

**The Highland Council  
No. 16 2020/2021**

Minutes of **Special Meeting** of the **Highland Council** held **REMOTELY** on **Wednesday, 28 October 2020** at 9.00am.

**1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence**

**Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

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

## **Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Allan, Mrs J Barclay, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms Kirsteen Currie, Mr L Fraser, Mr W Mackay, Mr C Macleod, Mr D Macleod, Mr N McLean, Ms P Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs F Robertson, Ms E Roddick, Mr A Sinclair and Mr C Smith.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

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

Item 3 – Mr A Baxter, Mr R Bremner, Mrs C Caddick, Mr A Christie, Miss J Campbell, Mr A Henderson, Mrs D Mackay, Mr B Lobban, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr B Thompson and Mrs C Wilson (all Financial)

Item 3 – Mr G Adam, Mr A Baxter, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Louden, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mr D Rixson, Mr P Saggars, Mrs M Smith and Mr B Thompson (all Non-Financial)

### **3. Scotland's Strategic Framework for Covid-19**

#### **Declarations of Interest**

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

**Mr D Rixson - as the Council representative on Isle of Rum Community Trust and the secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre**

**Ms M Smith - as a Board member of Albyn Housing Association**

**Mr B Thompson, Mr T Heggie and Mr A Jarvie – as Directors of High Life Highland**

**Mr K Gowans - on the basis of a family member being an employee of High Life Highland**

**Mr G Adam - as a director of a glamping company**

**Mr A Baxter - as a directoral trustee of a number of tourism related organizations**

**Mr C Fraser - as a trustee of the Cromarty Court House and Cromarty Harbour Trust**

The following Members declared financial interests 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 R Bremner - as a B&B owner**

**Mrs D Mackay - as a member of the NHS Highland Board**

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

**Mr B Lobban - as a director of a company involved in the sports and leisure sector**

**Mr G Adam - as part owner of two self-catering units**

**Mr P Saggars and Mrs H Carmichael - as a board members of the Nairn BID**

**Ms C Wilson - on the basis of family ownership of a High Street business and a family interest in a self-catering business**

**Mr A Henderson - as an accommodation provider**

**Miss J Campbell - as the owner of an Airbnb property**

**Mrs M Smith - as the owner of Excursions Ltd and beauty salons**

**Mr D Loudon - on the basis of renting out rooms to students during placements in Tain**

**Mr B Thompson - as the owner of a financial outdoor sports company in Lochaber**

**Mrs C Caddick - on the basis of having a share in a property in Aviemore**

**Mr A Baxter - as a qualified tourist guide**

**Mr H Morrison - as an owner of Smoo Caves in Durness**

**Ms I Mackenzie - on the basis of a family connection to a B&B business**

**Mr M Finlayson – as a partner of a small business to do with exhibitions supplying tourist related items**

**Mr C Munro - as the joint owner of a self-catering business**

**Mr C Macleod – as the owner of a small retailer**

It was confirmed that this Special Meeting of the Council had been arranged to allow all Members to come together to formally consider and debate Scotland's Strategic Framework for Covid-19.

In this regard, views were being sought around four headline areas – (i) Public Health and Wellbeing, (ii) Travel and Socialising Restrictions and Associated Economic Impacts, (iii) Financial and Welfare Impacts and (iv) Internal and External Communications.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was noted that the Council had been given a very short timescale by the Scottish Government to comment on the four issues which had been contained in the briefing/consultation paper;
- although it was considered likely that the Highland area would be placed in Tier 1 by the Scottish Government, it was still important that the Council took this opportunity to comment on the proposed tier system;
- above all, clarity of message would be crucial in order that everyone was aware of what acceptable within the individual tiers across Scotland;
- it was noted that areas could move up or down the tier system as part of a weekly review system which was to be put in place;
- it was anticipated that there would be strong guidance from the Scottish Government in relation to travel across areas which could be in different tiers and there was concern in relation to what this might mean for the hospitality sector in the Highlands;
- it was felt that special consideration had to be given as to whether some form of home visiting could be maintained, especially in rural areas where loneliness could be a significant issue amongst the elderly in particular;
- there had been significant joint working arrangements in place with the Director of Public Health in the Highlands over recent months and it was felt that information in this regard should be circulated to all Members of the Council;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Scottish Government for the opportunity to comment on the proposals on behalf of constituents across the area;
- it was noted that the SNP Group would also submit their own comments on the consultation paper directly to the Scottish Government;
- it had to be highlighted that there had been a significant number of positive tests for Covid-19 across the Highlands and as such there was concern that there would be any relaxing of restrictions which might allow the virus to spread more widely;

- it was also worrying that there could be an increase of travel into the Highlands from those in higher tiers which could have a detrimental effect on local areas;
- a robust testing system in the Highlands was essential both now and in the coming months;
- economic considerations were very important but they could not detract from the need to preserve public health across the area;
- it was vital that future messaging on the different tiers across Scotland was clear and easily understood by all;
- in relation to local variations, it was suggested that there should be adaptability and flexibility within each individual tier in the coming months if and when necessary;
- there should be key links in place in regard to the recovery of local businesses, including information on how specific issues would be captured and analysed;
- the joint work currently being undertaken with NHS Highland had to be maintained and it was felt that joint press releases in future would be helpful;
- clear guidelines in relation to the parameters of Tier 1 were imperative and, in contrast to other views expressed, it was felt that there should be no local variations allowed as this could confuse the messaging for the public;
- the thresholds needed for moving between tiers had to be clearly understood by all;
- there was a need for further and more detailed information on the support available for businesses and this should also include an update on the position relating to the Barnett consequentials;
- it was felt that there should be an explanation on the rationale for the time restrictions which had been put in place for some parts of the hospitality sector and an assessment of how successful this had been;
- it would be particularly important for the rules around in-home socialising to be very clear in the coming weeks;
- it was imperative that the Council continued to work with all partners across the Highlands in order to support recovery whenever and wherever possible;
- it had to be highlighted that the Highland economy relied heavily on the tourism sector and this had to be taken account of when responding to this consultation paper;
- there needed to be caution when suggesting localised systems across the Highlands as this could lead to unintended consequences;
- it was also a concern that there could be a situation which allowed unrestricted travel from higher tiers into the Highlands as this could lead to an increase in the number of cases of Covid-19 in the area;
- it was unfortunate that some people were now flouting the rules and it was therefore of vital importance that future messaging from the Scottish Government was both clear and concise;
- there was a need for a much more localised approach to testing, including the posting of tests to rural areas as and when needed;
- financial packages of support for local businesses were crucial in terms of ensuring the health of local communities;
- the Highland population appeared to be scrupulously following the rules so far in most places and it was vital that this continued;
- it was felt that there could perhaps be some arrangement considered for some form of limited outdoor socialising for elderly people in rural areas;
- implementing any rules on the restriction of travel across Scotland would be very difficult and this was a concern;
- the help of the military around the supply and distribution of testing kits should perhaps be considered;
- any decisions taken as a result of this consultation had to be clear and also sustainable;

- mental health concerns had to be highlighted as they had been increasing over recent months;
- any submission from the Council to the consultation should be evidence led wherever possible as it was felt that transmission of the virus in the area had been relatively low over the summer months;
- in terms of messaging, there had to be a balance between caution and reassurance, with perhaps an emphasis on the latter in the coming months if possible;
- it was felt that the virus would not fit neatly into the five tiers which were being proposed so there might need to be some flexibility in the coming weeks, not least for local businesses;
- it would be clearer for all if the Council Website could publish the Scottish Government press releases in their entirety in future as opposed to any abbreviated message;
- the proposed weekly review of the tier system by the Scottish Government was welcomed;
- there had to be a focus on making improvements to the current testing system wherever possible and this should be the subject of discussion with NHS Highland; and
- above all, it was essential that the prevalence of the virus in the Highland area was not allowed to increase and all steps necessary to avoid this situation had to be taken.

Thereafter, and with regard to whether it was considered that future travel restrictions from areas in the Level 3 tier or above were necessary, a vote was undertaken as follows:-

For Travel Restrictions – (30) – J Barclay, A Baxter, B Boyd, R Bremner, I Brown, J Bruce, J Campbell, K Currie, C Fraser, J Gordon, K Gowans, P Hadley, A Henderson, E Knox, B Lobban, D Louden, L MacDonald, A MacInnes, G MacKenzie, A MacKinnon, C MacLeod, J McGillivray, H Morrison, L Munro, M Paterson, E Roddick, K Rosie, N Sinclair, M Smith and B Thompson.

Against Travel Restrictions (28) – G Adam, J Barclay, C Caddick, I Campbell, H Carmichael, A Christie, M Davidson, J Finlayson, M Finlayson, R Gale, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, A Jarvie, D MacKay (Mr), D MacKay (Mrs), I MacKenzie, S Mackie, A MacLean, D Macpherson, B McAllister, C Munro, M Reiss, A Rhind, D Rixson, T Robertson, G Ross and P Sagers.

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** as follows:-

1. to support Tier 1 for the Highlands with in-home socialising;
2. to support no sub-regional variation;
3. to support travel restrictions from areas in Level 3 tier or above; and
4. the need for communication to be simple, concise and co-ordinated between all agencies, with the Council promoting Scottish Government/Public Health messaging rather than create its own content.

The meeting ended at 10.35am.

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**The Highland Council**  
**No. 17 2020/2021**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Highland Council** held **REMOTELY** on **Thursday, 29 October 2020** at 10.35am.

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

**Present:**

Mr G Adam	Mr D Mackay
Mr B Allan	Mrs 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 Macpherson
Mrs I Campbell	Mr R MacWilliam
Miss J Campbell	Mrs B McAllister
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr J McGillivray
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr N McLean
Mr A Christie	Mr H Morrison
Mr I Cockburn	Mr C Munro
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms L Munro
Ms K Currie	Ms P Munro
Mrs M Davidson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr J Finlayson	Mr I Ramon
Mr M Finlayson	Mr M Reiss
Mr C Fraser	Mr A Rhind
Mr L Fraser	Mr D Rixson
Mr R Gale	Mrs F Robertson
Mr J Gordon	Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Ms E Roddick
Mr A Graham	Mr K Rosie
Mr J Gray	Mr G Ross
Mrs P Hadley	Mr P Saggars
Mr T Heggie	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Henderson	Ms N Sinclair
Mr A Jarvie	Mr C Smith
Ms E Knox	Ms M Smith
Mr B Lobban	Mr B Thompson
Mr D Louden	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 Mrs L MacDonald and Mr D MacLeod.

During the meeting, tribute was paid to the late Mr Neil Clark, a former Councillor and also a Community Councillor in the Fort William area.

In this regard, it was confirmed that Mr Clark would be an enormous loss to the area as he had worked extensively over many years for the good of the community in Fort William in particular and had been highly respected and well liked by all who had known him.

As such, he would be very much missed and the condolences of the Council were extended to his family.

## 2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 9.1 – Mr B Lobban (Financial)

Item 9.2 – Mr K Gowans (Financial)

Item 9.2 – Mr A Jarvie, Mr T Heggie, Mr B Thompson and Ms L Munro (all Non-Financial),

Item 9.3 – Mr B Lobban (Financial)

Item 9.3 – Mr B Thompson (both Financial and Non-Financial)

Item 11 – Mrs D Mackay and Mr A Christie (both Financial)

Item 12 – Mrs D Mackay and Mr A Christie (both Financial)

Item 13 – Mr A Christie (Financial)

Item 13 – Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie, Ms L Munro and Mr B Thompson (all Non-Financial)

Item 14 – Ms M Smith (Financial)

Item 16 – Mr R Bremner, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Rixson, Mrs T Robertson and Ms M Smith (all Non-Financial)

Item 16 – Mr G Adam, Mr R Bremner, Mrs C Caddick, Ms I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Henderson, Mr D Loudon, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr H Morrison and Mrs C Wilson (all Financial)

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

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 10/11 September 2020 – which were **APPROVED** – subject to the following –

Item 12 (Question Time): Page 19: Response to Question No. 18 – reference had been made to “responses received at the Council Meeting on 25 June that the Leader was happy to circulate monetary arrangements but did not have the information at the time”. In this regard, it was agreed that ‘Leader’ should be replaced with ‘Chief Executive’ in relation to this wording.

Item 4 (Minutes of Meetings of Committees): Page 7: Corporate Resources Committee – it was noted that amendments which had been requested in relation to the Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 August would be circulated to Committee

Members at the next meeting on 11 November for approval.

It was also noted that in relation to the Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Area Committee held on 6 November 2019, the Head of Corporate Governance would contact Mr A Baxter to discuss an issue which had been previously raised concerning deletion of wording within that Minute.

Members also **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on 1 October 2020 as circulated

#### **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 the Volume which had been circulated separately.

In this regard, the Council **APPROVED** the Minutes of Meetings as circulated – subject to the following –

**Pensions Committee, 23 September** – it was agreed that apologies from Mr A Jarvie should be included in the Minutes of this meeting.

**Caithness Committee, 22 October -**

##### **\*Starred Item (i): Item 5: Notice of Motion**

‘Caithness Area Committee recognises the fundamental strategic importance of Wick John O’Groats Airport to the economy of the region and the energy, business and tourism sectors in particular.

Caithness Members confirm their full support for the Public Service Obligation and their commitment to working with stakeholders and partners to deliver this as a matter of urgency.

Caithness Area Committee further calls on Highland Council to identify financial support to secure the onward sustainability of the Airport.’

In this regard, it was clarified at the meeting that the Council was being asked by the Local Committee to continue with its efforts in exploring the resource implications of a successful PSO bid. As such, it was understood that any future support would need to go through the usual process of scrutiny and democratic approval with a full business case being presented to either a Strategic Committee or the full Council. It was however requested that the process begin in earnest and with cognisance of the urgency of the situation.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that Wick had had commercial services from its airport since the 1970s, with services connecting to Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and in its 50 years of operation the airport had been instrumental in supporting the economic growth of the region;
- the airport was also crucial to the local business and tourism sectors;
- travel times to the central belt of Scotland posed significant barriers to inward investment and business expansion and as such it was vital that the airport was maintained;
- Caithness Chamber of Commerce and other local stakeholders had taken early



action in commissioning a detailed and independent feasibility study in 2019 which had subsequently been developed into a full business case by early 2020. In this regard, consideration of a dual route public service obligation (PSO) by the Scottish Government was sought, not least in order to protect local services to Edinburgh and Aberdeen;

- it was confirmed that a PSO would require an annual subsidy of £3m over four years but was projected to deliver £5.2m in economic benefit and up to approximately 46k passengers per year (by the fourth year) as well as being a catalyst for 400-600 local jobs;
- it was critical that the investment from the Scottish Government was secured and this had the unanimous support of all local stakeholders;
- there was a need to convey thanks to the Council Officers involved (and especially the Executive Chief Officer for Infrastructure & Environment) for their support to date, including attendance at stakeholder meetings and investigation of the PSO case and the Council's role in delivering it;
- Transport Scotland had stressed that any PSO would have to be supported by the Council and other stakeholders;
- socio-economic recovery and reversing population decline were key priorities for the area and as such this Notice of Motion had unanimous cross-Party support in the area;
- collegiate working from MPs and MSPs in this respect was acknowledged and welcomed and as such it was essential to recognise that without a publicly funded PSO, neither flights nor jobs would be retained in the area;
- connectivity to and from the Highlands was crucial and as such this Notice of Motion sought to address market failure by expansive exploration of all future funding options; and
- confirmation from the Leader of the Council at the meeting that she would write to the UK Government as soon as possible in relation to the issues which had been raised was warmly welcomed.

### **Decision**

Thereafter, and having received clarification at the meeting that the purpose of the Notice of Motion was to seek agreement for the continuation of efforts to explore the resource implications of a successful PSO bid, the Council **AGREED** the Notice of Motion as detailed.

### **\*Starred Item (ii): Item 7: Presentation – Simec Atlantis**

'Caithness Area Committee recognises that the MeyGen project has positioned Caithness and Scotland as a world leader in the development and deployment of marine energy. The award winning and pioneering project has already produced more tidal stream power than anywhere else in the world, creating highly skilled jobs both direct and throughout the supply chain.

Caithness Members confirm their full support for the development of the project to realise its full potential in terms of tidal energy generating capacity and the establishment of the McCloud Data Centre creating an integrated subsea, terrestrial, data centre and renewables project to provide Scotland with world class digital infrastructure and the necessary tools to attract Hyperscale availability zone requirements.

Caithness Area Committee further calls on Highland Council to lobby the support of the UK Government for a 100MW minima for tidal energy in the next CFD auction round'.

During discussion, the huge potential of this non-controversial, established technology was highlighted and it was emphasised that the Meygen project had now already positioned Caithness (and Scotland) as a world leader in the development and deployment of marine energy.

In this regard, the potential future benefits for the whole of the Highland area were enormously significant. As such, it was important to recognise that the team from SIMEC Atlantic had made it very clear that they were extremely enthusiastic about working alongside the Council in realising these benefits.

It had therefore been unanimously agreed by the Caithness Area Committee that the Council should be asked to lobby the support of the UK Government for a 100MW minima for tidal energy in the next CFD auction round.

### **Decision**

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

#### **5. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board Co-Bhòrd Luachaidh na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean Siar**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Valuation Joint Board held on 22 November 2019 (approved by the Board on 18 September which had been the first meeting held in 2020) which were **NOTED**.

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

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Climate Change Working Group held on Thursday, 17 September 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

#### **7. Membership of Committees, etc Ballarachd Chomataidhean, msaa**

It was **NOTED** that Ms Maxine Smith, Mrs Pauline Munro and Mrs Liz MacDonald had confirmed that they were no longer part of the SNP Group. On that basis, Ms Smith now wished to be known as an 'Independent for Independence' and Mrs Munro and Mrs MacDonald wished to be Non-Aligned.

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

Ind – 26/SNP- 18/Cons – 10/Lib Dem – 9/Labour – 3/Green –1/Sutherland Independent – 1/Real Independent- 1/Independent for Independence – 1/Non-Aligned – 3/Vacant - 1

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

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

Audit & Scrutiny Committee – Dr I Cockburn to replace Mr D Loudon  
Economy & Infrastructure Committee – Ms N Sinclair to replace Mrs M Davidson  
Communities & Place Committee – Ms K Currie and Mr B Allan to replace Mrs L MacDonald and Mrs P Munro

Housing & Property Committee – Mr B Allan and Mr R Bremner to replace Ms M Smith and Mrs L MacDonald

Economy & Infrastructure Committee – Mr I Brown to replace Ms M Smith

Tourism Committee – Mr A MacInnes to replace Ms M Smith

Redesign Board – Mr B Boyd to replace Ms M Smith

Pension Board – Substitute Member – Mr A Henderson

Recovery Board – Mr A MacInnes to replace Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair

Tourism Committee – Ms M Smith to replace Mr B Lobban

## 8. Question Time Àm Ceiste

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

(i) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

‘What assurance can you give Elected Members, and the residents they represent, that the Highland Council will never again employ a consultant, or any other employee, on a salary or fee equivalent to £100,000 more than the £150,000 approximately (index linked equivalent) that is currently paid to the Prime Minister, the First Minister of Scotland or the Council's own Chief Executive?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and in line with the original question, it was queried again as to whether the Leader would give a commitment in relation to future salaries to be paid within the Council.

In response, the Leader confirmed that she always did her level best to ensure that services in the Council were effectively managed for the good of Highland communities.

(ii) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

‘What assurance can you give that in future any severance packages intended to be paid to exiting staff members from the Highland Council valued above £75,000 are first disclosed to all Elected Members of the Highland Council before they are published and printed in the publicly available annual accounts?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given that the last meeting of the Sub-Committee had been held on 28 August 2019 (and had lasted for 15 minutes) to deal with the arrangements that Members were now attempting to query in the Annual Accounts, clarification was sought on whether that was considered to be good governance.

In response, the Leader confirmed that she would discuss this with the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee.

(iii) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

‘To which Ministers within the Scottish or UK Government have you written since the last meeting of the Council on 10th September 2020, when did you write and what was the topic of each correspondence?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given that such correspondence was sent with the authority vested in the Leader to represent the agreed policies of the Council, it was queried as to why a statement had been made to the ‘Inverness Courier’ indicating that the entire Council had confidence in a particular issue when that had not been discussed or determined in the Council Chamber.

In response, the Leader confirmed that it was her job to convey the democratic decisions of the Council and not the views of individual Members.

(iv) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

‘In response to Councillor Mackie on 30th July, you stated that further enquiries would be made as to why the Council had not used the Furlough Scheme. Will you publish the details of the enquiries you made and the additional information you indicated would be provided to Members?’

The response had been circulated.

(There was no supplementary question).

(v) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

‘What was the outcome of the discussion between you and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee as outlined on Page 131 of the Council Minutes and when will this report come to Full Council for consideration?’

The response had been circulated.

(There was no supplementary question).

(vi) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

‘How many staff have been employed through the Transformation Change Fund, how many in each grade band and what is the total employment cost to the Council?’

The response had been circulated.

(There was no supplementary question).

(vii) Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

‘When will Members receive the detailed information on severance payments to Senior Management detailed in the Annual Accounts as you promised at the meeting of your Committee on 20th August 2020?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether it was considered that confidential briefings were the most appropriate form of scrutiny and governance for such matters.

In response, the Chair of the Corporate Resources confirmed that he believed that this was the case.

(viii) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

‘How many non-disclosure agreements have been entered into with staff recruitment agencies in each of the last five financial years and what is the total contract value relating to those agreements?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why the Council could not publish the number of non-disclosure agreements which had been entered into and the total contract value as this would not include reference to individual members of staff.

In response, the Leader confirmed that this would be dependent on the numbers involved but that she could discuss this further with Mr Baxter if he so wished.

(ix) Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

‘At the September Full Council Meeting, I asked a question regarding the total number of staff employed by the Highland Council and I also asked for a breakdown of the number of employees by each Executive Chief Officer (E.C.O) department. You stated in your reply to my question that, “The E.C.O Service employee breakdown will follow”. Do you have that breakdown in staffing numbers yet and can you share that information now with Elected Members? I also asked in my reply to you, “What is the ideal target number of Highland Council employees required to carry out all of the Council Services effectively?” As you were not in a position to answer that question on the day of the last Full Council meeting on September 10th, can you please answer that question today?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried again as to the ideal target number of Highland Council employees required to carry out all Council Services effectively, including a breakdown of staff numbers by each Executive Chief Officer.

In response, it was confirmed that this matter would be investigated and a response provided in due course.

(x) Mr D Macpherson

To the Leader of the Council

'Commitment to review the workings of all public CCTV under the executive powers or jurisdiction of Highland Council for Inverness and throughout the Highlands.

Can you please give a commitment that a full review will take place of the workings of all CCTV cameras and their recordings in Inverness and throughout other Highland towns to ensure that they are working correctly and are being maintained effectively, to give public confidence in preventing crime and helping Police Scotland Officers to solve crimes committed in these places.

And can you provide regular up-to-date information regarding the switch over from the obsolete analogue (black & white picture equipment), to the modern digital (colour picture equipment with zoom facilities), including those working and non-working of the CCTV cameras, to Elected Ward Members and can the review include the staffing levels and the times that the camera control rooms are being staffed and non-staffed in these locations, so that there can be no repeat of certain CCTV cameras being out of service with blackout spots for months and sometimes years on end, without local Ward Councillors being made aware of this concerning situation?'

The response had been circulated.

(There was no supplementary question).

(xi) Mr D Macpherson

To the Leader of the Council

'Regarding future Community Council Elections across Highland:

Can you give an assurance that your stated commitment and the Highland Council's stated commitment to 'Localism' is fully met. Allowing the several Community Councils in abeyance and all the many vacant Community Councillor posts to be effectively advertised, (including on lamppost posters and across the broad range of media and social media channels available today, as currently happens in other Scottish local authorities).

In so doing the Highland Council will be promoting and encouraging participation by the broadest cross-section of citizens, including a complete range of ages (from 16+ years) and all demographics of people in their communities, to participate in local decision making and thereby helping to better shape developments and improvements to their local areas, and only then will the Highland Council be able to demonstrate a genuine reinforcing of its stated desire for 'Localism' and to greater community participation in decisions affecting each community's local environment.'

The response had been circulated.

(There was no supplementary question).

(xii) Mr A Graham

To the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee

'In the 2019-20 financial year, how many Residents Permits, Residents Visitor Permits, Business Permits, and Business Visitor Permits were sold, what was the full annual charge for each of these, and what was the total income earned In the year? - please provide information for each area e.g. Inverness , Lochaber etc'

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, assurance was sought that once Service Points had re-opened, residents would be able to renew their parking permits at those locations.

In response, it was confirmed that it was expected that normal service would be resumed when Service Points re-opened.

(xiii) Mr C Fraser

To the Chair of the Housing & Property Committee

'The Scottish Government are bringing in fire, heat, smoke and carbon monoxide alarm legislation in response to the Grenfell Tower disaster. By February 2021, all homes in Scotland must have these alarms in their properties. What process is planned to make sure our social housing estate meets this new legislation?'

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether all tenants would receive written information on the new legislation in terms of what would be required.

In response, it was confirmed that the implementation date for the new legislation had now been moved to 2022 and as such there was adequate time to provide accurate and impartial information for tenants and the wider public and this would be undertaken by the Council, along with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Also, the position would be monitored through the Housing and Property Committee.

(xiv) Ms E Roddick

To the Leader of the Council

'Do you think it is appropriate that meetings about local resilience and third sector COVID response have gone ahead between yourself, Area Chairs and registered community groups without the knowledge and inclusion of other Councillors?'

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question and given that communities expected Members to be present at such meetings, it was queried as to whether the Leader would commit to inviting all Members to such meetings in future.

In response, the Leader confirmed that she would review the matter with the Chair of the Communities & Place Committee and inform Ms Roddick thereafter.

(xv) Mr B Boyd

To the Leader of the Council

'Can you please provide an up-to-date status of the project known as "The Gathering Place", in Inverness, with particular reference to spend-to-date on the project, which budget is paying for it, what the anticipated final total spend on the project will be and the date for completion?'

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given that financial and other priorities had changed dramatically since 'The Gathering Place' Project had been initiated, it was queried as to whether the Leader would agree to reduce further expenditure to the absolute minimum possible and re-assign any savings to current priorities.

In response, it was confirmed that the intention was to stay within budget for this project but that there had been delays which might have impacted on tenders received. In this regard, further information would be sought from the Project Manager and submitted to the Inverness City Arts Working Group in due course.

(xvi) Mr D Louden

To the Leader of the Council

You have been requested on a number of occasions at the Climate Change Panel to write to OFGEM to request a meeting to discuss a range of issues affecting the Highlands. Have you drafted and sent the letter to OFGEM and if not can you send one like this in the next four weeks?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Opposition Spokesperson on Economy and Infrastructure could be in attendance when the meeting with OFGEM took place.

In response, it was confirmed that an invitation would be issued to the Opposition Spokesperson to attend this meeting and also to attend a pre-meeting in advance to discuss the questions/issues to be raised with OFGEM.

(xvii) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

'At the last Council meeting during the debate on the Depute Chief Executive post recruitment, you accused my Group of lacking respect. A point further reiterated by yourself on BBC Radio Scotland. Can I ask where the respect for Members was when this post was advertised without our knowledge?'

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader believed that it had been respectful to advertise the post without Members' knowledge and whether she stood by that decision.



In response, the Leader confirmed that the written response which had already been circulated covered this issue.

(xviii) Mr A Jarvie

To the Chair of the Education Committee

‘At the City of Inverness Area Committee on 27 July, I asked for a copy of the ASN allocations by school and had not received it by the 30 September Education Committee when I asked again. I was latterly sent an email in which an Officer stated this couldn’t currently be provided as the relevant Officers are on leave. Is this Council deliberately dodging the release of this information, or are the data systems and/or policy so ineffective that they hinder staff in doing their jobs or an Officer being on leave means that no one can get essential and basic information?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to how Officers had been able to decide on the policy and set the hours (during leave) but not to send the information to Members.

In response, it was confirmed that a copy of the allocations for ASG’s had been sent to all Members on the previous day. It was also important to recognise that ASN and PSE allocations were needs based and as such had to vary and change almost on a weekly basis. Officers fully engaged with Schools and Members at all times and all opportunities were taken to issue information timeously.

(xix) Mr A Jarvie

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

‘At the 30 July Full Council, all of the financial returns as submitted to CoSLA were agreed to be released but this information is still not forthcoming. What is the reason for this delay and just when will Members have that information?’

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that this had been agreed at the full Council meeting on 30 July, it was queried as to why the CoSLA returns were to be reported to a Sub-Committee (which could decide to meet in private) and not the full Council for the information of all Members.

In response, the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee confirmed that this had been his decision. As such, the Resources Sub-Committee would meet on 26 November where this matter would be discussed.

## **9. Notices of Motion Brathan Gluasaid**

The following Notices of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance and subsequently selected for the agenda (in line with the agreed process for selection).

**Declaration of Interest**

**Mr B Lobban declared a financial interest in this item (9i) as a Director of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd and, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, left the meeting during discussion.**

**In his absence, one of the Vice Conveners (Mrs I Campbell) took the Chair.**

(i) Given the economic importance of Cairngorm Mountain to the economy of Aviemore and Badenoch & Strathspey and the wider Highlands, the Council welcomes and supports the decision by Scottish Government and HIE to fund the reconstruction of the funicular railway. This will provide a massive boost to the Highland economy and ensure the retention of a considerable number of very valuable jobs in the surrounding area.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need to emphasise the importance of the Cairngorm Funicular Railway to the area and to thank the Scottish Government for the considerable work in relation to funding the reconstruction (and Mr Fergus Ewing in particular in terms of his due diligence and lobbying) which had been greatly appreciated;
- snow sports played a huge part in Highland life and their contribution to the area could not be overstated;
- a large number of current and future local jobs were dependant on the railway and it was therefore hoped that the reconstruction could be completed as soon as possible;
- in relation to the importance to the local economy, there was a need for engineers and skilled workers on the railway and it was hoped that young people in the area would fill those positions as and when they became available;
- it would be true to say that the 'health' of the whole Spey Valley was affected by what happened on the mountain; and
- there had been limited snowfall in the area in recent years and it was therefore essential this now became a year round facility, perhaps involving schools where possible.

**Decision**

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

**(At this point, Mr Lobban returned to the meeting).**

**Declarations of Interest**

**Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item (9ii) on the basis of a family member being an employee of High Life Highland and, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, left the meeting during discussion.**

**Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie, Mr B Thompson and Ms L Munro declared non-financial interests in this item (9ii) as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

(ii) The Carnegie UK Trust has brought out a new report Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead. This report contains recommendations that we believe will be of interest and inspiration to us as we re-open many Highland libraries. The key points are:

- Public library services had a positive impact on those who engaged with them during lockdown
- Public library staff made a valuable contribution to the Covid-19 response.
- Public library services have huge potential to support individuals and communities as they navigate the short, medium and long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Public library services and their staff could have delivered much more - but faced barriers in doing so.

The report also has a section of suggested actions. Here are some –

- Strengthen status and voice in local authority structures, and value and invest in skilled and confident staff.
- Recognise the digital future is here and deliver a high-quality blended service.

We request that Council agrees that we draw High Life Highland's attention to the report and convene a cross-Chamber meeting to discuss libraries and their short and long-term future in Highland.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- a considerable amount of online work had been undertaken by libraries since the start of the pandemic and there was therefore a need to consider how a 'blended' service could perhaps be provided in future;
- there were very exciting examples of how libraries in other countries offered a considerable range of services and this could act as a template for the future of Highland libraries;
- it was imperative that any discussion of potential changes for libraries was undertaken in conjunction with High Life Highland from the outset and that this was on the basis of enhancing the services currently being provided;
- opportunities for external funding should be pursued wherever and whenever possible;
- future work involving all Members of the Council would be greatly appreciated and beneficial for all;
- it had to be recognised that libraries also offered locations for social interaction and this was extremely important and needed to be expanded where possible;
- in other countries, libraries were often viewed as 'community hubs' and this was an ideal situation which should be replicated in Highland;
- it would be important that any new arrangements and/or development of libraries was taken forward across the Highland area and not just in Inverness;
- it would be especially important in rural and remote areas to ensure that the mobile library service was maintained;
- consideration should be given to replacing current mobile vehicles with hydrogen buses or other low carbon vehicles;
- libraries were a vital part of the social and intellectual infrastructure in the Highlands and this discussion was in no way a criticism of what was already provided but rather an aspiration of what could be achieved in addition in future;
- the contribution which libraries currently made in respect of child literacy and in closing the attainment gap had to be recognised and as such they represented a multi-purpose, multi-functioning 'platform for life';
- it was recognised that Highland Council was one of very few Councils not to

have closed libraries and this had required a lot of work to be undertaken which was greatly appreciated;

- It had to be acknowledged that any significant change would require significant resource and partnership working would therefore be key to any future proposals. As such, working with High Life Highland at all stages and in all locations to establish what resources would be required was essential;
- in terms of the above, there was a need to highlight the excellent work which had been undertaken over recent months;
- there was an inter-generational aspect in any discussion of what was and could be provided by libraries and this had to be recognised;
- focusing on a school library service, involving tutor librarians, should be part of future work as this had been very successful in past years;
- school libraries needed additional investment now and were being held back from their full potential as a result of this not being provided;
- it was already accepted that libraries represented the best way to bridge the inequality gap through access to knowledge;
- in relation to the above, reference was made to the industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, who had reinforced the message that 'knowledge was the best way to give people a chance';
- the very clear statement of intent in relation to enhancing the services which libraries currently provided was warmly welcomed;
- consideration should be given to adapting current mobile library vehicles in order that they could provide a range of services for remote and rural areas in particular; and
- there was a need for Local Committees to continue this discussion and also to consider how currently owned Council buildings could be re-used in future.

### **Decision**

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

It was also **AGREED** that the Council should work with High Life Highland to ascertain what resources would be required to enable Highland Libraries to reach their potential.

### **Declarations of Interest**

**Mr B Lobban declared a non-financial interest in this item (9iii) as a Director of a Company which could be mentioned but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest was very remote and did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

**Mr B Thompson declared both financial and non-financial interests in this item (9iii) as a Company Director for several organisations listed in his Register of Interests but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interests did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

(iii) This Council agrees there are clear and substantial long-standing inadequacies in the sick pay system, highlighted this year by the Covid-19 crisis. In particular there is a need to:

- Increase Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from £95.85 per week to a fairer level e.g. the level of the Real Living Wage.
- Remove the waiting period ("waiting days") and make SSP available from the first day of sickness.

- Remove the eligibility requirement to have average earnings of £120 per week

This Council urges UK Government to review the sick pay system and reform it as a matter of urgency.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that currently only one in four workers received statutory sick pay which meant that those who needed it most were very often excluded;
- as such, there was an urgent need to lobby the UK Government to review the current system and instigate reforms as necessary and it was hoped that this would have the support of all Members;
- the current pandemic had meant that those on low wages now often faced being forced into extreme poverty very quickly and this was not acceptable;
- the United Kingdom was now in the minority on this issue whereby the majority of other countries currently paid a higher level of statutory sick pay to employees;
- there was often a disproportionate impact on women as well as those on low pay and this had to be brought to the attention of both the UK and Scottish Governments;
- in terms of Covid-19, it was the case that those on the lowest pay just could not afford not to go to work and this represented a significant risk during a pandemic;
- it was a misconception that statutory sick pay was issued by the UK Government when in fact the responsibility for payment lay with employers and it was known that it was not paid in all cases;
- it was suggested that the Council could perhaps check with its own suppliers as to what arrangements they had in place for their own employees; and
- there was a need for the UK Government to take responsibility for this issue in future and not just leave it to employers who were often not in position to meet the relevant costs.

### **Decision**

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

(iv) 'The statistics for our Council area clearly show the dependency residents are having on using the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough), additionally the alarming and rapid increases in claims for universal credit throughout Highland make it very clear that we face a bleak winter in Highland for many individuals and families. There are many challenges ahead that will have to be overcome.

Our economy has been devastated and whilst we have placed a lot of resources and time on aiding recovery, it will take time. The present furlough scheme ends on the last day of October. Whilst it is being replaced with the Job Support Scheme (JSS) this appears to be a much more complicated scheme for both employees and employers.

As a Council we will need using our own resources carefully ensuring that we can meet all the demands for our services and interventions whilst working closely with the public, 3rd sector and community partners as we face the continuing impact of the pandemic. We must all do our best to keep food on all tables, roofs over residents' heads and warmth in our citizens homes.

