

**The Highland Council  
No. 14 2020/2021**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held REMOTELY on Thursday, 10 September 2020 at 10.35am and adjourned/resumed on Friday, 11 September 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 H Morrison
Mr I Cockburn	Mr C Munro
Mrs M Cockburn	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, Infrastructure & Environment
Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place	Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning	Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing
Executive Chief Officer, Health & Social Care	Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance
	Executive Chief Officer, Economy

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms K Currie and Mr N McLean.

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

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

Item 9 – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial)

Item 10 – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial)

Item 12 – Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial)

Item 13(i) – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial), Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial), Mrs M Cockburn (Non-Financial), Mrs D MacKay (Non-Financial), Mr R Balfour (Non-Financial), Mr C MacLeod (Non-Financial) and Mr P Saggars (Non-Financial)

Item 13(iii) – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial)

Item 13(iv) – Mr R Bremner (Non-Financial)

Item 13(v) – Mr S Mackie (Non-Financial)

Item 14 – Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial)

Item 15 – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial), Mr A MacInnes (Financial), Mr A MacKinnon (Financial), Ms L Munro (Non-Financial), Mr T Heggie (Non-Financial), Mr B Thompson (Non-Financial), Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial) and Mr K Gowans (Financial)

Item 16 – Ms L Munro (Non-Financial)

Item 18 – Mr A MacInnes and Mr A MacKinnon (both Financial) and Ms L Munro, Mr D Rixson and Mr K Rosie (all Non-Financial)

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Convener highlighted that this was Scotland's Suicide Prevention Week and also World Suicide Prevention Day. As such, the importance of talking about this issue and specifically engaging in open and honest discussion of mental health matters was emphasised. Suicide was currently the leading cause of death amongst young people and it was hoped that everyone would therefore find a way to play a part in preventing something which had affected so many young people and families across the world.

At this point in the meeting, Mr D Macpherson queried as to whether the Convener could provide confirmation that no Elected Member of the Council would face investigation or sanction for stating the contents of any public document during discussion at the meeting. In response, the Convener advised that he could provide no such confirmation.

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

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 30 July/3 August 2020 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED** – subject to the following -

Following an issue raised by Mr A Baxter at the meeting whereby it was stated that various responses (which it had been agreed would be issued by Officers to Members in regard to a number of issues) were still awaited, it was **AGREED** that this would be followed up by the Head of Corporate Governance and the required responses issued to Members as a matter of priority.

Also, in relation to Item 11 within the Minutes (Employee Engagement and Wellbeing Survey), it was **AGREED** that a correction should be provided in relation to the last bullet point of discussion whereby it had been suggested at the meeting that disaggregated data should be shared with 'all Members through Strategic Committee meetings' and not just 'Strategic and Area Chairs' as had been detailed.

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

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

Easter Ross Area Committee 20 February  
Gaelic Committee 3 August -

**APPROVED** – subject to the following -

It was **AGREED** that confirmation should be provided for Members as to which specific Executive Chief Officer now had responsibility for Gaelic issues as it was understood that this was now the Executive Chief Officer (Performance & Governance) and not the Executive Chief Officer (Economy & Infrastructure) as had previously been understood to be the position.

Education Committee 6 August  
Housing & Property Committee 13 August  
Communities & Place Committee 19 August  
Easter Ross Area Committee 20 August  
Corporate Resources Committee 20 August -

#### **Notice of Amendment – Item 4 – Rec (v) - Post of Depute Chief Executive**

With reference to the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee held on 20 August, the following Notice of Amendment has been received in accordance with Standing Order 13 –

“Following the number of countersigners reaching the required threshold of eight, the decision reached by the Committee will be suspended pending consideration by the Full Council.”

Signed: Mr P Saggars Mr R Bremner Mr A Baxter Mr A Sinclair Mr S Mackie  
Dr I Cockburn Mr J Bruce Mr G MacKenzie Mr D Macpherson  
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was highlighted that a number of Members had expressed concern over being ‘blindsided’ by remarks made at the Corporate Resources Committee meeting by the Budget Leader and the Depute Leader of the Council in relation to the recruitment process for this post, specifically on the basis that such remarks had not in fact been ‘binding’ (a fact not known to Members at the time) and as such they might have voted differently at the meeting had they been aware of this situation;
- in light of the above, Members should now have a clear choice as to whether to freeze recruitment to this post until such time as a full Business Case had been brought to the full Council;
- there had been reports to the Corporate Resources Committee in relation to the Council’s current and serious financial position and it was therefore considered strange that this recruitment process had been initiated without the prior approval of Members and at a time of a 100% ban being in place on recruiting

- new frontline staff and when many Council Services were very stretched;
- there was a need for a full report to be brought to the full Council at the earliest opportunity which covered the Business Case for this post, the benefits which the post would bring and whether the management restructuring process had delivered the promised savings;
  - there should be consideration given as to whether now was the appropriate time to consider taking on additional costs of approximately £200k which this post would involve and as such a motion would be put forward at the appropriate time to suspend this appointment process until an immediate review of the current restructure had been concluded and that, together with a full Business Case, had been submitted to the full Council;
  - Member Seminars had been previously held whereby Members had had the opportunity to work together with Officers on issues of importance and had come to a shared understanding and consensus. As such, there was now an urgent need to reinstate those Seminars in order to include Members in governance and decision making across Council issues and remove any elements of frustration and distrust;
  - there was significant concern that responses had not been provided to legitimate issues raised at the Corporate Resources Committee meeting and that Members had been misled over the intent of the amendment put forward at the meeting by Administration Members;
  - it had not been considered that it was necessary to submit a Notice of Amendment given the discussion on the day of the Committee meeting but there had been numerous occasions since when it was clear that opinion differed from what had actually been agreed;
  - the arrangement of Seminars would allow input from all Members on issues of importance and this was welcomed;
  - there was a need to take stock and to reflect on current issues and the Members Seminars would allow this, not least in relation to governance and decision making;
  - it had been agreed that information would be provided for Members when the senior management restructure had been completed but this had been delayed due to the pandemic and it was therefore surprising that the recruitment to the post of Deputy Chief Executive was going ahead;
  - reference was made to the Minutes of the Corporate Resources Committee meeting whereby it had been stated that 'it was surprising that the recruitment of a Deputy Chief Executive was being progressed at this time and there was concern that Members had not been aware that the post was being advertised'. The Chair of the Committee had advised that it was 'inappropriate to comment on the matter' but had 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 Deputy Chief Executive were appropriate and particularly whether this appointment was critical to ensure the safer provision of key Council services'. Also in terms of the Minutes of the meeting, it had been highlighted that '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 had been expressed at the meeting in regard to the level of the severance payments to senior management as detailed in the Annual Accounts;
  - the terms 'blindsided' and 'misled' had been used by some Members during the debate and it was felt that these terms were inappropriate and unfortunate;
  - it was inevitable that any organisation of a comparable size to Highland Council would need to have a Deputy Chief Executive in place and this had been

previously agreed by the Council;

- in relation to the careful targeting of resources at the present time, it was considered that the recruitment to this post represented a process of rebuilding in order to ensure that a strong, stable and well-run senior management team was in place for the future;
- it was noted that one of the current Executive Chief Officers was already 'acting up' as Depute Chief Executive with a small honorarium and it was therefore questioned as to why it was still felt necessary to create a new standalone post at the present time;
- it appeared that there were currently approximately 19 Heads of Service across the Council but the previous understanding had been that 15 Heads of Service at that time would be reduced to around 11 when the Executive Chief Officers were appointed but this did not appear to have happened;
- on the basis that a considerable number of Executive Chief Officers had been appointed, it was questioned as to whether and where a 'skills gap' still existed across the Council;
- it was imperative that due process was followed in terms of recruitment at a senior management level and that any proposals in this regard had prior Member approval;
- clarification was sought on the recruitment process for this post as it appeared that it was in fact still being advertised and had not been frozen since the Corporate Resources Committee meeting;
- there had always been an atmosphere of respect in the Chamber but it was felt that the tone of the current debate at times had not met that standard and this was regrettable;
- the need for a post of Depute Chief Executive had been made already, not least in light of the current circumstances in dealing with the pandemic;
- in relation to the Seminars, it was expected that the Executive Chief Officers, who were already reviewing their teams, would contribute to future discussions;
- there was a need to have someone in place to deputise for the Chief Executive if this proved necessary;
- it was not in the best interests of the Council as a whole to delete this post at this time;
- there was concern at the criticism of comments made by Members which was viewed as an attempt to stifle debate and as such it was stressed that all Members of the Council had the right to be able to speak openly on any issue during discussion in the Chamber;
- it was understood and acknowledged that a decision had previously been taken on recruitment to the post of Depute Chief Executive but that did not mean that Members could not now take stock of the current situation and change their minds if they so wished;
- circumstances had changed greatly since the start of the year and a number of questions remained unanswered, including whether and how this post should be filled in light of the financial position now facing the Council;
- whilst agreeing with the urgent arrangement of Seminars, it was considered that a final report, together with a business case, on this issue should come back to the full Council for consideration;
- it was imperative that the Council took steps to build in additional resilience at the present time and the filling of this post would meet that requirement and ensure that the senior management team was 'fit for purpose', both now and in the coming months and years;
- the Chief Executive had done an excellent job since coming to the Council but she needed to have a full team in place and as such it was important that any review of this issue was undertaken quickly;
- a dangerous phase of the pandemic was approaching and steps had to be

taken to ensure that the correct senior management team was in place, including in relation to succession planning, across the Council; and

- a positive approach was being sought in regard to this issue and it was a matter of regret that there had been no Member Seminars arranged since last November as they offered a way forward in terms of addressing this issue which would be judged in the public domain and had to be resolved urgently.

Thereafter, Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr G MacKenzie, **MOVED** the suspension of the active recruitment to the post of Depute Chief Executive. Also, to further request that the Chief Executive reinstate, with urgency, the Member Seminars that were regularly held to update Members with progress in respect of the organisational structure and transition. These Seminars would offer Members the opportunity to review progress following the previously held governance workshops and offer the ability for Members to have input to the process as was previously the case.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, moved that the Council should proceed with the recruitment to the post of Depute Chief Executive and also reinstate, with urgency, the Members Seminars that were regularly held to update Members with progress in respect of the organisational structure and transition. These Seminars would offer Members the opportunity to review progress following the previously held governance workshops and offer the ability for Members to have input to the process as was previously the case.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 34 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 33 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

#### **For the Motion:**

B Allan, R Balfour, A Baxter, B Boyd, R Bremner, I Brown, J Bruce, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, C Fraser, K Gowans, P Hadley, A Jarvie, E Knox, D Loudon, L MacDonald, A MacInnes, Mr D Mackay, G MacKenzie, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, D Macpherson, R MacWilliam, J McGillivray, A Rhind, E Roddick, K Rosie, P Sagers, A Sinclair, N Sinclair, C Smith and M Smith.

#### **For the Amendment:**

G Adam, 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, Mrs D Mackay, W MacKay, A Mackinnon, A MacLean, B McAllister, H Morrison, C Munro, L Munro, M Paterson, M Reiss, D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, G Ross and B Thompson.

#### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** to suspend the active recruitment to the post of Depute Chief Executive and also to further request that the Chief Executive should reinstate, with urgency, the Members Seminars that were regularly held to update Members with progress in respect of the organisational structure and transition. These Seminars would offer Members the opportunity to review progress following the previously held governance workshops and offer the ability for Members to have input to the process as was previously the case.

Also arising from the Minutes of the Corporate Resources Committee, Members raised the following issues:-

- Page 190 – Item 4 – Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report – a commitment had been given at the meeting that further and more detailed information would be provided in regard to the Transformation Change Fund and also in relation to Severance Payments to Senior Management but this had not yet been received;
- Page 191 – Item 4 – it had been stated in the Minutes that the ‘Chair advised that the Administration and the Committee were fully supportive of the Chief Executive’ but it was suggested that reference to ‘the Committee’ was not an accurate reflection from the meeting and that this wording should therefore be removed;
- (At this point, reference was also made to the deletion of wording from the Minutes of a previous Lochaber Area Committee meeting without reference to the Chair of that Committee and, following discussion, it was agreed that this matter would be followed up by the Head of Corporate Governance);
- Pages 190/191 – at the meeting, it had been agreed that further detail would be provided for all Members of the Committee on the current number of Heads of Service across the Council (and the related cost savings in this regard) and also in relation to the settlement figures for previous staff members who had now left the Council (as detailed in the Accounts) but this had not yet been received;
- Pages 190/191 – it had been stated in the Minutes that the Council was in a far stronger financial position than it had been for ‘a number of years’ but reference had actually been made (at the meeting) by the Chair to ‘15/20 years’ and it was suggested that this should be clarified (within the Minutes); and
- Page 188/189 – Item 3 – Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee - on the basis that the Chair of the Committee had personally recalled this item at the meeting (without the agreement of the Committee), it was queried as to which Standing Order allowed the Chair to take this course of action. In response, the Chair acknowledged that he had not in fact had the authority to take this course of action and apologised accordingly.

