overall improvement in the position reported to the Council on 30 July 2020, reflected the holistic look across all individual budgets across the Council and impact of management control on these budgets. The figures would continue to be revised based on the Council's spend and income trend data together with any external factors that impact such as funding announcements.

The Head of Finance and Commercialism indicated that the level of reserves should relate to the level of risk faced by the organisation. The Council was currently facing an unprecedented level of risk and therefore he urged caution given that while the reserves had increased, there was a need to consider this in the context of the level of risk which was articulated in the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was testament to the sound financial governance which had been put in place that the reserves had increased to the budgeted level, however the continuing risks and uncertainty of the situation going forward had to be emphasised;

- there was a need for more detailed figures to be provided to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee to allow Members to drill down and consider the opportunities for further savings;
- the realignment of budgets to be progressed to reflect each Executive Chief Officer's area of responsibility;
- the Council would continue to lobby the Scottish and UK Governments in relation to additional funding and the Budget Leader had emailed Ms K Forbes, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, seeking clarification on the income recompense scheme;
- concern at the scale of uncertainty in relation to the income recompense scheme at this stage of the financial year in terms of the Council's financial planning, and the need for all Members to lobby on this issue;
- it was anticipated that the Council would receive some level of recompense in relation to the shortfall to Council Tax and further information was sought on the timescale for this;
- an improving position was being reported in relation to the projected budget shortfalls for both High Life Highland and Eden Court, however these projections were subject to constant change;
- the report was based on the available information at the current time and the financial position would require to be continually updated as new information emerged;
- the increase in the numbers claiming universal credit and also the significant reduction in income levels in Highland compared to the rest of Scotland was sobering;
- the Highlands was particularly exposed in terms of the long-term economic consequences as it was mainly service based with a great dependence on tourism, and therefore the increase in reserves and the cautionary approach being taken was welcomed;
- clarification was sought on the number of staff which had been employed through the Transformation Change Fund, the total cost to the Council and in relation to the allocation of employment costs. It was confirmed that Members would be circulated with more detailed information on the Transformation Change Fund;
- it was surprising the recruitment of a Depute Chief Executive was being progressed at this time and concern that Members had not been aware the post was being advertised. The Chair advised that it was inappropriate to comment on the matter at the present time. However, it was indicated that matters relating to the workforce fell within the Committee's remit in the Scheme of Delegation and therefore questions in relation to the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive were appropriate, and particularly whether this appointment was critical to ensure the safer provision of key Council services;
- the main premise of the senior management restructure agreed in April 2019 was that it was going to generate savings and confirmation was sought on whether there had been an increase in the number of Heads of Service in addition to the appointment of the Executive Chief Officers. In addition, concern was expressed at the level of the severance payments to senior management detailed in the Annual Accounts;
- Responding to concerns raised, the Chair provided an assurance that the restructure had generated savings and that he would arrange for Members to receive more detailed information on the severance payments to senior management detailed in the Annual Accounts;

- the Chair advised that the Administration and Committee were fully supportive of the Chief Executive. The Council was in a far stronger financial position than it had been for a number of years and this was thanks to the tireless work of the Chief Executive and her team;
- the restructuring had taken a period of time to implement and had been delayed due to Covid-19. The agreed senior management restructure had clearly involved the appointment of a Chief Operating Officer and not a Depute Chief Executive as had been advertised and concern was expressed at the lack of consultation with Members on this change;
- this was a unique and unprecedented situation for Members, officers and people in the Highlands. There was a need to show solidarity and work together to promote the Council and the Highlands, and produce and drive forward plans on the way forward for the recovery for the area;
- the need for openness and transparency in relation to funding received from the Scottish Government and for this to be reported with clarity to the Committee;
- along with the financial position there was a need to consider governance and communication when issuing financial information in the public domain, specific reference being made to issues with the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme.

At this point, the meeting was adjourned at 2.35pm and reconvened at 2.50pm.

Thereafter, Mr P Saggars seconded by Mr R Bremner **MOVED** that Members agree to suspend the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive until an immediate review of the current restructure had been reported to full Council.

Mr A Christie seconded by the Chair moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the matter of the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive be discussed at the next Council and a review/evaluation on the Senior Management Structure commences to ensure that the original aims of the Governance restructure were evidenced.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 8 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 10 votes and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr R Bremner, Mr J Bruce, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mr D Louden, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr S Mackie and Mr S Saggars.