Council believes we must point out our situation to both UK and Scottish Government and ask them how they can help our communities through the and MPs together and

outline the situation to them and we seek cross chamber support to write to both governments and to explain the challenges Highland face’.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there had been a 200% increase in claimants for this scheme in some areas of the Highlands which was alarming and a real concern for the coming months;
- as such, it was considered that there was a need to arrange an early meeting of the relevant cross- Service Working Group to discuss the issues which needed to be raised as a matter of urgency with both the UK and Scottish Governments;
- it was feared that the poverty legacy, which involved debt and despair, was going to have long term consequences for the Highland area;
- there was specific concern in regard to the tourism sector which had been severely impacted in recent months;
- there was a degree of fatigue amongst volunteers and advice teams were now overloaded in relation to workload across the Highlands and this Motion was therefore focused on bringing together partners and agencies in the area to arrange and provide the help necessary for the coming months in particular;
- the winter period was going to bring severe and additional challenges and as such urgent action was required;
- it was considered that the Job Support Scheme would not meet the necessary requirements and that there was a need for much less bureaucracy than at present in the face of impending levels of unprecedented poverty;
- liaison with the Scottish Government in terms of the sharing of ideas and proposals was imperative; and
- it was therefore essential that a meeting of the relevant Working Group was convened as soon as possible and it was suggested that this should be added as an additional element of the Notice of Motion.

### **Decision**

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

It was also **AGREED** that an early meeting of the relevant cross-Service Working Group should be arranged to take forward the issues which had been highlighted.

(It was noted that on this occasion there was no fifth Notice of Amendment to be considered as it had already been dealt with as Starred Item (ii) from the Caithness Committee at Agenda Item 4 earlier in the meeting).

## **10. Response to BT Consultation on Removal of Payphones**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/34/20 dated 11 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- there was considerable disappointment that this consultation had been received so soon after the previous consultation when a response had already been provided;
- it had already been highlighted that there were a number of local groups who had shown interest in adopting public payphones and this remained the case;
- most of all, it had already been confirmed that the number of calls made from public payphones in an area such as the Highlands should not be viewed as

the most relevant factor. It was most definitely the case that most relevance had to be placed on the vital nature (and location) of the calls made when this was often in an emergency situation;

- many parts of the Highlands currently had very poor signal coverage and as such public payphones were often a very important 'lifeline' for remote communities and their retention was crucial;
- it had to be questioned as to whether the responses already submitted on this issue had largely been ignored in light of this new consultation;
- it was of extreme importance that Ofcom were alerted to this situation and took a stance on it;
- many local and public payphones were currently located alongside defibrillators which highlighted their importance;
- the vital links for emergency services in the Highlands (where response times were very often crucial) had to be recognised and maintained and they could be put at risk by any proposals for future removal of public payphones across the Highland area;
- there was also a need to take account of issues in relation to poverty and areas of multiple deprivation whereby many Highland residents (including elderly persons) did not and could not have access to mobile phones; and
- a strong and robust response had to be forwarded in response to this latest consultation, not least in regard to the very short term timescale within which previous comments had been submitted but appeared to have been ignored.

### **Decision**

The Council: -

- (i) **AGREED** to support and endorse the concerns raised regarding the timing and content of the consultation given the current global pandemic and that this consultation followed only 9 months after the conclusion of the previous one;
- (ii) **NOTED** that the Leader had written to Ofcom seeking redress; and
- (iii) **AGREED** the response to British Telecom's proposed removal of public payphones as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

## **11. Revenue Budget – Update Report Ro-innleachd Buidseit**

### **Declarations of Interest**

**Mrs D MacKay declared a financial interest in this item as a member of the NHS Highland Board but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, and in terms of her dispensation, confirmed that she would take part in the discussion.**

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

There had been circulated Report No. HC/35/20 dated 15 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- it was noted that the position remained uncertain in the months ahead and as such further modelling would be undertaken with a report submitted to the Corporate Resources Committee in November and thereafter a range of scenarios reported to the December Council meeting;
- there was a need to thank the Officers concerned for the work which had been undertaken on the report;
- it should be clarified that the Scottish Government had made it clear that Local Authorities were expected to take into consideration the contribution that their reserves could make to meet funding pressures. Also, that consideration should be given to additional resources available from capital receipts and the change in accounting arrangements for service concession arrangements before taking advantage of a loans fund repayment holiday;
- in relation to the Fraser of Allander report, which had provided a wider economic commentary, reference had been made within the Executive Summary to the uncertainty of the immediate outlook and the expectation that it would take years to rebuild the economy;
- proposed 'fiscal flexibilities' which were to be passed on by the Scottish Government to Local Authorities to help them through the Covid-19 situation were welcomed and it was hoped that they would be continued in the future;
- the Scottish Government proposals in relation to capital grant funding being switched to revenue (or Councils borrowing to offset Covid-19 revenue costs), flexibility to use capital receipts to offset Covid-19 revenue costs and changed accounting arrangements in relation to PPP/PFI Schools were welcomed but there was a need to seek clarity on the allocation of funding in relation to the Income Support Scheme;
- there was also a need for further clarity in relation to the distribution of funding through the Barnett consequentials;
- it was very disappointing that no further UK or Scottish Government announcements on future funding were expected prior to the end of the year and this would create further uncertainty;
- it had been stated in the report that any year end overspend would need to be funded through contingency funds, reserves or the use of funding flexibilities and further information was needed in this regard;
- it had to be recognised that the Scottish Government had to be held accountable for decisions made in relation to changed priorities for funding, specifically in regard to Local Government;
- it was expected that further detail on the current funding situation would be provided at the Corporate Resources Committee meeting on 11 November;
- it was noted that planning was underway to look ahead to the 2021/22 budget and as such the report had outlined some of the areas of key assumptions and scenario planning which it was intended to present to Members in December. However, if the intention was for all Members to be involved in this process, it had to be highlighted that time was of the essence as the end of the year was fast approaching;
- it would be important to provide a focus on short term damage across the Council, as well as implications for the medium and long term;
- there had been considerable replenishment of reserves and therefore it had to be expected that these could be spent where necessary in the coming weeks and months;
- the flexibility being offered to Local Authorities by the Scottish Government in terms of finance was welcomed, not least in light of the fact that this flexibility was not being replicated elsewhere across the UK;



- a clearer picture on future funding was expected when the half-year figures were made available for Members;
- it had to be acknowledged that the position across the Council had changed greatly as a result of Covid-19 in that much planned activity had now had to be paused/stopped across a range of issues;
- a second national lockdown could not be ruled out in light of the current number of rising cases of the virus nationwide and this would have to be planned for at a time when other issues, such as Winter flu and the potential implications from Brexit, would also be the subject of consideration;
- it was considered that the Council was navigating well through the financial issues at present and the Officers concerned were thanked for the work being undertaken; and
- the practical help from the Finance Secretary had been extremely helpful and was warmly welcomed but there was a need for public announcements from the Scottish Government to also include specific detail in terms of clear messaging in future.

### **Decision**

The Council **NOTED** the terms of the report as circulated.

## **12. Highland Council Capital Plan 2018/19 to 2022/23 – Update Report**

### **Declarations of Interest**

**Mrs D MacKay declared a financial interest in this item as a member of the NHS Highland Board but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, and in terms of her dispensation, confirmed that she would take part in the discussion.**

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

There had been circulated Report No. HC/36/20 dated 15 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- it was noted that updated and more detailed information would be provided for the Council meeting in December;
- there was a huge task ahead in terms of the delivery of projects across Services and as such there was a need for all Members of the Council to work together in the months ahead;
- there had been no mention of slippage within the report and it was hoped that detail on this issue could be submitted to the Corporate Resources Committee meeting in November;
- in terms of flood protection, it was feared that the mitigating measures in place were still not preventing some local flooding and it was hoped that this would be resolved as soon as possible and in advance of any new developments. It was also suggested that this issue should be audited in future, perhaps as part of the initial planning stage;
- there was a need for further and more detailed information in regard to the ELC expansion (1140 hours);

- thanks were conveyed to the Officers concerned with the North Coast Care Facility and in this respect it was clarified that (in relation to Paragraph 6.1 of the report) this related to the provision of eleven care beds with specialist nursing and living care and a separate wing which would contain the opportunity for on-site supported living and housing accommodation which would provide more flexible support packages for adults of all ages living on the North Coast;
- it was noted that once an updated profile of expenditure linked to programme projects was available, work would be undertaken to model the impact of this expenditure on the annual loans charges budget and as such it was vital that such work was completed as soon as possible;
- in relation to the proposal that Members might wish to consider adopting an 'investment hierarchy' (with reference to climate, technology and demography in addition to the themes of net zero, inclusive growth and resilient and sustainable places), it was suggested that the detail around this proposal should perhaps be discussed in the first instance through Strategic Committees;
- clarification was needed in relation to the funding of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) programme;
- in terms of commitment to future projects, it was highlighted that Culloden Academy was currently over capacity and this was expected to continue so early action was needed. In this regard, and in noting that the Ward was greatly expanding, it was suggested that consideration should be given as to whether the siting of demountable units could help with the current situation at Culloden Academy and also other schools in the Highlands;
- this report should be viewed as 'good news' for the Highlands in terms of releasing expenditure and as such consideration would be given to re-phasing and modelling scenarios due to Covid-19, including (and in line with the Scottish Government Draft Infrastructure Investment Plan) the re-purposing of buildings wherever possible;
- as part of the move towards recovery, a further and more detailed programme would be issued in due course;
- in relation to the Scottish Government Draft Infrastructure Investment Plan, it was noted that the clear vision was to support and enable an inclusive net zero emissions economy (with three themes of enabling net zero emissions and environmental sustainability, driving inclusive economic growth and building resilient and sustainable places) and this was welcomed;
- a key issue in the development of the Council's capital strategy would be the need to reflect a planned approach to asset rationalisations in line with the Scottish Government's concept of capital maintenance and ensuring that assets were safe and fit for purpose. As such, the capital strategy would need to set a long-term strategic direction for how investment in assets was undertaken;
- it was noted that there were four tiers in the Scottish Government 'investment hierarchy' (determine future need, maximise use of existing assets, re-purpose and co-locate and replace or new build) and as such it was vital that the Council continued to pursue an effective asset management approach;
- there was need to continue lobbying the Scottish Government for future funding for schools and in this regard specific reference was made to the current situation pertaining to St Clements School in that progress had been expected for a number of years but was still awaited; and
- it was suggested that there was scope for improvement in the tendering process in relation to future school building programmes and that this should be considered and closely monitored.

**Decision**

The Council:-

- (i) **APPROVED** the commitments to projects of £34.706m as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (ii) **NOTED** the Council's submission to the Scottish Government putting forward Broadford Primary School and Nairn Academy as the Council's bids for Phase 2 of the Learning Estate Improvement Programme as detailed in Appendix 3;
- (iii) **AGREED** that an Options Appraisal of the possible build solution for the North Coast Care Facility be taken to the Health & Social Care Committee meeting on 12 November with a recommendation sought which provided best value for money and an expedient timescale for delivery owing to the urgent requirement for the new facility and that the recommended solution be brought back to the Council on 17 December for approval. In this regard, clarified that (in relation to Paragraph, 6.1 of the report) this related to the provision of eleven care beds with specialist nursing and living care and a separate wing which would contain the opportunity for on-site supported living and housing accommodation providing more flexible support packages for adults of all ages living on the North Coast; and
- (iv) **NOTED** the updates provided on the current Capital Programme, Capital Strategy and the Scottish Government's Draft Infrastructure Investment Plan.

### **13. Annual Corporate Performance Report Aithris Choileanaidh Bhliadhnaidh**

#### **Declarations of Interest**

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

**Mr B Thompson, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Ms L Munro declared non-financial interests in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/37/20 dated 13 October 2020 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- the information contained within the report conveyed a steady improvement but there were still areas of concern and they would be closely monitored;
- it was envisaged that a revised Programme for the Administration would be brought to the next Council meeting in December;
- there was a need to accelerate some of the targets in the report, including carbon reduction, supporting people at home, addressing issues of welfare and poverty and the provision of broadband in certain areas of the Highlands;
- it was noted that discussion would be undertaken with Group Leaders in regard to support for local communities;
- it was suggested that the timescale for a report on Statutory Performance Indicators and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework should be brought forward to enable discussion of relevant issues at Strategic

## Committees;

- there had been areas of good performance, such as in street lighting, but also areas where targets were not being met, such as the building of affordable new homes, and it was hoped that this could be improved;
- it appeared that recycling was decreasing year on year and this had to be remedied;
- in terms of the section entitled 'A Place to Thrive', it was very disappointing that in most cases the national averages were not being met;
- it would be extremely important to improve upon the situation in relation to the number of foster carers in the Highland area;
- it was also hoped that improvements in regard to the road condition network could be made in the near future;
- the statistics in relation to the decline in the number of pupils entering 'positive destinations' were very disappointing;
- there was a need to welcome the information on staff absences which represented an improving situation for the Council;
- in regard to the education statistics which had been provided, it was highlighted that there had been more recent information provided at the Strategic Committee level which confirmed an improving situation across a range of issues and this had been warmly welcomed;
- it was noted that it had not been possible to arrange a Citizens Panel in the current year, not least in light of the Covid-19 situation, but it was confirmed that it would be re-established when feasible;
- provision of 'dashboard' technology in future to allow 'live information' to be relayed to Members would be helpful;
- there was a need for further and more detailed information to be provided on the current number of foster carers and whether this had changed/improved in light of amendments to the fee structure. In this regard, thanks were conveyed to Mr A Baxter for the significant contribution which he had made over recent years in relation to this issue;
- information on the recruitment of an Education Consultant had been previously requested as part of an internal audit but this had yet to be received;
- the considerable work undertaken by Council Officers in terms of the receipt of Council Tax should be highlighted;
- the positive information in regard to recruitment of modern apprentices was welcomed;
- there was a need for more links to be made in relation to the issues reported through Strategic Committees and the full Council;
- in terms of future planning applications, it was suggested that there could be opportunities in future for additional income but that there required to be a focus on resourcing requirements within the Service in the first instance;
- a number of Head Teachers had undertaken presentations at recent Education Committee meetings and these had been very well received by all;
- the restoration work on Academy Street in Inverness was welcomed and similar examples could be seen across the Highlands, including specific projects in the Caithness areas;
- there were many examples of positive work being undertaken across the school estate and these should be highlighted;
- Business Gateway had reported a huge increase in individuals across the Highlands registering new private companies and as such a detailed update on this for Members was needed; and
- there had been a reduction in the percentage of people who agreed that the Council 'listened' and this was concerning and had to be addressed in view of its importance for the Highland area.

**Decision**

The Council: -

- (i) **NOTED** the progress being made with the delivery of the Corporate Plan for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020;
- (ii) **AGREED** that Service Plans should be refreshed for 2021/22;
- (iii) **AGREED** to await a further report on Statutory Performance Indicators and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework no later than March 2021; and
- (iv) **NOTED** that the Annual Performance & Attitudes Survey of the Citizens Panel had not been possible in the current year due to Covid-19.

**14. Recovery Action Plan: Phase 2 to end September 2020 – Update Report Bòrd Ath-shlànachaidh – Aithisg Ùrachaidh**

**Declaration of Interest**

**Ms M Smith declared a financial interest in this item as the Director of two businesses and, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, left the meeting during discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/38/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Transformation.

In this regard, there had also been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Recovery Board held on Wednesday, 7 October 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- there was a need to convey thanks to Officers for all the work which had been involved in what was a very inclusive report;
- it was noted that a Seminar would be arranged by the Chief Executive in the coming weeks with a further update to the next Council meeting in December;
- there had been problems previously with the supply of Covid-19 related items but this had now improved. However, there was no room for complacency and as such the Council would continue to build stock resistance in the months ahead;
- it was envisaged that improvements would be made to the current PRMS system to allow 'real time' updates in relation to the Recovery Plan in future;
- the very successful re-opening of schools was welcomed but it was highlighted that there were currently issues with the reactivation of the 20mph signs outside school buildings and this was a real concern for the darker weeks ahead. In response, it was agreed that this issue would be followed up with the relevant Council Services as a matter of urgency, not least in terms of the safety aspect for school pupils;
- an update was required in relation to the progress of the review of procurement services within the Council;
- the Brexit SWOT analysis was welcomed but there was some concern in relation to the very tight timescale in which this was to be undertaken;
- further information on the dates of forthcoming meetings of the Highland Economic Partnership would be helpful;
- in relation to the issue which had been raised in regard to the 20mph signs outside schools, it was suggested that consideration should be given as to whether there was an alternative and more robust form of technology which

- could be used in future; and
- it was noted that the proposal was now for 2 Vice Chairs to be appointed to the Recovery Board and a further update on this would be submitted to the next Council meeting in December.

### **Decision**

The Council **NOTED**: -

- the latest progress of the Council's Recovery Action Plan to 30 September 2020;
- the associated implications and pressures on resources in the delivery of the resilience activity and the recovery programme;
- the latest update regarding PPE as requested by the Recovery Board on 7 October 2020;
- that 2 Vice-Chairs would now be appointed to the Recovery Board (1 Administration/1 Opposition); and
- that a Brexit SWOT analysis would be undertaken by the Brexit Working Group and the outcome reported to the next Recovery Board meeting.

### **15. Redesign Board Update – Workforce Planning & Development**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/39/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

In this regard, there had also been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Redesign Board held on Thursday, 8 October 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

During discussion, thanks were conveyed to the Officers concerned for the work which had been undertaken and it was highlighted that considerable progress had been made over recent weeks.

It was also reiterated that all Members of the Council were able and encouraged to attend Board Meetings and Workshops.

### **Decision**

The Council **NOTED** the progress of the Workforce Planning & Development Project as detailed in the report.

### **16. Consultation on Short Term Lets – Licensing Scheme and Planning Control Area**

#### **Declarations of Interest**

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

**Mr D Rixson - as the Council representative on Isle of Rum Community Trust and the Council appointee for the Lochaber Housing Association**

**Mr J Finlayson - as a member of the Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association Board**

**Mrs T Robertson - as a Council appointed Director of Highland Housing Alliance**

**Ms M Smith - as a Board member of Albyn Housing Association**

The following Members declared financial interests 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 Henderson – as an accommodation provider (although not directly affected by the short term let legislation)**

**Mr G Adam - as part owner of two self-catering units (although this would not be the case when the legislation was passed)**

**Mr L Fraser - on the basis of renting out long-term accommodation**

The following Members declared financial interests and left the meeting during discussion:-

**Mr C Munro - as the joint owner of a self-catering business**

**Mr J Gordon - on the basis of running an Airbnb, a family connection to self-catering facilities and as a director of Skye Connect**

**Ms I Mackenzie - on the basis of a family connection to a B&B business**

**Mr D Louden - on the basis of renting out rooms to students during placements in Tain**

**Mrs C Caddick - on the basis of having a share in a property in Aviemore**

**Ms I Campbell - on the basis of owning property which was let to Country Cottages**

**Ms C Wilson - on the basis of family ownership of an Airbnb**

**Mr R Bremner - as a B&B owner (and on a non-financial basis as a Board member of Albyn Housing Association)**

**Mr R Gale - on the basis of a family connection to holiday accommodation**

**Ms P Munro - on the basis of running a family Airbnb**

**Mr H Morrison - on the basis of family ownership of an Airbnb and as a provider of hotel accommodation**

**Miss J Campbell declared a financial interest as the owner of an Airbnb property but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that she would monitor the discussion and leave if she considered it appropriate to do so (confirming that she did not intend to participate in any debate).**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/40/20 dated 19 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- this was a hugely important issue for the Highland economy and as such the speed of the Council response was commended;
- the proposals represented considerable change and were currently causing some concern, most especially for self-catering facilities;
- there was also a need to establish the appropriate future resource which would be required by the Council in terms of new arrangements;
- the drawing up of control areas would be very controversial and it was not clear exactly what the anticipated benefits were in this regard;
- it was suggested that the current arrangements in relation to self-regulation worked well in the Highland area and that there was not a need for any additional level of bureaucracy;
- it was also felt that the Tourism Committee should perhaps monitor the

- proposals and that MSPs should also be consulted as and when necessary;
- it had to be highlighted that in areas such Badenoch & Strathspey, where tourism was the 'life blood' of the community, there were now a significant number of AirBnB establishments as opposed to permanent homes;
- it was clear to see how some 'conditions', such as being greeted on arrival, could be challenging;
- further information was needed on future protections in relation to vexatious complaints and also in regard to the specific planning and licensing regimes;
- clarification was also required on the future role of Local Committees, specifically in terms of area control;
- the impact of short-term lets on affordable housing also needed to be highlighted; and
- with specific reference to the implementation of planning control areas (which was to be the subject of a report to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee after the regulations were finalised), it was suggested that consultation should be undertaken with Local Committees as well as the Housing & Property Committee.

### **Decision**

Members: -

- (i) **NOTED** that short-term lets had significant economic benefits to Highland communities but in some circumstances there could be negative impacts;
- (ii) **NOTED** the proposals would have significant resource implications for the Council and agreed that the costs of administering the scheme should be recovered in full through fees as permitted by the licensing scheme;
- (iii) **NOTED** that any costs incurred through the establishment of Control Areas under Planning legislation could not be recovered in this way and so would be additional;
- (iv) **AGREED** that the implementation of Planning Control areas should be the subject of a report to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee after the regulations were finalised and following consultation with the Housing & Property Committee and relevant Local Committees;
- (v) **AGREED** the setting of fees for the proposed licensing scheme should be the subject of a report to the Licensing Committee after the regulations were finalised; and
- (vi) **AGREED** to homologate the consultation response which had been submitted to meet the Scottish Government deadline of 16th October 2020.

## **17. Highland Council Whistleblowing Policy Poileasaidh Innsireachd Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/41/20 dated 13 October 2020 by the Corporate Audit and Performance Manager.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- whilst taking account of the terms of the report which had been circulated, it was still felt that an external provider/independent contractor could perhaps deliver a service which might be more acceptable to staff who wished to raise concerns. In this respect, reference was made to the current arrangements within Edinburgh City Council which seemed to work well for all concerned;
- further information was required in terms of the consultation which had been undertaken with Trade Unions;



- it was also queried as to how the opinions of staff (who were not members of Trade Unions) could be assessed;
- it would be helpful for Members to know which other Groups had been consulted in relation to the proposed new policy;
- there was concern in regard to recent media reports that any Council employee who spoke to the Press about workplace issues could be dismissed and this required to be clarified;
- it was very important that members of staff had a safe way to raise concerns and that they had confidence in this respect and it was not felt by some Members that this proposed policy achieved that aim;
- as part of the discussion on this proposed policy, there was a need for the terms of the relevant Standing Order to be highlighted in relation to when dissent could be recorded;
- there was a need to move away from the current policy and as such the proposals in the report represented a new neutral and fair policy for staff which would involve the Corporate Fraud Team who were used to dealing with confidential issues;
- with reference to Staff Partnership Forum meetings, it was confirmed that representatives from a number of Trade Unions had supported the terms of the proposed policy;
- it had to be noted that the proposed new policy would be reviewed after a six month period of time ;
- the Council had always had a very good relationship with the Trade Unions and their opinions were respected, not least in relation to this new policy;
- there was a need for further information in regard to exactly how many Trade Unions had been consulted, who they were and how many staff were Trade Union members across the Council;
- it was the view of a number of Members that employees should be able to contact an independent contractor if they so wished in terms of the aspiration for transparency across the Council;
- some Members had been contacted by staff who did not feel confident enough to come forward in light of the current arrangements for confidentiality and it was not felt that this new policy addressed that issue;
- it would have been preferable if the Trade Union representatives who had been consulted (and who supported the proposed policy) had been in attendance at this meeting;
- it should be recognised that any organisation could be damaged if staff were not enabled to raise legitimate concerns safely if and when they arose;
- thanks should be conveyed to Officers for their work on this report and it had to be noted that there was full confidence in the Corporate Fraud Team in terms of taking this new policy forward;
- it was highlighted that only Edinburgh City Council currently had an external contractor in place in this regard;
- it should be clarified as to whether the Trade Unions had been specifically asked for their opinion on the employment of an external contractor in future as it was felt that in many cases employees might not be comfortable about contacting other employees in the same organisation to raise concerns;
- this had been a reasoned and rational debate and it had to be recognised that there were cross-party concerns about the terms of this proposed new policy;
- there was a need to identify how staff members who were not in Trade Unions would be consulted; and
- if this new policy was to be adopted, it was essential that any review in the next six month period was very robust in order to address the issues which had been raised.

Thereafter, Mrs M Davidson, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, **MOVED** the recommendations within the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr S Mackie, moved that this item should be deferred until a subsequent Council meeting following a specific consultation for this policy with staff and Trade Unions and for the report to contain details of responses, support and suggestions.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 45 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 10 votes, with 8 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

G Adam, B Allan, R Balfour, J Barclay, R Bremner, I Brown, 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, A Graham, J Gray, T Heggie, A Henderson, B Lobban, A MacInnes, D Mackay (Mrs), G MacKenzie, A Mackinnon, A MacLean, C MacLeod, B McAllister, H Morrison, C Munro, L Munro, M Paterson, M Reiss, D Rixson, F Robertson, T Robertson, K Rosie, G Ross, N Sinclair, B Thompson and C Wilson.

**For the Amendment:**

A Baxter, B Boyd, J Bruce, P Hadley, A Jarvie, D Mackay (Mr), S Mackie, D Macpherson, P Saggars and C Smith.

**Abstentions:**

G Campbell-Sinclair, K Currie, K Gowans, E Knox, D Louden, R MacWilliam, N McLean and E Roddick.

The following Members (who had taken part in the vote) subsequently confirmed that they wished their dissent to be recorded:-

Mr B Boyd

**Decision**

The Council: -

- (i) **NOTED** the revised Whistleblowing Policy as circulated;
- (ii) **APPROVED** the policy for immediate implementation;
- (iii) **APPROVED** the supplementary guidance note for staff (on raising concerns) for immediate implementation;
- (iv) **NOTED** the intention to provide an annual monitoring report to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee beginning June 2021; and
- (v) **NOTED** the intention to review the policy with Trade Unions and with Staff Forum input and to report this to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in June 2021 along with any recommendations for change which would be scrutinised and recommended to the full Council for approval.

**18. Timetable of Meetings for 2020/21**  
**Clàr-ama Choinneamhan airson 2020**

The Council **AGREED** the Timetable of Meetings for 2021 as circulated and subject to the following –

Lochaber Committee – meeting date to be changed from 2 to 9 August 2021.

The Council also **AGREED** the following change to the current timetable – Gaelic Committee – meeting date to be changed from 21 October to 5 November 2020.

**19. Church Representative – Education Committee**

It was noted that the Council was required, in terms of Section 31 of the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994, to have a minimum of three Church representatives on the Education Committee, two of whom were to be appointed on direct nomination (by the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church) and the third involving discretionary procedures.

In this regard, and on the basis of the rota system previously agreed by the Council, Mr Ross Finlay had been nominated by the Free Church of Scotland as its representative to sit on the Committee.

The Council **NOTED** the nomination of Mr Ross Finlay by the Free Church of Scotland as its representative to sit on the Education Committee as detailed.

**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 10/11 September 2020 were available on the Council's Website.

The meeting ended at 6.30pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held Remotely on **Wednesday, 4 November 2020** at **10.30 am**.

### Present:

Mr R Balfour  
Mr B Boyd  
Mr I Brown  
Mrs C Caddick  
Mrs H Carmichael  
Mr K Gowans  
Mr J Gray  
Mr A Henderson

Mr D Louden  
Mr A MacInnes  
Mr C Munro  
Mr D Rixson  
Mrs T Robertson  
Mr P Saggars  
Ms N Sinclair

### Non-Members also present:

Ms J Barclay  
Mr A Baxter  
Mr R Bremner  
Mrs M C Davidson  
Mr J Finlayson (am only)  
Ms E Knox  
Mr B Lobban (am only)  
Mr J McGillivray

Mr G MacKenzie  
Mrs A MacLean  
Mr D Macpherson  
Mr H Morrison  
Mr R MacWilliam (am only)  
Ms M Smith (am only)  
Mr B Thompson (am only)

### In attendance:

Executive Chief Officer Environment and Infrastructure

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

**Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

### Business

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated from Mr W Mackay, Mr D MacLeod and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

- Item 6 – Mr D Rixson and Mrs T Robertson (non financial)
- Item 5 – Mr D Louden (financial) and Ms N Sinclair (non financial)
- Item 8 – Mr D Rixson and Mr K Gowans (non financial)
- Item 12 – Mrs T Robertson (non financial)
- Item 13 – Mr A Henderson (non-financial)
- Item 14 - Mr D Rixson (non financial)
- Item 16 - Mr D Rixson (non financial)
- Item 21 - Mr D Rixson (non financial)
- Item 22 – Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Rixson and Mrs T Robertson (non financial)

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

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

## 4. **Development and Infrastructure Service Revenue Budget - Monitoring** **Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Seirbheis an Leasachaidh is a' Bhun-structair**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/25/20 dated 14 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- information was sought and provided on the following, with further discussion to take place outwith the meeting if more detail was required:-
  - figures for school transport showed a £3.5m expenditure for the first half of the financial year which suggested there remained £10m to be spent in the second half;
  - there had been an £81k profit from car parks in the first half of the year but a projected loss of £250k in the second. This was surprising because the Council had stopped charging for car parks during the first half of the year but had since resumed;
  - Harbours showed a £1.1m profit in the first half of the year but just under £500k was projected for the second half; and
- appreciation was expressed for the decision to facilitate, since August 2020, the weekly, instead of fortnightly, return home of pupils from the islands who stayed in the school hostel at Mallaig.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the more detailed reporting of gross income and gross expenditure to improve scrutiny of net budgets as set out in the Appendices;
- ii. the Revenue Monitoring position for the period to 30 September 2020;
- iii. net spend at the end of quarter 2, totaled £12.053m;
- iv. based on the best available information to date, a service budget gap of £11.847m is forecast to end 2020/21;
- v. many areas of the Service rely on income to pay for services and this

- was significantly disrupted this year because of covid impacts. A loss of income is the key driver of the Service's budget gap;
- vi. the budget gap may change positively or negatively depending on: applying expenditure and recruitment controls, aligning services to meet budget savings agreed; income recovery in 2020/21; and
  - vii. further adjustments will be made in future quarterly reporting to reflect the updated apportionment of costs and savings across the new structure.

## 5. **Town Centre Fund Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile**

### **Declarations of Interest**

**Mr D Louden declared a financial interest in this item as a Director of an organisation that had been a financial beneficiary and left the meeting during the discussion.**

**Ms N Sinclair declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Wick Development Trust 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. ECI/26/20 dated 20 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- with reference to paragraph 6.2.3 which stated, 'if a grant eligibility issue does arise and the area committee goes against report recommendation in this respect, then the matter is referred to the Executive Chief Officer (Infrastructure and Environment) (ECO), in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee', it was explained this should have referred to the ECO in consultation with the Area Committee Chair. However, following concern being voiced by several Members, it was proposed instead that any such issues be referred to a special meeting of the relevant Area Committee;
- following concern being expressed that Members would have no prior knowledge of the proposed projects prior to them being presented to the Area Committee, it was explained there would be prior consultation with local Members via Ward Business Meetings; and
- it was clarified that all projects would have to meet the relevant Scottish Government criteria.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. that an area based approach was adopted to manage this additional Town Centre Fund grant offer with decision-making as detailed in section 6.2 and proposed area allocations as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. that paragraph 6.2.3 of the report be amended to state, 'if a grant eligibility issue does arise and the area committee goes against report recommendation in this respect, then the matter is referred to a special meeting of the relevant area committee' rather than to the Executive

Chief Officer (Infrastructure and Environment), in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

## 6. Strategic Housing Investment Plan Plana Tasgaidh Taigheadais Ro-innleachdail

### Declarations of Interest:

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

**Mrs T Robertson declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Council appointee to the Highland Housing Association 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. ECI/27/20 dated 26 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- the report was welcomed and attention drawn to the risk of under-delivery of housing targets, partly due to the Covid-19 crisis. It was suggested that consideration be given to obtaining planning permission for further housing on Council-owned land to help meet targets, with particular reference to shortages in Inverness and the market being developer-led. It was important to try to reduce the long housing waiting list;
- there was a limited pool of contractors and it was preferable to prioritise local contractors or sub-contractors. During times of recession developers were usually more willing to increase the Affordable Housing element of a development;
- attention was drawn to the different housing challenges in different areas of the Highlands. Innovative technology could be useful when building in challenging locations. Lobbying for infrastructure funding was vital;
- changing demographics required consideration, noting that Highland was becoming increasingly popular partly as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The ageing population was a key issue; and
- reference was made to the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan, for which the main issues report was being taken to relevant Area Committees for comment.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Strategic Housing Investment Plan, and that it be submitted to the Scottish Government in draft form pending consideration by Area Committees, all as included within Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** the planned investment programme as included within Appendix 2 of the report.

**7. Struan Hotel, Carrbridge - Compulsory Purchase Order  
Taigh-òsta an t-Sruthain, Drochaid Chàrr - Òrdugh Ceannachd Èigneachail**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/28/20 dated 5 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Members voiced support for the proposal, referring to the community backing for it, the possible danger the building presented, the opportunities that could be realised by its redevelopment and the need to send a clear message to owners of buildings that were left derelict for significant periods of time.

The Committee **AGREED** to:-

- \*
- i. recommend that Council resolve to make a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to acquire the Struan House Hotel, Carrbridge under Sections 9 and 10 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987;
  - ii. authorise the Head of Development and Regeneration to continue to undertake negotiation to acquire the Struan House Hotel by agreement and, failing agreement, to undertake negotiation through the District Valuer of any claims for compensation; and
  - iii. require the Head of Development and Regeneration to report back to Council in the event that the compulsory purchase cannot proceed for any reason.

**8. Inverness and Highland City Region Deal Update  
Cunntas às Ùr mu Chùmhnant Baile Roinne Inbhir Nis agus na Gàidhealtachd**

**Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

**Mr K Gowans declared a non-financial interest in this item as he sometimes worked with UHI Life Sciences but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/29/20 dated 14 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- there was a need to improve the clarity of reporting and this would be further discussed offline;
- it was important to have specific allocated resources for programme management;
- in relation to the management of projects, improved focus on the delivery of objectives would be appreciated. These were scrutinised in more detail



by the Monitoring Group and some projects were managed in partnership with other organisations;

- the importance of digital connectivity was emphasised, especially in relation to remote and rural communities, with information being sought and provided on the possible use of new technology. A brief summary was provided on the R100 project for the rollout of full fibre broadband, with many of the issues being complex and further information awaited from the R100 Project Board. Attention was drawn to government grant schemes to allow local communities to try to improve their broadband connections. It was hoped a contract would be signed with BT by the end of the year, following delays due to legal issues;
- the need to improve employability and skills was highlighted especially in relation to retaining young people in Highland;
- expanded information in relation to the previous spend profile was requested for future reports, this also to be presented to the Monitoring Group;
- information was sought, and provided, on the alternative activities of Newton Rooms staff while the rooms had been closed due to Covid-19. It was anticipated some might re-open in 2021;
- specific questions on specific issues during debate would be helpful, as would the allocation of one officer as a point of contact for Members, and to consider a further Members' briefing;
- information was sought on the permanence of the Portree and Plockton pop-up Newton Rooms but none was available at present;
- in response to concern about slippage on the costs in relation to the life sciences project, information was being sought from the consultants on how to bring the costs back within budget and the matter of funding for this had been discussed at an HIE Board meeting; and
- in response to a query about the A9 and A96 projects, it was explained these remained in the programme as far as was known, albeit at different stages, with the East Link being further ahead.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress with the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal during 2020;
- ii. **AGREED** to include in future reports expanded information in relation to the previous spend profile; and
- iii. **AGREED** to allocate one officer as a point of contact for Members on this issue and to consider a further Members briefing.