At this point, it was **AGREED** that the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee, in conjunction with the Head of Corporate Governance, would check the Minutes for accuracy in relation to the issues which had been raised and, if necessary, a revised version would be forwarded to all Members of the Committee thereafter. Also, it would be ensured that action was taken by the relevant Officers in terms of issuing the detailed information which it had been agreed would be forwarded to Members of the Committee but had not yet been received.

Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, 26 August  
City of Inverness Area Committee, 27 August  
Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee, 31 August

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded, and in taking account of the issues raised above, were otherwise **APPROVED** as circulated.

## 5. **Community Planning Board** **Bòrd Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Community Planning Board held on 28 February 2020 (approved by the Board on 21 August 2020) which were **NOTED**.

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

There had been circulated for approval Minutes of Meeting of the Climate Change Working Group held on Tuesday, 11 August 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

**7. Brexit Working Group  
Buidhean Obrach Brexit**

There had been circulated for approval Minutes of Meeting of the Brexit Working Group held on Monday, 17 August 2020 which were **APPROVED** – subject to the following:-

Item 6 – Brexit & European Update - it had been stated that it was feared that the Highlands would lose ‘approximately £90m per year in funding from 2021 through the loss of market access in particular’ but it was highlighted that this should be corrected to read as follows - ‘£90m in grants and £120m through market access restrictions making a total of £210m and that with a multiplier effect the total loss to the Highlands could be as much as a third of a billion pounds after Year 1’.

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

The Council **AGREED** the following:-

Communities & Place Committee – Mr R Balfour to replace Mr B Lobban  
Brexit Working Group – Mr J Bruce to fill the current vacancy  
Housing and Property Committee – Vice Chair – Mr L Fraser  
Pension Board – Mrs M Paterson

**9. Joint HC/NHS Monitoring Committee – Joint Chairs  
Co-Chomataidh Sgrùdaidh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd/NHS Co-  
Chathraichean**

**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.

It was **AGREED** that the Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee should replace the Leader of the Council as the Council Co-chair of the HC/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee.

This change would also require to be agreed by NHS Highland and the Committee Remit updated accordingly.

**10. Joint HC/NHS Adult Protection Committee  
Co-Chomataidh Dìon Inbheach Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd/NHS**

**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.



It was **AGREED** that Ms L Munro should be appointed to the Joint Adult Protection Committee.

## 11. Corporate Resources Sub Committee

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

At this point, the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee proposed that the wording in the recommendations of the original report should now be changed as follows – recommendation (i) ‘oversee’ to now read ‘consider’ and recommendation (iv) ‘be held in private’ to now read ‘be held in public’.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was suggested that formation of this Sub Committee represented a layer of unnecessary ‘bureaucracy’ as what was being proposed in relation to the remit was already being undertaken by the Corporate Resources Committee;
- it had been an error by the Chair to remove this item during discussion at the Corporate Resources meeting and as such this did not reflect well on the Administration;
- submission of the Minutes of Meetings of any new Sub Committee to the parent Committee did not allow for comprehensive debate, discussion or scrutiny;
- as had already been suggested, it was not clear as to what the need was for a new Sub Committee when budget issues were already within the remit of the Corporate Resources Committee;
- it had been highlighted that there could be a need to engage with subject matter experts and it was queried as to whether there would be additional expenditure in terms of such engagement;
- it had been stated that the Council was facing unprecedented financial challenges but also that it was in a far stronger financial position than had been the case in previous years and it was suggested that both statements could not be accurate at the same time and therefore required clarification;
- in relation to the importance of the subject matter, it was felt that a detailed business case was needed in terms of the proposal to create a Sub Committee with fewer Members than the parent Committee;
- it was also suggested that a more appropriate way forward would be to arrange additional or special meetings of the Corporate Resources Committee as opposed to creating a new Sub Committee; and
- in contrast to other views which had been expressed, it was felt that there would be no reduction in the level of scrutiny by the Corporate Resources Committee and that additional consideration of budget issues by a Sub Committee allowed for much greater transparency.

Thereafter, Mr A MacKinnon, seconded by Dr I Cockburn, **MOVED** the recommendations within the original report for the formation of a Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee – subject to amendments to recommendation (i) whereby the word ‘oversee’ would be replaced with ‘consider’ and recommendation (iv) whereby ‘held in private’ would be replaced with ‘held in public’.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr D MacLeod, seconded by Mr A Baxter, moved that there was no value in forming a new Sub Committee as its stated purpose was a restatement of the functions of the Corporate Resources Committee itself and it was therefore proposed that it should not be appointed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 53 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 9 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

G Adam, B Allan, R Balfour, J Barclay, B Boyd, R Bremner, I Brown, J Bruce, C Caddick, I Campbell, J Campbell, H Carmichael, A Christie, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, M Davidson, J Finlayson, M Finlayson, C Fraser, L Fraser, R Gale, J Gordon, K Gowans, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, A Henderson, E Knox, B Lobban, D Louden, L MacDonald, A MacInnes, Mrs D Mackay, W MacKay, G MacKenzie, A Mackinnon, A MacLean, C MacLeod, B McAllister, J McGillivray, H Morrison, C Munro, L Munro, M Paterson, M Reiss, D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, E Roddick, K Rosie, G Ross, N Sinclair, and B Thompson.

**For the Amendment:**

A Baxter, A Jarvie, D Mackay, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, D MacLeod, P Saggars, A Sinclair and C Smith.

**Abstention:**

D Macpherson

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** that the Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee should:-

- (i) consider budget, monitoring and outturn activities across the Council's revenue and capital budgets;
- (ii) comprise 11 Elected Members, drawn from membership of the Corporate Resources Committee and selected on the basis of political balance;
- (iii) be a sub-committee of, and report to, the Corporate Resources Committee;
- (iv) meet monthly, be held in public, and engage with subject matter experts as considered appropriate; and
- (v) submit minutes of the Sub-Committee's meetings to the Corporate Resources Committee for consideration and approval.

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED**:-

- (i) that the Corporate Resources Sub Committee should consider budget, monitoring and outturn activities across the Council's revenue and capital budgets;
- (ii) comprise 11 Elected Members, drawn from membership of the Corporate Resources Committee and selected on the basis of political balance;
- (iii) be a sub-committee of, and report to, the Corporate Resources Committee;
- (iv) meet monthly, be held in public, and engage with subject matter experts as considered appropriate; and
- (v) submit minutes of meetings to the Corporate Resources Committee for consideration and approval.

## 12. Question Time (Public) Am Ceiste

The following questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance from members of the public in terms of Standing Order 11a –

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

(i) Ms B Irvine

To the Chair of the Education Committee

“Many schools before COVID struck didn’t have their full allocation of staff with some requiring 5 teachers in various subjects across the board.  
7 September 2020

Now with the impact of COVID on education and learning the Deputy First Minister John Swinney has stated –

“Extra staff as schools re-open. Funding of £50 million will be ring-fenced for the recruitment of approximately 850 extra teachers and around 200 additional support staff as local authorities plan for the re-opening of schools”.

<https://www.gov.scot/news/funding-for-more-teachers/>

Announced on 4 September 2018, The Scottish Government is investing over £60 million in additional school counselling services across all of Scotland. £12 million will go to local authorities for 2019/20, rising to £16 million a year thereafter.

<https://www.gov.scot/news/mental-health-in-schools/>

The Scottish government announced in Sept 2019 £15m to recruit 1,000 classroom assistants to work with children who have additional support needs (ASN).

<https://www.gov.scot/news/additional-support-for-learning/>

Can the Highland Council therefore provide information as to what allocation of those funds mentioned above they received and also what recruitment has been carried out as per above?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and with reference to the table presented at Paragraph 5.5 where it had been stated that ‘out of the £2.2m ringfenced for extra staff, £800,000 had been spent already’, it was queried as to what this had been spent on, specifically how many teaching support staff and where. Also, from the table, it appeared that the remaining £1.4m was being used to possibly plug the budget gap. In regard to counselling, the First Minister had said, “the commitment we have made to put counsellors into secondary schools, every secondary school across the country, is on track and this is due to be completed at the end of October 2020” and it was queried at where Highland Council was in getting counsellors into all secondary schools as this was only a month and a half away.

In response, the Chair of the Education Committee confirmed that he would respond when he had the information to hand. In terms of the counselling and the allocation, and making sure that counsellors were in schools by October, a report was to go to the Education Committee on 30 September which would give more detail and, as indicated in the initial response, the Council was aiming to have local solutions for local schools. In this regard, and in some parts of Highland, schools already had counselling

in place, either through an outside organisation or through Council staff. In this respect, it was advised that Ms Irvine should forward an email to the Chair regarding the first part of her question and he would make sure that she got a response (which would also be circulated to all Members of the Council).

(ii) Ms J Matheson

To the Leader of the Council

“Since Roseanna Cunningham MSP announced that the new Crown Estates funding arrangement would see “100% of revenue generated” going to coastal communities to enable them to fund local projects, and “more decisions .... taken at a local level”, how can Highland Council justify its proposal to disregard Scottish Governments method of funding allocation when coastal communities are in desperate need of funding to support the ongoing increase in tourism.”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and whilst appreciating that this matter would be discussed later in the meeting, it was suggested that if the Council approved the proposal (and even if they rejected it), a great deal of time and taxpayers’ money had already been spent at a time when resources were stretched more than ever. The purpose of these funds could not have been made clearer by the Scottish Government and it was therefore queried as to how the development of the strategy in line with the report could be justified as it was at such extreme variance from what the Council had been asked to put in place.

In response, it was confirmed that the report on the agenda had come from an Officer and referred to a compromise position following a Members’ Seminar. It could be that the decision later in the day would be different from what was being recommended and in fact it was expected that Motions and Amendments would be put forward. As such, it was not considered fair to say that the Council was disregarding the Scottish Government’s instructions. The Council was taking local decisions.

(iii) Mr D Ogg

To the Leader of the Council

“In view of the fact that coastal communities have an ongoing lack of adequate job opportunities, does the Council not consider that it would be more appropriate for any administration of the Crown Estates Fund to be undertaken by people located in those communities rather than simply handing the job to “competent Officers (currently) running the LEADER/FLAG programmes which are nearing closure”.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was noted that the reply highlighted the challenge of ensuring that population imbalance, which inevitably led to a positivity of representation of west coast rural and coastal areas compared to more populous Wards elsewhere and (notwithstanding the good work of Councillors Baxter and Thompson) did not, in turn, lead to the inevitability of a lack of devolution of decision making and commensurate employment. Given the all Member nature of this decision making process, queried as to how the Council would ensure that the interests of rural coastal communities on the west coast of the Council area were represented to the extent that the capabilities of and employment opportunities for members of these communities helping to run their own affairs was recognised.

In response, it was highlighted that the recommendation was that the distribution was put to Area Committees and the likelihood was that the Lochaber Area Committee would be able to deal with some of these requests. Also, the money, as it stood at the moment, took a lot of account of sea area which meant that Lochaber would benefit substantially, whatever the final decision was when taken.

### **Question Time (Members)** **Am Ceiste**

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance in terms of Standing Order 11 –

(i) Mr A Graham

To the Chair of the Housing & Property Committee

“What is the current balance on the Landbank Fund, the total currently advanced, total current commitments and the available Fund balance at present?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, queried as to whether all Members of the Council could be provided with a schedule of the advances made from the Landbank Fund in 2019/20 and also those proposals already made in 20/21, including details of the project locations and the number of housing units involved.

In response, confirmed that that information could be provided and could either be circulated to all Members by email or made part of a forthcoming, or next, Housing and Property Committee meeting.

(ii) Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

"Could you give an update on the current position with rollout of fibre broadband to the Highlands, and what the Council is doing to progress it?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given that Internet access was now nearly a household necessity, queried as to whether it could be emphasised that all Highland households needed fast broadband access as soon as possible during meetings with the Parliamentary Under Secretary for State of Scotland and the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands.

In response, confirmed that this issue had already been raised and a positive response received. It was therefore hoped that this would now be moved forward for the Highland area.

(iii) Mr D Rixson

To the Chair of the Tourism Committee

“A recent report to the Tourism Committee showed the degree of enthusiasm for developing local tourist infrastructure projects – often involving the provision of toilets

and motor-home facilities. One of the problems which emerged was that of the 13 projects agreed under the first two rounds only 1 had actually completed. What actions do you propose to encourage the extension of the RTIF scheme and speed up delivery in the future?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that the current Summer period had exposed the inadequacies of the rural tourist infrastructure, queried as to what actions were proposed to encourage the extension of the RTIF scheme.

(As the Chair of the Tourism Committee had had to unavoidably leave the meeting, it was confirmed that a response would be provided by her for Councillor Rixson in due course).

(iv) Mr R Bremner

To the Leader of the Council

"How many employees of Highland Council took their full complement of holidays within the last holiday year?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was highlighted that holidays were an important part of the wellbeing of Council staff and employees but budget pressures could often mean that cutting costs to services brought added pressure that was not conducive with allowing staff and employees to enjoy those holidays. Therefore, queried what steps the Administration would take to ensure that an ethos existed within the Council to reduce pressure on staff and employees in order that they could enjoy and benefit from holiday entitlement comfortably within the year of allocation.