For the Amendment:

Mr A Christie, Mrs H Carmichael, Mrs M Davidson, Mr R Gale, Mr T Heggie, Mr B Lobban, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr D Macpherson, Mr M Reiss and Mr D Rixson.

Decision

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 June 2020 and **NOTED** the central case of the estimated year end forecast, along with the range of potential positions subject to external variables;

- ii. **NOTED** that a further report would be provided to the Highland Council on 10 September 2020 with further options to mitigate the budget gap;
- iii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with more detailed information on the Transformation Change Fund;
- iv. **AGREED** that Members be provided with a briefing on the severance payments to senior management detailed in the Annual Accounts; and
- v. **AGREED** that the matter of the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive be discussed at the next Council and a review/evaluation on the Senior Management Structure commences to ensure that the original aims of the Governance restructure were evidenced.

5. Resources and Finance Service, Performance and Governance Service and Transformation Service – Revenue Monitoring to 30 June 2020

There had been circulated Joint Report No RES/16/20 dated 30 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance and Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

The Committee **AGREED** the revenue monitoring position to 30 June 2020.

**RESOURCES AND FINANCE SERVICE
SEIRBHEIS NAN GOIREASAN CORPORRA**

**6. Treasury Management
Rianachd Ionmhais**

**(a) Summary of Transactions
Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/17/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report.

**(b) Annual Treasury Management Report 2019/20
Aithisg Stiùiridh Bhladhnaile an Ionmhais 2019/20**

There had been circulated Report No RES/18/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought in relation to the increased borrowing to fund capital expenditure on the Housing Revenue Account. The Head of Finance and Commercialism confirmed he would have a separate discussion with Mr D Loudon on this matter outwith the meeting;
- the potential to increase the authorised limit for borrowing to take account of ongoing capital projects. It was confirmed this limit was set annually by the Service on the basis of the planned capital investment and took into account any uncertainties with projects. The Head of Finance and

Commercialism advised that he would respond directly to Mr D Loudon on the authorised limit set for 2020/21;

- the potential for Public Works Loan Board interest rates which had been increased by 1% in the previous year, to be reduced; and
- concern the economic update by the Council's Treasury advisors, appended to the report made no mention of the impacts associated with Brexit, and the need for the Council to consider this issue in more detail. The Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance suggested that a session for Members with the Council's Treasury Advisors be arranged to provide for a more detailed understanding of the wider context.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Annual Treasury Management report for 2019/20; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a session for Members with the Council's Treasury Advisors be arranged.

7. Corporate Resources Service Quarterly Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Ràitheil Seirbheis nan Goireasan Corporra

There had been circulated Report No RES/19/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the statutory and key performance indicators as outlined in the report.

8. Annual Performance Monitoring: Welfare, Advice and Information Services 2019/20 Sgrùdadh Coileanadh Bliadhnail: Seirbheisean Sochair, Comhairle agus Fiosrachaidh 2019/20

Declarations of Interest: Mr A Christie as General Manager Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and Mr P Saggars as a Director of Nairn Citizens Advice Bureau declared non-financial interests in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Council's Welfare, Advice and Information Services and CABx be commended on their outstanding performance, and excellent services and value for money they delivered. These Services would become more critical for households as the furlough scheme was withdrawn in the Autumn and would make a valuable contribution to the Council's recovery plans;
- Whether plans which were in place ensure the Service was sufficiently staffed given that the demand for benefit and advice services was likely to significantly increase in the current year; and

- the Leader of the Council commented on the outstanding performance of staff and the CAB in 2019/20 and that she would have discussions with the Head of Revenues and Customer Services and CAB in regard to resourcing going forward in the first instance and that consideration would be given to the potential for an update report on the resourcing of the Welfare, Advice and Information Services to be submitted to the new Joint Wellbeing Sub-Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the undernoted performance:

- i. in excess of 26,500 customers were assisted by the Council's Welfare Support Team and Citizens Advice during 2019/20 for support with welfare, debt and housing issues;
- ii. financial gains for customers exceeded £23.7 million. This represented a £14.64 return for every £1 allocated to welfare, advice and information services by the Council;
- iii. a total of £11.6 million of debt (including £2.1m relating to mortgage/other secured loans) was presented to Citizens Advice, which represented a 28.7% decrease compared to 2017/18; and
- iv. Citizens Advice supported 3,029 customers (including social rented, private rented and homeowners) seeking housing-related advice, which highlighted the demand for consistent accessible support on these issues.