#### **9. Opportunity Cromarty Firth – Freeport Bid Cothrom Linne Mhoireibh – Tairgse Shaor-chalaidh**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/30/20 dated 14 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- Members expressed support for the opportunity and considered it significant enough that a final decision was presented to the full Council, given its strategic importance;

- the important role hydrogen played in helping the Council meet its 2025 carbon targets was highlighted;
- issues that should be taken into consideration included environmental factors, pay and conditions for port workers, pressure on roads and infrastructure and the effects on local people such as increased traffic, noise pollution and the scale of the development; and
- it was important the opportunity did not become a political issue and the potential benefits to the whole Highland economy were emphasised.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work being undertaken by the consortium in seeking to work together for businesses and communities in the area, and the potential Highland-wide benefits as outlined in the Council's approved indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (irrespective of the Freeport element);
- NOTED** the engagement that had been undertaken to date;
- AGREED** for officers to continue to engage with the Opportunity Cromarty Firth project to help realise the ambitions for the area;
- AGREED** to continue to assess the merits or otherwise of seeking Freeport status subject to further dialogue with Scottish Government and consideration of the results from socio-economic analysis; and
- AGREED** the final decision on the Freeport Bid be submitted to the Council rather than the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

**10. Proposed Changes to Pre-Application Consultation Requirements in Planning – Consultation Response**  
**Atharrachaidhean a Thathar a' Moladh do Riatanasan Comhairleachaidh Ro-iarrtais ann an Dealbhadh – Freagairt Co-chomhairle**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/31/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

It was suggested that the options detailed did not cover the entire population, noting there were people in remote communities isolating due to Covid-19 and, without internet, mail drops should be considered in addition to electronic communication or relying on notices in local shops etc.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the key proposals set out in the Proposed Changes to Pre-Application Consultation Requirements in Planning consultation document; and
- AGREED** to homologate the submitted response, at Appendix 1 of the report.

**11. Application for an Order to Exempt Access Rights during the construction of a Wind Turbine Development at Limekiln, Reay**  
**Iarrtas airson Òrdugh gus Còraichean Inntrigidh a Shaoradh fhad 's a thathar a' togail Leasachadh Crann-gaoithe aig an Àth-aoil, Meadhrath**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/32/20 dated 10 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Members voiced support for the views of Caithness Community Council and the local community that it was unreasonable and without justification to close public access on the core path for the length of time required. It would also set a concerning precedent.

The Committee **REJECTED** the Section 11 Order to exclude public access rights for a period of 2 years and not forward the application to Scottish Ministers thereby requiring the developer to facilitate open public access on the core path whilst construction of the wind farm takes place.

## 12. Uig Harbour Redevelopment - Update Ath-leasachadh Caladh Ùige – Cunntas às Ùr

**Declaration of Interest** - Mrs T Robertson declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Council appointee to the Highland Housing Association 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. ECI/33/20 dated 9 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- concern was expressed at the lack of clarity on the overall budget, noting that the entirety of the project was not underwritten by Transport Scotland, therefore the possible costs to the Council in the event of unforeseen circumstances was unknown. It was explained that 80% of the project was underwritten by Transport Scotland and the system of increased harbour dues to cover any additional costs was summarised, although if Transport Scotland did not agree to the terms, the proposal would have to be reviewed and approval sought for any amendments. In relation to risk, a significant factor was the need to undertake the work during winter to minimise economic disruption. More detailed costs would be brought to future committees once known; and
- officers were commended for their work on this complex project which provided vital connectivity to the Western Isles. It was important the project was not further delayed.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the change to the outage period from 2021/22 to 2022/23.

## 13. Corran Narrows Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Aiseag a' Chorrain

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

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/34/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- the Project Manager was commended and support voiced for his continued secondment to the project, which had been technically and politically complex;
- the Government response was disappointing considering the importance of the Corran Narrows as a lifeline strategic route, with long detours when the service was out of action. Further engagement should be undertaken, with the possibility of inviting the relevant Minister to attend a meeting of the Committee to seek support for the capital investment required;
- it was vital that funding was sought to produce an up-to-date socio-economic impact study, and the support of all Members with this was welcomed;
- it was concerning that the main vessel was currently being refitted and the support vessel was fifty years old;
- the importance of using renewable energy was highlighted; and
- thanks were extended to previous Councillors, Dr M Foxley and Mr C King, who had campaigned extensively for the Corran Ferry service and to maintain fares at a reasonable level.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that a letter was sent to the Cabinet Minister seeking approval to form a working group with officers from Transport Scotland, regarding the possibility of transferring over responsibility for the Corran ferry service in accordance with the principles set out in the Scottish Ferries Plan. The letter can be found in Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Scottish Government had advised that they would require confirmation regarding the Council's plans to fund the capital replacement of the vessels and slipways prior to the setting up of a formal working group to discuss any potential future transfer of responsibility. The responding letter from the Cabinet Minister can be found in Appendix 2 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** that the Corran Ferry Project would be included as part of the Council's Capital Programme Review;
- iv. **AGREED** to support the proposal for the new preferred Vessel and Infrastructure option - 2 x 25 car smaller hybrid vessels straight through (Ro-Ro) operation as detailed in Appendix 3 of the report;
- v. **NOTED** the Vessel and Infrastructure general arrangements and analysis (including high-level capital costs) – Option A / Option B as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report;
- vi. **NOTED** the requirement for the project managers secondment to be extended by 2 years (up to May 2023) to facilitate the ongoing discussions / negotiations with Transport Scotland / CMAL and other key stakeholders, and to ensure that links between the Local Community and Officers were maintained. Methods of delivery would be established, the necessary investment in the ferry service would be planned and a start date determined. The secondment would continue to be funded through the Corran Ferry trading account;

- vii. **NOTED** that the project would be seeking funding to procure an external source to undertake a detailed report on the critical importance of the ferry to meeting the varied socio-economic needs of the fragile communities served by the Corran Ferry;
- viii. **NOTED** a draft terms of reference for the Corran narrows fixed link working group were with relevant ward members for their consideration; and
- ix. **NOTED** the information in previous reports –
  - Corran Narrows Update ([Item 7](#) in background papers); and
  - Corran Ferry Options Appraisal ([Item 20](#) in background papers).

**14. Annual Report under Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2019/20  
Aithisg Bhladhnaíl fo Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde nam  
Buidhnean Poblach 2019/20**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council’s representative to the Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/35/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer for Economy & Infrastructure.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- the 10% reduction in the Council’s carbon emissions in 2019/20 was welcomed. It was queried how the targets going forward would be met as the distribution grid capacity constraints were having an impact on the ability of the Council to progress decarbonisation efforts. This was an issue that the Leader of the Council should explore with OFGEM;
- reference was made to the Highlands Adapts initiative which would deliver a place based partnership approach to climate change adaptation in collaboration with Community Planning Partners (CPP). It was advised that there had been comments made in the past regarding how variable these CPPs worked in different parts of Highland. It was advised the CPP in Lochaber had not met in over 2 years, therefore there was a concern about depending on CPPs which were not working;
- it was suggested that the Council’s own fleet of vehicles should be investigated at in terms of moving to a low carbon solution and how this could be done in practical terms and costs associated with it. Other Partner agencies such as Police/Fire/Ambulance and public transport could also be taken into account in the approach to be taken to a low carbon solution for vehicles in Highland; and
- in terms of 3 initiatives to reduce the Council’s carbon emissions, the impact of Covid-19 would require the Council to look at its corporate estate and there would be opportunities to decarbonise and reduce our reliance on gas and oil. Secondly, to look at the Council Fleet of 1100 vehicles the majority of which were diesel and look at alternatives, and lastly to look at the Council’s electricity consumption, particularly in the school estate.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** that the 2019/20 report be submitted as part of the mandatory reporting process under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties.

#### 15. Annual Road Condition Report Aithisg Bhliadhnaid mu Staid nan Rathaidean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/36/20 dated 7 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2019 and that our relative ranking had fallen from 25 to 26 position amongst Scottish Councils; and
- ii. **AGREED** the report as a useful source of evidence for capital programming.

#### 16. Biodiversity Duty Report Aithisg Dleastanas Bith-iomadachd

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to the Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/37/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- the report suggested that improvements made for biodiversity inevitably resulted in positive action in tackling climate change but this was not always the case;
- engaging school pupils with biodiversity at an early stage was welcomed;
- deer management was important given the damage they could do to forests;
- the possibility of woodland and forest crofts was to be supported given the positive ecological impact;
- prevention of wildfires was vital, especially this year where there had been a noticeable increase in wild camping;
- concern was expressed at non native species entering rivers and lochs and driving out the native ones and discussions with Fishery Boards would help to assess the impact and address this issue. In particular, the wild atlantic salmon, whose numbers were in decline, were important to the Highland economy;
- the eradication of Japanese knotweed at the Charles Kennedy Building in Fort William was recognised. Wildflowers too had been planted resulting in a magnificent display but it was disappointing that they weren't perennials;

- the global importance of the Flow Country was acknowledged and there was an opportunity now to promote and raise awareness of this on a virtual basis;
- the work of the Countryside Rangers was applauded and which had included Beach Cleans. These were popular in local communities and often the litter gathered was shared on social media. In regard to the Fishing for Litter initiative it was hoped this could be promoted in a similar manner and funded appropriate. The Chairman advised fellow Members that Highland Council was a member of KIMO, the Local Authorities International Environmental Organisation but funding for the Fishing for Litter had come from the European Union and the Scottish Government had agreed to continue the funding up until March 2021; and
- the report demonstrated the good work that the Council's Environmental team were involved in and how we protected and encouraged our flora and fauna.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the Biodiversity Duty Report 2018-2020 for publication on the Council's website by the end of December 2020; and
- NOTED** the content and breadth of work related to biodiversity undertaken across the organisation, accepting that the report still needed to incorporate the work of the High Life Highland Rangers (following return from furlough) and might be subject to a number of presentational and typographical changes prior to publication.

## **17. Road Structures Annual Report Aithisg Bhliadhnail Structaran Rathaid**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/38/20 dated 22 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- during the first half of the year only 22% of General Inspections had been carried out, another impact of Covid 19, and reassurance was sought, and provided, that the remainder of the inspections would be completed before the end of 2020/21. A report on progress would be submitted to the next ECI Committee and more detailed localised reports were also being considered at Area Committees;
- the four additional Structures Technician posts were welcomed, but it was questioned, as a result of climate change, if this would be sufficient. The work the inspectors did was critical for the safe carriage of the public over the road and bridge network;
- the clava bridge was not included in the list but Members reported damage to the structure as a result of recent increased usage and there was concern about its stability long term. To allay fears an inspection was requested;
- the Report allowed the Council to risk manage and identify problems but it was queried where information could be found on other bridges which needed attention. Ideally such information should be included in this Report;

- the Mill Burn had been used as a tool to make pupils aware not only of its history but of the impact of environmental matters;
- Members were assured that cattle grids were kept under review and, following consultation, were infilled if they were no longer necessary; and
- the Council was responsible for the footbridges crossing the River Ness and there were insufficient resources available to maintain them.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the position of the Bridge Stock Condition Indicators in Highland; and
- ii. the current position in Highland in relation to the number of structures inspections undertaken and an update on progress would be provided at the next meeting as well as local reporting to Area Committees.

**18. Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee – 2019/20 Annual Report  
Co-Chomataidh Co-obrachadh nan Rathaidean a Tuath – Aithisg  
Bhliadhna**

There had been circulated Report No ECI/39/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

There had been ministerial cognisance of the good work undertaken by the Joint Committee and the benefits of continued collaboration would be evident in the coming years. Referring to the topics which the Joint Committee had considered, the use of recycled plastic in road surfacing was highlighted, something for which Members had previously indicated their support and it was hoped this initiative could be trialled in Highland. Various suggestions were made as to whether this should be on housing estate roads or pavements but the car park in Nairn which had used this technique had, to date, fared well.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Annual report from the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee as attached at Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. the continued role of Highland Council in providing the Finance Officer for the Joint Committee; and
- iii. that it was intended that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee would continue to receive an annual report on performance activities annual achievements of the Joint Committee.

**19. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

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

- i. North PAC – 5 August 2020;
- ii. South PAC – 18 August 2020;
- iii. North PAC – 15 September 2020;

and, **APPROVED**:-

- iv. Harbours Management Board of 16 October 2020; and



v. City Region Deal Monitoring Group of 19 October 2020.

**20. Exclusion of the Public  
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail**

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

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

**Paragraphs 6 and 9**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/40/2020 dated 8 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

The Committee **NOTED** the monitoring statements for General Fund and Property Account transactions as approved by the Head of Development and Regeneration under delegated authority as well the Budgeted Sales for 2020/2021 and beyond.

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

**Paragraphs 6 and 9**

**Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

**Mrs T Robertson declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Council appointee to the Highland Housing Association 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 J McGillivray declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Dornoch & District Community Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct,**

**concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/41/20 dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Having acknowledged the work of officers during Covid-19, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations.

**23. Passenger, School and Community Transport  
Còmhdhail Luchd-siubhail, Sgoile is Coimhearsnachd**

**Paragraphs 6 and 9**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/42/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Thursday, 5 November 2020 at 10.00am.

### Present:

Mr M Finlayson  
Mr D Louden  
Ms P Munro

Mr A Rhind  
Ms F Robertson (**in the Chair**)  
Ms M Smith

### Officials in Attendance:

Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER  
Jim Holden, Housing Manager (North)  
Tim Stott, Principal Planner  
Douglas Chisholm, Planner  
Julie-Ann Bain, Planner  
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

### Also in Attendance:

Alex McKinley, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service  
Dave Macrae, Community Liaison Officer, Tain & District Development Trust

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

### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mrs C Wilson.

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

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

Item 5 – Ms M Smith, Ms P Munro and Mr D Louden (financial)

### 3. Community Update Cunntas Coimhearsnachd às Ùr

A verbal update was provided by Cllr Pauline Munro and Mr Dave MacRae (Tain & District Development Trust) in relation to community resilience work at the present time and plans going forward.

Key points included the following:

- assurance had been received from local supermarkets that they would continue to provide assistance to foodbanks through to Christmas and possibly beyond;
- funds had been set aside to help with potential debt issues;

- many local groups were providing an excellent service and thanks were extended to all, as well as Council staff, local communities and Highlands and Islands Enterprise;
- the provision by the Council of frozen food parcels to the Cromarty Firth Ward had been useful and would be welcomed in future; and
- issues of concern for community groups included volunteer fatigue, additional running expenses due to Covid-19, communication with people who did not have internet access, with leaflet drops being more challenging during dark winter months, mental health issues, and fuel poverty;

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members thanked Dave MacRae and his team for their much appreciated work;
- attention was drawn to the value of a weekly debrief session for community groups, which facilitated weekly communication on main issues, and avoided key people being overwhelmed with phone calls and messages throughout the week. The importance of open lines of communication was noted so that people knew who to contact and how;
- Home-start East Highland had distributed a number of devices to families in need and might be able to provide more;
- it was occasionally challenging to find out who the families or individuals in need were due to confidentiality;
- social media had been useful for communication during the Covid-19 crisis, although it did not always reach everyone;
- it was possible there could be some welfare funds for tenants of Albyn Housing and relevant community groups would be informed; and
- it was important the Council and other agencies did all they could to support local groups.

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

- i. to feed back to the Council that the provision of frozen food parcels in the Cromarty Firth Ward had been useful and would be welcomed in future; and
- ii. to share with relevant community groups information on the possible availability of welfare funds for tenants of Albyn Housing.

#### **4. Fire – Area Performance Summary Report Smàladh – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/13/20 dated 23 October 2020 by the Group Commander – Service Delivery, Highland North, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.

During discussion, Members welcomed the positive report and thanked the Fire and Rescue Service for their work and employers for releasing staff who were part-time retained officers.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

**5. Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 – Main Issues Report  
Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh 2 – Aithisg Prìomh Chùisean**

**Ms M Smith declared a financial interest in this item as the Chair of Albyn Housing 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.**

**Ms P Munro declared a financial interest in this item as land referenced in the Development Plan belonged to family members 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 staying in the meeting although she did not comment during the discussion.**

**Mr D Loudon declared a financial interest in this item as he had a close relative who owned land zoned in Area TN07 and he left the meeting during discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/14/20 dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Infrastructure and Environment.

A presentation was provided which covered the plan's vision, processes and timelines, a summary of the nine main issues detailed in the report and consultation plans.

During discussion, Members raised several proposed amendments to the Plan, all detailed in the decision below. Other issues raised included the following:

- information was sought and provided on the Council's policy in relation to affordable housing self-builds;
- in relation to landowners offering to sell land for development that was not allocated as such in the Plan, there would be opportunity during consultation for landowners to raise concerns about zoning and further reports would be brought to Area Committees following this process to seek approval of the final Plan;
- it was important not to neglect possible future leisure / tourism use on land zoned for large-scale industrial use at Nigg;
- information was sought on proposed changes to the 25% Affordable Housing policy, with consideration being given to increasing the percentage in areas with the greatest need;
- the dial-a-bus proposal for Seaboard Villages was welcomed;
- the current allocation of housing in Tain was not considered sufficient; and
- with reference to the report on the Freeport Bid that had been considered at the previous day's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, this could have a significant impact on development and growth in the area if successful.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the Main Issues Report (as applicable to this committee area) to be published for public consultation, subject to the following amendments:

- a. augmented references to be added within the relevant settlement sections to Evanton Rail Halt, potential Freeport status, and an enhanced rail spur to Highland Deephaven;
  - b. addition of a reference in the Placemaking Priorities text for Evanton to the limited capacity at Kiltearn Primary School and along Swordale Road;
  - c. addition of a specific preferred use of a Caravan Park for site SB02 within Seaboard Villages;
  - d. addition of a reference in the Placemaking Priorities text for Inver to allow for greater linear settlement expansion and the important role of the primary school as a hub for the community;
  - e. that the sites south west of Tain bypass have their preference changed to Alternative rather than Non-Preferred and that the related text be changed to explain that the Easter Ross Area Committee and in particular local Ward Members believe that these sites (TN10, TN12, TN13 and TN14) are more viable than alternatives within the bypass in particular in terms of accommodating self build housing plot development;
- ii. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in Paragraph 6.1 of the report; and
  - iii. **NOTED** the important role that the plan would play in addressing the Climate & Ecological Emergency, economic recovery and in taking forward the Council's agreed Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy recently submitted to Scottish Government;
  - iv. **AGREED** to investigate the potential for improvements to Portmahomack Harbour with the Council's Harbour Team; and
  - v. **AGREED** to discuss with the relevant case officer why the Grove site in Tain had not come forward for development.

## 6. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No ERA/15/20 dated 19 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:

- tribute was paid to the tremendous work undertaken by the Housing team during the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis;
- the trend on repairs and voids performance was of concern, and was mainly the result of access difficulties during the covid-19 crisis;
- a breakdown of the information contained in Appendix 1 for Wards 6&7 would be helpful in future reports;
- although arrears had risen significantly at the start of the financial year, they had reduced in the second quarter; and
- it was hoped that business opportunities on housing estates could be encouraged and, in relation to the possible use of Council-owned garages for small businesses, an options appraisal was being undertaken on the Council's garage estate and would be reported on in due course.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April to 30 September 2020 and **AGREED** to investigate the possibility

of desegregating the information contained in Appendix 1 of future reports to provide a breakdown for Wards 6&7.

**7. Invergordon Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/16/20 dated 13 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, attention was drawn to the need to find options for a resolution to the Town Hall situation.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund;
- ii. **NOTED** the current position in relation to the Invergordon Town Hall; and
- iii. **AGREED** the report to the next meeting should contain options for the future of Invergordon Town Hall.

**8. Tain Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/17/20 dated 23 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance, and Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund.

**9. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

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

The meeting ended at 12.15pm

**The Highland Council  
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held remotely on Thursday 5 November 2020 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr R Gale

Mrs D Mackay

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Munro

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr F Malcolm, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Communities and Place

Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film

Ms A Donald, Education Quality Imp Manager (North)

Mr S Scott, Head Teacher (Cluster)

Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer

Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager

Ms M Grant, Principal Housing Officer

Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

**Mr R Gale in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Ms K Currie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**The Items are recorded in the order that they were taken at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 9.**

**4. Police – Area Performance Summary  
Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/09/20 dated 26 October 2020 by the North Area Commander.

Due to technical issues, the Chief Inspector had been unable to attend the meeting to provide a formal presentation and it was agreed that the questions raised by Members would be provided to the Chief Inspector for responses and that there be a report on Police Area Performance to the next meeting on 22 February 2021.



During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- scarce coverage of Police Officers in the North and West was concerning, particularly with the volume of NC500 traffic this year and despite recognition of the challenges with staffing levels it was hoped that this would be addressed before next summer;
- a deeper understanding of police capacity was required given the occurrence of police travelling significant distances to respond to inquiries;
- it was positive that there was a downward trend with most issues, however, it would be useful to discuss the statistics on thefts by housebreaks as it could be suggested that remote areas were having more break-ins as a result of the vast influx of visitors that the North had seen;
- concerns were expressed at the lack of Police presence at Community Council meetings compared to previous years and there was an assumption that this was due to capacity. However, given how valuable their input was, it would be useful to have a summary report if Police representation was not possible;
- the statistics in relation to drug crime were thought-provoking and it was queried whether it would be possible to have a private briefing from the Police on Drugs Misuse to gain their perspective on the situation; and
- it was queried whether the downward trend in crime overall could be linked to lack of Police presence being able to identify crime as it was happening.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan:-
  - a. 2017-20 Year 3, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2019- 31 March 2020; and
  - b. 2020 – 23 Year 1, attached as Annex B to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 September 2020;
- ii. **AGREED** that the questions raised by Members be provided to the Chief Inspector for responses and that there be a report on Police Area Performance to the next meeting on 22 February 2021; and
- iii. **AGREED** that there be a private briefing on Drugs Misuse.

**6. Golspie Associated School Group Overview**  
**Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**  
**Ghoillspidh**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/20 dated 8 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In support of the report, a presentation was provided by the Cluster Head Teacher (Golspie and Rogart Primary Schools) on the impact of reopening of schools by focussing on the results in Golspie Primary School. It was highlighted that during lockdown there was significant support for pupils and meaningful work by various staff to ensure that the pupils remained engaged. However, since the re-opening of schools, data thus far showed that although the pupil attainment level was higher than local and national levels pre-

lockdown, regression was found post-lockdown. Significantly, there was an impact on attainment with substantial regression showing among pupils in numeracy, writing and reading, with reading being the most significant gap. As a result, the focus had been on strategies to accelerate learning in reading and writing. Reflecting on staff resilience there had been an increase of staff absence through stress and mental health issues compared to previous years, despite support from the Council.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- appreciation was expressed and echoed for the report and presentation being informative, engaging and impactful;
- explanation was sought and provided that staffing numbers were up to capacity and it was an improving picture in all key areas;
- clarification was sought and provided that pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) were not always included in the Emotional, Behaviour and Social Needs (EBSN) category and vice versa;
- keeping schools open was crucial for children's development given the staggering figures between pre and post-lockdown and the Catch-Up Programme was commended;
- the impact of stress and mental health issues on pupils and staff would be felt for some time;
- it was interesting to note the positive emotional resilience of younger children and the more significant impact of lockdown on secondary school pupils;
- confirmation was sought and provided that mental health support was being provided to secondary school pupils via the Support for Learning Department and Guidance staff within Golspie High School. In addition, extra funding had been made available for counselling and the ASG was in the process of exploring delivery options and determining allocation of funding;
- it was helpful that schools were receiving funding for counselling, however, it was challenging for Head Teachers to compete over services, and there was a responsibility to provide support to Head Teachers to ensure that this was rolled out in a proactive way that supported the child, family, and counsellor;
- the additional monies for mental health was over and above the counselling money and this brought an opportunity to have a significant positive impact;
- lockdown brought a real understanding and appreciation of teaching as a profession and demonstrated that it was a challenge to have young people engaged, attentive and learning;
- further information was sought and provided regarding the high number of placing out requests at Rosehall Primary School; and
- it was requested that a copy of the presentation be circulated to the Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and that a copy of the presentation would be circulated to the Committee.

## 5. **Tourism Infrastructure** **Bun-structar Turasachd**

There had been circulated follow Report No SCC/10/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- Member support for the report and appreciation of the team's effort was echoed;
- the current infrastructure was unable to cope with the influx of "Staycationers" throughout the past tourist season and there was risk that this scenario repeated itself next year without swift action;
- information was sought on what could realistically be achieved prior to the next tourist season that could make a difference particularly with respect to waste disposal from motorhomes. It was confirmed that discussion was underway between waste teams, communities and the North Highland Initiative to problem solve in respect of waste disposal of rubbish. In terms of wild camping, discussions were taking place between Community Services, the Countryside Team and the Northern Highland Initiative to obtain funding for seasonal rangers or wardens to do education and policing in the 'honeypot' areas to resolve waste issues there. In terms of toilet waste facilities for motorhomes, there was no concrete resolution at this time, however, discussions were ongoing about using the core money from the Coastal Communities Fund to put in place a network of sites around Highland focussing on gaps in waste management;
- access to beaches had become an issue and campsites in the North and West were full and there was no avenue to dispose of waste;
- it was emphasized that waste disposal and toileting was a complex issue and priorities varied in each community which was the reason for communities trying to become involved early on in problem solving efforts;
- there was a project underway in Brora to set up chemical waste disposal which had been an enormously difficult and fraught process for reasons well understood, nevertheless there was recognition that the need for these facilities remained;
- implementing a network of waste disposal hubs around the NC500 was viewed favourably and timelines were sought on completion of projects. It was confirmed that Crown Estate funds were being sought and if the bid was successful many projects could be completed by late Spring 2021. It was highlighted that some communities were much more straightforward to deliver the projects than ones where there was no pre-existing infrastructure which could prove to be a significant challenge; and
- concern was expressed about recent news stories that showed Covid-19 effected areas being identifiable by the examination of the sewage works. Explanation was sought on the implications for camping, outdoor toileting and the potential impact of Covid-19 on the soil and animals. It was confirmed that this had been identified as an issue across the country and Nature Scot in combination with VisitScotland had been tasked to do promotion for improved guidance on responsible camping and wild toileting and this was proposed for next year; further, it was

agreed that once launched, a copy of the document would be circulated to the Committee. It was requested that in addition to the document that contact details for each organisation be included.

The Committee: -

- i. **NOTED** the range of tourism infrastructure that was already provided in Sutherland;
- ii. **NOTED** the initial observations of where there might be considered to be gaps in provision;
- iii. **NOTED** whether further gaps existed that should be included in the Tourism Infrastructure Plan;
- iv. **AGREED** that a response be sought from Environmental Health on the impact and potential spread of Covid-19 from wild camping and outdoor toileting; and
- v. **AGREED** that, once launched, a copy of the document 'Campervan and motorhome waste disposal - A guide for independent developments' be circulated to the Committee along with contact details for each organisation.

## 7. **Sutherland HRA Capital Programme 2021-22** **Prògram Calpa HRA Chataibh 2021-22**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/20 dated 21 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property. After a summary of the report it was anticipated that there would be an update on expenditure against budget on the current 2020/21 capital programme to the next meeting of the Committee.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was confirmed that further information would be provided on the 2020/21 budget for Mainstream Investment and Aids and Adaptation;
- Assurance was sought and provided that a programme of works had been implemented to ensure that the housing stock met the new legislative requirements in terms of Smoke, Heat, & Carbon Monoxide Detectors. In addition, Tenants would be informed of the planned maintenance works through the next Tenant Newsletter;
- In noting that the budget allocation for Major Component Replacement for rewiring in the Sutherland programme was £50,000. Further information was sought and provided on the cost of a full rewire (approximately £8,000 per property) and the average lifecycle (approximately 30 years);
- Further information was sought on the status of the Trades Procurement Framework; and
- Confirmation was provided that the Environmental Improvements budget would be discussed at the next Ward Business Meeting and assurance was provided that Members would be updated on any budget changes.

The Committee: -

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to the Sutherland Area as set out at paragraph 5.7 of the report;

- ii. **NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Sutherland 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iv. **NOTED** the position relating the current year HRA Capital Programme; and
- v. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme would continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Area Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee;
- vi. **AGREED** that Members be provided with details of the 2020/21 budget for Mainstream Investment and Aids and Adaptation; and
- vii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with an update on the status of the Trades Procurement Framework.

**8. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020  
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2020 to 30 An t-Sultainn 2020**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/13/20 dated 27 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Attention was drawn to the magnificent job and excellent performance of the Housing team, particularly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic which had included implementing new ways of working to support the more vulnerable tenants and homeless applicants through this period;
- Officers were commended for the significant improvement on the target 'Average length of time taken to complete Emergency Repairs' and further clarification was provided on how this had been achieved. In addition, confirmation was provided that Covid had impacted on the average time taken to complete Non-emergency repairs as well as delays in emptying some properties due to travel restrictions during the lockdown period;
- Concern was expressed at the increasing trend of rent arrears and further information was provided on the work that the Service was undertaking to support tenants on reduced incomes and transitioning onto benefits for the first time. Appreciation was expressed to the Housing team for their work in providing much needed help and welfare support to ensure income maximisation for tenants; and
- A request was made for an update on the number and location of empty houses in the North and West of Sutherland.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with an update on the number and location of empty houses in the North and West of Sutherland.

### 3. Notices of Motion Brathan Glusaid

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

- \* (i) In view of the constraints imposed upon the Highland Council Capital Plan for years to come, and in view of the undeniable need for indoor sporting facilities to support the well-being of pupils attending the Dornoch 3-18 School Campus, the students attending the North Highland College Campus, and the local community in general, that Sutherland Members support in principle the construction of a low-cost Sports Barn, as per the attached (pp.1-3) generic drawings, to be built on a suitable site located appropriately on the School premises.

Signed: Mr J McGillivray Mrs D Mackay

During discussion, it was highlighted that there was a long history associated to the proposed Dornoch Sports Centre project. Although the limited capacity within the Highland Council Capital Plan was recognised, the community aspiration remained strong and the purpose of this Motion was to keep their ambition alive. It was felt that the provision of a Sports Barn was reasonable to progress and communities should be supported to do so. The County Committee had been consistently supportive of this project, which was important to the community, and it was clarified that support was sought in principle of the concept.

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

- (ii) Sutherland needs to be prepared to meet the demands of next year's tourist season. The provision of adequate and sufficient waste facilities to support motorhomes has been identified as a priority. The process to develop these is currently uncoordinated, complicated and time consuming. Sutherland County Committee calls on Highland Council to work in partnership with SEPA, Scottish Water, Planning and Funders to develop a co-ordinated resource which can be accessed by our communities in and around NC500.

Signed: Mrs D Mackay Mr J McGillivray

During discussion, Councillor Mackay confirmed that this Motion would be achieved via the publication of the document 'Campervan and motorhome waste disposal - A guide for independent developments' as referred to at Item 5 and this, along with support from the Coastal Communities Fund, would enable communities to take forward plans to develop a network of motorhome waste disposal facilities across the Highlands.

The Committee **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed and **NOTED** that the release of the document 'Campervan and motorhome waste disposal - A guide for independent developments' (as referred to at Item 5) would achieve this.

- (iii) Maintaining and improving good mental health has been identified by our communities as a key priority. This has been a particularly difficult year for those dealing with mental health issues, with these exacerbated by COVID, and the related issues including isolation, financial worries and job insecurity. We ask that Sutherland County Committee works with Sutherland Community Partnership to collectively better understand the issues and to enable community based solutions to be developed and implemented.

Signed: Mrs D Mackay Mr J McGillivray

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was explained that Mental Health had been exacerbated by Covid with people having to deal with a range of issues and, although short-term measures had been implemented, there was a need to have a better understanding of the long-term needs for Sutherland. The Committee was advised that the NHS Highland Head of Health Development had been commissioned by the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to work with communities to ascertain their needs in in terms of Mental Health, determine what support existed locally, and identify any gaps in provision. The outcome of this work would be reported to the CPP on 18 December 2020 and the NHS Highland Chief Executive would also be in attendance at this meeting. Therefore, this was an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the range of issues facing communities in Sutherland and to work collaboratively with partners to determine sustainable solutions of support for communities;
- Concerns had been received regarding the reducing facilities for senior people at Migdale Hospital and that New Craigs was becoming the centre for treatment for this age group;
- It was acknowledged that the Covid pandemic was having an enormous impact on Mental Health and Members felt that working with the CPP was a good way in which to connect existing organisations that were already providing support across Sutherland; and
- Confirmation was provided that the schools counselling was year on year funding and that the Mental Health funding would come forward next financial year. Reference was made to the importance of taking a responsible but creative approach to developing community-based solutions.

The Committee **AGREED** the Notice of Motion subject to working collaboratively with the Community Planning Partnership to take this forward.

- (iv) In March COVID restrictions led overnight to a dependency on digitalised services. Arctic Digital Nomads (ADN) is an international collaboration whose objective is to promote its regions as a work destination for people who are not office bound but who can work remotely anywhere. Sutherland has so much to offer in terms of environment, lifestyle and work/life balance. We ask that Sutherland County Committee examine the experience of ADN to look at how we can increase our economic diversity and become a destination of choice

for individuals and organisations around the world seeking a quality environment in which to live and work.

Signed: Mrs D Mackay Mr J McGillivray

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- It was explained that this Motion referred to Sutherland competing and succeeding in the workplace for the future. In particular, Covid had led to significant numbers of people working from home which presented an opportunity for people to work from anywhere provided they had access to WiFi connection. ADN was a collective network of remote rural communities working together to promote co-working and co-living in accommodation hubs of varying sizes. The employment status of Digital Nomads varied but they were usually young, therefore this was an opportunity to attract young people to Sutherland, an area of outstanding beauty with a wide range of qualities and attractions, and help local communities to flourish;
- There was an interesting concept and any opportunities to strengthen the local economy and retain young people were welcome; and
- Access to WiFi was crucial to the economic development and diversity of the area and it was proposed that the Motion be amended slightly to enable it to be progressed by utilising the resources of the Community Planning Partnership and Development Officers from the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust.

The Committee **AGREED** the Notice of Motion subject to working collaboratively with the Community Planning Partnership and Development Officers from the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust to take this forward.

**9. Dornoch Common Good - Quarter 2 Monitoring Statement 2020/21  
Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich - Aithris Sgrùdaidh Cairteil 2020/21**

There had been circulated Joint Report No SCC/14/20 dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officers Communities and Place and Resources and Finance.

It was highlighted that COVID-19 had had no impact on rental income, and all rent had been paid up to date to the Dornoch Common Good Fund. It was further reported that two large applications had been accepted by the Community Council and by local Members, and the details of this would be reflected in the next financial monitoring statement.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund, as shown in the Quarter 2 monitoring statement.



**10. Minutes**  
**Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 24 February 2020 and 9 July 2020, which were approved by the Council on 12 March 2020 and 30 July 2020 respectively.

The meeting closed at 12.32pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held remotely on Thursday 5 November 2020 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Bremner	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Gordon	Mr C Munro
Mr A Henderson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A MacInnes	Mr D Rixson

### Non-Member also present:

Mr J Finlayson

### In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance  
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager

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

### Mr C Munro in the Chair

### Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair conveyed the following items of good news:-

- the thanks of the Royal National Mod Local Organising Committee to the Highland Council for their support during the virtual Mod in October;
- Kate Forbes MSP was to share a pre-recorded message to the pupils who were participating in “Siuthad!”, a Gaelic Careers event; and
- Fèisean nan Gàidheal had just issued a Press Release introducing the Blas Festival Programme.

## Business

### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Mr A MacKinnon, Miss E Roddick and Mr A Sinclair.

### 2. Declarations of Interest

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

- Item 4 – Mr R Bremner (non-financial)
- Item 6 – Mr C Munro (financial)

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

### 3. Impact of Covid and Gaelic Recovery

There had been circulated Report No. G/3/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the bilingualism at the Gaelic Committee was welcomed and it would help evidence the level of commitment Members had to the Gaelic language;
- access to Gaelic speakers in schools and communities would have been hindered during Lockdown;
- recognition was made of the various digital events which had been provided both for young people and parents. This had required the Gaelic Team to change its approach from face-to-face to more innovative ways;
- details of the structure of the current Gaelic Team together with their roles, remits, responsibilities and areas covered were sought. In addition, it was also questioned if there was a Gaelic Team Development plan that linked specifically to education;
- it was noted that the Gaelic Development team members and their roles had been provided at a recent members' workshop and the workplan was also the subject of a report later on the agenda;
- it was important to highlight the availability of Gaelic Development officers;
- an application had been made to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's COVID support fund for projects to support the Gaelic Language Early years sector in relation to the Gaelic Language Recovery Programme. Only part of the requested amount was awarded and it was hoped that this had not negatively affected any of the projects;
- the online after school club for primary pupils was commended, especially as it was involving secondary pupils who would be able to relate better to the primary school pupils than adults would;
- reference was made to an article in the West Highland Free Press which had highlighted online surveys by Bòrd na Gàidhlig seeking opinions on Gaelic usage and increasing usage in communities. Shinty could be used as a vehicle for doing so and several youngsters from the Kinlochsheil Ladies team had contacted Councillor MacInnes to highlight their interest in this which was very encouraging;
- it was important the Education Committee was aware of developments in Gaelic education.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the action that had been taken to mitigate the impact of Covid on the delivery of the Gaelic Language Plan priorities;
- ii. **NOTED** the areas of current and future development; and

- iii. **AGREED** that details of the structure of the current Gaelic Team together with their roles, remits, responsibilities and areas covered be prepared and communicated.