In response, it was confirmed that the staff had had an extraordinary year and work had been undertaken alongside Trade Unions following which a decision had been taken for them to be enabled to take leave before the end of August if they so wished. It would be important, as the Council increased welfare discussions with both staff and the Trade Unions, to ensure that this process was working well, that decision making was fair and staff were encouraged to take their leave.

(v) Mr D Loudon

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

"Would you confirm that in 2018/19 employees earning £50,000 a year or more numbered 300 and in 2019/20 this increased to 574 employees earning £50,000 a year or more and explain if you think this represents excellence in cost control?"  
(See Annual Accounts Page 33)

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question – queried whether it was accepted that costs had risen from £538m in 2016/17 to £604m in 2019/20 and, if so, should the public accept that efforts to save money had been successful.

In response, it was confirmed that the main increase had been in relation to pay increases which had been set by the Scottish Government.

(vi) Mr D Louden

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“Would you confirm that total non-specific Grant support received from the Scottish Govt in 2018/19 was £498,728,000 and total non-specific Grant support received from the Scottish Govt in 2019/20 was £523,525,000 and this represented an increase of just under £25m rather than a much quoted £4m cut?”  
(See Annual Accounts Page 113)

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was highlighted that on 14 February 2019 the money available to provide existing services had reduced by just under £5m. On that basis queried as to whether it was accepted (as reported in the Annual Accounts) that £25m more had been received in the year from the Scottish Government rather than £5m less?

In response, it was confirmed that this would be investigated and a response provided, with a copy of the response also being circulated to all Members.

(vii) Mrs M Cockburn

To the Leader of the Council

“There are many businesses working hard to comply with Government guidelines and we must ensure that they are supported. However, I have had to report some companies for not adhering to these Covid-19 policies.

Does Highland Council have the manpower and support in the relevant team to ensure that the Highlands is a safe and compliant place in the workplace and for visitors now and the immediate future?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and whilst acknowledging the sterling work which the team have been doing, it was queried as to whether the Council could identify and support resources where possible as the increased incidents of reporting of establishments not complying was worrying and there had to be an emphasis on the public safety profile in the Highlands and protection of staff. As such, it was imperative to improve consumer confidence in relation to compliance by establishments which could increase footfall and revenue.

In response, and in expressing appreciation for the acknowledgement of the value of the Environmental Health team, it was confirmed that a detailed briefing would be circulated to Members on staff recruitment numbers and resource levels and future needs would be discussed with the Head of Environmental Health.

(viii) Ms M Smith

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee/Budget Leader

“Have you now arrived at a near final figure of what the Administration’s budget gap is?”

The response had been circulated.

(There was no supplementary question).

(ix) Mr K Gowans

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“What is the Council’s budget to fund planning enforcement action?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether it was agreed that this was not prudent financial management of a service given that the Council would not always be able to reclaim from third parties and that provided an element of risk which had not been assessed in either financial or reputational terms.

In response, it was confirmed that this was currently being investigated and the outcome would be communicated to Mr Gowans in due course.

(x) Mr K Gowans

To the Chair of the Environment & Infrastructure Committee

“Given the significant amounts of housing developments in the east of Inverness, some 4 -5,000 currently being built or planned, what progress has been made in identifying funding and securing land to build new primary and secondary schools as matter of urgency and will you agree to bring a comprehensive report advising of the progress to a meeting of E&I this year?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether it was agreed that the current developer contributions needed to be revised upwards in areas of high demand and frontloaded to serve the needs of areas in which they were located and if so whether a report could be submitted in this regard.

In response, it was confirmed that developer contributions had been recently upgraded but could be further reviewed to ensure that they had been set at the right level and a report submitted to Committee.

(xi) Mr K Gowans

To the Chair of the Environment & Infrastructure Committee

“Given the significant amounts of housing developments in the east of Inverness, some 4 -5,000 currently being built or planned, what progress has been made in identifying funding and securing land to build an indoor sports facility to service expanding settlements in the east of the Inverness and hinterland and will you agree to bring a comprehensive report advising of the progress to a meeting of E&I this year?”

The response had been circulated.



In terms of a supplementary question, and given the lack of phased infrastructure development which was often retrospective to housing development, queried as to whether it could be ensured that the provision of sports facilities and schools were forward phased to be at the front end as a condition of any new housing development.

In response, it was confirmed that developer contributions were taken to help with this and that sports facilities would be upgraded at the same time as new schools were built and secondary schools were extended in the area.

(xii) Mr K Gowans

To the Leader of the Council

“A new nursery was due to be opened adjacent to Milton of Leys Primary School in August 2019. This date was missed and the opening date was put back to August 2020. Understandably, this has been now delayed in some part due COVID-19.

Given the pressure on school and nursery rolls and the imminent provision of 1140 hours of free nursery care funded by the Scottish Government, *this is particularly concerning*. Can you provide the other reasons for the delays and provide me and the community with a realistic opening date?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what progress had been made on this matter given that Ward Members had not been updated since October 2019.

In response, it was confirmed that Officers had reported that they had been in touch with Local Members but that they would be reminded to provide a further update to all Local Members as soon as possible. Also, Officers had been in touch with the contractor and it was hoped that there would be no obstructions to this much needed facility. Information had been provided on the reconfiguration of classrooms and the potential construction methods for the extension.

(xiii) Mr S Mackie

To the Leader of the Council

“Do you believe that the self-imposed restriction of five Members’ Motions affords for the effective scrutiny of the Council and provide adequate opportunity for all elected Members to shape, debate and decide Council policy?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader believed that the Local Authority was affording every opportunity for Members to influence policy, given that she had sent an email on 23 August instructing Administration Members to ‘drown out’ Opposition Motions which she described as being ‘disruptive and negative’ and whether, in hindsight, she now agreed that this was a wholly inappropriate attempt to rein in scrutiny of the Local Authority and, in light of earlier speeches about ‘language and unity’, an example of hypocrisy.

In response, it was confirmed that the email which had been referred to was an internal document for the Independent Group and therefore there would be no comment on that document.

(xiv) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“What is the revised timetable for the Car Parking Review including plans for full implementation?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether, further to the answer provided, this budget saving now fell into the category of ‘unachievable’.

In response, the Leader confirmed that her understanding of the car parking review was that there had been a modest sum put against car park extensions in the current year. There was no doubt that the extra income anticipated was now unachievable unless communities themselves came forward to request the installation of new car parks.

(xv) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“Which recommendations made by the Highland Commission for Local Democracy has the Council implemented in full?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why there had been so little action several years after the Commission had reported and as such information was sought on how the Council had strengthened local democracy and localism, not including the already established Area Committees which had been in place when the Commission had met.

In response, it was confirmed that there were now more Area Committees which were a key part of localism and there had been substantial discussion at a local level on how to improve democratic decision-making at that level, e.g. participatory budgeting and the encouragement of other methods of involving the community.

(xvi) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Communities & Place Committee

“Why, when reopening recycling centres, has the Council kept them closed at weekends?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why recycling centres, other than in Inverness, had remained closed at weekends.

In response, it was confirmed that this was likely due to overtime costs and budget issues but it was hoped that opening times would be adjusted towards the end of the month as part of Phase 4.

(xvii) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“When, and how, as Leader of the Council have you been in contact with the Scottish and UK Governments to discuss what opportunities there are to realign the City-Region Deal to address new economic priorities in the Highlands and what has been the outcome?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and in regard to the political leadership requested at the Council meeting on 25 June 2020 to seek a review of the City-Region deals, queried as to why this had not yet been provided, the matter having instead been left to Officials.

In response, it was confirmed that this matter had been discussed by Officials with the UK and Scottish Governments, alongside unofficial talks with various key players, and a positive indication had been received that a review was likely. The process was complex in terms of cashflow and agreement of projects and it was important to decide on the best way of keeping Members updated. In the meantime, discussions would be continued with Ministers to keep the issue moving forward.

(xviii) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“What was the final total cost to the Council, including all agency fees, for the recent employment of the interim Executive Chief Officer for Education and Learning?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and with regard to a response received at the Council meeting on 25 June that the Leader was happy to circulate monetary arrangements but did not have that information at the time, it was queried as to why Members had not been told on 25 June 2020 that this appointment was subject to confidentiality arrangements.

In response, it was confirmed that the detail of the timing of the information provided would have to be investigated.

(xix) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Housing & Property Committee

“What areas within your Committee remit are you planning to devolve to Area Committees?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why Area Committees could not formally receive an element of capital receipts from the disposal of Council property in their areas.

In response, it was confirmed that this was within the remit of the Housing and Property Committee and work was about to be embarked upon in terms of introducing a corporate landlord model and an asset management approach to dealing with properties. This would give Area Committees substantially more information on the capital assets in their area and allow them to be much more robust in their scrutiny. Part of the rationale for introducing an asset management approach was that it enabled a more efficient and strategic approach to be taken. That might happen on a cross-area basis so there was a substantial debate to be had about how best to allocate control of capital receipts between the centre and Area Committees. Information was needed first and that would take a year or two of work but it would empower Area Committees substantially.

(xx) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Communities & Place Committee

“What areas within your Committee remit are you planning to devolve to Area Committees?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what functions of the Communities and Place Committee the Chair would like devolved to the Lochaber Area Committee

In response, it was confirmed by the Chair that he would like to see environmental health, playpark budgets, burials and extensions to burial grounds devolved to the Area Committee.

(xxi) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

“What areas within your Committee remit are you planning to devolve to Area Committees?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why the request made by Members at the end of the last Council term for consideration to be given to the devolution of planning to Area Committees had not been undertaken.

In response, it was confirmed that this had not yet been discussed but it was still on the agenda. It was considered that the current system of North and South Planning Application Committees worked well but the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee was happy to discuss the matter if it was felt that improvements could be made to the current process.

(xxii) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Education Committee

“What areas within your Committee remit are you planning to devolve to Area Committees?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and in light of the Chair of the Education Committee's response that further Education Committee functions could be devolved to Area Committees, it was queried as to the timescale for this evaluation and when recommendations would be made for changes to the Scheme of Delegation in relation to Education Committee functions.

In response, it was confirmed that Members had been invited to a Seminar on Attainment and it was hoped to present detailed information at Area Committee level on attainment in respect of individual schools. Other areas that could be decided at local level required to be discussed at the Education Committee and the Chair confirmed that he was happy to have a discussion with Mr Baxter in that regard.

(xxiii) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

"When will the process of dis-aggregating Service budgets to Area Committees be complete and will you confirm which budgets will be devolved?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why the Council decision, in February 2019, to review disaggregated budgets and improve local decision-making through a new approach to retention and monies for local allocation had not been implemented.

In response, it was confirmed that this was being looked into at present. It was necessary to bear in mind that the Council was going through a restructuring at senior level but the issue raised was important and steps would be taken to get it back on track.

(xxiv) Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

"How many staff are currently employed by the Highland Council today, how does this number compare with the number employed at the 2018-19 year end (at 31/03/2019) and the 2017-18 year end (at 31/03/2018) and could I have a breakdown by each Executive Chief Officer department?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what the ideal target was in relation to the number of Highland Council employees required to carry out all Council services efficiently.

In response, it was confirmed that it was not possible to specifically answer that question but that the Administration was happy with the current complement of staff and had made a commitment that there would be no redundancies. Staff were the most important element of the Council and their efforts, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, were commended.

(xxv) Mr A Jarvie

To the Chair of the Communities & Place Committee

“How is a 50% increase in brown bin fees over three years consistent with this Council’s declaration of a climate emergency?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given the Council’s declaration of a climate emergency, it was queried as to how the Council could be serious about meeting its obligations when it appeared to do no more than the minimum required and to put the profit of a service ahead of the environment.

In response, it was confirmed that when the brown bin service had initially been considered, the target price had been £50 but it had been introduced at a lower price to encourage people to take up the scheme and had become one of the most successful services the Council had implemented. The increase in price to £50 had encouraged more people to use recycling centres and the service was so popular that requests had been made for it to be rolled out elsewhere.

(xxvi) Mr A Jarvie

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“How many vehicles has the Council SORN’d to receive a road tax refund and placed on lay-up insurance during Covid?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and having visited the Recycling Centre in Inverness recently where a large number of vehicles had not moved since the Covid-19 lockdown (and there were similar examples in other Council locations), and on the basis that every vehicle which had not moved or was not being used was costing between £140 to £600 per vehicle in road tax, it was queried as to whether everything possible was being done to save money given the significant financial difficulties facing the Council.

In response, it was advised that the written response had confirmed the current situation with the Council’s Fleet and any further questions on this issue should be directed to the Council’s Transport and Logistics Manager.

(xxvii) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

“At Council on 31 October 2019, a motion was passed on the change developer contribution policy yet no policy change appears to have taken place. When will this happen?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was highlighted that a motion had been passed on the change to the Developer Contribution Policy but there had been no progress on this due to staff working on matters relating to Covid-19. However, six

months had passed between the change to the policy and the start of the Covid-19 crisis and it was therefore queried as to what Covid-19 response staff had been working on in October 2019.