The Committee **AGREED** that the potential for an update report on the resourcing of the Welfare, Advice and Information Services to be submitted to the new Joint Wellbeing Sub-Committee be investigated.

9. Covid 19 and School Trip Refunds Pàigheadh Air Ais Thursan Sgoile

There had been circulated Report No RES/21/20 dated 20 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair thanked Members for their email responses in agreeing to this item being progressed ahead of the Committee and sought formal ratification of the actions taken as contained in the recommendations outlined in the report.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the steps taken by the Council and its schools to manage the impact of school trip cancellations, and in turn minimise the costs arising by seeking to reschedule trips, or receive refunds or insurance payouts, where appropriate;
- ii. **AGREED** the action taken to refund parents in the situations as described within the report, where no other source of refund was available, and to avoid any financial loss or hardship on parents as a result;
- iii. **AGREED** the action taken to utilise the financial hardship fund, as the funding source for the refunds to parents; and
- iv. **NOTED** the further actions as set out within the report, regarding recovery and other actions to try and recover any further sums possible from providers via refund, or from insurers.

10. ICT Transformation Update
Cruth-atharrachadh ICT agus Ùrachadh Lìonraidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/22/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Chair commended the ICT Service on their exceptional work over the past few months during the emergency period and on behalf of the Committee conveyed his thanks to the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation and his team. Confirmation was also provided that Councillor D Rixson would be provided with an explanation on the additional colours being used within the RAG status column.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the ICT Transformation and Network Programmes.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS
GEÀRR-CHUNNTAS CHOINNEAMHAN

11. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meetings of the Central Safety Committee held on 7 February 2020 and the Staff Partnership Forum held on 7 February 2020.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing** held **REMOTELY** on
Wednesday, 26 August 2020 at 10.30am.

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 D Rixson
Mr A Henderson (sub for Mr J Finlayson)	Mr K Rosie
Mr A Jarvie	Ms E Roddick
Mr D Louden	Mr A Sinclair (sub for Mr C Smith)
Mrs D Mackay	Miss N Sinclair

Non Members also present:

Mr A Christie	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr R Gale	Mrs A MacLean
Mr A Graham	Mr D MacPherson
Mr J Gray	Mr C Munro
Mr A Jarvie	Ms P Munro
Mr B Lobban	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J McGillivray	

Officials in attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mrs F Malcolm, Interim Head of Integration Adult Social Care
Ms K Ralston, Head of Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer
Ms J Jennett, Head of Children's Services (Operations)
Ms J Park, Interim Head of Health
Mr I Kyle, Head of Improvement and Performance
Mr B Porter, Head of Support Services
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager
Ms D Munro, Child Protection Training Officer
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
Ms M Zavarella, 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 Committee.**

Linda Munro in the Chair

Preliminaries

The Vice Chair, Nicola Sinclair, expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to all health and social care staff for dealing with the challenges experienced during the Covid emergency. Gratitude was also expressed to Highland Council Social Work staff and High Life Highland archive staff who worked on the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, on the agenda at Item 5.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Finlayson and Mr C Smith.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 5 – Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 6 – Ms L Munro (non-financial)

Mr D Louden declared a general non-financial interest in terms of being a Trustee of Home-Start East Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

3. Good News Deagh Naidheachdan

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update on the following good news items and **AGREED** a copy of the Good News be circulated to the Committee:-

- thanks were extended to all staff who had continued to deliver the “day job” whilst also reacting to and dealing with the impact of Covid, and also to the members of the Escalation Support Team set up by NHS Highland;
- details were provided of the activities that had taken place at the Family Centre Merkinch Summer Hub 2020;
- Fostering & Adoption Service – examples were provided of many positive outcomes that had been experienced during lockdown. “Fostering Focus” had been sent to all foster carers and prospective adopters across Highland in July, and thanks were extended to a couple who were retiring from fostering aged 75 and 80, and who had looked after 22 children;
- Placement Services Change Programme - 36 young people had returned to Highland since the start of the Placement Programme in June 2018 and work was actively being undertaken to return a further 15 young people this financial year; and
- the Echo Project (Highland Hospice) had collaborated with the Council to host a series of virtual sessions to Health & Social Care staff on ‘Wellbeing and Resilience through Covid-19’.