#### 4. Progress against Gaelic Language Plan 3

**Declaration of Interest: Mr R Bremner declared a non financial interest as he had taken part in a recent Fèis Rois event at the Online Mod but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in general discussion. However should discussion arise specifically on Fèis Rois he would take no part in discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. G/4/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the formal reporting of external funding detailing the projects, source, grant requested, grant given etc was welcomed;
- it was queried why grants provided often were less than the initial amount sought and whether it was because there were more organisations seeking funding or if this was a shortfall in meeting Highland's needs;
- additional information was sought about projects. For example, the Council had applied for £988k as Gaelic Specific Grant (GSG) funding to support the Gaelic Team, their specific projects and Gaelic Medium Education staffing in Early Learning and Childcare, Primary and Secondary Education. It was felt that this was too generic and a more detailed breakdown would explain how the cut of £83k would impact on deliverability;
- from 2018/19 to 2020/21 the GSG request had increased by £44k but there were no reasons provided as to what had necessitated this;
- the organisations funded by the Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan Statutory Funding were detailed and information was sought, and provided, as to the level of communication exchanged in regard to the expectations of the organisations and what the Council had the ability to deliver. This was a similar scenario that the Council had when bidding for GSG funding;
- Gaelic language courses for Members, and staff, would be beneficial. Many of these could be delivered virtually and at minimal or no cost. It would also result in more Members of the Committee being able to contribute in Gaelic; and
- encouraging organisations to work together when funding was scarce was paramount but this needed to be done in cooperation and in a carefully considered manner.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. that the GLP3 be monitored on a quarterly basis utilising the Performance & Risk Management System (PRMS) which was the Council's corporate performance management system in order to support monitoring progress delivering GLP3;
- ii. a progress report on GLP3 would be submitted each quarter to the Gaelic Committee; and

- iii. the Chair of the Gaelic Committee and Senior Management aimed to meet bi-annually with the Scottish Government's Gaelic senior officers.

## 5. Virtual Online National Mod

There had been circulated Report No. G/5/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- Highland Council's Gaelic Team had worked alongside An Comunn Gàidhealach to help deliver the virtual online Royal Nation Mod. The Chair also made reference to Cèilidh na Comhairle, this time delivered in partnership with Fèis Rois, which had taken place on the Friday evening. This had included performances by Councillor Raymond Bremner and which he was congratulated on. The format of the evening was applauded, involving competitors and families, and meant that the Mod had finished on a positive note;
- appreciation was expressed for all the work involved in this year's Mod. In particular, it was pointed out An Comunn Gàidhealach had received 550 video submissions which had all been successfully processed in time for the Mod. This had been no small feat but had generated a huge amount of attention on social media;
- although undoubtedly the "traditional" Mod had been missed by many, the virtual online version had focused attention that the festival was still there;
- the international engagement was welcomed;
- the cancellation of the "traditional" Mod had had serious consequences for the local economy and for the many artists who were self employed within the creative industries who would not have acquired any of the usual bookings for events and gigs. Given the uncertainty as to what shape next year's Mod might take, it was likely that there would at least be some element of an online Mod and efforts should be made to replace this economic loss. This might include a modest live-streaming charge which could go some way to support these self employed artists;
- a "traditional" Mod would generate in the region of £3.2m in direct and indirect benefit with over 9,000 attendees and it was important that the lessons learnt this year were taken on board to provide something of value in 2021;
- Inverness now had a year in which to prepare and plan for the Royal National Mod 2021 and how the digital offering could be incorporated while maximising the cultural and economic benefit. Good strategic engagement had already taken place with key partners; and
- the enjoyment the Mod had given was inestimable, especially in a year affected by Covid 19, and had been a privilege to watch.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Virtual Mod;
- ii. **NOTED** the projects which the Gaelic Team developed and managed in conjunction with key stakeholders to support the Virtual Mod; and
- iii. **AGREED** to look in further detail the points raised during discussion in relation to developing the Mod for next year;
- iv. **AGREED** to look at the potential for generating income for the artists involved and the wider community; and

- v. **AGREED** a progress report be brought to the Gaelic Committee in May 2021.

## 6. Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learners Report

**Declaration of Interest:** Mr C Munro declared a financial interest as a close family member was employed as a Gaelic Medium Teacher but, 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. However, should discussion relate to agreeing resources or changes in policy, he would leave the meeting.

There had been circulated Report No. G/6/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the Chair of the Education welcomed the forthcoming attendance at the Education Committee of Sarah Fraser, Head Teacher of Newtonmore Primary School who was to report on Gaelic attainment;
- while welcoming in the increase in pupil numbers across Pre School, Primary and Secondary education, there still remained relatively few pupils sitting senior phase Gaelic and Gàidhlig qualifications. Other Members considered the increase to be relatively modest but felt this could be because language subjects were no longer popular with young people. Closer examination was therefore needed to see how young people could be motivated and encouraged to study languages;
- it was feared that the subject choices that needed to be made in S2 sometimes resulted in subjects such as Gaelic being filtered out;
- the level of information now provided enabled better Member scrutiny;
- ideally a Gaelic Medium education plan should be prepared for each school as this would assist forward planning and resourcing. This would also show Highland's ambition and vision for the future;
- e-Sgoil, an initiative developed by the Western Isles Island Council to improve equity and access to education, had been hailed as the way forward. However, little progress was made and an update requested on distance learning and the plans in place for the future to encompass more pupils; and
- greater support for Head Teachers was required if they were to successfully deliver the 12-18 programme in Gaelic.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to recognise the importance of the collaborative approach between the Gaelic Team and Education Officers who led, supported and provided professional development opportunities and resourcing for the range of contexts within Highland schools to provide and promote Gaelic Learner and GME provisions pan Highland;
- ii. **NOTED** the attainment profile within the framework of both a national discussion and direction on Gaelic and Gàidhlig curriculum reviews at secondary level; and
- iii. **NOTED** the Gairloch Catchment Gaelic Medium Consultation and that further information detailing this will be shared with the Education Committee.

## 7. Gaelic Committee Workplan

There had been circulated Report No. G/7/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- this clearly demonstrated that there was a robust strategy in place to achieve the aims of the GLP3;
- some Members expressed disappointment that they had been unable to attend the virtual workshops;
- Members welcomed the support and focus in Workshop 4 for Gaelic in secondary schools;
- the Committee endorsed an examination of the research being carried out by the Scottish Government and UHI into the decline of Gaelic in the vernacular community and that progress of the Gaelic Language Plan be reported to the Full Council annually;
- turning to Gaelic Communications and Engagement Strategy, it was important that this was still fluid and flexible and, as necessary, to reshape ideas. The Chairman confirmed that the Committee would be responsive to opportunities as and when they arose; and
- it was gratifying that Gaelic was now receiving the prominence it deserved and it was possible to now publicise the extensive and proactive work taking place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the common themes which arose out of the workshops;
- ii. **AGREED** proposed reports for future Gaelic Committee meetings;
- iii. **AGREED** to include in the workplan an examination of the research being carried out by the Scottish Government and UHI into the decline of Gaelic in the vernacular community; and
- iv. **AGREED** that progress on GLP3 would be reported to Full Council annually.

## 8. Gaelic Communications and Engagement Strategy

There had been circulated Report No. G/8/20 dated 28 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

Having suggested that more enthusiastic language be used when promoting the Gaelic language and culture, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the approach to developing a Gaelic Communications Strategy and **AGREED** the timescale for bringing the Communications Plan back to Committee.

The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm.

## Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh air astar air Diluain 5 Samhain 2020 aig 10.30m.

### An làthair:

Mgr G Adam  
Mgr R Bremner  
Mr I Gòrdan  
Mgr A MacEanraig  
Mgr A MacAonghais

Mgr D MacAoidh  
Mgr G MacCoinnich  
Mgr C Rothach  
A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais  
Mgr D Rixson

### Neo-Bhall an làthair:

Mgr I MacFhionnlaigh

### A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

A' Bh-uas K Lackie, Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomhach – Riaghlachas agus Coileanadh  
A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig

**Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.**

### Mgr C Rothach anns a' Chathair

### An Toiseach

Mus do thòisich gnothach foirmeil na coinneimh, thug an Cathraiche seachad na naidheachdan matha a leanas:-

- bha Comataidh Eagrachaidh Ionadail a' Mhòid Nàiseanta Rioghail air taing a thoirt do Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd airson an taic leis a' Mhòd Air-loidhne anns an Dàmhair;
- bha Ceit Fhorbais a' dol a thoirt seachad teachdaireachd ro-chlàraichte do na sgoilearan a bha a' gabhail com-pàirt ann an 'Siuthad!', tachartas dreuchdan Gàidhlig; agus
- bha Fèisean nan Gàidheal air fios naidheachd a chur a-mach le Prògram Fèis Blas.

### Gnothach

#### 1. Leisgeulan

Ghabhadh leisgeulan às leth na M-uas I Chaimbeil, Mhgr A MhicFhionghuin, na M-uas E Roddick agus Mhgr A Mhic na Ceàrdaich.

#### 2. Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Thug a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na foillseachaidhean com-pàirt a leanas:-

Cuspair 4 – Mgr R Bremner (neo-ionmhasail)



## Cuspair 6 – Mgr C Rothach (ionmhasail)

Dh'fhoillsich Mgr R Bremner com-pàirt neo-ionmhasail ann an cuspair sam bith a dh'fhaodadh buntainn ris a' cheangal aige ris na buidhnean a leanas: Mòd Ionadail Ghallaibh agus Chataibh, Meur Ghallaibh a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich, Còisir Ghàidhlig na Mealbhaich, Atomaig Piseag (Còisir Ghàidhlig) agus Comataidh Eagrachaidh Ionadail Mòd Ghallaibh 2010.

### 3. Buaidh Covid-19 agus Ath-shlànachadh na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/3/20 le ceann-latha 29 Dàmhair 2020 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghniomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè an deasbaid, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- chaidh fàilte a chur air dà-chànanas Comataidh na Gàidhlig agus chuidicheadh seo gus fianais a thoirt seachad air dealas nam Ball do chànan na Gàidhlig;
- bhiodh buntanas le luchd-labhairt Gàidhlig ann an sgoiltean is coimhearsnachdan air a bhacadh tron ghlasadh-sluaigh;
- chaidh aithne a thoirt do na diofar thachartasan didseatach a bha air an toirt seachad, an dà chuid do dhaoine òga agus pàrantan. Bha seo air toirt air Sgioba na Gàidhlig gluasad bho dhòigh-obrach aghaidh ri aghaidh gu dòigh-obrach nas innleachdaiche;
- chaidh fiosrachadh mu structar Sgioba na Gàidhlig a shireadh, cuide ris na raointean-ùghdarrais, dleastanasan agus sgìrean a bha buill na sgioba a' còmhach. A bharrachd, chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a bha plana leasachaidh aig Sgioba na Gàidhlig a bha a' ceangal gu dìreach ri foghlam;
- chaidh toirt fa-near gun deach fiosrachadh mu bhuill Sgioba na Gàidhlig agus na dreuchdan aca a thoirt seachad aig bùth-obrach nam ball o chionn ghoirid agus gun robh am plana-obrach aca na chuspair ann an aithisg na b' anmoiche air a' chlàr-ghnothaich;
- bha e cudromach toirt am follais gun robh oifigearan leasachaidh Gàidhlig rim faotainn;
- bha iarrras air a dhèanamh do mhaoin taic COVID Bhòrd na Gàidhlig airson pròiseactan a bheireadh taic do roinn Thràth-bhliadhnaichean na Gàidhlig a thaobh Prògram Ath-shlànachaidh na Gàidhlig. Cha deach ach pàirt dhen t-suim a chaidh iarraidh a thoirt seachad agus bhathar an dòchas nach robh seo air droch bhuidh a thoirt air gin de na pròiseactan;
- chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air a' chlub às dèidh sgoile do sgoilearan bun-sgoile, gu h-àraid seach gun robh sgoilearan àrd-sgoile na lùib agus bhiodh dàimh aca le sgoilearan bun-sgoile nach biodh aig inbhich;
- chaidh iomradh a thoirt air alt naidheachd anns an *West Highland Free Press* a bha air aire a tharraing gu suirbhidhean le Bòrd na Gàidhlig a bha a' sireadh bheachdan mu chleachdadh na Gàidhlig agus mu bhith a' meudachadh cleachdadh ann an coimhearsnachdan. Bha cothrom ann iomain a chleachdadh mar dhòigh gus seo a dhèanamh agus bha grunn dhaoine òga bho sgioba bhoireannach Cheann Loch Seile air fios a chur chun a' Chomhairliche MacAonghais gus ùidh a nochdadh an seo agus bha sin na adhbhar misneachd; agus
- bha e cudromach gun robh Comataidh an Fhoghlaim mothachail mu leasachaidhean ann am foghlam Gàidhlig.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na chaidh a dhèanamh gus buaidh Covid a lùghdachadh a thaobh a bhith a' libhrigeadh nam prìomhachasan ann am Plana na Gàidhlig;
- ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na raointean leasachaidh làithreach is teachdail;
- iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun deigheadh fiosrachadh ullachadh is a chonaltradh mu structar Sgioba na Gàidhlig agus an dreuchdan, raointean-ùghdarrais, dleastanasan agus na sgìrean a tha air an còmhdach.

#### 4. Adhartas Mu Choinneamh Plana na Gàidhlig 3

**Foillseachadh Com-pàirt:** Dh'fhoillsich Mgr R Bremner com-pàirt neo-ionmhasail sa chuspair seo seach gun robh e air pàirt a ghabhail ann an tachartas Fèis Rois o chionn ghoirid aig a' Mhòd Air-loidhne ach, às dèidh dha an deuchainn a thathar a' mìneachadh ann am Paragrafan 5.2 agus 5.3 de Chòd Giùlain nan Comhairlichean a chur an gnìomh, cho-dhùin e nach robh a' chom-pàirt aige a' cur bacadh air bho bhith an lùib an deasbaid san fharsaingeachd. Ach, nam biodh deasbad ann mu Fhèis Rois gu sònraichte, cha ghabhadh e pàirt sam bith san deasbad.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/4/20 le ceann-latha 29 Dàmhair 2020 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè an deasbaid, thog na Buill na puingeann a leanas:-

- chaidh fàilte a chur air cunntas oifigeil mu mhaoineachadh bhon taobh a-muigh a' toirt mion-fhiosrachadh mu phròiseactan, tobraichean, tabhartas air iarraidh, tabhartas air fhaotainn agus mar sin air adhart;
- chaidh ceist a thogail a thaobh carson a bha na tabhartasan a bha air am faotainn gu tric na bu lugha na an t-sùim thùsail a bha air a h-iarraidh agus co-dhiù a bha seo mar thoradh air barrachd bhuidhnean a' sireadh maoineachadh agus co-dhiù a bha seo ag adhbharachadh gearr-shuim a thaobh a bhith a' coinneachadh ri feumalachdan na Gàidhealtachd;
- chaidh tuilleadh fiosrachaidh a shireadh mu phròiseactan. Mar eisimpleir, bha a' Chomhairle air iarrtas a chur a-steach airson £988 mìle de mhaoineachadh Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig gus taic a chur ri Sgioba na Gàidhlig, na pròiseactan sònraichte aca agus luchd-obrach Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig ann am foghlam Tràth-ionnsachaidh is Cùram-chloinne, Bun-sgoile agus Àrd-sgoile. Bhathar an dùil gun robh seo ro fharsaing agus gun toireadh cunntas nas mionaidiche mìneachadh seachad air a' bhuidhnean a bheireadh gearradh £83 mìle air comas seirbheisean a libhrigeadh;
- bho 2018/19 gu 2020/21 bha an t-iarrtas a chaidh a-steach gu Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig air àrdachadh £44 mìle ach cha robh adhbharan air an toirt seachad a' mìneachadh carson a bha seo a dhìth;
- chaidh fiosrachadh a thoirt seachd mu na buidhnean a bha air am maoineachadh tro Mhaoineachadh Reachdail Plana Gàidhlig Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh agus fhaotainn mun ìre chonaltraidh a bha a' dol air adhart a thaobh dùilean nam buidhnean agus comas na Comhairle sin a libhrigeadh. Bha suidheachadh coltach ris a seo aig

a' Chomhairle fhèin ann a bhith a' cur iarrtas a-steach airson maoinachadh Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig;

- bhiodh cùrsaichean cànan Gàidhlig do Bhuill, agus luchd-obrach, buannachdail. Dh'fhaodadh mòran dhiubh seo a bhith air an libhrigeadh gu bhìortail agus aig prìs ìosal no an-asgaidh. Bhiodh seo a' ciallachadh gum faodadh barrachd Bhall dhen Chomataidh bruidhinn sa Ghàidhlig; agus
- bha e fìor chudromach buidhnean a bhrosnachadh gus obrachadh còmhla nuair a bha maoinachadh gann ach dh'fheumadh seo a bhith air a dhèanamh tro cho-obrachadh agus ann an dòigh a bha air a chnuasachadh gu cùramach.

#### **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh:-

- i. gum bu chòir Plana na Gàidhlig 3 a sgrùdadh air stèidh ràitheil a' cleachdadh Siostam Coileanadh & Sgrùdadh Cunnairt (PMRS) – siostam stiùiridh coileanadh corporra na Comhairle – gus taic a chur ri bhith a' cumail sùil air adhartas ann a bhith a' libhrigeadh Plana na Gàidhlig 3;
- ii. gum bu chòir aithisg adhartais mu Phlana na Gàidhlig 3 a chur a-steach gach ràith gu Comataidh na Gàidhlig; agus
- iii. gun robh Cathraiche Comataidh na Gàidhlig agus Àrd-luchd-stiùiridh ag amas air coinneachadh ri Àrd-Oifigearan Gàidhlig Riaghaltas na h-Alba dà uair sa bhliadhna.

#### **5. Am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail Air-loidhne**

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/5/20 le ceann-latha 29 Dàmhair 2020 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè an deasbaid, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- Bha Sgioba na Gàidhlig aig Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd air obrachadh còmhla ris a' Chomunn Ghàidhealach gus am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail Air-loidhne a libhrigeadh. Thug an Cathraiche iomradh cuideachd air Cèilidh na Comhairle, a bha air a libhrigeadh ann an com-pàirteachas le Fèis Rois agus a bha air a dhol a-mach air an oidhche Haoine. Bha an Comhairliche Raymond Bremner am measg na sheinn agus chaidh meal a naidheachd a chur air airson seo. Chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air a' chèilidh anns an robh farpaisich agus teaghlaichean a' gabhail com-pàirt agus a thug am Mòd gu crìch ann an dòigh shunndach;
- chaidh buidheachas a chur an cèill airson na h-obrach a bha an lùib Mòd na bliadhna sa. Chaidh innse gun robh An Comunn Gàidhealach air 550 tagradh bhidio fhaighinn agus gun deach dèiligeadh riutha gu soirbheachail ann an deagh ùine airson a' Mhòid. Cha robh seo furasta ach bha e air mòran ùidh a thogail air na meadhanan sòisealta;
- ged a bha mòran air am Mòd 'traidiseanta' ionndrainn, bha am Mòd Air-loidhne air cur nar cuimhne gun robh an fhèis ann fhathast;
- chaidh fàilte a chur air a' chom-pàirteachas eadar-nàiseanta;
- ri linn 's gun deach am Mòd 'traidiseanta' a chur dheth, bha droch bhuaidh aig a seo air an eaconamaidh ionadail agus airson an luchd-ealain a bha fèin-fhastachtaichte taobh a-staigh nan gnìomhachasan cruthachail is nach biodh air cosnadh àbhaisteach fhaighinn tro bhith a' cluiche aig tachartasan is cuirmean.
- air sàillibh mì-chinnt mu Mhòd na h-ath-bhliadhna, bha e a' coimhead coltach gum biodh co-dhiù pàirt dhen Mhòd air-loidhne agus bu chòir oidhirp a dhèanamh an call eaconamach a lùghdachadh. Math dh'fhaodte gum faodadh

cosgais bheag a bhith mu choinneamh beò-shruthadh gus taic air choreigin a thoirt do luchd-ealain fèin-fhastachta;

- bhiodh Mòd ‘traidiseanta’ a’ togail mu £3.2m ann am buannachd dhìreach agus neo-dhìreach le còrr is 9,000 an làthair agus bha e cudromach gun deigheadh toirt fa-near do leasan na bliadhna sa gus an deigheadh rudeigin luachmhor a chur air dòigh airson 2021;
- bha a-nis bliadhna aig Inbhir Nis airson ullachadh is planadh airson Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail 2021 agus mar a dh’fhaodadh na bha air a thabhann gu didseatach a bhith air a ghabhail a-steach fhad ‘s a bhathar a’ meudachadh na buannachd cultarail is eaconamach. Bhathar air ceangal ro-innleachdail a thogail mar-thà le prìomh chom-pàirtichean; agus
- bha am Mòd air tlachd a thoirt seachad nach gabhadh tomhas, gu h-àraid ann am bliadhna fo bhuaidh Covid 19, agus bha e na urram a bhith ga choimhead.

Às dèidh sin:-

- THUG** a’ Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan Mhòd Air-loidhne;
- THUG** a’ Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na pròiseactan a leasaich is a stiùir Sgioba na Gàidhlig ann an co-bhann le prìomh luchd-ùidh gus taic a chur ris a’ Mhòd Air-loidhne; agus
- DH’AONTAICH** a’ Chomataidh coimhead nas mionaidiche air na puingean a chaidh a thogail san deasbaireachd a thaobh a bhith a’ leasachadh Mòd na h-ath bhliadhna;
- DH’AONTAICH** a’ Chomataidh coimhead air dòighean gus teachd-a-steach a thogail airson an luchd-ealain agus a’ choimhearsnachd san fharsaingeachd;
- DH’AONTAICH** a’ Chomataidh gun deigheadh aithisg adhartais a thoirt gu Comataidh na Gàidhlig sa Chèitean 2021.

## 6. Aithisg Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig

**Foillseachadh Com-pàirt:** Dh’fhoillsich Mgr C Rothach com-pàirt ionmhasail sa chuspair seach gu bheil ball dlùth teaghaich ag obair mar thidsear ann am Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig ach, às dèidh dha an deuchainn a thathar a’ mineachadh ann am Paragrafan 5.2 agus 5.3 de Chòd Giùlain nan Comhairlichean a chur an gnìomh, cho-dhùin e nach robh a’ chom-pàirt aige a’ cur bacadh air bho bhith an lùib na deasbaireachd. Ach, nam biodh deasbad a’ buntainn ri bhith ag aontachadh ghoireasan no ri atharrachadh poileasaidh, dh’fhàgadh e a’ choinneamh.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/6/20 le ceann-latha 29 Dàmhair 2020 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè an deasbaid, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- chuir Cathraiche Comataidh an Fhoghlaim fàilte air an naidheachd gun robh Sarah Fhriseal, Ceannard Bun-Sgoil Bhaile Ùr an t-Slèibh a’ dol a thoirt cunntas air buileachadh Gàidhlig do Chomataidh an Fhoghlaim;
- ged a chaidh fàilte a chur air an àrdachadh ann an àireamhan sgoilearan ann am foghlam ro-sgoile, bun-sgoile agus àrd-sgoile, b’ e fhathast glè bheag de sgoilearan a bha a’ suidhe dheuchainnean Gàidhlig fhileantach is Gàidhlig luchd-ionnsachaidh aig àrd ìre. Bha Buill eile a’ beachdachadh gun robh an t-àrdachadh gu math beag ach bhathar an dùil nach robh daoine òga cho

buailteach cuspairean cànanain a ghabhail tuilleadh. Bha feum air barrachd sgrùdadh air dòighean gus daoine òga a bhrosnachadh is a mhisneachadh gus cànanan a ghabhail;

- bha eagal ann gun robh na roghainnean cuspair a dh'fheumadh a bhith air an dèanamh ann an ÀS2 uaireannan a' ciallachadh gun robh cuspairean mar Gàidhlig air am fàgail;
- bha an ìre fiosrachaidh a bha air a thoirt seachad a-nis a' comasachadh sgrùdadh nas fheàrr am measg Bhall;
- bhiodh e math nan deigheadh plana foghlaim FtG ullachadh airson gach sgoil seach gun cuidicheadh seo le bhith a' planadh is a' dèanamh cinnteach à goireasan a' dol air adhart. Shealladh seo cuideachd mòr-mhiann is lèirsinn Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd airson an ama ri teachd;
- bhathar an dùil gun robh e-Sgoil, iomairt a leasaich Comhairle nan Eilean Siar gus piseach a thoirt air co-ionannachd is cothrom air foghlam, a' tabhann slighe air adhart. Ach, cha deach mòran adhartais a dhèanamh agus chaidh cunntas às ùr iarraidh a thaobh ionnsachadh air astar agus na planaichean a bha air an suidheachadh airson an ama ri teachd gus barrachd sgoilearan a chom-pàirteachadh; agus
- bha tuilleadh taic do Cheannardan-sgoile a dhìth ma bha iad a' dol a libhrigeadh prògram 12-18 gu soirbheachail anns a' Ghàidhlig.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gum bu chòir aithne a thoirt do cho cudromach 's a bha dòigh-obrach cho-obrachail eadar Sgioba na Gàidhlig agus Oifigearan Foghlaim a bha air cothroman leasachaidh proifeiseanta agus goireasan a stiùireadh is a thoirt seachad airson an raoin cho-theacsaichean ann an sgoiltean na Gàidhealtachd gus solar Luchd-ionnsachaidh Gàidhlig agus FtG a thoirt seachad is a bhrosnachadh air feadh na Gàidhealtachd;
- ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan phròfaidhl bhuileachaidh taobh a-staigh frèam-obrach an dà chuid de chòmhradh is stiùir nàiseanta agus ath-sgrùdaidhean curraicealaim Gàidhlig aig ìre àrd-sgoile; agus
- iii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do Cho-chomhairle Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig Gheàrrloch agus gun deigheadh tuilleadh fiosrachaidh mu dheidhinn seo a cho-roinn le Comataidh an Fhoghlaim.

## 7. Plana-obrach Chomataidh na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/7/20 le ceann-latha 29 Dàmhair 2020 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghniomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè an deasbaid, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- bha seo a' sealltainn gu soilleir gun robh ro-innleachd làidir ann mar-thà gus amasan Plana na Gàidhlig 3 a choileanadh;
- dh'inns cuid de Bhuill gun robh iad duilich nach b' urrainn dhaibh a bhith an làthair aig na bùithtean-obrach air-loidhne;
- chuir Buill fàilte air an taic is am fòcas a bha ann am Bùth-obrach 4 airson Gàidhlig anns an àrd-sgoil;
- chuir a' Chomataidh aonta ri sgrùdadh dhen rannsachadh a chaidh a dhèanamh le Riaghaltas na h-Alba agus Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean mun chrìonadh sa Ghàidhlig sa choimhearsnachd dhùthchasaich agus gun

deigheadh cunntas air adhartas Plana na Gàidhlig a thoirt dhan Làn Chomhairle air stèidh bhliadhnail;

- a thaobh Ro-innleachd Conaltraidh is Com-pàirteachais Gàidhlig, bha e cudromach gun robh seo subailte agus gun gabhadh cumadh às ùr a chur air beachdan nam biodh sin riatanach. Dhaingnich an Cathraiche gum biodh a' Chomataidh co-fhreagrach do chothroman mar a thigeadh iad am bàrr; agus
- bha e na adhbhar gairdeachais gun robh a' Ghàidhlig a-nis na b' fhollaisiche agus gun robh e comasach an obair fharsaing is ghnìomhach a bhathar a' dèanamh a thoirt am follais cuideachd.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na cuspairean cumanta a thàinig am bàrr às na bùithtean-obrach;
- ii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh aithisgean airson coinneamhan Comataidh na Gàidhlig anns an àm ri teachd;
- iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gum biodh am plana-obrach a' gabhail a-steach sgrùdadh dhen rannsachadh a tha Riaghaltas na h-Alba agus Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean a' dèanamh mu chrìonadh na Gàidhlig anns a' choimhearsnachd dhùthchasaich; agus
- iv. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun deigheadh adhartas a thaobh Plana na Gàidhlig 3 aithris dhan Làn Chomhairle air stèidh bhliadhnail.

## 8. Ro-innleachd Conaltraidh agus Com-pàirteachais na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/8/20 le ceann-latha 28 Dàmhair 2020 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Às dèidh moladh gum bu chòir cainnt nas sunndaiche a chleachdadh ann a bhith a' cur cànan is cultar na Gàidhlig air adhart, thug a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan dòigh-obrach a thaobh a bhith a' leasachadh Ro-innleachd Conaltraidh Gàidhlig agus **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh raon-ama airson a' Phlana Chonaltraidh a thoirt air ais chun na Comataidh.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 12.45f.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held remotely on 10 November 2020 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr J Bruce  
Mrs M Cockburn

Ms P Hadley  
Mr B Lobban

### In attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance  
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning  
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager (Badenoch & Strathspey, Culloden & Ardersier and Inverness South)  
Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer  
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager (South)  
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager (LNBS)  
Mr S Eastaugh, Access Officer  
Ms F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

### Also in attendance:

Mr G MacLeay, Project Director, NHS Highland  
Mr K Rodgers, Project Director, NHS Highland  
Mr G Moir, Chief Executive, Cairngorms National Park Authority  
Inspector V Tough, Police Scotland

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

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

### BUSINESS

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Items 6 & 7 – Ms P Hadley (financial)

**3. NHS Redesign Project Update  
Fios às Ùr mu Phròiseact Ath-dhealbaidh an NHS**

There was a presentation by the Project Director, NHS Highland giving an update on the NHS Redesign project. During the presentation, Members were informed that it had been contractually confirmed that the completion date of the project had been delayed by 12 weeks and as a result the new handover date was now 31 May 2021. The new community hospital would comprise of 24 in-patient beds

with accessible courtyards; 12 consulting/treatment rooms; an Accident and Emergency Department with X-ray facilities, and the Aviemore GP Practice and community health and care teams. Members were provided with a virtual walk through tour of the new hospital.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- A number of queries were raised and confirmation was provided that the X-ray room was fully accessible and could support bariatric beds, the box on the wall was a representation of a Snellen chart, and digital connectivity to the NHS Highland IT system would be via standard NHS N3 line and appropriate infrastructure including full Wi-Fi access throughout the building;
- Assurance was sought that there would be sufficient physiotherapy staffing levels to enable a whole systems approach to deliver the required services locally;
- With regard to the hospital being located next to the railway line, it was confirmed that acoustic modelling had been undertaken which concluded that there would be meaningful activity for people but no impact on equipment;
- Confirmation was also provided that single en-suite rooms varied in size between 16.5-22sqm and vending facilities would be available to provide refreshments; and
- The importance of the new building with up to date facilities and equipment for existing staff were emphasised.

Thereafter Committee expressed their appreciation for the virtual tour and **NOTED** the presentation.

#### **4. Heritage Horizons Bid Iarrtas Fàirean Dualchais**

There was a presentation by Mr Grant Moir on the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Heritage Horizons Project Bid during which it was explained that the Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA) was in the process of submitting a final bid, due by 26 February 2021, in the category of Landscape and Nature. It was explained that a transformation project was being developed focussing on people and nature thriving together and further information was provided on the vision, aims and objectives of the project along with examples of the different project themes. It was explained that this would be a two stage process, with the first being a development phase for two years (2021-2023) with a total funding package of £2.4m with 50% of this provided by the NLHF and the second being a five year (2023-2028) delivery phase with a total funding package of £40m which included £12m from the NLHF.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was requested that a copy of the presentation be circulated and that the Committee be kept up to date with progress of the bid;
- The importance of the bid to the area was emphasised and it was felt this would be recognised and endorsed by the Council;
- Confirmation was sought and provided that this would be a significant opportunity to generate income and attract private finance to the Park area;



- Confirmation was provided that travel and transport would be a key strand of the bid. It was suggested that the CNPA should dovetail with the work already being undertaken by the Council in terms of developing sustainable public transport provision;
- With regard to encouraging local apprenticeships, assurance was provided that job creation was a key aspect of the project and there would be opportunities for local contractors. In addition, there would be collaborative working with the Highlands and Islands Enterprise to upskill local businesses to ensure they had the capacity to undertake the infrastructure works required; and
- The progress of the bid was the result of the hard work and dedication of officers and their collaborative approach was welcomed. The project provided an exciting opportunity for both CNPA and the Council for transformational change to be delivered, the need for which had been accelerated by the pandemic.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation, a copy of which would be circulated to Members, and **AGREED** that:-

- i. local Members continue to be kept informed of progress with the bid;
- ii. the Council and Cairngorm National Park Authority work collaboratively to develop new ways to provide sustainable public transport; and
- \* iii. the Committee seek Council endorsement of the bid.

## 5. **Police Area Performance Report** **Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/08/20 dated 10 October 2020 by the Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The impact of Covid, particularly on young people, had been challenging and it was essential that clubs/activities were recommenced as soon as possible to ensure that they were not negatively stereotyped for anti-social behaviour;
- It was queried whether it would be feasible to work collaboratively with car schemes to address the increasing trend in car thefts;
- Appreciation was expressed to Officers for their compassionate and supportive response to domestic abuse offences; and
- In terms of a potential influx of visitors for New Year, confirmation was provided that no events were being organised in this regard. Members of the public would be reminded of the Scottish Government's travel restrictions and the reduced opening hours of licenced premises would continue to be monitored.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan:-

- i. 2017-20 Year 3, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2019- 31 March 2020; and
- ii. 2020 – 23 Year 1, attached as Annex B to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 September 2020.

**6. HRA Capital programme 2021-22  
Prògram Calpa HRA 2021-22**

**Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained in the room to participate in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/09/20 dated 21 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing & Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Further information was sought and provided on the impact of Covid on accessing properties in respect of the Heating Replacement Programme. In addition, it was clarified that an Options Heating Appraisal was undertaken to determine the best type of heating replacement system for each property. It was requested that there be further discussion at the next Ward Business Meeting on the different types of heating systems available;
- Concern was expressed that Badenoch and Strathspey did not receive their fair share of the capital allocation and it was clarified that the percentage of the HRA Capital Plan allocated to the Area was a UK Government accepted approach and used a calculation based on stock number, type and age to determine a major repair allowance per stock type/age and the level of investment required for each area; and
- In view of the delays to the programme arising from Covid, it was queried whether the Capital budget would be ring-fenced.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to the Badenoch and Strathspey Area as set out at paragraph 5.7 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Badenoch and Strathspey 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iv. **NOTED** the position relating the current year HRA Capital Programme;
- v. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme would continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Area Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee; and
- vi. **AGREED** that the different types of heating systems available be discussed at the next Ward Business Meeting.

**7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020  
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean gu 30 An t-Sultainn 2020**

**Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained in the room to participate in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/10/20 dated 21 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, confirmation was provided that there was no specific reason for the significant reduction in homelessness presentations but the position would continue to be monitored. In addition, it was also confirmed that there was no evidence of an increase in anti-social behaviour complaints.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020.

**8. 2019/20 Area Road Structures Annual Report  
Aithisg Adhartais Rathaidean & Dhrochaidean Sgìreil 2019/20**

There had been circulated Report No **BS/11/20** dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Concern was expressed at bridges being scored below 65 against the Bridge Stock Condition Index (BSCI) and it was clarified that this was a method of recording and categorising the findings but the bridges were in a serviceable condition and these bridges would continue to be inspected more frequently but repair works were not currently required. However, further concern was expressed at the condition of Cromdale bridge and confirmation was provided that a report would be provided on this;
- It was suggested that additional support was required to enable culvert inspections to be completed;
- Concern was expressed that the Planned Schedule of Works had been interrupted due to Covid and further information was sought and provided on the feasibility of the slippage in the programme being recovered. Confirmation was also provided that Shankland Court, Grantown-on-Spey was on the Capital works structural improvements priority list for drainage works to be undertaken;
- The purchase of the new snow plough for the area was welcomed; and
- Aviemore was currently in the process of being converted into a 20mph speed limit zone at virtually no cost to the Council. There was demand for this to be adopted in other communities and further information was sought and provided on any plans in this regard. It was proposed that the Council bring forward proposals to introduce temporary speed restrictions in all areas of Badenoch and Strathspey currently served by 30mph speed limits and these proposals be considered at the next meeting of the Committee. It was recognised that there would be a financial implication for this but sources of external financial support were available. It was therefore felt that proposals should be developed, in line with communities' objectives, with a view to them being progressed subject to funding being available.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report and **AGREED** that a report be provided on the condition of Cromdale bridge; and

- \* ii. **AGREED** that the Council bring forward proposals to introduce temporary speed restrictions in all areas of Badenoch and Strathspey currently served by 30mph speed limits and these proposals be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

**9. West Highlands and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan Review  
Ath-sgrùdadh Plana Phrìomh Cheuman na Gàidhealtachd an Iar agus nan Eilean**

There had been circulated Report No **BS/12/20** dated 14 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the Committee recognised that the Cairngorm National Park Authority supported the proposals and confirmation was provided that the Committee's approval of the Amended Core Paths Plan was the most the Council could do in terms of demonstrating their strength of support. In addition, it was highlighted that additional parking was being provided next to the railway station at Dalwhinnie.