In response, it was confirmed that staff had not been working on Covid-19 in October 2019 and disappointment was expressed that no progress on changes to developer contributions had been made. As such, discussions would be held with Officers and the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to expedite this matter.

(xxviii) Mr S Mackie

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“How many ratepayers have received a Council Tax payment holiday during Covid?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that in March the Council’s website had shown a permanent link to Council Tax payment holidays on the Council Tax page but this navigation had been removed between mid-March and April, it was queried if this navigation would reappear given how many constituents across the region were facing hardship due to Covid-19.

In response, it was confirmed that this matter would be investigated and a response provided for Mr Mackie.

(xxix) Mr S Mackie

To the Leader of the Council

“How many hours of Continual Professional Development have the whole Executive Leadership team received or undertaken in the past 12 months?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given that Members were responsible for Senior appointments, it was queried as to whether the Leader would commit to ensuring that Continual Professional Development (CPD) was embedded in Senior Officer roles and the amount of CPD logged in hours from now on.

In response, Leader undertook to discuss this matter with the Chief Executive.

(xxx) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“We are we halfway through the financial year, but the Council is not yet fully charging for parking permits and residents have contacted me confused. Why are we losing out on much needed revenue?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the new parking permit system would be operating at full capacity to allow all parking permit applications to be processed to bring in much needed revenue and whether any

surplus income generated would be ringfenced to the locality and made available to invest locally as agreed by each Local Committee.

In response, it was confirmed that the parking permit scheme would be operating at full capacity but that this would be wholly dependent on the Covid-19 situation. In terms of surplus funds being raised from the scheme, this would be investigated and a response provided for Mrs MacKenzie.

(xxxii) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

“Why are we not able to create a Highland Rover ticket to create a much needed income in the Highland Region as previously agreed to explore at the former EDI Committee as, with the Stay vacation boom, this would be both welcomed for value to users and income to the Council?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to how revenue raised from the Council Rover Scheme would be used and whether it would be ringfenced to local communities to supplement income for tourist related maintenance and infrastructure.

In response, it was confirmed that a Visitor Management Plan was being prepared and the use of any surplus income would require to be considered at a later date.

(xxxiii) Mr A Sinclair

To the Chair of the Education Committee

“What assessment has been made as to why the Highland Council cannot attract applicants for senior education posts, in what is one of the most competitive recruitment fields within Local Government?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that there had been two Local Authorities who had been unable to appoint a Director/Executive Chief Officer for Education, it was queried as to whether those Local Authorities were Highland Council and Scottish Borders Council.

In response, it was confirmed that the two Local Authorities were Highland Council and Scottish Borders Council and that over the last few years there had been a number of other Councils also in a similar position with difficulties in recruiting at a senior level. In this regard, the difficulty in recruiting at a senior level was a growing problem both in Scotland and the wider UK.

(xxxiiii) Mr A Sinclair

To the Leader of the Council

“Can you detail the total spend to date of City-Region Deal Funding within Wick and East Caithness?”

The response had been circulated.



In terms of a supplementary question, and given that it was an extremely high-profile package of taxpayers' money with significant public and political interest across the region, it was queried as to whether the Leader would support efforts to provide a breakdown in spend by Council Ward from this point forward.

In response, it was confirmed that there had been maps and scripts prepared which had been circulated to Members in relation to spend (and it was recalled that Thurso had had a substantial spend). It was also agreed that discussion would be undertaken with the relevant Officer to determine what else would be possible in this regard.

(xxxiv) Mr D MacLeod

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“What Council fund was each of the last financial year's severance payments taken from?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether details could be provided in relation to the total cost of severance payments made through the Council's General Fund for the last year.

In response, it was confirmed that this would have to be obtained and provided in due course.

(xxxv) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

“What representations have you made to the Chief Executive about Members' concerns that micromanagement is hindering the operation of the Council and disempowering staff?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and with reference to an email on 25 August from the Leader which confirmed that she and the Convener were to meet with the Chief Executive to discuss micro-management holding up the operation of the Council and disempowering staff, it was queried as to what the outcome of that meeting had been.

In response, it was confirmed that this was a quote from an internal Independent Group summary which had been circulated on behalf of the Independent Group and no details would be shared.

(xxxvi) Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

“How many Janitors' houses does Highland Council currently own throughout its Highland and Islands school communities, and of these janitor houses, can you please give an update on the number that are empty and the length of time that they have been empty for, including how much revenue has not been collected in housing rent and council tax, (listing the element within this 'education & housing estate' that are

within the 'Empty Homes Council Tax Penalty' for properties that have remained empty for over one full year and continue to be empty today)?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what assurances could be given to Members that every possible step was being taken to reduce homelessness for citizens and to create much needed revenue for the Council from its vacant housing stock.

In response, and in relation to housing stock, reassurance was provided that everything possible was being done to free up houses for rent and every effort was being made to make vacant properties available for rental as permitted by law.

(xxxvii)Mr D Macpherson

To the Leader of the Council

"Is it acceptable that Elected Members of Highland Council are being encouraged and instructed to complete F.O.I. (Freedom of Information) requests in order to obtain information that should be made readily available to them by virtue of their position as publicly elected Highland Councillors?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried why, if Members were not supposed to send Freedom of Information Requests to obtain information, a Member had shared recently that they had been advised by an FOI Officer that they should and at FOI induction training 3 years prior this had been reiterated.

In response, it was confirmed that any Member could put in a Freedom of Information Request if they so wished. However, if a Member could not obtain the information from asking Officers involved in those services or if there were any issues with this, then information should be sought from the Service Chair or the Leader of the Council.

### **13. Notices of Motion Brathan Glusaid**

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

In this regard, there had also been circulated Financial Impact Statements from the Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance.

#### **Emergency Notice of Motion:-**

'Throughout the pandemic we have received information on national and Highland wide numbers infected with Covid-19. However, as powers to implement lock downs and restrictions are moving to more local areas, we believe we require more localised information.

We are aware that detailed information is shared on a daily basis with a range of authorities, including senior council officers, but there are currently restrictions in place about who this is shared with such as with elected members. This has a detrimental impact on our ability to plan, make informed decisions and provide advice and reassurance to our communities.

This Council calls on the First Minister to reconsider the flow of information from the Scottish Government Resilience Rooms to local authorities and to review the current protocols to enable more timeous and appropriate sharing of information to enable enhanced partnership working with the Scottish Government and resilience partners and, critically, improved local decision making and representation.'

Signed: Mrs M Davidson Mr A Christie Mr A Jarvie Mr J Gray

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- as part of planning for a second wave of the Covid-19 virus, it was expected that there would be a move to more localised lockdowns and as such more localised decision making and as such it was hoped that this Motion would have cross-Party support;
- the situation was moving very rapidly and there was a need to request more local information from the Scottish Government as a matter of urgency, not least so that the Council was in the strongest possible position to support local communities;
- it was important for the Scottish Government to review how information was distributed in future and to lift restrictions on some of the NHS statistics in particular (which were currently only provided for Senior Officers in the Resilience Group) so that they could be used in local decision making;
- it was suggested that the flow of information had been disappointing in some cases and had been dealt with differently by different Health Boards in the absence of any national directive from the Scottish Government and this situation needed to be improved;
- building up knowledge and expertise in the Highlands for the future would enable the best decisions to be made in conjunction with the Scottish Government and NHS Highland;
- whilst not disagreeing with the terms of the Notice of Motion, there was some concern about confidentiality issues and as such it was felt that there was a need for more detail to be provided on proposed future structures;
- it was also stressed that medical decisions should not form part of any future structure/decision making process;
- it would be imperative for very strong conditions to be attached to any future sharing of information;
- it had to be acknowledged that the Council had the best knowledge of the Highland area and local circumstances and would be best placed to make decisions on when and where to share future information;
- there had to be an assessment of the potential increased workload for Council staff in any new arrangement for the sharing of information;
- it was suggested that as an amendment the second paragraph of the Motion should be removed and the following wording added to the third paragraph 'including a localised breakdown of previously Highland-wide statistics' (to be inserted between 'sharing of information' and 'to enable partnership working');
- it was noted that any confidential information would only be shared with Elected Members of the Council;
- there was a need to ensure that public expectations of any new arrangement were correctly managed in order not to give the idea that all information would be released when this might not be the case in some circumstances;
- it was suggested that the following wording should be added to the Notice of Motion and/or the Amendment – 'the Council further commits to improving communication and working arrangements with NHS Highland's public health colleagues'; and

- whilst not taking away from the national strategy, and in taking account of the very best public health advice at a local level, there was a need for a Highland wide strategy to deal with any future stages of the pandemic.

Thereafter, Mrs M Davidson, seconded by Mr A Christie, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Ms E Roddick, seconded by Mr R MacWilliam, moved that the second paragraph of the Motion should be removed, the following wording added to the third paragraph 'including a localised breakdown of previously Highland-wide statistics' (to be inserted between 'sharing of information' and 'to enable partnership working') and that the Council should further commit to improving communication and working arrangements with NHS Highland's public health colleagues.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 47 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 20 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

#### **For the Motion:**

G Adam, J Barclay, A Baxter, 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, A Jarvie, B Lobban, Mrs D Mackay, Mr D Mackay, W MacKay, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, A Mackinnon, A MacLean, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, D Macpherson, B McAllister, J McGillivray, H Morrison, C Munro, L Munro, M Paterson, M Reiss, D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, G Ross, P Saggars, A Sinclair, N Sinclair, C Smith, and B Thompson.

#### **For the Amendment:**

B Allan, R Balfour, B Boyd, R Bremner, I Brown, G Campbell-Sinclair, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, C Fraser, K Gowans, P Hadley, E Knox, D Louden, L MacDonald, A MacInnes, G MacKenzie, R MacWilliam, P Munro, E Roddick and K Rosie.

#### **Decision**

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

Prior to consideration of the undernoted Notices of Motion (i) to (v) which had been listed on the agenda for the meeting, it was **NOTED** that Standing Order 10.1, which confirmed the previous agreement by the Council that only 5 Notices of Motion could be considered at any one meeting, could be re-considered by the Council at the next Review of Standing Orders.

At this point, and on being advised by Mr A Baxter that he had been forced to submit a Freedom of Information request in order to have sight of other Notices of Motion submitted (but not selected) for this meeting, the Convener **AGREED** that he would discuss this matter with Mr Baxter following the meeting.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

The following Members declared non-financial interests in this item (i) but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion –

**Mr A Christie – General Manager, Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**

**Mr A Jarvie, Mrs M Cockburn and Mr R Balfour – Directors of Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey CAB**

**Mrs D MacKay – Director of East Sutherland & Caithness CAB**

**Mr C MacLeod – Director of Skye & Lochalsh CAB**

**Mr P Siggers – Director of Nairn CAB**

(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.'

Signed: Mr D Rixson Mr R Gale

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Highland public wanted a greener future and this Notice of Motion was about amplifying that message by including remote working as part of the future of the Council on the basis that it had already been demonstrated that it could work successfully;
- the Covid-19 crisis had provided an opportunity for remote working which had been embraced and now it had to be carried forward as part of the Council culture;
- this had to be a choice made by each employee but it was considered that it could aid wellbeing, as well as helping with the pursuit of environmental goals, reducing the Council's corporate carbon footprint and acting as an example for others;
- ultimately, it was hoped that this could cover all employees of the Council over the next 30/40 years but it had been deliberately submitted on the basis of applying to new employees only at this time;
- if agreed, it was suggested that this could be the starting point for a sensible and practical policy across the Council;
- operational requirements had to be paramount but all applications for flexible working should be considered by Line Managers;
- it was felt that this could help to address issues of depopulation in rural areas of the Highlands in particular by attracting people to come and live and work in the area;
- it had already been proved over recent months that working with TEAMS was very successful and as such there was a need to build and expand upon that success;
- it had to be acknowledged that remote working offered more flexible working opportunities for those with disabilities, parents of young children and those with caring responsibilities;
- even before Covid-19, both UHI and Highlands & Islands Enterprise had incorporated remote working into their recruitment strategies and following these examples would help the Council to build on its reputation as an inclusive and modern employer;
- if agreed, it was anticipated that all future vacancies would be considered for

- remote working and advertised as such if suitable;
- a small amendment was suggested in terms of adding the following wording to the end of the Motion – ‘The Council will update its HR strategy to enable remote working for all those that aren’t location or office dependent, identify and target areas of depopulation when recruiting and use targeted recruitment to attract candidates with disabilities and caring responsibilities’;
  - it was clear that not all employees wanted to work from home and as such it was imperative that the choice was their own;
  - it was noted that discussions were currently ongoing at a national level with a view to perhaps introducing a requirement for employers to offer remote working in future;
  - a small amendment was therefore suggested to include the following wording at the beginning of the third paragraph – ‘A review is carried out during recruitment to ask if applicants would like to consider remote working’;
  - it was suggested that consideration should also be given to commencing discussion with Trade Unions in relation to existing staff where roles were suitable for home working and in cases where they might wish to make this choice;
  - it was essential that any reviews were undertaken quickly to reduce any potential increase in staff workload and that issues of mental health were also quickly addressed;
  - whilst offering remote working, it would also be important to take account of the benefits of face-to-face interaction, particularly in relation to new employees;
  - it should be highlighted that teaching online had been very successful, particularly in light of the introduction of new and emerging technologies;
  - whilst agreeing with the terms of the Motion, it would also be important to take account of unintended consequences, such as new employees living out with the Highland area which would not address one of the aims of addressing depopulation in rural areas;
  - there was a need to take account of the fact that some areas in the Highlands still had connectivity issues and this would be a factor for remote working;
  - it was suggested that the Council should now start to consider ways in which to change the balance towards remote working for all employees over a period of time through the development of HR procedures to support home working and engagement with employee representatives and Trade Unions; and
  - there was a need to provide practical aids where necessary for those employees working from home and to recognise and acknowledge the sacrifices which they and their families had been making in this regard over recent months.