4. Future Thinking of Care in the Highlands - Opening up a conversation with our Communities, staff and partners Smaoineachadh mu Chùram san Àm ri Teachd sa Ghàidhealtachd – A' fosgladh còmhraidh le ar coimhearsnachdan, luchd-obrach is com-pàirtichean

The Chief Executive introduced the item, emphasising that everyone matters equally and paying tribute to the leadership shown by Members as part of the Covid recovery process. She welcomed the inclusion of the care message in the Council's mission statement and as the new COSLA email slogan.

A presentation included the national picture and Highland data for children in care. The national promise for the future included an Independent Care Review to move towards early intervention and prevention and phase out acute and crisis care. Reference was made to the thoughts of Dr Katherine Trebeck, social care support and the reform of adult social care, care home data, and challenges and opportunities for the future.

During discussion the following issues were considered:

- Adult Social Care training, with a focus on mental health, would take place for Members on 28 August 2020 at 11am;
- the presentation slides should be emailed to Members;
- the increasing amount of care that was required by society was of concern;
- care homes were not only for elderly people;
- the need to remodel the delivery of care and improve the quality of life for people within communities was challenging as front-line services had to continue being delivered while being redesigned. Partnership working was key;
- the references to early intervention were welcomed and 'prevention' should also be included;
- it was important to distinguish between those who wanted care and those who needed care;
- it had been noted that some voluntary services during the Covid crisis had replaced the need for more official care services and discussion on how to build on this was required;
- it could be more challenging to provide care-related support for younger people, and it was vital the finances were arranged to ensure the best use was made of them, noting that finances had been distorted for many years due to high expenditure on out of authority care placements. Efforts to tackle this were summarised and reference was made to early intervention and prevention though the provision of respite youth activities, advice, and safe places for young people to gather. Sport, or even exercise such as walking, was of significant benefit to young people. It was felt that better use could be made of self-directed care and more required to be done to tackle mental health and substance abuse in families;
- Pauline Munro gave an example of an older person with self-care needs and an officer would discuss this with her outwith the meeting;
- there was to be a virtual ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) conference on 6 November 2020 at 10.30am. It was not yet known if it would be possible, from a technical perspective, to have open access to it;
- the efforts of the Lochalsh Community Partnership during the Covid crisis were praised and a summary was provided of their activities. It was disappointing the community minibus was no longer in operation due to social distancing requirements and this would be discussed with the Transport Manager;
- continued smarter working with the third sector would be helpful;
- attention was drawn to the problem of children arriving at school hungry, dirty, or tired and practical school-based solutions for these issues were proposed;
- the efforts of volunteers in communities were appreciated but possible volunteer-burnout was of concern, and long-term reliance on volunteers could be problematic;
- the focus on communities was welcomed and examples were provided of excellent community work undertaken in secondary schools with youth workers;

- it was important for people to be in care homes as close as possible to their own homes and families, and reference was made to the 'Let Us Stay Up' initiative which had highlighted the importance of allowing people receiving care, especially young people, to be treated as individuals and live as normal a life as possible, for example not being put to bed early due to an inflexible care regime;
- reference was made to the high number of children who were providing care for their parents in Sutherland and the importance of providing them with emotional, practical and financial support;
- an audit of all areas of good practice would be helpful to allow others to duplicate projects;
- it was suggested that health and social care should be provided by one organisation rather than being seen as being delivered by two separate organisations, and should be based on a life cycle approach, from prenatal to palliative care. A revised framework for management information was suggested;
- the Chair suggested it had been useful to start this conversation with the Committee and that it would be continued at future meetings;
- consideration should be given to reviewing the Council estate to establish if schools or other buildings could be used for young people as part of care/youth activities. It was thought the current Council policy on the need for janitorial attendance at out of hours events was a barrier and Members should consider lobbying for this to be changed;
- it was hoped Aviemore Green Health could present to the Committee in future on their work;
- reference was made to some children finding school a respite from a difficult home-life and the importance of investing in support for such children when they were young was emphasised; and
- the Chief Executive referred to the community asset transfer policy, emphasised the importance as acting as one Council and pointed out that service plans were being developed and would be presented soon. New structures for working with partners were being developed and lessons from Members on community working would be taken on board. The Leader of the Council endorsed the importance of the service plans and would consider changes required to the Council's programme.