The Committee **APPROVED** an Amended Core Paths Plan for the Badenoch and Strathspey area of the West Highland and Islands Core Paths Plan Review with one outstanding objection to one proposed core path.

**10. Badenoch and Strathspey - Education Report  
Bàideanach agus Srath Spè – Aithisg Foghlaim**

There had been circulated Report No **BS/13/20** dated 26 October 2020 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was highlighted that some of the weblinks in the report were broken and this needed to be addressed for future. The Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning advised that an Attainment Toolkit Data pack would be circulated to Members and this would provide detailed information on the key attainment measures without the need of having to use links. In the meantime, she provided a summary of the key measures in respect of Kingussie Area School Group and Grantown Area School Group highlighting areas that were performing well and areas where there was scope for improvement. The Chair welcomed the update and confirmed that this was the level of detail that should be reported to future meetings;
- With regard to some of the attainment details provided, it was assumed that there would be a period of settlement in respect of the recent appointments of permanent Head Teachers;
- In terms of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), there was a need to capture the transitions from P7 to S1. It was highlighted that there was greater accessibility of support systems in the primary setting compared to the secondary setting and this needed to be addressed. It was queried whether Additional Support Needs should be assigned to

individual pupils and have the resource follow them through their education journey;

- SIMD did not get into the detail of rural deprivation and there was a need to look beyond this indicator and support a person-centred pathway;
- With regard to Wi-Fi being cost prohibitive for some families, confirmation was provided that a MIFI Council device could be issued which provided internet access. In addition, further work had also been undertaken to upskill parents on digital learning to enable them to provide support to pupils at home; and
- It was vital that young people had a good awareness of health and wellbeing issues and the implementation of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Award for S3 was welcomed.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report and to ensure that there were no broken links in future reports; and
- ii. **AGREED** that an Attainment Toolkit Data Pack be circulated to Members.

## 11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 7 July 2020 which were approved by the Council on 30 July 2020.

The meeting was closed at 12.40pm.

**The Highland Council  
Corporate Resources Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee held remotely on Wednesday 11 November 2020 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr R Bremner	Mr D Louden
Mrs C Caddick	Mr G MacKenzie
Dr I Cockburn	Mr S Mackie
Mrs M Davidson	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr R Gale	Mr D Macpherson
Mr T Heggie	Mr M Reiss
Mr A Henderson (substitute)	Mr D Rixson
Mr A Jarvie (substitute)	Mr P Saggars
Mr B Lobban	

**Non-Members also Present:**

Mrs J Barclay	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Baxter	Mr C Munro
Mr A Christie	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J Finlayson	Mr B Thompson

**Officials in attendance:**

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive  
 Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer  
 Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer  
 Mr E Foster, Head of Finance and Commercialism  
 Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services  
 Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT and Digital Transformation  
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator  
 Ms M Zavarella, Clerical Assistant

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

**Mr A Mackinnon in the Chair**

**BUSINESS**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair and Mrs H Carmichael.

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

Item 3 – Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson (non-financial)  
 Item 8 – Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

**3. Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report to 30 September 2020  
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 30 Sultain 2020**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson declared a non-financial interest in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/23/20 dated 30 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the considerable work undertaken on this report, specifically in terms of monitoring and governance, under what were very difficult circumstances;
- the current projections in respect of a year-end out-turn position with a net budget overspend of only £8.7m were welcomed in terms of the reduction from the previously higher projections in this regard;
- the positive financial management at the present time was welcomed but it was stressed that it was imperative that consideration was given to spending money across the Highlands whenever and wherever possible, not least during the current pandemic situation;
- there was concern in relation to the year on year vacancy management situation although it was recognised that there was a need for this to be used in the current circumstances. However, it was hoped that in future this could be viewed as only a last resort and that other options for savings measures would be considered in the first instance;
- it was the case that there were some recurring deficits year on year within some Service budgets and as such there was a need to focus on this with a view to perhaps setting more realistic budget targets in future where appropriate;
- in terms of the unallocated corporate savings regarding procurement, it appeared that progress was being made and this was welcomed;
- it was noted that further clarification would be provided following the meeting in relation to areas of overspend/shortfall within the report, including payments to partner centres, higher vehicle expenditure, computer services, residential care, European grants, commercial refuse collection and vehicle maintenance income;
- in respect of non-domestic rates, clarity was needed as to how the decrease in collection in the current year might affect the Council in the following financial year;
- the work currently being undertaken in relation to workforce planning would considerably add to the information available in terms of staffing and this could also be used in any future discussion on vacancy management across the Council;
- it would be helpful if clarification could be provided on the changes in staffing numbers across the Council over recent years;
- there should not be a presumption that the posts currently being held as vacant were not needed in future;
- vacancy management was a very prudent measure to be taken by the Council at the present time but there should also be a focus on the staff currently covering the workload associated with those vacant posts to ensure that they were able to cope;

- the work being undertaken on workforce planning might enable the Council to adopt different recruitment procedures in future and this could be beneficial for all concerned;
- there was much uncertainty at present at both a UK and Scottish Government level but the Administration was open to providing updates for the budget leaders within the Opposition Groups across the Council as and when such information was received;
- it was highlighted that the SNP Group was content to offer help to the Administration in the coming weeks and months in order to benefit the Highland economy wherever possible and this was welcomed at the meeting. Issues on which the SNP Group had already provided a focus included how the economy could be strengthened, the total spend for the following financial year, contingency plans for the Brexit situation, use of reserves, spend on projects to create income streams for the Council, measurement of value for money, examples of best practice within other Local Authorities, consideration of modular buildings, self-financing energy projects and future borrowing levels; and
- it was noted that a further update would be provided for Members in regard to procurement issues in due course.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. the financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 September 2020;
- ii. clarification be provided regarding the changes in recent years to staffing numbers;
- iii. the Leader of the Council brief Opposition Group budget leaders on the national position as reported at COSLA Leaders meetings; and
- iv. that Members be provided with an update on procurement.

#### **4. Corporate Capital Monitoring Report to 30 September 2020 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 30 Sultain 2020**

There had been circulated Report No RES/24/20 dated 2 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the work on this report was welcomed on the basis that it represented a 'monitoring' position and a further report would be submitted to the full Council meeting on 17 December 2020;
- there was a need for a further update on the Tain 3-18 Campus project, specifically in relation to progress on the site investigation survey and consultation work which had been previously paused;
- in regard to the net external borrowing figure which had been contained in the report, it was essential that action was taken to initiate action on projects across the Highlands wherever possible (and especially Education projects) to mitigate the severe effect that the current pandemic had had in the area in recent months;
- it was also suggested that where capital funding had required to be paused on specific projects due to the pandemic, it could perhaps be used to develop other new and 'shovel ready' projects where feasible as this would also benefit the Highland economy;
- all available measures had to be taken now in relation to the current pandemic - and also to address the potential implications arising from the Brexit situation - as it would not be possible to have a situation whereby the Council waited for further



developments within either issue and the SNP Group was willing to work with the Administration in this regard. As such, it was hoped that all Members of the Council could work together for the benefit of the Highland area;

- there were very tight timelines associated with future budgets at the present time and it was therefore imperative that all feasible action was taken as soon as possible;
- employment creation had to be key to all action taken in relation to the Highland economy in the coming weeks and months;
- there was concern in regard to a lack of progress on work being undertaken on Culloden Academy and it was hoped that this could be addressed as soon as possible; and
- it was noted that a Seminar for Members had been arranged for the end of November 2020 and it was expected that some of the issues which had been raised could be discussed in more detail at that time, including development of the Capital Strategy and a focus on the links between capital and revenue funding.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the capital monitoring position to 30 September 2020;
- ii. that further information be provided to Councillor
  - a. D Loudon on progress of the Tain 3-18 Campus including whether the site investigation survey had been undertaken and if the consultation could be undertaken online; and
  - b. T Robertson on the progress of the Culloden Academy project.

**5. Resources and Finance Service Revenue and Performance Monitoring to 30 September 2020**  
**Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais gu 30 Sultain 2020**

There had been circulated Report No RES/25/20 dated 24 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the extensive work which had been undertaken and also the new format of the report which was warmly welcomed;
- it had to be highlighted that this service had never been as important for the Highlands as it was at the present time;
- the information which had been contained in relation to the early payment of invoices by the Council was welcomed as this was especially important for local businesses across the area;
- the excellent results in terms of the processing of claims was also highlighted in terms of its crucial importance at the present time;
- there was a need to closely monitor the uptake of Covid-19 specific grants and support grants and to provide information for Members in this regard;
- comparison should be made with work being undertaken by other Local Authorities in terms of the future sharing of best practice; and
- the statistics for the collection of Council Tax which showed only a 1.2% decrease was exceptional in the current circumstances.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the revenue and performance monitoring position to 30 September 2020; and
- ii. that further information be provided to Members on the uptake of Covid-19 grants.

**At this point, the meeting was adjourned at 11.55am and reconvened at 12.05pm.**

**6. Performance and Governance Service Revenue Monitoring to 30 September 2020  
Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais – Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach gu 30 Sultain 2020**

There had been circulated Report No RES/26/20 dated 9 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, and in response to a query, it was confirmed that the budget figure which had been presented for Legal Services represented a complex situation through a combination of income and expenditure budgets but it was hoped that the anticipated recruitment to Solicitor posts would improve this situation.

It was also acknowledged that a further saving of £58k could be achieved if the proposed By-Election (which had been postponed due to the pandemic) did not go ahead in the coming months.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the revenue monitoring position to 30 September 2020 as detailed in the report.

**7. Treasury Management  
Rianachd Ionmhais**

**a. Summary of Transactions  
Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/27/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- In terms of the information which had been provided, it was hoped that the intention was not only to increase temporary reserves and reduce external borrowing as it had to be highlighted and acknowledged that every pound spent by the Council would have a subsequent 'multiplier effect' across the Highlands which would considerably boost the local economy;
- It was also essential to take advantage of currently low interest rates in relation to future capital projects;
- There was an urgent need for discussion to be undertaken with the Public Works Loans Board as it was felt that the current arrangements did not work well for or benefit the Highlands;
- It would be important in the coming months to ensure that the Capital Programme remained affordable for the long term;
- All opportunities should be taken to discuss future investment in the area with the Scottish Government and it was suggested that work on the A82 had to be given a very high priority; and

- It would be essential for the Council to present a 'united front' in all future discussions with both the Scottish Government and the Public.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 July to 30 September 2020 as circulated.

**b. Mid-year Treasury Management Report 2020/21**  
**Aithisg Stiùireadh Ionmhais Meadhan-bliadhna 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No RES/28/20 dated 30 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee **AGREED** the Mid-year Treasury Management report for 2020/21 as circulated.

**8. Carbon Budgeting**  
**Buidseat Carboin**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/29/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- In terms of the Resource Implications, it was highlighted that much of the work to date had been focussed on being self-financing and this approach was commended. In addition, it was further indicated that this work created opportunities for significant savings to be generated both in terms of carbon reductions and financially;
- The Leader of the Council's meeting with Ofgem to address difficulties in reducing the carbon footprint due to the lack of accessibility in the grid infrastructure was welcomed;
- The importance of this work was recognised but concern was expressed that the majority of the key tasks within the Action Plan had been prioritised as 'High' and there was a need for this to be reassessed to ensure it was realistic, reflected the current economic climate, and actions that would have genuine carbon and financial reductions prioritised. However, it was highlighted that a commitment had been made to make Highland carbon neutral by 2025 hence why the actions had been prioritised in this manner and the need for carbon budgets to support the delivery of this target was emphasised. Further concern was expressed, and assurance was provided, that the project would be sufficiently resourced;
- Assurance was sought and provided that consideration had been given to the impacts of Covid;
- It was recognised that this was an ambitious project but there were significant opportunities for Highland in terms of renewable energy, environmental restoration and economic development and these should be seized. In doing so, Highland could become a leader of the climate change sector;

- Hydrogen technologies needed to be utilised and confirmation was provided that a copy of the recent briefing on this would be circulated to Members; and
- Climate change was the responsibility of the whole of the Council, not just a single committee, therefore a corporate wide approach should be adopted to making carbon reductions and achieving the target of making Highland carbon neutral quickly as possible.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the report submitted to the Recovery Board on 7 October 2020 and attached at Appendix 1 to the report; and
- AGREED** that carbon budgeting recommendations arising from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee be considered by Council; and
- AGREED** that a copy of the Hydrogen briefing be circulated to Members.

## 9. **ICT Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh ICT**

There had been circulated Report No RES/30/20 dated 7 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Chair commended the ICT Service for their exceptional work over the past few months in response to the pandemic to ensure the continued delivery of services and conveyed his appreciation to the ICT team.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the ICT Transformation and Network Programmes, overall Wipro performance and the SOCITM benchmarking.

## **MINUTES OF MEETINGS** **GEÀRR-CHUNNTAS CHOINNEAMHAN**

## 10. **Minutes of Meetings** **Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan**

There had been circulated and **APPROVED** the following Minutes of Meetings:-

- Corporate Resources Committee held on 20 August 2020 and **AGREED** that an update be provided on the review/evaluation of the Senior Management Structure;
- Staff Partnership Forum held on 14 August 2020; and
- Central Safety Committee held on 14 August 2020.

## 11. **Exclusion of the Public** **Às-dùnadh a' Phobail**

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 8 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

## 12. **Project Dòchas** **Pròiseact Dòchais**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. RES/31/20 dated 3 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the report.

The meeting was concluded at 1.13pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing** held **remotely** on Thursday 12 November 2020 at 10.30am.

### Present:

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

### Non Members also present:

Mr R Bremner	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Christie	Ms A MacLean
Mr A Henderson	Mr D Macpherson

### Participating Officials:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive  
 Mrs F Malcolm, Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care  
 Ms K Ralston, Head of Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer  
 Mr I Kyle, Head of Improvement and Performance  
 Mr B Porter, Head of Support Services  
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator  
 Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator

### Also in attendance:

Mr S Steer, Director of Adult Social Care, NHS Highland

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

**Linda Munro in the Chair**

## BUSINESS

### Preliminaries – amendment to order of business

In accordance with Standing Order 8, the Committee **AGREED** that Item 6 be considered as a private item at the end of the agenda.

## Preliminaries – Good New Stories

- i. **Connecting Scotland** was a Scottish Government programme set up in response to coronavirus. Phase 1 (April – July 2020) had focused on those who were at risk of isolation due to coronavirus because they were in the extremely high vulnerability group ('shielding') or the higher risk of severe illness group. Phase 2 had launched on 18 August 2020 and focused on households with children, or where a child was normally resident, including pregnant women with no child in the household, and care leavers up to the age of twenty-six (in line with eligibility for aftercare support). Organisations working with people in the target groups for Phase 2 were able to apply for devices to distribute and the Highland Council had successfully bid for 308 Chromebooks and 302 iPads – a total of 610 devices, which would be allocated for 111 young care leavers and 499 families;
- ii. **Highland Champs Event** - Clachnaharry, young people with care experience and members of Highland Champs had met at Bught Park to enjoy an outdoor adventure day on Sunday 1 November 2020;
- iii. The transfer of **Home Farm Care Home** from HC-One to NHS Highland had been agreed, with NHS Highland formally taking ownership of the care home from Monday 2 November 2020;
- iv. **Echo Sessions** - the next series in Staff Wellbeing and Resilience through Covid started the week following the meeting;
- v. **Statement from a Care Experienced Young Person**; and
- vi. Speech and Language Therapy team's '**Words up Wednesdays**' was a new book which highlighted a collection of stories from across the Scottish education system, showcasing some of the most innovative, effective and impactful examples of learning during lockdown.

The Chair welcomed the good news and praised the hard work that had gone into the achievements, especially during a pandemic crisis.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News Stories.

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

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

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following declaration of interest:

Item 9 – Ms L Munro (financial)

### 3. **Presentation: Green Health, Ailsa Villegas, NHS Highland** **Taisbeanadh: Slàinte Uaine, Ailsa Villegas, NHS na Gàidhealtachd**

The Green Health Partnership in Highland aimed to develop opportunities and build on existing resources to support individuals and communities to improve their physical and mental health, and wellbeing and resilience, through engaging with and appreciating the natural environment.

A presentation was provided outlining the aims and achievements of projects to reach people who rarely or never engaged with the outdoors. The benefits of spending time in the natural environment were summarised and a survey was underway to understand the socio-economic factors influencing people's behaviour. Work with partners was ongoing to improve greenspace provision.

During discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- Members referred to the benefits they had experienced from the outdoors and various kinds of outdoor exercise and several offered to submit photos of themselves enjoying the outdoors as 'Green Health Champions' for the Communications Team to use to promote such activities;
- attention was drawn to local groups working at ward level and with schools helping people to get outdoors. Local initiatives could be added to the Green Partnership directory;
- it was important that outdoor learning was encouraged in education and it was hoped steps could be taken to reduce the bureaucracy around consent and risk assessments which could be time-consuming and discourage teachers from taking children outdoors;
- teenagers could be a difficult group to reach and to encourage outdoors and it was hoped solutions to this could be found to get them out walking or cycling, noting there were charities which could help families to procure bikes. A summary was provided of initiatives undertaken to encourage teenagers to use outdoor spaces during school breaks;
- some outdoor charities such as Cycling without Age had been forced to stop or reduce activity due to Covid-19;
- consideration was being given to the provision of 'free parts' play in play parks, and to the provision of a public facing weblink to allow people to easily source their nearest green space;
- there was guidance online for care homes and 'bringing the outdoors in' projects, and reference was made to a case study on improving outdoor access for care home residents;
- stakeholder events on social prescriptions would be starting the following week; and
- the next steps would be further discussed with the Chair outwith the meeting.

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

- i. the Chair discuss the next steps with the Highland Green Health Partnership Senior Development Officer; and
- ii. the Council's Communications Team be asked to contact Members of the Committee who might be willing to submit photos of themselves enjoying the outdoors.

#### **4. Violence Against Women Partnership Com-pàirteachas Fòirneart An Aghaidh Bhoireannach**

**Presentation by James Maybee, Principal Officer (Criminal Justice Services)  
Taisbeanadh le James Maybee, Prìomh Oifigear (Seirbheisean Ceartas Eucoirean)**



There had been circulated Report No HSW/15/20 dated 7 October 2020 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

A presentation covered the definition of violence against women, with some key statistics on its prevalence and the impact of Covid in recent months. The structure and aims of the VAW Partnership were outlined and a summary was provided on the work being undertaken in social work, with reference to the Safe and Together model, an internally recognised suite of tools to help inform professionals in this area which had been considered by the Chief Officer Public Protection Group in 2019. Resources were a key issue if the Safe and Together model was to be implemented.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- information was sought on whether there were sufficient resources to support victims of violence, especially in rural areas, with concerns that funding was being reduced. These concerns would be addressed in the 2021-24 Plan;
- rather than teaching young girls how to stay safe, as had been the focus in the past, it was important the emphasis shifted to teaching all young people about consent;
- recent statistics suggested Highland experienced higher levels of domestic violence than the average for Scottish Local Authorities and information on the reasons for this would be helpful;
- Inverness Women's Aid had been in existence for over forty years and it was hoped lessons could be learned from their valuable experience;
- noting the importance of early intervention and prevention of violence, reference was made to Education initiatives to help teach consent, such as Safe, Strong, Free, and further consideration of the content of Personal and Social Education in schools was required to ensure it was appropriate and up to date (this was to be considered further by the Council's Education Committee);
- more information was required on the impact and implications of the Covid-19 crisis;
- in rural locations victims of domestic violence often had fewer choices of places to escape to;
- safe spaces could make more use of technology and virtual support;
- an ambition of this Committee was to involve all services across the Highlands to help reduce domestic violence and Members were urged to attend the training and make appropriate financial decisions in relation to supporting this vital service; and
- the Safer Together model would be further discussed outwith the meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report and presentation and **AGREED** that a copy of this be circulated to the Committee;
- ii. **NOTED** the work of the partnership in progressing the national Equally Safe agenda and local plan resulting from this;
- iii. **NOTED** the statistical information about the HVAWP response to this matter throughout Covid-19; and

- iv. **AGREED** the Safer Together model would be further discussed outwith the meeting by the Chair, the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care, Head of Children's Services (Operations), and the Principal Officer (Criminal Justice Services).

## 5. **Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing** **A' Toirt Taic do Shlàinte Inntinn agus Sunnd**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/16/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

The Chief Executive summarised the report, which detailed two Scottish Government grants, one for the development of community mental health and wellbeing services for 5 -24 year olds, their families and carers, and another which could be carried forward to 2021/22 in response to the increasing children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing issues arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The rationale behind choosing Caithness as a pathfinder project to inform a pan Highland approach was explained.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- the particular difficulties relating to mental health that had been experienced in Caithness in recent times were acknowledged and support was voiced for choosing Caithness as the pathfinder project, noting that many other areas of Highland experienced similar problems, and that the processes and learning from Caithness would be rolled out across the Highlands in future;
- the proposed 'whole system' approach was welcomed and it was further suggested a child-upwards approach should be adopted. It was important that services provided were determined with significant input from service users;
- the functioning of Community Planning Partnerships across Highland was erratic, with only some meeting regularly and functioning as intended;
- in relation to the age range for assistance of 5-24, it was important nobody was missed, noting that young people were moved from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs) to Adult Services at 18, and that not all children and young people attended school regularly and could miss out on school-based services. Service providers had to seek out the people who needed them;
- school based services allowed children the opportunity for peer support;
- it was vital that people with lived experience were invited to contribute to the 'mental health and well-being summit' proposed for February 2021;
- with regard to recruitment challenges that had been faced in Caithness and other areas of Highland, it was intended the whole system approach would help to remodel services to better meet needs, in partnership with other organisations and communities;
- many of the issues relating to children and schools would also be considered at the Education Committee the following week, and particular attention was drawn to the need to update Personal and Social Education;
- any new approach should link to models and practices already in place;
- the funding was welcomed and efforts should continue to obtain more;
- with reference to a conference the previous week on Adverse Childhood Experiences, attention was drawn to the importance of prevention and early

intervention on mental health issues, and turning adversity into positive action;

- work was ongoing with NHS Highland on efforts to improve the assessment process and waiting list for CAMHs, as part of the whole system improvement process which would feed into the proposed summit in February 2021;
- small improvements could sometimes make a significant difference to people, and it was important to engage with the public on this;
- one of the focus points of the pathfinder initiative would be to build on good mental health work that was already taking place and the importance of engaging with all Council staff on this area of work was emphasised;
- the importance of listening to the communities was emphasised, with flexibility and facilitation where required, as was the need to achieve some short time successes;
- close effective working with partners as well as communities and the young people most affected was vital;
- with regard to timescales for workshops, it was important to give clinicians at least six weeks' notice of required attendance to ensure clinical activity did not have to be cancelled. It was confirmed consideration would be given to evening events to provide flexibility and a special Area Committee meeting was planned before the end of the year with anticipated contribution from NHS Highland and other partners. It was important the professional views were taken on board as well as lived experience voices;
- creative ways of engaging with hard to reach young people were required;
- the Chief Executive voiced gratitude to the Chair of the Committee and all staff involved with the ACEs conference the previous week; and
- in summary, the Chair drew attention to the following aspirational paragraph from the report appendix: 'Every child and young person and their families or carers will get the help they need, when they need it, from people with the right knowledge, skills and experience to support them. This will be available in the form of easily accessible support close to their home, education, employment or community.'

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report and the grants awarded;
- ii. **APPROVED** the approach set out in terms of convening a Mental Health Workshop to inform a whole systems approach and working with all services across the Council and with our Third Sector and community planning partners to achieve that;
- iii. pending the approach set out above being agreed in terms of a pan Highland approach, **APPROVED** some initial investment in Caithness by way of a pathfinder project to inform a pan Highland approach;
- iv. **AGREED** to hold a Mental Health and Wellbeing summit in February 2021 as set out in paragraph 6.2 of the report; and
- v. **AGREED** that immediate actions be taken in Caithness as set out in paragraph 6.3 of the report.

## 7. **Integrated Children's Services Plan 2020 Plana Seirbheisean Amalaichte Chloinne 2020**

There had been circulated Report No HSW/18/20 dated 6 October 2020 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- this report was an interim progress update and the draft Plan would be presented to the Committee in February 2021. As it was generally considered that December was not an ideal time to consult with children and young people, this would start in January 2021 and might not be completed in time for the February draft. Members were keen to understand the creative methods used to reach and engage with young people, particularly those who were care-experienced and who lived in remote and rural locations;
- concern was expressed that the ineffective functioning of some of the Community Planning Partnerships could impact on the progress with the Plan, which should be reported to every meeting of the Committee. The need for support for the community partnerships was emphasised, noting that those which were functioning well had dedicated staff resources, and the Chief Executive offered to discuss the resourcing requirements with the other statutory partners and report back on this to the Chair of the Committee;
- the Chair of the Community Planning Board spoke of the importance of the Council, NHS Highland, relevant third sector agencies, local community partnerships and other partners inputting into and signing off the Plan. Given the logistics of submitting it to several relevant committees, it might be more efficient to submit it directly to the full Council. Of key importance was how the Plan would be evaluated and held to account, and more information on this was required;
- key issues relating to the plan included having a robust planning process in place, clear articulation of responsibilities, a ragged system to track timelines, and a consistent approach to a performance management framework, noting that traction could be lost in complex planning environments;
- it was explained that this Plan would replace what would have been For Highland Children 5 and it was hoped the Plan would be a key focus of the community partnerships;
- at a recent meeting with the Highland third sector interface, the importance of engaging with young people at a time that best suited them had been clear, and further information was sought on the methods for obtaining feedback from young people and the various groups that represented them; and
- the importance of a whole system approach with communities at the centre was emphasised, as was the importance of effective relationships with partners.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work undertaken by the Integrated Children's Service Plan Board in progressing the Plan;
- ii. **NOTED** the decision to route this Plan through the Community Planning Partnership Board in line with Scottish Government advice; and
- iii. **AGREED** the Chief Executive discuss the resourcing requirements of the Community Planning Partnerships with the other statutory partners and report back on this to the Chair of the Committee.

**8. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2020/21  
Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach Ràith 2 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No HSW/19/20 dated 2 November 2020 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- various financial queries were raised including on the figures for residential care, foster care fees and electricity charges and these would be discussed in detail outwith the meeting. It was explained there was no budget for temporary agency worker fees as these were usually the result of vacancies and expenditure was balanced against vacancy savings;
- the layout and content of the report was welcomed, with particular reference to the budget glossary in Appendix 2, the recruitment of ten new social workers and the planned rebasing of the budget; and
- the Chair thanked officers for the recent useful financial training and urged Members to attend in the New Year if they had not already done so.

The Committee **NOTED** the revenue budget outturn forecast for the year.

**9. Adult Social Care – Care Home Assurance Report  
Cùram Sòisealta Inbheach – Aithisg Barantais Dachaigh-Cùraim**

**Ms L Munro declared a financial interest in this item as a Self-directed Support Specialist 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 HSW/20/20 dated 9 October 2020 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- the stress on the care home system due to Covid-19 was unprecedented, with eleven closed to admissions at present, this being a loss of around 60 beds. This was causing pressure on finances and on staff and unpaid carers;
- information was sought and provided on policies in place to ensure hygiene and infection control between patients and to deal with gaps in staffing due to staff having to self-isolate, with attention being drawn to the contingency plans all care homes required to have in place and to NHS Highland's rapid response team for emergency staff shortages;
- in response to a query about delays in care home staff receiving Covid-19 test results, the Director of Public Health would be asked to provide information to Members on this and other relevant test-related issues;
- care home inspections were still being carried out but were often virtual rather than in person;
- it was important to look after the safety and emotional well-being of care home staff, with many working under considerable additional pressure, and to value

- their important role. It was hoped the forthcoming national review of social care needs would focus on care workers, not only on social workers;
- the issue of dementia or other areas of mental incapacity which could make social distancing a challenge had been raised at the Committee in July 2020 and it was requested that future reports relating to adult social care assurance would cover this issue. It was explained that this was a challenging issue and assurance was provided on measures in place to ensure patients' right were not compromised; and
  - in response to a query about the uptake of Self-Directed Support, a report on this would be presented to the Committee in February 2021.

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

- i. the Director of Public Health be asked to provide a brief summary for Members of the Covid-19 testing concerns, especially in relation to reported delays in test results;
- ii. the issue of dementia or other areas of mental incapacity which could make social distancing a challenge be covered in future reports relating to adult social care assurance; and
- iii. a report on Self-Directed Support be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on 10 February 2021 with NHS Highland to provide an input.

## 10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

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

- i. Highland Child Protection Committee held on 4 June 2020;
- ii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group held on 15 June and 17 August 2020;
- iii. Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership held on 3 December 2019, 18 February 2020 and 26 May 2020;
- iv. Highland Community Justice Partnership held on 20 June 2020; and
- v. Highland Council/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 22 October 2020.

### Close of Public Meeting

Karen Ralston, Head of Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer, would be leaving the Council in December 2020, and Members thanked her for her hard work and professionalism during her time with the Council, wishing her well for the future.

### Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A (4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for Item 6 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 8 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**6. North Coast Care Facility**  
**Goireas Cùraim a' Chost a Tuath**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HCW/17/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 18 November 2020 at 10.35 am.

### Present:

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

### Religious Representatives:

Mr R Finlay  
Ms S Lamont  
Mr W Skene

### Non-Members also present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Henderson	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Jarvie	Mr C Munro
Mr B Lobban	Mr B Thompson
Mr D Mackay	

### In attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive  
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning  
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)  
Ms G Newman, Highland Children's Forum (Third Sector)  
Ms S Blyth, Highland Parent Council Partnership

### Also in attendance:

Mr T Allison, Director of Public Health, NHS Highland  
Mr I Ross, Chair, High Life Highland  
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

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

**Mr J Finlayson in the Chair**

**Preliminaries**



Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chairman expressed his appreciation to school staff, parents, pupils, officers, Public Health staff and fellow Members for the ongoing resilience and support that all stakeholders continued to show during the Covid 19 pandemic.

## **Business**

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr S Mackie.

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

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

Item 4 – Mr A Christie (financial)

Item 5 – Mr A Jarvie and B Thompson (both non-financial)

Item 6 – Mr A Christie (financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial) and Mr B Thompson (non-financial)

Item 7 – Ms E Knox (non-financial)

Item 9 – Mr A Christie (financial), Mr K Gowans (financial), Mr T Heggie (non-financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial), Ms E Knox (non-financial) and Mr B Thompson (non-financial)

Item 10 – Mr K Gowans (financial), Mr T Heggie (non-financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial) and Mr B Thompson (non-financial)

Ms N Sinclair declared a general non-financial interest on the basis that she had children enrolled in nursery and primary school but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.

### **3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth**

There had been circulated a list of outstanding achievements by pupils and schools.

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

### **4. Education Recovery Ath-shlànachadh Foghlaim**

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

#### **i. Public Health Slàinte Phoblach**

The Director of Public Health, NHS Highland, provided a verbal update during which he gave an overview of issues relating to Covid 19. In presenting data, he pointed out that NHS Highland also included the Argyll and Bute Council area so, when drawing conclusions, Members should bear this in mind.

Relative to other areas, there was a low incidence of Covid 19 in Highland and levels were appearing to be flattening off. Considerable data was available on the Public Health Scotland website which also provided a breakdown as far as locality level. Looking to the future, it was hoped for a continued reduction in infection rates and, whilst it was unlikely that there would be an increase, it was important to continue to adhere to control measures and restrictions. In Education settings there was no evidence of any widespread transmission but, should a pupil feel unwell, the guidance was for the pupil concerned to stay off school. The development of vaccines was to be welcomed but it was unlikely these would be licenced for use for those under 18 years old, the vaccines being targeted at those at higher risk and the elderly.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in response to a question that, in relation to the Test and Protect campaign, it was confirmed that 97% of contacts of someone who had tested positive for Covid 19 had been traced in the Highlands. However, in a school context it was more difficult to predict who the precise contacts were;
- teachers and parents needed support as anxiety levels were prevalent, even if Highland was in Tier 1, and it was important to communicate the scientific message about how to reduce spread to allay these fears;
- there had been a significant outbreak of Covid 19 in a school in Fife and assurances were sought that should similar outbreak occur in Highland an appropriate response would be taken;
- in response to a question it was explained that it was not within NHS Highland's remit to enforce inspection regimes in schools to ensure compliance with standards for hygiene and social distancing. This was a matter for the Council but NHS Highland was able to provide advice as necessary. Members were also informed that the Council's procedures were inspected by the Health and Safety Executive and who had been positive about the Council's approach. Furthermore, advice to schools concerning ventilation had been issued;
- disappointment was expressed that a young person had been sent from Skye to Inverness for a test despite there being a Covid Assessment Centre in Portree; and
- the Director of Public Health was thanked for his support and cooperation with education officers.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## ii. **Recruitment Fastadh**

The Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager provided a verbal update during which Members were informed that, from the start of the school session, appointments to 4 Secondary Head Teacher posts had been made, 3 of which were external candidates. 13 appointments had been made to Primary Head

Teacher posts, again 6 of which were external appointments. Regarding Area Manager posts, 2 appointments had been made to the post of Interim Area Manager to support Head Teachers.

Utilising the Education Recovery Funding, appointments had also been made to six virtual teacher posts to support the provision of on-line learning for any pupils unable to access face to face education. Appointments to the posts across the Associated School Groups (ASGs), as per the plan shared at the last committee meeting, started immediately after the October break and 13.2 FTE primary teaching posts across ASGs had now been appointed. Only 2 posts remained vacant and alternative arrangements had been put in place.

Appointments had also been made to 1.7 FTE of Secondary teaching posts, as well as 34 hours of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) plus the additional allocation of hours to some existing PSAs. Following representation and discussion with the 4 largest secondary schools regarding the pressure on caseloads for guidance/pupil support teachers which had been exacerbated by lockdown and COVID issues, it has been agreed to appoint 6 FTE additional Principal Teacher of guidance/pupil support posts for the remainder to the school session to reduce caseloads across these schools, helping these schools to further support the health and wellbeing of pupils. Finally, 4 secondary schools which had experienced a higher than anticipated stay-on rate had also been advised that they would receive additional staffing to reflect this.

During discussion, the Members were encouraged by the number of appointments which had been made recently and the high calibre of candidates. However, some schools, such as Lochaber High School, had been unable to appoint to a substantive post. This was exacerbated with out-of-date supply lists and a Head Teacher, in such circumstances, could be faced with the decision to ask a pupil not to come into school if no support was available. The Council's promise to give its young people the best possible education was not therefore being met and a system to provide more up-to-date supply lists was called for. In response, Members were assured that the supply list was a "live" document and was, as a result, up-to-date. ASN appointments were also being made and it was hoped these would be filled very soon.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and that a summary of all appointments would be circulated to all Members.

### iii. Curriculum Curraicealam

Head Teachers from Newtonmore and Caol Primaries gave a presentation on learning, teaching and assessment. Both of Head teachers had had to deal with outbreaks of Covid within their school communities.

Mr Hamilton had been Head Teacher in Caol Primary for a number of years and now also at the impressive new Caol Campus. He detailed the work which had taken place during the summer preparing for pupils return to school and that teachers and pupils had been keen to return to the learning environment. With Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) the school had employed a Children Services Worker and this had proved invaluable. This hadn't been without its challenges and he

highlighted the need to keep parents informed and to manage staff anxieties and expectations. However, with the support of families, the school team were striving to provide high quality learning and education.

