

(i) Council recognises the desire amongst the Highland population to make the post-pandemic future a greener one.

Council recognises the environmental advantages to remote working where it suits the employee, as well as the potential for local employment to reverse the process of rural depopulation.

Council resolves that, with all new appointments, a review is carried out prior to recruitment, to establish whether the role could be fulfilled just as effectively by remote working. If the conclusion is that the job lends itself (wholly or in part) to remote working, then those opportunities should be extended to all applicants.

There is currently an option for staff to request home working and this is being reviewed as part of the corporate 'return to the workplace' project. An option for remote working can also be explored at the recruitment stage. There may be costs associated with remote working in terms of homeworking equipment and any other associated costs. There may also be savings achieved by disposing of building vacated by staff.

Signed: Mr D Rixson Mr R Gale

(ii) This Council recognises from its own poverty and inequality data that large areas of the Highlands have over 70% and based on data provided by the CAB up to 90% of households in fuel poverty and commits to doing all in its power to resolve the inequity that has arisen due to the regional distribution charges for electricity provision. To that end this Council will write to the **Minister of State (Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth) the Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP** in support of the cross-party Early Day Motion EDM #552 that; "calls on the Government to replace the current electricity distribution system with one that replicates that of gas and telecoms and share the cost of energy distribution equally across the UK".

Signed: Mr R Gale Mrs T Robertson

There are no financial implications arising from this motion.

(iii) The Highland Council welcomes developments between HC-One and NHHSH regarding the transfer of ownership to NHHSH and for them to deliver care.

Given the exceptional nature of the situation of the costs involved the Scottish Government have agreed to provide capital funding to NHHSH for the purchase of Home Farm. These exceptional costs are also prevailing with the revenue costs and even more so as they will be re-occurring at an estimated £1.2m per annum, which Highland Council has not budgeted for.

The impact of Covid-19 will have an impact on council budgets that are already overstretched and the Council agrees to write to the Scottish Government asking for an assurance that all revenue funding regarding Home Farm would be met by the Scottish Government.

Signed: Mr J Gordon Mr J Finlayson Mr C Munro Mr C MacLeod

If Home Farm is purchased by NHH any additional costs will need to be met by Highland Council. Therefore, requesting that government provide the necessary funding would mitigate any additional costs being incurred by the Council.

(iv) Council agrees to bring an immediate report to the next appropriate Strategic Committee on its readiness for commencement of mass evictions of tenants from private and social housing due to months of build-up of rent arrears as a result of Covid-19 contributing to loss of earnings and redundancies.

This is an ideal opportunity to purchase off the shelf quality modular pods available from several Scottish distributors almost overnight. Council should work with Registered Social Landlords and other partners to identify suitable land sites on their portfolios to place these pods that in terms of quality are high end. In terms of price, they vary for a 3 bed unit from as little as £40,000 to £110,000 which is still cheaper than a traditional build which averages £120,000 to £160,000 per unit. This is doubly important at a time when some traditional construction companies will inflate their costs considerably due to Covid and pass these onto the taxpayer.

These pods could be initially temporary but may be there for a considerable time to help solve our desperate housing crisis.

To this end planning consents should be expedited once the sites are identified.

Signed: Mr C Fraser Ms M Smith Dr I Cockburn Mr D Loudon

This is an area which the Council has considered previously and whilst there may be some benefits to modular building as temporary accommodation the costs to the Council could be significant. Previous experience has shown modular homes to be more expensive than traditional build. As an example, the Council funded a pilot modular homes project in Alness (part funded by the Scottish Government) which was 10% higher than a comparable traditional build project on an adjacent site.

The Council house new build programme for 2020/21 with the Scottish Government has been agreed and there is no funding currently available to fund this initiative, therefore the total cost would have to be funded through Council borrowing.

(v) In order to reflect the geographical, demographic and logistical challenges in our diverse range of communities in Highland it is clear that the one size does not fit all in a planning context. The current guidance states that one of the definitions of a major planning application is when it meets the threshold of 90 houses, (recently changed from 50 houses). Clearly, the impact of any developments is extremely variable across the region, city, towns, villages and settlements.

In addition, another criterion that has been recently changed is that for the number of objections that triggers an application being referred to the relevant Planning Applications Committee has risen from 5 to 8. Again, this does not take into account the variances in population density across the region.

Regardless of how many Ward Councillors request referral of a planning application, under the current scheme of delegated powers the decision remains at the discretion of the Area Planning Officer.

This motion calls for these inconsistencies be resolved in the following ways:

1. Initially, the planning threshold for major development to be reduced to 50 houses with immediate effect for all new applications;
2. Proposals will be brought to the relevant Committee to agree the introduction of a graduated or graded criterion to determine what constitutes a major development, relative to the area or environment. *(For example; 5 houses for settlement areas, 10 houses for villages, 20 houses for towns, 50 houses for city locations)*
3. Proposals will be brought to the relevant Committee to agree the number of objections required to refer an application to the relevant Planning Applications Committee be set at 5 for city and towns and 3 for villages and settlements or thereby.
4. In instances where two or more local Ward Councillor advise the Area Planning Officer that they wish any planning application to be referred to the relevant Planning Application Committee for determination, it will be mandatory to do so.

These are measured and proportionate adjustments that will enable all Elected Members to better represent the integrity of their communities.

This proposal has the potential to slow down the processing and determination of all applications considerably with an increased amount of staff time and resourcing spent dealing with these applications.

Signed: Mr K Gowans Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair Dr I Cockburn Mr D Macpherson