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

As an **AMENDMENT**, Ms E Knox, seconded by Mr A Jarvie, moved that the Council should update its HR strategy to enable remote working for all those who weren’t location or office dependent, identify and target areas of depopulation when recruiting and use targeted recruitment to attract candidates with disabilities and caring responsibilities. Also, that a review be carried out during recruitment to ask if applicants would like to consider remote working.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 36 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 31 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion:**

G Adam, 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, Mrs D Mackay, W MacKay, A Mackinnon, A MacLean, D MacLeod, D Macpherson, B McAllister, H Morrison, C Munro, L Munro, M Paterson, M Reiss, D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, G Ross, N Sinclair, and B Thompson.

### **For the Amendment:**

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

### **Decision**

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

(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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- fuel poverty was one of the most prevalent aspects of hardship in the Highlands with approximately 70% of households being affected and as many as 90% in Caithness and Sutherland;
- Highland residents paid more in relation to distribution costs as compared with larger urban areas and the differences could be substantial e.g. average costs in the Highland were £122 per year compared with £95 per year in the south of Scotland and £65 in London;
- at the present time, tourism income had all but disappeared due to the pandemic and this, together with higher electricity costs, had created a serious situation for many people;
- households often had to make a choice between eating or heating which in effect meant that food poverty came with fuel poverty which was an unacceptable situation;
- it was therefore essential that lobbying of the UK Government was undertaken in order to highlight and seek a solution for the issues which had been raised;
- it was important to acknowledge that the consequences of fuel poverty were often misery, discomfort, ill health and debt and this had to be addressed;
- choice of heating was often limited in many Highland areas to oil or coal and it

was considered that replacing the current electricity distribution system would improve this situation whilst also lowering costs;

- there was a need to arrange a meeting with Ofgem as soon as possible to discuss such issues as the additional 2p per kw/hr, the waste of switched off wind power overnight, opportunities to decarbonise transport and home heating, possible provision of low cost hydrogen as an alternative to natural gas, contracts for difference (especially in relation to tidal power), longer life for generation projects and the grid to be balanced more easily through the use of pump storage hydro;
- the terms of the Notice of Motion represented a very considered and constructive introduction to this topic and was welcomed;
- it was considered that Energy Policy/Fuel Poverty was a 'black and white issue' and as such the current UK policy was wrong and had to be reviewed;
- it was imperative that the Council took a corporate view on this issue in order to add a strong voice to the calls for it to be reviewed at a national level in order to make the policy 'fit for purpose';
- it was inconceivable that power lines were located in the Highlands and yet the area was in fact penalised in terms of costs and at the very least there was a need for some form of premiums to be introduced for bills (whereby the area generating the electricity was allowed some form of discount);
- it was suggested that, in order to make this a more permanent policy area, the Council should agree to undertake to lobby and to look at what could be done realistically in the meantime to support as many people as possible by adding the following wording to the end of the Motion – 'that the Council further commits to lobby to resolve this inequity and as a start agree to create a presumption in favour of renewable energy with new Council House developments (depending on local circumstances and being economical for tenants);
- the Highland area should not be in a position of having to endure fuel poverty which disproportionately affected the elderly and those with young babies and as such the Council needed to do more wherever possible, including through focus groups, lobbying and starting a campaign/awareness raising attitude on this issue;
- a very small percentage of the constraints payments to switch turbines off would in fact pay for all fuel poverty in a single Ward in the Caithness area;
- there was a need for everyone to work together, alongside the MPs and MSPs for the area, in terms of addressing this issue; and
- in terms of the proposed additional wording in relation to 'creating a presumption in favour of renewable energy with new Council House developments', it was suggested that it would not be appropriate to restrict future tenants in relation to their choice of energy provider but that proposal could be considered in the first instance at Strategic Committee level as and where appropriate.

### **Decision**

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

*(At this point, the meeting adjourned - 5.30pm – and resumed the following day, Friday, 11 September at 9.00am.)*

Prior to consideration of the remaining Notices of Motion, the Chief Executive advised that information had been released on the previous day (10 September) by the First Minister and, having considered it overnight, it was her intention to call an urgent meeting on the following Monday with the Convener and Group Leaders to discuss the implications for the Highland Council as a priority.



In summary, it was noted that the First Minister had confirmed that Scotland was not yet ready to move to Phase 4 due to the increase in Covid-19 cases and would therefore remain in Phase 3 until at least October. In addition, it was noted that the number of people from separate households who were allowed to meet had been reduced, there was increasing concern about the potential for students returning to Universities and potentially catching Covid-19 and passing it on to elderly people, working from home remained the preferred position but would be reviewed again on 1 October, a new contact tracing app had been launched on the previous day and the average daily rate had now increased to 55 from 14 with the 'R' number having risen to 1.5.

Information had also been received which it was considered could have substantial financial implications for the Council and a resultant impact on decision making and the delivery of key services.

In this regard, the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) advised that if there had been prior knowledge of this information, the recommendations within the Revenue Budget report would have been different. As such, it was considered even more unlikely that the budget gap presented in the current report would be the expected outcome for the current financial year and a larger deficit was now envisaged as it was not expected that any further grant funding would be received from the Scottish Government. In addition, it was not likely that the expected £12m from the Income Recompense Scheme would be received.

A letter had been received from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance which sought powers for Local Authorities to borrow and it was considered that the Scottish Government approach to the UK Government could be potentially very helpful and, if successful, could provide the Council with further resource and greater certainty on which to base decisions.

Overall, it was suggested that there was therefore a need to all time for this approach from the Scottish Government to the UK Government to make progress before taking any further decisions.

The Leader of the Council referred to the letter which had been received from the Cabinet Secretary and expressed her view that it could be a 'game changer' in terms of how the Council could close the budget gap in the current financial year and also in regard to the huge difference which it could make to the Highland area. As such, more time was needed before coming to any firm decisions on revenue budget proposals.

The Depute Leader highlighted the fast-changing situation and specifically the new information which had been received and which required detailed consideration/evaluation by both Members and Officers in the first instance. As such, and on the basis that it would be ill advised for any final decision to be taken on the budget gap at the present time, it was suggested that a Special Meeting should be arranged to allow further detailed consideration of future options and possibilities, including any changes which might come forward in regard to the Income Recompense Scheme. In the meantime, it would be important for the Council to support the Scottish Government in its discussions with the Treasury.

Following a short recess to allow consideration of the new information which had been received, it was **AGREED** that Item 15 on the agenda – Revenue Budget 20/21 Update Report - should now be deferred and a Special Meeting arranged within 10 days to allow discussion in relation to this situation to continue at that time.

It was also **AGREED** that, in the meantime, a Briefing for all Members should be undertaken by the Chief Executive at the beginning of the following week – Monday, 14 September - at a time to be advised.

### **Notices of Motion (continued)**

**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.**

(iii)'The Highland Council welcomes developments between HC-One and NHSH regarding the transfer of ownership to NHSH 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 NHSH 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 over stretched 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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the tragic events at Home Farm over recent months had caused great distress to the Skye & Raasay communities and had also highlighted some of the shortcomings which had occurred in Care Homes across the country which continued to be investigated;
- during the period when deaths had been occurring at Home Farm, Local Members had sought to have meetings with NHS Highland, Highland Council and national politicians to get information and to discuss how matters could be improved, both for the short and long term, in order to ensure that there was a safe and reputable Care Home on the island;
- the health, safety and wellbeing of residents and the confidence of relatives in relation to provision had been the main factors for consideration, irrespective of any additional costs to be incurred. As such, it had always been the strong hope and expectation that any funding required to improve the situation and give solace to the families and the wider community would be forthcoming;
- the recent good news regarding the NHS Highland buy-out of Home Farm, supported by the Scottish Government, had been well received by the local community but it had come as a surprise to all that, as part of the rescue package, the running costs of Home Farm would not be covered. In this respect, a lot needed to still be done to restore confidence in Home Farm and it was hoped that support would come from the Scottish Government in terms of covering the revenue costs as it was well documented that many Local Authorities were facing financial pressures and budget gaps;
- above all, Home Farm needed to be fully funded in all areas in order to fully restore confidence;
- the sense of community anxiety and grief over recent months had been palpable and the Scottish Government involvement in the transfer of Home Farm to NHS Highland was welcomed. However, there was still deep concern

in relation to the private provider and a situation which was viewed as privatising profits when at the same time the losses were effectively being socialised;

- as such, it was hoped that the Council could write to the Scottish Government to request that the revenue costs (estimated at £1.2m per annum) be met for the first two years at least;
- the First Minister's recent announcement of her intention to consider a National Care Scheme was welcomed;
- the lack of communication and information from Home Farm, with the exception of what was reported in the press, was staggering and extremely distressing for all concerned;
- thanks had to be conveyed to all Members, and especially the Leader of the Council, Mr A MacKinnon and Ms L Munro, for their care and support for Ward 10 which had not gone unnoticed by the wider community;
- Home Farm had strong links with the community and it was extremely concerning that many staff members were now suffering mental issues as a result of what had happened and as such it was imperative that they received help from NHS colleagues as and when required;
- there had been shock at a national level when the true extent of Covid-19 cases at Home Farm had been revealed and the inability to protect the most vulnerable was a terrible indictment on society and should never have been allowed to happen;
- evidence would be presented to a future large scale investigation but this would come too late for the residents who had passed away;
- there had been repeated calls for privatisation of the NHS to be halted but it had to be acknowledged that health & social care had been privatised for many years, including within Scotland, and as such capitalism had a 'loud voice' within the care sector where residents were often sadly treated as a commodity and this had to be changed;
- the proper standard of care had not been delivered in a private setting and whilst the transfer of Home Farm was welcomed, Highland Council could not be expected to meet the future revenue costs from current resources and as such it was of extreme importance that a letter was sent to the Scottish Government to seek clarity on this situation;
- it was noted that a letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Health had now been received by the Leader of the Council in which it had been confirmed that the Scottish Government would meet the revenue costs for a period of one year. Whilst this was welcomed, it was still the case that urgent discussions would still be needed in terms of future years and this would be progressed as soon as possible in order to identify a long term solution;
- the staff within Home Farm had been heroic and there was a need to acknowledge their bravery in the most difficult of circumstances;
- thanks had to be conveyed to Mr J Gordon for the way in which he had handled this extreme situation with both dignity and restraint at all times;
- in also thanking all of the Skye Councillors, it was stressed that there was a need to reflect and proceed with caution in terms of what would be provided in the future across the Highlands by private companies working in partnership with the public sector. In this regard, it was hoped that if a 'one care' system was introduced by the Scottish Government, it could be piloted in the Highlands;
- thanks should also be conveyed to Council Officers, and especially Mrs F Malcolm, for the reports which had been produced during this difficult time;
- consideration should be given to the submission of a future report assessing the risks of another similar situation occurring in the Highland area and what actions could be put in place to stop this happening;
- the lack of information had been a real issue for the Skye Members and this had to be the subject of future discussion with NHS Highland in order to ensure

- that this was not the case in the future; and
- it had to be highlighted that care was a 'right' and should never be considered a 'commodity'; and
- an offer to arrange a Seminar on 'Test and Protect' would be followed up and all Members encouraged to attend at a future date.

### **Decision**

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

**Declaration of Interest – Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Board Member of Albyn Housing Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

(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 tax payer.