Sarah Fraser had been a Head Teacher at Newtonmore Primary School since August 2016 but, since August 2020, when Newtonmore was clustered with Gergask Primary, she became a non-teaching head covering both schools. A Gaelic speaker, Ms Fraser had also worked for Highland Council as a Gaelic Medium teacher since 1994. Newtonmore was now the main Gaelic Medium (GM) School in Badenoch and Strathspey with a rising roll. She too welcomed the support of parents and outlined how the school had had to adapt. In particular, the Early Years classes had embraced outdoor learning with the opportunity for them to investigate and explore. The school had tried to make the learning environment as normal as possible but, particularly with the GM pupils a dip in oral language ability had transpired during Lockdown. Newtonmore Primary had used its PEF for Pupils Support Assistants and to build an outdoor learning classroom.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the testimonies of the Head Teachers demonstrated how resilient pupils had been and how the hard work of pupils, staff, parents and communities had facilitated the return to school;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how intergenerational activities were incorporated;
- support was voiced for the outdoor classroom for Newtonmore Primary; and
- the mental health of parents was recognised, especially during Lockdown when incomes might have dropped and it was important, where possible, to support them through newsletters and emails etc.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## **5. Improving Outcomes for Young People Update** **Fios às Ùr mu Leasachadh Thoraidhean do Dhaoine Òga**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson declared non-financial interests in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- introducing the report, the Chairman pointed out that Members had had the opportunity to attend Attainment Workshops which explained how Insight worked and what level of data access Members could get to relating to their local schools. However, the Scottish Government had recently indicated that the confirmed Insight data for last session, which the Council and schools would normally have had by now, would not be available until February 2020. This

was unfortunate in terms of looking at the most recently confirmed exam results which, as already discussed at Committee, had been very positive. The report also looked at how the Virtual Academy was supporting attainment;

- the intention was for Education officers to attend ward meetings to present the secondary schools leavers' attainment profile in the key measures. However, the Head Teacher or a member of the school's Senior Management Team should also attend, being in a good position to provide this data;
- the Virtual Academy was to be welcomed but the numbers involved were disappointing and a commitment was sought to bring back a fuller report to an early meeting of the Committee as to how the Virtual Academy could be expanded, together with a timetable;
- the Virtual Academy made no mention of Gaelic and, to help address the problem of delivering subjects at secondary school level in Gaelic Medium, this needed to be included;
- the virtual comparator referred to in Appendix 1 of the report showed Highland either on or above the line but a clearer picture as to what the virtual comparator was made up of was required to accurately assess attainment; and
- there was positive feedback from those Members who attended the workshops who had found them invaluable.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Scottish Government had taken the decision not to produce INSIGHT data until February 2021 and that Members would receive a full report once data had been analysed and benchmarked with national data;
- ii. **AGREED** the content of ward attainment meeting data to be presented by officers, and Head Teachers where possible, and the tool kit provided to allow Members to scrutinise data;
- iii. **NOTED** the positive attainment results achieved through the delivery of senior phase courses within The Highland Council virtual academy;
- iv. **AGREED** that officers would bring a report to future Education Committees on the impact of the Scottish Attainment Challenge audit on Highland schools; and
- v. **AGREED** that a report on proposals for expanding Highland Virtual Academy provision be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

## 6. Developing a Whole Systems Approach to Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing Ro-innleachd Mathais

**Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr A Christie** declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

**Mr A Jarvie** and **Mr B Thompson** declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/20 dated 30 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that the importance of this item could not be underestimated, especially at present, and this was reflected in the fact that a paper on the same topic had been presented to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee the previous week.

Supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of all Highland citizens, including children and young people, had never been more important and to do so effectively it was necessary to use a whole system approach which linked into the systems already in place as part of the GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) agenda and the Highland Practice Model.

The first recommendation in the report asked Members to not only be involved in supporting the initiative but to increase their knowledge and understanding of what constituted good mental health and what caused stress, anxiety and poor mental health. The report provided an opportunity for Members to learn and understand more about mental health whilst also supporting a way forward that looked to improve how children, young people and families were supported.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- mental health issues needed to be treated with a psychosocial approach complemented by medicine. However, it was also important to recognise and support young people experiencing “normal” distress;
- for the initiative to work it was important to ensure that schools, youth workers, family support workers etc worked together rather than in silos. In addition, it was necessary to listen to their views in terms of what might work locally – eg a hub or some other facility;
- the report to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee had referred to working with Community Partnerships and a timeframe of 2027, and concern was expressed in that regard. Whilst there was no issue with Community Partnerships being part of the team, very few of them were currently working well in Highland and it was suggested that working with schools was the most appropriate route. However, Councillor G Ross, Chair of Inverness Community Partnership, expressed disappointment that there was not more reference to Community Partnerships in the report, particularly in recommendations ii and iv. He emphasised that work was taking place at a local level, Inverness Community Partnership having already established a mental health and wellbeing group, and he would welcome the opportunity to be involved in a whole systems approach;
- the need to focus on transitions from primary school to secondary school was emphasised;
- Members welcomed the reference throughout the report to supporting children, families and staff;
- children were more resilient and resourceful than they were given credit for and the information in the report suggested that most were dealing with the Covid pandemic better than expected. However, it was not surprising to read that it was the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children who were most at risk of mental health issues;
- if adults’ mental health and wellbeing was not looked after this would impact on the children in their care, and reference was made to research in that regard.

There was a lot in the report about what should be done to protect the mental health of children and young people but less about what action was being taken to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff such as teachers and Pupil Support Assistants;

- support was expressed for the whole system and whole society approach that the report aspired to;
- in relation to the counselling funding from the Scottish Government, it was understood that it had been distributed to schools but there did not appear to be clarity as to how it would be spent. Support was expressed for counselling being embedded in school culture and delivered by qualified practitioners as the report proposed. However, there was a need for specific actions and timescales. In addition, it was suggested that if the school counselling service was to reflect a whole systems approach it should also be made available to school staff. There did not appear to be anything in the funding criteria to prevent this, and thanks were expressed to the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning who had indicated that she would look into the matter;
- a whole systems approach sometimes indicated a broad approach that was difficult to accomplish and ran the risk of heightening expectations but in this case the emphasis on preventative approaches, counselling provision in schools and training key stakeholders in counselling was exactly right;
- as referred to in the report, Fortrose Academy was an example of a school where a whole systems approach had been successful and Local Members described the measures that had been implemented and the work that had taken place with parents and employers. In particular, the provision of a mental health worker within the school for two days per week had had a significant impact;
- the current picture in terms of mental health was bleak as a result of Covid and joining up services to achieve better outcomes for young people had never been more important. Members cited statistics on anxiety levels amongst expectant mothers and referred to research on the long-term effects of stress hormones during pregnancy. In addition, reference was made to recent high-profile cases of teenage suicide, a lack of social interaction as a result of Covid restrictions appearing to be a common theme. Psychiatrists had reported that many of them were overworked and could not manage their caseload; long waiting times for routine GP appointments and referrals added a needless delay to people getting the support they needed; and the already diminished capacity of services was being compounded by higher demand;
- some Members expressed uncertainty as to what the report set out to achieve and information was sought on the current position, including the number of staff, their location and their workload, and where it was hoped to get to. Having a mental health professional within a school to whom guidance teachers could make referrals would remove bureaucracy and waiting times but, without measurable outcomes, it was questioned how Members would know that the approach had been a success. In addition, clarification was sought as to what was meant by the statement in the report that “the capacity and ambition within communities to provide localised support to families provides an excellent opportunity for a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing rooted in communities first.”;
- whilst the funding of approximately £1m was very welcome, it probably equated to one counsellor per ASG. It was important to know what was needed, how much of that was covered by the £1m and what additional resource was available as, whilst £1m was a lot of money, there was a significant possibility it would only scratch the surface;

- it was understood that the detail of how the counselling funding would be spent was to be decided at local level and this was welcomed;
- as stated in the report, mental health was not just an absence of mental illness, and it was important to take it seriously. Mental health and wellbeing was relevant to all, and everyone had experienced, to a greater or lesser extent, the impact of anxiety during the Covid pandemic;
- it was important to recognise the limitations of counselling as highlighted in section 9 of the report;
- it was understood that there were issues with access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in some schools and waiting lists could be long, and information was sought on whether there was a strategy for how the new counselling funding would interact with existing services or if it depended on individual ASGs or schools;
- the intention to deliver ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) aware/informed services was welcomed;
- the report did not address resource, which would be key when considering what services might look like;
- the traditional mental health services model was unsustainable and had been for a number of years, and it was right that the report alluded to the role of communities;
- mental health issues needed to be addressed at an early stage and long waiting lists were not acceptable;
- concern was expressed as to how the proposals in the report would be implemented in such a way that they made a difference on the ground;
- additional funding alone was not necessarily helpful given the issues previously experienced in Highland in terms of recruiting staff, particularly mental health professionals, and information was sought on whether any work had been done in relation to the procurement of external services that could be delivered online; and
- the Highland Children and Young People's Forum (the Forum) welcomed the report and its focus on a whole systems approach and the child's voice. Mental health and wellbeing had been raised by children and young people in several the Forum's reports and they had consistently asked for better mental health understanding in schools and a more joined up approach. The recent Letters from Lockdown report had highlighted that young people recognised the overall anxiety as a result of Covid and wanted to be able to provide peer support and have the information to do so. The Forum was working with the Integrated Children's Services Board to develop engagement with children and young people across third sector organisations in Highland around the five identified priorities, including mental health and transitions, and it was hoped that this would be an ongoing dialogue with children and young people. Inspire Highland, the Forum's young people's participation group, had a sub-group looking at mental health and it would be helpful if they had an opportunity to present to Members of the Education Committee and the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee. In that regard, it was requested that consideration be given to a seminar bringing together both Committees, NHS Highland and the Third Sector, as well as young people from Inspire Highland and those taking part in the engagement work. It was proposed that young people be at the centre of the seminar and that discussions take place on what was needed, what difference it would make and how it would be measured.



Officers responded in detail to the points raised, during which it was explained that the report set out a proposal for approval so that a strategy could be created. Much of the detail requested by Members, including impact measures, examples of which were provided, would be in the strategy. In addition, it was confirmed that the Chief Executives of public sector agencies in Highland had identified mental health and wellbeing as one of their top priorities and a meeting was scheduled to take place the following day at which the issue of resourcing would be considered. The Chief Executive undertook to update Members following the meeting.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to become involved in this initiative and increase Members' knowledge and understanding of good mental health and wellbeing, what caused stress in the individual and in organisations and how the Council could effectively promote wellbeing and support resilience in Highland communities;
- ii. to acknowledge the work already being done across Education and Learning to support wellbeing and resilience and the plans to build on this and to create coherence across the system – including networking with colleagues in Health and Social Care, 3rd sector partners, NHS Highland services, High Life Highland and the Health and Social Care Committee. This would also include making links with the work of the Communities and Place Committee building upon the COVID response from volunteers across Highland communities where many volunteers developed skills and approaches locally as part of the humanitarian response. The capacity and ambition within communities to provide localised support to families provided an excellent opportunity for a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing rooted in communities first;
- iii. to recognise The Highland Council's commitment to being an ACE Aware Council and to increase Members' knowledge and understanding of the adversity in childhood and how this could manifest as distress in schools and might later result in mental ill-health if not supported effectively at an early stage;
- iv. the ambitious approach proposed to more consistently support the wellbeing of children, families and staff across all Highland schools through the application of a framework of support, service provision and training over the next 5 years. This framework would map out the role of mental health support services, family support, school and care support, resources for curriculum development and training and approaches to working with communities to develop a community first response; and
- v. to explore the possibility of a seminar in conjunction with the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, NHS Highland and the Third Sector.

## **7. Additional Support Needs Transformation Update Fios às Ùr mu Fheumalachdan Taice a Bharrachd**

**Declaration of Interest: Ms E Knox declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Board Member of CHIP+ but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/20 dated 12 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the Chairman explained that the report set out how the Council intended to develop its plans for Additional Support Needs (ASN) to fit in with the Scottish Government's national review of ASN so that there would be synergy between what was happening in Highland and nationally. It also detailed the different types and timescales for engagement with different groups, including Members, and it had been hoped to host a workshop for, initially, Education Committee Members. Unfortunately few Members had attended so the workshop had been postponed but would be open to all Members next time;
- whilst seminars and workshops enable issues to be explored in greater detail and to involve third sector organisations, reports and decisions had to come back to the Education Committee;
- concern was expressed that the report lacked detail, context and a sense of urgency in taking ASN transformation forward. It suggested the current model was not working, neither in terms of the quantum nor the matrix, but an examination was needed to determine why it wasn't working;
- it was unclear if the purpose was an overall review of ASN Transformation or specifically an examination of the needs matrix and the allocation model;
- the consultation that had taken place earlier in the year had generated action points but these had not been detailed, there was no information as to what had happened as a result and whether they had been successful. Furthermore, the report stated that the current allocation model was not delivering improved outcomes but there was no analysis as to why this was the case;
- although a timeline had been produced for Phase 2 engagements there was no detail about these engagements e.g. how it was to be done, who specifically it was going to be done with and if Local Members would be allowed to participate take part;
- when deciding the quantum of resource allocated to a school or ASG it was important to capture rural data;
- the fact that Highland was emerging as having one of the lowest child to Pupil Support Assistant (PSA) ratios in Scotland, as well as lower than comparator authorities, should be celebrated. PSAs were important and should not be an area in which to make savings;
- when looking at comparators there were several complexities which needed to be considered e.g. the state and capacity of the schools and the fact that number of PSAs had halved nationally. The argument that other authorities had fewer PSA had to be taken in context that the number of ASN teachers in Highland had been steadily falling and it now had the lowest number of ASN teachers. Highland also had the lowest teacher;pupil ratio of 62.4 per 1000 pupils, thus placing additional pressure on teachers and schools and emphasising the need for increased ASN resources to support the learning journey of children;
- it should be an ambition to have smaller class sizes as this enable teachers to provide more individual support to pupils;
- devolving decisions about ASN allocation to school and ASG levels was welcomed as they were better placed to understand local circumstances and need;
- Members were aware of the anxiety of parents, especially those of children with ASN who, in some cases, had already struggled to access sufficient support. A lot of engagement had already taken place and this had raised expectations of parents and schools so it was important to move forward at a pace; and

- given the importance of the subject, it was questioned why the report had been received late.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work undertaken thus far in the Additional Support Needs Improvement Plan;
- AGREED** the proposal for extensive Member and stakeholder engagement; and
- AGREED** that options would be brought back to the Education Committee for Member consideration and approval early in the new year.

## 8. Early Learning and Childcare 1140 Hours Fios às ùr mu Thràth-ionnsachadh is Chùram-chloinne

There had been circulated Report No EDU/23/20 dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- there were a number of issues affecting the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in Kinmylies Primary and a position statement was sought for Ward Members as soon as possible;
- conflicting information was circulating as to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in the Milton of Leys area with some projections given that it was unlikely to be provided until 2022 at the earliest. As some information related to land acquisition Councillor K Gowans would be updated directly;
- reference was made to the nurse accommodation at Cradlehall Primary which was unable to be used due to the poor state of the toilets. This lack of maintenance was unlikely to be unique to this school and it was therefore suggested that the lack of proper maintenance was resulting in a lack of capacity;
- given the considerable housing development detailed in the Inner Moray Forth Development Plan, and other housing developments not yet known of, it was important to build in a level of contingency when planning forward;
- expectations had been raised that 1140 hours Early Learning Childcare was to be provided at Lochardil Primary and there had been disappointment when this had not materialised. However, this was now going to take place in January 2021;
- information was also sought as to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in the Tornagrain and Stratton areas;
- while welcoming the progress that was now being made with the provision of 1140 childcare hours, it was queried why Members at the start of the year had been told it would be necessary to delay projects; and
- officers were thanked for the work now taking place.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the updated position regarding Early Learning and Childcare and provision of 1140 hours;
- NOTED** the further progress towards delivering 1140 hours in all Highland settings;

- iii. **NOTED** the current status of Early Learning and Childcare capital projects and work being taken forward to progress project delivery;
- iv. **NOTED** the updates provided regarding ongoing discussion with the Scottish Government and other local and national developments; and
- v. **AGREED** that a briefing on the latest proposals in relation to Kinmylies Primary Nursery be provided to Ward Members.

**9. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2020/21  
Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2<sup>na</sup> Cairteal 2020/21**

**Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr A Christie** declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

**Mr K Gowans** declared a financial interest as his wife was an employee of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

**Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson** declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland and **Ms E Knox** declared a non-financial interest as a Board Member of CHIP+ but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/24/20 dated 27 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

The chairman highlighted that the projected multi-million overspend had been reduced to a forecasted £720,000 overspend, representing 0.3% of the Education Service budget of just under £212,000.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the revenue budget outturn forecast for the year; and
- ii. the improvement in forecast as a result of adjustment in costs and additional funding.

**10. High Life Highland Progress Report  
Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd**

**Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr K Gowans** declared a financial interest in this item as his wife was an employee of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

**Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/25/20 dated 9 November 2020 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland (HLH).

The chairman highlighted that due to the impact of Covid-19 on biannual reporting requirements this was the first High Life Highland report to the Education Committee since November 2019. The report provided an update on the valuable work that HLH had been undertaking over the year to support communities and schools despite the closure of all HLH facilities in March 2020. The chairman pointed out that through innovation and a determined approach many services had been moved online. The work of HLH had been further recognised by Drew Hendry MP, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, when he paid tribute to the more than 500 HLH staff who signed up to volunteer during the pandemic.

The Chief Executive, High Life Highland, gave a presentation in amplification of the report during which he reported on the company's performance, digital innovation during lockdown, recovery of services and highlighted that youth work would be a priority focus moving forward. Furthermore, HLH had received the distinguished Gold Award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme as a result of support to serving veterans and their families.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the wide-ranging work of High Life Highland, particularly the responsiveness to the Covid-19 pandemic and achieving the Gold Award through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme was commended;
- engaging youth in programming was vital to avoid the anti-social behaviour that had been increasing during the pandemic due to the deficit of facilities available to them. As a result, the elite athlete program was warmly welcomed with a suggestion that sites be located in the East side of Inverness where there was a large youth population and increased deprivation. Furthermore, HLH youth workers had been doing outstanding work in their communities throughout the pandemic. In response, the Chief Executive, High Life Highland, confirmed that elite athlete development was an important step in facilitating young people achieving their potential where they live, study and grow while highlighting that HLH had always strived to create opportunities for everyone at an affordable price. In addition, partnership working with Third Sector Organisations remained an important step in engaging young people;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reopening of community centres whereby it was emphasised that a balanced approach was required as a result of challenges due to budget limitations, age of the buildings and limited ventilation which restricted the options of services that became available; and
- in response to a question, it was explained that the decision to furlough staff was a challenging one with priority being given to securing/saving jobs. However, it was stressed that many staff would be furloughed on a part-time rather than full-time basis and HLH continued ongoing efforts through the Wellbeing Team to maintain contact with staff who had been impacted.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the excellent partnership working and the contributions that HLH staff had made to the Council's resilience work during lockdown;
- ii. the services that had been delivered during lockdown through the innovative use of technology, including over 2 million online customer engagements;
- iii. the update on the recovery work which was underway to re-establish services which HLH delivered on behalf of the Council;
- iv. the updates on facility opening; staff feedback and health and wellbeing; customer feedback and next steps (at Appendix B of the report);
- v. that, in the light of the above and the restrictions which had been imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, HLH had met or exceeded the outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with The Highland Council for the operating period to September 2020;
- vi. that HLH's 2019/20 financial statements were unqualified and prepared on a going concern basis;
- vii. that HLH's financial position had improved throughout the year due to the actions taken by the HLH Board but that there could still be a deficit which it was not possible for it to contain within its reserves;
- viii. that HLH would be very likely to face significant financial pressure into the next financial year as it recovered income streams; and
- ix. that HLH would explore opportunities for capital development with **sportscotland** to support the recovery of the Highlands from the coronavirus pandemic.

The meeting concluded at 3.45 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held remotely on Thursday 19 November 2020 at 10.00 am.

### Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr J Gray
Mr B Boyd	Mr A Jarvie
Mr I Brown	Ms E Knox
Mrs C Caddick	Mrs I MacKenzie
Miss J Campbell	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs E McAllister
Mr A Christie	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr G Ross
Mr K Gowans	Mr C Smith
Mr A Graham	

### Officials in Attendance:

Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer – Resources and Finance  
 Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer – Transformation and Economy  
 Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment  
 Ms A Clark, Head of Policy, Communities and Place  
 Ms S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services  
 Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager, Communities and Place  
 Mr T Stott, Principal Planner, Development Plans Team  
 Mr C Baxter, Planner, Development Plans Team  
 Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager  
 Mr R Pope, Policy and Programmes Manager  
 Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager (Inverness)  
 Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer  
 Mr J Taylor, Road Operations Manager - Inverness  
 Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance  
 Ms M Murray, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance  
 Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

### Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector M MacInnes, Inverness Area Commander, Police Scotland

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

**Mrs H Carmichael in the Chair**

### Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Committee **AGREED** to alter the running order of the agenda, to make best use of officer time, as follows: 1-3, 11, 10, Additional Item, 5, 4 (scheduled for 2pm), 6-9, 12, 13.

The Provost & Leader of Inverness and Area made the following announcements:-

- Former **Councillor Major H.H.M (Hamish) Sutherland** had passed away on the 28 October 2020, having been a member of Inverness Town Council, Inverness District Council and Highland Regional Council, serving in the Crown and Raigmore areas of Inverness from 1972 to 1986;
- Former **Councillor Jim Crawford** had passed away on 13 September 2020, having been elected as a Highland Councillor for the Inverness South Ward in 2007, and 2012, and served as an Independent Councillor and then Non-Aligned Councillor;
- **Queen's Birthday Honours 2020**
  - Isobel Shand MacDonald received an MBE (Member of the British Empire) for services to the community in Inverness (Milton of Leys Inverness);
  - Robert McDonald Johnston Shanks received a BEM (British Empire Medal) for services to the Seaforth Highlanders Regimental Association and the community in Culloden, Inverness and Dingwall; and
- **Good News** - on 29 October, Scotland's Towns Partnership announced Inverness Business Improvement District (BID) had been nominated as a Highland High Street Hero, receiving a Highly Commended Award. Inverness BID was one of only 5 of the 40 Scottish BIDs to be recognised in these awards.

### **Business**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms E Roddick.

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

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

Item 6b – Mr K Gowans (financial) and Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr J Gray, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs C Caddick and Mr A Graham (all non-financial)

Item 10 – Ms J Campbell (non-financial)

#### **3. Appointments to Sub-Committee, Working Groups etc Cur an dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidh, Buidhnean Obrach is eile**

The Committee **AGREED** that Mrs I MacKenzie be appointed to the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee.

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

(i) The City of Inverness Area Committee agrees to undertake a 're-imagining of the City of Inverness'

To create a programme of works to include:



- to investigate the possible pedestrianisation of Union Street and Queensgate;
- to undertake a 'deep clean' of all streets within the curtilage of the City, to plant trees and shrubs within the City, to make the City a cleaner, greener, fresher place to live, work and visit; and
- to ensure that all stakeholders are participants in this Programme.

This Programme of Re-Imagining the City of Inverness will encourage more people into the City, support existing City Centre businesses, and create a café/restaurant culture within the square of Union Street, Queensgate and the Victorian Market.

During discussion, the following points were considered:-

- It was requested that a Working Group comprising interested Members, Officers and Stakeholders be set up to take the Motion's concept forward, to gather opinion through public consultation and report back to the City of Inverness Area Committee early in the New Year.
- There was a need to maximise investment received from national Government and look at how the environment of the Town Centre can be made more attractive for people to visit and shop.
- There was evidence to suggest that properly planned pedestrianisation can have a significant positive impact on the visitor experience to a Town Centre as well as helping to tackle climate change and improve air quality.
- It was felt that there should be an assessment of the possibility of pedestrianisation in the City Centre with a view to increasing footfall and additional customers for businesses.
- In the Spaces for People discussions held earlier in the year, the Business Improvement District Group were not in favour of pedestrianisation.
- There would be a cost to deep clean all streets within the curtilage of the City. This cost was not budgeted for and it was queried where this money would come from.
- It was suggested that the various elements of the Motion should be considered at the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub Group rather than setting up a separate Working Group, as it was felt this would be duplication of current efforts to achieve economic recovery for the City. Over the last few months the Sub Group had already worked on a variety of different projects including looking at improving the Cityscape. The Sub Group had had discussions with the Business Improvement District and the Federation of Small Businesses to try and improve the overall situation within the Town Centre. All Member ideas and suggestions on how to invigorate and revive the City Centre were welcome and would be considered by the Sub Group.
- It was felt that the costs of the measures contained in the Motion would be outweighed by increased business and improvements to public health.
- The issue of access for people who cannot engage in active travel options was raised. It was important not to cut off access for retailers or for people coming into the City Centre to visit/shop who could not walk or cycle
- There were other good Town Centres where lessons could be learned, but they all had their challenges. In particular, it was felt that pedestrianisation was not the panacea as some suggest. Other considerations such as the weather which was not favourable for a café culture proposal had to be taken into account when considering pedestrianisation.

- The Proposers of the Motion were content with assurances given at the meeting that the various elements of the Motion would be discussed at the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub Group.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** that the various elements of the Notice of Motion be considered at the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub Group.

(ii) That the CIAC notes with concern the as yet unknown impact of Covid-19 on businesses operating within the Inverness Common Good Fund estate. The committee resolves to consult with those businesses with a view to providing appropriate additional supports in order to promote the mutual long-term interests of both commercial tenants and the ICGF

During discussion, the following points were considered:-

- There had to be support available to ensure the long term viability of businesses within the Common Good Fund Estate which would in turn support the Common Good Fund income stream.
- Reference was made to the Community Wellbeing and Recovery Report at item 10 of this meeting, in which Officers had concluded that “it would not be appropriate to support one section of the business community within Inverness. Supporting only Common Good Fund tenants would place other businesses at a disadvantage. The Common Good Fund did not have the financial resources to develop a hardship scheme for all businesses and in addition Scottish Government Schemes already exist in addition to the extension of the furlough scheme to support business. The purpose of Common Good funding was to provide ‘clear benefit for the wider residents of the Burgh’ of Inverness. It would be difficult to argue that supporting individual businesses would support this purpose.” Further, the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub Group had been in discussions with the Business Improvement District Group and the Federation of Small Businesses who represented the vast majority of businesses in the City. The Sub Group were happy to discuss with these Groups on how to improve the overall situation for businesses in Inverness. Therefore, given the above points, it was felt that the terms of the Notice of Motion could not be supported.
- It would be checked with the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub Group if the Group’s Minutes could be circulated to all City of Inverness Area Committee Members for information immediately following the Sub Group meetings.

Thereafter, Mr R MacWilliam, seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr G Ross, seconded by Mrs H Carmichael, moved not to support the Motion.

On a vote being taken between Mr MacWilliam’s Motion and Mr Ross’s Amendment, the votes were cast as follows:-

**Motion:** Mr I Brown, Mrs Campbell-Sinclair, Mr K Gowans, Ms E Knox, Mr R MacWilliam

**Amendment:** Mr R Balfour, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs M Davidson, Mr A Graham, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr J Gray, Mr D MacPherson; Mrs E McAllister, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Mr C Smith

**Abstention:** Mr B Boyd

Mr Ross's **AMENDMENT** was carried by 12 votes to 5.

### **Decision**

The Committee **AGREED** not to support the Motion.

(iii) This council undertakes to achieve "Living Wage" designation status for Inverness to provide benefit and support for lower paid employees, while improving the reputation of businesses. This will be prioritised to enhance our COVID-19 recovery. The CIAC undertakes to bring a report to the next meeting of CIAC to take this forward.

During discussion, the following points were considered:-

- It was highlighted that this Motion would encourage businesses and organisations to become "Living Wage" employers, encourage suppliers and those who rent premises to adopt the scheme. There were many businesses and organisations who were already "Living Wage" employers such as The Highland Council, NHS Highland and High Life Highland. It was particularly relevant to Inverness given the significant tourism industry and the common sectors for low wages were tourism, hospitality, retail, leisure and the care sector. If Inverness was to achieve "Living Wage" designation, it would enhance the reputation of Inverness as a responsible City and build confidence in the area.
- A view was expressed that while the aspiration of a "Living Wage" was commendable, caution was expressed regarding undertaking to achieve this, as it was not something the Council could do. The Council adhered to and promoted the living wage but it could not mandate that other businesses do and it was the wrong time to push for this given the Covid-19 health crises. It was suggested that the Motion be amended to reflect that the City of Inverness Area Committee has the ambition to achieve "Living Wage" designation status for Inverness.

Thereafter, Mr K Gowan's seconded by Mrs Campbell-Sinclair **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mrs C Caddick, seconded by Mr D MacPherson, moved that the terms of the Notice of Motion be amended to reflect that the City of Inverness Area Committee has the ambition to achieve "Living Wage" designation status for Inverness.

On a vote being taken between Mr Gowan's Motion and Mrs Caddick's Amendment, the votes were cast as follows:-

**Motion:** Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs Campbell-Sinclair, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Ms E Knox, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs E McAllister

**Amendment:** Mr R Balfour, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mrs M Davidson, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr D MacPherson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Mr C Smith

Mrs Caddick's **AMENDMENT** was carried by 11 votes to 9 .

### **Decision**

The Committee **AGREED** that the City of Inverness Area Committee has the ambition to achieve "Living Wage" designation status for Inverness to provide benefit and support for lower paid employees, while improving the reputation of businesses. This will be prioritised to enhance our COVID-19 recovery. The CIAC undertakes to bring a report to the next meeting of the CIAC to take this forward.

### **5. Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 – Main Issues Report Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh 2 – Aithisg Phrìomh Chùisean**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/25/20 dated 5 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

Officers summarised and explained the report and the contents of Appendix 1 and clarified that the recommendations in the report should include the following updates, provided verbally:-

- the Inverness Settlement Development Area white boundary as shown on the maps on pages 103, 109, 117 and 122 of Appendix 1 was correct, not the boundary shown on the higher resolution maps on pages 186 to 189; and
- that an additional site 115, The Tower, Westhill had been erroneously omitted from Appendix 1 but properly assessed and therefore should be included in the published Main Issues Report as a Non-Preferred site.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Development Plans Team were thanked for their work on the Plan;
- Council staff should do everything possible to respond to community requests for meetings during the consultation period including, if permissible at that time, face to face events;
- the reluctance of some landowners to release allocated sites for development should be taken into account and solutions such as compulsory purchase considered;
- Housing in the countryside and rural development in general should be encouraged particularly given the increasing desire and ability to work from home;
- the Appendix 1 reference to the need for traffic management measures on Ardersier High Street should be strengthened given the proposed Economic Development Area designation at Fort George and the traffic implications that a change of use of that site could have;
- local communities could be confused by the lack of housing capacity figures for sites in the Main Issues Report;
- support was voiced for the recommended preferred approaches on self-build, affordable housing, accommodating the ageing population, and lower

- carbon heating systems, but concern was expressed as to how these new policies might affect viability for developers and householders;
- the purpose and accuracy of the housing in the countryside Hinterland boundary between Daviot and Tomatin was queried;
  - it was queried whether there was sufficient capacity in schools, sports facilities, and other infrastructure to support the level of growth suggested;
  - several Inverness City site-specific queries were raised and addressed regarding the justification for the preferences set out in Appendix 1;
  - clarification was sought that the amber colour of the Loch Ness tourism corridor notation on the Spatial Strategy Map was not an indication of doubts about the Council's preference to support it and was an indication of the special value Loch Ness represented to the economy;
  - assurance was sought that flooding issues, particularly at Slackbuie and Milton of Leys, had been taken into account in determining the site preferences;
  - concern was expressed at the expense of some sources of renewable / green energy sources, particularly for heating homes;
  - there was a desire for legacy sites from previous plans within the older parts of Inverness that had not come forward for development to be reconsidered;
  - assurance was sought that the mix of housing types and sizes on each housing site reflected those required to meet the needs of the Housing Register;
  - the Plan should better promote access to and the quality and attractiveness of the City's waterfront;
  - clarification was offered that the Fort George training area was not likely to be surplus to MoD requirements and that the relevant Economic Development Area text and map in Appendix 1 should reflect this; and
  - the reasons for non-preferring the currently allocated sites north of Tomatin were queried; and
  - assurance was sought and provided that the Plan would come back to the Committee after the consultation period, prior to a final decision.

Following a brief adjournment, Mrs Carmichael, seconded by Mrs Davidson, **moved** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr Gowans, seconded by Ms Knox, moved as an **amendment** to accept the recommendations as detailed in the report with the exception of IN85 remaining designated as Greenspace as cited in the current Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan.

Mr Jarvie, seconded by Mr Smith, moved as a **second amendment**, to accept the recommendations as detailed in the report with the exception of an additional Hinterland consultation option to limit the southern reach of the Hinterland to a boundary of approximately of the C1068 road through Daviot and the C1056 to the north east, with a transition to housing in the countryside south of this.

The Clerk explained that although usual practice was to vote two amendments against one another, in this instance, in accordance with Standing Order 26, as the amendments related to separate issues within the report, they would each be voted against the motion.

On a vote being taken between Mrs Carmichael's motion and Mr Gowan's amendment, the votes were cast as follows:-

**Motion:** Mr Balfour, Mrs Caddick, Miss Campbell, Mrs Carmichael, Mrs Davidson, Mr Gray, Mr Macpherson, Mrs McAllister, Mrs Robertson, Mr Ross

**Amendment:** Mr Boyd, Mr Brown, Mrs Campbell-Sinclair, Mr Gowans, Mr Jarvie, Ms Knox, Mrs MacKenzie, Mr MacWilliam, Mr Smith

**Abstentions:** None

Mrs Carmichael's **MOTION** was carried by 10 votes to 9.

On a vote being taken between Mrs Carmichael's motion and Mr Jarvie's amendment, the votes were cast as follows

**Motion:** Mr Balfour, Mr Brown, Mrs Caddick, Miss Campbell, Mrs Carmichael, Mrs Davidson, Mr Gowans, Mr Gray, Mr Macpherson, Mr MacWilliam, Mrs McAllister, Mrs Robertson, Mr Ross

**Amendment:** Mr Boyd, Mr Jarvie, Mrs MacKenzie, Mr Smith

**Abstentions:** Mrs Campbell-Sinclair, Ms Knox

Mrs Carmichael's **MOTION** was carried by 13 votes to 4, with 2 abstentions.

## Decision

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to include the verbal update provided by officers that:-
  - a. the Inverness Settlement Development Area white boundary as shown on the maps on pages 103, 109, 117 and 122 of Appendix 1 was correct, not the boundary shown on the higher resolution maps on pages 186 to 189;
  - b. that an additional site 115, The Tower, Westhill had been erroneously omitted from Appendix 1 but properly assessed and therefore should be included in the published Main Issues Report as a Non-Preferred site;
- ii. **AGREED** the Appendix 1 reference to the need for traffic management measures in Ardersier High Street should be strengthened given the proposed Economic Development Area designation at Fort George and the traffic implications that a change of use of that site could have;
- iii. **AGREED** the Plan should better promote access to and the quality and attractiveness of the City's waterfront;
- iv. **AGREED** the Fort George training area was not likely to be surplus to MoD requirements and that the relevant Economic Development Area text and map in Appendix 1 should reflect this;
- v. **APPROVED** the Main Issues Report (as applicable to this committee area) to be published for public consultation, accepting that a number of minor presentational and typographical changes will be made prior to publication;
- vi. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in paragraph 6.1 of this report; and
- vii. **NOTED** the important role that the plan will play in addressing the Climate & Ecological Emergency, economic recovery, and in taking forward the Council's agreed Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy recently submitted to Scottish Government.

**6. Inverness Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis**

**a) Financial Monitoring and Capital Project Report  
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail agus Pròiseactan Calpa**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/26/20 dated 5 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

In particular, it was advised that the external fabric works on the Town House was progressing well and would be concluded as soon as possible. Also, the Victorian Market project would commence in January, 2021.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the financial monitoring report to 30 September 2020; and that overall expenditure was within agreed budgets; and
- ii. the current status of capital projects.

**b) Grant Applications over £10,000  
Iartasan Tabhartais thar £10,000**

**Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item as a family member was an employee of High Life Highland and would not participate if the High Life Highland application was discussed or voted on.**

**The undernoted Members declared a non-financial interest in this item for the reasons listed but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude their involvement in the discussion:**

**Mrs I MacKenzie and Mr J Gray – as regular attendees at Crown Church  
Mr A Graham – as a family member was a volunteer with Blysthwood Care  
Mr A Jarvie – as a Director of High Life Highland  
Mrs C Caddick – as a member of Inshes Community Association**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/27/20 dated 3 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

In this connection, there had been circulated separately a copy of supporting documentation as Booklet A.