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

- i. the presentation be emailed to Members of the Committee; and
- ii. to consider reviewing the Council estate to establish if schools or other buildings could be used for young people as part of care/youth activities.

**5. Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and Implications for Local Authorities and presentation on Historic Abuse Inquiry and Section 21
Rannsachadh Droch Dhiol Chloinne agus Seaghan airson Ùghdarrasan Ionadail agus Taisbeanadh air Rannsachadh Mì-ghnàthachadh Eachdraidheil agus Earrann 21**

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item in terms of being a Director of High Life Highland but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HCW/09/20 dated 17 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

The Chair introduced the presentation, commenting on the sombre and important nature of the item and the thousands of hours of work which had gone into the Inquiry. The Leader of the Council praised the staff and others who had worked on the issue since 2004 and welcomed that the Bill was now being progressed and due recompense would be provided, with early payments having been made to people with terminal illnesses.

A presentation included the history of the decision in 2004 to conduct an Inquiry into past institutional child abuse, the financial redress advanced payment scheme, Section 21 Notices (Children in Foster Care), redress for survivors, and next steps and recommendations.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- information was sought and provided on how someone who had experienced abuse could get in contact, which was through the Council, through a third party or by contacting the Inquiry directly;
- the report was harrowing and lessons must be learnt by having robust systems in place with early intervention measures;
- child protection was everyone's business;
- it was vital the Council prepared adequately for when the Bill came into effect in April 2021 for five years. A briefing would be circulated on the work being done on the outcomes from the Inquiry via the Council's Corporate Risk Register, with timelines;
- in relation to the need to provide therapeutic support, conversations about this in addition to the finances required, were ongoing with the Scottish Government, Social Work Scotland, Chief Social Work Officers, and COSLA. The Committee would be updated as clarity developed; and
- it was decided, following discussion, the recommendation which stated 'acknowledge the future reputational risks to the Council as a consequence of the Inquiry' should be removed.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and:

- i. **NOTED** the presentation and recognised the work undertaken by Council staff and colleagues at the HLH Archive Centre;
- ii. **NOTED** the publication of the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Bill on 13 August 2020; and
- iii. **NOTED** the potential unfunded costs to the Council arising from this new legislation and the completion of this and on-going Inquiries;
- iv. **AGREED** a briefing be circulated on the work being done on the outcomes from the Inquiry via the Council's Corporate Risk Register, with timelines; and
- v. **AGREED** the Committee continue to be updated in due course as the Bill progressed.

6. Commissioned Health Service Assurance Report Aithisg Barantachaidh Seirbheis Slàinte Barantaichte

Ms L Munro declared a non-financial interest in this item in terms of being a Director of the Family Nurse Partnership but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HCW/10/20 dated 17 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- in response to a question about the roll-out of the Family Nurse Partnership across the Highlands, this would be discussed with the Scottish Government at their next meeting in eight weeks and any issues and timescales would be reported back;
- concern was expressed at the failure to achieve the targets for statutory health assessments and immunisations for Looked After children, and the reasons behind the statistic were summarised, including the need for meaningful health assessments with the engagement of the child, who might often be in a stressful situation, that children often moved location. Immunisation rates had dipped during Covid lockdown. Recruitment was underway for two specialist nurses who would be tasked with focusing on early intervention including assessments and immunisations;
- the inclusion of vacancy data in revenue monitoring reports would be considered for future;
- it was pointed out that much of the data on domestic violence was anecdotal and a report was sought once a robust method had been established for the collection of local data from all relevant agencies on domestic violence. A future presentation to the Committee on the work of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group was proposed;
- the importance of officer succession planning was emphasised and efforts in this regard were summarised;
- information was sought and provided on preparations for the winter flu vaccination programme, noting that it had been widened for 2020-21;
- the important role of school nurses was highlighted and reference was made to the recent 'transforming nursing in the community' programme, with a refocus on addressing health inequalities and child poverty. A wide variety of health professionals would be involved with schools and communities in the future and people could also seek advice at pharmacies on a range of issues;
- information was sought and provided on the 'Just Ask' helpline which had been operational for around two years and facilitated families getting in touch with Allied Health Professionals;
- the redeployment of health staff from the Council to the NHS during the Covid emergency was summarised, although there had been less demand for their services than had been anticipated;
- the working relationship between the Council and NHS Highland had improved during the Covid emergency, with more clarity on roles and responsibilities;
- information was sought and provided on the development of locally-required skills with UHI;

- following a request for red / amber / green ragging of issues in reports, it was explained the performance framework was being reviewed to produce a set of measures to ensure effective governance and ragging would then form part of future assurance reports; and
- the value of mother and toddler groups was highlighted, and it was hoped those which had paused due to Covid would resume in due course.