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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- this was an extremely important issue and as such it was welcomed that the Scottish Government had recently confirmed that there would be no enforced evictions for the next six months so the Council had that period of time to put additional measures in place to help and support any households facing eviction;
- it was acknowledged that the Council already had a Homelessness Prevention Strategy already in place, and this was not meant to increase the workload of hard working Housing Officers at this time, but it was felt that additional steps needed to be taken now to prevent the serious issues which could arise from future homelessness in the Highlands;
- many families were already struggling with reduced income/job losses at a time when security of incomes was crucial and in this regard there was serious concern in terms of what might happen when the current furlough scheme was ended;
- there could be many unintended consequences arising from the pandemic and reference was made to the potential impact on children who were subjected to increased levels of stress in households badly affected by the current situation;

- modular pods were already being used successfully across the country, including by a number of other Councils, and the potential savings to the Council and the homelessness budget in particular should be highlighted;
- it was also pointed out that modular pods could be effectively moved from location to location relatively easily as and when this was needed;
- it had been previously agreed that a Seminar would be arranged in relation to homelessness but this had not yet happened and now needed to be arranged as a matter of urgency;
- consideration should be given as to what the Council could do with its own land in order to make the best possible use of available budgets and to help as many people as possible in the area;
- whilst agreeing fully with the intentions behind the Notice of Motion, it was felt that there were other ways to proceed and as such it was suggested that the Council should commit to a report being submitted to the next Housing & Property Committee on anticipated homelessness levels, including consideration of the potential Covid-19 economic impact on homelessness and commenting on national and local homelessness policies and resources. This report also to further detail the prevention and rapid re-housing strategies available to the Housing Service;
- in addition, and in order to protect vulnerable residents from homelessness, unemployment and to avoid mental health stress, it was suggested that the Council should instruct the Leader to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to demand that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Furlough) be extended from its present end date of 31/10/20 until at least 31/3/21 on the basis that this extension would give further protection and re-assurance to Highland residents, whilst also supporting local businesses and recognising the economic dependency that the Highland area had on the tourism and hospitality sectors;
- further, that the Council should continue to seek suitable sites for development for social housing and, alongside site identification, Officers should carry out a cost comparison (including whole life costings) of off-site fabrication against traditional construction. In this regard, Officers should also explore the potential of locally sourced off-site fabrication supply as part of the new Council House building programme, recognising the huge benefit the Council's Housing Capital Programme brought to the Highland economy, and a Seminar on this issue should be arranged at an early date;
- it was stressed that the main focus above all had to be on keeping people in their own homes and preventing homelessness and it was recognised that a key part of this would be an extension to the current furlough scheme;
- whilst not disagreeing with the aims of the Notice of Motion, there was concern that the use of modular pods could be viewed as going back about 60 years when a lot had been learned over the past decades and as such the key priority had to be on preventing homelessness in the first place and the continuation of integrated affordable housing across the Highland area;
- prevention and early intervention were key to addressing this issue and it was stressed that information had to be provided for all Highland residents who faced the threat of eviction to make them aware that making contact with the Citizens Advice Bureaux, Highland Council and other charity organisations should be their first step in getting advice on the way forward;
- it was feared that ending the furlough scheme in the coming weeks could create multiple issues, including homelessness, which could have a severe and detrimental impact for many years;
- there was a need for a radical rethink in terms of what land was currently available in the Highlands and how this could be used in future, specifically with reference to the Inner Moray Firth Development Plan;

- the amendment which had been put forward would give the Leader the opportunity to write to the UK Government and to add to the voices already calling for an extension to the Furlough Scheme and this was welcomed;
- decent homes for all had to be a priority in the Highlands so the proposal to use the powers within Local Development Plans in relation to the future use of land/green space should be followed up;
- whilst welcoming the input from all Members on this issue, there was a need to move away from language which referred to 'slums' and 'ghettos' as this was in no way the intention behind the Notice of Motion which had been submitted on the basis of trying to identify provision for a future situation where there could be the potential for great need;
- there should be a focus on regeneration of unused land within individual Wards in order to identify opportunities for future development;
- the housing crisis (created by a lack of national investment at a local level) was not something of the Council's making but there were actions that could be taken, such as identifying the need for and building the correct number of houses in the Highlands and not allowing this process to be hindered unnecessarily in any way;
- there was real concern that there was the potential for civil unrest across the country if the furlough scheme was ended in the following month;
- it had to be acknowledged that some private landlords were responsible for families having to live in appalling conditions and this had to be addressed wherever and whenever possible as a priority;
- there should be a focus on buildings across the Highlands in order to identify opportunities for re-development and conversion in future;
- it was considered that the existing systems in place to prevent homelessness were not entirely satisfactory and the purpose of the Notice of Motion was to highlight that high-quality modules were also available as a possible solution and could be viewed at locations within the Highlands if necessary.

Thereafter, and having received confirmation that a report would be submitted to the next Housing & Property Committee, a letter would be sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by the Leader in relation to the issues raised regarding the furlough scheme, work would be continued to seek sites for development of social housing and a Seminar would be arranged to further discuss the issues raised – all to be completed by March 2021 – the signatories to the Notice of Motion agreed to accept the amendment which had been put forward at the meeting.

### **Decision**

Members **AGREED** as follows;-

- (i) that a report should be submitted to the next Housing & Property Committee on anticipated homelessness levels, including consideration of the potential Covid-19 economic impact on homelessness and commenting on national and local homelessness policies and resources. This report also to further detail the prevention and rapid re-housing strategies available to the Housing Service.
- (ii) that, in order to protect vulnerable residents from homelessness, unemployment and to avoid mental health stress, the Leader should write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer as soon as possible to demand that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Furlough) be extended from its present end date of 31/10/20 until at least 31/3/21 on the basis that this extension would give further protection and re-assurance to Highland residents, whilst also supporting local businesses and recognising the economic

dependency that the Highland area had on the tourism and hospitality sectors.

- (iii) that the Council should continue to seek suitable sites for development for social housing as part of the ongoing process and, alongside site identification, Officers should carry out a cost comparison (including whole life costings) of off-site fabrication against traditional construction. In this regard, Officers should also explore the potential of locally sourced off-site fabrication supply as part of the new Council House building programme, recognising the huge benefit the Council's Housing Capital Programme brought to the Highland economy. All of these actions to be completed by March 2021 at the latest; and
- (iv) that a Seminar, to include discussion of all the issues raised at the meeting, should be arranged at an early date.

**Declaration of Interest – Mr S Mackie declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis that a planning application had now been submitted (which contained his name) but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

(v) 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.'

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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- support had been received from Members across the Council for what was not a 'political motion' but rather a proposal for Members to be given the opportunity to determine what they considered to be appropriate thresholds to define when planning applications were to be determined using delegated powers;
- the Highland Council area covered a land mass larger than Belgium with a diverse range of geographical, logistical and economic challenges. In this regard, and in most cases, the geography defined the 'character' of communities but for planning applications the same threshold was used for all (regardless of size, population or location) and this did not take account of the current variations and needs of local communities in a balanced way;
- currently, eight objections from eight different households were needed before a planning application was submitted to a Planning Applications Committee which had an adverse effect on areas of low population;
- it was reasonable to assume that that Local Members were best placed to comment on local planning applications as they knew their communities best;
- the Notice of Motion had been submitted to enable a more proportionate, appropriate and considered use of delegated powers to represent local needs and was intentionally not prescriptive in order to allow Local Members to use their own expert local knowledge and judgement in terms of informing and defining what was an appropriate level in each of the contexts which had been laid out;
- overall, the Notice of Motion sought a collaborative and inclusive solution and one which would enable Members to better represent their constituents;
- it was felt that this Notice of Motion would be welcomed by residents across the Highlands in that it would provide more control for Local Members on local planning issues;
- it had to be highlighted that the current arrangements made it especially difficult in remote and rural areas where it could be extremely difficult to achieve objections from eight people, not least in terms of geography;
- the terms of the Motion addressed the frustrations felt by constituents in relation to planning applications and if agreed would provide greater scrutiny of the process than at present and more local input;
- there was a need to speed up the current process whilst also retaining control and the proposals being put forward would address these issues as well as meeting the aims of the localism agenda;
- there were inconsistencies in the wording of the Motion and it had to be clarified that the Council had no control over the first two issues which had been identified and that other changes being suggested in terms of the current process were likely to lead to an increase in the number of Planning Application Committee meetings needed in future;
- whilst not disagreeing with the principles of the Motion, there was a need to fully understand the potential impact/implications and it was therefore proposed that a Seminar should be arranged as soon as possible to allow detailed consideration with a report to be submitted (with recommendations) to the next Economy & Infrastructure Committee;
- environmental and planning matters were of the utmost importance but, whilst not disagreeing with the intent of the Notice of Motion, it had already been stated that the Council did not have the power to deal with some of the issues which had been raised and in that regard a Seminar in the first instance would be extremely helpful. Also, there was a need to consider the potential impact of any changes in terms of the length of meetings, staff support and associated cost implications;
- as opposed to what had been suggested, there was a need instead to



encourage a greater number of citizens to become involved in the planning process;

- the Council were currently dealing with a higher number of planning applications than any other Local Authority in Scotland and any agreed changes would have to take account of the potential impact on the Service/Officers;
- there was a need to support this Notice of Motion as it was essentially restoring the arrangements which had been in place previously. In this regard, new requirements had been submitted to the Council in December 2019 for approval without a detailed document or presentation at the time and as such some Members had not been fully aware of the changes until the start of the current year;
- the most important factor was having due process in place across the Council in terms of ensuring that the right decision was made in the right way and the terms of the Notice of Motion would provide that reassurance;
- it was suggested that the new requirements which had been in place since the end of the previous year had been detrimental to planning on a democratic level and as such the arrangement of a Seminar would be welcomed as it would allow this and other planning issues to be fully debated and discussed by all Members;
- since the end of March, the new arrangements for online meetings had proved successful and very effective and it was considered that this could enable more Members to become involved in the planning process in future and also help with the handling of any potential increased volume of applications coming forward;
- it was also suggested that consideration needed to be given as to whether the current two Planning Application Committees were sufficient and if not whether there would be merit in dividing the process across local areas;
- the arrangement of a Seminar was not necessarily agreed by all as previous Planning Seminars were viewed as having limited success;
- the terms of the Notice of Motion promoted localism and increased control for local residents across the Highlands and it was expected that this would be welcomed;
- there was a need to take action on the proposals quickly and to put training in place where necessary for any new agreed proposals;
- there was concern regarding what was viewed by some Members as the 'default position' of the Council in terms of arranging Seminars in the first instance to discuss new proposals/take decisions and it was not felt that such Seminars had been productive in the past. As such, it was suggested that previous proposals put forward by Members should now be considered as part of a new review of the planning process, including the proposal to return planning decisions to local Area Committees;
- the introduction of virtual meetings had overall worked very well and in this regard particular reference was made to the South Planning Application Committee whereby it was considered that the meeting process had actually been improved. In this respect, Officers from across the Highlands could now present reports and visualisations at any meeting and it was suggested that this should be used as a starting point for involving all Members of the Council (regardless of location) in the planning process;
- there appeared to be a general consensus that there needed to be change but it was important that it was accepted that this needed to be informed change and that Planning Officers were entitled to be given the opportunity to give advice in this regard;
- it was also important to make the distinction on what could be done nationally in comparison with what could be done at a local level in relation to the planning process;

- this was a very timely and appropriate Motion to bring to the full Council and it was highlighted that in certain aspects it only sought consideration (as opposed to a decision) and as such it would only be appropriate to arrange a Seminar if this could be organised within a short timescale; and
- the arrangement of a Seminar for all Members of the Council (within a short timescale) to allow detailed discussion of the proposals within the Notice of Motion was accepted by the movers/seconders of the Motion – with the proviso that a report would be submitted to the Full Council before the end of the year reflecting the views put forward by Members at the Seminar.

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** that a Seminar should be arranged (within a short timescale) to allow detailed discussion of the proposals within the Notice of Motion – with the proviso that a report would be submitted to the Full Council before the end of the year reflecting the views put forward by Members at the Seminar.

#### **14. Recovery Action Plan: Progress to 30 June 2020 - Update Report Bòrd Ath-shlànachaidh – Aithisg Ùrachaidh**

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

There had been circulated Report No. HC/25/20 dated 27 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Transformation.

There had also been circulated Additional Report No. HC/30/20 dated 6 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education.

Further, there had been circulated Minutes of Meetings of the Recovery Board held on 24 August 2020.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Chair of the Recovery Board thanked Members for their excellent contributions. Progress had been made and Phase 2 had now been reached with Phase 3 to follow in the last quarter of 2020 and Phase 4 in the first quarter of 2021. However, external factors had impacted on the key priorities identified, such as the Covid-19 virus itself, Government support and national statistics in terms of unemployment and welfare;
- the Chair of the Recovery Board too was congratulated for allowing robust scrutiny and questioning to take place at meetings and for the collegiate approach which had been adopted;
- three areas of slippage had been identified but it was anticipated that two of those would be resolved prior to the next Council meeting. However, some Members questioned if the re-branding of the Council should be a priority at present and that instead greater emphasis should be placed on communication so that, in preparation for any future lockdowns, lessons could be learned, particularly in relation to previous communication with Community Councils and local Resilience Groups as it was considered that regular briefings with these groups would have helped and could have avoided unnecessary duplication;
- with limited staff resources, it was therefore important to concentrate on those aspects of the Recovery Programme which were considered to be urgent and

the general consensus was that re-branding was not. As such, it was important to streamline work and to support the Senior Management Team;

- alongside the work of the Recovery Board, the Brexit Working Group, the Tourism Committee and the Redesign Board were also looking at key tasks which needed to be addressed and progress would be reported in due course;
- although there were areas of concern about recovery, most of these were out with Council control e.g. the potential end of the furlough scheme on 31 October and outbreaks of the virus both locally and nationally. All of these issues would create additional economic pressures and increase the reliance on welfare support;
- whilst there were currently adequate supplies of personal protective equipment, this was a very fast changing situation and had to be closely monitored;
- with Brexit taking place in December, there was considerable concern raised in relation to this timescale as there appeared to be limited scenario planning, very little 'no-deal' planning, few meetings with key stakeholders, a need for more progress with the Council's Capital Programme (including identification of "shovel ready" projects) and more re-assurance that these matters would be addressed timeously;
- before the extension to Brexit had been granted, 'Operation Yellowhammer' had been set in place where consideration had been given to establishing warehouses to store food stuffs and goods and, given that Brexit was to take place on 1 January, and the potential for winter weather to hinder the transport of goods, it was suggested that this should be revisited as a matter of urgency;
- supporting the Highland economy was essential but it was difficult to see how this could be fully achieved when the Council had frozen levels of expenditure, including within the Capital Programme;
- it had been stated in the report that the 'restoration of political governance' was now 'complete' but it was suggested that, as part of the proposed future Seminars, an anonymous Members' Survey should be undertaken to seek views on further improvements in this regard. In response, the Chair of the Recovery Board suggested that in the first instance the political Group Leaders should meet to outline concerns and to discuss the questions to be asked within a survey;
- it had been understood that Climate Change would be central to the recovery process but there was no indication of how this would be achieved. In response, it was highlighted that the next Recovery Board meeting was scheduled to look at this particular issue in more depth;
- with many families struggling to feed their children, there was a lack of awareness as to where help could be found in this respect and this had to be urgently addressed; and
- the Customer Relationship Management system had to be a key business process for a service organisation such as Highland Council and should not be considered solely as an IT issue. Careful consideration of the requirements of the system was necessary and it was suggested that a Seminar could highlight how it could work better for individuals, communities and groups across the Highland area.