In particular, the recommended funding for Inshes Community Association towards Inshes Scooter and Wheeled Sports Park was welcomed and was very positive for that area of Inverness.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the following applications for funding:-

- a) Inshes Community Association – £30,000
- b) Crown Church Inverness. Church of Scotland - £30,000

- c) Blythswood Care - £20,000
- d) Merkinch Local Nature Reserve Boardwalk - £22,500

and **AGREED** to refuse the application from High Life Highland for £10,300.

**7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020  
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2020 gu 30 Sultain 2020**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/28/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

In particular, reference was made to the significant increase in Tenancy offers refused and given that it was important to understand why Tenancy offers were refused, it was requested that further information on this be submitted in the next report to the Committee. It was explained that the general reasons related to changes in circumstances compared to people's applications or their housing needs had changed. Also, the increase was also partly due to the backlog in housing allocations.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020; and
- ii. that further information in relation to the reasons for the significant increase in Tenancy offers refused would be included in the next report.

**8. Inverness Area Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2021-2022  
Prògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 21-22**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/29/20 dated 3 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to Inverness Area as set out at 5.7;
- ii. **NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Inverness Area 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 1;
- iv. **NOTED** the position relating the current year HRA Capital Programme; and
- v. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme would continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee.

**Due to technical issues, Mr G Ross took the Chair during the following item and for the remainder of the meeting (excluding items 10 and 11 which had been taken earlier in the day)**

**9. Area Structures Report 2019/20  
Aithisg Structaran Sgìre 2019/20**



There had been circulated Report No CIA/30/20 dated 1 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the Leader of the Council referred to a wooden bridge with no sides near the substation on the road past Auchterawe. She requested that it be inspected and the findings reported to her.

Detailed discussion took place on the Infirmary Bridge, during which the following main issues were raised:-

- the bridge was iconic and of historic significance as well as being an important active travel route for locals and visitors;
- it appeared to be a question of when, rather than if, the bridge would close;
- it was requested that the required works outlined in the report be scoped out so that detailed invitations to tender were ready to be issued as soon as the opportunity arose;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the bridge was included in both the general and principal inspection programmes. It had recently undergone a principal inspection and would be subject to monthly inspections going forward to ensure there was no significant deterioration;
- immediate action was necessary to prevent further deterioration and it was suggested that it be recommended to the full Council on 17 December 2020 that capital funding be allocated to allow the required works to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity. However, other Members were of the view that a recommendation to Council was not the best way forward and suggested that a Members' briefing take place as proposed in the report. It was important to make haste but in a measured and careful manner, and a package of funding needed to be put in place from various sources;
- it was emphasised that it was a Council bridge, not a Common Good asset;
- it having been queried whether the required works were a "sticking plaster" and the same issues were likely to arise again in a few years, it was explained that 20 to 25 years appeared to be the length of time between major repairs on a bridge of that sort;
- information having been sought on the cost of a replacement bridge for comparison purposes, the Chair suggested that this be provided at the proposed Members' briefing;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that a variety of potential external funding sources, including Historic Environment Scotland, were being explored;
- it was necessary to repair the bridge in a way that maintained its original appearance as much as possible; and
- there were other bridges in and around the Ness Islands and it was suggested that they could be audited and included in any potential funding package.

In responding to the points raised, the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment explained that, whilst the Infirmary Bridge was important to Inverness, within the overall Council context there were a range of other bridge repairs that might be seen as equally or more important, particularly given that the Infirmary Bridge was pedestrian only. It was emphasised that officers were committed to putting together a funding package that would deliver the required repairs and regular reports would be provided to the Committee which it was hoped would alleviate Members' concerns.

Following discussion, Mr G Ross, seconded by Mrs M Davidson, **moved** the recommendations in the report.

As an **amendment**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr C Smith, moved that the Committee request the Council to agree that capital funding be allocated to allow repair to be undertaken as soon as possible and prevent a snowballing repair bill.

On a vote being taken, the **motion** received 13 votes and the **amendment** received 5 votes, with no abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

Mr I Brown, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mrs M Davidson, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Gray, Ms E Knox, Mr D Macpherson, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs E McAllister, Mrs T Robertson and Mr G Ross.

**For the Amendment:**

Mr B Boyd, Mr A Graham, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie and Mr C Smith.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the general contents of the Structures Report; and
- ii. the recent deterioration of the Infirmary Bridge and the implications of the deterioration and consequential maintenance work urgently required.

It was further **NOTED** that updates on the Infirmary Bridge would be provided to the Committee in due course.

**10. Community Wellbeing and Recovery – Related Projects  
Mathas agus Ath-shlànachadh Coimhearsnachd – Pròiseactan  
Buntainneach**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/31/20 dated 10 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment, and the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- Officers were thanked for the report, which contained feedback from recent workshops held with Members;
- reference was made to the unstable economic situation many individuals and businesses were facing as a result of the Covid-19 crisis and it was suggested some of the Common Good Fund underspend be held back for 2021;
- concern was expressed that the proposed £20k for a rebranding / marketing campaign was insufficient to achieve suitable outcomes. Investment in a longer term, more comprehensive 6-month strategic campaign was suggested, though would require significantly more money and planning;
- the Inverness Events Manager was retiring and was thanked for his valued contribution to many events and wished well for the future;
- noting that the underspent funds had been for events, arts and entertainment, it was suggested that they should be used to support struggling artists and musicians;

- concern was expressed about the process being used to re-allocate the underspend, the late issuing of the report, and the lack of detail on the proposals. Attention was drawn to the role of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee to scrutinise detailed applications for Common Good Funds. It was proposed the applications therefore be referred to a special meeting of the Sub-Committee, with any over £10k being referred back to the City of Inverness and Area Committee, in accordance with Standing Orders. However, in relation to the proposed award of (up to) £30,000 to MFR Mission Christmas, it was acknowledged that there was a need to determine this award before Christmas and, as the Committee was broadly supportive of this in principle, it was suggested power be delegated to the Inverness City Area Manager to make the award, subject to the unanimous agreement of all Members of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee. It was also pointed out that the Common Good Fund Sub-Committee had many more applications than there were funds available and the projects detailed in the report should be considered alongside other applications;
- reference was made to the considerable challenges facing the city centre, including the poor maintenance of some buildings and the problem of absent landlords. Various projects that were ongoing at present to address some of the issues;
- in response to queries, it was explained that the intention was for the £40,000 referred to in the report to create a grant budget to which third sector organisations could apply to support specific projects and activities which would be managed by the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee and this had been a proposed outcome of the Members' workshop; and
- raising awareness was not considered a sufficiently specific outcome for a campaign to tackle discrimination, which should detail a more specific behaviour change.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the feedback from the workshop with Inverness groups and the key issues and challenges identified;
- ii. **NOTED** the update on the ongoing review of events and festivals and the wider arts and that a paper will be presented to the February committee on a new approach and programme for going forward;
- iii. **NOTED** the update on City Centre infrastructure projects identified in the August paper and how it is proposed to progress these; and
- iv. **AGREED** the applications detailed in the report recommendations be referred back to the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee, to be assessed and scrutinised in the usual manner, with applications over £10k being recommended to the City of Inverness and Area Committee for approval in accordance with the Common Good Fund standing orders, with the exception of the proposed award of (up to) £30,000 to MFR Mission Christmas, for which, due to the necessity of considering this before Christmas, power would be delegated to the Inverness City Area Manager to make the award, subject to the unanimous agreement of all Members of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee.

**Additional Item – Covid-19 Inverness City Recovery – Rose Street Multi-Storey Car Park – Tarrif Adjustment**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/34/20 dated 12 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:

- the proposal to offer two hours of free parking was welcomed to encourage people to shop in the city centre; and
- concern was expressed that in order to make the proposal cost-neutral, the 3-12 hour tariff had been increased slightly, making it comparable to the Eastgate car park tariff, and might cause people to go to the Eastgate parking instead. A summary was provided of the method and reasoning behind the proposed temporary price structure.

The Committee **NOTED** the amended Tariff schedule that has a cost neutral impact on service budgets and the decision to implement the Tariff adjustments to be taken by the Executive Chief officer, Infrastructure and Environment under delegated powers.

## 11. CCTV- Public Space City CCTV System

There had been circulated Reissued Report No CIA/32/20 with changes made to paragraph 4.2 and 4.10 of the original report dated 9 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Environment and Infrastructure, the Inverness Area Commander and Police Scotland.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the usefulness of CCTV as a deterrent was highlighted, therefore it would be helpful if public awareness of the cameras could be increased, including their mention in any crime-related press releases;
- in response to a request for regular reports on the functionality of the CCTV system and future investment required, a report was due to be submitted to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in early 2021. It was important faults were reported early and urgently addressed;
- attention was drawn to the safety benefits of CCTV and the importance of having modern cameras in good working order. A rolling refresh programme was suggested within the City Wards;
- it was hoped Members would be able to visit Burnett Road Police Station to view the CCTV camera feeds;
- stakeholder input should be sought, with particular mention of Community Councils;
- it would be helpful to recommence the annual submission of a report on CCTV to the Community Safety Partnership; and
- information was sought and provided on the level of communication and joint working with the company who managed the CCTV system and arrangements for organising repairs.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the repair and improvement works undertaken to repair damage sustained by electrical storms and through works by statutory undertakers;
- ii. **NOTED** the outcomes achieved by the Inverness CCTV System as reported by Police Scotland; and

- iii. **AGREED** the proposal that a report on the options for development of public space CCTV (both in Inverness and the Highlands), with updates on the operation of the City CCTV system, is presented to the City Area Committee.
- iv. **NOTED** a report would be submitted to the Economy and infrastructure Committee on the functionality of CCTV cameras and future investment requirements;
- v. **AGREED** to give consideration to the creation of a rolling refresh programme for CCTV systems within the City Wards to ensure they are maintained; and
- vi. **AGREED** consideration be given to recommencing the annual submission of a report on CCTV within the City Wards to the Community Safety Partnership.

## 12. Town Centre Fund

There had been circulated Report No CIA/33/20 dated 10 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- last year there had been some confusion as to what constituted a town centre in terms of the Scottish Government's criteria and information was sought as to whether that had been clarified to ensure that projects were not rejected for an administrative reason;
- support was expressed for Option 3, as recommended in the report, and the need for a short timeframe for applications was emphasised;
- it was queried whether applications had to be for new projects or whether existing projects that had run out of funding were eligible;
- the inclusion of Ardersier in the list of eligible settlements was welcomed and it was queried whether Milton of Leys included Inshes, which was in the same locality. Likewise, it was queried whether Westhill included Cradlehall and whether Inverness Campus fell under the eligible settlements; and
- information was sought on the mechanism for making an application.

In responding to the points raised, the Regeneration and Employment Team Leader explained that there was a high degree of flexibility in terms of eligibility and it would be for Members to determine what the final projects were. There would be a light-touch project proposal pro forma and there were three key criteria, namely, it must be capital, deliverable within the specified timescale and in or adjacent to one of the identified localities.

The Committee **AGREED** that a call for projects be issued as soon as possible and that a Special Meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee be convened to consider submissions and agree which projects would benefit from Town Centre Fund investment.

## 13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated various Minutes for noting or approval as appropriate.

In relation to the Minutes of the City of Inverness Area Committee on 27 August 2020, it was commented that item 7 – City Recovery – did not mention the £341k underspend from the Events and Festivals Budget. Similarly, the amount of funding that had been secured to implement measures to reduce bus traffic on

Margaret Street and Academy Street (£442,855) had not been specified. It was also suggested that it would helpful to provide officers' names as well as their titles.

The Committee otherwise:-

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes of the City of Inverness Area Committee held on 27 August 2020;
- ii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Victorian Market Stakeholder Group held on 29 September 2020;
- iii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 17 August 2020;
- iv. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Inverness Common Good Fund Grants Sub-Committee held on 2 November 2020; and
- v. **NOTED** the Minutes of the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub-Group held on 21 September 2020, 8 October 2020, and 9 November 2020.

The meeting ended at 6.35 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 25 November 2020 at 11.30 am.

### Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A MacInnes
Mr B Allan	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Balfour	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr J Bruce	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Ms K Currie	Mrs M Paterson
Mr C Fraser	Mr I Ramon
Mr R Gale	Mr A Rhind
Mr J Gordon	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Henderson (Chair)	

### Non-Members also present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Finlayson	

### In attendance:

Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

### Also in attendance:

Ms R Clarke, Local Development Officer, Applecross Community Company  
 Ms S Viitanen, Local Development Officer, Applecross Community Company  
 Mr O Kilbride, Chair, Applecross Community Company  
 Mr D Wilson, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

### Mr A Henderson in the Chair

### Business

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D MacLeod.

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

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

Item 4ii – Mr A Henderson (non-financial)

### 3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair highlighted the following items of good news:-

- Martin MacDougall, a Street Cleaning Operative in Inverness City Centre, had won the Stagecoach Highland Community Hero Award and had gone on to win the National Stagecoach Community Hero award in recognition of the work he had done to support local children by providing them with free colouring books during lockdown.
- Six apprentice mechanics had finished their training and received their certificate:
  - Elliot Geddes, Wick
  - Alick Elrick, Brora
  - Kai Campbell, Fort William
  - Kyle Dempster, Fort William
  - Jon Hutchinson, Inverness
  - Scott Matheson, Inverness

A seventh mechanic, Gregor Rose from the Aviemore workshop, had completed his training a year early and had come to the Council Chamber last year to be presented with his certificate.

- Susan Messem, a trainee Food Safety Officer based in Sutherland, had passed her professional exams in August for the Higher Certificate in Food Premises Inspection. She would be looking to undertake additional qualifications in 2021 on food labelling and composition.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

### 4. Supporting Community Action and Involvement A' Cur Taic ri Gnìomhachd is Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd

#### i. **Presentation: Applecross Community Company** **Taisbeanadh: Companaidh Coimhearsnachd na Comraich**

Roslyn Clarke, Local Development Officer, Applecross Community Company (ACC) gave a presentation on the work of ACC, the benefits it brought and what more the Council could do in support.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed the presentation, which the Chair confirmed would be circulated to all Members, and commended ACC for the work it had done in response to Covid and the number of projects taking place in the community;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Hartfield House was now a hostel run by The Applecross Trust;
- information was sought, and provided, on the number of children in the community;



- the Council's Tourism Committee was wrestling with the issues that lay ahead in terms of the anticipated increase in the number of visitors to Highland over the next few years and information was sought on the problems that had been experienced in Applecross and what was meant by a regional approach, the need for which had been referred to during the presentation. Detailed discussion ensued on issues including wild camping, waste, pressure on local facilities and infrastructure, the potential for slow and sustainable tourism, the need to educate visitors at the first point of contact, the need to strike a balance in terms of charging for parking etc and the impact of the North Coast 500 on the tourism market, including the environmental impact as a result of increased cleaning/laundry services. The Vice Chair of the Tourism Committee undertook to liaise with ACC separately on these issues;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that it would be helpful if three-phase electricity was extended to Applecross, particularly as this would enable light industry to take place;
- the work taking place in terms of local job retention and creation was commended;
- the R100 project was what would eventually delivery broadband to the community;
- an invitation was extended, and accepted, to deliver the presentation to the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Committee;
- views were sought, and provided, on how to address the issue of volunteer fatigue;
- reference having been made to the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Local Development Officer scheme, the importance of working with partners was emphasised;
- it was necessary to take inclement weather into account when investing in roads and passing places;
- affordable housing would keep families in the area and make Applecross even more of a vibrant community than it already was, and the work taking place in that regard was welcomed; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the means of charging for the community toilets.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation and that it would be circulated to all Members for information.

**ii. Community Asset Transfer Requests**  
**Iarrtasan Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Trustee of Spean Bridge Village Hall but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No CP/13/20 dated 23 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair, as a Local Member, expressed support for the sale of the car park at Station Road, Corpach, to Kilmallie Community Centre. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that the possibility of implementing parking charges had been explored by the Council and had not been viewed as viable;
- information was sought, and provided, on the measures that were in place to protect the Council against organisations selling community assets for a profit in the future; and
- Members having emphasised the need to expedite the Men's Shed in Maryburgh, it was confirmed that progress was being made and it was anticipated that it would be brought to the Committee in February 2021.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the sale of the car park at Station Road, Corpach to Kilmallie Community Centre for £7,500, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.1 of the report;
  - ii. the sale of Lochinver Mission Centre to Assynt Development Trust for £1, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.2 of the report; and
  - iii. to homologate the decision to clarify the extent of land to be transferred at Spean Bridge Community Centre to Spean Bridge Community Centre SCIO, specifically that this was to include the associated car park.
- iii. **Progress report on the Framework for Community Participation and Involvement**  
**Aithisg adhartais mu Fhrèam-obrach airson Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No CP/14/20 dated 9 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report and expressed thanks to the Head of Policy and all those involved in the engagement work;
- many of the issues raised were pre-existing but Covid had brought them to the fore and it was necessary to take them forward and make Highland communities better places as a result;
- some of the issues raised were significant and it was questioned whether the Council was in a position to address them. It was necessary to manage expectations and it would be helpful to take some practical small steps towards fulfilling some of the larger ambitions outlined in the report;
- information was sought, and provided, on how it was proposed to follow up on the work taking place. It was added that the pandemic had uncovered some deficiencies in the Council's processes and, when it was over, it was necessary to take stock and make sure that preparations were in place in the event a similar situation arose in the future;
- information was sought, and provided, on what resilience plans looked like in light of Covid and what support could be offered to communities to develop them and ensure a consistent standard;

- some of the most vulnerable people did not engage with services or statutory bodies and information was sought, and provided, on how it was proposed to help them;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the work set out in the report was being shared at both strategic Community Planning Partnership level and local Community Partnership level;
- planning for a pandemic was similar to planning for other emergency scenarios such as a major power cut or an extreme weather event and it was necessary to have processes in place so that there was no delay at the beginning in terms of mobilising volunteers, distributing supplies etc; and
- information was sought, and provided, on what engagement and information sharing was taking place NHS Highland and third sector organisations on the feedback gathered on mental health provision.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the feedback from engagement work undertaken to date in sections 5 and 6 of the report;
- ii. the work planned and currently underway and that an update report on further outcomes from the various engagement strands would be presented to the next meeting of the Communities and Place Committee; and
- iii. key areas for action and development as a result of the feedback received so far.

**iv. North Kessock Bottle Banks – Petition and Response**

**Athchuinge air a cur a-steach a thaobh a bhith a' suidheachadh bhancaichean bhotal ann an Ceasag a Tuath, Siorrachd Rois**

There had been circulated Report No CP/15/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

In introducing the report, the Head of Policy highlighted that, whilst not yet validated, a petition had yesterday been received requesting that the bottle banks be moved back to their original location. This demonstrated the strength of feeling on both sides.

The Chair added that it was important to take into account the capacity of the Election Office to administer the proposed community ballot. Given that a by-election was scheduled to take place in March 2021 and the Scottish Parliament Election was in May, it was proposed that the community ballot be held in January 2021.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Local Members summarised the background to the situation which had divided the community and expressed concern that the petition would divide it further, a counter-petition having already been received as highlighted by the Head of Policy. Doubt was expressed about the proposed community ballot, constituents having questioned whether the Council would be able to reinstate the bottle banks, if that was the finding of the ballot, when it had not been able to do so previously. However, the situation needed to be resolved and support was therefore expressed for the ballot subject to two

conditions, namely that prior to the ballot an attempt be made to mediate a solution using an external mediator who would engage with all parties, and that the outcome of the ballot be enforced, with a court order being obtained if necessary to ensure that the bottle bank was installed and protected at the agreed site;

- it was important that the will of the majority was upheld and that those who lost a democratic vote accepted it;
- glass was one of the best items for recycling and was seen as part of the circular economy. However, one of the downsides was the noise created at bottle banks and reference was made to the stipulations placed on hotels and bars in terms of not using bottle banks late at night;
- the decision of the public meeting in September 2017 should have been final and disappointment was expressed that the matter had been allowed to persist and had come to a strategic committee to be resolved;
- concern was expressed regarding the assertion in the petition that, if the bottle banks were returned to their original location, there would continue to be peaceful protest and letters of complaint;
- the situation had been and continued to be stressful for all concerned and there was merit in the suggestion of a mediator;
- Members praised the coastal garden developed by the North Kessock Ticket Office Project;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the proposed ballot would use the North Kessock Primary School catchment area which included Charleston; and
- concern was expressed regarding the amount of time and public money that had been spent on this matter, and it was requested that information be provided on the total costs incurred.

Thereafter, clarification having been provided on the Council's petition process and the potential for external mediation, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the petition received regarding bottle banks in North Kessock;
- ii. **NOTED** the background to the current situation; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a community ballot be undertaken on the future location of the bottle banks to enable a final conclusion to be reached and enforced, subject to external mediation taking place beforehand if possible.

## 5. Update on Humanitarian and Welfare Needs and Support Fios às ùr mu fheumalachdan is taic daonnachdail is sochair

There had been circulated Report No CP/16/20 dated 9 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chairman reminded Members of a recent Council press release which had detailed the various funds available;
- eventually a time would come to review how effective the support had been, especially during the first six weeks of the Covid pandemic;
- a Member contended that the Covid Discretionary Budget had been managed poorly and that scrutiny of the decision-making process was being hampered as the Member Gold Covid Group minutes had still not been made available. At the

peak of the pandemic applications to relieve Covid hardship had been refused and yet there was still money unspent which, later on the agenda, was now proposed to be used for play parks. It was important to ensure that money intended for hardship relief and to stimulate communities to help each other was used only for that purpose;

- the elderly and vulnerable were spending more time in their homes and were therefore using more fuel to heat their homes and it was suggested that the UK Government could be lobbied to increase the winter fuel payment. Alternatively, it was queried if the Council itself could supplement the amount;
- it was queried if the Covid Ward Budget could be rolled over into the next financial year and clarified this would be discussed under item 11 later on the agenda;
- some Wards had spent a significant proportion of their Covid Ward Budget and it was disappointing that this had not been the experience across all Wards; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Scottish Welfare Fund was administered by the Council's Welfare team.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update on humanitarian and welfare needs response across Highland, including:
  - the focus on food and fuel insecurity for the second wave of covid-19;
  - the new supports in place for people who had to self-isolate under Test and Protect;
  - the local hub support arrangements in place to respond to food insecurity requests and should a local outbreak occur;
  - the different supports in place to address financial insecurity;
  - the supports in place to address fuel insecurity; and
  - the supports in place related to mental health and wellbeing;
- ii. **NOTED** the new roles Local Authorities now had in supporting the Test and Protect process;
- iii. **NOTED** the Connecting Scotland programme and the number of devices that had come to Highland to support digital inclusion; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Chair of the Committee write to Scottish Government and Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations requesting that employability clients on low incomes, disabled people on low incomes and older people on low incomes are identified as eligible for the third phase of the Connecting Scotland Programme.

## 6. Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Highland 2021-2024 Plana Ionadail Smàlaidh is Teasairginn airson na Gàidhealtachd

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

On behalf of the Local Senior Officer for Highland, Derek Wilson, there had been circulated the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Highland 2021-2024. Undoubtedly the pandemic had affected what the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) could deliver and this was reflected in the Plan. It was likely therefore that it would be

reviewed during the three year period of the Plan. He went on to highlight the main elements and the seven local priorities.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- deliberate and wild fires had increased this year, especially over the summer months, and it was hoped the Council and the SFRS could work together to highlight the need to dispose of disposable barbecues properly and that campfires could not be lit randomly. This had further been exacerbated when recycling centres had been closed and individuals with a build-up of material had taken to burning rubbish which had subsequently got out of control;
- with more community defibrillators now in place it would also be useful if the SFRS could train people in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). In this regard, and in response to a question, it was confirmed that a register of the location of community defibrillators was maintained by the Scottish Ambulance Service;
- a plea was made for the road safety virtual reality initiative to be rolled out to rural areas;
- information as to the retirement age for full-time and retained fire fighters was requested as was the possibility of retired full-time firefighters returning to assist as volunteers;
- the current recruitment campaign was welcomed and it was confirmed new banners and adverts had been procured and every attempt was made with communities to encourage applicants;
- firefighters had previously needed to respond to fires within a specified time but, especially in rural and remote areas, this deterred many from applying and a more flexible approach was welcomed;
- some might be deterred from applying as a firefighter due to the requirement to take two weeks off from their permanent job for the initial training and a more flexible approach needed to be adopted;
- as a result of Covid it was queried if there had been an increase in individuals joining the SFRS. In response, there was no significant increase although more had wanted to take an active part in the community. However, the pandemic had delayed medicals for Retained Duty System firefighters;
- unwanted fire alarms signals could not always be avoided, despite the best intentions of the property owners, but the problem was those who didn't engage to drive these down; and
- appreciation was expressed for the scope of the work undertaken by full-time and retained fire fighters and the Local Senior Officer, in welcoming these comments, confirmed that he would relay them, recognising the morale booster it was for the staff.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Highland 2021-2024.

## **7. Support for exporting businesses in preparation for EU exit Taic airson ghnòthachasan às-mhalairt ag ullachadh airson an AE fhàgail**

There had been circulated Report No CP/17/20 dated 13 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the fees proposed were significantly lower than those set by the Council previously so it was queried how sustainable the fee level was and if there was any scope, in the future, to reduce it to support exporting businesses; and
- the additional requirements that would be placed on the Environmental Health Service from 1 January 2020 would place further strain on officers and it was important to ensure there was capacity and for a contingency plan to be prepared should the need arise. It was vital that officers had the resources they required to be able to fulfil the Council's statutory duties.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work undertaken by officers to date to prepare for supporting exporting businesses to the EU;
- NOTED** the Environmental Health Team's role in Export Health Certification;
- AGREED** revised fees for Export Health Certificates from 1 January 2021 as set out in Appendix 2, drawing on work underway nationally;
- AGREED** to delegate authority to the ECO Communities and Place to set a fee for Supporting Attestations, following consultation with the ECO Resources and Finance and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities and Place Committee;
- AGREED** to delegate authority to the ECO Communities and Place the flexibility to further revise the fees for Export Health Certificates following consultation with the ECO Resources and Finance and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities and Place Committee in the event there were any developments regarding EU Exit which would benefit the Council and local businesses (eg a national fee being proposed) before the mid-year review proposed below; and
- AGREED** a review of the demand for Export Health Certificates for EU trade and non-EU trade for the first six months of 2021 to commence in July 2021 and be reported to the following Communities and Place Committee in August 2021 along with any revision of fees if required.

## 8. Licensing of Residential Caravan Sites Ceadachd làraich charabhanaichean còmhnaidheach

There had been circulated Report No CP/18/20 dated 16 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- there was a degree of disparity between Highland Council and other Local Authorities in relation to fees and it was suggested that the fee for one unit be reduced but that it be increased for 11-20 and 21-40 units. However, the Chairman drew Members attention to how the fees were calculated and the intention was that they would cover costs;
- people who lived full time in caravans were quite often vulnerable and it was hoped this licensing would offer greater regulation;
- it was confirmed that the regulations applied to sites where caravans were used as the main residence of occupiers and vacating them for short periods would not change their nature; and
- in response to a question, the position regarding the application of Council Tax to residential caravans would be provided to Councillor D Macpherson.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the licensing system for mobile home sites with permanent residents;
- ii. **NOTED** the proposed timescale and phasing for implementation in the Highland area over the next 12 months;
- iii. **APPROVED** the fees for Residential Caravan site licence applications for 2020/21 and 2021/22 as set out in the report; and
- iv. **APPROVED** that cost recovery for enforcement action be based on the appropriate productive hourly rate for the grade of officer taking the action with full cost recovery proposed unless it cost more to pursue the cost or where the site owner had made their best efforts to comply with any enforcement action.

## **9. Burial and Cremation Policy and Management Rules Poileasaidh agus Riaghailtean Stiùiridh Tìodhlacaidh is Losgaidh-chuirp**

There had been circulated Report No CP/19/20 dated 16 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report and expressed appreciation to all staff involved in burials and cremations for the understanding and compassion shown to families. The need to recognise and encourage staff was emphasised, and particular reference was made to grave diggers who might undertake multiple burials in a day, often in difficult weather conditions;
- information was sought, and provided, on how the rules would be enforced in a way that was sensitive and specific to each bereaved family's circumstances, and what personnel would be used in this engagement;
- it was requested that a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee on the how the final management rules had been received following implementation;
- it was questioned whether the rules requiring prior notice of any proposals to play music, including bagpipes and drums, and of a large number of attendees, which was not defined, were necessary. In addition, it was queried whether the rule prohibiting dogs, with the exception of guide dogs, in burial grounds was going to be enforced;
- in relation to the crematorium, the need to be user-friendly and flexible was emphasised. In particular, concern was expressed regarding access being granted only ten minutes prior to a funeral commencing, with attendees being kept outside even if there was not another service beforehand;
- it was queried whether the rule relating to bringing into the crematorium any object that might be considered dangerous included the customary 'Sgian Dubh' when in Highland dress;
- information was sought, and provided, on the cost difference between erecting a head stone in Nairn and Inverness;
- it was imperative that the Management Rules were communicated to the public, one suggestion being a booklet that undertakers could give to families;
- the Council had limited resources and it was necessary to consider how it was going to be able to deliver the outcomes of the review; and
- consideration should be given to reducing the Council's fees, which it was contended were too high.

Thereafter, the Committee:-



- i. **NOTED** that the Council undertook around 1500 burials and 1200 cremations a year across the Highland area. The Council currently had 268 burial grounds and operated Inverness Crematorium, located at Kilvean, Inverness;
- ii. **NOTED** that further amendments might be required to the policy arising from the review undertaken by the Competition and Markets Authority and these would be reported to a future meeting of the Committee;
- iii. **AGREED** the refreshed burial and cremations policy attached at Appendix 1 of the report which addressed the internal audit actions agreed;
- iv. **AGREED** that consultation be undertaken on the updated draft management rules for burials grounds and the Inverness Crematorium as set out in Appendices 2 and 3 of the report, taking into account the points raised during discussion, in keeping with the legislative requirements to consult;
- v. **AGREED** that a report on the outcome of the consultation and the final management rules be considered at the next meeting of the Committee;
- vi. **AGREED** that appropriate guidance and signage be provided to communicate the final management rules; and
- vii. **AGREED** that a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee on the how the final management rules had been received following implementation.

#### **10. Communities and Place Revenue Monitoring Report to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Buidseit airson Cairteal 2 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No CP/20/20 dated 6 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the improved outturn forecast from Q1 with the budget gap forecast to reduce from £4.84m to £3.272m;
- ii. that the budget gap reported was associated mainly with shortfalls in income, disrupted by Covid;
- iii. the achievement of savings was hampered by Covid impacts, although £646k were achieved, a further £330k partially achieved so far and only £71k not achievable this year. Work continued to apportion all savings agreed to the new service structure;
- iv. expenditure controls, including for recruitment, were helping to reduce the budget gap;
- v. ongoing mitigation would include expenditure controls, income recovery and claiming all potential Government grant; and
- vi. an income project to clarify, manage and forecast income better was underway in the service to help reduce risks to the overall budget.

#### **11. Proposals for Covid Ward Funds and Investing in Play Parks Molaidhean airson Maoin Uàird Covid agus Tasgadh ann am Pàircean Cluiche**

There had been circulated Report No CP/21/20 dated 11 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was contended that the Council had failed to maintain its play parks over several years and there was a strong argument to be made for investment so children and young people had somewhere to go. However, the level of Covid Ward Funds had initially, understandably given that the demand was unknown, been set at £500 and this had hampered some community groups, necessitating them to apply repeatedly. The underspend was not therefore to be welcomed as much stronger community capacity could have been established at an earlier stage;
- the Council's dialogue regarding Recovery suggested Covid-19 was in the past but caution was urged as, nine months on from lockdown, restrictions were still in place. Covid Ward Funds should therefore continue for community capacity building. Furthermore, redirecting the Fund for play park maintenance would go little way to addressing the backlog of work required;
- approaches to the Covid Ward Funds varied between Wards, some concentrating on the longer term impacts of Covid such as mental health and unemployment;
- devolving funding for play parks to Area level was to be welcomed and this needed to be made explicit in the recommendations;
- alternative ways to address play park maintenance were suggested including Community Payback; and
- whilst a long-term strategy was undoubtedly required to address play parks, the Covid Ward Funding needed to be directed at supporting the most vulnerable in communities, particularly during the winter months.

The Committee:-

a. **NOTED:-**

- i. the decision made at Council on 1 October 2020 sought the Committee's views in the first instance on investing in play parks for conclusion by the December Council meeting. The Committee's views were sought to report to the December Council meeting;
- ii. that the initial enhanced allocation to Covid Ward Funds had been distributed based on vulnerability to Covid, which took into account ill health and old age indicators, and that this needed to be re-visited given the Council decision on 1 October 2020 and the socio-economic impacts now affecting more communities;
- iii. that a review of the Covid Ward Funds was already planned to adapt to changing circumstances;
- iv. that Ward Members needed to identify and agree through Area Committees what proportion of their fund they wanted to set aside for projects to assist children and adults post Covid, such as contributing to Play Park equipment alongside funding for food and humanitarian assistance so that Ward Managers could administer the fund, with decisions on awards of £10k and over made at Area Committees in keeping with the Scheme of Delegation;
- v. that the Council had a large play estate, with 339 play areas with 2043 individual units of play equipment;
- vi. that the annual budget for play areas was £187,600 and the estimated backlog of repairs and maintenance amounted to £3.436m;
- vii. the options for investing £100k of additional investment and that given the scale of the backlog this investment alone would not make a significant impact on the estate; and

viii. the option to adopt a place-based approach, using local knowledge and community effort and resources alongside Members and staff advice to solve problems together and to identify possibilities for a more sustainable approach to the play estate. There were good practice examples of this approach in Wards already.

\* b. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council meeting in December on the Covid Ward Fund that:-

- i. some level of Covid Ward resource be retained for welfare and humanitarian needs and supporting joint working with community bodies;
- ii. the enhanced award be equalized up as set out in Appendix 2 costing £240k to be funded from the hardship fund that was currently set aside to reduce the budget gap in 2020/21;
- iii. increased flexibility in the fund be permitted by raising the maximum award for community groups from £500 to £1500, removing the restrictions on spend per month and any unspent fund could be carried forward into 2021/22; and
- iv. officers draw up new criteria for Covid hardship grants to ensure that community groups are encouraged to support community resilience activities, including provision of clear communication and defined rationale of reasons for declining applications, and a timely appeals process.

\* c. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council meeting in December that budgets for play park management be devolved to Area Committees in consultation with Wards.

## 12. Fleet Cabhlach

### i. **Operational Fleet Compliance, Policies and Procedures** **Gèilleadh, Poileasaidhean agus Modhan-obrach a' Chabhlaich Obrachaidh**

There had been circulated Report No CP/22/20 dated 16 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the requirements in section 1 relating to the Operator Licence, that the licence was due for renewal in February 2021 and that the Council's performance was currently rated externally as compliant;
- ii. the requirement in section 2 relating to the White Fleet; and
- iii. that the refreshed Fleet policies and procedures reflected legislative requirements and were aligned to the Council's budget.

### ii. **Developing the approach to greening the fleet** **A' leasachadh dòigh-obrach gus an cabhlach a dhèanamh nas uaine**

There had been circulated Report No CP/23/20 dated 12 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the national target for local government to decarbonise its light fleet by 2025 and the Council's target for the region to be carbon neutral by 2025;
- ii. **NOTED** the estimated 8% reduction in emissions arising from fleet vehicles' use of petrol, diesel and gas oil from 2012/13 to 2019/20;
- iii. **NOTED** the progress made to decarbonise travel and fleet to date by:
  - a. reducing staff travel (with staff travel and member costs reduced by 36% between 2017/18 and 2019/20);
  - b. providing car club vehicles as an alternative to grey fleet use;
  - c. reducing fleet numbers;
  - d. reducing leasing costs;
  - e. supporting more efficient use of fleet through route optimisation and telematics, driver behaviour monitoring and training;
  - f. replacement of vehicles where affordable with fully electric small vans and cars;
  - g. training the mechanic workforce to maintain electric vehicles; and
  - h. accessing Scottish Government funding for installing charging points and fleet replacement;
- iv. **NOTED** that links were being made with the feasibility into an Energy from Waste plant including the potential to convert energy generated to hydrogen for Council and other fleet use as part of the development of a hydrogen strategy for the region;
- v. **NOTED** the current higher costs of procuring Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) even with whole life cycle costing, plus charging infrastructure. While costs might fall as technology improved and take up increased, budget provision and external funding were not yet identified to meet decarbonising targets. However, work was underway to quantify the costs for a phased replacement programme and to identify all potential funding sources to inform future budget setting;
- vi. **NOTED** progress reports on further phases of work would come to this Committee and be included in the wider reporting to the Climate Change Working Group; and
- vii. **AGREED** the phased approach proposed to green the fleet by focusing initially on cars and light commercial vehicles building on progress to date and reducing the overall mileage travelled (with service targets set), rightsizing the fleet and replacing vehicles with ULEV alternatives within affordability. An action plan had been attached at Appendix 2 of the report. Later phases would focus on heavy goods vehicles and fleet use by contractors and suppliers.