The Committee:

- NOTED** the measures put in place across the Covid-19 pandemic to support the commissioned child health service in Section 6 of the report;
- NOTED** the service delivery arrangements and commented on plans for service improvement and clinical and professional governance set out in Section 9 of the report;
- AGREED** to discuss the roll out of the Family Nurse Partnership across the Highlands with the Scottish Government at their next meeting in eight weeks and report back on issues and timescales;
- AGREED** to report back to the Committee once a robust method had been established for the collection of data on domestic violence; and
- AGREED** to bring a future presentation to the Committee on the work of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group.

7. Overview of Data Reporting to Scottish Government Tar-sealladh mu Aithris Dàta do Riaghaltas na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No HCW/11/20 dated 17 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- data headlines could be alarming and where there were significant variances, some reference or explanation in the report would be helpful;
- references to early awareness and signposting were welcomed;
- it was important to benchmark Highland performance against other areas and share best practice. It was explained that networking was undertaken with other Local Authorities and Child Protection Committees to monitor national trends;
- the significant increase in children placed on the Child Protection Register during Covid was of concern, especially since the children were more difficult to reach due to lockdown, and attention was drawn to the audit being undertaken of the Child Protection Register, which would be presented to a future Committee meeting;
- concern was expressed not only for the immediate impact of lockdown but the longer-term economic impact and its effect on services;
- it was vital to learn lessons from the pandemic and to be prepared for a second lockdown or other similar pandemic. Learning points included communication methods, and the impact on parental mental health, noting that almost half of children on the Child Protection Register had parents with substance abuse issues;
- the vulnerability of foster care provision had increased during the pandemic, with some foster parents having to shield, and it would be checked whether this had been included in the Council's Covid recovery plans; and
- the need to provide support after transition from children's to adult services was emphasised, especially for less mature young people.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the findings contained in the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the creative ways in which services and partners had ensured contact with vulnerable children, young people and their families during the Covid-19 pandemic;
- iii. **AGREED** to check the Council's Covid recovery plans included tackling the vulnerability of the foster care provision experienced during the pandemic; and
- iv. **AGREED** to bring back the audit, including process and findings, of the Child Protection Register to a future Committee meeting.

8. Transformation and Governance Arrangements with NHS Highland Ullachaidhean Cruth-atharrachaidh agus Riaghlachais le NHS na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No HCW/12/20 dated 21 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care.

During a summary of the report, attention was drawn to two key amendments to the terms of reference, that membership of the Project Management Board would consist of four councillors and four NHS HIGHLAND Board members, and that paragraphs 7.2 and 7.3 of the reports, workstreams, now included mental health. The Chair clarified that of the four Councillors to sit on the Project Management Board, one would be from the SNP opposition group, one from the Conservative group and two from the Administration.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- it was felt there had been insufficient scrutiny of the partnership arrangements in the past and this would be taken into consideration as part of governance arrangements of the reviewed agreement;
- it was queried whether the Project Management Board was a step towards an Integration Joint Board (IJB) instead of a Lead Agency arrangement, noting that Highland was the only area in Scotland without an IJB. It was explained that while there were advantages and disadvantages of each model, there were no plans to move towards an IJB, however the Project Management Board was a significant step towards an Integrated Strategic Plan, which was needed. The Joint Monitoring Committee provided governance;
- the improved working relationship between the Council and NHS HIGHLAND during the Covid crisis was welcomed, with mutual trust being key;
- the Chief Executive provided a correction in regard to paragraph 7.2 of the report which was read out to the meeting and was detailed below;
- the themes detailed in paragraph 7.3 of the report would be subject to review across all services, from communities to acute services. Assessments for children and adults would be looked at further, following three months of workshops at the end of 2019. Key work would be undertaken with the Community Planning Partnerships and other local organisations. It was important to aim for best value on income maximisation and issues around transitions had been identified as a key piece of work, as had workforce planning;
- it was clarified that the intended review of the Partnership Agreement in April 2020 had been postponed due to Covid and work remained ongoing on this;

- the importance of working at pace on all issues discussed was emphasised;
- it was clarified that the Community Planning Partnership was not the only type of group working well at local level, with Aviemore Green Health being given as an example of good practice;
- it would be ideal if NHS HIGHLAND and the Council's Health and Social Care delivery could be merged into one service partnership model and be presented as such to the public, rather than viewing it as a project-based initiative. Reference was made to the need to look after people as a continuous process from pre-birth to death; and
- it was important to create and promote proper careers in care, with reasonable salaries, training and commitment, and the Interim Head of Integration for Adult Social Care would discuss this further with Councillor Bill Boyd outwith the meeting.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** and **APPROVED** the proposed approach as set out in the Terms of Reference; and
- AGREED** Section 7.2 of the report be corrected to read: The project will require to focus on the following key areas in terms of the future delivery of family and community care for children and adults with a focus on residential care, care at home and in the community, learning disability and mental health and well-being.

9. Revenue Budget Monitoring 1st Quarter 2020/21 Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach Ràith 1 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No HCW/13/20 dated 17 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were considered;

- in response to concerns about the overspend on Looked After Children, it was suggested the Chair, Leader of the Council and relevant Social Work officers discuss this in more detail outwith the meeting;
- an underspend on family and children social work had been reported for several years and required investigation. It was welcomed that recent recruitment for social workers had attracted a good number of applications, and information on vacancies would be welcomed in future reports. A summary was provided of ongoing recruitment and work that was being undertaken with Human Resources on recruitment;
- information was sought and provided on the numbers of children accommodated outwith the area during Covid, noting that some had complex issues. Efforts were being made to bring these children and young people back to Highland;
- concern was expressed about budget variances as follows: a £600k overspend on residential care in the first quarter of the year, a £200k spend on temporary agency staff in the first quarter of the year (for which there was no budget set), foster care fee expenditure and whether this was for out of area placements, and an overspend on 'supporting people' of £154k in the first quarter. It was considered important that Members were informed of such variances and where the pressures in the system were. More information was also sought on underspends as follows: vacancy management, notably the budget for nurses being only 73% spent, direct payments for self-directed care being underspent by £190k (with £111k having been spent), and half of the £185k budget for overnight care for vulnerable adults

being unspent in the first quarter. Responses were provided for some of the issues raised, including the use of agency staff to cover vacancies, the efforts to reduce the number of out of area placements, the need to keep siblings together whenever possible, and the effect of Covid on overnight care for vulnerable adults and on the availability of self-directed care. The Head of Support Services suggested further discussions be held with Councillor Derek Loudon outwith the meeting to address the detail of the issues raised, including variances and the amalgamation of cost centres. It was suggested that financial training be offered to Members who required it, possibly to be combined with Service issues. The importance of effective financial scrutiny was highlighted;

- attention as drawn to the need for a strategic view of the long-term consequences of the pandemic;
- given the challenges in recruiting professional staff to rural areas, the importance of local training was emphasised; and
- it was suggested the figures on the report were six months out of date but it was pointed out they represented the position at 30 June 2020.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and **AGREED**:-

- i. the Chair, Council Leader and relevant Social Work officers discuss the overspend on Looked After Children in more detail outwith the meeting;
- ii. consideration be given to including information on recruitment outcomes within future revenue reports; and
- iii. training on financial scrutiny be offered to Members, possibly combined with related Service issues.

10. School Years Immunisation Report Aithisg Ion-dhìon Bhliadhnaichean Sgoile

There had been circulated Report No HCW/14/20 dated 10 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care.

It was hoped that more support for this service would be obtained via the Committee, given the amount of nursing time vaccination took up, the widening of the threshold for flu vaccinations, and GP services being at capacity. A summary was provided of ongoing discussions with NHS Highland about the use of part-time nursing staff in commissioned health services to take on additional hours to help to deliver the GP practice adult vaccination programme. Discussion were also underway about the possible use of school buildings during school holidays. Members welcomed the return of the nurses and other health staff to schools.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and the partnership working and future planning.

11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes had been circulated and were **NOTED**:

- i. Highland Child Protection Committee – 19 November 2019, 5 March and 4 June 2020;
- ii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group – 20 February, 16 March and 20 April 2020;

- iii. Highland Community Justice Partnership – 19 December 2019 and 11 March 2020; and
- iv. Highland Council/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee – 22 January 2020.

The meeting ended at 4.10pm.