In relation to the Additional Report No. HC/30/20, the following issues were raised:-

- following representations from Members and communities, the expansion of the 1140 hours Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) was moving forward in a phased manner and the Chair of Education confirmed that the review of the expansion delivery plans would be considered at the Education Committee meeting on 30 September;
- the expansion of ELC was an important part of the Council's Recovery Plan

and would provide families with an opportunity to access additional childcare at the earliest opportunity;

- Council Officers were fully engaging with the Scottish Government in relation to the ELC expansion and were working in partnership to assess risks, identify mitigating actions and accelerate the programme as safely and appropriately as possible;
- with the increase in Covid-19 cases, contingency planning was still necessary for all education settings;
- there would be unknown challenges as winter approached and this was a concern;
- the success of the return of pupils to schools in August was commended but it was important not to become complacent and not to underestimate the stress which this had placed on all staff involved with the process;
- details of the location of the further 30 settings which had been based on an initial readiness assessment (and had been referred to in the report) were sought. However, it was noted that this was not possible until consultations had been concluded and a full assessment carried out following which Local Members would be informed; and
- it was hoped that the report to the next Education Committee meeting would continue to build on the progress made and work towards the full implementation of 1140 hours across Highland.

### **Decision**

The Council **NOTED** the latest progress on the Council's Recovery Action Plan to 30 June 2020, the associated implications and pressures on resources in the delivery of the Recovery Programme and the latest update on Personal Protective Equipment.

In regard to the Additional Report, it was **AGREED** that funds could be released to enable circa 30 settings to provide 1140 hours of ELC as soon as possible, with some prior to the October holidays where safe and practical to do so, and overall no later than January 2021.

It was also **NOTED** that the additional costs of moving settings would be in the region of £250k and that updated costs would be reported to the Corporate Resources and Education Committees and that the Education Committee on 30 September would receive a detailed report on the review of 1140 hours provision and information relating to individual settings.

The Council further **AGREED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Recovery Board held on 24 August 2020.

## **15. Revenue Budget 2020/21 – Update Report Buidseat Teachd-a-steach**

### **Declarations 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.

**Ms L Munro, Mr T Heggie, Mr B Thompson and Mr A Jarvie** also declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

**Mr A MacInnes and Mr A MacKinnon declared financial interests in this item as Directors of Organic Sea Harvest and confirmed that they would leave the meeting (by turning off cameras and microphones) during discussion.**

**Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item on the basis that a family member was an employee of High Life Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/26/20 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance.

### **Decision**

It was **AGREED** to **DEFER** consideration of this item to a Special Meeting on a date to be confirmed – on the basis that a Briefing for all Members of the Council would be undertaken by the Chief Executive on Monday, 14 September.

## **16. Boundary Review Ath-sgrùdadh Chrìochan**

**Declaration of Interest – Ms L Munro declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis that her Ward could be adversely affected by the proposals but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/27/20 dated 2 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Boundary Commission's proposals had disappointed Elected Members and communities and, in their entirety, were unacceptable. As such, there had been little account taken of the effect on remote and rural areas. It was therefore important to put forward a strong case to reject these proposals and the methodology used and to lobby Scottish Ministers to increase the number of Councillors for Highland;
- it was important to be clear and to emphasise within the response that Members considered the proposals an affront to democracy and should be rejected. If they were implemented, there would be vast swathes of Highland which would, in effect, be left with no representation;
- when Members had met to discuss the proposals, the second recommendation within the report – to approach the Boundary Commission to change their recommendations to more appropriately reflect the requirements of a large Local Authority that had a mixture of urban, rural and island wards – had not been specifically agreed and a request was made for it to now be removed;
- the Islands (Scotland) Bill, the legislation which had triggered this review, had been put in place to ensure that island communities received proper representation and yet the proposals meant that the Isles of Skye and Raasay would lose a Councillor;
- the parity for the Islands was 1:800 while on the mainland it was 1:2,800;
- the combined Island Authorities had a land mass which would fit into the land mass of Sutherland which faced exactly the same challenges which underpinned the Island (Scotland) Bill, namely remoteness, peripherality and

- small population. Similar issues therefore necessitated similar levels of support;
- the Island Authorities had their own dedicated Local Authorities as well as their own MPs and MSPs and a dedicated Scottish Government Minister for the Islands and consequently they received additional funding. In contrast, Caithness, Sutherland and a portion of Ross Shire shared 1 MP and 1 MSP over a considerably large land mass;
  - Sutherland would be reduced to only 4 Elected Members but if the Islands (Scotland) Bill was applied, it would be eligible for 13;
  - Caithness had reduced from 10 to 8 Members after the last review and the proposals being put forward would reduce this again to 7 with the argument being made that the population was reducing. However, the Caithness Elected Members were working collectively not only to slow the decline in population but to reverse it with initiatives to improve the socio-economics for the area. There was also an active voluntary sector which Elected Members sought to support but with reducing numbers this would become more difficult;
  - in determining representation, there was a need to take account of geography, remoteness, travel time and spread of population within an area;
  - localism was vital and what was being proposed, based solely on a numerical formula, was unrealistic;
  - despite the Chair of the Commission acknowledging the need to take account of local ties, this had not been followed up by the Boundary Commission within these proposals which were considered to be out of touch with the democratic needs of the Highlands;
  - the omission of rural mainland areas from the Bill was an error as they too required to have the same protected status as the islands;
  - a more holistic approach was needed e.g. the population of some areas of Highland grew dramatically during the tourist season, resulting in many issues which Elected Members had to deal with;
  - reference should be made to the work carried out by the Commission on Highland Democracy in terms of highlighting what form of representation was needed in Highland;
  - comparisons were made to Norway which had a similar population to Scotland and had a significantly high level of representation. In this regard, many other European countries had a lower number of electors per ward than the UK.;
  - it was noted that as the Commission's proposals would be the subject of consultation, Members individually could make representations, as could constituents and political parties;
  - it might be necessary, if agreement wasn't reached, to run the next election on the current boundaries. Whilst this was not ideal, it would be significantly better than what was now being proposed;
  - the Elections Manager was commended for the detailed consultation which he had carried out with Members at Ward Business Meetings; and
  - there were some proposals in the review which were welcomed i.e. the boundary changes to the Black Isle.

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** to reject the proposals in their entirety as they stood and to approach the Scottish Government to review the remit of the Boundary Commission in regard to rural Authorities to lift the cap on total Councillor numbers and provide for greater discretion in the application of parity ratios.

It was also **AGREED** that the second recommendation within the report – to approach the Boundary Commission to change their recommendations to more appropriately reflect the requirements of a large Local Authority that had a mixture of urban, rural

and island wards – should be removed.

## **17. Employee Engagement Wellbeing Action Plan Plana Gníomh – Sunnd**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/28/20 dated 31 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance.

During discussion, reference was made to anonymous contact which had been made by staff with an Elected Member which concerned allegations of corporate bullying within the Council. As such, it was suggested that details of these allegations should be provided to the Chief Executive and the Head of HR in the first instance following which a report could be submitted to the full Council if necessary.

In terms of the Action Plan which had been submitted, it was stressed that this should be viewed as a support measure for staff and a 'building block' for the way forward. It was also acknowledged that staff had to be at the centre of everything which was undertaken by the Council, both now and in the future.

### **Decision**

The Council **NOTED** the Employee Engagement Wellbeing Action Plan at Appendix 1 to the report.

It was also **AGREED** that comments made at the meeting in relation to allegations of corporate bullying within the Council should be discussed with the Chief Executive and the Head of HR in the first instance and that if necessary a report should be submitted to a future meeting of the Council thereafter.

## **18. Crown Estate Net Revenue Oighreachdan a' Chrùin**

### **Declarations of Interest**

**Mr A MacInnes and Mr A MacKinnon declared financial interests in this item as Directors of Organic Sea Harvest and confirmed that they would leave the meeting (by turning off cameras and microphones) during discussion.**

**Ms L Munro declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis that her Ward could gain substantially from the proposals 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.**

**Mr D Rixson and Mr K Rosie declared non-financial interests in this item on the basis of being a Council appointee on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and a Board Member of Thurso Community Development Trust respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/29/20 dated 24 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there had already been significant discussion on this issue so the recommendations within the report would be formally moved at the end of the discussion;
- this was a very important issue and many areas of the Highlands would welcome the potential benefits which could arise. In this regard, there would be opportunities to provide a focus on funding for local and sustainable projects in addition to current avenues of funding which, whilst welcome, were often much more restrictive and did not cover all areas;
- rurality was a problem and often meant that certain areas were not able to gain the benefits afforded to larger and more urban areas;
- as little central administration of the funds as possible would be helpful and should be the aim from the outset;
- the benefits for rural areas in particular should be maximised as much as possible;
- it was expected that there would be differing views in relation to the de minimis level and in this respect a 'compromise' amendment would be put forward at the appropriate time seeking agreement for a funding distribution model with a de minimis allocation of £75k and a 7.5% strategic fund (which would be set out in a table) to apply to the initial tranche of funding available to the Council;
- the main aim of the Crown Estate funding was to deliver benefit to coastal communities and this had to be pursued;
- it was expected that the share of funding for coastal areas would reflect the criteria laid out by the Scottish Government and as such projects had already been considered in relation to economic recovery, community resilience, climate control and issues in regard to living in rural communities, including sustaining and energising these communities to meet future challenges;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment, for the report which had already been the subject of much discussion and represented an opportunity to invest in local communities across the area;
- the opportunities presented as part of this funding could be transformational and as such were an excellent example of 'pure devolution' in that significant levers for funding could be directed towards local areas;
- it was not felt that rural areas of the Highlands had benefitted greatly from the City Region Deal (although it was accepted that there had been significant constraints on expenditure). However, this new opportunity for future funding could considerably help rural areas with some of the ongoing issues, such as transport, health, connectivity and de-population which were constant challenges, along with the expectation that the ending of the furlough scheme would make these challenges even worse at a local level;
- the new funding arrangements had been made quite clear by the Scottish Government in that coastal communities were to receive 100% of revenue generated from marine assets and as such these communities were looking forward to being advised as to how Local Authorities would use this opportunity to enhance localism;
- the current level of engagement from local organisations who were seeking to work collaboratively with the Council, and the genuine desire to provide match funding where and when needed, was encouraging;
- the 'compromise' amendment which was to be put forward would ensure that every area across the Highlands would receive additional funding and this would also take account of the impact on individual areas in relation to activities being undertaken and having an impact on their immediate vicinity;
- it had to be acknowledged that all areas of the Highlands had unmet need and



there was therefore a need to support the recommendations in the report;

- disparity would risk undermining localism or 'place based decision making' and as such the £100k de minimis option would allow all Local Committees to progress with local recovery initiatives whilst still allowing the largest share of the funding to go to remote coastal communities;
- the effect of reducing the de minimis level to zero would be very unfortunate for some areas, particularly as a substantial share of the Crown Estate income came from the Posts of the Cromarty Firth and Nigg;
- the circumstances and climate of coastal communities in the Highlands were very unique and presented their own challenges and it would therefore be very important that any decision taken proved that the Council was listening to those communities;
- both the Scottish Government and the Crown Estates had given clear directions on this funding and it was essential that the Council took account of these directions;
- it was important to pay tribute to the work undertaken over many years on this issue and in this regard the considerable contribution from the previous Lochaber Councillor, Dr Michael Foxley, was highlighted;
- there was no fixed methodology for distribution of Crown Estate funding but it had been agreed to use the sea bed area and that was of significant benefit to the Highlands and had to be strongly supported;
- in relation to the purpose, eligibility and broad principles of this funding, a strategic approach was imperative in order to ensure that the Highland economy recovered from the current Covid-19 situation and this would be the best way to help both coastal and non-coastal areas;
- in agreeing with the need for a strategic approach, it was stressed that how any future funding was spent was every bit as important as how much was received. In this regard, it was therefore intended to submit an amendment at the appropriate time for funding to be allocated to areas and distributed in line with the sea-bed methodology, with no 'central pot' and no de minimis level. Also, in terms of Paragraph 7.3, to add 'any such local challenges' and, in terms of resourcing, to ask that a report be submitted outlining the resources needed to administer the funds as justification for the proposed levels of staffing;
- it was disappointing that this had been referred to as an 'Officer's report' on the previous day as it was understood that it had in fact been considered and approved by Members of the Administration before being submitted to the full Council;
- in agreeing with removal of the 'central pot', it was suggested that this would ensure that coastal areas would receive maximum benefit and have opportunities for future transformation by using the funding to its fullest potential;
- the Crown Estate methodology was very clear and it had to be accepted that it was based on the sea bed and the coastline;
- it should be accepted that local communities were best placed to decide on how any future funding should be spent and as a message of respect to them there should be very few restrictions placed on it;
- there had been a number of comments made during the debate in relation to the distribution of the City/Region Deal but it should be noted that the Highland Council was the only Local Authority to have introduced a 'regional' aspect to this as all others had dealt solely with City Deals;
- there was a need to take account of the detail within the report in respect of eligible geography;
- it should be noted that the distribution formula had not been 'set in stone' by the Scottish Government and would be reviewed at a future date; and
- in relation to the distribution of the Town Centre Fund, some of the comments

made at the meeting were corrected by confirming that some areas of the Highlands had actually given up some parts of their funding to ensure that all areas received funding.