### 13. Waste Sgudal

#### i. Waste Projects Update

#### Fios às ùr mu phròiseactan airson sgudal a ghluasad is a ghlanadh

There had been circulated Report No CP/24/20 dated 16 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Scottish and Southern Electricity Network had been commissioned to report on the grid connection investment requirements for the potential scale of the Energy from Waste (EfW) facility being considered and Councillor R McWilliam requested sight of the report as soon as it was available; and
- it was reflected that during the Covid-19 pandemic many people had disposed of considerable amounts of rubbish, a resource which could have been used by an EfW facility. The future use of the plant was to be welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED** that:-

- i. the bid preparation and submission stage of the Inverness waste transfer station process would have concluded by the date of this Committee, moving on to the evaluation and recommendation stages thereafter;
  - ii. the tender specification for the Aviemore waste transfer station would be released to the market this month;
  - iii. discussions to identify the most suitable site in Fort William for the waste transfer station requirement were continuing;
  - iv. the next phase of the planned progressive restoration of Seater landfill site would be undertaken during 2020-21;
  - v. specifications were being developed for interim, medium-term waste management contract requirements to take to the market during 2021; and
  - vi. work continued to ascertain the feasibility of progressing a proposal for an energy-from-waste facility.
- ii. Membership of Waste Strategy Working Group  
Ballrachd Buidheann-obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr R MacWilliam would replace Mrs L MacDonald on the Waste Strategy Working Group.

The meeting concluded at 5.05 pm

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit and Scrutiny Committee** held REMOTELY on Thursday, 26 November 2020 at 10.30am.

### Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr R Balfour	Mr S Mackie
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs A MacLean
Mr B Boyd	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Bremner	Mrs M Paterson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr P Saggars
Mrs M Davidson	Mr B Thompson

### Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr A Jarvie
Mr J Finlayson	Mr D Mackay
Mr K Gowans	Mr H Morrison
Mr A Henderson	

### Officials in Attendance:

Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance  
 Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance  
 Ms E Johnston, Corporate Audit & Performance Manager  
 Miss D Sutherland, Corporate Audit Manager  
 Ms S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services  
 Ms R Cleland, Corporate Communications Manager  
 Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property & Facilities Management  
 Ms A MacPherson, Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager  
 Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Development and Infrastructure  
 Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Corporate Resources  
 Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator  
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator  
 Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

### Also in attendance:

Ms J Brown, Engagement Lead, Grant Thornton  
 Mr J Boyd, Audit Director, Grant Thornton

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

**Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair**

## 1. Apologies for Absence

## **Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. External Audit Reports Aithisgean Sgrùdaidh bhon Taobh A-muigh**

There had been circulated the External Audit Reports prepared by the Council's External Auditors (Grant Thornton) and issued since the last Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

During discussion, it was confirmed that the audit would be concluded before the end of 2020. Clarification was also sought and provided on the materiality of any potential changes and it was noted that the General Fund would not be impacted.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the report as circulated.

### **4. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report Ath-bhreithneachaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais**

There had been circulated Report No AS/13/20 dated 16 November 2020 by the Corporate Audit Manager which summarised the final reports issued since the date of the last meeting, together with details of work in progress and other information relevant to the operation of the Internal Audit Section.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- Members thanked staff for the work that had been undertaken during the Covid-19 crisis when many had been diverted to other duties;
- it was possible that some of the information from the review of fleet management arrangements could be helpful to the Council's Redesign Board;
- in relation to procurement, information was sought on the terms of reference to be used for the audit;
- in response to a query on the timelines for the review of the recruitment of a Consultant as the Interim ECO for Education & Learning, it was confirmed that it was intended for this to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in January 2021 on a date to be decided;
- the use of a Gantt Chart chart in future reports to illustrate the audit process should be considered;
- in response to a query about the review of the arrangements for the effective governance of ALEOs and partnerships, the detail of this was still to be scoped; and
- attention was drawn to the importance of taking climate change and carbon clever implications properly into consideration during any review.

During discussion of specific audit reports, the following issues were raised:-

- the LEADER team were commended for their work;
- the issues highlighted in the Collection of School Meals Income audit reflected the cumbersome nature of the variety of procedures and assurance was provided that processes were constantly under review;
- assurance was sought and provided that the issues highlighted by the Workforce Planning and Staffing Arrangements – Teaching review had been corrected and processes tightened, with the error in relation to salary increments having been the result of human error; and
- in relation to the investigation into the administration and use of Self Directed Support (SDS) packages, it was clarified in response to a query that the review had been requested by Health and Social Care management and a more detailed report, including on individual cases, had been provided to them. The review had been brought to the Committee as it was felt there were wider issues to be considered, as reflected in the report recommendations. The Children to Adult Services transition process was highlighted as an area of concern and in response to a request to include Adult Services in the SDS review, this would have to be discussed with NHS Highland, who delivered Adult Services on behalf of the Council. There were ongoing discussions with NHS Highland to work in a more coordinated and joint way, and joint sub-group with NHS Highland was planned to tackle the actions identified by the review. Reference was made to the Scottish Government's paper on the implementation of SDS and to the additional challenges caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Final Reports referred to in Section 4.1 of the report;
- NOTED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at Section 5 of the report and details of progress against the 2020/21 Audit Plan at Appendix 1 to the report;
- AGREED** the Corporate Audit Manager would consider the inclusion of a Gantt chart on the audit process in future reports; and
- AGREED** the Corporate Audit Manager would provide Councillor Bremner with the information on the terms of reference of the standard audit document that would be used in relation to procurement.

**5. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Annual Report on the Scottish Welfare Fund Independent Review Service 2019/20  
Ombudsman Seirbheis Phoblach na h-Alba Ath-sgrùdadh Neo-eisimeileach  
Maoin Sochair na h-Alba 2019/20**

There had been circulated Report No AS/14/20 dated 16 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- the remarkable performance of the team was emphasised, particularly their compassion when working with vulnerable individuals and managing a geographical area that presented many challenges in terms of poverty and deprivation;
- the Service Delivery Team was leading the way in terms of understanding the policy and process of implementation around universal credit and welfare services; and



- it was highlighted that two modern apprenticeships would be provided to Looked After Children and it was emphasised that as Corporate Parents the Highland Council should be able to provide opportunities for work to all looked after children.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**: -

- i. the Council's outstanding performance for processing 99% of SWF applications within the statutory timeframes (1 working day for Crisis Grants and 15 working days for Community Care Grants);
- ii. that from 5,965 SWF applications received by the Highland Council, the SPSO received 8 valid requests for 2nd tier reviews (0.13%) and changed the Council's decisions in 5 cases (0.08%); and
- iii. the pivotal role undertaken by Officers as per paragraph 11.2 of this report.

## **6. Annual Report of Scottish Public Service Ombudsman Cases determined in 2019/20**

### **Bhliadhnaile de Chùisean Ombudsman Seirbheis Phoblach na h-Alba air an dearbhadh ann an 2019/20**

There had been circulated Report No AS/15/20 dated 13 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the outcomes of the SPSO cases; and
- ii. that actions had been taken in response to the Ombudsman's recommendations.

## **7. Members Survey on the Effectiveness of Audit and Scrutiny Committee**

### **Suirbhuidh Bhall mu Èifeachdachd Comataidh an Sgrùdaidh**

There had been circulated Report No AS/16/20 dated 16 November 2020 by the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager.

During discussion, the following main points were raised: -

- the Chair of Audit & Scrutiny Committee was recognised for his good work;
- in welcoming the on-line learning modules and workshops, it was noted that it had been identified within the survey that there was a need for further guidance on how to fulfil roles and this directly related to improving training and development for Members;
- it was agreed to introduce practical examples into the training modules for internal audit, risk and performance management;
- it was noted that Members of the Committee were always encouraged to raise any issues related to the remit of Audit & Scrutiny Committee with either the Chair of the Committee or the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager; and
- it was noted that there was a training and development programme being finalised to address any weaknesses identified through the survey.

Thereafter, the Committee: -

- i. **NOTED** the key findings of the survey;

- ii. **AGREED** that the survey should continue to be conducted annually;
- iii. **NOTED** that training modules on internal audit, risk and performance management were available for online learning; and
- iv. **NOTED** that the overall requirements for training would be finalised through a Corporate Programme of Members Training being finalised in conjunction with Members for 2021/22.

**8. Audit Scotland – Local Government in Scotland Overview, Challenges & Performance 2020**  
**Sgrùdadh Alba – Riaghaltas Ionadail ann an Alba: Foir-shealladh, Dùbhlain & Coileanadh 2020**

There had been circulated Report No AS/17/20 dated 12 November 2020 by the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of examining the headlines of the report in preparation for future budget setting and how to work with CoSLA to get a fair deal;
- essential continued improvement of community empowerment and engagement through the Community Planning Partnership in terms of addressing local challenges and achieving improved outcomes for communities;
- it was noted that the Leader of the Council would investigate the possibility of the Leader of the Opposition attending CoSLA meetings;
- it was suggested that a local case study should be selected within the Council with a view to being self-analytical and self-critical in terms of the challenges that Audit Scotland were giving to Local Authorities;
- the need to direct and target budget spend in order to maximise output for longer-term solutions was highlighted;
- clarification was sought and received in relation to ‘pensioner’ status;
- it was suggested that the Council should consider means of increasing younger staff levels;
- there was concern in regard to demographic and social changes which were creating increased demand during a period when budgets were under considerable pressure;
- direct communication with Audit Scotland was essential in relation to any future changes;
- information was sought and provided regarding the statement which had been made on ‘a lack of investment in management and leadership capacity’ as it was felt that this was a very generic comment;
- in response to a query, it was noted that ‘relative poverty’ was defined as ‘those having a minimum amount to sustain participation in the local community’;
- it was agreed that guidance on how to access the Brexit Vulnerabilities Index should be circulated to Members; and
- it was noted that national external audit reports should be taken to the relevant Strategic Committee or full Council for consideration.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the national report in the local context as circulated.

It was also **AGREED** that guidance on how to access the Brexit Vulnerabilities Index should be circulated to all Members.

The meeting ended at 12:34pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair)** held remotely on **Monday, 30 November, 2020 at 10.30 am.**

### Present:

Mr J Finlayson  
Mr J Gordon

Mr C MacLeod  
Mr C Munro

### Participating Officials:

Mr Malcolm Macleod, ECO Infrastructure and Environment  
Mr Willie MacKinnon, Ward Manager  
Ms Jennifer Bruce, Principal Housing Officer  
Mr Don Esson, Education Quality Improvement Manager (West)  
Mr Gordon MacDonald, Road Operations Manager  
Mr Alan Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer  
Ms Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

### Also in Attendance:

Mr Stuart MacPherson, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)  
Mr Mike Colliar, Group Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

**Mr J Gordon – Cathraiche (Chair)**

### Preliminaries

The Chair paid tribute to David Noble, who had sadly passed away at the weekend. A keen runner, Mr Noble had been Chief Executive of Skye and Lochalsh District Council for 21 years, and the Chief Executive of the Highland Tourist Board, and more recently an independent facilitator for the Sir Lewis Ritchie report. He would be sadly missed by all.

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

Item 7 – Callum Munro (financial)

#### 3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED**, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 31 August, 2020, which had been approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 10/11 September, 2020.

#### **4. Highlands and Islands Enterprise Presentation Taisbeanadh Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean**

Mr Stuart MacPherson, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) gave a presentation on HIE's role in economic recovery in Skye, Lochaber and Wester Ross.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:

- tourism and hospitality accounted for around 32% of jobs in the area;
- in relation to the ambitious programme of house and school construction, information was sought and provided on the impact of Covid-19 on the sourcing and transportation of resources;
- further information was provided on the digital enablement grant, which was a blend of capital and expert support for companies, with examples provided;
- the investment grant scheme for young companies was welcomed as they might struggle in the current circumstances more than more established companies;
- the localism agenda and the developments as part of the Skye & Raasay Investment and Infrastructure Plan were welcomed, including the plans to tackle inequalities. It was suggested that in addition to Portree and Uig, developments in Broadford be added;
- the importance of diversification was emphasised and examples were provided;
- a brief summary was provided of the current situation in relation to onshore developments at Uig harbour;
- reference was made to increases in universal credit claims and unemployment, although some of these could be people on furlough. More information on the situation would be available in Spring 2021 when the furlough schemes came to an end; and
- the importance of fast broadband for rural areas was emphasised and a brief summary was provided on the roll out of full fibre broadband and the voucher scheme for rural areas.

The Committee thanked Mr Macpherson and his colleagues at HIE for their work and **NOTED** the presentation.

#### **5. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No SR/8/20 by the Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:

- the general low level of incidences reported was welcomed;
- information was sought and provided on efforts being undertaken to increase diversity among SFRS staff, with particular reference to the need to increase the numbers of female officers;

- the encouragement of age 16+ school leavers was suggested and reference was made to a cadet employability scheme that had been paused due to Covid-19 but would hopefully restart when safe to do so;
- the increase in the numbers of people home-working had not so far resulted in the expected increase in incidents in the home, which could be partly due to awareness-raising campaigns in the media. There had been a slight increase in Quarter 3;
- a national directive was investigating the disparity in performance between full-time and retained fire stations, with an aim of lessening the impact on retained officers' primary employment; and
- in relation to recruitment, especially in rural areas, it was important to widen the range of possible candidates through leaflet drops, press releases, posters and open days, once these were allowed again.

The Committee thanked the SFRS staff for their work and **NOTED** the Local Performance Report.

## **6. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/9/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- information was sought and provided on the effect Covid-19 had on the availability of officers, with reference to the importance of filling vacancies;
- in relation to homelessness, information was sought and provided on capital programme plans for new Council builds in the ward, and whether there had been an increase in the use of private buildings for homelessness. While this had been the case in the short term, information would have to be sought outwith the meeting on the longer term trends. A brief explanation was provided on shifts in the use of resources to meet homelessness demands and reference was made to the Empty Home Project and various workstreams that were in place;
- concern was expressed at the increases in rent arrears in the preceding two years and discussion took place on the possible reasons for this, including the introduction of universal credit, relationship breakdown, and job losses as a result of Covid-19. The support offered to tenants in this position was summarised;
- information was sought and provided on developments at Woodside (which was with Development and Infrastructure to consider planning options) and Cruachan Place (which had been delayed due to Covid-19 but it was hoped units would be on-site by the end of 2021); and
- the Chair thanked the housing staff for their much appreciated work.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020 and **AGREED** any information available on increases in the use of private buildings for homelessness be provided to Mr Finlayson.

## **7. Portree Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Phort Rìgh**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr Callum Munro declared a financial interest in Item 7 as his wife was employed by the Highland Council and worked part-time in a primary school in the Portree ASG. Due to the general nature of the paper and that no decisions with implications for resourcing were involved and, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/10/20 by Interim Area Education and Learning Manager (West).

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the Interim Area Education and Learning Manager (West) explained that the format of the report was under review, with some of the data to be brought up to date, and this would be taken forward through Ward Business Meetings;
- information was sought on what support was being offered schools in anticipation of school inspections being re-started;
- it was important to update and modernise the school estate and it was hopeful that developments at Broadford and Dunvegan schools would be taken forward;
- Mr Finlayson made several points which were inaudible due to technical difficulties;
- concern was expressed that not all those entitled to were claiming free school meals;
- Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) funding was not being distributed fairly in rural areas and representations should be made to the Scottish Government on this;
- it was important to support staff to fill vacancies wherever possible;
- information was sought and provided on initiatives to provide online parents’ evenings, with a review of pilots anticipated;
- in response to a query about provision for mental health issues, a summary was provided on the various sources of support including the Council, health protection teams, environmental health, NHS Highland, welfare support, psychological services, local Members and the Ward Manager, as well as the process for dealing with any issues;
- the figures in the report provided a useful snapshot but longer term trends and projections would be helpful; and
- in response to a query about falling school rolls and the levels of pupils in Gaelic and English medium education, summaries were provided, although it was pointed out that in rural areas, one family could impact greatly on the percentages due to the overall small numbers.

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

## **8. Area Roads Capital Programme Progress Adhartas Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/11/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- it was queried whether any capital underspends could be carried forward into the following year and the importance of keeping all allocated funds in the area was emphasised. However, a decision on this was outwith the remit of the Area

Management, and efforts would be made to ensure the 2020-2021 allocation was spent within the year;

- in response to a query about the availability of equipment to undertake additional work such as ditching when staff were available, it was explained that most additional plant was hired as required although there were aspirations to obtain some local-based plant such as a tractor with a power arm, flail and ditch cleaner;
- the local team were thanked for their work on the shared funding and income-generation schemes, with reference to the usefulness of their local knowledge and the benefits of using local contractors where possible. It was explained that over 90% of the funding for these schemes had been retained within Skye, with a small amount spent engaging a local contractor in Glenelg and hiring welfare units in Inverness;
- the 2021 programme was welcomed, with particular mention of work in the centre of Portree. It was emphasised that priority was given to the areas for which the highest number of complaints were received; and
- the additional pedestrian crossing in Portree was welcomed.

The Roads Operations Manager drew attention to one further issue that was not included in the report, which was recent events in Marishadder where an agreement had been reached with a contractor to repair damage to the road.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## **9. Skye and Raasay Investment Plan – Proposed Approach Fios às Ùr mu Bhun-structar agus Tasgadh**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/12/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- officers were thanked for their work on the Plan;
- the place-based approach was especially welcomed, as was the bringing together of stakeholders and the clear articulation of desired outcomes, which would all be of significant benefit to local communities. It was vital that ideas generated through community engagement were taken fully into consideration; and
- with the Islands Bill not being of as much benefit to the Isle of Skye as had been hoped, and with the boundary commission considering the reduction of the area's democratic representation, this Plan was of significant importance to the area.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the proposed approach to engagement as outlined in paragraph 6 and the proposal to refer a final draft Skye & Raasay Investment Plan to a future Committee meeting for approval;
- ii. **NOTED** that the outcomes for Skye & Raasay outlined in Section 5 take account of pre-existing priorities and outcomes and would be used to consider the benefits of projects; and
- iii. **NOTED** that it was proposed that all Council ECOs were engaged in this process along with relevant teams, as well partner agencies and representatives of community organisations.



## 10. Town Centre Fund

There had been circulated Report No SR/13/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members thanked officers for the prompt production of the report and supported the need for a special Committee meeting. While voicing broad support for Option 4, it was felt that Option 1 required further consideration in relation to Broadford.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** to provisionally award the Isle of Skye and Raasay Town Centre Fund equally to Broadford and Strath Community Company and Portree and Braes Community Trust. On the proviso that they develop an eligible project(s) in accordance with criteria and carry out appropriate stakeholder engagement, including further consideration of Option 1 for Broadford & Strath Community Company; and
- ii. **AGREED** to hold a Special Committee Meeting to agree the final detail of the project.

The meeting ended at 12.40pm

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held remotely Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr L Fraser	Mrs L MacDonald
Mr T Heggie	Mr P Saggars

### In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, ECO Performance & Governance  
 Mr W Munro, Interim Ward Manager  
 Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager  
 Mr D Chisholm, Planner  
 Mr D Wood, Principal Housing Officer  
 Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager  
 Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer  
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

### Also in attendance:

Mr R Nixon, Local Senior Officer for Highland (Item 3)

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

**Mr T Heggie in the Chair**

## BUSINESS

### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Item 5: Mr L Fraser (non-financial)  
 Item 7: Mr P Saggars (non-financial)

### 3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Local Committee Performance Report for 2020-21 Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba – Aithisg Coileanaidh na Comataidh Ionadail airson 2020-21

There had been circulated Report No **NC/10/20** dated 13 November 2020 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland (Scottish Fire and Rescue Service).

During discussion, it was explained that the establishment figure for Nairn Station was a maximum of 20. There was a need for an availability of 10 at all times therefore Nairn was currently in a very strong position with good availability. The Chair requested that the Committee's appreciation be conveyed to the local fire fighters for their diligent work and their commitment to the safety of the community.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report attached to the report.

**4. Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 – Main Issues Report  
Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh 2 – Aithisg Phrìomh Chùisean**

There had been circulated Report No **NC/11/20** dated 16 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment. The Main Issues Report had been circulated separately as Booklet A. A presentation was made in support of the report during which officers explained the process and the contents of the Main Issues Report. In addition, it was explained that there had been an error in the Auldearn map shown in Appendix 1 of the papers presented. A map had been shown at the meeting indicating the corrected boundary to Alternative site AU02, Meadowfield Steadings, Auldearn to include the adjoining paddock to the south and approval was sought for this be amended in the Main Issues Report.

During discussion, the following main points had been raised:-

- It was acknowledged that the consultation could not undertake face to face responses due to the current pandemic and it was queried whether the Plan could be displayed publicly, e.g. at the local library/community centre to enable viewing;
- With regard to neighbour notification, it was explained that all households would receive notification of the Plan and be encouraged to respond to the consultation and this was welcomed. The importance of reaching hard to reach people and motivating them to respond was emphasised;
- It was disheartening that social media campaigns against the Plan had already started. It was hoped that the public would consider the wider needs for Nairnshire, which included a high demand for affordable housing, and respond positively to the Plan;
- Assurance was provided that consideration had been given to the land surrounding the sawmill to ensure any future development to this area would not impact on the ongoing operations of the mill;
- Concern was expressed that addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency had been assigned as a key priority within the Plan but many local residents might view affordable housing and economic growth of more importance and it was felt that there should be greater emphasis on these local aspects. It was indicated that due to the subsidies levied, Scotland had the most expensive charges for electricity in Europe and these green policies were a direct hindrance to economic growth. In addition, there were beneficial side effects to climate change, such as fuel poverty being reduced due to increasing temperatures and this was welcomed; and

- It was noted that the Plan had not made reference to open/green spaces and it was thought that the Farmers Showfield green space within NA12 would be protected. Further information was sought on density in terms of NA12 but it was explained that the Plan did not indicate any potential yield from sites. In addition, if no applications had previously been forthcoming for this area it was suggested that this area should be excluded and the land revert to its previous status and assurance was provided that this option had been considered as part of the process.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the Main Issues Report (as applicable to this Committee area) subject to the 'Alternative' site AU02, Meadowfield Steadings, Auldearn being expanded to include the adjoining paddock to the south and **AGREED** that it be published for public consultation, accepting that a number of minor presentational and typographical changes would be made prior to publication;
- AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in paragraph 6.1 of the report;
- NOTED** the important role that the Plan would play in addressing the Climate & Ecological Emergency, economic recovery, and in taking forward The Highland Council's agreed Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy recently submitted to Scottish Government; and
- AGREED** to investigate the Plan being displayed locally for public viewing.

**5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020  
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2020 gu 30 Sultain 2020**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr L Fraser declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Sub-Contractor for the Housing Service in Nairn but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No **NC/12/20** dated 10 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points had been raised:-

- Concern was expressed at the increasing rent arrears trend and although the diligent efforts of the team were welcome, it was queried whether this could be brought back on track;
- Officers were commended for their efforts which were reflected in the performance results, particularly in regard to the Average re-let time and non-emergency repairs;
- Confirmation was provided that the Clerk of Works vacancy had been filled;
- It was indicated that it was difficult for suppliers to allocate payments against individual invoices as the Council often made a bulk payment by BACs. Confirmation was provided that this would be investigated; and

- Overall this was a good set of performance results and further information was sought on the reason for the increase in the Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs particularly compared to the rest of Highland.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April to 30 September 2020; and
- AGREED** to investigate the bulk payment of invoices by BACs and to clarify the reason for the increase in the Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs particularly compared to the rest of Highland.

## 6. **Area Road Structures Annual Report 2019/20** **Aithisg Bhliadhnail Structaran Rathaid Sgìreil 2019/20**

There had been circulated Report No **NC/13/20** dated 12 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, confirmation was provided that none of the bridges categorised as poor condition were at risk of restrictions/closures and that Montgomery Drive was now an adopted road. With regard to the ownership of footbridges, it was confirmed that Scottish Water was responsible for the Sewage bridge and clarification would be provided on whether the Council was responsible for the Auldearn burn footbridge.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and **AGREED** clarification be provided on whether the Council was responsible for the footbridge over the Auldearn burn.

## 7. **Town Centre Fund** **Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr P Saggars declared a non-financial interest in this item as a director of Nairn Bid but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No **NC/14/20** dated 16 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the Committee indicated their support for the report and the Chair proposed that the words 'an established organisation' be replaced with 'Nairn Bid' in recommendation i and that a special meeting be held as soon as required.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** to provisionally awarding the Town Centre Fund (TCF) allocation for Nairn to Nairn Bid whose remit aligned with the objectives of the TCF. On the proviso that they develop an eligible project(s) in accordance with criteria and carry out appropriate stakeholder engagement; and

- ii. a Special meeting of the Committee be arranged as soon as practical to agree the final detail of the project.

**8. Nairn Common Good Fund: Quarter 2 Monitoring 2020/21 Report  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteil 2  
2020/21**

There had been circulated Joint Report No NC/15/20 dated 17 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the Committee was informed that as at 30 September 2020 much of the loss in value to the Investment Portfolio had been recovered following the improvement to the UK financial markets and it was anticipated that the value at the year-end would be the same as that in 2019.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of the Nairn Common Good Fund as shown in the Quarter 2 Revenue Monitoring Statement against Budget for 2020/21.

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

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 16 September 2020, which were approved by the Council on 29 October 2020.

The meeting was concluded at 12.20pm.

**The Highland Council  
Tourism Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Tourism Committee held REMOTELY on Thursday 3 December 2020 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr G Adam	Mr S Mackie
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Fraser	Mr H Morrison
Mr J Gordon	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Henderson	Mr D Rixson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie (substitute)
Mr A MacInnes	Ms M Smith

**Non-Members also Present:**

Mr J Bruce	Mr K Gowans
Mrs I Campbell	Mr A Graham
Mr Alasdair Christie	Mr Lobban
Mrs Margaret Davidson	Mr D Mackay
Mr John Finlayson	Mr P Saggars
Mr R Gale	

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment  
 Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film  
 Ms L Joiner, Tourism Project Co-ordinator  
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator  
 Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator  
 Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator

**Also in attendance:**

Mr M Ferguson, Cairngorms National Park Authority  
 Mr M Tait, Cairngorm Business Partnership

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

**Mr Gordon Adam in the Chair**

**1. Apology for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr R Bremner.

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

Item 6 – Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)  
 Item 7 – Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)

**The undernoted Members declared interests relating to all items on the agenda for the reasons provided but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion:**

**Financial interests applicable to all items:**

Mr G Adam - part owner of two self-catering units

Mr J Gordon – Air BnB provider

Mr A Henderson – B&B provider

Mr H Morrison – Hotel owner

Ms M Smith – director of Thistle Excursion (not trading this year)

**Non-financial interests applicable to all items:**

Mr G Adam – Director of a glamping business

Mr J Gordon - Director of Skye Connect

Mr A Jarvie – Director of High Life Highland

**3. Appointment of Chair  
Cur Cathraiche an Dreuchd**

Ms M Smith, seconded by Mr D Macpherson, moved that Mr G Adam be appointed as Chair. There being no other nominations, he was duly appointed.

On account that this now made the position of Vice Chair vacant, Mr G Adam, seconded by Mrs M Paterson, moved that Ms M Smith be appointed as Vice Chair. There being no other nominations, she was duly appointed.

**4. Tourism Committee - Terms of Reference  
Comataidh Turasachd – Cumhaichean Iomraidh**

There had been circulated Report No TC/06/20 dated 20 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed that the public might assume there was a dedicated tourism budget and that not having a budget might hamper progress. It was suggested that budget aspirations required further discussion alongside the wider Council budget allocation discussions that would take place prior to the Council's budget meeting in February 2021;
- the wording in the remit should be strengthened to reflect the importance of sustainability in the context of climate change and carbon clever initiatives, and also in relation to the importance of Gaelic and cultural heritage, as detailed in the recommendations, below. It was suggested that Councillor Calum Munro be included in any discussion about Gaelic;
- attention was drawn to the importance of tourism initiatives being community-led, with specific reference to tackling the carbon implications of and possible pollution from tourist routes such as the North Coast 500;
- the impact of Brexit on tourism was not yet known;
- attention was drawn to the importance of environmental tourism and the importance of working with the Climate Change Working Group on key



issues. It was suggested that the employment of an environmental tourism officer would be helpful; and

- another bullet point should be added to the remit to promote the requirement for all agreed tourism strategies and projects agreed by the committee to contribute to the Council's response to the climate and ecological emergency.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the draft Terms of Reference for the Tourism Committee subject to the following amendments:
  - a. the first bullet point of the remit, 'to develop and review a Highland Tourism Strategy', be amended to include reference to sustainability;
  - b. a specific clause be added to the remit on recognising the need to challenge every aspect of the tourist industry in terms of its ecological impact, and that every proposed tourism initiative be challenged on its carbon footprint so that the tourist industry contributed to Highland Council achieving its Climate Change targets;
  - c. the importance of Gaelic and cultural heritage be strengthened in the remit;
- \* ii. **AGREED** that the amended remit be recommended to the Council for inclusion within the Scheme of Delegation; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the allocation of a specific budget for Tourism be discussed by the ECO Infrastructure and Environment with the Chief Executive, the Leader, the Depute Leader, the Committee Chair and Vice Chair, prior to the Council's main budget allocation review in February 2021.

## 5. **Presentation: Visitor Management** **Taisbeanadh: Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail**

Murray Ferguson, of Cairngorms National Park Authority, explained how national parks functioned and provided information on Cairngorms National Park, key issues and themes facing the park, and work in the pipeline for the future. Mark Tate, from the Business Partnership on Visitor Management, gave an overview of work undertaken with the Park Authority to help with the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. He highlighted the importance of working with communities, the opportunities for visitors, and the challenges that were still being faced.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Mr Ferguson and Mr Tate were thanked for their presentations;
- Members welcoming the information that some of the poor visitor behaviour that had been experienced in 2020 in Highland had also been experienced in other countries;
- some communities had been concerned that visitors would bring Covid-19 to their localities but that had not proven to be the case, with businesses practicing good hygiene measures;
- it had been disappointing that one large campsite within the Park had not opened in 2020, despite pleas from local and national leaders. The importance of engaging with tourism businesses on reopening was emphasised, given the large numbers of visitors, especially camper van

tourists, that had been experienced (it was estimated that approximately one million visitors had been to the Park since July 2020);

- the Dark Skies initiative, to provide people with the opportunity to view the night sky without light pollution, was praised and it was hoped it would continue;
- the value of the ranger service was highlighted, especially for environmental tourism, to help to communicate countryside rules and guidance, and to undertake work with children and young people in schools. Some rangers were employed by smaller estates, sometimes with grant aid, within the Park and, going forward, there was an aim for all rangers to work as part of a Park-wide team. Further discussion on the ranger service would be undertaken with High Life Highland;
- attention was drawn to the long-term benefits of rewilding projects and to the value of eco-tourism;
- it was important there was collaboration between the Park Authority and the Council's Climate Change Working Group;
- increasing numbers of camper vans were expected in the coming years and it was important to develop strategies to manage this, noting that it was often a small number of key sites which were the most affected by excessive numbers of visitors, therefore a system of communication and information provision was essential. The majority of camper van visitors were respectful of local environments and keen to behave appropriately, and many were affluent and likely to spend money in local economies during their visits;
- reference was made to the value of Gaelic as a promotional tool for tourism; and
- information was sought and provided on the Park Authority's bid to the Heritage Lottery for around £50m to address climate change with an emphasis on nature and through a place-based approach. They had passed the expression of interest stage and the final bid would be submitted in February 2021.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## 6. **Visitor Management Plan Plana Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

During a verbal update, the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment explained that information gathering was occurring across Council services to determine areas of improvement for the 2021 tourist season that was in-line with current staffing and budgets. Additionally, recommendations were being sought for long-term improvements from 2022 onwards in terms of legislative change and infrastructure improvements in key workstreams. It was confirmed that a report on the Visitor Management Plan would be brought to the next Committee and would showcase the developments on the Isle of Skye in relation to tourist carparking and income

being achieved.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought and provided on the new carparking facilities at the Storr and Quiraing which was based on a self-funding model covering capital costs and profit-sharing that would be further detailed in the report coming to the next Committee;
- in response to a question it was agreed that electric vehicle charging points would be outlined in the next report given the growth of environmental tourism and it was commented that the Climate Change and Energy teams were making positive progress on electric vehicles in terms of accessing opportunities and selling strategies to key funders;
- with regard to the success story on the Isle of Skye it was requested that information on campervans and visitor facilities also be included in the future report given the lessons learned in this area; and
- in response to a question it was confirmed that the Highland Council, SEPA and Scottish Water guidance report on Campervan and Motorhome Waste Disposal had been recently published and would be circulated to Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update;
- ii. **AGREED** that a copy of the Campervan Waste Disposal Guidance document be circulated to Members; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a final report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the Visitor Management Plan with additional areas of focus on electric vehicle charging points and on showcasing the positive developments in respect of campervans and visitor facilities on the Isle of Skye.

## 7. **Tourism Infrastructure Plan Plana Bun-structair Turasachd**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

During a verbal update, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film explained that the draft Tourism and Infrastructure Plan was in the audit and gap analysis phase currently undergoing wider consultation with key partners. It was anticipated that the responses provided would offer significant information on key areas which would be utilised in developing the final draft of the plan to feedback to the Committee for approval. It was highlighted that next steps would be to analyse feedback, identify projects to fill gaps and determine with the Committee how to address needs in infrastructure while prioritising feasibility, time and budget. It was commented that the Council made 16 applications through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for Highland area projects and the results would be announced 15 December 2020.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the volume of applications made to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure fund and highly anticipated the results;
- the guidance on Campervan and Motorhome Waste Disposal was a positive development however, Members expressed concern about the daunting information enclosed and whether this would deter small scale businesses. In response, it was commented that cost-effective solutions for small scale sites would be challenging though it was highlighted that these businesses did not require overnight waste disposal on-site but could consider relying on a wider network of waste disposal facilities available. The guidance may be useful for a community development of a standalone waste facility for motorhomes passing through for instance and it was confirmed that the Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film would liaise with interested parties in respect of installing waste disposal facilities;
- managing expectations of the public on timelines of improving infrastructure for tourism was important as it might take a few years to achieve all that was being sought;
- it was suggested that emergency arrangements that had been previously identified be revisited in the short-term if large projects were not feasible within the timescale for the upcoming tourism season;
- in response to a question it was explained that in order for communities to be open to development financing it was important to highlight that there was a commercial opportunity available to them and though the Council might not be able to provide financial assistance, other forms of support such as Business Gateway would be accessible;
- The need for increased non-statutory tourism (brown) road signage, particularly on the A9, was emphasised and it was suggested that the Chair, Vice Chair and Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film liaise with Transport Scotland regarding this. It was highlighted that it could be a lengthy process due to funding requirements;
- the Tomintoul Bowling Club was a good example of a simple small-scale facility that appeared functional and accessible with good signage and it would be useful to know the facility and payment strategy was managed; and
- in response to a question it was explained that small towns and villages that desired increased marketing and tourist draw could look into utilising less costly avenues such as social media and should consider gathering community information and feeding into the North Coast 500 team to market these destinations on the NC 500 website. The Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film would liaise with Destination Management Organisations to assist in this regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update and that a final draft of the Tourism Infrastructure Plan would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee;
- ii. **AGREED** that the Chair, Vice Chair and Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film liaise with Transport Scotland regarding improving the tourism (brown) signage on the A9; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film would liaise with interested parties in respect of installing waste disposal facilities and

Destination Management Organisations on marketing and promoting small towns/villages and lesser known destinations across the Highlands.

The meeting concluded at 12:26pm.