Thereafter, Mrs T Robertson, seconded by Ms L Munro, **MOVED** the recommendations within the report as follows:-

- (i) the funding distribution model as set out in the report to apply to the initial tranche of funding available to the Council;
- (ii) the governance structure recommended within the report;
- (iii) the details of scheme eligibility as recommended within the report:
  - a. broad eligibility principles
  - b. eligible applicants
  - c. eligible geography
  - d. rates available;
- (iv) the administration resource requirements to support communities and Members in preparing, administering and managing the fund for the initial tranche of funding available to the Council; and
- (v) that the scheme be advertised and applications sought as soon as practicable to support the economic recovery and the development of projects.

As a **FIRST AMENDMENT**, Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr J Finlayson, moved as follows:-

Amendment to Recommendation (i) within the report to read – ‘agree the funding distribution model with a Strategic Fund of 15% and a de minimis amount of zero’; and

Amendment to Paragraph 5.4 (final bullet point) within the report to read – ‘Funding for the administration of the Scheme to be a maximum of £100k.

<b>AMENDMENT - Bremner / Finlayson</b>				
2017/2018	£1,292,405.46			
2019	£1,742,299.32			
<b>Total amount</b>	<b>£3,034,704.78</b>			
15% for Strategic Projects and Admin	<b>£455,205.72</b>			
	De minimis allocation	% Top Up By Sea Area	Amount Top Up	Final Allocation
<b>DIMINIMIS</b>				
Inverness	£0.00	0.47%	£12,123.65	£12,123.65
Dingwall & Seaforth and Black Isle	£0.00	0.85%	£21,925.74	£21,925.74
Nairn	£0.00	0.47%	£12,123.65	£12,123.65
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	£0.00	13.47%	£347,458.52	£347,458.52
Lochaber	£0.00	17.91%	£461,988.28	£461,988.28
Skye and Raasay	£0.00	19.60%	£505,581.82	£505,581.82
Sutherland	£0.00	27.15%	£700,334.00	£700,334.00
Easter Ross	£0.00	4.19%	£108,081.01	£108,081.01
Caithness	£0.00	15.88%	£409,624.45	£409,624.45
<b>Total Diminimis</b>	<b>£0.00</b>	<b>99.99%</b>		
<b>Total 2017-19</b>	<b>£3,034,704.78</b>			
Less 15% Strategic Projects and Admin	£2,579,499.06			
Less £0k diminimis	£2,579,499.06			

As a **SECOND AMENDMENT**, Ms E Knox, seconded by Mrs L MacDonald, moved agreement of a funding distribution model with a de minimis allocation of £75k and a 7.5% strategic fund as set out in the table below to apply to the initial tranche of funding available to the Council.

WITH £75,000 DE MINIMIS				
2017/2018	£1,292,405.46			
2019	£1,742,299.32			
Total amount	£3,034,704.78			
7.5% for Strategic Projects and Admin	£227,602.86			
DE MINIMIS				TOTAL
Inverness	£75,000.00	0.47%	£10,020.88	£85,020.88
Dingwall & Seaforth and Black Isle	£75,000.00	0.85%	£18,122.87	£93,122.87
Nairn	£75,000.00	0.47%	£10,020.88	£85,020.88
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	£75,000.00	13.47%	£287,194.13	£362,194.13
Lochaber	£75,000.00	17.91%	£381,859.45	£456,859.45
Skye and Raasay	£75,000.00	19.60%	£417,891.98	£492,891.98
Sutherland	£75,000.00	27.15%	£578,865.67	£653,865.67
Easter Ross	£75,000.00	4.19%	£89,335.07	£164,335.07
Caithness	£75,000.00	15.88%	£338,577.79	£413,577.79
Total de minimis	£675,000.00	99.99%		
Total 2017-19	£3,034,704.78			
Less 7.5% Strategic Projects and Admin	£2,807,101.92			
Less £75,000 de minimis	£2,132,101.92			

As a **THIRD AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr S Mackie, moved as follows:-

Paragraph 2.1 within the report – replace with ‘the funding distributed to the Areas by the same sea methodology by which they are received’;

Paragraph 7.3 – add the following – ‘Other such specific local challenges’; and

Paragraph 13 – replace with ‘A report to come back outlining the administration resources needed to administer the fund in the initial phase and anticipated continuing resource thereafter’.

On a vote between the **THIRD AMENDMENT** and the **SECOND AMENDMENT**, the **THIRD AMENDMENT** received 24 votes and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 26 votes, with 5 abstentions, and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** was therefore carried forward to the next round of voting, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Third Amendment**

A Baxter, R Bremner, B Campbell, I Cockburn, J Finlayson, R Gale, J Gordon, A Henderson, A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, A MacLean, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, D Macpherson, H Morrison, C Munro, M Reiss, K Rosie, A Sinclair, N Sinclair, C Smith and B Thompson.

### **For the Second Amendment**

G Adam, B Allan, B Boyd, I Brown, J Campbell, H Carmichael, A Christie, M Davidson, M Finlayson, C Fraser, L Fraser, K Gowans, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, E Knox, D Loudon, L MacDonald, Mrs D Mackay, G MacKenzie, R MacWilliam, B McAllister, L Munro, F Robertson, E Roddick and G Ross.

### **Abstentions**

J Bruce, M Cockburn, B Lobban, D Rixson and T Robertson.

In a vote between the **SECOND AMENDMENT** and the **FIRST AMENDMENT**, the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 24 votes and the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 26 votes, with 6 abstentions, and the **FIRST AMENDMENT** was therefore carried forward to the next round of voting, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Second Amendment**

G Adam, B Boyd, I Brown, J Campbell, H Carmichael, A Christie, M Davidson, M Finlayson, C Fraser, L Fraser, K Gowans, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, E Knox, D Loudon, L MacDonald, G MacKenzie, R MacWilliam, B McAllister, L Munro, F Robertson, E Roddick and G Ross.

### **For the First Amendment**

B Allan, A Baxter, R Bremner, B Campbell, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, J Finlayson, R Gale, J Gordon, A Henderson, A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, A MacLean, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, D Macpherson, H Morrison, C Munro, M Reiss, K Rosie, A Sinclair, N Sinclair, C Smith and B Thompson.

### **Abstentions**

J Bruce, R Gale, B Lobban, A MacLean, D Rixson and T Robertson

In a final vote between the **MOTION** and the **FIRST AMENDMENT**, the **MOTION** received 26 votes and the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 28 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **FIRST AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion**

G Adam, I Brown, J Campbell, H Carmichael, A Christie, M Davidson, M Finlayson, C Fraser, L Fraser, R Gale, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, E Knox, D Loudon, L MacDonald, G MacKenzie, A MacLean, B McAllister, J McGillivray, L Munro, D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, E Roddick and G Ross.

### **For the First Amendment**

B Allan, A Baxter, B Boyd, R Bremner, B Campbell, I Cockburn, M Cockburn, J Finlayson, J Gordon, K Gowans, A Henderson, A Jarvie, Mrs D Mackay, Mr D Mackay, I MacKenzie, S Mackie, C MacLeod, D MacLeod, D Macpherson, R MacWilliam, H Morrison, C Munro, M Reiss, K Rosie, A Sinclair, N Sinclair, C Smith and B Thompson.

### **Abstention**

B Lobban

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** as follows:-

Amendment to Recommendation (i) within the report to read "Agree the funding distribution model with a Strategic Fund of 15% and a 'de minimis' amount of zero; and

Amendment to Paragraph 5.4 (final bullet point) within the report to read “Funding for the administration of the Scheme to be a maximum of £100k.

Table Attached to above – as follows -

2017/18 - £1,292,405.46

2019 - £1,742,299.32

Total Amount - £3,034,704.78

15% for Strategic Projects & Admin - £455,205.72

	De minimis Allocation	% Top Up By Sea Area	Amount Top Up	Final Allocation
Inverness	0.00	0.47%	£12,123.65	£12,123.65
Dingwall & Seaforth & Black Isle	0.00	0.85%	£21,925.74	£21,925.74
Nairn	0.00	0.47%	£12,123.65	£12,123.65
Wester Ross, Strath & Locahalsh	0.00	13.47%	£347,458.52	£347,458.52
Lochaber	0.00	17.91%	£461,988.28	£461,988.28
Skye & Raasay	0.00	19.60%	£505,581.82	£505,581.82
Sutherland	0.00	27.15%	£700,334.00	£700,334.00
E Ross	0.00	4.19%	£108,081.01	£108,081.01
Caithness	0.00	15.88%	£409,624.45	£409,624.45
Total De minimis	0.00	99.99%		
Total 2017-19			£3,034,704.78	
Less 15% Strategic Projects & Admin			£2,579,499.06	
Less 0k de minimis			£2,579,499.06	

## 19. Scheme of Delegation – Coronavirus Sgeama Tiomnaidh – Inbhean Malairt

It was noted that, on 28 August 2020, the Scottish Government had introduced further regulations to control risks from Covid19, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Directions by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Regulations 2020.

In this regard, amendments to the Scheme of Delegation were proposed to take account of the new regulations.

At this point in the meeting, it was **NOTED** that discussions in relation to a Member-led review of the Scheme of Delegation and Governance Structures across the Council were due to commence in the following week.

## **Decision**

The Council **APPROVED** the following amendments to the Scheme of Delegation to include the new Regulations and to make minor amendments to clarify existing delegations related to Public Health and Covid19:-

### **Page 140 Environmental Health**

<b>Statute</b>	<b>Description of power or duty</b>	<b>Title of Officer/level of post to which delegated</b>
Coronavirus Act 2020	To exercise the appropriate duties of office under the relevant provisions of the listed legislation, including any related orders, regulations or other instruments:- a) made thereunder, or b) any modification or re-enactment of the foregoing	Environmental Health Manager and any Officers designated by the Environmental Health Manager
The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020	Power to serve notice or give a direction	Environmental Health Officer
The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Directions by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Regulations 2020		
Coronavirus Act 2020, Section 58 of and Schedule 28 <i>Powers relating to the transportation, storage and disposal of dead bodies and other human remains.</i>	Power to give a direction	Environmental Health Officer
The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020, Regulation 7(12)(b)	Designate a person for the purposes of the regulations	Environmental Health Manager
The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Directions by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 Regulation 11(9)(b)		
Public Health etc. (Scotland) Act 2008 Section 5(1)	designate persons for the purpose of exercising, on behalf of the authority, the functions of	Environmental Health Manager

“local authority competent person”

<b>Statute</b>	<b>Description of power or duty</b>	<b>Title of officer/level of post to which delegated</b>
The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020	Power to serve notice	Trading Standards Officer
The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020, Regulation 7(12)(b)	Designate a person for the purposes of the regulations	Trading Standards Manager

## **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 30 July/3 August 2020 were available on the Council's Website (but not in the Members' Library as had been stated on the agenda).

### **ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEM**

#### **Compensation Payments for SJC Casual Workers**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/31/20 dated 7 September 2020 by the Head of Human Resources.

#### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** Option 3 as outlined in Section 4 of the report to compensate all casual workers affected i.e. casual workers who had received some or no payment for work undertaken, however less than they would normally receive due to COVID and bring their earnings up to the average of the previous 3 pay periods which could amount to c£136,000.

It was also **AGREED** that the period for payment should cover 3 months only.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm.