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The Highland Council
No. 18 2020/2021

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held **REMOTELY** on **Thursday, 17 December 2020** and continued on **Thursday, 7 January 2021**.

Meeting on Thursday, 17 December 2020

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

Present:

Mr G Adam	Ms P Hadley
Mr R Balfour	Mr A Henderson
Mrs J Barclay	Mr A Jarvie
Mr A Baxter	Ms E Knox
Mr R Bremner	Mr B Lobban
Mr I Brown	Mr D Louden
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Mackay
Mrs C Caddick	Mr W MacKay
Mrs I Campbell	Mr S Mackie
Miss J Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Christie	Mr R MacWilliam
Dr I Cockburn	Mr J McGillivray
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr C Munro
Ms K Currie	Ms L Munro
Mrs Davidson	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs T Robertson
Mr M Finlayson	Mr K Rosie
Mr L Fraser	Mr G Ross
Mr R Gale	Mr A Sinclair
Mr K Gowans	Mr C Smith
Mr A Graham	Mr B Thompson
Mr J Gray	

Following the calling of the roll, and in light of the fact that only 45 Members had been able to connect into the meeting due to widespread technical issues across the Council that morning, the meeting was postponed until 12 noon.

At 12 noon, it was confirmed that the technical issues had not been able to be resolved and as such the meeting was therefore again postponed – on the basis that a new date for resumption would be notified to Members in due course.

(Subsequently confirmed that the meeting would resume on Thursday, 7 January 2021 at 9.00am).

Meeting on Thursday, 7 January 2021**1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
A' Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan****Present:**

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

In Attendance:

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

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr I Ramon and Mr P Saggars.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 5 – Ms P Hadley and Mrs C Caddick (Financial)
 Item 7 – Mr A Christie and Mr K Gowans (Financial)
 Item 7 - Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie (both Non-Financial)
 Item 8 – Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie (both Non-Financial)
 Item 8 – Mr K Gowans (Financial)
 Item 9 – Mr A Christie (Financial)
 Item 16 – Mr A Christie, Mr B Thompson, Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie (all Non-Financial)
 Item 16 – Mr A Christie and Mr K Gowans (both Financial)
 Item 17 – Mr A Christie and Mrs D MacKay (both Financial)
 Item 17 – Mr B Thompson, Ms L Munro and Mr D Rixson (all Non-Financial)
 Item 22 – Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie (both Non-Financial)
 Item 22 – Mr A Christie and Mr K Gowans (both Financial)
 Item 27 – Mrs D MacKay and Mr A Christie (both Financial)
 General – Mrs M Cockburn – as a Council appointee on Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureaux (Non-Financial)
 General – Ms L Munro – as an employee of Community Contacts (Independent Self-Directed Support Adviser) (Non-Financial) and as an employee of Carr Gomm (Self-Directed Support Adviser) (Financial)

3. By-Election – Ward 12 – Aird and Loch Ness – New Date Fo-Thaghadh – Uàrd 12 – An Àird agus Loch Nis – Ceann-latha Ùr

It was **NOTED** that a new date had been set for the By-Election for Ward 12 and it would now be held on Thursday, 11 March 2021.

URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

In line with Standing Order 8, the Convener advised that he had agreed to accept the following Notice of Motion as an urgent item of business:–

‘That the Council agrees to make adjustments to the agenda and the conduct of the meeting in order to provide time to debate 2 urgent items of business - the implications of the First Minister’s recent statement in response to Covid-19 and the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement on the basis that these items will now become new agenda Items 3(i) and 3(ii) respectively.

Also, that the following scheduled items be deferred - Item 19, Highland Labour Market (to now go to the E&I Committee on 4 Feb), Item 21, Annual Review of Standing Orders (to go to the March Council meeting) and Item 22, Annual Review of the Scheme of Delegation (to go to the March Council meeting).

In addition, that all the scheduled Notices of Motion on the agenda be approved and that, in respect of the Questions which have been listed, any supplementary questions to be submitted and responded to in writing – and circulated to all Members and published on the Council’s Website thereafter. Following discussion with the member of the public who had submitted a question, any supplementary

question and answer to also be dealt with in the same way.

Members are asked to acknowledge that the whole of the country is in a deteriorating position with regard to the progress of the virus and the tougher Covid-19 restrictions will have a material impact on the way in which the Council delivers its core services and emergency response. Whilst formal Council, Committee and Board meetings will all continue to be held as planned, it is anticipated that urgent actions will need to be taken out with these scheduled times and which will be of sufficient importance to justify Member notification. These actions are likely to fall into 3 categories:

1. Actions taken as directed by an external authority - i.e. UK Government; Scottish Government; Public Health/NHS; new legislation etc;
2. Actions taken at operational level that are within Officers' existing delegated authority;
3. Actions taken to respond to an emergency situation out with current policy and so the decision will require homologation – as is already provided for within the Scheme of Delegation;
4. It is proposed that Members are provided with a briefing on all such matters on a weekly basis and that decisions requiring homologation are also published on the Council's website in advance of being taken to Council;
5. Members are also asked to acknowledge that the shift back into national lockdown and the likelihood of increased staff absence will have an impact on the Council's physical, staffing and financial resources. This will require the redirection of Council resources to areas of highest priority, including working with partners to support the NHS. Committee and Board agendas will likewise be pared back to essential items only to ensure staff are able to focus on these priority areas'.

Signed: Mrs M Davidson Mr R Bremner

At this point, and following clarification being sought from the Head of Corporate Governance as to how this new and additional item of business was to be dealt with, it was confirmed that Standing Order 8 allowed for the sole discretion of the Convener in terms of accepting urgent items of business for meetings, with Standing Order 9 providing confirmation that the power to vary the order of business rested with the Members present at the meeting.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was concern in relation to the proposal to remove/defer the specified items from the agenda in order to make time for discussion of 2 new items of business;
- the proposals in respect of 'notifiable actions' were questionable as they appeared to compare with the use of 'emergency powers' in the previous year and this was a situation which some Members did not want to return to and which did not seem to be replicated at the present time by other Local Authorities in Scotland;
- it was queried as to whether these new proposals were being presented as a result of the lockdown which had been recently announced or whether a decision on their presentation had been taken before the Christmas period;
- further detailed information was needed as part of an Action Plan to accompany these new proposals; and
- further clarification was also required as to how and when Members of the Council who were not part of the Administration or any political group could put forward their views/comments on these new proposals.

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

Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr S Mackie, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that Members should agree to make adjustments to the Council agenda and the conduct of the meeting in order to provide time to debate the 2 urgent items of business - the implications of the First Minister's recent statement in response to Covid-19 and the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement – but that the scheduled items on the agenda should not be deferred.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 51 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 11 votes, with 4 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

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

For the Amendment:

Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr J Bruce, Ms P Hadley, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A Rhind, Mr A Sinclair and Mr C Smith.

Abstentions:

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr D Macpherson, Mr R MacWilliam and Mr N McLean.

Additional Agenda Item 3(i)

Implications of First Minister's Statement in response to Covid-19

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there would be many issues which would have to be dealt with as part of this new lockdown. As such it was essential to learn lessons from the lockdown in the previous year, including the need to work closely with community groups across the Highlands and to keep them fully informed at all times with facts and figures at a local level;
- it was also essential that contact was made with schools in order to ensure that the necessary cleaning arrangements would be in place in the months ahead as part of a focus on how such buildings might be used creatively by local communities, particularly around the Easter period;
- lack of communication had been an issue during the previous lockdown and this had to be improved upon now by the Council and NHS Highland, especially at a local level where Members were often having to learn about

recent developments through the local press and social media;

- it was highlighted that improved communication would be especially vital during the rollout of the vaccination programme across the Highland area;
- there was a need for discussion with NHS Highland around adult social care and specifically in relation to issues around delayed discharges where improved action was needed;
- support for NHS Highland should be provided wherever and whenever possible to assist with the vaccination programme;
- future briefings for Members had to be factual, honest and forward thinking whilst at the same time providing progress reports on the vaccination programme;
- the work currently being undertaken with the gritting of roads across the Highlands was greatly appreciated and the thanks of the Council should be conveyed to the staff involved in this work;
- there were a number of serious issues facing the Council at present, including Covid-19, Brexit and Climate Change and it was vital that these issues were tackled in a holistic manner wherever possible;
- there had to be a serious focus on mental health issues across communities, with help provided when and where necessary for the young, the elderly and those with disabilities in particular;
- it was essential that local businesses were supported as much as possible in the coming months;
- the actions taken by local Community Councils and community groups in the previous year was commended and it was imperative that this was continued in the coming months, with help and assistance provided by the Council as and when necessary;
- briefings for Members at Ward level should be scaled up when and where needed in the coming months and should include more local detail, including Police Scotland and Environment Health enforcement information;
- additional support for community groups should be introduced where needed and specifically in cases where 'volunteer fatigue' had already been reported;
- further guidance on travel arrangements in and out of the Highland area should be provided as soon as received by the Council;
- consideration should be given to the use of all terrain vehicles for the gritting of roads and pavements where necessary, alongside the regular provision of information in this regard for Local Members;
- it would be crucial for the Council to have an updated Emergency Plan in place when the new lockdown ended and it was noted that this could be followed up by the Recovery Board in the coming weeks;
- the future use of Ward Discretionary Funds should be considered as part of the recovery effort;
- there had been issues reported to Members in relation to the current operation of the 'track and trace' team by NHS Highland and as such it was imperative that any problems were resolved quickly so that this vital team felt confident in their working arrangements in the coming weeks and months;
- it would be extremely beneficial if Local Members could be provided with details of the number of Covid-19 cases in their respective areas so that they could update and reassure members of the public when approached;
- a list of Environmental Health Officers, as well as those Officers who were dealing with grant funding available from Highlands & Islands Enterprise, should be provided for Members;
- the majority of briefings for Members in the coming months should also be made available to the public if possible;
- it was concerning that there had been no mention of a specific Action Plan to accompany the Notice of Motion which had been presented for consideration;

- a number of local community groups had confirmed that they had not received a large degree of support from the Council in the previous year and it was hoped that this would now change;
- the creation of a Resilience Group weekly briefing, together with increased clarity around travel arrangements, would be beneficial for all;
- it was suggested that the Scottish Government should provide a focus on changing the current arrangements for travel to close certain 'loopholes' which currently existed;
- the training of non-Teachers to provide support with mental health for young people should be a priority;
- preparation of a Town Centre Recovery Plan, along with an Action Plan to Open Up the Highlands, should also be given priority;
- there had to be a focus on looked after children in the coming months;
- there was a need to commend Council staff, NHS staff and those working in local surgeries;
- work had to be started now, along with other organisations if necessary, to prepare for the Summer months in particular when there could be an influx of tourists to the Highlands and appropriate facilities had to be provided;
- consideration should be given as to whether it was necessary to provide public briefings before formal Committee and Council meetings in the months ahead;
- all Members should be provided with full and detailed information on Business Support Grants;
- one single and central point of contact within the Council for local volunteers would be beneficial;
- there was a need for an assessment as to how the services provided by High Life Highland were potentially going to be affected by this latest lockdown;
- the current economic crisis had to also be acknowledged alongside work being undertaken in regard to Covid-19 issues; and
- there also had to be a strong focus on the considerable number of carers who were looking after loved ones at home and had faced significant additional challenges over the past year. As such, suggestions for additional help which could be put in place to assist them would be warmly welcomed.

Thereafter, Mr A Baxter, seconded by Mr R MacWilliam, **MOVED** that, in addition to the Notice of Motion which had been proposed, the Council should also agree the following Additional Actions:-

- Prepare a Resilience Group Support Programme to provide practical support for local resilience groups as we identify funding support that can be provided or diverted.
- Introduce a weekly virtual briefing for Resilience Groups and Community Councils convened by the Chief Executive (or appropriate ECO) and the Leader of the Council (or Senior Administration Councillor).
- Identify resources to train appropriate staff in the provision of Mental Health First Aid to provide additional support for school staff in dealing with the mental health issues experienced by young people during the lockdown and beyond.
- Discuss with the Scottish Government (and other appropriate partners) the current operation of travel advice and identified loopholes in regulations that are exposing areas of the Highland Council to higher risk and seek changes to these regulations where appropriate.
- Prepare a Town Centre Recovery Plan to identify what resources are available and what practical action the Council can take to support town centre and high street businesses.

- Prepare a “Highland Opening-Up Plan” to identify risks and action required by the Council as pandemic restrictions are eased in the future.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as follows:-

In acknowledging that the whole of the country was in a deteriorating position with regard to the progress of the virus and that the tougher Covid-19 restrictions would have a material impact on the way in which the Council delivered its core services and emergency response, and whilst formal Council, Committee and Board meetings would all continue to be held as planned, it was agreed that urgent actions would need to be taken out with these scheduled times which would be of sufficient importance to justify Member notification.

These actions were likely to fall into 3 categories:

1. Actions taken as directed by an external authority - i.e. UK Government; Scottish Government; Public Health/NHS; new legislation etc;
2. Actions taken at operational level which were within Officers’ existing delegated authority;
3. Actions taken to respond to an emergency situation out with current policy and so the decision would require homologation as was already provided for within the Scheme of Delegation;
4. It was agreed that Members would be provided with a briefing on all such matters on a weekly basis and that decisions requiring homologation would also be published on the Council’s website in advance of being taken to Council;
5. Members also acknowledged that the shift back into national lockdown and the likelihood of increased staff absence would have an impact on the Council’s physical, staffing and financial resources. This would require the redirection of Council resources to areas of highest priority, including working with partners to support the NHS. Committee and Board agendas would therefore be pared back to essential items only to ensure staff were able to focus on these priority areas.

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

- Preparation of a Resilience Group Support Programme to provide practical support for local resilience groups as funding support was identified that could be provided or diverted.
- Introduction of a weekly virtual briefing for Resilience Groups and Community Councils convened by the Chief Executive (or appropriate Executive Chief Officer) and the Leader of the Council (or Senior Administration Councillor).
- Identification of resources to train appropriate staff in the provision of Mental Health First Aid to provide additional support for school staff in dealing with the mental health issues experienced by young people during the lockdown and beyond.
- Discussion to be undertaken with the Scottish Government (and other appropriate partners) on the current operation of travel advice and identified loopholes in regulations that were exposing areas of the Highland Council to higher risk and seek changes to these regulations where appropriate.
- Preparation of a Town Centre Recovery Plan to identify what resources were available and what practical action the Council could take to support town centre and high street businesses.

- Preparation of a “Highland Opening-Up Plan” to identify risks and action required by the Council as pandemic restrictions were eased in the future.

Additional Agenda Item 3(ii)

UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it would be imperative for the Council to work with other organisations with a common purpose in the weeks and months ahead in order to minimise any potential issues for the Highland area. In this regard, a meeting should be arranged with all parties across the Highlands with the aim of uniting behind a clear vision for all;
- in terms of proceeding as fast as possible, more information was needed now in relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund;
- small and medium enterprises could be significantly affected by the need now for new and additional bureaucracy so any changes to current arrangements had to be identified quickly, including in relation to in-shore fishermen who were exporting to the continent;
- it would be especially important for the Council to publish all updated information on the website for access by Highland businesses who were trading with the EU and the rest of the world;
- liaison was needed with the Chamber of Commerce at an early date in order to discuss issues as and when they arose;
- there was very real concern about the potential impact on rural businesses in particular across the Highland area;
- the forthcoming Seminar would allow discussion of all relevant issues at this time, including matters in relation to future trading arrangements, and this was welcomed;
- there could be significant material changes for Highland businesses and it was vital that the Council demonstrated that it was aware of such changes and was dealing with them;
- on the basis that the current lockdown was exacerbating the Brexit situation, and not least the impact on trading arrangements, it would be especially important for Members to be regularly briefed on the information being relayed by Council Officers in order to be able to pass it on more widely as and they were approached. As such, inclusion of such information within Weekly Briefings would be appreciated;
- important information, through reports and minutes, had arisen from the Brexit Working Group and all Members should make themselves aware of the details of this information;
- it was imperative that confirmation was received as soon as possible as to the Highland Council’s allocation from the Shared Prosperity Fund;
- it had to be recognised that in addition to the challenges currently being faced by businesses through additional administration, there were also financial and employment issues to be managed;
- it should be acknowledged that the agreement which had been reached with the EU represented a much better situation than would have been the case in a ‘no deal’ scenario;
- in terms of export licensing, issues had been raised regularly since 2017 in relation to cost and process. As such, a commitment had been given by the Budget Leader in 2019 that a review would be undertaken but this was still awaited and was now urgent in terms of the need to support local businesses;
- invitations to the forthcoming Seminar should be circulated to as many

- organisations as possible across the Highlands;
- proper and detailed canvassing of local businesses and organisations had to be a priority now in terms of identifying exactly how they were being affected by new arrangements;
 - in relation to export licensing, more detail was needed on current charging arrangements and also in respect of issues with new and additional paperwork and it was imperative that this was dealt with at an early date to help to ease the current situation; and
 - as part of the focus on the Shared Prosperity Fund, it had to be recognised that all sectors across the Highland area could be affected differently. As such, early identification of joint working arrangements to address all issues as and when they arose would be key to minimising future problems.

Thereafter, Mr S Mackie, seconded by Mr A Jarvie, **MOVED** that an urgent review of the Council's export licensing framework should be conducted with a report submitted to the next meeting of the Communities & Place Committee.

Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr A Henderson, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Council should recognise the challenging situation that businesses and communities faced by Brexit, compounded at this time with lockdown and Covid-19 challenges, and agree to seek clarification from the Westminster Government as to what support it could expect from the Shared Prosperity Fund to assist in mitigating extra costs arising through Brexit and report the expected increased costs which might have to be mitigated to the next Communities & Place Committee.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 7 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 50 votes, with 3 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr A Baxter, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr M Reiss and Mr C Smith.

For the Amendment:

Mr G Adam, Mr B Allan, Mr R Balfour, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Ms I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Ms P Hadley, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr A MacInnes, Mrs D Mackay, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs B McAllister, Mr J McGillivray, Mr N McLean, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Ms P Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr D Rixson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mr G Ross, Ms M Smith and Mr B Thompson.

Abstentions:

Mrs C Caddick, Mr R Gale and Mrs F Robertson.

Decision

The Council, in recognising the challenging situation that businesses and communities faced by Brexit, compounded at this time with lockdown the Covid-19 challenges, **AGREED** to seek clarification from the Westminster Government as to

what support it could expect from the Shared Prosperity Fund to assist in mitigating extra costs arising through Brexit and report the expected increased costs which might have to be mitigated to the next Communities & Place Committee.

4. Confirmation of Minutes Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 28 October and the Minutes of the scheduled Meeting held on 29 October 2020 as contained in the Volume – which were **APPROVED**.

5. Minutes of Meetings of Committees Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean

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

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

Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 4 November

Starred Item: Compulsory Purchase Order

AGREED to resolve to make a Compulsory Purchase Order to acquire the Struan House Hotel, Carrbridge under Sections 9 and 10 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987.

Sutherland County Committee, 5 November

Starred Item: Highland Council Capital Plan

NOTED the terms of the Notice of Motion which had been agreed by the Sutherland County Committee as detailed below –

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 generic drawings, to be built on a suitable site located appropriately on the School premises.

Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, 10 November

Declarations of Interest

Ms P Hadley and Mrs C Caddick declared financial interests in the following item (Heritage Horizons Bid) as members of the Cairngorm National Park Authority Board 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.

Starred Item (i): Heritage Horizons Bid

AGREED to endorse the Heritage Horizons bid as detailed.

Starred Item (ii): 2019/20 Area Road Structures Annual Report

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

Communities & Place Committee, 25 November**Starred Item (i): Covid-19 Ward Funds****AGREED:**

- (i) some level of Covid-19 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; and
- (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

Also, Officers to draw up new criteria for Covid-19 hardship grants to ensure that community groups were encouraged to support community resilience activities, including provision of clear communication and defined rationale of reasons for declining applications, and a timely appeals process.

Starred Item (ii): Investing in Play Parks

AGREED that budgets for play park management be devolved to Area Committees in consultation with Wards.

Tourism Committee, 3 December**Starred Item: Terms of Reference**

AGREED the amended remit for inclusion within the Scheme of Delegation.

**6. 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 18 September 2020 (approved by the Board on 20 November 2020) which were **NOTED**.

**7. Community Planning Board
Bòrd Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd**

Declarations of Interest

Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie declared non-financial interests in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in

Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

Mr A Christie (as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland) and Mr K Gowans (on the basis of a family member being employed by High Life Highland) declared financial interests but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part.

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Community Planning Board held on 21 August 2020 (approved by the Board on 5 November 2020) which were **NOTED**.

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

Declarations of Interest

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

Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest on the basis of a family member being employed by High Life Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part.

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Climate Change Working Group held on 6 November 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

9. Brexit Working Group
Buidhean Obrach Brexit

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 him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Minutes of Meetings of the Brexit Working Group held on 28 October 2020 and 23 November 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

10. Redesign Board
Bòrd Ath-dhealbaidh

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Redesign Board held on 27 November 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

11. Recovery Board
Bòrd Ath-shlànachaidh

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Recovery Board held on 23 November 2020 which were **APPROVED**.

**12. Recruitment Panel – Executive Chief Officer (Health & Social Care)
Pannal Fastaidh – Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomhach (Slàinte & Cùram Sòisealta)**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Recruitment Panel for the Executive Chief Officer (Health & Social Care) held on 23 October 2020 which were **NOTED**.

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

The Council **AGREED** the following –

Appointment of 2 Vice Chairs for the Recovery Board – Mrs M Davidson and Dr I Cockburn

Education Committee – Mr A Jarvie to replace Mrs I MacKenzie

Tourism Committee – Mr J Bruce to replace Mr A Jarvie

Corporate Resources Committee - Mr B Boyd to replace Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair

Recovery Board - Mr B Boyd to replace Mr K Gowans

**14. Question Time
Am Ceiste**

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

As detailed above, it was confirmed that any supplementary questions (both from the member of the public and Council Members) should be submitted in writing and thereafter (together with responses) would be circulated to all Members of the Council and also published on the Council's Website.

Public

(i) Ms J Alexander

“In relation to the £7.5m extension that is due at Culloden Academy, this was approved in March 2018 in a 5-year Capital Programme as per the School Estate Management page on your website.

The school was built for 900 and the role is now 1110 and growing to 1243 pupils in 2022, with houses still going up.

I am a parent of 2 pupils in Culloden and 1 pupil in Balloch Primary. I would like to know where is the £7.5m for the refurbishment for my children's school?

When do you intend to start the extension? At the last parent council meeting of Culloden Academy, which I am a member of, it was suggested that some sort of temporary units could be put in place to fill the gap before the extension work. Would this come out of the £7.5m budget and would this slow down the extension? Where would they be built? Culloden is a great place to live however I honestly believe we are letting the young people, teachers and the community of Culloden down due to the poor school building and lack of facilities. I am not looking to blame anyone or for excuses, we just want to move forward and get some transparency.

The response had been circulated.

Members**(i) Mrs I Mackenzie****To the Chair of the Communities & Places Committee**

“Can you provide a timeframe for Service Centres to re-open?”

The response had been circulated.

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

“Can I have a breakdown of the number of meetings of the various Highland local community partnerships which have taken place since March 2020?”

The response had been circulated.

(iii) Mr A Jarvie**To the Leader of the Council**

“As this Council enters its fourth budget, can you name four localism programmes this Council has approved and successfully rolled out to communities?”

The response had been circulated.

(iv) Mr A Jarvie**To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee/Budget Leader**

“At the last budget, when I only saw the budget details a fortnight in advance, when we met I asked for an assurance that my Group would be involved in budget discussions in October/November this year as had been the case previously. Despite this promise, your response to me at the Resources Sub-Group on 26 November was that it was my responsibility to guess when the budget process was underway and that I had to ask for a meeting to discuss it. When did it become the Opposition’s responsibility to ask the Administration about the budget they want Opposition Groups to support and should it not be your role as Budget Leader to engage with all Groups as soon as the budget process is underway?”

The response had been circulated.

(v) Mr A Jarvie**To the Leader of the Council**

“With the ever increasing number of responses to Members of this Council at Committees being to discuss the matter they have raised “offline”, is it your intention to establish an Offline Committee where the responses to these questions can be heard by all in an open and transparent manner?”

The response had been circulated.

(vi) Mr A Jarvie**To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee/Budget Leader,**

“How many posts, and at what total cost, were funded by the Change Fund and other time limited or earmarked posts in the previous and current financial year and can you confirm that all that these posts have ceased or plan to be and are not a cost pressure on the general funds?”

The response had been circulated.

(vii) Mr K Gowans**To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee**

“Culloden Academy is experiencing chronic overcrowding which has been well documented over many years on the school roll projections. The school is currently on track to be over capacity by 300 pupils by 2022 which the school will not be able to accommodate.

In 2018, this Council agreed an allocation of £7.5m from the Capital Budget to fund a new extension to be completed by 2022. There is now no prospect of this being delivered. Lack of activity has delayed this project and the Council is now in a position where demountables, or portakabins as they are more commonly known as, will need to be deployed.

To reassure pupils, staff and parents, will you confirm the extension will be completed by August 2023, the provision of demountables will be not funded from the £7.5m allocation and that the scale of the extension will not be compromised to “fit” the budget?”

The response had been circulated.

(viii) Mr S Mackie**To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee**

“Can you break down the number of staff on long term sick who were off for 6 – 12 months, 12-18 months, 18-24 months and 24 months during this current or last financial year and whether that is broken or unbroken absence for that period of time?”

The response had been circulated.

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

“During a motion on ‘Nuclear Free Highlands’, this Council re-affirmed its’ support for the Caithness and North Sutherland nuclear sector, Council agreed:

- To make representations to the Scottish Government to withdraw their outright opposition to new nuclear development.
- To make those in the nuclear supply chain aware that the Highlands have the skills, public support and proactive partnerships to embrace the next generation of nuclear energy.

- Publicly state the Local Authorities willingness to support the future of the sector.

In response to a question on this matter at a subsequent Full Council meeting, you responded that “no such activity has been undertaken”.

Will you commit to honouring the successful motion by making representations on behalf of the Highland Council to nuclear sector supply chain and the Scottish Government before the end of this Parliamentary Session?”

The response had been circulated.

(x) Ms E Knox

To the Leader of The Council

“After the Full Council of 10 September 2020, you wrote to Kevin Stewart, Minister for Local Government and Planning, indicating he Highland Council “does not accept that the number of Highland Councillors should reduce at all and indeed in some Wards there was a very strong case to increase the numbers”.

You wrote to Community Councils on 16 November and 2 December expressing concern about the proposed boundary changes and urging them to make representations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland.

Can you explain why, despite the Highland Council voting unanimously to reject the proposals, you did not make such representations to the Boundary Commission during their 11 week consultation with Councils?”

The response had been circulated.

(xi) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Leader of the Council

“What is Highland Council doing to help alleviate and prevent loneliness during Covid19?”

The response had been circulated.

(xii) Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

“In March 2020, Elected Members were asked to agree to this year’s Revenue Budget, (including a Council Tax rise to the highest possible level permitted in Scotland by the Scottish Government).

It was with the agreement of Members and the express terms that the extra percentage increase in Council Tax being paid by Highland taxpayers was to be ring-fenced and used solely to fund essential road repairs, to carry out surface dressing and road resurfacing, plus carrying out other requirements relating to road improvements across the Highland and Island communities within the Highland Council area.

How much of the agreed budget for roads set out for this financial year 2020-21 has actually been allocated for road projects and spent so far on road repairs and improvements in Highland?"

The response had been circulated.

(xiii) Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of Corporate Resources Committee

"As the Highland Council sets out its Budget proposals and begins its discussions and deliberations for the Budget for the next financial year 2021-22, what assurance can you give to Highland constituents to demonstrate to them and convince them that the level of service won't keep dropping year by year as the price that they pay for their reduced services via their Council Tax keeps increasing?"

The response had been circulated.

(xiv) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

"You have increasingly accused my efforts of scrutinising this Council at such a critical time, when Councillors feel they have less and less of a say about how this Council operates, as being "political statements". Most recently, without any hint of irony, at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

You stated this after I highlighted a report last month which showed 50% of Members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee did not fully believe that the Council was open to scrutiny and only 40% believed that scrutiny is actively encouraged.

Is your dismissal of these concerning statistics from our own Audit and Scrutiny Committee as a "political statement" not symptomatic of the issue that this Council is not open to scrutiny?"

The response had been circulated.

(xv) Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of Corporate Resources Committee

"The levels of staff employed by Highland Council in 2011 was stated as being 9,477 employees.

From the figures that you have provided to me at Full Council on 10/09/2020, it shows that, from 2017 to the present day, the staff levels have averaged at 10,114 per annum, peaking at 10,300 in 2018-19.

To what do you attribute this continual increase in staff at Highland Council while other organisations are working smarter not harder and reducing staff numbers while improving their efficiencies and outcomes and do you have a breakdown of staff numbers by ECO Department?"

The response had been circulated.

15. 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). It had also been confirmed that there were no financial or resource impacts arising from any of the Motions.

In this regard, and as highlighted above, all of the Motions were **AGREED**.

(i) Highland Council requests that the UK and Scottish Governments work together to provide complete transparency to Scottish Local Authorities – and the Scottish people – on all matters pertaining to Barnett consequentials.

Signed: Mr D Rixson Mr A Christie

(ii) As one of the four Councillors within Ward 5, I am reminded again that as a local Councillor I am responsible for making decisions on behalf of the Ward 5 constituents in ensuring the delivery of their local services. Having been elected some 19 months ago, I have now come to a decision that we are so far behind the curve with our Ward work plans that it will be impossible to catch up under the current budget strategy. Every day of every week the same complaints cascade down into our inboxes with requests for the transformation of services in respect of our schools estate, public rubbish bins, road resurfacing, electric car charging points, improvements to public toilets, proper facilities for campers, motorhomes and caravans, especially the safe disposal of their waste, enforcement on our overcrowded roads and so it goes on.

These are not large Capital item requests but many small and necessary day to day basic service requirements which we are being accused of failing in our duty to our constituents in providing.

We are now in an emergency situation and we need to be really proactive and allocate the correct budget and resources to each service that is now at a tipping point. We owe this to our services staff, communities, visitors and the wider public in general, real change is needed and quickly.

My ask is that we get on with the task in hand, empower our communities, give them what they need and watch the transformation take hold.

Signed: Mr A MacInnes Mr R Bremner Dr I Cockburn

(iii) That Highland Council will host a summit of public and private sector partners to clarify the impact of Brexit on the Highlands early in 2021.

Signed: Mr R MacWilliam Mr D Louden

(iv) The Highland Council undertakes to achieve “Living Wage” designation status for the Highland Council Area to provide benefit and support for lower paid employees, while improving the reputation of businesses and the region. This will be prioritised to enhance our COVID-19 recovery and therefore agrees to bring a report to the next meeting of the Highland Council to take this forward.

Signed: Mr K Gowans Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair Ms E Knox Mr B Boyd
Mr R MacWilliam Mr D Louden

(v) We propose that we prepare a case and speak with the Scottish Government about renewing efforts to help communities secure more of Scotland's land, recognising this has huge national significance with the imperative of Climate Change.

We ask that a cross-Chamber meeting of interested Councillors is held to discuss how we as a Council can strengthen our support and use existing processes such as the Local Development Plans to make registration easier.

Also, that we discuss this with some of our many successful community landowners and ask how both we, and the Scottish Government, can make this process simpler. Finally, we propose that we present our findings to the Scottish Government along with suggestions to enable an increase in community land ownership.

Signed: Mrs M Davidson Mr A Henderson

16. Revenue Budget Update Report Buidseat Teachd-a-steach

Declarations of Interest

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

Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureaux but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part.

Mr A Christie (as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland) and Mr K Gowans (on the basis of a family member being employed by NHS Highland) declared financial interests but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/42/20 dated 4 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- due to the Council meeting having been postponed on 17 December 2020, the reported figures were significantly out of date and it was queried as to whether the figures for Quarter 3 could be made available to Member groups as soon as possible, particularly noting the need to consider key issues and recent changes prior to the 2021-22 budget being drawn up. In this regard, it was confirmed that it was the intention for the Quarter 3 figures to be available within the next fortnight;
- information was sought and provided on progress with a system to provide earlier financial data for Members and it was confirmed that further discussion on this issue would be undertaken outwith the meeting. Also, advance work which had been undertaken prior to the festive break on budget projections required to be updated due to the anticipated impact of the new lockdown;
- Officers involved in the budget process were thanked for their work in

such challenging times;

- In regard to the importance of winter maintenance, especially in relation to people being able to use pavements for daily exercise during lockdown, it was noted that meetings were being held to discuss increasing staff capacity. However, requests for the purchase of additional equipment would require more consideration given the budget situation and it was highlighted that while the Council had a duty to grit pavements and roads according to the agreed policy, pedestrians and drivers of vehicles had ultimate responsibility for ensuring their own safety and deciding whether road or pavements were safe to use;
- In respect of parking on pavements, which was illegal, it was emphasised that this could hamper pavement gritting;
- information was sought and provided on plans to continue enhanced cleaning of school buildings during the latest lockdown, noting that schools were still in use for the vulnerable and key worker children. It was also hoped that school buildings could be used for activities which involved young children;
- attention was drawn to the speed at which Covid-19 related events could change and the associated impact on health and finances, including the potential additional cost risks of extended or further lockdowns;
- it was not known at present if the Council could benefit from the furlough scheme being extended to cover parents who could not work due to childcare requirements;
- the recruitment of an Employability team leader post was welcomed and information sought and provided on plans for that Officer to work with other organisations involved in this area of work as part of the monitoring of the effectiveness of the post in the months ahead;
- information was sought and provided on the possible impact of changing interest rates on savings measures;
- attention was drawn to the falling deficit over the previous six months and it was suggested that consideration should be given to the innovative use of the Council's reserves to boost the Highland economy. In this regard, Members were urged to familiarise themselves with the relevant financial reports which were presented to the Corporate Resources Committee; and
- it was suggested that remaining ward discretionary budgets could be used to boost play parks and that community councils and residents' associations should be involved in those discussions.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the revenue budget update report as presented;
- (ii) **AGREED** to allocate £0.5m to meet the increased requirements for cleaning services within schools during Quarter 1 of 2021/22; and
- (iii) **AGREED** to allocate £0.135m for the establishment of a 2-year fixed term Employability team leader post to meet the unemployment challenges facing the region in these challenging times.

17. Highland Council Capital Plan 2018/19 to 2022/23 – Update Report Ath-sgrùdadh Prògram Calpa

Declarations of Interest

Mr B Thompson 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.

Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest as the Council representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part.

Mr A Christie (as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland) and Mrs D MacKay (as a Board Member of NHS Highland for which she had a dispensation) declared financial interests but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/43/20 dated 9 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need for an update to be provided in relation to Bun Sgoil Ghaidhlig, Lochaber as this had been in the Capital Plan for a number of years;
- further information was also required in relation to Early Learning & Childcare projects (Appendix 1) whereby it was noted that gross expenditure had been detailed but no income and it was therefore assumed that this funding had been received from the Scottish Government;
- also, in regard to site investigations/consultation undertaken on schools, a progress report on the Tain 3-18 Campus was needed;
- generally, it was queried as to how much work had been impeded by the two lockdowns over the past year and specifically what the effect would be on future expenditure. As such, it was important that this situation was closely monitored in order to ensure that monies could be rolled forward and therefore retained in the Highland area where they were desperately needed as opposed to having to be returned to the Scottish Government;
- it was vital that the Council focused on borrowing at the present time when interest rates were low in order to help the Highland economy as much as possible, with a particular emphasis on self-financing projects;
- in terms of current slippage, it was stressed that there should be consideration given to utilising this as much as possible at the present time, including a focus on repairs which had been outstanding for some time;
- it was also queried as to whether there had been any discussion in relation to a potential sale of the Headquarters building and relocation of staff in this regard;
- with reference to the excellent Treasury Management presentations which had been undertaken at the end of the previous year, and specifically graphs which had been contained in Appendix 3 to the report, comparisons were drawn between one of the graphs which highlighted that Highland Council was the third most borrowed Council in Scotland and another graph which confirmed that the Council's gearing ratio was about average. As such, the two graphs appeared to be in conflict which had led to an assumption that the Council could perhaps be underfunded as compared with other Councils across Scotland and further detail was sought in this regard;

- in terms of future borrowing and the use of reserves, close and clever consideration had to be given to the rates currently available from the Public Works Loans Board, not least in terms of the potential benefits for the Highland area;
- there had to be a focus on new schools as part of any new housing developments in the Highlands as this was currently not always the case;
- an update was needed in relation to the Option Appraisal for a new site for St Clements School along with further action to progress this issue;
- thanks had to be conveyed to the Officers concerned in connection with the action which had been taken in relation to Invercoe Bridge in Lochaber which was much appreciated. However, it was stressed that many bridges across the Highlands had been in an unacceptable state for some time and this issue had to be addressed as a matter of urgency, not least to avoid a potential situation where local communities could be cut off in the event of a problem with a 'lifeline' bridge. As such, it was stressed that a comprehensive future plan to deal with this issue should be provided as soon as possible;
- the good news in connection with the Learning Estate Improvement Programme was warmly welcomed and in this regard thanks were conveyed to the Officers concerned for the work which had been undertaken and also to Kate Forbes MSP and Fergus Ewing MSP for their support. As such, this was an excellent result for the Highlands and it was now imperative for the Council to be bold in moving the projects forward which would also help to support the construction industry in the area;
- an update on Culloden Academy would be welcomed and specifically in relation to where the new modular units would be placed and how they would be funded as part of the consideration of the additional children involved in this respect;
- there was also a need for more detail on the lack of spend to date in relation to Culloden Academy;
- as part of the consideration of current borrowing levels, additional information on the current savings on staff costs would be welcomed as it was understood that these savings had been substantial over the past year;
- the spending as a result of the current Capital Plan represented a huge boost to the local economy and was warmly welcomed. In this respect, it was essential that all Members worked together to achieve the best outcomes for the area;
- with specific reference to Culloden Academy, a report for the Parent Council was urgently needed to provide an update on the current situation and not least to address the issues with staff morale and the impact on pupils. As such, it was suggested that demountable units could only be a temporary measure and a report on more detailed proposals was expected in the near future; and
- in respect of Flood Risk Management Plans, it was acknowledged that work on a number of these plans across the Highland area had been put on hold over recent months due to staff being deployed to Covid-19 duties but it was hoped that this work could now recommence in light of the importance of this issue to local communities.

Decision

Members **NOTED**:-

- (i) the reprofiled Capital Programme and associated Loans Fund debt charges;
- (ii) the provision made for the North Care Facility - subject to the decision on the confidential report later on the agenda; and
- (iii) the ongoing work to develop the Council's Capital Strategy.

**18. Proposals for Covid-19 Ward Funds and Investing in Play Areas
Molaidhean airson Maoinean Uàird Covid-19 agus Tasgadh ann Àiteachan-cluiche**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/44/20 dated 3 December 2020 by Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was suggested that additional wording should be added to recommendations 2.3i and 2.3ii to confirm that they would be postponed until after the lockdown period and not actioned before Summer 2021 – this applied to the gathering of Member views at Ward/Area meetings in respect of options for the £100k additional investment (which would enable debate at Area Committee meetings and inform the budget setting process for 2021/22 onwards) and also to the devolvement of budget and decision making to Area Committees to enable a place based approach that used local knowledge, community effort and resources alongside Member views and staff advice to solve problems and identify possibilities for a more sustainable approach to the play estate;
- there were areas across the Highlands where play areas were badly needed for children and it was hoped that respective Local/Area Committees would give consideration to innovate ways in which this could be provided in future, with particular reference being made to Ward 14 at the meeting;
- it was essential to keep decision making at a local level and as such the proposal to postpone recommendations 2.3i and 2.3ii until the Summer was not considered to be acceptable;
- it was suggested that consideration should be given as to whether it was necessary to create a Working Group to take forward discussion on issues related to future investment in play parks across the Highlands;
- in relation to recommendations 2.3i and 2.3ii, and with specific reference to the current mental health crisis across the country, it was suggested that these recommendations should be replaced with the following wording –‘in recognising the significant mental health impacts that Covid-19 is having indiscriminately across the Highlands, it is agreed to tackle the impending mental health crisis as a priority. In doing so, initially set up a £100k pot for organisations and community groups to submit bids for projects to improve mental health and wellbeing in Highland communities’;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the work which had been undertaken on this issue but it was extremely disappointing that this funding had not yet been allocated;
- it had to be recognised that community groups had previously applied for additional funding but had been turned down and this had to be resolved.

Whilst appreciating the issues which had been raised in relation to play parks, it was not felt that there was any connection between these issues and the Covid-19 hardship fund and at the appropriate time an amendment would be put forward to seek agreement to change the management of Covid-19 Ward funds and devolve decision making on play parks to Local/Area Committees but not to divert any amount of current Covid-19 hardship funding to play parks or for any other alternative purpose;

- it had to be accepted that this was about priorities and the fact that it was not clear as to what was going to be needed in the months ahead to tackle Covid-19. The funding had come from the Scottish Government for a specific reason and therefore had to be used for the intended purpose;
- consideration should be given to the development of a Plan for Play Parks across the Highlands in order to identify the issues which had been raised by Local Members in this regard;
- the use of the funding had to be a local decision made by Local Members as they were best placed to make decisions in this respect and as such there should no ring fencing as had been suggested during the debate;
- it was regrettable that no decision had been made to date on use of this funding. However, it was felt that it would make no significant difference to the longstanding issues in relation to play parks which had been highlighted during the debate;
- it had to be stressed that the mental health issues arising from the pandemic would require to be dealt with for many years to come and allocating funding towards that issue would be a huge step and could make a very considerable difference;
- it had been suggested that there was no link between the Covid-19 hardship funding and the play park issues but it could be argued that there were in fact very strong links between both issues, particularly in deprived areas;
- communities across the Highlands were going to need funding for a range of issues in the months and years ahead. As such, any proposal to ring fence any part of this funding at this time was not considered to be appropriate; and
- play parks could make a huge difference to the mental health of families and it was felt that this could be crucially important in the months ahead, not least in terms of restoring a degree of normality as part of recovery from the pandemic.

Thereafter, Mr A Henderson, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, MOVED agreement of the recommendations within the report – with the proviso that additional wording be added to Recommendation 2.3i (that Member views on the options for £100k additional investment be gathered initially in Ward /Area meetings, supported by relevant staff, to enable debate at Area Committees and to inform the budget setting process for 2021/22 onwards) and Recommendation 2.3ii (budget and decision-making be devolved to Area Committees to enable a place-based approach that used local knowledge, community effort and resources alongside Member views and staff advice to solve problems together and to identify possibilities for a more sustainable approach to the play estate) to confirm that they would be postponed until after the lockdown period and not actioned before Summer 2021.

As a First Amendment, Ms M Smith, seconded by Mrs P Munro moved the recommendations within the report to devolve all use of Covid-19 monies to local Wards and then Area Committees for them to decide on its use - and to refuse the

proposal to delay any decisions on Recommendations 2.3i and 2.3ii until Summer 2021 as detailed within the Motion.

As a Second Amendment, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr A Baxter moved the replacement of Recommendations 2.3i and 2.3ii (as above) with the following – ‘In recognising the significant mental health impacts Covid-19 is having indiscriminately across the Highlands, it is agreed to tackle the impending mental health crisis as a priority. In doing so, initially set up a £100k pot for organisations and community groups to submit bids for projects to improve mental health and wellbeing in Highland communities’.

As a Third Amendment, Mr R MacWilliam, seconded by Mr K Gowans, moved that the Council should agree to the proposed recommendations to change the management of Covid-19 Ward funds and to devolve decision-making on playparks to Local Area Committees but not to divert any amount of current Covid-19 hardship funding to playparks or for any other alternative purpose.

On a vote being taken between the Third Amendment and the Second Amendment, the Third Amendment received 32 votes and the Second Amendment received 8 votes, with 23 abstentions, and the THIRD AMENDMENT was therefore CARRIED, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Third Amendment

Mr B Allan, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr A MacInnes, Mrs D Mackay, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mr A Rhind, Mrs T Robertson and Mr K Rosie.

For the Second Amendment

Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mr S Mackie, Mr J McGillivray, Mr C Smith and Ms M Smith.

Abstentions

Mr G Adam, Mr R Balfour, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Ms P Hadley, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Ms L Munro, Ms P Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mr G Ross, Ms N Sinclair, Mr B Thompson and Mrs C Wilson.

On the following vote being taken between the Third Amendment and the First Amendment, the Third Amendment received 26 votes and the First Amendment received 36 votes, with 1 abstention, and the FIRST AMENDMENT was therefore CARRIED, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Third Amendment

Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D Mackay, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr D

Macpherson, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr J McGillivray, Mr C Munro and Mr C Smith.

For the First Amendment

Mr G Adam, Mr R Balfour, Ms I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Ms P Hadley, Mr T Heggie, Mrs L MacDonald, Mrs D Mackay, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Munro, Ms P Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Ms N Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr B Thompson and Mrs C Wilson.

Abstention

Mr A Henderson

On the final vote being taken between the Motion and the First Amendment, the Motion received 28 votes and the First Amendment received 32 votes, with 3 abstentions, and the FIRST AMENDMENT was therefore CARRIED and became the decision from the meeting, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr B Allan, Mr R Balfour, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr C Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Gray, Mr A Henderson, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr A MacInnes, Mrs D Mackay, Mr D Mackay, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr D Macpherson, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro and Ms E Roddick.

For the First Amendment

Mr G Adam, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Ms P Hadley, Mr T Heggie, Mr D Loudon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mrs B McAllister, Mr J McGillivray, Ms L Munro, Ms P Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mr G Ross, Ms N Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr B Thompson and Mrs C Wilson.

Abstentions

Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Mackie and Mr C Smith.

Decision

Members **NOTED**:-

- (i) the decision made by the full Council in October 2020 to seek the view of the Strategic Committee in the first instance on investing in play parks for conclusion by the December Council meeting. The Communities & Place Committee had considered options at its meeting on 25th November 2020 and this had informed the recommendations in the report;
- (ii) that for Covid-19 Ward Funds:

- the initial enhanced allocation to Covid-19 Ward Funds had been distributed based on vulnerability to Covid-19, which had taken into account ill health and old age indicators and that this needed to be re-visited given the Council decision in October 2020 and the socio-economic impacts now affecting more communities;
 - that a review of the Covid-19 Ward Funds was already planned to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to learning from the process;
 - that Ward Members needed to identify and agree through Area Committees what proportion of their fund, if any, they wanted to set aside for projects to assist children and adults post Covid-19, 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;
- (iii) that for the management of the play areas estate:
- the Council had a large play estate, with 339 play areas with 2043 individual units of play equipment;
 - that the annual budget for play areas was £187,600 and the estimated backlog of repairs and maintenance amounted to £3.436m; and
 - 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;

The Council **AGREED** for the Covid-19 Ward Fund:-

- (i) that some level of Covid-19 Ward resource be retained for welfare and humanitarian needs and supporting joint working with community bodies in recognition that the needs of individuals as a result of the impact of Covid-19 persisted;
- (ii) that the enhanced award be equalized up as set out in Appendix 2 costing £240k to be funded from the hardship fund which meant that it would add to the current budget gap in 2020/21;
- (iii) that 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 for any unspent fund to be carried forward into 2020/21
- (iv) that the criteria and arrangements for the grant fund be amended to reflect the learning and feedback with the revised criteria set out at Appendix 3; and
- (v) that, where awards were declined, an appeals process be put in place which was as set out in the grant guidance and criteria found at Appendix 3.

The Council also **AGREED**:-

- (i) that Member views on the options for £100k additional investment be gathered initially in Ward /Area meetings, supported by relevant staff, to enable debate at Area Committees and to inform the budget setting process for 2021/22 onwards; and
- (ii) that budget and decision-making be devolved to Area Committees to enable a place-based approach that used local knowledge, community effort and resources alongside Member views and staff advice to solve problems together and to identify possibilities for a more sustainable approach to the play estate.

19. Highland Labour Market Dùbhlain Margaidh Obrach na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/45/20 dated 27 November 2020 by Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

In this regard, and as highlighted above, it was **AGREED** that this item should now be considered at the next meeting of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee on 4 February 2021.

20. 2020 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Highland Council

There had been circulated Report No. HC/46/20 dated 4 December 2020 by Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **AGREED** to write formally to the Boundary Commission as set out in Paragraph 6.3 of the report; and
- (ii) **NOTED** the actions which had been taken and those that were underway to lobby for a change in the Boundary Commission's approach.

21. Annual Review of Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings Ath-sgrùdadh Òrdughan Seasmhach

There had been circulated Report No. HC/47/20 dated 1 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

In this regard, and as highlighted above, it was **AGREED** that this item should be carried forward to the next scheduled meeting of the Council on 25 March 2021 for consideration at that time.

22. Annual Review of the Scheme of Delegation Ath-sgrùdadh dhen Sgeama Riochdachaidh

Declarations of Interest

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

Mr A Christie (as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland) and Mr K Gowans (on the basis of a family member being employed by High Life Highland) declared financial interests but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/48/20 dated 3 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

In this regard, and as highlighted above, it was **AGREED** that this item should be carried forward to the next scheduled meeting of the Council on 25 March 2021 for consideration at that time.

23. Timetable of Meetings for 2021 Clàr-ama Choinneamhan airson 2021

The Council **AGREED** the following changes to the Timetable of Meetings for 2021:-

City of Inverness Area Committee – Additional Meeting – 18 January
 Easter Ross Area Committee – Additional Meeting – 20 January
 Isle of Skye & Raasay Committee – Additional Meeting – 25 January
 Audit & Scrutiny Committee – Additional Meeting – 28 January
 Sutherland County Committee – to move from 22 February to 1 March

24. 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 29 October 2020 were available on the Council's Website.

25. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Council **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 6, 8 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

26. School and Public Bus Contracts
Cùmhnantan Bhusaichean Sgoile is Poblach

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/49/20 dated 4 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

Decision

Members **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report – subject to an amendment to the final recommendation whereby it was agreed that a further report would be submitted to the full Council or the Economy & Infrastructure Committee in regard to contracts post December 2021.

27. North Coast Care Facility
Goireas Cùraim a' Chosta a Tuath

Declarations of Interest

Mr A Christie (as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland) and Mrs D MacKay (as a Board Member of NHS Highland for which she had a dispensation) declared financial interests in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Members only Report No. HC/50/20 dated 3 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Health & Social Care.

Decision

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

The meeting ended at 5.45pm.

**The Highland Council
No. 19 2020/2021**

Minutes of **Special Meeting** of the **Highland Council** held REMOTELY on **Thursday, 4 March 2021** at 10.30am.

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

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mrs D Mackay
Mr B Allan	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Balfour	Mr W MacKay
Mrs J Barclay	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Baxter	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr B Boyd	Mr S Mackie
Mr R Bremner	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr I Brown	Ms A MacLean
Mr J Bruce	Mr C MacLeod
Mrs C Caddick	Mr D MacLeod
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Macpherson
Miss J Campbell	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mrs B McAllister
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Christie	Mr N McLean
Dr 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, 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, Transformation & Economy

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

There were no apologies for absence.

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Convener, on behalf of the Council, thanked the Officers responsible for the compilation and circulation of the papers for the meeting.

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

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

Item 4 – Non-Financial - Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs M Davidson, Mr B Lobban, Ms E Knox, Ms L Munro, Mr B Thompson, Mr D Rixson, Mr A Christie, Mr T Heggie, Mr G Ross, Mr C Munro, Mr A Jarvie, Dr I Cockburn, Mr D Louden, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs D MacKay, Mrs I Campbell, Mr D Macpherson, Mr P Saggars, Mr C MacLeod, Mr R Balfour, Mrs M Paterson, Mr R Gale and Mrs A MacLean .

Item 4 – Financial - Mr A Christie, Mrs D MacKay, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Mackie, Mr C Munro, Ms M Smith, Mr N McLean, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs F Robertson and Ms P Hadley (all Financial)

3. **Appointment of Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee**

It was **NOTED** that Mr A MacKinnon had stepped down as Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee.

It was also **NOTED** that Mr J Gray had now replaced Mr T Heggie on the Committee.

On that basis, Mr M Reiss, seconded by Mr A Christie, **MOVED** that Mr J Gray should be appointed as Chair.

Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Boyd, **MOVED** that Dr I Cockburn should be appointed as Chair.

On a vote being taken, Mr Gray received 42 votes and Dr Cockburn received 24 votes, with 4 abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For Mr J Gray

Mr G Adam, Mrs J Barclay, Mr J Bruce, Mrs C Caddick, Ms I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mrs L MacDonald, Mrs D Mackay, Mr D Mackay, Mr W Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr J McGillivray, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Ms N Sinclair, Mr B Thompson and Ms C Wilson.

For Dr I Cockburn

Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Ms E Knox, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacInnes, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D MacLeod, Mr R

MacWilliam, Mr McLean, Ms P Munro, Mr Ramon, Ms E Roddick, Mr K Rosie, Mr A Sinclair and Ms M Smith.

Abstentions

Ms P Hadley, Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Mackie and Mr C Smith.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to appoint Mr J Gray as Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee.

4. Revenue Budget 2021/22 to 2023/24 Buidseat Teachd-a-steach agus Cìs Comhairle

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:-

Mrs M Cockburn – as a Council appointee - Board member of the Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

Mrs M Davidson – on the basis of a family member being employed by the Council

Mr B Lobban – as a Director of Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Limited and whilst the company was not specifically mentioned, funding for tourism was mentioned in the report

Ms E Knox – as a Trustee of Thriving Families, a Highland charity supporting parents and carers of children with additional support needs

Ms L Munro – as a Director of High Life Highland

Mr B Thompson – as a Director of High Life Highland

Mr D Rixson – as the Council's representative on the Lochaber Housing Association, its subsidiary Lochaber Care and Repair and the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre

Mr A Christie – as General Manager of the Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and as a parent of a child in secondary education

Mr T Heggie – as a Director of High Life Highland

Mr G Ross – as an Office Bearer with Highland Disability Sport

Mr C Munro – as Chair of the Local Community Trust

Mr A Jarvie – as a Director of High Life Highland, a Director of the Inverness & Nairn Citizens Advice Bureaux, a Council appointee on the Inverness Access Panel and a Council appointee on Highland Disability Sport

Dr I Cockburn – as a Board member of Ullapool Museum

Mr D Louden – as a Director of Made in Tain and a Director of the Tain Heritage Trust

Mr S Mackie – on the basis of a family member being employed as a Probationary Teacher

Mr A MacKinnon – on the basis of family members being employed by the Council

Mrs D MacKay – as a Director of the East Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau

Mrs I Campbell – as a Director of the Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association

Mr D Macpherson – on the basis of a family member being employed as a Teacher

Mr C Munro – as the Council representative on the Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations

Mr P Sagers – as a Director of Nairn Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr C MacLeod – as a Director of the Skye & Lochaber Citizens Advice Bureau and the Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association

Mr R Balfour – as a Director of the Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

Mrs M Paterson – as a Director of the Puffin Pool Board, Chair of the Highland Football Academy and on the basis that family members were Teachers

Mr R Gale – as Trustee of the Go Golspie Development Trust

Mrs A MacLean – as a Director of Ross & Cromarty Citizens Advice Bureau and a Director of Sight Action

The following Members declared financial interests but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion:-

Mr A Christie - as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland

Mrs D MacKay - as a Board member of NHS Highland for which she had a dispensation and as a Director of the East Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr A Jarvie – as a Communications Officer with Inclusion Scotland and on the basis that a family member was in their final PGDE year as a Probationer Teacher

Mr S Mackie – as the Chair of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group

Mr C Munro – on the basis that a family member was employed as a Gaelic Medium Teacher

Ms M Smith – as the Chair of Albyn Housing Society

Mrs C Caddick – as a member of the Cairngorm National Park Authority Board

Mrs F Robertson – on the basis of work undertaken for Blythswood Care

Ms P Hadley – as a member of the Cairngorm National Park Authority Board

The following Members also declared financial interests and confirmed that they would leave the meeting if there was any detailed discussion as follows:-

Mr K Gowans – on the basis that a family member was an employee of High Life Highland and he would leave the meeting if there was any discussion regarding the budget line HC 050320

Mr N McLean – as a Director of Geo-Rope Limited/Geo-Structural Limited/Geo-Info Limited and he would leave the meeting if there was any discussion regarding Roads & Transport development issues as part of Strand 2 of the report.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/1/21 dated 18 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer (Resources & Finance) which detailed proposals in relation to the Revenue Budget for 2021/22 to 2023/24.

In this regard, there had been tabled Amended Template in relation to Saving 2.17 (Corran Ferry).

There had also been tabled 'Alternative Budget Proposal' from the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group which detailed alternative proposals in respect of protecting Services, additional investment priorities, additional savings and use of reserves.

In summarising the budget proposals which had been presented, the Depute Leader of the Council confirmed that he would move the recommendations within the report

(together with the revised template in respect of Corran Ferry) at the appropriate time. In this regard, he expressed his thanks to the previous Budget Leader/Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee for the work and commitment which he had given over recent years and also to Council Officers, the SNP Group, the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group and non-aligned Members for their input which had been sought on the basis of being as inclusive as possible throughout the budget process.

Continuing, he specifically thanked the SNP Group (for engaging so positively with the Administration in producing a collaborative budget which was welcomed as a new approach for the Council) and Councillor Andrew Baxter (for his input to the amended template in respect of Corran Ferry).

These were unprecedented times for the Highlands as a result of the pandemic and a number of issues had to be taken into account, including the number of staff who were currently furloughed, the level of business closures, the rise in unemployment, the increase in claims for Universal Credit and the impact on economic, physical and mental health across the area.

However, the recovery phase had now begun and as such it was vital to build upon the work already underway through the Recovery Board which had to be the way forward for the Council. As such, the strategy now had to focus on health and prosperity in the coming months and this would include dealing with not only issues as a result of the pandemic but also the situation arising from the Brexit process and the increase in poverty.

In this respect, the budget proposals would be regularly reviewed in the coming months in line with good governance and also to measure outcomes and assess risks. As such, it was vital that collaboration was continued as part of delivery of the proposals so that planned outcomes could be successfully achieved.

The Leader of the SNP Group expressed his thanks to the Chief Executive and the Executive Chief Officers for the help and assistance given to his Group over recent months as part of the collaborative work which they had undertaken to help to deliver the budget which had been presented.

In working towards presenting proposals to aid recovery across the whole of the Highlands, he highlighted the role of his Group in evaluating and scrutinising the budget process and confirmed that this effective and regular scrutiny would be continued in the coming weeks and months in order to ensure that the required outcomes were delivered.

Issues arising from both Covid-19 and the Brexit process were uppermost in the minds of many people across the Highland area and as such the budget proposals sought to mitigate as many problems as possible from both situations.

Whilst it might be considered to be unprecedented to produce a collaborative budget of this kind, it was strongly felt that this was what Highland communities both wanted and expected in the current circumstances.

The Leader of the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group, in presenting an 'Alternative Budget Proposal' from his Group, paid tribute to the hugely important and significant role which local communities had played across the Highlands over the past year which represented localism in action. Specifically, local services had been delivered to a very high standard and this was hugely commended by all.

In expressing thanks to the Depute Leader of the Council for the inclusion which had been shown to the Group within the budget process, he expressed the hope that this would be continued in future as it was considered that the impact from Covid-19 was far from over and the implications would be felt for many years to come across the Highland area.

In this regard, and whilst being supportive of certain budget recommendations within the report, there were some specific areas where it was felt that alternative proposals should be considered, including childcare, early learning, tourism, roads and burial fees. As such, the Group's 'Alternative Budget Proposal' contained detailed and specific recommendations in relation to removal of proposed Administration savings, additional investments, additional savings and additional use of reserves and it was hoped that serious consideration would be given to these alternative proposals, both now and in the coming months.

Following a short recess, and during discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to all for the extraordinary level of work which had been undertaken on the collaborative budget from the Administration/SNP Group and also the Alternative Budget Proposal from the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group;
- for the first time in many years, the budget which had been presented for approval contained an element of growth and, whilst there was still a need for a degree of prudence in the coming months, thanks were due to the Scottish Government for the funding which had been received;
- the proposed budget would be subject to review in June and in the Autumn and it was recognised that there would be challenges ahead but it was hoped that the budget proposals (which aimed to help and support communities across the Highland area) would be welcomed by all;
- there were no immediate budget pressures to be taken account of which was a welcome situation for the Council at this time and as such it should be recorded that this was also due to additional funding which had been received from the UK Government;
- the fundamental difference between the Administration/SNP budget and the Alternative Budget Proposal from the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group was the use of reserves. As such, it was not considered that this was the most appropriate time to add to the Council's current level of reserves when they could be used to help and assist those in need across the Highlands, including many local businesses;
- it was also questioned as to whether it was the right time to make savings through deletion of posts and reducing budgets for mental health and cyber security in particular;
- in regard to the health and wellbeing aspect of the budget, the rights and needs of service users had to be paramount in decision making and thanks were recorded to the Scottish Government for increasing the funding currently available for mental health services. In this respect, it was imperative that Officers were both supported and resourced in relation to delivering tailored services, such as through early intervention programmes;
- it had been anticipated by the SNP Group that a large surplus was likely in the current year and it was therefore welcomed that a strong focus was now being given to a large programme of investment to help recovery across the Highlands. In this regard, thanks were conveyed to the Scottish Government for the additional investment which was helping to make this possible;
- the proposals for investment in modern apprenticeships were especially

welcome at this time;

- there was a need to continue to focus on projects for the longer term and especially opportunities for self-funding investment, especially in relation to climate change;
- it was acknowledged that it had not been possible to undertake a zero-based budgeting exercise in the current year but the commitment which had been given for this to be taken forward over the next two years was welcomed;
- an increased focus on carbon reduction/sequestration across the Council estate was now required, with a particular focus on efficiency measures to reduce the cost of energy being used in Council buildings and investigation of the opportunities available to increase revenue by undertaking generation where possible;
- it had to be clarified that the Council would be spending £20m on roads over the next two years and that whilst it was always an aim to spend more, there were factors in place which limited the spend in any one year;
- it was felt that the budget proposals provided a balanced result for the year and whilst some savings might appear unpalatable, they were essential in order that the Council could move forward with the health and prosperity strategy which had been outlined;
- restrictions as a result of the pandemic were likely to be in place for some time and as such the economic outlook remained bleak and it was important that this was acknowledged;
- Council staff had to be commended for the way in which they had embraced new and flexible ways of working at a time when they were also dealing with new challenges;
- it was imperative that the Council worked closely with partners to attract investment, address skills shortages and improve connectivity across the Highlands;
- a low carbon agenda (with climate action being taken as and when necessary) had to be at the forefront of discussions across the Council in the months and years ahead;
- in regard to the £10k saving which had been proposed in relation to the Nigg/Cromarty Ferry, it was stressed that this ferry was crucial for the tourism infrastructure of Easter Ross and the Black Isle, not least in view of the fact that any loss of visitors would impact hugely on tourist attractions in the area. Also, considerable work and investment had been undertaken at a local level to instigate/implement improvements to the current structure over recent months. For this reason, both Local Committees in the area would work together to identify a solution which would include discussion on the possibility of each being able to contribute £5k from the new place based funding to ensure that there was no change in support for the ferry;
- the Council was now working 'smarter' in terms of identifying efficiencies and improvements and this was welcomed, with specific reference being made to the proposed allocation in respect of roads which would be an investment for the future;
- as part of future discussions on the allocation of Ward Discretionary Funds, consideration should be given to investing in play parks in order to address issues currently being dealt with by children and families across the Highland area;
- consideration should also be given to improving the current CCTV arrangements where and when necessary;
- it was considered that this was very much a budget which focused on 'people priorities' and this was warmly welcomed;
- as the first budget for many years which delivered significant investment in the Highlands, it was important to record thanks to both the UK and Scottish

Governments, and Senior Officers, for their contributions in this regard;

- it was also extremely important to highlight and acknowledge how well local communities across the Highlands had dealt with the pandemic over the past year and to convey the thanks of the whole Council in this respect;
- the budget proposals represented a huge programme of work over the coming year which was both ambitious and exciting and in this regard specific reference was made to the work to be undertaken on asset management and the identification of new ways of working across the Council which could be transformative for both this Council and the new Council in 2022;
- whilst welcoming the significant level of work which had been undertaken in relation to the alternative budget proposals being put forward, it was however important to note that a fundamental difference was in the financial sustainability aspect and specifically the use of reserves;
- in regard to the alternative budget proposals which had been put forward by the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group, it was highlighted that this was not a 'peace time' budget but one which was being presented at a time of great uncertainty for communities, businesses and public institutions. In this respect, thanks were conveyed to the Depute Leader of the Council, Mr M Reiss and Officers for the time which had been given to discussion of the proposals and the Group looked forward to working with the new Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee in the coming months. All Members wanted the Council to be as ambitious as possible so it was hoped that the alternative proposals would be the subject of close scrutiny;
- it was also of the utmost importance to convey thanks to the key workers, community volunteers and charitable groups across the Highlands whose contributions during the past year had ensured that the situation had not been as bad as it might have been. As such, their actions taken pressure off both the Council and the NHS on every occasion that they had stepped up to help;
- there was widespread concern about the condition of roads across the area so it was hoped that all efforts would be used to identify significant additional investment whenever possible;
- the contribution of the Council, and the work of the Executive Chief Officer (Infrastructure & Environment) and his team in particular, in relation to the Wick Airport PSO was highlighted and hugely appreciated by all concerned;
- it was hoped that the close collaboration and consultation from the budget process could be continued in the coming months and would include local communities across the Highland area;
- it was suggested that in hindsight it had been beneficial for the Council that there had been no agreement for an 'emergency budget' in the previous year and in this regard it was also queried as to whether the Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee was now to be removed as it did not appear that it had been used as part of the current budget process;
- thanks were conveyed to the Depute Leader of the Council for the consultation on the Corran Ferry savings template which had led to a better outcome than had originally been proposed and was much appreciated;
- the proposed funding for tourism management was welcomed and it was hoped that the Council could build on that in future years;
- it had been very refreshing to see an entire alternative budget proposal from the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group and thanks were conveyed to the members of the Group for the considerable work which had been undertaken in that regard;
- clarification was provided in relation to the current situation with looked after children in the Highland area and it was stressed that the situation was still unclear at the present time and could be subject to change in the coming weeks and months;

- in acknowledging and welcoming the positive budget situation, thanks were recorded to Officers and also the Trade Union representatives for their contributions;
- the focus had to be on repairing lives across the Highlands so the proposals which would impact positively on both physical and mental health were very much welcomed;
- when discussing the current level of reserves and their possible use, it was essential to recognise the unprecedented number of factors and risks across a range of issues and these had to be taken into account when making decisions for the coming weeks and months;
- it was suggested that there was now an urgent need to identify a possible solution for the underfunding of Local Authorities and the NHS both locally and nationally;
- there would be huge opportunities in respect of future energy systems within the Highlands and these had to be explored;
- all Members were deeply indebted to the Council staff who had risen to all challenges during the pandemic and this should be recorded;
- in terms of the visitor management strategy, the quick action and additional funding which had been provided was welcomed, not least because of the reassurance which it would provide for local communities;
- the economic prosperity fund, and specifically the targeted support for social enterprises, was also welcomed and represented huge potential for communities across the Highlands; and
- it had to be highlighted that this was the first budget where there were opportunities to invest widely in communities across the area and to ensure that the needs of people came first across a range of issues at a time of great uncertainty.

Thereafter, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr R Bremner, **MOVED** the recommendations within the report - together with the amended template in respect of Corran Ferry.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr P Saggars, moved the following:-

- to amend recommendation (iv) within the report to read as follows – ‘Agree the savings plans as detailed in Sections 16 and 19 and Appendix 1 of the report, adjusted for those savings as detailed on the ‘Removal of Proposed Administration Savings’ schedule of the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group’s alternative budget.
- to add the following recommendations to the report - (x) agree to the ‘Additional Investments’ as included in the Conservative Group’s alternative budget and (xi) agree to the Additional Savings, and additional Use of Reserves, to balance the budget as outlined in the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Group’s alternative budget.
- to delete recommendation (vii) within the report (which sought agreement for maintaining General Fund non-earmarked reserves at a minimum of £24.7m as outlined in Section 17 of the report).

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 58 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 11 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

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

For the Amendment

Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mrs P Hadley, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr I Ramon, Mr P Sagers, Mr A Sinclair and Mr C Smith.

Decision

The Council: -

- i) **AGREED** the Scottish Government's offer of £4.231m and to freeze Council Tax rates at 2020/21 levels as outlined in Section 13 of the report;
- ii) **AGREED** the investment of £9.81m in a Visitor Management Strategy, Economic Prosperity Fund, Place Based Investment and Ward Discretionary Budget top-up as detailed in Section 19 and Appendix 1 of the report;
- iii) **AGREED** to progress the nine key transformation projects as detailed in Section 19 and Appendix 1 of the report;
- iv) **AGREED** the savings plans as detailed in Sections 16 and 19 and Appendix 1 of the report;
- v) **APPROVED** the funding of budget pressures and budget uplifts as detailed in Sections 10 and 11 and Appendices 3 and 4 of the report;
- vi) **AGREED** to the reprofiling of previously agreed savings as outlined in Section 15 and Appendix 7 of the report;
- vii) **AGREED** to maintain General Fund non-earmarked reserves at a minimum of £24.7m as outlined in Section 17 of the report and that anything in excess of this amount could be deployed within future phases of the Investment Plan as detailed in the Health and Prosperity Strategy at Appendix 1;
- viii) **AGREED** that the impact of any changes in Government funding that might come as part of a final budget settlement be considered as part of the budget review and development of a medium-term financial plan over the coming months; and
- ix) **AGREED** to lobby as a matter of urgency to secure as much funding as possible from the Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Council also **AGREED** the amended template for Saving 2.17 (Corran Ferry) as follows - savings template amended to reflect a lower increase in fares for the vast majority of drive up customers (cars, motorcycles etc). The fares to increase from £8.80 to £9.10 (an increase of 3%). Campervans and minibuses of less than 6m to see an increase in fares from £8.10 to £13.00 and the changes to larger campervans and caravans to remain as per the original template.

The meeting ended at 1.20pm.

Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 13 January 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mrs J Barclay
Mr C Fraser

Mr A MacKinnon
Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer - Housing and Property
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager (Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth), Chief Executive's Office
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr R MacLeod, Area Housing Manager
Mr J McHardy, Housing Development Manager
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer
Miss S Tarrant, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Group Commander A McKinley, 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.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulans

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee held on 13 October 2020 which were approved by the Council on 29 October 2020.

Members asked that the action note from Item 9 for workshop session(s) with community groups across the area be taken forward by the Chair, the Vice Chair and the Ward Manager.

**4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn**

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/001/21 dated 18 December 2020 together with the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report by the Local Group Commander for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

In discussion, the following main points were addressed by the Local Group Commander:-

- on a question on whether home fire safety visits had been undertaken during the Covid 19 period, the Local Group Commander confirmed that only very high-risk home fire safety visits could be undertaken during this time, this meant homes with no smoke detection or homes where there was a possibility of fire related crime. The Group Commander stated, that as soon as restrictions were lifted engagement would recommence;
- recruitment and training had been ongoing although training at this time was restricted, remote training on their E Learning platform had taken place with safety critical training such as breathing apparatus and incident command training continuing at designated training facilities in their respective bubbles to reduce the risk;
- fire stations were operated with a bubble of four and these bubbles did not mix with other fire station officers and only occupied the fire station when required for risk critical maintenance; and
- the fire stations had been utilised already for some vaccinating of paramedics and several community fire stations were being utilised as Covid 19 test centres. If the NHS requested assistance to roll out the vaccinating programme the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service would be happy to help, as they were ideally placed with risk assessed, Covid secured premises.

Members thereafter thanked the Group Commander and asked that their appreciation for the work undertaken be passed to all fire station staff.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the report.

**5. Roads Capital Programme Progress Report 2020/21
Aithisg Adhartais Prògram Calpa Rathaidean 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/002/21 dated 9 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment which detailed the proposed 2021/22 Roads Maintenance Programme for Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth.

Members discussed the proposed 2021/22 Roads capital Maintenance Programme for the area which was pending confirmation of the Council's Community and Place Committee budget allocations.

The Community and Place Committee local allocations budget for 2021/22 had not yet been determined so the roads maintenance programme presented to the Committee today was based on the 2020/21 budget.

As the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Area have a total of 28% of the road length in the former Ross and Cromarty area, this capital programme is based on 28% of the 2020/21 Ross and Cromarty Area Capital Budget which equates to £291,715. Members want to see further work carried out for this figure, as well as the final allocation figure when it is known, to be split down at ward level to give both the Black Isle Ward and the Dingwall and Seaforth Ward a budget.

Because of uncertainty regarding the actual budget and how this will be split between wards, Members felt they could only agree to works for which money can be confirmed.

Only surfacing works approved in the 20-21 programme but not yet completed will be undertaken this financial year as winter permits. Resurfacing works were proposed on the A832 at Muir of Ord and at the U2711 Bogallan – Allanglach Road on the Black Isle. There are a further 21 resurfacing works that have been identified as priority works but for which additional funding and further committee approval would be required. These include resurfacing sections of the A832 at a number of locations including Cromarty, Muir of Ord, Dingwall, Tore and Munloch; the C1071 Heights of Docherty route and the U2975 Ardnagrask Road.

Surface dressing was also proposed along the A862 at Station Road and the U3031 Riverford Crescent road in Conon Bridge. These schemes together with a further 6 projects on a list which will only be delivered if additional funding and committee approval can be secured.

Members had not had the opportunity at ward level to look in detail on the priority list of works nor were they in a position to know a definite figure for our budget. We have only been able to agree the projects for which funding was confirmed to go-ahead. Further talks will take place at ward level on allocation and the priority list for other projects. Once this has taken place the decisions will be ratified as soon as possible by our Area Committee. This detailed work will take place as rapidly as possible and in the meantime officers will make arrangements for the confirmed projects to move forward.

All local members are committed to ensuring we make the most of available resources and will continue to review and monitor progress on a regular basis.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed 2021/22 Roads Maintenance Programme for Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth area as above; and

- ii. **AGREED** that further talks take place at ward level on allocation and the priority list for other projects and that these would be brought back to Committee.

6. **Town Centre Funding** **Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile**

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/003/21 dated 18 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members had concerns over the Newton Room project within Dingwall Town Hall and the ingress of water which required immediate attention; and
- all works should be undertaken urgently to secure the Town Centre funding as works had to have started before 31 March 2021 or the funding would be lost.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed additional items of TCF expenditure, namely:-

- i. Rosemarkie and Fortrose Trust are to receive an additional £25k to allow them to complete the refurbishment of the public toilets in Rosemarkie and Fortrose;
- ii. £100k will be invested in Dingwall Town Hall i.e. roof repairs; and
- iii. the remaining £71,364 will augment the £30k approved in 2019/20 to deliver improvements to the North Kessock (A9) Layby i.e. improved lighting to the steps, waste disposal facility, information/interpretation and white lining of vehicle spaces.

7. **Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP)** **Plana Tasgaidh Taigheadais Ro-innleachdail**

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/004/21 dated 14 December 2020 inviting consideration of the Highland's draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) which sets out proposals for affordable housing investment during 2021-2026, as reported to Economy and Infrastructure Committee at the meeting held on 4 November 2020.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members asked that the history of the areas be taken into account when naming the new developments;
- there had been no recent updates on the Meiklefield Road development and the Station Road development in Dingwall for some time and Members asked that an update be provided to the WBM;
- a notice board/sign in the Meiklefield Road area detailing the development was beneficial for local residents; and
- a request that the private tenants and owner/occupiers in Meiklefield Road be kept up to date with the project.

- Fodderty is on the ward boundary and should be included in the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh plan

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the Highland's draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan;
- ii. that updates would be provided to the Ward Business Meeting for Meiklefield Road and Station Road in Dingwall; and
- iii. the progress within the developments highlighted within section 5 of this report and included as appendix 1 of the report.

8. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/005/21 dated 14 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Housing and Property which provided Members with information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 September 2020.

Members started by thanking the Housing Service Team for their work during the Covid-19 outbreak and asked that their appreciation be passed to staff.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed for those in receipt of benefit and having arrears for the first time due to Covid-19 and Members urged tenants to get in touch as soon as possible if they were having money problems, the Housing Service had been undertaking a pro-active approach and tenants were advised through newsletters and when signing a tenancy to get in touch as soon as they understood they may have arrears;
- some people from other areas had been intending to come to the Highlands with the perception that the Highlands was a safer place to be during the covid outbreak, these people had been urged to stay where they were; and
- Members understood that mutual exchanges could not take place at the present time where the higher level of transmission from the new mutated Covid-19 strain prevented people from entering a property that was not their own home, with mutual exchanges the houses could not remain empty for any length of time as the exchanges happened on the same day.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

9. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

There had been circulated Reports Nos BIDS/006/21 – BIDS/008/21 dated 17 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources and Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which provided information on the following Common Good Funds:-

- a. Cromarty Common Good Fund BIDS/006/21;
- b. Dingwall Common Good Fund BIDS/007/21; and
- c. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund BIDS/008/21.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated information provided in relation to each Fund.

The meeting closed at 12:55 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 14 January 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mrs I Campbell
Dr I Cockburn

Mr A MacInnes

In attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager (Skye, Ross and Cromarty), Infrastructure and Environment
Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager (North), Property and Housing
Mr J McHardy, Housing Development Manager
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer
Miss S Tarrant, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer, Chief Executive's Office
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Group Commander A McKinley, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Ms R Clarke, Local Development Officer, Applecross Community Company (ACC)
Mr O Kilbride, Chair, Applecross Community Company

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

Business

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. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 15 October 2020 which were approved by the Council on 29 October 2020 were noted.

4. **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/001/21 dated 18 December 2020 together with the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Performance Report by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following responses were received from the Group Manager:-

- there is a financial cost to false alarms, for example, a call out charge for each retained firefighters, an hourly rate for staff thereafter, vehicle fuel, wear and tear on the equipment. There is also an element of road risk having an appliance respond to an incident. The Group Commander advised that when there were repeated false alarms the local managers will help and work in partnership with the premises holders to reduce unwanted fire alarm activations. The Protect and Prevention Directorate has recently appointed a UFAS Champion who has the reference of overseeing the reduction strategy;
- station availability was constantly monitored especially in these challenging times. The Group Commander advised that they strove for 100% appliance availability, at all times, and they would challenge any reductions seen in availability;
- recruitment and training had been ongoing although training at this time was restricted, remote training on their E Learning platform had taken place with safety critical training such as breathing apparatus and incident command training continuing at designated training facilities;
- the Fire service were still responding to medical emergencies and now carried defibrillators on all appliances, the Fire Service endeavoured to support the Scottish Ambulance Service in any way they could following the relevant training in the use of specialised equipment; and
- Members had been impressed with the engagement with the elderly on fire safety visits. On a question on whether home fire safety visits had been undertaken during the Covid 19 period, the Local Group Commander confirmed that only very high-risk home fire safety visits could be undertaken during this time, this meant homes with no smoke detection or homes where there was a possibility of fire related crime. The Group Commander stated, that as soon as restrictions were lifted engagement would recommence, the amount of people seeking home safety visits was very good.

The Committee **NOTED** the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Performance Report.

5. **Supporting Community Action and Involvement Presentation: Applecross Community Company A' Cur Taic ri Gniomhachd is Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd 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 brings and what more the Council could do in support.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- Ms Clarke responded that there was too much wood to sell it all to the community, the majority of the wood would be felled and removed by the contractor with only a small proportion of the wood sold within the community;
- the ACC had looked at installing a campervan waste disposal unit but the positioning would be in close proximity to the existing one. Local people had mixed views and wanted to encourage the use of the camping site for campervans where they could use camping site toilets and waste disposal units and not the use of wild camping;
- Members commended the community with their clear vision and for their collaboration and resilience during the Covid-19 outbreak;
- land purchase took a considerable time, an example was for an asset transfer from NHS Highland for a piece of land beside the GP surgery, which had commenced in approximately 2015 and it had taken five years to purchase;
- preference would be for a community owned let holiday home as opposed to a holiday home only used for two weeks in the year. A let holiday home provided local employment an income and money spent within the community, unfortunately most holiday homes were not owned by local people who could not compete with the money paid for local houses by people from elsewhere in the country.

The Committee thanked Ms Clarke and Mr Kilbride for the very informative presentation.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

6. Town Centre Fund Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/002/21 dated 15 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the proposed additional items of Town Centre Fund expenditure, namely:-

- i. Strathpeffer Community Council - additional pump for the Fountain and/or Waterfall cascade - £9,000;
- ii. Strathpeffer Community Council - extend electricity supply within the new gazebo to provide power points and lights - £1,000;
- iii. Strathpeffer Community Council - Improved signage for visitors - £15,000;
- iv. Strathpeffer Community Council - drainage works required for the site of the new community play park - £28,000; and
- v. the residual balance of £3,104 should be held as contingency in the event that the cost items exceed budget estimates or in the event it is not required used for a trishaw for the new Peffery Way to facilitate residents from local care homes accessing the countryside.

7. Associated School Group Overview
Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/003/21 dated 8 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Ullapool Associated School Group (ASG).

The Committee **NOTED** the report had been withdrawn and would be brought to the next meeting of the WRSL Committee.

8. Roads Capital Programme Progress Report 2020/21
Aithisg Adhartais Prògram Calpa Rathaidean 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/004/21 dated 15 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment which detailed the proposed 2021/22 Roads Maintenance Programme for Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question on the Bundaloch Road works, Mr Moncrieff advised that due to the suspension on funding for Capital Works at the start of the Covid-19 outbreak these works had not been completed last year, it was intended that, subject to the weather, these works would be completed before the end of this financial year and if not it would be completed at the start of the next financial year; and
- the Strathhill road into Plockton required work and Members would look at this and if additional funding was made available it would be discussed at the next ward business meeting.

Mr Malcolm MacLeod advised that a report was intended to be brought to the E and I Committee on 4 February on additional capital funding. An updated capital report would then be brought to the next relevant Area Committee with the enhanced level of funding for the next two years set out.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed 2021/22 Roads Maintenance Programme for Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh.

9. Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP)
Plana Tasgaidh Taigheadais Ro-innleachdail

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/005/21 dated 22 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment which report invited consideration of the Highland's draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP), which sets out proposals for affordable housing investment during 2021–2026, as reported to Economy and Infrastructure Committee at the meeting held on 4 November 2020.

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED**:

- the Highland's draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan; and

- the progress within the developments highlighted within section 5 of this report and included as appendix 1 of the report.

10. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/006/21 dated 15 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing which provided Members with information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 September 2020.

The Committee **NOTED** that as the Committee was no longer quorate, Cllr I Campbell having lost connectivity, this report would be carried to the next meeting of the WRSL Committee.

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Monday, 18 January 2021** at 12 noon.

Present:

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

Officials in Attendance:

Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer - Resources & Finance
 Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
 Mr A Webster, Regeneration and Employment Team Leader
 Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Ms O Bayon Committee Officer, Chief Executive's Office

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

Mrs H Carmichael in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Graham, Ms E Knox, Ms E Roddick and Mr C Smith.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 3 – Miss J Campbell and Mrs T Robertson (both non-financial)

3. Town Centre Fund

Declarations of Interest –

Miss J Campbell declared a non-financial interest in respect of the application for the Castle Tavern on the basis of having previously made representations for the owners on a separate issue and, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of

Conduct, confirmed that she would not take part in the debate on this particular application.

Miss Campbell also declared a non-financial interest in respect of the application for 7-17 Union Street as a Board Member of the Inverness Townscape Heritage Project but confirmed that she would remain during discussion of this application.

Mrs T Robertson and Mrs M Davidson declared non-financial interests in respect of the application for the vacant shop at Drumnadrochit as a Director of the Highland Housing Alliance and a Trustee of the Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that they would remain during discussion of the application.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/1/21 dated 7 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment.

There had also been circulated additional Addendum: Revised Table and Late Proposal Submission dated 15 January 2021.

During discussion, and prior to discussion of the applications which had been received, clarification was sought on the overall process and specifically whether further bids could be sought within the timescale if any funding remained unassigned. In this regard, it was confirmed that this would be possible although the aim would be to allocate all of the available funding at this meeting if possible.

Also, and in relation to any further Town Centre Fund allocations which might come to the Council from the Scottish Government in the future, it was suggested that work should begin now in order to ensure that 'shovel ready' projects were in place to take advantage of such funding if it was received.

Thereafter, the Committee dealt with the applications which had been presented as follows:-

- 1) Glen Mhor Limited - REJECTED
- 2) MacGregors Bar - REJECTED
- 3) Browns Gallery - REJECTED
- 4) The Castle Tavern - REJECTED
- 5) High Street, Inverness – AGREED to allocate £34,510
- 6) 7-17, Union Street, Inverness –

Mrs C Caddick, seconded by Miss J Campbell, MOVED that this application should be agreed in principle (on the basis that the exact sum to be allocated would be discussed later in the meeting).

As an AMENDMENT, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr R MacWilliam, moved that this application should not be approved at this time.

On a vote being taken, the MOTION received 12 votes and the AMENDMENT received 4 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the MOTION was therefore CARRIED, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion – Mr R Balfour, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Gray, Mrs B McAllister, Mrs T Robertson and Mr G Ross.

For the Amendment – Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Jarvie and Mr R MacWilliam.

Abstentions – Mrs I MacKenzie and Mr D Macpherson.

Therefore, AGREED IN PRINCIPLE (on the basis that the exact sum to be allocated would be discussed later in the meeting).

- 7) Vacant Shop, Drumnadrochit – AGREED IN PRINCIPLE (on the basis that the exact sum to be allocated would be discussed later in the meeting).
- 8) Beaully Public Toilets – AGREED that this application should be included on a reserve list to be determined if/when further funding was made available by the Scottish Government.
- 9) The Pavilion, Victoria Drive (Mens Shed) – AGREED IN PRINCIPLE (on the basis that the exact sum to be allocated would be discussed later in the meeting).

Following further discussion on the exact sums to be allocated to the projects which had been agreed in principle –

Mr G Ross, seconded by Mr R MacWilliam, MOVED the full allocations to the Vacant Shop, Drumnadrochit (£75,000) and The Pavilion, Mens Shed (£30,000) with the remaining funding of £112,958 being allocated to the Union Street project.

As an AMENDMENT, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr D Macpherson, moved the full allocations to the Vacant Shop at Drumnadrochit and The Pavilion, Mens Shed, but that full details of the Union Street project should be circulated to Members of the Committee in the first instance and prior to any final decision being taken on the allocation to this project (by the Executive Chief Officer in consultation with City Committee Members).

On a vote being taken, the MOTION received 15 votes and the AMENDMENT received 2 votes, with 1 abstention, and the MOTION was therefore CARRIED, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion – Mr R Balfour, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Gray, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs B McAllister, Mrs T Robertson and Mr G Ross.

For the Amendment – Mr A Jarvie and Mr D Macpherson.

Abstention – Mrs I MacKenzie

In summary, the Committee therefore **AGREED** as follows in respect of the applications which had been presented:-

- 1) Glen Mhor Limited – REJECTED
- 2) MacGregors Bar – REJECTED
- 3) Browns Gallery – REJECTED
- 4) The Castle Tavern – REJECTED
- 5) High Street, Inverness – AGREED (£34,510)
- 6) 7-17, Union Street, Inverness – AGREED (£112,958)
- 7) Vacant Shop, Drumnadrochit – AGREED (£75,000)
- 8) Beaully Public Toilets – AGREED to include on a reserve list for consideration
- 9) The Pavilion, Victoria Drive, Mens Shed – AGREED (£30,000)

The meeting ended at 2.50pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Monday, 18 January, 2021 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr B Allan	Mr I Ramon
Mr A Henderson	Mr D Rixson
Mr N McLean	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
 Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
 Ms E Taylor, Assistant Ward Manager
 Mr A Webster, Regeneration and Employment Team Leader
 Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration
 Mr J McHardy, Housing Development Manager
 Ms M Cameron Principal Housing Officer
 Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager
 Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer
 Mr L Macdonald, Repairs Manager
 Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer
 Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure
 Mr S Farrow, Principal Engineer
 Mr S Eastaugh, Access Officer, Inverness, Lochaber and Nairn
 Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant

Also in attendance:-

Chief Inspector J Valentine, Police Scotland (Item 3)
 Acting Inspector N Hough, Police Scotland (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.

Business

1. Interim Chair

The Chairman had submitted his apologies for the meeting and therefore Members were invited to appoint an Interim Chair.

Mr A Henderson was unanimously appointed as Interim Chair for this meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter.

3. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:-

Item 4 - Mr A Henderson (non financial)
 Item 5,6,7 & 9 - Mr D Rixson (non financial)
 Item 11 – Mr B Thompson (non financial)

4. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/1/21 by the Lochaber Area Inspector.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- In relation to the issue of sharing sexual images by school pupils and persons being victims as a result, it was highlighted that this could have a devastating impact on the lives of young people and therefore the Police, Schools, Parents and young people would have to work together in addressing this critical issue. It was explained that usually these images had been shared consensually and then there could be repeat offences when these images were shared again. Therefore, there was work for Schools, Police and the families of the young people to inform and support those involved.
- It was noted that there were 72 missing persons reports that the Police in South Highland had to deal with. It was explained that the number of missing persons had increased through the period of lockdown and in particular there had been several missing person reports relating to vulnerable people, but thankfully they were usually found fairly quickly. Clarification on high risk and medium risk missing persons would be included in a future report.
- It was concerning to see a substantial increase in sexual crimes and domestic abuse. The Police continued to investigate these crimes and support victims.
- In relation to speeding offences there was a small reduction in the number of offences. It was explained that during the first lockdown there were few vehicles on the road and therefore the Police were not proactively undertaking speed checks. As lockdowns were lifted, Police did target their resources to catch speeders at key times and locations and were catching them regularly. A combination of education and enforcement would hopefully maintain good road safety standards.
- It was queried what the protocol was for diverting traffic along the A861 via the Corran Ferry when the A82 trunk road was closed between Corran and Fort William. Also, what was Police Scotland's views of the use of the A861 by HGVs during A82 closures, and would Police Scotland give a commitment to take part in a Stakeholders Group to review the situation and work with the local community to address their concerns and change any existing protocols with national agencies. In response to the queries, it was highlighted that Police Scotland had contacted Transport Scotland on these issues and it was advised that the diversion route was not meant to go over the Corran Ferry, given the congestion it would cause on roads that were inappropriate for large volumes of traffic. Police Scotland would welcome taking part in a Stakeholder Participation Group to discuss this matter to find a solution.

Thereafter, the Committee, **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 November 2020.

5. Town Centre Fund Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

Declaration of Interest – Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as an Adviser to Caol Regeneration Company and 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 interests did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/2/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A summary was provided of the six proposals received by the Council for Lochaber Town Centre Funding and an assessment of their eligibility status.

Thereafter, Members proceeded to discuss the projects to fit the funding allocation of £84,156 which was available for the Lochaber area. Members were generally supportive of awarding funding for The Black Parks, Kilmallie Community Centre Car Park, Kilmallie Christmas Lights and The Parade, Fort William projects. In relation to the remaining two proposals, the main points raised were as follows:-

- In relation to the Puffer Pier and Slipway project concern existed about deliverability as Marine Scotland licenses were not in place. These had been submitted on 4 December, 2020 and could take a maximum of 14 weeks to determine. This would make it challenging for the tender to be awarded or the project to commence prior to the deadline of 31 March, 2021. However, the project did show good progress and there was the prospect of it being completed on time that it could be supported.
- In relation to the Caol Car Park project, this was a Council owned Car Park and it was acknowledged that it did need to be resurfaced. Caol Regeneration Company had taken the initiative to seek funding to resurface it. It was understood that the Council would be receptive to a grant award to allow these works to take place as there was no budget available in the capital programme to do it. The Council's preference was that they should carry out the works on their own asset rather than entering into a contractual arrangement with a third party.
- The Puffer Pier and Slipway project did not have obvious alternative funding should a grant not be awarded, whereas the Council could have the money available to resurface Caol Car Park, given the increased money available to fund road repairs.
- It was proposed that the Lochaber Committee writes to the Council's Roads Service and ask them to work up a scheme to resurface the Caol Car Park. If there is delay in the Puffer Pier and Slipway project then funding could instead be diverted to the Caol Car park project.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the following projects and amount of funding from the Town Centre Fund:-

- Puffer Pier and Slipway -£29,478
- The Black Parks - £15,000

- Kilmallie Community Centre Car Park – £23,556
- Kilmallie Christmas Lights – £722
- The Parade, Fort William - £15,400

The Committee also **AGREED** that the Lochaber Committee writes to the Council's Roads Service and ask them to work up a scheme to resurface Caol Car park. This would be the reserve project for funding should the Puffer Pier and Slipway project not proceed.

6. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais**

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 was circulated Report No LA/3/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The work of the Housing Service was much appreciated and their support to tenants, particularly during the Covid period, was commended.
- In relation to the issue of fuel poverty and access to reliable heating it was queried if there was a sufficient emergency supply of wood pellets for tenants and what were the support measures for tenants with wood pellet boilers i.e. was there a replacement scheme in place. It was advised that the Council did have a good supply of wood pellets that tenants were able to access if required. Further, there was not a programme for boiler replacement, but each request for heating replacement was assessed on its merits.

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

7. **Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/22** **Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2021/22**

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 was circulated Report No. LA/4/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members noted that a 2% general rent increase was being recommended to the Housing and Property Committee on 27 January 2021 and were supportive of this same level of increase for Garage Rents in Lochaber.

In terms of the strategic framework for dealing with garages in Lochaber, a comprehensive report on the condition of all garages and garage sites had now been

completed and would be submitted to Members for consideration in due course. Tenants would thereafter be consulted on any proposals.

The Committee **AGREED** a 2% rent increase to apply to Lochaber Garages and Garage Sites.

8. Strategic Housing Investment Plan Plana Tasgaidh Taigheadais Ro-innleachdail

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest 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.

There was circulated Report No. LA/5/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members commended proposals for the programme of affordable housing accommodation in Lochaber and it was welcomed that more new houses were proposed for rural areas of Lochaber. In particular, it was great news that Fort William, Upper Achintore Phase 1 had been approved as this would have a considerable impact in meeting housing needs in Lochaber. Phase 1 would also provide an opportunity to open up land at this site for further housing in future. The project at Lochaber House, Fort William was also to commence soon which was great news for the town centre regeneration.

A request was made for more details on timescales and engagement with local communities. For example, what was the timescale for the Lochaber Housing Association feasibility study for the Kinlochleven site and what discussions have been held with the local Community Council. Also, the Strontian Dalmore site had uncertainties over what will happen to the vacant school building. In this connection, it was queried what arrangements are in place if the adjacent village hall was needed for the community; what discussions had there been with the village hall committee; what plans are in place for the future demolition of the school and timescale for decisions on future use of the site. It was explained that the feasibility study on the Kinlochleven site was on hold as a site visit was required and this would be done once Covid restrictions were relaxed to allow this. A response to the other issues would be sent to Members after the meeting.

It was advised that the main issue with regards to increasing the availability of rural housing was the lack of land that was readily and economically available to deliver new housing solutions. There was sufficient land in the highlands for house building, but there were issues with difficult land conditions, getting land that was sufficiently close to services and acquiring land so as to build at affordable rates. Funding was also required to open up the infrastructure in rural areas and it cost more to build houses in rural areas.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED:-**

- i the Highland’s draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan; and
- ii the progress with the developments highlighted within section 5 of the report and included as appendix 1.

9. Claggan Quadrangles Update Cùirt-lios Ceàrnagach a' Chlaiginn

There was circulated Report No. LA/6/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

Members were generally supportive of the draft design to help improve the aesthetics, amenities and functionality of the Claggan quadrangles as well as alleviate parking problems. However, there were some concerns regarding lack of greenery and play facilities. An undertaking was given to amend future design plans to incorporate more greenery, play areas and play facilities.

It was noted that overall there had been a positive response to the design proposals from residents. It was queried what the main comments were from those residents who did not like the plans. In general, some respondents did not want any work done or cars in the quadrangles. Overall respondents were very enthusiastic about the proposals. An undertaking was given to provide Members with the detailed comments from respondents.

It was queried what was the future for this Estate in the long term as the closes were poor and the heating system in the flats inadequate. Also, it would be good to have some Forum set up to discuss these issues. It was advised that by regenerating the quadrangles, it would highlight repair works in other areas of the Estate e.g. external painting.

The Committee:-

- i **APPROVED** the design concept illustrated in Appendix 1 and progress project to full design stage. Also, that future design plans would incorporate more greenery, play areas and play facilities;
- ii **NOTED** a funding options appraisal will be presented to Members at a future briefing; and
- iii **NOTED** that further resources will be committed to developing a full technical design.

10. West Highland and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan Review Ath-sgrùdadh Plana Prìomh Cheuman Atharraichte na Gàidhealtachd an Iar is nan Eilean

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to 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.

There was circulated Report No. LA/7/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members supported the contents of the report and the recommendations and highlighted the importance of Core Paths for exercise during the Covid-19 pandemic and that it was important they were kept open and available to the public.

Officers support to the Lochaber Local Access Forum was much appreciated. There was a good mix of community and landowner interests represented on the Forum and there was good debate at meetings. There was not always consensus regarding some

of the proposals brought forward, the majority of which related to the impact Core Paths would have on forestry work.

A recommendation of the reporter in the Public Local Inquiry into the first Highland Core Paths Plan was that more remote routes should be considered in future. This was an overriding feature of this review of Core Paths in Lochaber.

Reference was made to Community Council consultation on Core Path signage. It was requested that if there was not a constituted Community Council, then signage proposals are submitted to a Lochaber Ward Business Meeting for consideration.

The Committee having acknowledged the significant work undertaken by Officers on the Core Paths plan review:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Amended Core Paths Plan for the Lochaber area of the West Highland and Islands with outstanding objections on 9 proposed core paths outlined in the report.
- ii. **AGREED** to modify the amended core paths plan to include changes to 5 proposed core paths and the removal of 3 proposed core paths;
- iii. **APPROVED** a six-week public consultation on the modifications to the Amended Core Paths Plan; and
- iv **AGREED** that if there was not a constituted Community Council then Core Path signage proposals are submitted to a Lochaber Ward Business Meeting for consideration.

11. **U1122 Creag Aoil Quarry Road, Torlundy Partial Deletion Dubhadh Às Rathad fo Urra**

There was circulated Report No. LA/8/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed partial deletion of the U1122 Creag Aoil Quarry Road, Torlundy.

12. **Banavie Primary Safer Routes to School Slighean nas Sàbhailte dhan Sgoil**

Declaration of Interest – Mr B Thompson declared a non-financial interest in this item as his children attended Banavie Primary School 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 was circulated Report No. LA/9/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Members were supportive of the proposal for a footpath widening scheme for Banavie Primary School. This proposal was something that parents and the Parent Council at Banavie Primary School have been campaigning for some considerable time. In terms of the objections to the proposals, it was understood that these were not necessarily about this specific project, but concern whether in the long term there would be a significant development down that road. However, it was unlikely that any development would happen in this area in the long term and given the significant access issues with the bridge, it was unlikely that any development would happen at any stage. Also, it was felt there was a need to reduce the volume of traffic on this road to make the environment more pleasant for residents and school pupils.

Officers were commended for the lengths they went to in order to try and resolve the objections to the Scheme and their comprehensive responses to objections.

The Committee **AGREED** the implementation of the footpath widening scheme for Banavie School Road, Banavie, Fort William.

13. Invercoe Bridge Replacement Scheme Update
Aithisg Drochaid Inbhir Comhann

There was circulated Report No. LA/10/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

It was explained that the Invercoe Bridge Replacement Scheme was required due to the condition of the existing bridge and was a top priority in the Council's list of structures due for replacement. A summary was provided on progress to replace the bridge.

The Committee **NOTED** the update report.

14. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated for information the following Minutes of Meetings, the terms of which were **NOTED**:-

- i Lochaber Committee held on 28 September, 2020; and
- ii Special Lochaber Committee held on 11 December, 2020.

The meeting ended at 12.55 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Wednesday, 20 January 2021 at 10.00am.

Present:

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

Ms F Robertson
Ms M Smith
Ms C Wilson

Officials in Attendance:

Alison Clark, Head of Policy
Alan Webster, Regeneration and Employment Team Leader
Helen Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Ms F Robertson in the Chair, except for part of Item 3, as indicated in the minutes, during which time Mr A Rhind was in the Chair.

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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Ms F Robertson – part of Item 3 (non-financial)
Mr D Louden – part of Item 3 (financial)

3. Town Centre Fund Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

Ms F Robertson declared a non-financial interest in part of this item as a member of Tain Task Force 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 majority of the discussion but she would vacate the Chair and not participate in the discussion and decision about that particular application.

Mr D Louden declared a financial interest in part of this item as a Director of Tain Heritage Trust and left the meeting during discussion of their application.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/01/21 dated 7 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer: Infrastructure and Environment.

Clarification was sought and provided on the importance of the Committee making a decision without deferment due to the need for the projects to be committed to by the end of March to secure the funding.

A summary was provided of the report and, during discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members were reminded of the previous decision to split the £140,260 funding 50:50 between the two wards;
- information was sought and provided on the need for a building warrant for the Picture House project;
- an explanation was sought and provided for the relatively high cost of the resurfacing work to the Rose Garden path, this including it being in a conservation area and the need for drainage work;
- the importance of the Rose Garden and toilet refurbishment to the local community and visitors was emphasised;
- it was suggested the toilet refurbishment could be undertaken without the additional work in the Rose Garden, and the extra money used to install a lift in the Picture House;
- clarification was sought and provided that if any of the projects came in under budget, there were other projects to which additional funds could be diverted to ensure they were not lost; and
- Members acknowledged there were no concerns with the proposals for Cromarty Firth Ward and these would utilise the allocation for that Ward.

At this point in the meeting, Ms Robertson vacated the Chair as a result of her declaration of interest, and Mr Rhind, as Vice Chair of the Committee, took the Chair. Ms Robertson and Mr Louden did not participate in the remaining decision-making.

In relation to the proposed projects for Tain and Easter Ross, Ms M Smith, seconded by Ms P Munro, **moved** to use £36k for the Tain Picture House and the balance of circa £34k for the toilet refurbishment only.

Ms C Wilson, seconded by Mr M Finlayson, moved as an **amendment** to use the entire allocation for Tain and Easter Ross towards the toilet refurbishment and Rose Garden project, and for Members to work with other projects where possible to help them source alternative funding, with particular reference to the installation of a lift at the Tain Picture House.

Following a vote, the results were as follows:

For Ms Smith's motion: Ms Smith, Ms Munro

For Ms Wilson's amendment: Ms Wilson, Mr Finlayson, Mr Rhind

Ms Wilson's **MOTION** was carried by 3 votes to 2.

At this point, Ms F Robertson returned to the Chair.

It was suggested that in order to maximise the use of the funding, it would be preferable for work on the projects to be undertaken by the Council, even if the Council required to enlist specialist contractors. Any balance on grants budgets following the drawdown of funding for these agreed projects would be available for Tain Picture House project.

The Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. the proposed projects to receive Town Centre Grant as follows:
 - a. Rose Garden, Tain – £70,130 to Tain Task Force and The Highland Council for new surfacing of the Rose Garden paths and refurbishment of the public toilets, *with assistance provided where possible to other projects to source funding, with particular reference to the need for a lift at the Tain Picture House;*
 - b. Shore Road, Invergordon - £50,000 to The Highland Council to provide a traffic and passenger management system for visiting cruise ships;
 - c. Evanton street lighting - £20,130 to The Highland Council to install new architectural lighting columns at the southern entrance of Evanton to improve the amenity, welcome and arrival of the village; and
- ii. that projects should be undertaken by the Council where possible and any balance on grants budgets following the drawdown of funding for these agreed projects would be available for Tain Picture House project.

The meeting ended at 10.55am.

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Thursday, 21 January 2021** at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie
Mr M Reiss

Mr K Rosie
Ms N Sinclair
Mr D MacKay

Officials in attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning
Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Ms A Donald, North Area Manager, Education & Learning
Mr S Sandecki, Head Teacher, Wick High School, Education & Learning
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer, Development & Infrastructure
Mr T Murdison, Property Manager, Education & Learning
Mr A Puls, Planning Team Leader, Education & Learning
Ms S James-Gaukroger, Townscape Heritage Assistant, Education & Learning
Mr N Young, Senior Engineer, Education & Learning
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Inspector A Goskirk, Police Scotland
Mr A Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group
Mr E Sinclair, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Mr M Thomsen, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Mr J West, Head of Culture, High Life Highland
Ms V Trelfer, HiTRANS

1. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest

Item 6: Mrs N Sinclair (non-financial)
Item 8: Mr R Bremner (non-financial)
Items 7, 8 and 10: Mr K Rosie and Mrs N Sinclair (non-financial)

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings – 22 October and 11 December 2020

There had been circulated Minutes of the previous Meetings held on 22 October 2020 and 11 December 2020 (which had been approved by the Council on 17 December 2020 and 7 January 2021 respectively) which were **NOTED**.

4. Matters Arising – Action Tracker

There had been circulated an Action Tracker which detailed the actions arising from previous meetings.

The Ward Manager provided the following updates:-

- an item had been included on the agenda of the Ward Business Meeting on 15 February 2021 in relation to the information that Members wished to be included in future ASG reports;
- a meeting would be held with the Chair to discuss arrangements for a meeting of Caithness Members to consider the issues within Wards 2 and 3, and those affecting the whole area with a view to an action plan being developed as soon as possible;
- there would be consideration at the next Ward Business Meeting of the opportunity for the Council to facilitate the continuation and expansion of Thurso Community Development Trust's lunch club service throughout the area; and
- the Chair would have discussions with the Ward 2 Members in relation to the continuing support for the refurbishment of Thurso Fire Station.

The Committee **AGREED** the updates to the action tracker.

In accordance with Standing Order 9, the Committee AGREED to take item 11 on the agenda at this point.

11. Caithness Horizons Update Fios às Ùr mu Horizons Ghallaibh

There had been circulated Report No CC/06/21 dated 11 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the re-branding of Caithness Horizons, and improvements being undertaken to the premises to support its reopening as outlined in the report was welcomed as a positive step forward, and thanks were conveyed to all partners involved;
- regular updates be provided to Members on the basis the Committee was the appropriate public forum for this information to be provided;
- the need to get the message out to the public through a press release and social media channels as to why the rebranding and other changes to this Caithness facility were being made to ensure it was commercially successful, and going forward the importance of information on programming and local involvement being in the public domain;
- it was important the physical signage to the premises was in place as soon as possible, and the need to liaise with BEAR Scotland in early course on this issue; and
- a key issue was that the support and involvement of the wider Caithness community would be crucial in determining the success and sustainability of the facility which would continue to showcase Caithness.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. positive progress made regarding building and other preparatory works to support the re-opening of Caithness Horizons, Thurso; and

- ii. ongoing support from Highland Council, High Life Highland and Dounreay Site Restoration Limited, on a partnership basis, with the intent to re-open the facility as soon as circumstances under the current Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown allow.

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/01/20 dated 30 December 2020 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, Members expressed their appreciation of the hard work being undertaken behind the scenes by Police Scotland and in partnership to tackle often challenging issues in the community, and their involvement in a range of multi-agency forums. The presence of Police Scotland within the community also provided reassurance to the public.

Thereafter, Members raised the following issues:-

- Police Scotland be commended on the increased number of drink driving detections over the period, and concern was experienced in relation to the need to build on long term campaigns and continue to reinforce the message about the risks associated with this behaviour;
- in addition to local initiatives the opportunity for more national advertising campaigns in relation to drug/drink driving;
- the potential to reduce the volume of paperwork officers had to deal with in relation to vehicle thefts; and
- an update was sought and provided in relation to the impact of the restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic on anti-social behaviour in the area, and an assurance was provided that Police Scotland had and would use their powers to take action where necessary.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23, Year 1.

6. Wick Area School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Sgìre Inbhir Ùige

Declaration of Interest: Ms N Sinclair declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that family members attended Newton Park Primary School and Nursery in Wick, 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 CC/02/21 dated 22 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Care and Learning.

The North Area Manager provided a verbal update on the arrangements for remote Learning and Childcare in Caithness during the current Covid-19 lockdown period. Key points included that a number of schools remained open to provide childcare for key workers and vulnerable pupils, overseen by a skeleton staff. Those pupils identified by

schools and partners as vulnerable were prioritised for in school support. Lunch and transport arrangements continued as required and direct payments and supermarket vouchers were being provided to families who were eligible for free school meals and for accessing online learning. She also provided a summary of the remote learning being delivered, advising that clear guidance had been shared with all Headteachers and parents and carers. A balance of live learning and independent activity was being delivered, with regular live engagement each week for every learner and staff were monitoring the health and wellbeing of pupils. Expectations on the amount of remote learning and how it was presented had to be manageable for pupils, parents and staff. She also outlined the support being provided to those who required help with devices or connectivity. Positive feedback was being received from Head Teachers during the second lockdown period, staff were more confident with the technology, engagement was good, and those who were not engaging had regular communication and support from staff in their schools.

The Head Teacher, Wick High School, reported that 37 key worker and vulnerable pupils were attending the School within the Covid-19 risk assessment procedures and supported by a skeleton staff. Attendance and engagement with remote learning was good, and a priority was the health and wellbeing of pupils, families and staff. In relation to SQA qualifications, the advice was that information for assessments could not be collected by remote learning as it was not possible to replicate exam conditions. In addition, there were pupils who were entitled to additional support needs that could not be provided remotely at home, raising questions about equity for all and quality assurance procedures. At present the School was continuing with the essential coursework and further communication was awaited from the SQA. On return from lockdown, the focus would be on recovery and the attainment gap, developing strategies to support those pupils most affected by the lockdown and collecting evidence for SQA qualifications.

The Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning reported that the latest position nationally was the potential for some young people at key transitions stages to return after the February break and discussion around the mass testing for school staff and how this would be rolled out. In terms of the quality assurance of remote learning, HMIE were keen to engage with schools in the area in relation to good practice, the experience of parents, and areas of potential improvement, and reports would be brought back to the Education Committee on this matter. The Executive Chief Officer also provided a detailed update on the Additional Support Needs (ASN) Transformation, including the stage intervention approach, progress with engagement activities, and the review of PSA pathways.

In discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- clarification was sought and provided on the impact of lockdown on attainment and specifically the level of information that would be available to measure attainment following the return to school;
- pride was expressed at the improvements which had been achieved and sustained in attainment in Wick High School and the pupils and staff were commended for their hard work which was exemplified in the positive destination figures detailed in the report;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the figures shown for unknown destinations. There had been a reduction in the figures over the period 2016/17 to 2018/19 due to the action taken to better track leaver destinations. The ECO,

Education and Learning confirmed the format of future reports would be reviewed so that Members were provided with more up to date information;

- clarification was sought and provided as to how the additional ASN/PSA resource referred to in the report had been determined and an update was provided on the ongoing review of the assessment of need as part of the ASN improvement strategy;
- clarification was sought and provided on the level of provision of chrome books across all schools in the area and for vulnerable pupils and on supporting active learning in the lower primaries;
- the potential to reduce bureaucracy and volume of paperwork to free up officer and staff time and to reduce stress particularly at the current time, specific reference being made to that associated with teacher interviews, school plans; and
- the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on leavers, noting that more pupils were staying on at school and that it was too early to assess the impact on senior pupils pursuing positive destinations outwith the area.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and the verbal update provided on education in Caithness during the current Covid-19 lockdown period.

7. Town Centre Fund Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

Declarations of Interest – Mr K Rosie as a Trustee of the Thurso Community Development Trust and Mrs N Sinclair as Director of Wick's Heart 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 their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CC/03/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members commended the officers for the progress made to the Town Centre Fund projects. Members also welcomed the proposal to enhance CCTV provision in Wick and Thurso, commenting this was supported by the local community and considered essential to protecting current and future investments in the town and public protection.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the proposed additional Town Centre Fund expenditure for 126 High Street, Wick; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a Special Committee Meeting be held on 19 February 2021 to consider Council led projects to benefit from the remaining Town Centre Fund investment.

8. Covid-19 Response Update: Caithness Voluntary Group / Caithness Community Partnership Fios às Ùr mu Fhreagairt Covid-19: Buidheann Saor-thoileach Ghallaibh

Declarations of Interest – Mr K Rosie as a Trustee of the Thurso Community Development Trust and Mrs N Sinclair as Director of Wick's Heart 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 their involvement in the discussion.

Mr Allan Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group (CVG) provided an update on this item during which he advised that resilience meetings would continue to be held on a fortnightly basis. CVG had contacted the groups who had previously been working in the community, all of which had confirmed they would provide support in the current lockdown. Halkirk Village Committee were now providing support to their community in the form of meals for the elderly, lunch packs for school children and help with shopping. There was concern about the absence of food supplies from the Scottish Government to people shielding in the current lockdown and the pressure this was placing on community groups, and representations were being made in this regard. CFINE was supplying food supplies and sanitary products to a range of organisations in the area. Caithness Foodbank had confirmed they were well stocked and able to assist the community groups, and the Mental Health Action Group was making progress developing their mental health hub. A number of organisations including CVG had been participating in the Connecting Scotland project which involved the provision of tablets and chrome books to young families, older people and those shielding who were not previously online. CVG had issued 100 devices in the last six months and requests had been received for 72 more devices. Thurso Community Development Trust were also involved in this project. He thanked all parties for the funding received for transport to allow people to attend their vaccine appointments. In conclusion, Mr Tait advised that while these continued to be challenging times, the community had pulled together and was working well with statutory partners to support as many people as possible.

Mr Eann Sinclair and Mr Martin Thomsen, both Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), provided an update on behalf of Caithness Community Partnership and advised that focus over the next period would be on delivering funding to communities and business. HIE had moved from administering the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund which had been successful in the area, to administering the successor programme, the Scottish Government's Community Recovery Fund and three substantial approvals had been made to Home Start Caithness, Northlands Creative Glass and Lybster, Latheron, and Lyth Community Development Company. The Fund remained open until 12 February 2021 and information was provided on the application process. Take up had not been to the same extent as the previous Fund for a number of reasons, however the number of applications was expected to increase. An update was also provided in the business resilience support being provided through a range of funds.

In discussion, Members expressed conveyed thanks to the community and officers for the ongoing resilience work being undertaken in Caithness and raised the following issues:-

- the resilience effort by the community in Caithness had been outstanding and excellent links and networks had been established as a result of the resilience effort in the area and there was an opportunity to build on this work after the pandemic;
- the response had been genuinely driven by the community from the ground up and was a model of localism that should apply across all the Council's services;
- the potential to extend the Community Recovery Fund's deadline for applications given that the current lockdown would delay the recovery process, potentially until Easter. It was confirmed that representations had been made to the Scottish

Government on this matter and that officers were being as flexible as possible within the current structure of the Fund. The case was to be made to the Scottish Government about extending deadlines and CVG would continue to coordinate partnership bids into the Fund.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

**9. Wick: Pulteneytown Conservation Area: Appraisal and Management Plan
Inbhir Ùige: Sgìre Glèidhteachais Pulteneytown: Measadh is Plana Stiùiridh**

There had been circulated separately in Booklet A Report No CC/04/21 dated 7 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the potential to extend the Conservation Area around Huddart Street would be considered further;
- clarification was sought and provided on the timescales for undertaking an appraisal and management plan for the conservation area in Thurso. It was confirmed that an initial assessment has been conducted and there would be consultation with local Members within the next few months;
- the report highlighted how special and unique the Pulteneytown Conservation Area was and there was a need consider how to better promote the area; and
- the potential was to extend the consultation period beyond the proposed six-week period depending on the level of response in the lockdown period.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content and findings of the Wick: Pulteneytown Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA);
- ii. **NOTED** the content, findings and recommendations of the Wick: Pulteneytown Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP); and
- iii. **APPROVED** both the CAA and CAMP for a minimum six-week public consultation, subject to there being flexibility to extend the consultation period if required.

**10. Wick and Thurso Active Travel Plans
Planaichean Siubhal Gniomhach Inbhir Ùige is Inbhir Theòrsa**

Declarations of Interest – Mr K Rosie as a Trustee of the Thurso Community Development Trust and Mrs N Sinclair as Director of Wick’s Heart 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 their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CC/05/21 dated 15 December 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided on the next steps in relation to stakeholder discussions and sense checks to ensure local knowledge was taken into account;
- specific concern was expressed at the proposal for a quiet street/low traffic neighbourhood at Sir Archibald Road, Thurso on the basis that it was a no through road on which residential and commercial premises were located;
- confirmation was sought and provided that there would be full consultation with taxi operators and retailers in relation to the proposals for Princes Street, Thurso;
- concern at any proposal to widen the pathway along the section of Ormlie Road subject to the national speed limit if it would reduce the width of the road on safety grounds;
- the potential for any signage in Ward 2 to be in one language only on the basis it was suggested this was the preference of the majority of the public locally; and
- consideration of the report be deferred to allow for further discussions to be held between Members and officers on the detail of the proposals and for clarity to be provided on the Council's policy in relation to the inclusion of Gaelic on Council signage.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to defer consideration of this item to the Special Meeting to be held on 19 February 2021.

The meeting ended at 1:00pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Special Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair)** held remotely on **Monday, 25 January, 2021 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr J Finlayson
Mr J Gordon

Mr C MacLeod
Mr C Munro

Participating Officials:

Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager
Mr A Webster, Regeneration and Employment Team Leader
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative 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 J Gordon – Cathraiche (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. **Town Centre Fund** **Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile**

There was circulated Report No. SR/1/21 by the Executive Chief officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A summary was provided on the proposals received by the Council for Isle of Skye and Raasay Town Centre Funding allocation of £56,104. The Broadford and Strath Community Company required £28,052 to augment their 2019/20 Town Centre Fund award of £99,483 in order to deliver the approved project of new public toilet provision in the town. Portree and Braes Community Trust were proposing to invest £9,000 in the purchase and installation of 3 x stainless steel notice boards in the car park next to the Tourist Information centre. It was proposed that the remainder (£19,052) of the funds be invested in refurbishing the small hall (bar area) and disabled toilet of the Portree Community Centre.

It was confirmed that both projects were eligible for Town Centre Funding and there were no concerns regarding deliverability of the projects.

Members were very supportive of awarding funding to both proposals which were important projects for both Towns. The importance of decisions about this spend coming from local communities was acknowledged.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i the final detail of the Town Centre Fund proposal for Broadford and formally award Broadford and Strath Community Company £28,052; and
- ii the final detail of the Town Centre Fund proposal for Portree and formally award Portree and Braes Community Trust £28,052.

The meeting ended at 10.40 a.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 27 January 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr B Allan	Mr A Jarvie
Miss J Barclay	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Bremner	Mrs A MacLean
Miss J Campbell	Mrs L Munro
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs F Robertson
Mr C Fraser	Mr P Siggers
Mr L Fraser	Mr B Thompson
Mr R Gale (substitute)	

Non-Members also present:

Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs D Macpherson
Mr A Henderson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr B Lobban	

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
 Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
 Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance
 Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager
 Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator
 Ms O Bayon, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Mrs D Budge, Tenant Participation Representative

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

Mr B Thompson in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Graham, Mrs B McAllister and Ms E Roddick.

Thereafter, the Chair on behalf of the Committee, extended his thoughts and consideration to those Members who were unable to attend the meeting due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their families.

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

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

Item 3: Mr R Bremner (non-financial) and Mrs L Munro (financial).

**3. Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2021/22
Tuairmsean Teachd-a-steach HRA 2021/22**

Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds he was a Board Member of Albyn Housing Society Limited 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.

Mrs L Munro declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HP/01/21 dated 13 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an update was sought and provided on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's ability to undertake repairs and maintenance. It was confirmed a reduced service was currently being operated and an update on the budget would be reported to the next Committee;
- the additional costs associated with upgrading and maintaining the Council's listed buildings and the need to acknowledge those higher costs in developing the housing revenue and capital programmes;
- the need to develop a future programme for the replacement of older heating systems and future cyclical maintenance and servicing costs, noting this issue would be discussed further at the rearranged Members seminar;
- comments were sought and provided on the Administration's proposals to address the fact the Council had lower rents but higher debt repayments in comparison to other local authorities given the impact on the ability to deliver more effective improvement and maintenance programmes;
- the Council was not able to write off this historic debt and had to balance this against setting rent levels to minimise hardship. The key focus going forward was on the efficient use of the available resources through an asset management based approach to HRA stock;
- concern at the increase in rent arrears and the impact this was having on rent levels. It was confirmed that a more detailed report on rent arrears would be presented to the next Committee;
- the impact of continued rent increases on tenants particularly in the current economic climate and recognition of the level of assistance and support available to those tenants who were experiencing hardship due to factors outwith the Council's control;
- the level of consultation undertaken with tenants was welcomed and demonstrated the majority recognised the benefits of a rent increase if

this delivered more effective improvements in respect of repairs, maintenance and investment;

- the potential for a Members seminar to be arranged to consider housing issues, examples of good practice across the Council and the devolution of more housing matters to Area Committees;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the resourcing and performance of the repairs service, noting it was subject to a process of continuing improvement and had been reviewed by the Redesign Board;
- in terms of localism, the potential and the associated challenges with disaggregating the housing budget and setting of rent levels in the areas to better respond to local housing need;
- an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the supplementary rent paid by tenants of new build properties to cover the loan charges associated with new builds;
- a draft response to the Scottish Government consultation on New Build Heat Standard be brought back to Members for consideration;
- an update was sought on the impact of the External Auditor's report on the undervaluation of the Council's land and properties on the Council's ability to borrow. It was reported that discussion on the implications was ongoing and further clarification would be brought back to the Committee in due course;
- clarification was sought and provided around the increase in the number of HRA properties to be used as temporary accommodation and the support required from community planning partners to address issues that might present in communities;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the figures for rent loss on garages would be reported within the revenue monitoring report to be presented to the next Committee;
- a report be provided in relation to long terms voids, the underlying causes and potential solutions. It was confirmed further information would be reported to the next Committee and that Area Committees might be the best forum for more detailed reporting;
- the Head of Housing and Building Maintenance would have discussions with local Members in Nairn with regard to improving communication around the management of the capital programme;
- the potential to use HRA balances to invest in more new builds and maintenance, noting that ultimately it was for the Committee to take a view on this matter and for officers to investigate the pros and cons; and
- the Members seminar to be rearranged would cover the affordability of new housing and allow for more detailed Member discussion on this issue.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the draft HRA Revenue Budget for 2021/22 (attached as Appendix 1);
- ii. a **2%** increase for council house rents for 2021/22;
- iii. that this percentage increase (**2%**) be applied to all residential HRA rents and service charges (except for sheltered housing services) and to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches;
- iv. that there should be no increase in service charges for sheltered housing tenants in 2021/22; and
- v. that non-HRA rents for leased property be increased as stipulated in existing contracts.

The meeting was closed at Noon.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Special Meeting of the **Audit and Scrutiny Committee** held **REMOTELY** on Thursday, 28 January 2021 at 11.00am.

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 D Mackay	Mrs H Carmichael
Mr R MacWilliam	Mr D Louden
Mr A Henderson	Ms L Munro
Mr B Lobban	Mr A MacKinnon
Mr M Finlayson	Mr A Baxter
Mr A Jarvie	

Officials in Attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
 Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer - Resources & Finance
 Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer - Performance & Governance
 Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance
 Ms E Johnston, Corporate Audit & Performance Manager
 Miss D Sutherland, Corporate Audit Manager
 Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager
 Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms J Brown, Director (Engagement Leader), 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**

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

Item 3 – Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial)

Item 4 - Mr G MacKenzie, Dr I Cockburn, Mr A Jarvie and Mrs M Davidson (All Non-Financial)

3. **External Audit Report** **Aithisgean Sgrùdaidh bhon Taobh A-muigh**

Declaration of Interest - Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis of being a Director of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report from the Council's External Auditors (Grant Thornton) as follows – Annual Report 2019/20 to Elected Members and the Controller of Audit.

Following a summary of the report, and during discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks were conveyed to all those involved in the compilation of the report;
- in relation to the significant risks in regard to financial management, and specifically the overspend around the Care & Learning Service due to a failure to deliver in year corporate savings targets, it was stressed that it was imperative that this issue was addressed so that it did not continue to appear in future budget reports;
- it was also suggested that as risks continued to be identified, monitored and managed across the Council, additional governance should be included through regular reports/updates to meetings of this Committee;
- in relation to capital expenditure and investment strategies, it was expected that a 'root and branch' review of the Capital Plan would be instigated prior to the Summer Recess;
- in terms of governance and transparency, it was vital that in future Committee reports were presented/summarised by Chairs and/or Vice Chairs at meetings (as opposed to Officers) on the basis that they could deal with any issues/questions arising thereafter;
- in respect of the Corporate Workforce Plan, it would be beneficial if this could be reviewed by External Auditors in addition to current reviews being undertaken through the Redesign Board;
- an update on the re-profiling of the Capital Plan would be welcomed, along with the presentation of opportunities for future work on development of the Council's capital strategy to be undertaken by Members across the Council;
- there had been reference within the External Report to situations where Members had raised what were considered to be operational issues at public meetings (and specifically Strategic Committee meetings). However, it was contended that some Members felt that (having tried other avenues) this was

the only opportunity available to them to raise such issues in terms of scrutiny and at the same time to allow public transparency in this regard;

- with specific reference to the issue which was contained in Item 4 on the agenda, it was highlighted that some Members had felt themselves to be reprimanded and prevented from raising questions on this matter at public meetings on the grounds of confidentiality. However, the issue was contained within the External Audit Report and was now a matter of public record and it was therefore queried as to whether questions previously raised would be answered when the report came to the full Council for formal approval;
- there had to be a close and detailed focus on all budgets across the Council and specifically those which were considered to be under most pressure;
- it had generally been felt that discussion on both operational and policy issues by Members at meetings had been appropriate, but further detail was now required if it was considered that this had not been the case;
- it had been highlighted that, in terms of financial management and governance, the Council had performed well in comparison with other Local Authorities and this was welcomed;
- the issue of slippage in the medium to long term had to be given a strong focus in relation to any discussion of future capital investment;
- it had been highlighted within the External Audit Report that meetings, and specifically Strategic Committee/Full Council meetings, often over-ran significantly due to prolonged debate and this should be reviewed/improved as the Council moved forward;
- further information was requested on the Council's Asset Register and specifically the potential impact of any unreported value and in this regard the External Auditor clarified that there was no material impact;
- it was highlighted that some Members had previously felt that they had been reprimanded for making reference at meetings to early retirement payments made to former employees. However, it was the case that this information was contained in the External Audit Report which was a public document. In this regard, and in response to questions as to whether an apology was now due to those Members (along with clarification as to why they had been reported to the Standards Commission), it was confirmed that the matter should be raised with the Chief Executive;
- in terms of the issues surrounding the late submission of reports to the full Council and Strategic Committees, it was queried as to whether the Finance Service in particular was under resourced and whether this needed to be addressed;
- on the basis that it was imperative that everyone within the Council was fully aware of their role in the organisation, it was suggested that further and detailed examination of those roles (including Members and Officers) should be undertaken as a priority in order to address some of the issues which had occurred in the past year, including the ability for scrutiny as and when necessary; and
- there was a need for further information to be provided for Members on the issues which had been addressed during meetings of the Members GOLD Covid-19 group throughout 2020 and it was hoped that this issue would also be included in the next External Audit Report.

Thereafter, the Committee otherwise **AGREED** the Annual Report 2019/20 Elected Members and the Controller of Audit and the Letter of Representation as circulated.

4. **Internal Audit Review** **Ath-bhreithneachaidhean In-sgrùdaidh**

Declarations of Interest – Mr G Mackenzie, Dr I Cockburn, Mr A Jarvie and Mrs M Davidson declared non-financial interests in this item on the basis of having been interviewees within this process but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, and in light of both the internal and external audits now having been completed, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No AS/1/21 dated 18 January 2021 by the Corporate Audit Manager on the review of the recruitment process for the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning.

Prior to discussion, the Chair advised the Committee that independent legal advice had been sought and received on this item. On that basis, it was his intention to immediately move into private session should any Member of the Committee raise an issue which he considered came into the category of exempt information.

In response, it was queried as to when and from where the independent legal advice had been sought and why it had not also been circulated to the Committee. In this regard, it was confirmed that a response would be provided by the Chief Executive to the relevant Member for this query.

Thereafter, and during discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks were conveyed to all those involved in the compilation of the report and specifically the conclusions and recommendations which would allow consideration in regard to implementing new measures as and where necessary;
- the recommendations in relation to future recruitment processes were particularly important in terms of avoiding any further issues in this respect;
- it would be imperative to ensure that the recommendations within the Action Plan were closely monitored;
- briefings for Members of the Council in relation to future recruitment procedures would be especially useful and important;
- this was an issue which had been contained in the External Audit Report which was a public document and as such it was extremely concerning that Members who had sought details previously at meetings had been warned of the consequences of revealing what was considered at that time to be private information;
- as part of their role, it was crucial that Members of the Council were able to undertake the correct scrutiny of issues as and when necessary and it was felt by some Members that they had been prevented from doing this in recent months. In this regard, the Chair clarified that the Members’ role was to scrutinise service performance and not individual Officers;

- it was noted that some individual Members who had previously commented on this issue had not been interviewed as part of this process;
- it was important to highlight the political element within the process which had not been mentioned in the report but was felt by some Members to be fundamental to the situation which had occurred over recent months;
- reference had been made to the behaviour of Members as being one of the main factors within this issue but there had been no specific examples of such behaviour detailed within the report. Also, it was the firm view of some Members that the recruitment process which had been followed in this case had not been as transparent and open to scrutiny as it should have been which had led to them having had no choice but to ask questions at public meetings in order to seek clarity and answers to their questions;
- it had been stated that the process which had been followed had not contravened any Council policies but it was contended that the lack of policies in this regard had in fact been one of the main issues;
- there were concerns that the timeline which had been provided in the report was contradictory to the timeline which had been submitted to previous Member Briefings;
- it was clear that the non-publication of contract notice terms had been an error but also noted that this had now been covered in one of the recommendations;
- it was noted that the type of reporting required/expected through minutes of recruitment meetings in future was now to be reconsidered/reviewed and this was welcomed as it would provide more detail of where and when individual decisions had been taken;
- there was a need for responsibility to be accepted in relation to what had happened throughout this issue. As such, there had to be clarity around behaviour and what was/was not acceptable in future and it was essential that this clarity was provided by the Chief Executive as a matter of priority;
- clarity around Members' behaviour was also needed as it was the case that some Members had felt that they had legitimately taken certain actions around scrutiny as part of their role as contained in the Code of Conduct but had subsequently felt reprimanded for having done so;
- no assurances had been given that another individual would not be employed in the future on similar terms/salary level despite such assurance having been sought at previous meetings;
- there had to be a balance achieved between Members' oversight and transparency as the Council moved forward, especially in relation to future recruitment procedures, with the recommendations within the Action Plan being implemented as a matter of priority;
- the use of Consultants was often very expensive in terms of recruitment which made succession planning especially important across the Council in future; and
- the confirmation that acting tracking reports would be submitted to the Committee in the coming months as the recommendations were implemented was welcomed.

Thereafter, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the report as circulated, along with the External Audit opinion which had been provided as Appendix 1.

ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEM 5

**Audited Accounts 2019/20
Cunntasan Sgrùdaichte 2019/20**

There had been circulated Report No AS/2/21 dated 25 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Audited Accounts for 2019/20 as circulated.

The meeting ended at 1.05pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held Remotely on **Thursday, 4 February 2021** at **10.30 am**.

Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr A MacInnes
Mr B Boyd	Mr W MacKay (am only)
Mr I Brown	Mr C Munro
Mrs C Caddick	Mr D Rixson
Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr P Saggars
Mr J Gray	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Henderson	Ms N Sinclair
Mr D Louden	

Non-Members also present:

Mr G Adam (am only)	Mr B Lobban (am only)
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs A MacLean (pm only)
Mr A Baxter (am only)	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Bremner	Mr J McGillivray
Mr M Finlayson	Mr H Morrison (pm only)
Mr J Gordon	Mrs M Paterson (am only)
Mr A Graham (am only)	Ms M Smith (am only)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer - Infrastructure & Environment
 Mrs K Lackie - Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance
 Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport
 Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager
 Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration
 Mrs A Mackay, Business Manager
 Mr A McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager
 Mr F McGunnigle, City-Region Deal Programme Manager
 Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates)
 Mr J McHardy, Housing Development Manager
 Mr J MacLennan, Senior Service Support Officer
 Mr A Fraser Principal Engineer – Flood Team
 Mr R Pope, Policy and Programmes Manager
 Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator
 Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator
 Ms O Bayon, Committee Administrator

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D MacLeod.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 4 - Mr K Gowans (financial)

Item 8 - Mr A Baxter, Mr A Henderson and Ms M Smith (all financial)

Item 10 - Mr D Rixson and Mrs H Carmichael (both non-financial) and Mr K Gowans (financial)

Item 16 - Mr D Rixson and Mrs T Robertson (both non-financial)

Item 17 - Mr D Rixson, Mrs T Robertson and Mr Saggars (all 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

Declarations of Interest- Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item as an employee of UHI 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/01/2021 dated 19 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- officials were thanked for their work and it was suggested that income targets were being missed due to drops in activities, mostly related to Covid-19 but also to Brexit;
- the importance of Harbours activity and income to the Council was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on the additional expenditure anticipated during the remaining months of the financial year;
- it was important the Council's internal accounting systems were kept as up to date and accurate as possible to allow managers to manage their budgets effectively; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, that in-year underspends would be used to offset overspends in other areas. Revenue budget underspends could not be carried forward to the following year, unless related to specific grant funding that allowed this. Overall a significant overspend was anticipated due to low income.

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 31 December 2020;
- iii. net spend at the end of quarter 3, totaled £22.716m;
- iv. based on the best available information to date, a service budget gap of £8.941m 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-19 impacts and the impact of BREXIT in particular to harbours income. 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. Economic Recovery Update Cunntas as Ùr mu Fheabhas Eaconamach

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/2/21 dated 17 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- three key issues affecting the economy were Covid-19, Brexit and Climate Change. A brief summary of the various funding sources likely to be lost as a result of Brexit, totally around £90m, was provided;
- information was sought on the possible use of redundant Council buildings to assist new or expanding businesses, which might also generate income for the Council. It was explained that while there were few vacant buildings, the use of Council-owned land for grant-funded business starter units was a useful idea to take forward;
- the place-based strategy was welcomed; and
- consideration should be given to the inclusion of aquaculture, including fish farming and seaweed cultivation, given its importance to many local economies, especially on the west coast. Reference was also made to some of the negative aspects of fish farming. This would be further considered with Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress being made on the Council's Economic Recovery Strategy and the points raised in discussion.

6. Highland Labour Market Dùbhlain Margaidh Obrach na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/3/21 dated 17 January 2021 by Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the increased level of unemployment was of concern and it would have been useful to have the previous year's figures for comparison, and to know to what extent the rise was seasonal;

- officials were thanked for the report and the opportunities being offered to young people during challenging circumstances;
- it was important the Council was not duplicating work being done by other organisations and a summary was provided of joint working being undertaken to avoid this happening, as part of the 'Leaving No one Behind' agenda;
- the demographics of the Highlands were especially challenging in relation to retaining young people;
- appreciation was expressed for Job Centre staff who had experienced an increased and changed workload as a result of Covid-19;
- the increase in Universal Credit was welcomed and consideration should be given to lobbying the UK government for this increase to continue in the longer term;
- work was ongoing with Scottish Government over grant carry-over and pulldown across the 2021/22 financial year;
- in response to concern that young people were being given Kickstart placements for only six months, it was explained if placements were longer, fewer young people would be able to benefit from the scheme, and that around 75% progressed to paid employment; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the ongoing role of gateway organisations in the Kickstart programme, especially in Highland where there were a larger number of smaller organisations.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the labour market challenges facing the Highland economy and in particular the impact this will have on young people;
- AGREED** that The Highland Council adopts a pro-active and leadership role with partners through the Highland Employability Partnership, to ensure clients receive a cross agency service that is responsive to their needs and enables them to progress towards and into employment;
- AGREED** that The Highland Council as an employer and service provider, provides the proposed work experience and job creation opportunities and, through its management of external funding, enables others to also do so; and
- NOTED** that the proposed staffing changes to ensure that The Highland Council has capacity to effectively undertake its employability function during this challenging time are being taken forward following agreement at the Council meeting on 7 January 2021.

7. Covid related pressures and service prioritisation Cuideaman a' buntainn ri Covid agus a' toirt prìomhachas do sheirbheisean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/4/21 dated 22 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the progress of capital projects, with particular reference to the Tain 3-18 Campus, was queried. Information was sought, and provided, on the situation with funding for some programmes if there were delays. Some construction work was being slowed down due to social distancing and similar Health and Safety requirements;
- Members acknowledged the difficult circumstances being faced by many staff due to Covid-19 restrictions, risks and secondments; and

- the candour in the report was welcomed and it was hoped the recovery process would lead to fairer and greener practices in future.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the additional Covid-related services being delivered by the Service;
- ii. the pressures that this puts on service delivery;
- iii. the 4 harms posed to our staff and our customers as a consequence; and
- iv. the effect on services in a number of areas as set out in Section 5.

8. Business Grants – Discretionary Grant Scheme Tabhartasan Gnothachais – Sgeama Thabhartasan fo Ùghdarras

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Baxter declared a financial interest in this item as Tour Guide and left the meeting during discussion.

Mr A Henderson and Ms M Smith declared financial interests in this item as an owner of a B & B Establishment and of a Trading Company respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/5/21 dated 21 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- a level of discretion or flexibility in the amount of money awarded was suggested, rather than having a fixed sum of £2,000, with attention drawn to some sectors which had been more adversely affected than others. It was proposed this could either be delegated to the ECO (Infrastructure & Environment) in consultation with the Committee Chair and Vice Chair, or to a Working Group. Attention was drawn to the need to balance speed of decision-making and award of grants with the ability to make individual decisions on awards, with the proposals having been based on the Government's Strategic Business practice;
- the challenges of designing a scheme that captured every type of affected business was highlighted;
- discretion on the amount of reduction in business an organisation had to have experienced was also proposed;
- with reference to the scheme being available for companies with up to 50 employees, it was proposed this should be lowered to only benefit smaller businesses. However, it was explained out that most companies with a significant number of employees would have premises and would therefore be ineligible for this grant, and the scheme criteria followed national guidance;
- it was suggested there should be flexibility on the sales period on which a company was assessed for loss of business, given that many small Highland companies were seasonal and might have little to no winter income but might have lost considerably during summer 2020;

- Members welcomed the decision not to insist on companies having a business bank account, and supported the largest number as possible of small businesses being supported;
- the lack of cruise ships at Invergordon had affected associated small businesses across the Highlands;
- it was suggested that any leftover funds could be redistributed as a 'top-up' to eligible businesses as part of Phase 2; and
- a further suggestion was that priority for Phase 2 should be given to businesses which had suffered 100% loss of income.

Mrs T Robertson, seconded by Mr D Rixson, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr D Louden, seconded by Mr K Gowans, moved as an **AMENDMENT** to:

(1) set up a working group to consider changes to the initial scope of the grant scheme with representation from all political groups; and (2) allow discretion for awards to be varied at the direction of officers and the working group to add to the £2,000 amount with a second round amount.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 11 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 5 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr R Balfour, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr J Gray, Mr A Henderson, Mr C Munro, Mr D Rixson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr P Saggars, Mr A Sinclair and Ms N Sinclair.

For the Amendment

Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr K Gowans, Mr D Louden and Mr A MacInnes.

Decision

The Committee **AGREED** to the proposed Discretionary Grant Scheme and that delegated decision making be given to the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to make any grant criteria changes required in light of other national grant schemes and to design and deliver a second phase grant scheme, if not all of the grant was utilised.

9. Roads Capital Spend Cosg Calpa Rathaidean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/6/21 dated 11 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- while welcoming the investment, Members emphasised the importance of progressing improvements as soon possible once the current Covid 19 restrictions permitted;

- the inclusion of the Portree Link Road in the report as a strategic project was highlighted. Although being short in length, this would have a significant impact and would be transformative;
- cognisance was needed for the improvements to smaller road projects which would have a major impact on the communities they served. For example, the road running north to south on Raasay was undoubtedly strategic in nature. Similarly, other single track roads road serving areas of low population but carrying high volumes of traffic in the tourist season would benefit greatly given the anticipated costly arrangements and difficult topography involved; and
- there needed to be an element of fairness with all Area Road Managers being involved to monitor where and where investment was being allocated.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- AGREED** to continue with the current distribution method for the £7.2M base allocation for road maintenance as detailed in section 6.1 of the report; and
- APPROVED** the distribution of the additional £20M for road maintenance as detailed in the report, subject to future reports coming to this Committee and Local Committees on the detail of the spend.

10. 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 and Mr K Gowans declared non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association and as an employee of UHI respectively 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 discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/7/21 dated 13 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Members commended to comprehensive report but expressed concern over the continued delay of the R100 digital roll out and alternatives to Broadband were being considered. Members sought, and were provided, detail of these alternatives;
- Members were also aware of difficulties with the Longman Remediation project and it might be prudent to have a list of possible alternative proposals to ensure funding was used within the timescale available;
- an update to Members on Adventure Tourism project was requested;
- little of the funding for the Technology Placement had been used and it was recognised that this was because demand was low. Given the importance of youth employment it would be useful for Members to be aware of measures were being taken to ameliorate this; and
- Councillor Saggars sought clarification about the status if the Fit Homes in Nairn.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress with the City Region Deal during the last Quarter; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Annual Report 2019/20 attached at Appendix 2 of the report.

11. Flooding Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Thuiltean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/8/21 dated 6 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In amplification of the report a brief presentation by the Principal Engineer (Infrastructure) was provided giving an overview of the SEPA National flood risk assessment and the consultation process for delivering a plan-led, risk-based approach to Flood Risk Management Strategies in Scotland. He stressed the importance of working collaboratively with all responsible authorities along with public consultation to assess and agree a plan of actions to reduce the risk of flooding in the most vulnerable areas in their Local Plan District (LPD). Members were informed that the SEPA consultation process would be postponed until June 2021.

Members welcomed the report and the studies which had been undertaken to help and protect local communities, who had experienced flooding and the impact of climate change. There was also a Member's query regarding the average annual damages column in the detailed flood risk management plans. In response it was confirmed that the figure was developed to represent the cost of annual damage due to a flood in a geographical area. Every flood prevention action identified and undertaken would reduce the cost of damage, but not remove the value altogether.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** work undertaken to date in partnership with SEPA to allow SEPA to publish draft Flood Risk Management Strategy information for joint consultation;
- ii. **AGREED** to the publication of the potential Actions for the Local Flood Risk Management Plan for Highland and Argyll Local Plan District and the Local Flood Risk Management Plan for Findhorn, Nairn and Speyside Local Plan District in June 2021 (or as otherwise directed by Scottish Government), as shown in Appendix 1; and
- iii. **NOTED** a further report on the final Flood Risk Management Strategies and Plans would be brought to committee, after the public consultation closes.

12. Road Construction Consent Charges – Outcomes from Legal Challenge Cìsean Aonta Togail Rathaidean – Toraidhean bho Dhùbhlan Laghail

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/9/21 dated 12 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed revised scale of fees for Road Construction Consents, which in accordance with the original report of 16 August 2018

(Appendix 1 of the report) would be applied retrospectively from 1 April 2017; and

- ii. **NOTED** that Highland Council's previous fees were subject to a legal challenge and the revised fee structure was a response to this challenge.

13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated Minutes of Meetings as follows:-

- i. South Planning Applications Committee held on 9 October 2020 and 3 November 2020 – **NOTED**;
- ii. North Planning Applications Committee held on 20 October 2020 – **NOTED**; and
- iii. City Region Deal Monitoring Group held on 17 November 2020 and 21 January 2021– **APPROVED**;

14. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **AGREED** to resolve that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Property Transactions Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/10/2021 dated 8 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Following discussion, 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 as the Budgeted Sales for 2020/2021 and beyond.

16. Land and Property Fearann agus Cuid-seilbh

Declaration of Interest:

Mrs T Robertson declared a non-financial interest in this item as an adviser to the Board of the Elsie Normington Foundation but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

Mr D Rixson declared a non- financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, would not take part in discussion.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/11/2021 dated 16 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

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

17. Housing Development Initiatives Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais

Declarations of Interest:

The following 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 their involvement in discussion:-

- **Mr D Rixson - as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association**
- **Mrs T Robertson - as a Council appointee to the Highland Housing Association**
- **Mr P Sagers - as a Director of Nairn CAB**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/12/2021 dated 25 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

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

The meeting ended at 2:00 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held remotely on 9 February 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr J Bruce (late arrival, 10.42am)	Ms P Hadley
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance
 Mr D Gallagher, Business Gateway Service & Development Manager
 Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer
 Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager (South)
 Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Mr M Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority
 Ms K Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey
 Mr R Nixon, 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 B Lobban in the Chair

BUSINESS

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

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Item 5: Ms P Hadley (non-financial)
 Item 9: Ms P Hadley (financial)

3. **Notices of Motion** **Brathan Gluasaid**

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

That Members of the Badenoch & Strathspey Area Committee recognise and fully support the efforts of Highland Council staff in delivering Council services while continuing to support partner organisations and our communities during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Signed: Mr B Lobban Mrs M Cockburn Ms P Hadley Mr J Bruce

During discussion, concern was expressed that the significant efforts by staff to deliver services were not being recognised. However, it was clearly evident that staff had a strong work and team ethic and continued to deliver vital services to local communities despite the difficult circumstances such as the prolonged period of bad weather and the ongoing response to the pandemic. Members expressed their appreciation and commended staff for their efforts, recognising they often went beyond the call of duty, to ensure the continued delivery of Council services.

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

4. Business Gateway Slighe Gnothachais

There was a verbal update provided by the Business Gateway Service and Development Manager on the current support being provided by Business Gateway Highland during the current Covid-19 pandemic. It was explained that delivery of business grants had primarily been provided by the Economy and Regeneration team along with additional support from other Council services including Finance, Internal Audit Fraud and Digital Services. To date the team had processed grants of approximately £85m to over 8,000 businesses, many of which had received multiple grants, and staff were commended for their efforts and also the partnership working that was now fully engaged and had been invaluable. A general overview of the Business Gateway service was provided including the 1,600 businesses that had been receiving support and also the 152 business start-ups which was 50% lower than compared with same period last year. Prior to Covid, Highland was the only Business Gateway service in Scotland delivering support for business start-up workshops online in addition to a variety of webinars, tutorials and podcasts to support businesses. In addition, work was ongoing to develop specific webinars on mental health and Brexit. Moving out of lockdown, the challenge would be to transition businesses from survival to investment mode and funding options to support this would be sought as well as helping businesses to manage change and become more resilient. In conclusion, he encouraged all businesses and elected Members to sign up to the Business Gateway newsletter and their Facebook page which gave updates and information on all the support services available locally.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair thanked the Business Gateway Service and Development Manager for his presentation and requested that he provide the Committee with details of the Business Gateway website and social media pages;
- Positive feedback had been received from many local businesses for the help and support they had received in responding to Covid from Business Gateway. However, it was highlighted that the need for this professional support would be ongoing, particularly following the lockdown and in response to Brexit, therefore the importance of ensuring that the Business Gateway service was adequately resourced going forward was emphasised;
- Further information was sought and provided on the response to fraudulent applications; and

- It was felt that the Business Gateway service was an excellent example of a responsive business model that was able to adapt and respond to change.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that the Business Gateway website and social media details be emailed to the Committee.

5. Presentation: Badenoch Heritage Great Places Project
Taisbeanadh: Pròiseact Dualchais agus Sàr Àiteachan Bhàideanach

Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Board member of Badenoch Heritage Great Place Project 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 was a presentation by Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning and Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority and Karen Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey (VABS), giving an update on the progress of the Badenoch Great Places Project.

The presentation included details on the four project aims; an update on the work and summary of the projects that had been undertaken so far during 2018-2020; development of the website and mobile app which would be launched in April 2021 and also the augmented reality; and the work planned for the final nine months of the project which included the embedding of the legacy of the project in the community.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The impressive work of the project was welcomed and it was indicated that this initiative provided the opportunity to generate a variety of benefits, particularly to rural communities, and should therefore be replicated across other areas of the Highlands;
- The importance of digital marketing, particularly internationally, was emphasised and information was sought and provided on whether there had been a greater online interest in the Project due to Covid. Further information was also sought and provided on the feasibility of accessing and working with schools digitally;
- Confirmation was provided that the Project was working collaboratively with partners on the green health agenda;
- The Project had been extremely informative and had enabled many hidden places of historical interest to be uncovered and generated significant levels of positive local engagement;
- Confirmation was provided that local businesses were being encouraged to sign-up to the App which mapped local services and attractions available; and
- It was important that success of the Project was shared across all areas of Badenoch and Strathspey including the more remote areas and that important historic places were recognised.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

**6. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Comataidh Sgìreil Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/01/21 dated 15 January 2021 by the Area Commander.

The Committee welcomed the overall good performance as set out in the report, however, concern was expressed at the significant increase in deliberate fires during July and August 2020. It was anticipated that pressures on the tourist areas would increase during the forthcoming season and concern was expressed that the wild camping problems that had been experienced during the previous year would continue. It was therefore queried what action could be taken to encourage visitors to act responsible and the establishment of a multi-agency partnership working group to develop a joint strategy to address this issue was welcomed. In addition, further information was sought and provided on the processes available for responsible reporting and the promotion of this to the public.

Further information was also sought and provided on whether there had been any additional interest in recruitment due to increased levels of furlough/unemployment.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance report.

**7. Town Centre Fund
Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/02/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members welcomed this additional funding and recognised the benefits this would bring to local communities. Communities were urged to have 'shovel ready' projects prepared in the event of further funding being available in the future. Members also expressed their appreciation to the Principal Regeneration Officer for the work that had been undertaken in processing and scrutinising the applications.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Badenoch and Strathspey Area had been allocated £112,208 of funding and the four eligible areas for Town Centre Fund investment were Aviemore, Grantown on Spey, Kingussie and Newtonmore; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the undernoted projects be allocated a Town Centre Fund grant (the value of funds to be offered in each case as highlighted):-

Aviemore Village Green

Hard landscaping works to the Village Green - **£29,300**

Aviemore War Memorial

Improvement works, including groundworks, natural stone planters, steps from the main street to memorial, new paving, poppy sculpture, memorial poppy wreath stand and stand and electrics for Christmas tree - **£24,504**

Grantown Square

Supply and installation of new electrical ducting and cabling to replace existing faulty network in the Square - **£7,570**

Caberfeidh Horizons, Kingussie

Physical improvements to the community hub consisting of a new front door and eight replacement windows - **£22,000**

Gynack Gardens

Environmental improvement works to the Gardens - **£10,350**

Market Stance Playing Field, Kingussie

To contribute towards a project to upgrade the Market Stance Playing Field - **£10,000**

Newtonmore War Memorial

To improve accessibility to the War Memorial - **£8,000**

**8. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/22
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/03/21 dated 5 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, it was suggested that in future consideration should be given to having a larger increase for non-housing tenants in order that any rises for tenants were kept to a minimum. It was further suggested that consideration should also be given to how the Council was reimbursed from non-tenants and it was clarified that, following a change to policy, Council tenants were given first priority in respect of vacant garages.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** a 2% rent increase to be applied to Badenoch and Strathspey Garages.

**9. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean gu 31 An Dubhlachd 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/04/21 dated 14 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- although the diligent efforts of the team were welcome, concern was expressed at the increasing rent arrears trend and how this was likely to be compounded due to the significant increase in demand for Universal Credit and increasing fuel costs. Further information was sought and provided on how this would be managed;
- The impact of Covid on Maintenance repairs was recognised and the support provided from staff via the Emergency Repairs hotline was commended; and
- It was confirmed that the Allocations process was longer due to the implementation of additional Covid secure measures.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020.

**10. Kingussie and Grantown on Spey Common Good Funds
Maointean Math Coitcheann Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh agus Bhaile nan
Granndach**

There had been circulated Joint Report No BSAC/05/21 dated 26 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was recognised that this was the initial stages of the process but this could generate substantial benefits for both Kingussie and Grantown on Spey which was positive for the future;
- Although the cash amounts in both funds were small, there were a number of other allocations of funding which had been amalgamated into the overall Highland-wide fund and it was queried whether these could be reassigned to the Kingussie/Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund;
- It was noted that the Kingussie Provost Chain had been recorded as an asset and it was queried whether the ownership of the Grantown on Spey Provost Chain, which was currently in the care of Grantown Museum, would be assigned to the Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund;
- Further information was sought and provided on property that was considered inalienable and the ease/flexibility of the process to change their use; and
- It was noted that there were a number of small dormant trusts and it was queried whether it would be feasible to approach the lawyers that managed these to ascertain if it would be feasible to incorporate these into the common good funds.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the list of property proposed to be included in the Common Good Asset Register for Kingussie (Appendix 1);
- ii. **AGREED** the commencement of the public consultation on the list of proposed property for Kingussie in accordance with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015;

- iii. **NOTED** the position regarding the ongoing investigations into Common Good property in Grantown on Spey; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Committee continue to be kept informed of progress.

**11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 9 November 2020 which were approved by the Council on 7 January 2021.

The meeting was closed at 12.23pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held **remotely** on Wednesday, 10 February 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mrs J Barclay
Mr B Boyd
Mrs I Campbell
Mrs M Cockburn
Mrs M Davidson
Mr J Finlayson
Mr A Jarvie
Mr D Louden

Mr W Mackay
Mrs I Mackenzie
Mrs L Munro
Mrs M Paterson
Mr D Rixson
Mr K Rosie
Mr C Smith
Miss N Sinclair

Non Members also present:

Mr I Ramon
Mrs T Robertson

Mr D Macpherson
Mrs A MacLean

Participating Officials:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care and Chief Social Work Officer
Ms F Malcolm, Interim Head of Integration Adult Social Care, Health and Social Care
Mr I Kyle, Head of Improvement and Performance, Health and Social Care
Mr G MacLachlan, Area Care & Learning Manager, Health and Social Care
Ms J Jennett, Head of Service (Children YP & Fam), Health and Social Care
Ms D Munro, Lead Officer (Child Prot. Committee), Health and Social Care
Mr B Porter, Head of Support Services, Health and Social Care
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, Resources and Finance
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms M Zavarella, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

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

Linda Munro in the Chair

Preliminaries

Covid-19 Deaths in the Highland

The Committee sent their deepest condolences to the families and carers of the people in Highland who had sadly lost their lives to Covid-19, and special tribute was paid to Sue Roddick, who had worked for the Council's Social Work service for many years, and was greatly missed by all.

New ECO Health and Social Care

Fiona Duncan was welcomed to her first Committee in her role as ECO, and she gave a brief summary of her experience and plans for her role.

The Committee **NOTED** the preliminaries.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Mrs D Mackay and Ms E Roddick.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 9 – Mr A Jarvie and Ms L Munro (non-financial)

Ms L Munro declared a general financial interest 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 meeting.

Additional Item: Good News

At the request of the Chair, the Committee **AGREED** to take this additional item and the Committee **NOTED** the following items of good news:

- a Financial Inclusion Project was addressing the high level of unclaimed benefits by families with young children;
- there had been a delivery of 617 devices through the Connecting Scotland scheme to ensure the most vulnerable children, young people and families were not digitally excluded;
- Helen Gilpin, the Lead Nurse for Looked After and Care Experienced Young People, had been accepted onto the Queens Nursing Institute for Scotland Programme for a Queen's Nurse Award; and
- Kirstie-Ann Duncan, a care experienced young person, had successfully completed a business course and was now attending the City of Glasgow college studying law. At the College Development Network annual awards, held on the 3 of December 2020, she won the student of the year award.

The Committee **AGREED** to provide further information to Mr J Finlayson on Helen Gilpin, Lead Nurse for Looked After and Care Experienced Young People.

3. Presentation: Public Health Vaccination Programme, Dr Tim Allison, Director of Public Health and Policy, NHS Highland Taisbeanadh: Prògram Banachdachaidh Slàinte a' Phobaill, Dr Tim Allison, Stiùiriche Slàinte a' Phobaill is Poileasaidh, NHS na Gàidhealtachd

Dr Allison's presentation included Covid-19 case statistics, including for the new variant; test & trace issues; progress with the vaccination programme, including in care homes and the housebound; and targets for completion of the different vaccination priority groups.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- although Highland had the lowest Covid-19 case rate on mainland Scotland, there was no room for complacency, as evidenced by recent outbreaks;
- information was sought and provided on the availability of test & trace staff in future and it was explained that while there were now staff on fixed term contracts, there was also some reserve capacity of trained people;
- the vaccination of residents over the age of 50 in Knoydart was appreciated;
- it was anticipated that when schools re-opened there would be an increased demand for testing, and clarification was sought and provided in relation to the location of Covid-19 priority post-boxes for the return of home tests. Attention was drawn to the pilot for the use of fire stations for testing and to the courier service offered to people unable to get to a priority post box, either community transport or private courier services;
- the 'jabs for cabs' scheme, which involved taxis providing safe transport for vulnerable or elderly patients to attend vaccination appointments, was welcomed and it was suggested community funding might be used to help with this;
- information was sought on reported glitches in the home testing system on Skye and Dr Allison would check this had been resolved;
- attention was drawn to the importance of providing essential information to parents on how to administer a home test to a child, with reference to the discomfort it could cause to obtain an adequate sample for testing. A summary of the different types of test was provided (PCR and lateral flow);
- gratitude was expressed to staff in Care Homes given the distress and trauma they had experienced along with the families of elderly patients who had lost their lives to Covid-19;
- the public should continue to attend their GP for non-Covid-19 medical issues and it was hoped that relief could be provided to GP practices providing vaccinations to allow them to continue with their usual work. It was explained that the responsibility for the vaccination roll-out lay with the Health Board and if GPs were unable to meet the requirements, the Health Board would be obliged to source an alternative mechanism, something that in remote and rural Highland would be challenging. Highland, unlike most of Scotland, was following a GP-led model for the vaccination roll-out;
- clarification was sought and provided on the priority groups for vaccination, which had been decided by the Scottish Government;
- in relation to people being made aware of their priority for vaccination and their level of clinical vulnerability, this was being undertaken by GP practices;
- it was suggested that some people might not be self-administering the home Covid-19 test accurately. However, it was explained that it could be especially challenging in some areas for tests to be undertaken by a health professional, especially for people unable to leave their home; and
- Members paid tribute to the families who had lost people to Covid-19 and to the health and social care staff who had helped to care for them.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the Covid Vaccination Programme.

4. Presentation: The Promise, Fiona Duncan, ECO for Health and Social Care
Taisbeanadh: An Gealladh, Fiona Duncan, Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomhach airson Slàinte agus Cùram Sòisealta

The Promise, Scotland's ambition for children and young people: "We grow up loved, safe, and respected so that we realise our full potential."

The presentation covered how The Promise had been put together between February 2017 and February 2020, driven by those with lived experience of the care system. A summary was provided of the seven reports that had been produced and the five foundations, as well as budget issues and plans for the future, which included honest assessment, collaboration with Community Planning Partnerships, keeping the promise as corporate parents, partnership working and building networks.

Discussion of The Promise was taken as part of Item 5.

The Committee **AGREED** to give their commitment to helping all vulnerable children to feel loved and have the childhood they deserved.

5. Corporate Parenting Board and The Promise Bòrd Pàrantachd Chorporra agus An Gealladh

There had been circulated Report No HSCW/01/21 dated 25 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion of this Item and Item 4, the following issues were considered:

- the Chair welcomed the report and presentation as a radical new way of working with the Community Planning partners to realise the ambitions for Looked After children. She acknowledged the ten-year implementation plan but urged prompt action and change;
- officials were thanked for their work on the report and reference was made to the importance of the five foundations and to the focus on family relationships and giving children a safe and happy childhood;
- attention was drawn to the challenges being faced by some Community Planning Partnerships, with some meeting infrequently, and it was felt this must be addressed and properly resourced, with appropriate and clear leadership, and up to date locality plans. Regular updates would be provided to the committee;
- pupil engagement with online schooling varied considerably and was of concern, as was the lack of day care for children with special needs;
- the importance of action, appropriate timelines and effective governance was highlighted, along with engagement with partners on key elements of transformation;
- attention was drawn to the importance of community action to protect vulnerable children, and preventative spend to achieve this;
- the positive impact of having Children's Champions at area-level was highlighted and should be reinstated; and
- Members were reminded of training on 26 February 2021 at 11.30am on 'Who Cares, Scotland' and corporate parenting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the findings of the Independent Care Review and the seven output reports;
- ii. **NOTED** the challenges and the assessment of where we were now, and the cross-cutting collaborative work needed to do, to achieve the aspirations of The Promise;
- iii. **NOTED** the Corporate Parenting Board's approach to improving outcomes for Care Experienced Children, Young People and Care Leavers;
- iv. **NOTED** the priorities identified by the Corporate Parenting Board; and
- v. **AGREED** a report be presented to the Committee on 19 May 2021, if the information was available by then, on progress with expanding the Children's Champion project.

6. Revenue Budget Monitoring 3rd Quarter 2020/21 Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach Ràith 3 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No HSCW/02/21 dated 26 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the planned reprofiling of the budget for 2021-22 was welcomed, with particular reference to the budget for out-of-authority care and temporary agency spend;
- in response to queries about Social Worker vacancies, a summary was provided of recent successful campaigns to recruit new and experienced Social Workers;
- in response to a query about the reported £1.2m staff costs (by subjective) in Annex 1 of the report, a breakdown of this would be provided to Mr Rixson;
- concern was expressed in relation to underspends on family teams, especially in relation to Self-Directed Support (SDS). It was explained that this was largely because most residential and respite care facilities were closed due to Covid-19 restrictions, and alternative services tended to cost less. A breakdown of the SDS figures for 2019-2020 excluding residential and respite care was requested and reference was made to Scottish Government guidance on alternative SDS expenditure, with many requests having been approved and much work being undertaken to source alternatives for families. A report on SDS was planned for the Committee in May 2021. It was important to also provide support to service providers to ensure they were still in operation once Covid-19 restrictions had been lifted; and
- an explanation was sought and provided on the £2.5m expenditure that was directly attributable to Covid-19 issues, and how this had been reported;

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the revenue budget outturn forecast for the year; and
- ii. **NOTED** the mitigating action, and ongoing risks and uncertainties arising from Covid19 in relation to these forecasts;
- iii. **AGREED** to provide further information on the £1.2m of staff costs (by subjective) reported in Annex 1 of the report to Mr Rixson; and
- iv. **AGREED** to provide to the Committee a breakdown of expenditure on Self-directed Support for 2019-20, showing how much was spent on residential and respite care and how much on other expenditure.

7. Partnership Arrangements with NHS Highland – Update Ullachaidhean Com-pàirteachais le NHS na Gàidhealtachd – Fios às Ùr

There had been circulated Report No HSCW/03/21 dated 5 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- it was confirmed that it was achievable for the revised Integration Scheme to be agreed prior to the new financial year, and it is intended that the partnership review and framework be considered for Member scrutiny at the Joint Monitoring Committee on 8 March 2021, the meeting of the Highland Council on 25 March 2021, and the NHS Highland Board;
- it was confirmed that there would be consultation on the revised scheme with partner groups and relevant organisations;

- clarification was sought, and provided, that the revised scheme was being prepared on the basis of the Lead Agency Model;
- with regard to Member scrutiny for performance of adult social care services delivered, it was explained that given the revised governance of the Council the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee would be the appropriate forum for meaningful scrutiny; and
- it was further clarified that extensive meetings had occurred regarding the scheme with the Chief Executives, Directors of Finance, Strategic Lead Officers and Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care (and equivalent) from both the Highland Council and NHS Highland. In addition, there was an national meeting of Group Leaders and Chief Executives occurring across Scotland at 4pm on 10 February 2021 in light of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland report and it was agreed that this report would be circulated to Members of the Committee and updates provided to all Members thereafter.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. and **APPROVED** the current position and the proposed approach.
- ii. the partnership review and framework be considered for scrutiny at the Joint Monitoring Committee on 8 March 2021, the meeting of the Highland Council on 25 March 2021 and the NSHS Board on 30 March 2021; and
- iii. that a copy of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland would be circulated.

8. **Vulnerable Children Within the Highlands** **Clann So-leònte Taobh A-Staigh Na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No HSCW/04/21 dated 25 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- Members welcomed the report, commenting that it was impactful and raised important questions;
- despite some worry about children slipping through the care net, the report brought reassurance that the situation was being well managed, and it would be a relief to parents and children alike when pupils returned to school;
- the report demonstrated a range of issues for both the children and parents that had to be addressed and it was important to be alert to them and act appropriately. It was therefore proposed that funding be provided to support an early intervention programme to enable a proactive service for children and families. However, it was highlighted that the report recommended further investigation and interrogation of the data and it was felt that this should be undertaken first and the outcome of this would then inform the level resource required. The Chair therefore proposed that officers undertake a review of early intervention and prevention post Covid-19 and a report be brought back to the next Committee; and
- it was commented that reaching out to all vulnerable children was crucial in order to have their voices heard as traditional streams were not necessarily effective.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** contents of the report;

- ii. **NOTED** challenges of where we were now, and the proposals for interrogating the data and information. Firstly, to ascertain if an early intervention/prevention team was required or appropriate. Second, to assess whether our systems (across all partners) were robust so that any hidden harms could be identified, and to intervene appropriately; and
- iii. **AGREED** a review be undertaken of early intervention and prevention in response to Covid and the outcome reported to the next meeting on 19 May 2021.

**9. Annual Chief Social Work Officer Report 2019-2020
Aithisg Bhliadhnaid Àrd-Oifigear Obair Shòisealta 2019-2020**

Declarations of Interest – 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 the interest did not preclude their involvement in discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HSCW/05/21 dated 25 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- the report was welcomed by Members;
- staff efforts in managing increased caseloads as a result of rising referrals was commended;
- clarification was sought, and provided, that increasing referrals could be due to a variety of reasons including legislation changes around domestic abuse and increased alertness of community partners as a result of training delivered. It was viewed positively that the trend suggested increased awareness which allowed for early intervention;
- financial difficulties were a major cause of crisis in many families and it was encouraged that the Council lobby for the universal credit uplift of £20 to continue as this helped families manage additional pressure that came with Covid-19. In response, the Leader of the Council suggested a meeting be convened with herself, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Executive Chief Officer (Health, Social Care and Wellbeing) and Member representatives from each political party to discuss drafting a letter to both governments for the continued support of the £20 Universal Credit uplift and other support needs if identified;
- Care at Home staff had been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic and deserved distinct credit for their commitment, particularly in the early stages when there were PPE shortages;
- it was emphasised that planning partnerships were built into the whole system and it was important to pay attention to this;
- regarding community payback orders, many of the statistics showed great success though the only outlier was the acquisition of new skills. It was queried and further information was provided on the feasibility of building the acquisition of new skills into the system as a whole;
- the recruitment of three new Mental Health Officer posts was welcomed but further information was sought and provided on whether this would be sufficient to allow the significant backlog to be managed;
- it was highlighted that with respect to the fragmentation cause by homeworking, face to face contact was invaluable;

- the increase in fees for foster carers, which allowed better use of resources and increased ability to meet the needs of the child, was welcomed and it was confirmed that this applied to the review that had been undertaken in 2020;
- There would be additional financial pressures on budgets particularly arising from lockdown and it was queried whether there were similar levels of discussion of the commissioned children's services to that undertaken in respect of the Adult Social Care commissioned services;
- it was suggested by the Leader of the Council that a Member Briefing take place on the Independent Review of Adult Social Care report;
- in response to a statement about the potential for £68,000 additional funding, it was agreed that the Head of Service (Children, Young People and Families) would follow up to determine if Highland would be receiving additional funding for alcohol and drug rehabilitation treatment;
- a request was made for updated statistical data be brought back to the Committee in the future; and
- in response to a statement, it was highlighted that in order to address the financial pressure on the Service and to better address the needs of children and families as a whole it was necessary to shift the focus towards redelivery, redesign and restructuring of services. This would bring a focus towards early intervention for the most vulnerable in hopes to increase quality of life and provide services that had wider reach and were more productive.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the issues raised in the annual report;
- ii. **NOTED** the impact that COVID-19 had on the population and the ability of services to adapt to the challenges that this had brought in relation to the delivery of statutory social work services;
- iii. **AGREED** a meeting take place with the Leader of the Council, Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Executive Chief Officer (Health, Social Care and Wellbeing) and Member representatives from each political party to discuss writing a letter for the continued support of the £20 Universal Credit uplift; and
- iv. **AGREED** further information be provided to Mrs I Mackenzie on the additional funding (£68,000) for alcohol and drug rehabilitation treatment.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes were circulated and **NOTED**:-

- i. Highland Child Protection Committee held on 3 September 2020;
- ii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group held on 19 October 2020; and
- iii. Highland Community Justice Partnership held on 4 November 2020.

The meeting ended at 1.00pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Thursday 11 February 2021 at 10.35 am.

Present:

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

Religious Representatives:

Mr R Finlay
Ms S Lamont
Mr W Skene

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Henderson	Mrs M Paterson
Mrs I MacKenzie	

In attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning
Mr B Porter, Head of Resources
Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer
Mrs F Shearer, South Area Manager, Education and Learning
Mrs B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Ms T Mackie, ICTiLearning, Improvement & Strategy
Mr R Quigley, ICTiLearning, Improvement & Strategy
Mr D Paterson, Quality Improvement Officer
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms G Newman, Highland Children's Forum (Third Sector)
Mr J Hasson, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Teachers and pupils from Inverness Royal Academy

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair thanked school staff, parents, guardians, pupils, Council officers, Public Health staff and all other stakeholders for the resilience and flexibility they had shown in the face of another lockdown and a further period of remote learning. He added that, whilst recognising the many and continuing challenges being faced, it was important to acknowledge the positive work taking place in schools supported by parents, third sector groups and other key stakeholders.

He went on to explain that, given the timescales for distributing the agenda and papers, some detail in the reports might already have been superseded, or would be superseded in the coming weeks, and officers would provide an update, where appropriate, when introducing the reports.

Finally, he indicated that there was no Public Health representative in attendance as they were all extremely busy supporting the fight against Covid and the vaccination programme. However, the Director of Public Health had attended the Health and Social Care Committee the previous day and, it was hoped, would be present at the next meeting of the Education Committee.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 3 – Mr A Christie (non-financial)

Item 4 – Mr A Baxter (non-financial), Mr A Christie (financial), Mr K Gowans (non-financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial), Ms E Knox (non-financial), and Ms N Sinclair (non-financial)

Item 5 – Mr A Baxter, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox and Ms N Sinclair (all non-financial)

Item 6 – Mr A Baxter, Mr A Jarvie and Ms N Sinclair (all non-financial)

Item 7 – Mr A Christie (financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial) and Ms N Sinclair (non-financial)

Item 9 – Mr A Jarvie (non-financial) and Mr K Gowans (financial)

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

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis that he was the parent of a child who attended Inverness Royal Academy 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.

Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer, informed Members of outstanding achievements by pupils and schools, a digital summary of which had been circulated in advance of the Committee.

In addition, teachers and pupils from Inverness Royal Academy gave a presentation on their journey to gaining the Silver Award as part of the Rights Respecting Schools Award Programme and being the first secondary school in Highland to do so. Topics covered included Curriculum, Positive Behaviour Policy, LGBT+ and Social Media and Events, as well as the journey to achieving the Gold Award.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members commended the inspirational and thought-provoking presentation, and welcomed the emphasis on global and responsible citizens in The Curriculum for Excellence being realised;
- young people often taught older people about the values of respect and empathy and it was good to see that young people not only learned such values but were willing to stand up for them;
- it was disappointing that a small number of complaints had been received and, in that regard, information was sought, and provided, on what the school/school community could do to spread the message to the wider community about the importance of respecting the rights of students, including those within the LGBTQ community; and
- it was important to share the experience of Inverness Royal Academy to encourage other schools to take part in the Rights Respecting School initiative.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the outstanding achievements and the accompanying presentation.

4. **Education and Learning – Back to School** **Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh – Air Ais dhan Sgoil**

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 their involvement in the discussion:

Mr A Baxter – parent of children in primary and secondary school
Mr K Gowans – parent of a child in primary school
Ms E Knox – Trustee on the Board of Thriving Families
Ms N Sinclair – parent of children in nursery and primary school

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest 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.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/01/21 dated 15 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair informed Members that the Return to School Project Board, which both he and Councillor Graham MacKenzie attended, had been reinstated and had met twice so far in 2021. In relation to the presentation referred to on the agenda, this had been circulated to Members to view in advance of the Committee.

The Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning explained that the purpose of the report was to provide an update on the directives and guidance received from the Scottish Government with regard to schools opening, provision of education and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), including expectations of support for families and communities during the continued Covid restrictions. However, many of the points within the guidelines had been superseded following the First Minister's announcement on 2 February on the phased managed return of ELC and schools, and a detailed update was provided on the progress made to date. Further guidelines were awaited from the Scottish Government to inform updated school safety guidance, guidance on the testing programme, and technical guidelines and support for secondary school practical work. There would be a further announcement on 16 February regarding the return to school and all of the work taking place would be dependent on the scientific data provided. The response by children and young people, parents, all staff and officers to the latest announcement had been outstanding and officers would continue to react with agility and integrity but at the same time it was necessary to think to the future and maximise what had been learned over the last year, particularly in terms of curricular developments, choice and offer.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the update on mental health provision in schools was welcomed, and appreciation was expressed to officers for the work that had taken place in that regard;
- whilst the immediate priority was the return to school and ensuring that pupils and school staff were safe, it was important to look to the future and ensure that the pupils impacted by the pandemic could catch up on lost learning. Remote learning provision had been impressive, particularly during the current lockdown and in secondary schools, but it was no substitute for face-to-face learning;
- information was sought, and provided, on what discussions had taken place with Trade Unions, teachers representatives and civil servants regarding the next stage after the return to school and what provision would be made for those who needed it most to bring them back to the level they should be at; whether

discussions had taken place with the Deputy First Minister about the additional resources required for school communities to address the issue of lost learning; and the Council's assessment, in a Highland context, of the detailed Scottish Government guidance on the return to school, and what representations were being made where the guidance did not fit with how education was provided in Highland. In relation to the need to interpret the Scottish Government guidance at local level, the Chair commented that engagement with Head Teachers was crucial and weekly meetings were taking place to get their input. In addition, it was suggested that if Members had any specific issues they wished to highlight they be emailed to the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning in the first instance so they could be discussed with the Chair and fed into the ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government;

- tribute was paid to the members of the Return to School Project Board for the comprehensive and coherent approach to the return to school, and the thorough anticipation of issues rather than dealing with them in a reactive manner;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that music instructors would be supporting pupils' practical assessments when schools returned;
- it was queried whether officers were content with how lost learning had been assessed after the first lockdown and what was being done to ensure that lessons learned were taken into account when looking to assess the latest gaps in provision;
- the lack of interaction/socialisation young people had experienced in recent months would potentially lead to behavioural issues when they returned to school, and several Members suggested making school facilities available during the Easter holidays for voluntary engagement events, potentially utilising High Life Highland staff and volunteers, whereby young people would have an opportunity to take part in activities, talk to each other and express anxieties. Suggested activities/services included drama, sporting activities, digital access to counselling services, and digital detox;
- tribute was paid to the former Director of Care and Learning, Bill Alexander, for his vision and initiative in implementing the Chromebook rollout;
- staff were commended for their professionalism, resilience, innovation and adaptability to the rapidly changing circumstances;
- in relation to the vaccine rollout, a number of teaching unions had made a robust case to the Scottish Government for the prioritisation of teaching staff, which made sense to many people, and the prioritisation of Additional Support Needs (ASN) staff who could not maintain physical distance from the children they supported was welcomed;
- public health remained the overriding issue and disappointment was expressed that there was no public health representative in attendance. The Chair explained that the Director of Public Health had given a presentation to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee the previous day, which he suggested be circulated to Members of the Education Committee for information. In addition, the Director of Public Health had given an assurance that he would attend the next meeting of the Committee, and Members questions, specifically in relation to education, would be sought in advance;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Council's view as to the strategic approach required to overcome Covid;
- information was sought, and provided, on the mechanisms in place to enable teachers to report concerns regarding Covid safety measures, and whether they could be assured such concerns would be investigated and addressed. The Chair commented that such matters were usually reported at school level in the

first instance but issues could also be raised with HR or through the confidential staff helpline. Members added that there were many reasons why staff would not want approach a manager, and it was suggested that consideration be given to a simple online form or portal. It was important that such issues were collated centrally and solutions put in place;

- the importance of the partnership between parents, teachers and pupils in terms of maintaining the learning journey throughout the pandemic was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on what was being done to support pupils through the return to school, which would be a stressful experience for many;
- it was queried whether the Broad General Education had been more challenging to deliver via remote learning than the senior phase, and how it would be known, in two or three years, whether young people had caught up on lost learning;
- concern was expressed regarding the delivery of the secondary school curriculum, some aspects of which were better suited to online delivery than others;
- provided local authorities met the SQA's requirements there would be consistency of delivery and assessment across Scotland. However, it was necessary to ensure that the appropriate delivery platforms were in place;
- parents had generally been understanding and supportive of school staff. However, concerns had been raised, at parent council meetings, regarding lost learning and transitions;
- it having been queried whether consideration had been given to allowing pupils to repeat a year to recover lost learning, it was explained that there was no legislation in that regard at present;
- there was no reference to a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment in the implications section of the report, and it would be helpful to include this in future reports;
- consulting with children, young people and families would be key to getting the new ASN allocation model right;
- a plea was made that children who had a Child's Plan be involved in the review of the Child's Plan process;
- it having been queried why some schools had counsellors and others did not, it was explained that the resource sat with Associated School Groups and a report on the impact of counselling provision on young people and communities would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee;
- the number of mental health initiatives taking place was welcomed, as was the possible date for a mental health seminar in April 2021; and
- Appendix 2 of the report included some of the issues previously raised by the Children and Young People's Forum, namely, that local improvement was not necessarily best made by comparing with other local authorities, that qualifications were not necessarily the best measure of improvement for all children and young people and that consideration should be given to positive school destinations.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the directives and guidance provided by the Scottish Government to schools, settings, families and communities;
- ii. **NOTED** the criterion and flexibility provided by the Scottish Government to support The Highland Council in the provision and prioritisation of keyworker childcare;

- iii. **NOTED** the criterion used for vulnerable children to access in-school/setting support in line with Scottish Government recommendations and the additional flexibility implemented by The Highland Council to take into account the context of Highland communities to maximise the support for vulnerable young people identified locally;
- iv. **NOTED** the governance put in place to ensure a multi-agency decision making process;
- v. **NOTED** the plan for mental health and wellbeing support for staff and young people during this time;
- vi. **AGREED** that the presentation by the Director of Public Health to the Health and Social Care Committee on 10 February 2021 be circulated to Education Committee Members for information; and
- vii. **AGREED** that there would be a presentation by the Director of Public Health, specifically in relation to education matters, at the next meeting of the Committee, and that Members questions would be sought in advance.

5. Education and Learning - Remote Learning Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh – Ionnsachadh Air Astar

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 their involvement in the discussion:

Mr A Baxter – parent of children in primary and secondary school

Mr K Gowans – parent of a child in primary school

Ms E Knox – Trustee on the Board of Thriving Families

Ms N Sinclair – parent of children in nursery and primary school

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/2/21 dated 13 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that he hoped the report would give Members confidence in the work taking place in Highland schools at present, which was being recognised by Education Scotland and other national bodies as exemplifying good practice. In addition, it was hoped that the report demonstrated that what was being offered to learners in terms of digital and remote learning continued to be developed and improved.

At this stage, it had been intended to show a video recitation of a poem, written by Jo Fitzpatrick from Nairn Academy, which recognised the challenges that learners and school staff faced as they adapted and developed remote learning, and gave thanks for the work being undertaken by schools. Unfortunately, this was not possible for technical reasons but it was confirmed that a link to the video would be circulated to all Members.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- tribute was paid to teachers, leaders, support staff and early years practitioners, who had adapted quickly and cheerfully to the sizeable challenge of remote learning;
- Members with nursery and school-age children spoke to their own experience of online learning, and welcomed the fact that the Council had allowed schools the flexibility to adapt how they worked to suit their unique skillset and the wider community;
- nothing was better than face-to-face interaction, particularly for young children, and that was one of the biggest challenges at present;
- digital technology was a huge part of young people's education, entertainment and socialisation, and those who had not grown up with it had a responsibility to catch up. It was necessary to understand how social media worked in order to educate young people on its dangers, and to teach young people how to balance screen time with time outdoors, creative play and face-to-face socialising. It was also important to embrace the enormous possibilities of digital media and ensure everyone could access them regardless of geography or income. Schools were already rising to this challenge and the report was welcomed;
- it was questioned whether the new way of working that had emerged during lockdown was the beginning of a more comprehensive approach to the use of digital technology in schools and the associated implications for the health and wellbeing of young people;
- families had been at home for an extended period over the winter months and many would be struggling to keep their homes warm. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that information on the support available had been distributed to all parents. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the advice and support being provided to teaching staff who were working from home, and it was confirmed that details of how to claim tax relief had been distributed via the staff newsletter;
- information was sought, and provided, on the processes in place to monitor those children with whom it was difficult to engage online, particularly lower achieving pupils and those with ASN who did not respond well to self-directed learning;
- the Chair of the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP) explained that the HPCP had hosted an online training session for parents on digital learning. This had included a presentation by Tania Mackie from the Council's Education Improvement Team which had been worthwhile and thought-provoking. One of the points that had arisen was the need to look at things in more depth, not only from the children's perspective but from the parents' point of view, and discussions were taking place with officers regarding further developing the presentation and whether there was anything that could be done to enhance the wellbeing of parents, who were not accustomed to home-schooling, at the present time;
- the Council had been proactive in the way it had handled online safety and tribute was paid to Robert Quigley, ICTi Learning Officer, for his work with children and parents in that regard;
- there was an opportunity to provide more advice on informal learning, particularly for parents on the pros and cons of the various online platforms young people used in their own time; and

- a concerning national trend, which appeared to disproportionately effect ASN pupils and which had been accelerated by lockdown, was the number of parents taking their children out of the school system altogether. Some parents would welcome a hybrid of home-schooling and online lessons, and it was suggested that steps be taken to engage with parents who had made or were on the verge of making the decision to take their children out of school regarding what new ways of delivering education the Council could offer to support their children.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** the strategic direction for digital learning and skills in Highland schools as set out in paragraph 6.1 of the report;
- NOTED** the plans and position for supporting the effectiveness of remote learning across the Highlands;
- scrutinised and **NOTED** the progress made to support remote learning across Highland, including the support for digital inclusion; and
- AGREED** the ICT in Learning strategy for 2021.

**6. Short, Medium and Long-Term Action Plan – Education and Learning
Plana-gnìomha Geàrr-ùine, Meadhan-ùine is Fad-ùine – Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh**

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 their involvement in the discussion:

**Mr A Baxter – parent of children in primary and secondary school
Ms N Sinclair – parent of children in nursery and primary school**

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/03/21 dated 12 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair emphasised the importance of the Action Plan given the uncertain times and the ever changing educational landscape. The Plan was very much led by the current empowerment agenda which was being promoted at all levels of education from Scottish Government to classroom level and, as well as being flexible and subject to change, was being driven by both national advice and Head Teachers who knew local circumstances best. The Plan would evolve and the Education Committee would continue to receive feedback at future meetings, not only about the Plan itself but about the outcomes being realised from it;
- confirmation was requested as to the permanency of the Education Improvement Team. Despite indications that an operation framework proposal would be

considered at a full Council meeting this had yet to take place. As a result there were many Head Teachers who had been acting up for up for two years, putting a strain on the Senior Management Team level. There were personnel issues too which would come into play regarding entitlement to posts and, accordingly, to give certainty and to be fair to staff, parents and pupils concerned, this needed to be addressed. In response, the Chair highlighted the benefits of secondments but assured Members that the Service was moving forward with setting the structure; and

- the core objective of the Plan was to close the attainment gap but it was important that the focus was not a statistical exercise and that every child achieved their potential in terms of achievements and attainment.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the short, medium and longer term priorities as described in the report; and
- ii. that further reports on the progress of the action plan would be taken to future Education Committees for challenge and scrutiny.

7. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) 1140 Hours 1140 Uair a Thìde de Thràth-Ionnsachadh is Cùram-Chloinne

Declarations of Interest:

Ms N Sinclair declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis that she was a parent of children 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 their involvement in the discussion.

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest 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.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/04/21 dated 15 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair informed Members that confirmation had now been received from the Scottish Government that, as anticipated, August 2021 was the revised date for the roll out of 1140 hours. This item provided an opportunity to update Members on the final 19 settings due to deliver 1140 hours from August 2021;
- as there were no officers from the Council's Estate Team present, the Chair suggested that queries regarding individual settings should be addressed at Ward Business Meetings. However, Members expressed regret that their specific queries could not be answered at the meeting, in an open and public

forum. These officers were integral to the delivery of the overall project and should be in attendance;

- looking at the programme of work, many projects had the target date of August 2021, with none opening between April and August. The ethos of 1140 hours was to provide flexibility with either full-time provision during term time or part-time provision all year round. If facilities were not to open before August 2021 this prevented those who needed childcare during the summer from accessing it. In response, the Chair pointed out that it was often necessary to carry out capital works during the summer when pupils were not at school;
- given the length of the programme and the associated issues it was suggested that a seminar or Special Meeting of the Committee be held to explore matters in more detail;
- there were risks associated with buildings, some of which were visible whilst others were hidden hazards;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the capacity issues reported within the Care Inspectorate and the degree to which this could impact on the roll out;
- the provision of 1140 ELC hours was important not just to children but to families;
- in some areas of Inverness, where schools were capped, there were anomalies where some families were able to access 1140 hours but others, living close by but in a different catchment area, were not. Consequently, it was important to look at alternative interim arrangements to bring forward 1140 hours until capital works were addressed;
- the provision of 1140 ELC hours was a critical element of the Recovery Plan as it enabled parents to return to work;
- conflicting information had been provided as to the delay in providing ELC in Milton of Leys Primary School. The Head of Resources undertook to provide the Ward Business Meeting with up-to-date information as to the status of this project; and
- there were various issues affecting the provision of ELC at Kinmylies and Muirtown Primary Schools and it was requested that the Head of Resources or an Estates Team officer attend a Ward Business Meeting where these could be explored in more detail.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the updated position regarding ELC and provision of 1140 hours;
- ii. the further progress towards delivering 1140 hours in all Highland settings;
- iii. the current status of ELC capital projects and work being taken forward to progress project delivery;
- iv. the updates provided regarding ongoing discussion with the Scottish Government and other local and national developments;

and **AGREED**:-

- v. that officers attend the next Ward Business Meetings to discuss the arrangements in respect of Milton of Leys, Kinmylies and Muirtown Primary School Nurseries respectively;
- vi. that Estates Team representatives be requested to attend future meetings of the Committee to respond to questions on specific capital projects; and
- vii. that consideration be given to how to better engage with Members on the final 19 ELC settings and the associated contingency plans.

8. Review of the statutory consultation exercise to establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Gairloch Primary School
Ath-sgrùdadh air an eacarsaich cho-chomhairle reachdail gus sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig a stèidheachadh airson Bun-Sgoil Gheàrrloch

There had been circulated Report No EDU/05/21 dated 12 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that the Gaelic Medium catchment area for Gairloch Primary School was ongoing. This process was in response to the statutory guidance issued by Bord na Gaidhlig which recommended that local authorities create catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the proposal set out within the Consultation Report (Appendix 1) and associated appendices;
- ii. **NOTED** the representations received and the report from Education Scotland (Appendices 3i-3iv); and
- * iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the creation of a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Gairloch Primary School on the basis set out in paragraph 1.2 of the report, namely, to create a Gaelic Medium catchment that overlays the current English Medium catchments of Gairloch Primary School, Poolewe Primary School, Bualnaluib Primary School and Kinlochewe Primary School.

9. Revenue Budget Monitoring 3rd Quarter 2020/21
Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 3^{mh} Ràith 2020/21

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest on the basis that a close relative 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.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/06/21 dated 13 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The financial impact of the pandemic was acknowledged, along with significant additional expenditure being incurred to support education recovery. However, some positive signs of improvement in the forecasts were highlighted.

Concern was expressed over any proposal to cut Additional Support Needs for financial savings as part of the forthcoming budget. In addition, the underspend in Devolved School Management (DSM) reserves was highlighted and it was requested

that that the underspend should be considered for Easter engagements to benefit students.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the revenue budget outturn forecast for the year;
- ii. the improvement in forecast and the reasons as set out within the report; and
- iii. the remaining risks and uncertainties relating to the financial position as a result of Covid-19, and in particular the risks relating to the ongoing impact of the current lockdown, and continuing pressures that will be faced for the remainder of this financial year, and potentially extending into 2021/22.

10. Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers
Geàrr-chunntas na Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail airson Thidsearan

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 9 December 2020.

The meeting concluded at 14.20 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Wednesday, 17 February 2021 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
Mrs C Wilson

Officials in Attendance:

Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER
Mark Rodger, ECO - Property & Housing
Jim Holden, Housing Manager (North)
Robert Campbell, Estate Strategy Manager
Jonathan Henderson, Housing Investment Officer
Iain Moncreiff, Roads Operation Manager
Sara Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector Jamie Wilson, Police Scotland

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

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

There were none.

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

Item 5 – Pauline Munro (financial)

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

There had been circulated Report No ERA/01/21 dated 3 February 2021 by Chief Inspector Jamie Wilson, Area Commander (North Highland Area Command).

Following a summary of the report, Member raised the following issues:

- the increases in assaults on emergency services workers, especially police officers, was shocking and Members voiced full support for the Police in tackling this;
- tougher action was urged on the high levels of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, with reference in particular to problems in the Rose Garden toilets, Tain. A summary was provided of action being taken including a

partnership approach between the Police, Education and Youth Services. It was proposed the Senior Ward Manager facilitate a meeting between the Police, Youth workers and Education for Alness, similar to arrangements previously made for Tain;

- information was sought and provided on measures being taken in response to lockdown offences, including large gatherings and people attending second homes. A summary was provided of the levels of evidence required for the Police to take action and the public was urged to continue reporting any unlawful activity; and
- with reference to the recent accident at Evanton junction, Maxine Smith sought and received confirmation that the police could provide statistics on road traffic incidents to facilitate liaison with the Scottish Government on the need for changes to road layouts etc.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 1 for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 November 2020; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Senior Ward Manager facilitate a meeting between the Police, Youth workers and Education for Alness, similar to arrangements previously made for Tain.

4. **School Estate Improvements Update** **Fios às Ùr mu Leasachaidhean Oighreachd Sgoile**

An update was provided on School Estate Improvements as follows:

Alness Academy - Phase 1: New School Building - Handed over in October 2020.

Alness Academy - Phase 2: Demolition of School/External Works - Programmed for completion by October 2021, now likely to be November.

Obsdale Primary: Nursery Unit - Building has been handed over, external works to be completed during Easter holidays.

Bridgend Primary: Nursery Unit - At tender stage, due on site from May to July.

Coulhill Primary: Nursery Unit - At tender stage, due on site from May to July.

Kiltearn Primary: Extension/Refurbishment - At initial design stage.

Invergordon Academy: Refurbishment of Toilets - At initial design stage.

Park Primary: Modular Classroom Units and Internal Alterations - Nursery to be operational after Easter; school to be operational from August.

Tain 3-18 Campus: New School Building - to open in 2024; more detailed update to Ward Members on Monday 22nd; meeting of Stakeholder Group to be arranged.

Tain Royal Academy: Accessibility Improvements – Complete.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- confirmation was sought and provided that planning permission for Invergordon Academy has been submitted and there was time to deal with queries;

- Members expressed concern at lack of information on progress with Tain 3-18 campus and it was hoped the stakeholder group would soon reconvene. The target opening date of August 2024 was challenging but a programme had been set out with this aim.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and **AGREED** improved communication in relation to the Tain campus was required.

5. **Area Roads Capital Programme for 2021-22** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2020-21**

Declaration of Interest - Mrs P Munro declared a financial interest in this item as her family's business (Pat Munro) was a possible contractor and if contractors were discussed, she would leave the meeting.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/02/21 dated 28 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- concern was expressed by all Members at the poor condition of the Area's roads. Priority should be given to tackling the potholes ahead of the proposed capital programme;
- Members deemed the condition of the roads in Easter Ross to be significantly worse than in other areas of Highland and the current method of road maintenance budget allocation by length of road was unsatisfactory and required discussion with the Leader of the Council and the ECO (Infrastructure and Environment), along with all Members of the Area Committee;
- reference was made to several specific roads where potholes were particularly bad;
- information was sought on why a member of roads staff had been seconded to burials, given the workload being experienced by roads staff. It was explained this had been due to Covid-related staff absence and urgent burial work;
- the method for filling potholes with tar was queried, with Members pointing out how often and how quickly potholes could reopen. Attention was drawn to the inadequacies of the available resources including budget, staff and equipment;
- it was suggested there was no need to include maps with the report as Members were familiar with the Area, however it was pointed out that maps had been requested during consideration of a previous report;
- reference was made to concern being expressed on social media about the poor state of the roads and that it was worrying some Council staff were being targeted on social media and in person;
- in response to queries, it was explained that the disaggregation of Area budgets reduced the flexibility in the use of resources. A summary was provided of the staff and plant available for Easter Ross, and that the number of staff was dictated by the agreed winter maintenance policy;
- it was pointed out that the proposed capital programme had already been discussed with Members at ward business meetings, however Members were unanimous in their desire to use the capital budget primarily for

tackling potholes, especially after the recent cold weather which had made the situation worse; and

- it was important to understand how much work the current roads staff were able to undertake and to consider the use of contractors where necessary. The rules around contract tendering and likely timescales were summarised.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- i. all Easter Ross Members and the ECO (Property & Housing) be invited to the meeting already arranged between the Chair, the Council Leader and the ECO (Infrastructure and Environment) to discuss the Roads budget for Easter Ross; and
- ii. to allocate a minimum of 70% of the Area Roads Capital Budget 2021-22 to dealing with potholes within the Area, with any budget left over from the potholes to be used for the Capital Programme as set out in the report and for authority to be delegated to the ECO (Infrastructure and Environment) in consultation with all Easter Ross Area Members to decide on the detail in this regard.

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

There had been circulated Report No ERA/03/21 dated 2 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, officials were thanked for their attendance at ward business meetings and it was clarified that once a plan was developed for pothole repair, further Member input would be sought via ward business meetings.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to Easter Ross Area as set out at 5.5;
- ii. **NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in sections 5.2 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Easter Ross 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 will 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.

7. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/04/21 dated 1 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020 and **AGREED** to provide Ms M Smith

with details of why there was a discrepancy between time taken to complete non-emergency repairs in Cromarty Firth compared to Tain and Easter Ross.

8. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/2022
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2021/2022

There had been circulated Report No ERA/05/21 dated 2 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- reference to Lochaber in the report was a typographical error;
- there were garages that required repair before they could be rented out, but current budgeted funding was insufficient to undertake all the required maintenance;
- there was a need for an overall asset management strategy for garages and to invest in them to create income, with ideas including converting them to storage units, demolishing them to create parking, or using them as small business units. A pilot was being undertaken in Dingwall and once completed the outcomes would be reported to the Committee along with an outline business case for future options which, in due course, could be consulted on with Members, tenants and other stakeholders. All options would be discussed at a future joint ward business meeting in the first instance;
- Members proposed a 2% increase in garage rents in line with inflation and other rental increases.
- Jim Holden was wished well on his imminent retirement and thanked for his many years' service to the Council.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- i. a 2% rent increase to apply to Tain & Easter Ross and Cromarty Firth Garages; and
- ii. the ECO (Property and Housing) attend a joint ward business meeting, to be arranged by the Senior Ward Manager, to discuss issues relating to the future use of Council-owned garages.

9. Use of Cromarty Firth Covid Response Funds
Cleachdadh Maoin Freagairt Covid Linne Chrombaidh

There had been circulated Report No ERA/06/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the use of the Covid-19 Response Funds had already been discussed and agreed by the Council; and
- a post-Covid-19 lunch-club for the elderly was proposed and, following discussion, this would be done through the usual Ward Discretionary Fund application process as long as it would be under £1.5k initially;

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £15,000 from the remaining Cromarty Firth Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to support the provision of play equipment in the Cromarty Firth Ward in consultation with amenities staff and local communities; and
- ii. **NOTED** that next steps to progress this work would include confirmation of any match funding available, the type of equipment to be installed based on the budget available and consideration of ongoing maintenance associated with any equipment installed. This would involve the amenities team and communities.

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

There had been circulated Report No ERA/07/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, Members asked that it be made clear to the public that the Invergordon Town Hall required a significant amount of money to be spent on it to avoid it crumbling and decaying, and the only means of raising the necessary money and saving the building was to explore its lease or sale.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Invergordon Common Good Fund Annual Report for 2019/20;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Invergordon Common Good Fund, as shown in the 2020 Quarter 3 monitoring statement;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2021/22; and
- iv. **AGREED** disposal of the Invergordon Town Hall by lease or sale on the open market should be explored, noting this would require a new public consultation under the terms of the Community Empowerment legislation.

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

There had been circulated Report No ERA/08/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Tain Common Good Fund Annual Report for 2019/20;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Tain Common Good Fund, as shown in the 2020 Quarter 3 monitoring statement; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2021/22.

**12. Tain Common Good – Disposal consultation, Wild Life Pond Kiosk, Tain Links
Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich – Co-chomhairle Chuidhteachaidh,
Bothag Lochan Fiadh-bheatha, Machair Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/09/21 dated 2 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at Appendix 1;
- ii. **AGREED** the proposal to change the use of the Wildlife Pond Kiosk to a café outlet subject to the consent of the Sheriff Court being obtained; and
- iii. **NOTED** that other permissions might be required relating to planning and environmental health in connection with the operation of the business however, these were separate processes and procedures to those required under Community Empowerment legislation.

**13. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 5 November 2020.

The meeting ended at 12.50pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held remotely Wednesday 17 February 2021 at 10.50 am.

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mr T Heggie

Mrs L MacDonald
Mr P Saggars

In attendance:

Mr W Munro, Interim Ward Manager
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to 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 3: Mr P Saggars (non-financial)

3. 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/01/21** dated 5 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, it was proposed that in the event of any underspends and in order to provide flexibility Nairn Bid, in consultation with Members, be able to move funds across the budget headings detailed in Appendix 1 to the report to take account of cost variations across individual items on the basis that the project outputs would be delivered as agreed.

The Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. the final detail of the Town Centre Fund proposal for Nairn and formally award Nairn BID £28,052 to deliver the project as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; and
- ii. that Nairn Bid, in consultation with Members, be able move funds across the budget headings detailed in Appendix 1 to the report to take account of cost variations across individual items on the proviso that the project outputs would be delivered as agreed.

The meeting was concluded at 10.55am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held remotely on Thursday 18 February 2021 at 10.00 am.

Present:

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

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer Transformation and Economy
 Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance
 Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure
 Mr E Foster, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism
 Ms A Clark, Head of Policy
 Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
 Mr C Baxter, Planner
 Mr N Young, Senior Engineer
 Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer
 Mr M MacDonald, Corporate Improvement Project Manager
 Mr J Mitchell, Principal Housing Officer
 Mr J Kelman, Principal Project Manager
 Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
 Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator
 Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator

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

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms E Knox and Mrs B McAllister.

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

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

- Item 4: Mrs I Mackenzie (non-financial)
- Item 5: Miss J Campbell (non-financial)
- Item 7b: Miss J Campbell and Mr A Jarvie (both non-financial)
- Item 7c: Mrs H Carmichael (non-financial)

3. **New Years Honours** **Urraman na Bliadhna Ùire**

Members were advised that Paula Morag Lloyd had been recognised in the New Year's Honours List for services to the Vulnerable in Inverness during the Covid-19 Response. The Provost advised that a letter of congratulations had been sent to Ms Lloyd.

4. **Spaces for People – Updates and Next Steps** **Àiteachan do Dhaoine – Fios às Ùr**

Declaration of Interest – Mrs I Mackenzie declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds a family member had set up a petition in relation to this item 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. CIA/2/21 dated 3 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised a number of issues including the following main points:-

- it was suggested the spaces for people interventions had resulted in increased congestion in the City centre over the festive period;
- it appeared from the report, that as a percentage of space users the number of pedestrian and cyclists had decreased and there had been a slight increase in the number of road users;
- the need to acknowledge that at present some interventions to aid social distance were required, but also to recognise the significant public upset at the scheme overall;
- concern that to date there had been a lack of meaningful consultation with Members and the public, this having been conducted via the Council's online portal which was not accessible to all;
- the need to support and engage with businesses in the City centre and not implement measures which may reduce their footfall;
- in recognising the need to shift the balance of travel, a balanced stakeholder group of interests be established to produce an inclusive active travel masterplan taking into account the needs of all;
- the statistics around the public's behaviour as outlined in the report reflected the fact that most people were respecting the Government's advice to stay at home;

- the current measures on Academy Street were unsightly and it was important these be replaced with more aesthetic and greener interventions going forward;
- officers had confirmed permanent measures would be unlike the current temporary interventions and would be a product of consultation and the merits of the design options would be discussed further by the Committee;
- the need to recognise there were many people who lived outwith the City that relied on their cars or public transport to travel to work;
- careful consideration be given to the alternative design options for the Castle Street/Castle Road area on the basis the current arrangements were not adequate in terms of road safety;
- in the context of the Climate emergency, the proposed interventions would help reduce air pollution and ensure a cleaner City centre environment, noting that Academy Street had been assessed to be one of the most polluted streets in Scotland;
- the spaces for people measures had already delivered a number of excellent schemes with positive benefits and feedback being received and officers be commended for their work in this regard;
- confirmation was sought and provided that a traffic assessment was being undertaken in respect of Kingsmills Road, where it was suggested a significant increase in traffic had been observed. The wider impacts of the interventions were also being analysed and monitored on an ongoing basis;
- the need to develop and consult on proposals for a comprehensive transport strategy in the City, including better park and ride facilities and public transport taking into account the impacts on climate change and public health, potentially in conjunction with the Inverness Community Partnership;
- officers had outlined the full consultation that was to be undertaken in relation to any permanent measures and the need to reinforce the fact the majority of people supported rather than opposed the proposals;
- Members should have the courage to centre spaces around people and not vehicles and design an accessible City centre that would attract people to live, work and visit and of which future generations could be proud;
- the need to take a more overarching approach and inject more urgency in developing an active travel strategy for the City, including undertaking a realistic appraisal of the financial implications and how this strategy would be funded;
- the recommendations in the report be strengthened to provide for wider consultation on the proposals;
- the potential for the City Area Recovery Group , at which there had been positive discussions in terms of supporting the City centre, to move this forward by taking ownership and project managing an active travel plan for the City.

Following further discussion, the Provost seconded by Mrs T Robertson, **moved** approval of the recommendations in the report subject to recommendations (v) and (vi) being amended and to an additional condition as follows:-

- v. agree for officers to develop design options for a permanent street change for Academy Street for consideration at a future committee *with the proviso that the design development process includes consultation with representatives of the City business and residential communities to include representatives from Disability Access Groups*; and
- vi. agree for officers to develop design options for a permanent street change around Inverness Castle for consideration at a future committee *subject to consultation as in recommendation v, above*.

Additional Condition

Agree (a) to the development of proposals for a comprehensive transport strategy in the City taking into account the likely impact of Climate change and pollution on public health and (b) that effective pro-active public engagement be introduced in parallel with the strategic study, potentially in conjunction with the Inverness Community Partnership.

As a **first amendment**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr C Smith, moved that the Committee:-

- i. Acknowledge the need at present for some interventions to aid social distance, but also the significant public upset at the scheme overall;
- ii. Where these measures are not needed for the purpose of social distancing, these will be removed and those measure still required in the short term retained – subject to continual review and adaption where needed. At the appropriate time and social distancing is neither required or advised, all spaces for people measures to be reversed and returned to the pre-covid layout; and
- iii. In recognising the need to shift the balance of travel, agrees to establish a balanced stakeholder group of business representatives and owners, walking, cycling, disability and motorist groups, local residents, Community Councils and Councillors with the aim of producing an active travel masterplan with route specifics, enabling future measures to be rolled out on an informed manner taking into account the needs of all.

As a **second amendment**, Mr R MacWilliam seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, moved the following addition to the recommendations in the report:-

The Highland Council will consult Highland citizens, public bodies and community groups on an agreed strategy which is grounded in up-to-date research and accessible design principles with intention to accelerate modal shift from vehicles to cycling and walking across Inverness city centre. Officers are asked to report back on progress to the next meeting of the Committee with a detailed position from the council administration as to how this strategy will be funded.

On a vote being taken between the **first amendment** and the **second amendment**, the **first amendment** received 4 votes and the **second amendment** received 11 votes, with 5 abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the First Amendment:

Mr R Balfour, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr C Smith.

For the Second Amendment:

Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr D Macpherson, Mr R MacWilliam, Ms E Roddick.

Abstentions:

Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross.

On a subsequent vote being taken between the **motion** and the **second amendment**, the **motion** received 11 votes and the **second amendment** received 6 votes, with 3 abstentions. The **motion** was therefore **carried**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr R Balfour, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross.

For the Second Amendment:

Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr K Gowans, Mr R MacWilliam, Ms E Roddick.

Abstentions:

Mr A Jarvie, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr C Smith.

Decision

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to consider the progress made to implement the Spaces for People Highland project to support physical distancing during the pandemic;
- ii. **NOTED** the outcome of monitoring of interventions;
- iii. **NOTED** that work was progressing on schemes for Riverside Way & Millburn Road through the Inverness City Active Travel Network project;
- iv. **AGREED** to retain the four key interventions in Inverness whilst Government recommendations for physical distancing remained in place, including extending Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders under Coronavirus legislation, if required;
- v. **AGREED** (a) to the development of proposals for a comprehensive transport strategy in the City taking into account the likely impact of Climate change and pollution on public health and (b) that effective proactive public engagement be introduced in parallel with the strategic study, potentially in conjunction with the Inverness Community Partnership;
- vi. **AGREED** for officers to develop design options for a permanent street change for Academy Street for consideration at a future committee with the proviso that the design development process includes consultation

- with representatives of the City business and residential communities to include representatives from Disability Access Groups; and
- vii. **AGREED** for officers to develop design options for a permanent street change around Inverness Castle for consideration at a future committee subject to consultation as in recommendation vi, above.

5. Events and Festivals Tachartasan agus Fèisean

Declaration of Interest – Miss J Campbell declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Eden Court Highlands but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/3/21 dated 28 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Transformation.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the proposals outlined in the report represented an exciting and unique opportunity to work in collaboration with High Life Highland and Eden Court to bring high quality events and festivals to Inverness;
- the need to have a proposed programme of events and costings prior to agreeing a budget and whether it was intended to fill the vacant Events Manager post going forward. It was confirmed that a further report on the way forward and the operating model to inform resource requirements would be brought to the Committee in May 2021;
- the need to consider the types of offerings going forward and the timing of events over the year;
- the importance of there being no conflict of interest in collaborating with preferred partners when inviting tenders for events in terms of the Council’s contract standing orders;
- the potential to include the University of the Highlands and Islands, Inverness Caledonian Thistle FC, Royal National Mòd and the Blas Festival in the collaborative partnership framework arrangement going forward;
- a successful and holistic events and festivals programme had been delivered since 2009 and the opportunity for the vision to be further refreshed on the basis it replicated much of what was already in place;
- concern at the proposal to charge for some events on the basis it was important they remained accessible to all. It was confirmed that any proposals to charge for an event would be subject to equality and socio-economic impact assessments;
- it was hoped that collaboration with partners would enhance the core programme of events, provide an opportunity to share costs and attract additional sources of funding;
- in agreeing to preserve the current events and festivals budget, any under-spend on the budget should be retained for the following year but not as an additional sum to budget agreed for the following year;
- while entry to events should continue to be free, there was the opportunity to introduce charging for enhanced viewing areas or facilities

and the potential to harness other opportunities for the Council to generate income from its events;

- the potential for more digital online events be explored on the basis this would help support equalities and may encourage some people to attend events in person in future. Digital events also had the potential to significantly increase exposure and this in turn may attract sponsorship for events;
- events and festivals was key to the economic recovery of the City and in relation to wellbeing, and it was hoped that if Covid guidelines allowed a larger event could be organised towards the end of the year; and
- meeting invites to the Events and Festivals Working Group and the Committee's other Sub Committees/Working Groups be circulated to all Committee Members to allow for more participation and scrutiny.

Thereafter, the Committee: -

- i. **AGREED** the vision, values and objectives detailed in Appendix 1;
- ii. **AGREED** to preserve the current events & festivals budget in the sum of £0.303m to support the development of a refreshed events and festivals programme;
- iii. **AGREED** that any under-spend on the budget be retained for the following year noting that this sum would not be added to the budget agreed for the following year;
- iv. **NOTED** that the governance arrangements with scrutiny through the Events and Festivals Working Group, with annual reports to CIAC will continue;
- v. **NOTED** the next steps as detailed in section 7.1 of this report and that a subsequent paper will be presented at the May 2021 CIAC; and
- vi. **AGREED** that all Committee Members receive meeting invites to the Committee's Sub Committees/Working Groups.

6. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/22 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/4/21 dated 3 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

The Committee **AGREED** that a 2% rent increase be applied to Inverness Garages and Garage Sites.

7. Inverness Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

a) 2019/20 Final Position, Financial Monitoring and Capital Projects Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail agus Pròiseactan Calpa

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/5/21 dated 3 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

In introducing the report, the Inverness City Area Manager provided an update in respect of winter fuel payments, confirming that a total of £127,968 had been paid out to date.

Inverness Town House - The Principal Project Manager provided an update on the two current major capital projects, namely, the Town House and the Victorian Market. It was explained that the Town House had been scheduled for completion in late December/early January, but delays had been experienced due to Covid and the revised completion date was the end of March 2021. The main issue was the external works and the fact that contractors were having to limit what they could do, or use mechanical means, to maintain social distancing. In addition, there had been some issues with the delivery of materials, often sourced from Europe. On a positive note, the fact that there were no staff working in the building at present had allowed progress to be made on the internal works. It was hoped that the revised completion date was achievable, but progress was being monitored week by week. There was no change to the cost frame at present, but an extension of time claim had been received and was currently being evaluated. The Inverness City Area Manager would be notified of any developments as soon as possible and a further update would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

Victorian Market - In relation to the Victorian Market, work had commenced on site in January, beginning with the asbestos removal works. It had originally been intended to have site accommodation on Academy Street. However, due to the Spaces for People interventions and the installation of fibreoptic cables on Academy Street it had been necessary to rethink, and it had been agreed that the main contractor would hire a vacant shop unit on Union Street for the duration of the contract. In addition, space for a skip would be allocated in Union Street. It was hoped that the associated costs would be covered by the contingency element of the contract, but he would report back to a future meeting of the Committee if that was not the case. It was a one-year contract so the end of the contract period was (unforeseen circumstances permitting) January 2022 but the contractor was currently scheduled to finish in December 2021 and Covid-related issues had been allowed for.

At this stage, the Chair of the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Group addressed the Committee, explaining that the Recovery Group had been formed in June 2020 and had met on ten occasions since. It had examined options to help residents and businesses recover from the effects of the Covid pandemic, worked through a variety of issues and established a system of checks to ensure proper governance of any proposed actions prior to their implementation.

To fully understand the implications of any actions the Committee might wish to implement to assist Council or Common Good business tenants it was first necessary to carry out a full financial, economic and equalities assessment. When that had been completed, it was suggested that there would be an additional meeting of the Committee to fully consider the subsequent recommended actions prior to their implementation.

One of the many issues on the agenda had been the viability of businesses in the centre of Inverness, including Council and Common Good business tenants. Businesses on a global basis had been impacted by Covid and various levels and lengths of lockdown restrictions. The impact on businesses had varied considerably: generally, but not always, the impact had been negative. The UK and Scottish Governments had made various business support grants available to support businesses impacted by Covid and these

had been open to businesses across Highland, including city centre businesses, to apply for. Although these grants had been administered by Council staff, they had been widely available to businesses other than Council business tenants.

Members of the Recovery Group had asked for advice from Council officials with knowledge, expertise and responsibility as to how the Group could further assist businesses to recover. The advice given was that the Council had responsibilities with regards to both Council and Common Good business tenants. In the case of supporting businesses during Covid, the Council had a responsibility to clearly establish the level of need, not only of those that had raised the issue but of others to whom the Council had a responsibility. It would be irresponsible to consider any group, such as the Victorian Market traders, in isolation and as a reaction to a campaign. There was a Victorian Market Stakeholders Group, chaired by Councillor Isabelle MacKenzie, which met with traders on a regular basis. The Common Good Fund had also financed the appointment of the Victorian Market Manager, Joe Murray, who supported marketing, development, and wider communications.

The responsibilities of Members and officials of the Council had to be considered in the wider context of their duty of care and their fiduciary duties regarding Council and Common Good resources. One of the key responsibilities of Members and officials was that they must always act responsibly, consistently and respectfully to all. As always, in making decisions, the question of balancing the various competing issues should be considered in depth. It was critical that the reasoning behind any actions was transparent, justifiable and capable of withstanding scrutiny. Presently, there was a complex array of financial support available with further announcements regarding additional business grants focussing on non-domestic rates having been made as recently as Tuesday of the current week.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- thanks, were expressed to the officers who prepared the reports and those behind the scenes who did so much work in relation to the Common Good Fund, as well as to the Members of the Common Good Fund Sub-Committee for their work throughout the year;
- information was sought, and provided, on the year-to-date underspends on the Victorian Market Maintenance and Operations budgets and how the remainder of the budgets would be spent by the end of the financial year;
- in relation to rental income, the Property Manager having confirmed that most tenants had continued to pay their rent, it was suggested this was because they had no option;
- concern was expressed that the full financial impact of Covid might well not be felt until the following year;
- it was queried what flexibility had been offered to tenants in terms of rent relief;
- relying on national schemes was not sufficient. Food and drink businesses, for example, had so far not been eligible for grants because they had not been required to close, yet some had lost a significant proportion of their business due to hotels and pubs being closed. Whilst the Economy and Infrastructure Committee had, at its most recent

- meeting, approved a discretionary grants scheme, a grant of £2k was helpful to a small business but not to a larger employer;
- the proposed impact assessment was welcomed. However, this was not a laborious process and it was hoped that the additional meeting of the Committee would take place in the next few weeks and that there would be a full overview of the operations of the Common Good Fund estate. In addition, it would be helpful to have comments or representations from a range of tenants;
 - offering rent relief was not just for social good, it was within the remit of fiduciary duty, and it was in the best interests of the Common Good Fund to do everything possible to retain tenants and protect revenue;
 - the statement by the Chair of the City and Area of Inverness Recovery Group was encouraging. However, it was suggested that there were some inaccuracies in terms of the support that the Committee could afford to its commercial tenants. The small businesses in question created the vibrancy that was going to be necessary going forward, and it was asked that Members be open-minded;
 - it was important that the Victorian Market project was completed as soon as possible given the effect any delays would have on trading, and the assurance that the project was currently projected to be completed on budget was welcomed. It having been queried when the Committee would next have an opportunity to scrutinise the project to ensure that it was still on track, the Principal Project Manager explained that a status report was presented to every meeting of the Committee and if there were any issues to report he would attend and update Members directly;
 - a request having been made for a meeting with the Victorian Market traders, the Chair reiterated that it would not be appropriate to consider any group in isolation and that an additional meeting of the Committee would take place following completion of the necessary impact assessment;
 - on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the valuation error which had been reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee did not affect Common Good Fund property valuations;
 - in response to a question regarding the underspend on the Compensation Payments – Victorian Market budget, it was explained that when the budget had been set it had been unclear how much compensation would be payable to each tenant as it depended when they left and whether they intended to return to the Market. It was added that the purpose of the budget was specifically to compensate tenants who had had their tenancies terminated as a result of the refurbishment contract. The Inverness City Area Manager undertook to provide a detailed breakdown of compensation payments to all Members of the Committee;
 - a date for the additional meeting of the Committee having been requested, the Chair confirmed that it would take place as soon as the results of the impact assessment, which was now underway, were available and noting that it was essential that the Committee be fully informed before taking a decision; and
 - it was proposed that it be added to the recommendations that the grants offered to Victorian Market tenants be proportionately increased based on the delays to the refurbishment works as a result of Covid. However, the Inverness City Area Manager advised that it would not be appropriate to make such a decision until the financial implications had been assessed, and it was suggested that the proposal be investigated and revisited at the

additional meeting of the Committee. The Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance assured Members that officers would carry out a full and thorough investigation of the financial implications as quickly as possible. It was added that additional information was coming in daily from government and it was important to ensure best value for any money the Committee expended. The Chair did not accept the proposed additional recommendation.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Inverness Common Good Fund final monitoring report for 2019/20 and balance sheet as at 31st March 2020;
- ii. **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 31 December 2020; and that overall expenditure was within agreed budgets;
- iii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the current status of capital projects;
- iv. **NOTED** that an additional (Special) meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee would take place following completion of a comprehensive financial, economic and equalities assessment to inform any decisions the Committee might wish to take to assist Common Good business tenants;
- v. **AGREED** that a breakdown of compensation payments in respect of the Victorian Market be circulated to all Members of the Committee; and
- vi. **AGREED** that the proposal that the grants offered to Victorian Market tenants be proportionately increased based on the delays to the refurbishment works as a result of Covid be revisited at the additional meeting of the Committee following completion of the necessary financial assessments.

Mr A Jarvie requested that his dissent be recorded.

b) Grant and Capital Projects Proiseactan Tabhartais agus Calpa

Declarations of Interest: Miss J Campbell and Mr A Jarvie declared non-financial interests in this item as a Member of the Inverness Community Safety Partnership and a Director of High Life Highland respectively but, as Council appointees and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that they would remain and take part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/6/21 dated 26 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance. A copy of supporting documentation had also been circulated as Booklet A.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to the Inverness Gull Project, gulls remained an issue and, it having been queried what the proposed funding covered and whether awarding a greater amount would lead to a better result, it was suggested that a report on the project be presented to the next meeting of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee. Councillor Smith requested that he also be kept informed;
- with regard to the application by Visit Inverness Loch Ness, it was confirmed that, whilst the amount applied for was £30,000 per annum, the

Committee was not being asked to commit any funding beyond the first year. It was further confirmed that the Inverness Common Good Fund was being asked to provide 50% of the total funding required, with Visit Inverness Loch Ness and Inverness BID each providing 25%;

- in relation to the application by Inverness Botanic Gardens/High Life Highland, it was highlighted that Councillor Macpherson was no longer a Director of High Life Highland;
- Velocity Café and Bicycle Workshop did tremendous work and it was hoped that they could be accommodated. It was confirmed that the applications would come back to the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee for consideration as soon as the additional information requested to ensure there was no duplication across the applications had been received.

Thereafter, the Committee determined the current grant applications as follows:-

- 1) Velocity Café and Bicycle Workshop Ltd – Bespoked Project – **AGREED** to defer for submission of further information;
- 2) Velocity Café and Bicycle Workshop Ltd – Bike-it/Scoot-it Project – **AGREED** to defer for submission of further information;
- 3) Inverness Botanic Gardens/High Life Highland – **APPROVED** a grant of £16,127 towards Apples for All at Bught Apple Park;
- 4) Visit Inverness Loch Ness – **APPROVED** a grant of £30,000 from the Partnership Working Budget towards Inverness City Recovery Marketing;

and **APPROVED** the following applications submitted by Inverness BID:-

- 1) The City of Inverness Annual Floral Displays 2021 - £61,100
- 2) Operation Respect Easter/Summer/Autumn 2021 – £9,113
- 3) Inverness Gull Project - £11,200
- 4) Inverness Community Safety Partnership - £9,700

It was further **AGREED** that a report on the Inverness Gull Project be presented to the next meeting of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee, and that information also be provided to Councillor Smith in that regard.

c) **ICGF Budget Setting for 2021/22 and Capital Programme Buidseat ICGF – 2021/22**

Declaration of Interest: Mrs H Carmichael declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Inverness BID and Inverness Loch Ness BID 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. CIA/7/21 dated 2 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on how much of the projected deficit was in addition to what it would otherwise have been and the impact of liquidating assets to fund it, particularly whether a higher percentage of the portfolio would have to be liquidated now than pre-Covid to achieve the same revenue;
- whilst it was appreciated that the investment strategy was delegated to the Pensions Committee, it would be helpful to see more detail on how the Common Good Fund was performing and it was suggested that there should be an item on the next Committee agenda looking at the investment strategy and the overall expenditure of the Fund in future years. The interest had previously been generous but as the total volume of assets had decreased so had the interest and it was necessary to change from a passive strategy to a longer-term income focussed strategy to rebuild the Fund's reserves. The Chair responded that the reason for a passive strategy was to ensure a safe return. However, other Members commented that, coming out of a recession, remaining passive was a missed opportunity;
- information on the Fund's investments would be valuable when considering what could be done to support business tenants; and
- an update was sought on the review of the city's CCTV system and it was queried whether the budget allocation of £90,000 needed to be increased to provide a fit for purpose system that would protect citizens and stakeholders in the city centre. The Inverness City Area Manager explained that officers were working closely with Police Scotland and it was intended to report to the next meeting of the Community Safety Partnership and, in due course, the City Committee. He undertook to ensure Councillor Macpherson received an invitation to the Community Safety Partnership and confirmed that there was no requirement to increase the budget allocation at this stage.

In responding to the points raised, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism confirmed that further information on the make-up of the Common Good Fund's assets, how the Fund was performing, and potential investment approaches could be included in future monitoring reports. In relation to potentially changing the investment strategy, it was explained that Members first needed to decide what they wanted the Fund's long-term investment outcomes to be. Investment could then be tailored accordingly.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the Common Good Fund budget for 2021/22 as detailed within the report and appendices; and
- ii. that further information on the make-up of the Common Good Fund's assets, how the Fund was performing, and potential investment approaches be included in future monitoring reports.

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated various Minutes for noting or approval as appropriate.

It was questioned how Members who did not sit on a particular Sub-Committee/Working Group could carry out their scrutiny role when they were not invited to the meetings and the discussions took place in private, the Minutes of the Inverness City Arts Working Group and the discussions regarding the My Ness Project being cited as an example. Discussion ensued, during which it was reiterated that any Member could attend any Sub-Committee/Working Group as an observer and going forward, as agreed under item 5, all Members of the Committee would receive the electronic invites to the Committee's Sub-Committees/Working Groups so they could choose whether or not they wished to attend.

The Committee otherwise:-

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes of the City of Inverness Area Committee held on 19 November 2020 and 18 January 2021 (Special);
- ii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Inverness City Arts Working Group held on 10 December 2020;
- iii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Inverness Common Good Fund Grants Sub-Committee held on 27 November 2020 and 25 January 2021;
- iv. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Victorian Market Stakeholders Group held on 10 November 2020, 8 December 2020 and 12 January 2021; and
- v. **NOTED** the Minutes of the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub-Group held on 9 December 2020 and 21 January 2021.

The meeting ended at 3.35 pm.

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Special Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Friday, 19 February 2021** at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr D Mackay
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie

Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie
Ms N Sinclair
Mr A Sinclair

Officials in attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning
Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer, Development & Infrastructure
Mr N Young, Senior Engineer, Education & Learning
Mr R Pope, Policy and Programmes Manager, Development & Infrastructure
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator , Performance and Governance

Also in Attendance:

Ms V Trelfer, HiTRANS
Ms J Allan, ARUP
Mr G Diamond, ARUP

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

Items 3 and 4: Mr K Rosie and Mrs N Sinclair (non-financial)

**3. Town Centre Fund
Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile**

Declarations of Interest – Mr K Rosie as a Trustee of the Thurso Community Development Trust and Mrs N Sinclair as Director of Wick Development Trust 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 their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CC/07/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Town Centre Fund investment would contribute to revitalising town centres in Caithness and the Principal Regeneration Officer be thanked for his work, particularly in relation to funding;

- in respect of Thurso, the sum of £6,384 be taken from the approved £15,000 wayfinding budget and supplemented by the residual balance of the 2020/21 Town Centre Fund allocation (£2,379) in order to allow the market stall proposal to proceed, leaving £8,616 for the refurbishment of the Precinct clock;
- the role of the community and the Council in bringing forward the proposals be recognised;
- it was anticipated the funding would be recurring and going forward there was an excellent opportunity to take a more strategic approach and work flexibly in partnership with other community stakeholders in the area to effect positive change;
- the CCTV project would have wider impacts than the initial investment as it would protect future larger infrastructure projects from vandalism and contribute to public safety; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that it was for the Council to take a sensible and practical approach in determining what constituted the town centre in relation to funding opportunities.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** to invest £16,100 in CCTV infrastructure in Wick;
- AGREED** to invest £25,625 in CCTV infrastructure in Thurso; and
- AGREED** that in respect of Thurso, the sum of £6,384 be taken from the approved £15,000 wayfinding budget and supplemented by the residual balance of the 2020/21 TCF allocation (£2,379) in order to allow the market stall proposal to proceed, leaving £8,616 for the refurbishment of the Precinct clock.

4. **Wick and Thurso Active Travel Plans** **Planaichean Siubhal Gnìomhach Inbhir Ùige is Inbhir Theòrsa**

Declarations of Interest – Mr K Rosie as a Trustee of the Thurso Community Development Trust and Mrs N Sinclair as Director of Wick Development Trust 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 their involvement in the discussion.

There had been re-circulated Report No CC/05/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the need for more regular consultation with local Members and the Committee going forward as the Plan was implemented to ensure there was community support for specific proposals;
- an update on this item be provided to the Committee on a regular basis as a standing item;
- further information was sought and provided in relation to the proposed active travel forums;
- the level of public engagement in response to the consultation was welcomed, particularly given the challenges in undertaking a consultation during the Covid-19 pandemic;

- the potential for active travel to link in with local projects aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing in the area;
- the reality of budgetary constraints in terms of balancing the need to invest in improving the condition of the road network and delivering active travel projects;
- the social value and mental health and wellbeing benefits associated with active travel would generate savings across the board;
- the need to better communicate to the public what was involved in active travel and the outcomes the Plan intended to achieve;
- active travel had featured relatively high up the rankings in relation to a community survey undertaken by the Thurso Community Development Trust, and there was an expectation projects would be delivered in the area;
- the importance of towns being made as accessible as possible was key to attracting inward investment to the area;
- the need to be smart and flexible in terms of maximising the available funding to deliver active travel projects and to be more strategic in terms of linking in with other projects and funding opportunities in the area;
- a proposal that further local sense-checking and discussion be undertaken by ward members, supported by officers, as funding became available to implement specific proposals. These proposals were considered to be fluid and adaptable to changing circumstances; and
- additionally, the Caithness Area Chair and Vice-Chairs would take responsibility for investigating funding opportunities and driving the implementation of the Plan to improve active travel options in the County.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report, in particular the recent policies that identify walking, wheeling and cycling at the top of the sustainable transport hierarchy;
- ii. **APPROVED** the use of the Wick and Thurso Active Travel Masterplans as material consideration when dealing with development proposals and as supporting documents for funding bids;
- iii. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment to liaise with other bodies, including Transport Scotland, with a view to identifying funding opportunities and a delivery programme to target early improvements across the Wick and Thurso active travel network; and
- iv. **AGREED** that further local sense-checking and discussion be undertaken by ward members, supported by officers, as funding becomes available to implement specific proposals. These proposals are considered fluid and adaptable to changing circumstances. Additionally, the Caithness Area Chair and Vice-Chairs will take responsibility for investigating funding opportunities and driving implementation of the Plan to improve active travel options in the County.

5. **Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/2022** **Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No CC/08/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

- options to rationalise and change the use of some garages and garage sites were being considered and piloted in the area, including off-street parking, storage units and other uses;

- the need to address the level of garage voids and the potential to consider demolition as part of the range of options being discussed at the monthly housing meetings;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Principal Housing Officer would respond directly to Mr S Mackie on the comparison between Council and housing association garage rents in the area; and
- the proposed increase in the rents represented a few pence per week.

The Committee **AGREED** that a 2% increase be applied to Caithness Garages and Garage Sites in 2021/22.

The meeting ended at 11.05am.

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh **air astar** air Dimàirt 23 Gearran 2021 aig 10.30m.

An làthair:

Mgr G Adam	Mgr A MacAonghais
Mgr R Bremner	Mgr D MacAoidh
A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul	Mgr G MacCoinnich
Mr I Gòrdon	Mgr C Rothach
Mgr A MacEanraig	Mgr D Rixson

Neo-Bhall an làthair cuideachd:

Mgr I MacFhionnlaigh

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

A' Bh-uas K Lackie, Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas
 A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig
 Mgr R MacAoidh, Oifigear Leasachaidh
 A' Bh-uas M A NicLeòid Mitchell, Oifigear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig
 A' Bh-uas A NicRath, Rianaire Comataidh, Seirbheis a' Choileanadh is an Riaghlachais

Cuideachd a' frithealadh na coinneimh:

A' Bh-uas S NicIlinnein, Ceannard, Bòrd na Gàidhlig
 Mgr S Whannel, Stiùiriche an Fhoghlaim, Bòrd na 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

Gnothach

1. Leisgeulan

Ghabhadh leisgeulan às leth Mhgr A MhicFhionghuin, na M-uas M NicPheadrais, 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 7 – Mgr C Rothach (ionmhasail)

Cuspair 8 – Mgr A MacEanraig (ionmhasail) agus Mgr R Bremner (an dà chuid ionmhasail agus neo-ionmhasail)

Dh'fhoillsich Mgr R Bremner com-pàirt neo-ionmhasail cuideachd 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. Suidheachadh Iar-Chathraiche

Às dèidh a bhith air am moladh is taic fhaighinn, chaidh ainmeachaidhean fhaotainn airson dreuchd Iar-Chathraiche Chomataidh na Gàidhlig mar a leanas:-

Mgr R Bremner
Mgr A MacEanraig

Nuair a chaidh bhòt a ghabhail fhuair Mgr Bremner 4 bhòtaichean agus fhuair Mgr MacEanraig 6 bhòtaichean, gun neach sam bith a' seachnadh bhòtadh, agus chaidh na bhòtaichean a chur mar a leanas:-

Bhòtaichean do Mhgr Bremner

Mgr R Bremner, Mgr A MacAonghais, Mgr D MacAoidh agus Mgr G MacCoinnich

Bhòtaichean do Mhgr MacEanraig

Mgr G Adam, A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul, Mgr I Gòrdan, Mgr A MacEanraig, Mgr C Rothach agus Mgr D Rixson

Mar sin **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gum bu chòir do Mhgr MacEanraig a bhith na Iar-Chathraiche air Comataidh na Gàidhlig.

4. Naidheachdan Matha

Thug a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na naidheachdan matha a leanas:-

- Chuir an Cathraiche fàilte air taic Mhinistireil agus chom-pàirteach airson tachartas dreuchdan Gàidhlig, 'Siuthad' a bha luchd-obrach leasachadh coimhearsnachd Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd a' cur air dòigh gach bliadhna agus a chaidh a chumail san t-Samhain;
- Chaidh pròiseact ùr airson taic a chur ri ionnsachadh Gàidhlig a chur air bhog le MG Alba, a' tabhann dòigh-ionnsachaidh cho iomlan 's a tha air a bhith ann airson ginealach. Dheigheadh SpeakGaelic a chur air bhog anns an t-Sultain 2021 le cùrsa, làrach-lìn ionnsachaidh agus prògraman a' dol còmhla ris thar àrd-ùrlaran BBC Alba;
- Fhuair Film G, an fharpais bhliadhnail fhilmichean Gàidhlig, an àireamh as motha de thagraidhean a fhuair iad riamh. Uile gu lèir, bha 95 filmichean agus 9 sgriobtaichean am measg thagraidhean na bliadhna sa;
- Bha Hana agus Raonaid NicNèill, Bun-Sgoil Mhalaig, air Duais Innleachdas ann am Foghlam Gàidhlig na h-Alba a bhuannachadh airson Clasrum Air an Oir. Bha FC Sonas cuideachd ann an cuairt dheireannach na farpais seo, airson a bhith a' brosnachadh dhaoine òga gus a' Ghàidhlig a chleachdadh ann an suidheachaidhean coimhearsnachd a' cleachdadh dùbhlain ball-coise; agus
- Chaidh meal-an-naidheachd a chur air Bun-Sgoil Chille Mhoire agus Bun-Sgoil Stafainn airson tagradh soirbheachail a chur a-steach gu Bòrd na Gàidhlig airson taic le pròiseact coimhearsnachd sgoile. Bheireadh am pròiseact, a fhuair duais £2,200, taic is brosnachadh do bhith a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig taobh a-muigh a' churraicealaim am measg sgoilearan Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig le bhith a' toirt barrachd chothroman dhaibh a' Ghàidhlig a bhruidhinn taobh a-muigh a' chlasa

ann an grunn shuidheachaidhean. Bhiodh cothrom aig daoine òga ceangal a thogail le luchd-labhairt fileanta na Gàidhlig sa choimhearsnachd ionadail ann am pròiseact eadar-ghinealaich.

5. Taisbeanadh – Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Thug Shona NicIllinnein, Ceannard, agus Jim Whannel, Stiùiriche an Fhoghlaim aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig, seachad taisbeanadh mu dhreuchd a' Bhùird agus Plana Cànaidh Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig agus chuireadh fàilte air a' mheudachadh ann an co-obrachadh le Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd, gu h-àraid aig ìre Àrd-Oifigearan. Bha an taisbeanadh aca a' còmhachadh trì prìomh chuspairean: a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig, ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig agus a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig, agus mar a dh'fhaodadh iad a bhith air an adhartachadh is air an neartachadh.

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

- Bu chòir rannsachadh a dhèanamh air cothroman a bharrachd gus teisteanasan teagaisg a thoirt seachad ann am Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig (FtG). Bheireadh seo air adhart luchd-obrach le sgilean nas farsainghe;
- Chaidh aithne a thoirt do dh'obair chom-pàirteach, gu h-àraid tro na h-amannan dùbhlach a chaidh fhiosrach tron bhliadhna a chaidh seachad. Bha dreuchd chudromach aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig ann a bhith a' toirt taic do dh'ùghdarrasan ionadail agus bha pàirt riatanach aca tron ceangal le Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd ann a bhith a' cuideachadh gus FtG a libhrigeadh tron ghalar mhòr-sgaoilte. Ach a dh'aindeoin seo, bha e cudromach gun deigheadh measadh a dhèanamh air na chaidh ionnsachadh agus dh'fheumadh planaichean Bòrd na Gàidhlig co-thaobhadh ris a seo;
- Chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air an sgeama bhogaidh gus tidsearan a ghluasad gu FtG ach bha e cudromach gun robh an luchd-obrach seo an uair sin a' faighinn taic. Bha e cudromach cuideachd gun deigheadh an comasan a thomhas;
- Chaidh cuireadh a thoirt do Bhòrd na Gàidhlig gus taisbeanadh a thoirt seachad do Chomataidh an Fhoghlaim airson dealbh nas farsainghe a thoirt do Bhuill mu na bha a' tachairt aig ìre nàiseanta; agus
- Chaidh fiosrachadh iarraidh mun àireimh Oifigearan Leasachaidh a bha aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus far an robh iad air an suidheachadh.

Às dèidh taing a thoirt dhan Bh-uas Shona NicIllinnein agus do Mhgr Jim Whannel, thug a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan taisbeanadh.

6. Adhartas mu Choinneamh Plana na Gàidhlig 3 (Aithisg Ràitheil, Pròiseas Sgrùdaidh)

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/1/21 le ceann-latha 3 Gearran 2021 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Thog an Cathraiche a' phuing gun robh Plana Gàidhlig na Comhairle a' ceangal ri Plana Cànaidh Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus gun robh na dhà letheach-slighe trom beathannan. Aig coinneamhan Comataidh san àm ri teachd bhiodh fòcas air an adhartas a bhathar a' dèanamh.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

- i. dhan aithisg ràitheil mu choinneamh Plana na Gàidhlig 3 agus do na leasachaidhean leantainneach agus soirbheachail; agus
- ii. do na dùbhlain a tha an lùib a bhith a' buileachadh nan gnìomhan comasachaidh sa Phlana, gu ìre mhòir air sàillibh a' ghalair mhòr-sgaoilte, agus gun robh seo air beagan sleamhnachaidh adhbharachadh.

7. Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus Foghlam Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig – Fios às Ùr

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.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/2/21 le ceann-latha 3 Gearran 2021 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

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

- Chaidh sgrùdadh a dhèanamh air na ceumannan practaigeach a dh'fhaodadh a bhith air an gabhail gus cleachdadh na Gàidhlig sa phròiseas ionnsachaidh a bhrosnachadh;
- Bha e cudromach gus deigheadh feum cho math 's a ghabhadh a dhèanamh de Sgioba Foghlaim Bhòrd na Gàidhlig agus dèanamh cinnteach gun robh com-pàirteachas agus conaltradh làidir. Cuideachd, bha feum air soilleireachd is soilleireachadh gus dèanamh cinnteach gun robh na diofar shlighean a' tighinn còmhla;
- Air sgath àireamh sgoiltean FtG na Gàidhealtachd, bu chòir dhan ùghdarras a bhith a' faighinn àireamh nas motha de thidsearan pròbhaidh; agus
- Chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh mun àireimh sgoilearan ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig.

THUG a' Chomataidh FA-NEAR:-

- i. do na gnìomhan a bhathar air gabhail os làimh gus buaidh Covid air lìbhrigeadh Foghlaim Ghàidhlig a mhaothachadh; agus
- ii. do raointean leasachaidh làithreach is teachdail.

8. Fèis BLAS 2020

Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt:

Dh'fhoillsich Mgr A MacEanraig com-pàirt ionmhasail sa chuspair seo seach gun robh ball teaghaich corra uair a' faighinn cosnadh pàighte bho Bhlas 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.

Dh'fhoillsich Mgr R Bremner com-pàirt an dà chuid ionmhasail agus neo-ionmhasail sa chuspair seo seach gun robh e air pàirt a ghabhail ann am prògraman Blas roimhe, an dà chuid mar Fhear an Taighe agus mar bhall de bhuidheann chom-pàirteach agus mar aoigh air cèilidh taighe ach, seach gun robh a' chom-pàirt eachdraidheil agus seach gun robh com-pàirt san àm ri teachd buailteach a bhith bhiortail, 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 na deasbaireachd.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/3/21 le ceann-latha 3 Gearran 2021 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach – Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

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

- Chomharraich an Cathraiche gun robh sàr luach airgid an lùib Fèis Blas agus, seach gun robh i air-loidhne, gum biodh i math dh'fhaodte air luchd-èisteachd nas farsainge a ruigsinn;
- Chaidh fàilte a chur air Fèis nan Tallachan Beaga a bha mar phàirt de Bhlas;
- Tha Blas air a bhith na deagh eisimpleir de dh'fhèisean a bhith a' dol air-loidhne. A dh'aindeoin duilgheadasan aig an toiseach, bhathar air leasanan ionnsachadh agus, nam biodh feum air, dh'fhaodadh an fhèis a bhith air a ruith air-loidhne a-rithist; agus
- Dh'fhaodadh e a bhith cosgail tachartasan a fhrithealadh, a thaobh siubhal is àite-fuirich is eile, ach tron fhèis air-loidhne bha cothrom ann na tachartasan a choimhead bho chofhurtachd na dachaigh.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg;
- ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan obair a rinneadh gus an fhèis a ghluasad gu àrd-ùrlaran air-loidhne; agus
- iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh Fèisean nan Gàidheal a mholadh airson Fèis 2020 a libhrigeadh gu soirbheachail.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 12.15f.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held **Remotely** on Tuesday 23 February 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Mackay
Mrs I Campbell	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Gordon	Mr C Munro
Mr A Henderson	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
 Mr R Mackay, Development Officer
 Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
 Ms A MacRae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance Service

Also in attendance:-

Ms S MacLennan, Chief Executive, Bòrd na Gàidhlig
 Mr J Whannel, Director of Education Bòrd na Gàidhlig

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

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs E Roddick and Mr A Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

Item 7 – Mr C Munro (financial)

Item 8 – Mr A Henderson (financial) and Mr R Bremner (both financial and non-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. Appointment of Vice Chair

Having been duly proposed and seconded, nominations were received for the position of Vice Chair of the Gaelic Committee as follows:-

Mr R Bremner
Mr A Henderson

On a vote being taken, Mr Bremner received 4 votes and Mr Henderson received 6 votes, with no abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

Votes for Mr Bremner

Mr R Bremner, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D Mackay and Mr G MacKenzie

Votes for Mr Henderson

Mr G Adam, Mrs I Campbell, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Henderson, Mr C Munro and Mr D Rixson

The Committee therefore **AGREED** that Mr A Henderson should be Vice Chair of the Gaelic Committee.

4. Good News

The Committee **NOTED** the following items of good news:-

- the Chair welcomed Ministerial and partner support for the Highland Council's annual community development project event, 'Siuthad' which had taken place in November;
- a new project to support Gaelic learning had been launched by MG Alba, offering the most comprehensive approach to learning Scottish Gaelic in a generation. SpeakGaelic would be launched in September 2021 with a course, a dedicated on-demand learning website and complementary programming across BBC ALBA platforms;
- Film G, the annual Gaelic film-making competition, had their highest ever entries. In total, there were 95 films and 9 scripts in this year's entries;
- Hana and Rachel MacNeil, Mallaig Primary School, had received a Scottish Gaelic Innovation In Education Award for Clasrum Air an Oir. FC Sonas were also finalists in this award, for encouraging young people to use Gaelic in community settings using Football challenges; and
- Kilmuir and Staffin Primary schools were congratulated on their successful application to Bòrd na Gàidhlig to support their school community project. The project, awarded £2,200, would provide primarily support and promote extra-curricular Gaelic usage amongst Gaelic Medium pupils by offering more opportunities for pupils to speak Gaelic outwith the class in a variety of settings. Young people would have the opportunity to engage with Gaelic fluent speakers within the local community in an inter-generational project.

5. Presentation – Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Shona MacLennan, Chief Executive Officer and Jim Whannel, Director of Education of Bòrd na Gàidhlig gave a presentation on the role of the Bòrd and the National

Gaelic Language Plan during which she welcomed the increase in collaboration work with Highland Council, particularly at Senior Officer level. Their presentation covered three main themes, namely, using Gaelic, learning Gaelic and promoting Gaelic and how these could be encouraged and enhanced.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- opportunities to provide additional teaching qualifications in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) should be explored. This would generate staff with wider skills sets;
- partnership working was acknowledged, especially during the challenging times faced over the last year. Bòrd na Gàidhlig had had an important role in supporting local authorities and their engagement with Highland Council to help deliver GME during the pandemic had been vital. Nevertheless, it was important to evaluate what had been learnt and Bòrd na Gàidhlig's plans would need to align with this;
- the immersion scheme to move teachers into GME was commended but it was important that these staff were then supported. It was important too to measure their competency;
- an invitation was extended to Bòrd na Gàidhlig to present to the Education Committee to give Members a broader picture of what was happening at national level; and
- information as to the number and location of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Development Officers was requested.

Shona MacLennan and Jim Whannel having been thanked, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

6. Progress against Gaelic Language Plan 3 (Quarterly Report, Monitoring and Scrutiny Process)

There had been circulated Report No. G/1/21 dated 3 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

The Chair pointed out that the Council's Gaelic Language Plan tied in with Bòrd na Gàidhlig's one and was at the same mid-way stage. At future Committee meetings there would be a focus on progress being made.

The Committee **NOTED** :-

- i. the quarterly report against Gaelic Language Plan 3 and the positive on-going developments; and
- ii. the challenges regarding the implementation of the enabling actions in the Plan, largely due to the pandemic, which had resulted in some slippage.

7. Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learner Education – Update

Declaration of Interest: Mr C Munro declared a financial interest as a close family member was employed as a Gaelic Medium Teacher 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. G/2/21 dated 3 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the practical steps which could be taken to encourage the use of Gaelic in the learning process was explored;
- it was important to make as much use as possible of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Education Team and to ensure that partnership and engagement was strong. In addition clarity and clarification was required to ensure all the different pathways linked together;
- given the number of GM schools in Highland, the authority should be given a greater number of GM probationer teachers; and
- information was sought as to the number of pupils learning Gaelic.

The Committee **NOTED** :-

- i. the actions that had been taken to mitigate the impact of Covid on the delivery of the Gaelic Education; and
- ii. the areas of current and future development.

8. **BLAS Festival 2020**

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Henderson declared a financial interest on the grounds that a family member occasionally received paid employment from Blas 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 R Bremner declared both financial and non-financial interests on the grounds of having taken part in previous Blàs programmes both as Fear an Taigh as a member of a participating group and as a house cèilidh host but, as the participation was historic and any future activity was likely to be virtual, 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. G/3/21 dated 3 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the Chair highlighted the excellent value for money that the Blas Festival had offered and, being online, had probably reached a wider audience;
- the Small Halls Festival included as part of Blas was welcomed;
- Blas led the way for other festival going online. Despite initial difficulties, lessons had been learnt and, if necessary, could be run virtually again; and

- attending events could prove expensive in terms of travel and accommodation etc but the format adopted meant that these events could be watched in the comfort of your own home.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the work done to move the festival onto virtual platforms this year; and
- iii. **AGREED** to commend Fèisean nan Gàidheal on the successful delivery of the 2020 Festival.

The meeting concluded at 12.15 pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held **REMOTELY** on Wednesday, 24 February 2021 at 11.30 am

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A Henderson (Chair)
Mr B Allan	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Balfour	Mr D Macpherson
Mr J Bruce	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Ms K Currie	Mrs M Paterson
Mr C Fraser	Mr I Ramon
Mr R Gale	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J Gordon	

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr J Finlayson
Mrs J Barclay	Mr B Lobban
Mr R Bremner	Ms F Robertson
Mrs M Davidson	Ms M Smith

In attendance:

Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
 Ms A Clark, Head of Policy, Communities and Place
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources, Communities and Place
 Mr P Mascarenhas, Community and Democratic Engagement Manager, Communities and Place
 Mr A Yates, Environmental Health Manager, Communities and Place
 Mr A McKinnie, Senior Waste Manager, Communities and Place
 Miss J Maclennan, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Highland Local Policing Commander, Chief Superintendent Conrad Trickett

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

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam and Mr A Rhind.

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

Item 11iii – Mr D MacPherson (non-financial)

Item 13 – Mr A Henderson and Mr J Gordon (financial)

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

The Chair highlighted the following items of good news:-

- Highland Council was supporting NHS Highland with a mobile vaccination unit to support the Covid-19 vaccination programme across Highland. The mobile unit had been nicknamed the Jabbernaut;
- the bin crew on Stratherrick Road was appreciated by a local resident by obtaining the correct bin when the wrong one was placed on the roadside and included as an example of the positive feedback waste teams receive;
- the great work of the Environmental Health team was highlighted for their efforts to support local seafood businesses with their export trade, assisting businesses to meet the requirements for export health certificates in trading with the EU; and
- refuse workers on the Isle of Skye were praised for their quick thinking in ensuring the safety of an elderly islander who required medical assistance during a snowstorm.

The Committee **NOTED** the items of good news and staff achievements.

4. **Community Asset Transfer Requests** **Iarrtasan Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No. CP/1/21 dated 22 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the transfer of the former Maryburgh Primary School was welcomed by Members, highlighting that there was a keen group ready to take the Men's Shed project forward and confidence that it would be of great benefit to the local village and wider community;
- to prevent any potential interference of community projects supported by all local Members it was suggested that Community Asset Transfers under £100,000 be devolved to relevant Area Committees and in response it was explained by the Chair that this could be explored when the Scheme of Delegation was being revised;
- the project was a good use of Community Asset Transfer as it benefited the community, displayed localism in a positive way, saved money to the Council

- on upkeep/non-domestic rates and it was encouraging that the development included developer contribution;
- in response to a query about the source of funding for the project, the Community and Democratic Engagement Manager agreed to gather that information and liaise with Councillor Macpherson directly; and
 - the project would be a major improvement for the Ross-shire village and other areas should be encouraged to get involved in a similar vein for their own communities.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the sale of the former Maryburgh Primary School to Maryburgh Men's Shed for £1, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.1 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** the decision taken by the Chair of Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place to approve a small increase in the extent of land transferred as part of the already agreed transfer to Cromarty Development Trust at Whitedykes Industrial Estate, Cromarty. This was agreed as part of the terms of transfer.

5. Sleat War Memorial Conservation Agreement Aonta Glèidhteachais Cuimhneachan-Cogaidh Shlèite

There had been circulated Report No. CP/02/21 dated 27 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the report was welcomed by Members and it was encouraging to see a solution for the Sleat War Memorial;
- significant effort had been made by officers, stakeholders, tenants and landlords alike to reach a solution;
- in response to a comment, it was confirmed that the funding made available for maintenance had been used for upgrades to the Memorial; and
- it was suggested that decisions around war memorials that involved minimal or no cost be devolved to Area Committees rather than using the forum of Strategic Committees and the Chair agreed this could be explored when the Scheme of Delegation was being revised.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the legal burden the agreement places on the tenant and landlord of the land on which the war memorial is sited; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Council enter into the Conservation Agreement as detailed in the report to secure the long-term management and maintenance of the site of the Sleat War Memorial.

6. Progress report on the Framework for Community Participation and Involvement
Adhartas agus gnìomh bhon Fhrèam airson Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/03/21 dated 1 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to mental health and wellbeing, the Council had a duty of care, not only to its staff but to all Highland citizens. GPs had reported a surge in people coming forward with mental health concerns, particularly in the under 25 age group, one of the main causes being furlough and the possibility of being made redundant. In addition, people had not come forward with health complaints as soon as they usually would, and it was anticipated that many people's ailments would now be at a more advanced stage and more challenging to treat;
- thanks were expressed to all volunteers for their efforts throughout the pandemic, and the need to recognise them and harness volunteering for future resilience was emphasised. Particular reference was made to the outstanding work of volunteers in Citizens Advice Bureaux, to whom Members had directed constituents with concerns about fuel poverty and benefit entitlement;
- it was good to see that cognisance had been taken of what was happening in Highland, and the work taking place would stand the Council in good stead for future resilience responses;
- it was encouraging to see the amount of work the Council and organisations across Highland had done to support local communities;
- it was important that investment was made in professional mental health resources, particularly Community Psychiatric Nurses, and information was sought on what communication had taken place with NHS Highland in that regard and how the Council was working with partners on mental health issues;
- Mental Health Youth Workers were doing tremendous work with young people but they were inundated and it was queried whether any local funds were available to fund apprentice-type posts to support them; and
- it was understood that Distress Brief Interventions, whereby people in distress could phone and talk to somebody straight away, were working well, and it was suggested that further information be sought and circulated to community groups, via the weekly briefing, and Committee Members.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the engagement and support for third sector groups since the end of last year, including a weekly written briefing to over 400 community bodies, setting up 6 new local resilience networks, a new resource pack for information and signposting on mental health and wellbeing support, ongoing support and information to help people experiencing food and fuel poverty and the additional Covid ward funding availability designed to be even more accessible;
- ii. **NOTED** the action underway by the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) to understand the impacts of Covid on volunteering as recently reported to the Highland Community Planning Partnership;
- iii. **NOTED** how the motion agreed at Council would be progressed as outlined in section 6 of the report and in appendix 1, with the new action on a weekly virtual

- briefing commencing week beginning 15th February and reviewed after 3 months;
- iv. **NOTED** the update on the progress against the participation and engagement framework including the shift in timescales due to the latest lockdown period;
 - v. **AGREED** to the revised timescales proposed for the Recovery Plan actions outlined in 7.5 of the report and **NOTED** that further actions would be developed based on the learning from this latest period and brought to the next committee for consideration;
 - vi. **AGREED** that the Head of Policy would liaise with relevant partners and colleagues and provide further information to Committee Members on the various strands of work taking place in respect of mental health and wellbeing, Community Psychiatric Nurse provision and the potential to fund apprentice-type posts to support Mental Health Youth Workers; and
 - vii. **AGREED** that information on Distress Brief Interventions be sought and provided to community groups, via the weekly briefing, and Committee Members.

7. Performance against the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 - 2023 Coileanadh mu choinneamh Plana Poileasachd Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/04/21 dated 10 February 2021 by the Highland Local Policing Commander, Chief Superintendent Conrad Trickett.

During a verbal update, a detailed explanation of the statistics was provided in relation to several areas of the report and it was highlighted that all statistics were impacted by Covid-19.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- one explanation for the reduction in road deaths could be the lack of international visitors and the decrease of traffic on the roads, it was highlighted that a campaign on road safety on the A82 was ongoing at the moment and required additional funding/investment to protect against accidents;
- it was likely that the additional number of drug driving offences was only a fraction of the true number and this had to be enforced as strongly as drink driving had been in the past through licensing boards, supermarkets etc.;
- deaths due to drug use was a tragedy for the individual, their family, the community and involved agencies and it was important to support those with substance abuse issues;
- it was emphasised that home was not always a safe environment for people and incidents of domestic crimes were too high;
- the mounted police team initiative was commended and feedback from constituents was positive. in response to a question on further rollout of the mounted police initiative, it was explained that the trial of the initiative in the Inverness area would be reviewed in a few months' time and results reported back to a future meeting of the Committee;
- in response to a query about the debated extension of the 50 mile speed limit in the Munlochy Road/B9161 area, it was agreed that Chief Superintendent Trickett would determine the policing position and liaise with Councillor G Adam directly, given the conflicting views provided by traffic police at the community consultation meeting and given to Transport Scotland;
- regarding missing persons, it was explained that there was a reduction from previous years. Most often, missing persons were eventually located;

- information was sought, and provided, on visitor management in rural areas for the upcoming tourist season and it was explained that a local group was continuing to look at the broader elements of infrastructure, environmental and enforcement with a focus on partnership working. It was highlighted that police had been involved at all levels of discussion from the Highland Council to Scottish and UK Governments and there was ongoing planning to ensure a deliverable set of operations when restrictions were lifted which included; toilet provision, refuse, traffic hotspots, and criminality;
- appreciation was expressed for police officers that were managing domestic crimes and it was confirmed that these cases required significant resource and partnership working;
- regarding cyberbullying, it was highlighted that, despite not being mentioned in the report, it was an area of growth and a cyberbullying division was being established in Police Scotland and that education and partnership working played a key role;
- in relation to a question about managing online threats towards Councillors in the context of upcoming elections it was explained that police meetings around election planning were ongoing. There was a national operation running for elected members, MSPs etc and security advice to all people standing for election would be provided in the lead up to the election in May. Furthermore, there was a process that police had with multinational social media companies to report concerns raised; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, on drug driving and it was explained that the roadside testing could detect 17 types of drugs and that prescription drug abuse was less commonly found in cases where the user had the drugs prescribed in their own names.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Local Performance against the Highland 2020-2023 Policing Plan.

8. Ongoing Covid-19 service impacts and adjustments **Buidhean is atharrachaidhean seirbheis leantainneach Covid-19**

There had been circulated Report No CP/05/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- Members welcomed the report and commended the work of the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Service Management Team;
- the use of technology such as Microsoft Teams, which many people had now embraced, presented real opportunities for savings across the Council;
- in relation to the Visitor Management Plan, Members were impressed by the number of staff from several different services who had researched and put in place measures that it was hoped would prevent many of the issues experienced the previous summer. Much of this had fallen to the Communities and Place Service and appreciation was expressed in that regard;
- the pace at which new services had been set up was commendable. Particular reference was made to the free Covid helpline, which it had been reassuring to be able to direct constituents to;
- the humanitarian response to the pandemic had been incredible and thanks were expressed to Council staff as well as partners including High Life Highland, NHS Highland and Eden Court Theatre;

- reference was made to the increase in fly-tipping, and the proposed prioritisation of waste services, should the need arise, was welcomed;
- members of the public had welcomed the public conveniences being open at Whin park, and had commended the standard of cleanliness;
- in relation to burials and cremations, the efforts of all involved and the dignified manner in which arrangements had been carried out were commendable; and
- the report would be a useful document if similar challenges were faced in the future.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the five service risks and mitigating action now in place to support business continuity and the Council's duty of care as an employer as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
 - ii. **NOTED** the service adjustments in place for the Environmental Health Team given their need to prioritise public health tasks and support for business trading with EU countries, as set out in paragraphs 6.2 and 6.3 of the report;
 - iii. **NOTED** the seven new workstreams affecting the Environmental Health, Policy and Ward Management and Customer Services Teams, the re-start of the amenities review and new work on play areas, the service lead role in supporting NHS Highland's vaccination programme, contributing to a Council Visitor Management Plan and participating in the running of elections;
 - iv. **NOTED** the adjustments required for the Policy and Ward Management Team as set out in paragraph 6.5 of the report;
 - v. **NOTED** that for the time being Committee business supported by the service would focus on urgent and time critical reports, supplemented by Member briefings and Ward Business Meetings;
 - vi. **AGREED** the temporary re-prioritisation of waste, public conveniences and grounds maintenance services as set out in paragraph 6.3, although these would only be required if staff absence could not be covered; and
 - vii. **AGREED** that a longer timescale be sought for some statutory duties and requirements as set out in paragraph 6.10 of the report.
- 9. Update on the support for businesses exporting to, and importing from, the European Union (EU)**
Fios às ùr mun taic do ghnothachasan ag às-mhalairt gu, agus ag ion-mhalairt às, an Aonadh Eòrpach

There had been circulated Report No CP/06/21 dated 10 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the knowledge of the speakers at the recent Brexit seminar was commended;
- information was sought, and provided, on how quickly fish exports were getting to France and Spain; whether fishermen were having to freeze fish when they would not have before, whether supply lines were anything like what they had been previously; the difference in the paperwork for chilled versus frozen fish; and whether the difference in the cost businesses could charge for chilled fish and shellfish as opposed to frozen had been taken into account; and
- thanks were expressed to the Environmental Health Manager and his team for their efforts in getting French and Spanish fishermen back into Lochinver, which meant a lot to the area, particularly in terms of employment.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the approach to taking forward the motions through the Brexit Working Group and workshop;
- ii. the demand from businesses in the region for support to trade with the EU and the enhanced service provided by the Environmental Health team as set out in paragraph 6.5 of the report;
- iii. the shortfall in income of around £70k forecast to end March 2021; and
- iv. given uncertainty around the intentions of business following EU exit, the Committee previously agreed to a six-month review of service demand and provision to report to the Committee in August 2021.

10. Communities and Place Revenue Monitoring Report to 31st December 2020
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Choimhearsnachdan is Àite gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2020

There had been circulated Report No CP/07/21 dated 6 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the improved outturn forecast from Q2 with the budget gap forecast to reduce from £3.272m to £1.005m;
- ii. that the budget gap reported is associated mainly with shortfalls in income, disrupted by Covid and forecast to amount to £2.6m of external income. Government grant for income recompense will help reduce income shortfalls across the Council and is held corporately and not allocated to individual Services;
- iii. the budget gap has reduced because of further income recovery for grounds maintenance, Government Covid grant received and ongoing expenditure controls; and
- iv. on-going mitigation continues in Quarter 4 and includes ongoing expenditure controls, further income recovery where possible and claiming all potential Government grant.

11. Waste Projects Update
Fios às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Sgudail

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

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/21 dated 5 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In relation to the Fort William Transfer Station a call was made to keep Lochaber Members informed of progress in identifying a site. The location of the Transfer Station would need to be dealt with sensitively and local Members would be best placed to gauge opinion and act as advocates. In addition, information was sought, and provided, as to when a response would be received from SSEN in relation to the heat generation proposal for an Energy from Waste plant in the Longman.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Inverness waste transfer station tender evaluation had concluded, the capital allowance was confirmed by Council in January 2021 and senior management approval has been provided to proceed to the award of contract;
- ii. the tender specification for the Aviemore waste transfer station was currently out to tender;
- 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 mid-2021;
- v. specifications were being developed for interim, medium-term waste management contract requirements to take to the market during 2021;
- vi. work continued to ascertain the feasibility of progressing a proposal for an energy-from-waste facility;
- vii. minutes from the Members' Waste Strategy Working Group of 23 December 2020 as detailed later on in the Committee's agenda;

and **AGREED**:-

- viii. that a quarterly update on the Fort William Waste Transfer Station be provided to Lochaber Elected Members.

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

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 23 December 2020 were **APPROVED**.

13. Response to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee call for views on the statutory instruments for short-term letting Freagairt do ghairm Comataidh Riaghaltas Ionadail agus Choimhearsnachdan Pàrlamaid na h-Alba do bheachdan mu na h-innealan reachdail airson leigeil air mhàl san ùine ghoirid

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/21 dated 27 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- The Scottish Government announced on 18th February 2021 that it had withdrawn the Order to provide more time to deal with concerns raised; however the implementation date was not being postponed;
- in response to concern about the possibility of local Members being overruled in larger committees by those not supportive of Planning Control Areas, it was explained that the strategic approach to Planning Control Areas would be made by the Strategic Committee (Infrastructure and Environment) and the decision on local implementation would be made by Area Committees. It was agreed that the Environmental Health Manager would seek confirmation on this governance point based on the decision made at Council and a response would be provided to Members; and

- the introduction of Planning Control Areas was important to many areas of the Council and local area views being circumvented would not be supported, ultimately if this was the case it would be brought before Full Council and the expectation that input from Area Committees be paramount to decision making.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** that the response requested clarification on the definition of the term guest house for licensing purposes;
- NOTED** that the response requested clarification on the application of control areas to B&B accommodation;
- NOTED** the request for a later implementation date if required by local authorities;
- HOMOLOGATE** the consultation response which was submitted to meet the Scottish Parliament deadline of 27th January 2021 as attached at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- NOTED** that Members previously agreed that after the regulations are finalised, the implementation of Planning Control areas should be the subject of a report to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee and following consultation with the Housing & Property Committee and relevant Local Committees and that the setting of fees for the proposed licensing scheme should be the subject of a report to the Licensing Committee.

14. Scottish Government Consultation on the Welfare of Animals during Transport Freagairt co-chomhairle Riaghaltas na h-Alba – sochair bheathaichean ann an còmhhdhail

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/21 dated 29 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- in response to a question about implications for non-commercial animals such as horse owners, dog breeders etc., it was explained that the main concern was to ensure the welfare of all animals. There was not any significant change for domestic pets and it was emphasised that partnership animals should be given the same protections as other animals;
- regarding any impact of the Internal Market Act given that Scotland and Wales had stronger environmental requirements compared to England, it was explained that, despite not having a joined-up UK measure to ensure seamless movement between borders, it was not anticipated that this would have any impact on trade between nations; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the need for animals travelling South to abattoirs and it was explained that Dingwall and Grantown were the nearest premises and, given the lack of trade requests locally for over 30-month animals (OTM) or stock animals, the travel was necessary to have the trade available to them.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the background to the recommendations to improve the welfare of animals during transport and the proposed consultation response; and

- ii. **AGREED** the proposed response is submitted to the Scottish Government.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held REMOTELY on Thursday, 25 February 2021 at 10.30 am

Present:

Mr B Boyd	Mr A Henderson
Mr R Bremner	Mr A Jarvie
Mr J Bruce	Mr B Lobban
Mrs C Caddick	Mr D Louden
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr G MacKenzie
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr M Reiss
Mr R Gale	Mr D Rixson
Mr T Heggie	Mr P Saggars

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Christie	Mrs A MacLean
Mr J Finlayson	Mr H Morrison
Mr A Graham	Mr C Munro
Mr J Gray	Mr T Robertson
Mr D Mackay	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
 Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance
 Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance
 Mr E Foster, Head of Finance and Commercialism, Resources and Finance
 Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources and Finance
 Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT and Digital Transformation, Resources and Finance
 Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Resources and Finance
 Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager, Resources and Finance
 Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health Safety & Wellbeing Manager, Resources and Finance
 Mr A McKinnie, Senior Waste Manager, Community Services
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms M Zavarella, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

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

Mr M Reiss in the Chair

PRELIMINARIES

Prior to commencing the meeting, the Vice Chair expressed his appreciation to Mr A Mackinnon for his diligent efforts and all that he had done during his four years as Chair of Corporate Resources Committee.

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr S Mackie and Mr A Mackinnon.

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

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

Item 4: Mr T Heggie and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 7: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 10: Mrs C Caddick and Mr A Baxter (financial) and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news updates:

- Hannah Jones Senior HR Officer had been awarded MSc in Human Resources Management with distinction from UHI and 20 candidates who had completed SVQ Business Administration Level 3 and SVQ Level 3 Social Services Children and Young People supported through the in-house SVQ team;
- the significant achievements of the Digital Services team to support the Council's Covid effort and Logan Maclean had been successful in securing a permanent ICT Technician post in the team following completion of a Modern Apprenticeship; and
- a Financial Inclusion Project addressing the high level of unclaimed benefits by families with young children.

**4. Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report to 31 December 2020
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2020**

Declarations of Interest: Mr T Heggie and Mr A Jarvie 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/01/21 dated 11 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

The Vice Chair indicated that the financial year had been uniquely challenging due to Covid-19, however the Council's financial position had steadily improved and it was pleasing to note that a surplus of over £3m was projected to be delivered. Credit for this was due to officers for their hard work in managing the Covid-19 response. He also thanked the UK and Scottish Governments for the substantial additional funding that had been made available to local authorities. It was important Members did not consider this year's financial position in isolation from the medium-term financial outlook, and that this would be discussed in more detail when the budget was presented to the full Council on 4 March 2021.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- officers be commended on the fact the General Fund balance had increased significantly in the current year;
- concern that the projected surplus had been achieved due to a significant underspend of nearly £15m on staff costs on what appeared to be vacancy management. In this regard, an explanation be provided on how such a high figure had been reached and genuine thanks extended to staff for their work in challenging circumstances;
- there had been ongoing concerns around vacancy management and recognition it was not a long-term tool, however it had to be appreciated that the Council had not been operating as business as usual in the Covid-19 period and the need to manage vacancies had been essential;
- the current position reflected the prudent financial management and governance of the Council including the way the additional funding received had been managed. It was recognised that in the longer term there was a need to redefine how the available monies were spent;
- this had been a difficult year which no-one could have predicted and had been a learning experience for Members, staff and the public alike. The praise for staff was heartfelt and their performance during the pandemic and in ensuring the Council was not facing a financial crisis had been outstanding;
- it was understood the funding to be received from the Income Recompense Scheme had been increased and this was welcomed. It was confirmed that an update would be provided to the full Council on 4 March 2021 on any additional external funding received since the budget papers had been issued;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Council was adopting an open approach in relation to the Scottish Government's funding flexibilities given the uncertainties around the budget in future years;
- the importance of using surplus monies on the budget as spend to save and that further discussion on this would take place in the budget discussions on 4 March 2021;
- the need to ensure the surplus shown on the HRA as a result of the impact of Covid-19 was spent expeditiously in the next financial year;
- going forward it was recognised there was a need to review how income was achieved and treated within the budget;
- clarification was sought and provided on the budget process including that the Depute Leader would present the budget at the full Council on 4 March 2021, and the consultation currently being undertaken with Members; and
- delivering a budget that was workable and accountable, properly evaluated and addressed the economic impacts of Covid-19 was the responsibility of all Members and required their positive and active involvement.

The Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance advised that the underspend shown on staff costs did not reflect the correct position. A significant amount of housekeeping work was to be undertaken and management issues addressed and this would reduce the value of the vacancies being reported. Members were being kept updated on this work. Once this virement exercise had been completed there would be a clearer picture of where overspends and underspends were being reported. She advised that in relation to vacancy management any essential posts had not been held back from being filled.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 31 December 2020.

5. **Corporate Capital Monitoring Report to 31 December 2020** **Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2020**

There had been circulated Report No RES/02/21 dated 15 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

The Vice Chair advised that while capital spend had been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown, it was anticipated that by the end of the financial year around £100m would have been invested in the Council's housing and property assets. There had been lengthy discussion at the full Council meeting on 7 January 2021 on the capital budget and the reprofiling of the programme and there had been no significant change in the position since then.

In discussion, it was noted that there had been a significant underspend on capital projects in the current financial year due to the pandemic. The Council's capital spend was extremely important for the whole Highland economy and building recovery in the area and therefore it was critical the available capital monies were spent as expeditiously as possible in the next financial year.

The Committee **APPROVED** the report.

6. Resources and Finance Service – Revenue and Performance Monitoring to 31 December 2020

Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2020

There had been circulated Report No RES/03/21 dated 29 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the Council tax in-year collection rate had decreased only marginally in the current year and the public in the Highlands were thanked for their efforts in continuing to pay at a time when many were experiencing financial difficulties;
- the Head of Revenues and Customer Services and her Team be thanked for the high level of support and assistance provided to a large number of people facing financial difficulties and those experiencing poverty, many for the first time;
- many businesses had been adversely impacted over the year due to the pandemic and those able to pay their non-domestic rates be thanked in this regard;
- in relation to the Fuel Support Fund, consideration be given to offering continued support in the next financial year to those struggling to pay their fuel bills;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the approach taken in relation the Council tax collection during the pandemic, the support provided to those struggling to make payments, and the Council's statutory duties in relation to the collection and recovery process;
- if feasible, it would be helpful for a more detailed breakdown to be provided to the next meeting in relation to council tax payments in the current year and the method of collection;
- clarification was sought and provided on the approach being taken to the recovery of BID levies and the range of support being provided to relieve the financial pressures on businesses, many of which would take a significant period of time to recover from the pandemic;
- following a piece of cross party work by Members, the Council had written again to the UK Government seeking changes to Universal Credit and the outcome was awaited;
- at the same time, there had been cross party discussion on how the Council dealt with the issues around poverty and inequality and to ensure these issues were considered when developing the Council's policies for change going

forward. In this regard, the Acting Head of Policy had been tasked with undertaking a review on this matter;

- the importance of the Council paying invoices as quickly as possible given the economic impacts of the pandemic; and
- further information be provided to Members in relation to the Care and Learning Service's performance on the payment of invoices.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Revenue monitoring position for the period to 31 December 2020;
- ii. **NOTED** the statutory performance indicators, local key performance measures and where available, comparisons to Scottish averages;
- iii. **NOTED** the effectiveness of the standard and level of services provided by the Resources and Finance Service and alignment with the Council's commitment to Best Value and continuous improvement;
- iv. **AGREED** the continuation of the Fuel Support Fund to 31 March 2021 involving indicative expenditure of £0.790m to be met from Government Covid grant to assist with humanitarian and welfare needs;
- v. **NOTED** the actions for the Service on the Recovery Action Plan and the slippage remarks provided;
- vi. **AGREED** that if feasible, a more detailed breakdown be provided to the next meeting in relation to Council Tax payments in the current year and the method of collection; and
- vii. **AGREED** that further information be provided to Members in relation to the Care and Learning Service's performance on the payment of invoices.

**7. Performance and Governance Service Revenue Monitoring to 31 December 2020
Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais – Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2020**

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/04/21 dated 14 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Revenue Monitoring position for the period to 31 December 2020; and
- ii. **NOTED** the progress being made on the Recovery Plan Workstream – Leadership, Culture and Performance.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.40am and reconvened at 11.45am.

**8. Treasury Management
Rianachd Ionmhais**

**a. Summary of Transactions – Quarter ended 31 December 2020
Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/05/21 dated 15 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- It was important that Members recognised the link between undertaking borrowing to fund capital investment and the impact of repayment of this on the annual revenue budget; and
- regarding the summary of transactions for the current quarter, there was a pattern emerging of debt building up over the course of the year as the grant funding was used for projects. However, the Council debt level had been significantly reduced and was nearly £100m less than in March 2020 as a result of not undertaking the capital works and it was anticipated that this would start to increase once capital spending resumed.

The Committee **AGREED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 October to 31 December 2020.

b. Strategy Statement and Investment Statement – 2021/22
Aithris Ro-innleachd agus Aithris Tasgaidh – 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No RES/06/21 dated 15 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- although the UK national debt had gone up significantly, the interest bill had not due to the low rates of interest for government borrowing. Quantitative easing purchases of government debts would help to suppress the rise in debt yield and keep the total interest bill and greatly expanded government debt portfolios within manageable parameters and was also the main alternative to a programme of austerity;
- it was important to acknowledge that Highland was in the middle of a crisis and the importance of the Council spend to aid the recovery of the Highland economy was highlighted;
- the impact on revenue, a £3m increase in loan charge payments in the next two years which would not return to the current level until 2026/27, was highlighted. Continuing, it was indicated that over the next five years external debt would increase approximately £150m not including any Public Private Partnership obligations. Although the need to sustain the Highland economy was acknowledged, it was further highlighted that there was a need for cognisance of the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream;
- there was a need for a more long-term strategic approach and to benchmark the Council against other Local Authorities in Scotland, to show how the Council had been performing;
- information was sought, and provided, on emergency efficiency loans and the funding obtained by the Council from Salix Finance was provided as an example;
- an update was sought and provided regarding the outstanding unsecured loan stock for Inverness Airport Business Park Ltd (IABP) during which it was explained that, details of this loan were reported to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee, the terms in the agreement set out that IABP had to repay only when in a position to do so. In view of this, it was therefore felt that it was unlikely that the loan would be repaid in the near future;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on terms to be agreed in the Transaction Management Strategy Statement and Investment Statement and further confirmation provided that there was minimal change in terms of the main strategy approach to borrowing;

- the reduction in borrowing rates for the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) was welcomed and was mainly due to Local Authorities being denied access for investment purposes, it was clarified by officers that this was for commercial rather than regular investment;
- concern was raised about how the unemployment figures were outlined in relation to foreign working lost from the UK workforce by returning home, it was emphasised that this would likely be European workers in the Highland tourist industry and could mean significant staff shortages, and at the minimal analysis by the Advisors on Brexit. It was suggested that a separate analysis should be requested on the impact of Brexit on the Highland Council;
- regarding the point made about too much action being taken too quickly to introduce austerity measures, it was emphasised that this behaviour would only compound the issues at hand and if this did continue the Council would have to address it with the UK Government; and
- the increasing portion of rents going towards repayment of borrowing had been raised previously at the Housing and Property Committee and it was highlighted that the Member seminar 'New Social Housing Options' on 26 March 2021 would cover affordability of social housing options which was an important topic for the Housing Revenue Account moving forward. Members were urged to attend.

* Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the Treasury Management Strategy Statement & Investment Strategy for 2021/22 and the Prudential Indicators as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

9. Annual Occupational Health and Safety Report 2019/20
Aithisg Bhliadhnaile Slàinte is Sàbhailteachd is Sùnn Dreuchdail Chorporra 2019/20

There had been circulated Report No RES/07/21 dated 26 January 2021 by the Interim Head of HR.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the increase in training attendance was praised, particularly given the difficult circumstances in moving online and altering the administration of training as a result;
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) had been of assistance particularly in terms of mental health and it is positive to see the effort going towards the health and safety of employees;
- it was queried whether one Fire Safety Officer was sufficient, particularly after the events at Invergordon Primary School, and confirmation was provided that a second Fire Safety Officer would be in place shortly;
- it was suggested that an appeal should be made to employees to ascertain interest in taking on the role of Responsible Premises Officer;
- it was encouraging to see the positive trends of health and safety;
- in response to a statement about asbestos being an ongoing problem, it was suggested that Head/Depute Head Teachers should be reminded to complete the E-learning course on Managing Asbestos in Schools and to ensure that the Asbestos Register was kept up to date; and
- with respect to Did Not Attend Appointments (DNAs), it was highlighted that charging for appointment costs should be examined given the current level of pressure on the medical profession.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the achievements and performance for 2019/20;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Occupational Health and Safety Report; and
- iii. **AGREED** to the key challenges for 2020/21.
- iv. **NOTED** that the Occupational Health & Safety Wellbeing Manager would remind Head/Depute Head Teachers to complete the e-learning course on Managing Asbestos in Schools and to ensure that the Asbestos Register was kept up to date.

**10. Non-Domestic Rateable Premises and Commercial Waste Services
Aitreabhan Reatachail Neo-Dhachaigheil agus Seirbheisean Sgudail Coimeirsealta**

Declarations of Interest: Mrs C Caddick declared a financial interest in this item as the owner of a third share of a house that is a non-domestic rateable property and Mr A Baxter as non-domestic rates payer and has a commercial waste contract with the Council and left the meeting for this item.

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/08/21 dated 27 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were considered

- Appendix 1 to the report indicated that the credit amount from the closure of council tax could be substantial and the costs of having a commercial waste collection would be relatively minor. However, due to the current Covid crisis a number of businesses that did not have Non-Domestic rates valuations had changed over from council tax to Non-Domestic Rates to enable them to access business grants. Therefore, concern was expressed that many of these small businesses might not have the level of council tax credit being suggested within the report and further assurance was sought and provided on this; and
- the report was welcomed and it was highlighted that it was a simple tidying up of a process that had long been necessary for the Council to enact.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** in the circumstances discussed in Section 5 of the report, that the available credit on a council tax account, after first being used to reduce the associated non-domestic rates bill, be further used to reduce the arising commercial waste services charges;
- ii. **AGREED** that this policy was implemented with immediate effect and be applied to all properties that the Assessor transferred from the council tax list to the non-domestic rates valuation roll from the date of policy implementation; and
- iii. **NOTED** any residual credit remaining on the council tax account, after the processes set out in the first recommendation were complete, would be automatically refunded to the taxpayer in line with current procedures.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS
GEÀRR-CHUNNTAS CHOINNEAMHAN

11. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Corporate Resources Budget Sub-Committee had not met since 26 November 2020 and future decision making around meetings would be undertaken by the next appointed Chair; and
- In response to a question about the staffing restructure, the Vice Chair advised that he would ask the next appointed Chair to consider that a breakdown of cost of the new management structure be brought to the Committee as previously agreed.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the undernoted Minutes of Meetings as circulated:-
 - a. Central Safety Committee held on 13 November 2020 and 9 February 2021;
 - b. Corporate Resources Budget Sub-Committee held on 26 November;
 - c. Staff Partnership Forum held on 13 November 2020 and 12 February 2021;and
- ii. **AGREED** that the Vice Chair ask the next appointed Chair of the Committee to consider bringing a breakdown of the costs of the new management structure to a future meeting of the Committee.

12. 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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6, 8 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

13. Project Dòchas Progress Report
Pròiseact Dòchais Aithisg Ùrachaidh

There had been circulated to Members only Report No RES/09/21 dated 7 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

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

14. Debts recommended to be written off
Fiachan gam Moladh airson Di-sgrìobhadh

There had been circulated to Members only Report No RES/10/21 dated 28 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

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

The meeting was closed at 1.13pm.

**The Highland Council
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held remotely on Monday 1 March 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Ms K Currie

Mr R Gale

Mrs D Mackay

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Munro

Officials in attendance:

Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Communities and Place

Ms A Donald, North Area Manager, Education & Learning

Ms K Wood, Headteacher, North Coast Campus, Education & Learning

Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operation Manager, Infrastructure and Environment

Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Communities and Place

Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance & Governance

Also in Attendance:

Station Commander J Gardiner, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Mr R Gale 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.

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

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report
Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/01/21 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members commended the Station Commander and his crews for the work undertaken across the area and on the support provided to the community and raised the following main points:-

- clarification was sought and provided on the statistics shown in relation to accidental dwelling fires for Quarter 3. The Local Senior Officer

confirmed that he would provide further clarification to Members on this matter;

- an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the number of false alarms recorded in November 2020. It was confirmed there had been an issue at a care home due to a faulty detector head which had now been replaced;
- the need to undertake a recruitment drive in view of the impacts of the pandemic on recruiting, retaining and training staffing and taking account of the age profile of existing staff;
- specific concerns in relation to the station availability at Tongue and Bettyhill and confirmation the Local Senior Officer would have discussions with Mr H Morrison outwith the meeting to discuss opportunities to recruit and train staff in the locality; and
- it was hoped the issues with the automatic fire alarm at Tongue Fire Station had been resolved.

The Committee **NOTED** following scrutiny, the content of the report, and that clarification would be provided on the statistics in relation to accidental dwelling fires for Quarter 3.

5. **Update on Implementation of 20mph Speed Limits Fios às Ùr mu Bhuileachadh Chriochan-Astair 20msu**

The Committee was provided with the following update:-

Restricted Roads (20mph Limit) (Scotland) Bill

In 2019 the above Private Members Bill to reduce the general speed limit on restricted roads (*i.e. C and U class roads in built up areas*) to 20mph was put forward to the Scottish Parliament. Highland Council supported the proposal and made the point that The Scottish Government make available suitable funding for both Local Authorities and Transport Scotland to enable implementation. The Bill was unsuccessful and therefore the intention is to bring a report to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in May 2021 to outline potential ways forward for 20 mph limits in Highland.

Highland Council 20mph Implementation Programme

The August 2013 TEC/13 paper outlined that £50,000 per annum had been identified for the implementation of the Council 20mph programme. This dedicated Council budget, due to run until 2022/23, was cut in 2017/18. Therefore, while there was a desire to implement 20mph schemes across the Council Area, there was no dedicated budget for this implementation.

More recently there has been the introduction of temporary 20 mph speed limits in Dingwall and Aviemore via Sustrans emergency COVID Spaces for People funding with Fort William, Thurso and Portree due to go live imminently. These temporary limits were valid for a period of 18 months and would then require a permanent Road Traffic Regulation Order.

Going Forward

The Council would continue to identify funding opportunities for the implementation of 20 mph limits across the area. Wards were welcome to provide their list of desired locations for the implementation of a 20 mph limit to the Road Safety Team (road.safety@highland.gov.uk) and these would be

assessed and added to the list. Full details of the process would be outlined in the report to the Environment and Infrastructure Committee in May 2021.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it appeared the ongoing project in relation to the implementation of 20mph speed limits was slow in being rolled out in villages within Sutherland, and the need for Members to push for more urgency in this regard,
- the Back Road, Golspie be considered as a priority given that it was used as a rat run and served both the Primary and High Schools;
- a number of community councils in the North, West and Central Sutherland ward had been proactive in relation to this item and a number of schemes for the area would be put forward;
- Edderton Community Council was seeking to have 20mph limits implemented within the village and had funded signage in this regard. In addition there was the ongoing issue of the 40mph limit on the A836;
- Dornoch Area Community Council were keen to have a number of 20mph schemes implemented within the boundary of the Burgh; and
- a proposal that the implementation of 20mph speed limits be progressed as quickly as possible within Sutherland and that consultation take place with communities across the County.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update; and
- * ii. **AGREED** to request that the implementation of 20mph speed limits be progressed as quickly as possible within Sutherland and that consultation take place with communities across the County.

6. **Road Structural Maintenance 2021/2022** **Càradh Structar Rathaidean 2021/2022**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/02/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that it was hoped to commence work on the Altnamain Straight in March 2021 and details were provided on the proposed scheduling of the works going forward;
- an update was sought and provided on challenges around staffing and the ability to deliver works and support was expressed for as much work as possible to be carried out inhouse;
- the Council was conducting a review of staffing and it was hoped the staff resource would be increased going forward;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the projects it was anticipated could be delivered within the available budget in 2021/22, noting this would be continually reviewed as schemes were delivered;
- the need to ensure that stocks of tarmac were reserved for those routes in priority need;

- confirmation was sought and provided that match funding was being secured from Scottish Timber Transport Fund in respect of routes in Sutherland;
- the importance of storing and covering salt to maintain its quality and the proposals to erect salt barns in Lairg and Wick, going forward;
- clarification was sought and provided on the reconstruction works proposed for Craigton, Bonar Bridge; and
- the priorities within the Programme would be subject to further discussion at the next Ward Business Meeting.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed Roads Maintenance Programme 2021/22 for the Sutherland Area, on the basis priorities would be considered further at the next Ward Business Meeting.

4. Remote Learning and Childcare in Sutherland Schools Ionnasachadh Iomallach agus Cùram-chloinne ann an Sgoiltean Chataibh

The North Area Manager and Headteacher, North Coast Campus gave a verbal update on this item.

The North Area Manager gave an overview of this first phase of return to schools, advising this had gone smoothly due to the careful planning of head teachers, Officers from transport, catering, cleaning, health and safety and education had worked closely to ensure services required were provided safely. Schools now had a stock of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) home testing kits for use by staff and senior phase pupils. Positive feedback was being received from head teachers in Sutherland, and the return had allowed teachers to measure and monitor where the children were in their learning.

In relation to remote learning, a balance of live learning and independent activity was being delivered and health and wellbeing remained a key priority. Support was being provided to those who required help with devices or connectivity. During the second lockdown period, staff were more confident with the technology, attendance and engagement was good, and those who were not engaging had regular communication and support from staff in their schools.

The Head Teacher, North Coast Campus gave a presentation on the lockdown lessons and return to schools over the period of the pandemic to date, the priority being the health and wellbeing of pupils, parents and staff. She provided a summary of the remote learning delivered at all levels, the support provided by staff to pupils and the engagement with parents. The return to schools was focusing on the recovery process and assessment of pupils' progress with learning. In terms of lessons learned, she advised that communication was key and that offering an online option had increased parents' ability to engage. Whilst online learning offered many possibilities that could be transferred into the traditional classroom, it was could not replace the benefits of face to face learning.

Members congratulated the Head Teacher, staff, pupils, parents and the wider school community on the excellent work undertaken within the North Coast Campus in response to what had been and continued to be extremely challenging circumstances due to the pandemic. The return to schools and

new opportunities which had arisen for example in relation to online parent engagement was also welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update.

**7. Dornoch Common Good
Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

**(a). Consultation on proposed change of use of an area of Dornoch Links for the location of a takeaway food van
Co-chomhairle mu atharrachadh cleachdadh ga mholadh airson raon de dh'Fhigheach Dhòrnaich airson bhana biadh-siubhail**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/03/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

In discussion, support was expressed for the recommendations set out in the report. The proposed new site represented a positive step forward and addressed some of the concerns raised in consultation and while initially a short-term lease was proposed, there was the potential to extend this after the pilot period. It would be the applicant's responsibility to deal with any planning and licensing issues.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at **Appendix 1**;
- ii. **AGREED** the suggested amendment to the proposal regarding location;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposal to change the use of the amended area of Dornoch Links for the location of a takeaway food van subject to the consent of the Sheriff Court being obtained; and
- iv. **NOTED** that other permissions may be required relating to planning and environmental health in connection with the operation of the business however, these are separate processes and procedures to that required under Community Empowerment legislation.

**(b). Annual Report 2019/20, Proposed Budget 2021/22 and Quarter Monitoring Statement 2020/21
Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2019/20, Buidseat ga Mholadh airson 2021/22 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh Ràith 3 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/04/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

In discussion, officers were commended on an excellent report and on the range of projects being supported by the Common Good Fund. The Ward Manager was thanked for his work in conjunction with Dornoch Area Community Council for the progress made towards the refurbishment of the Dornoch Square public conveniences.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Dornoch Common Good Fund Annual Report and Accounts for 2019/20;
- ii. **AGREED** the Dornoch Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2021/22; and
- iii. **NOTED** the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement against budget.

**8. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 5 November 2020 and 14 December 2020 which were approved by the Council on 7 January 2021.

The meeting closed at 12.15pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held remotely Wednesday 10 March 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mr T Heggie

Mrs L MacDonald
Mr P Saggars

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, ECO Performance & Governance
Mr W Munro, Interim Ward Manager, Performance and Governance
Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager, Housing and Property
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Economy and Infrastructure
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Resources and Finance
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Area Inspector V Tough, Police Scotland (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

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

Item 5: Mr L Fraser (non-financial)
Item 7: Mr L Fraser (non-financial)

3. Police Scotland Area Performance Report Poileas Alba – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No **NC/02/21** by the Area Inspector.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Confirmation was provided that a proportionate response, which included engagement and education with members of the public, was being taken in respect of the issuing of Covid fines. It was also queried whether there

would be more policing, particularly in areas such as the Links, as the weather improved to ensure that social distancing measures were maintained and further information was provided on how this would be managed;

- It was welcomed that the positive community response to Covid had been recognised in the report;
- It was confirmed that there had not been a rise in suicide calls but that the trend for vulnerable person calls was increasing;
- The new testing mechanism, Drug Wipes, could be the reason for the increase in the number of people being detected for drug driving offences. It was therefore queried and clarified that there would be increased messaging and education of this method of testing in a bid to deter motorists from drug driving;
- Confirmation was provided that the missing people statistic was similar to other areas; and
- It was acknowledged that there was a need to attract and recruit Special Constables for the Nairnshire Area.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020.

4. **Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/22** **Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No **NC/03/21** by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Further information was sought and provided on the process to address garages that were in a poor state of repair;
- Confirmation was provided that the total annual rent received would remain within the Nairnshire rents budget;
- It was highlighted that the Nairnshire garages/garage sites were almost fully occupied but rent levels were significantly lower than the rest of the Highlands. It was therefore felt that there was capacity for a greater increase than 2% and this should be considered for the next financial year. The Housing Manager proposed that further financial modelling be undertaken with a view to aligning Nairnshire rent levels closer to the Highland average.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. a 2% rent increase to be applied to the Nairnshire Garages; and
- ii. that further financial modelling be provided on aligning the Nairnshire rent levels with the Highland average.

5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean gu 31 An Dubhlachd 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/04/21** by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- In view of the ongoing delays due to Covid, it was queried whether there would be sufficient capacity to undertake capital programme works once permitted to do so. The Housing Manager acknowledged this concern and proposed that the Housing Investment Officer should attend a Ward Business meeting to provide further information on this; and
- The overall performance results were positive and staff were commended for their efforts. It was noted that the level of tenancy offers refused was significantly lower than the national average. This highlighted the high demand for housing in Nairnshire and the need for every effort to be made to support affordable housing for the area. It was further highlighted that in Nairnshire there was a need for a high level of housing points compared with other areas of the Highlands which further demonstrated the shortage of housing in the local area and that repurposing existing buildings would not be sufficient to meet the housing need demand.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the Housing Investment Officer be invited to attend a future Ward Business meeting to provide further information on the roll out of the capital programme works.

6. Nairn Area Roads Maintenance 2021/22
Càradh Rathaidean Sgìre Inbhir Narann 2021/22

There had been circulated Joint Report No **NC/05/21** by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The high quality of the pavement works at the hospital was highlighted;
- There was only a small local team covering a wide remit of duties and the significant pressure on staff was highlighted;
- It was indicated that items 66 to 82 in the Appendix to the report all related to footpaths, several of which were on Council housing estates, and it was confirmed that work was underway to investigate the feasibility of using

funding from the Environmental Improvement budget to assist with these works;

- Confirmation was provided that Laing Garden was not part of the Cranloch scheme but that this work would be incorporated into the roads programme and that the 50mph speed limit signs would be installed at Brackla; and
- Appreciation was expressed for the work undertaken to ensure that both the resources and benefits for the community were maximised.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the proposed prioritised 2021/22 Roads Programme for the Nairn Area.

**7. Nairn Common Good Fund: Consultation on Links Tea Room and Store
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann: Co-chomhairle mu Sheòmar-teatha
is Stòr Links**

Declaration of Interest: Mr L Fraser declared a non-financial interest in this item having worked for the tenant of the Links Tea Room 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 Joint Report No **NC/06/21** by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Appreciation was expressed for the work that had been undertaken in regard to this initiative;
- Members expressed their support for the disposal, by lease, of the Links Tea Room;
- Disappointment was expressed that if tenders were invited for the old store and there was no interest, then a new consultation would be required. It was confirmed that there was a cost saving by making a joint application, in respect of the Tearoom and the old store, to the Sheriff Court. It was further clarified that the cost of an application was approximately £1,800 - £2,500 and that these costs would be apportioned between the two assets;
- Concern was expressed at the condition of the old store which it was felt was currently unfit to be let out and it was therefore felt that the building should be demolished. Further views were expressed in support of this option;

The meeting was adjourned at 11.50am and reconvened at 12 noon.

- Members proposed that the electrical supply should be retained but that the old store should be demolished on the basis that the building was extremely dilapidated and did not readily lend itself to being repurposed; demolition of the old building and landscaping the area would be in keeping with the revamp of the Links area; no firm proposals had been received in respect of use of the building and, in the absence of these, there would be additional costs to the Common Good Fund arising from the need of a further consultation and Sheriff Court application fees.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** the responses to the issues raised in connection with both proposals;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposal to dispose, by lease, of the Links Tea Room, The Links, Nairn;
- iv. **NOTED** the response from Nairn West & Suburban Community Council regarding alternative use/repurposing of the old store on the Links and **AGREED** the proposal to dispose, by demolition, of the old store, The Links, Nairn and to return the use of the area of land to public amenity; and
- v. **NOTED** that it would be necessary to seek Sheriff Court consent in respect of both proposals.

8. Nairn Common Good Fund – Budget Setting for 2021/22 and Quarter 3 2020/21 Monitoring Report
Maoin Maitheas Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Suidheachadh Buidseit airson 2021/22 agus Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteil 3 2020//21

There had been circulated Joint Report No NC/07/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, appreciation was extended to Mr John Prince for his help and support in the successful reduction of the fishing levies and it was hoped that this might be reduced further in future. It was also clarified that the Council absorbed the costs of standard Freedom of Information requests and that these were not recharged to the Common Good Fund.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Nairn Common Good Fund budget for 2021/22 detailed within the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Nairn Common Good Fund as shown in the Quarter 3 Revenue Monitoring Statement against Budget.

9. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 2 December 2021 which were approved by the Council on 7 January 2021.

The meeting was closed at 12.15pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held remotely on Thursday 11 March 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

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

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr J McGillivray
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Henderson	Mrs T Robertson

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
 Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Housing and Property
 Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management, Housing and Property
 Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager, Housing and Property
 Mr R Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager, Housing and Property
 Mr J McHardy, Housing Development Manager, Housing and Property
 Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, Resources and Finance
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms O Bayon, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

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

Mr B Thompson in the Chair

BUSINESS

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Finlayson and Mr C Fraser.

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

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

Item 4: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 7: Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Thompson (non-financial)

Declaration of Interest: Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in items 3,4,5,6,7,8 and 9 below as a Board Member of Albyn Housing Society Ltd but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news updates:-

- Tenants from Ballifeary worked with the Ballifeary Community Council to establish the Let's Grow Ballifeary-Bught garden project which consisted of accessible wooden planters filled with a range of winter vegetables which the community would be encouraged to harvest;
- Throughout the COVID pandemic, the Tenant Participation Team had been providing support to enable tenants to get connected to attend meetings and events online. Working collaboratively with the Libertie Project, android tablets had been provided to 32 households who did not have a suitable device. As part of a second phase of this scheme, the Libertie Project was working with the SCVO to deliver the Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland programme in the Highlands which, subject to eligibility criteria, provided either a Chromebook or an iPad, and a mobile WIFI device with 24 months of unlimited data allowance. The Tenant Participation team had been referring tenants or residents who met the criteria for these devices to help them keep connected to their families and friends, order shopping online and get them involved in Tenant Participation online events and activities;
- The Hilton Bike Project which had been set up to encourage people out of their cars and children and young people to take up cycling. Expert advice was provided from WheelNess and works would commence in the Spring to install bike shelters, tool stations and air pumps and funding had been secured from the Environmental Improvement budget;
- The Upper Achintore Regeneration Group had been working to combat climate change and enhance the local environment. Two potential tree planting sites had been identified and sponsorship had been received from Ben Nevis Distillery to install recycled whisky barrels throughout the area;
- Congratulations were extended to Paula Lloyd, tenant from Hilton, who had been awarded the BEM in the New Year's Honours List for services to the homeless and Catherine Stoddart, tenant from Ballachulish who had been elected on to the TPAS Scotland (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Board as a tenant representative; and
- The work of the Tenant Participation Officers to maintain connected with tenants and the assistance being provided to support them online.

4. Update on Corporate Landlord and Asset Management Strategy Fios às Ùr mu Ro-innleachd Uachdarain Chorporra agus Rianachd So- mhaoin

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

There had been circulated Report No HP/02/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Executive Chief Officer provided an update to the report following the full Council meeting on 4 March 2021 at which the Council's budget was approved. In particular, he outlined the significant investment in Health and Safety spend and approval of the Change Fund bid which would help drive forward asset rationalisation and support future ways of working for staff.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- this was a substantial project and it would be helpful for a Members briefing to be arranged on this item;
- the significant investment in health and safety was welcomed and it was confirmed that an update would be provided to each Committee in relation to the detail of the Programme and spend.
- a summary of the work being undertaken in respect of the Health and Safety programme also be provided to Members;
- in relation to schools, it was confirmed the Education & Learning Service was currently assessing the educational requirements of their buildings, and a future phase of asset management would consider their physical condition and investment requirements;
- confirmation was sought and provided that Area Committee and local member and community engagement would be a key factor in shaping the investment programme and in considering the social value and community use of buildings;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the recruitment process for the posts detailed at section 4.6 of the report would commence as quickly as possible;
- confirmation was sought and provided that staff would be involved in the project in a range of ways going forward, details of which were provided;
- a more detailed explanation was sought and provided on the requirement to deliver a new and better evidence base and the timescales involved;
- the significant linkages between the work being undertaken by the Redesign Board in relation to workforce planning and future ways of working and the delivery of the asset management strategy and the importance of Member oversight being well managed through the Board and the Committee in this regard;
- it was suggested a stand alone forum be established comprising Members and officers to consider both asset management and future ways of working for staff;
- the asset management approach should take forward options for disposing of the current Council Headquarters site to a developer and building a new headquarters in an alternative location, and consider the impact on the Capital Programme;
- the need to dispose of any properties the Council leased in early course on the basis of the savings this would deliver;
- a crucial part of the performance metric should be a building's environmental performance in terms of the Council's commitment to becoming carbon neutral;
- the potential to relocate services from the Diriebught Depot to a Council owned site near the Longman Roundabout and use the land for housing development;

- it was hoped that the significant additional investment in asset management would allow projects such as the above to be investigated; and
- it was critical the asset management strategy and future ways of working supported small rural communities and enabled home working.

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

- Member briefing be arranged on this item; and
- summary of the work being undertaken in respect of the Health and Safety programme be provided to Members.

5. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget Monitoring Statement to 31 December 2020
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus Neo-thaigheadais gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2020

There had been circulated Report No HP/03/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that fire safety works to Council properties were wholly funded through the HRA., and no external funding had been received in this regard It was confirmed that Members would be circulated with details of the Scottish Government's funding made available to homeowners for fire safety measures;
- the proposed carry forward of the HRA surplus was welcomed, however concern was expressed at the backlog of repairs and maintenance and potential capacity issues in the ability to spend the additional monies available in the next financial year. It was confirmed that while it was anticipated the additional spend would be manageable, the uncertainties around trade capacity and sub-contractor, material and other costs was recognised and this would be kept under review;
- the opportunity ahead of the next financial year to undertake external non-essential repairs and maintenance and environmental works in housing estates where safe social distancing could be maintained. It was confirmed the approach would be to commence and maximise external low risk works as soon as the Government guidelines permitted; and
- in relation to the backlog of repairs and maintenance an assurance was provided that as with the first lockdown a prioritised programme by repair type, waiting times and some geographical clustering would be drawn up with a view to expediting the backlog as soon as possible.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account and non-Housing Revenue Account;
- AGREED** that any year end HRA surplus should be added to the 2021/22 HRA Revenue budget for repairs and maintenance, in order to fund the backlog of work arising from Covid-19 restrictions during 2020/21; and
- AGREED** that Members be circulated with details of the Scottish Government funding available to homeowners for fire safety measures.

6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report to 31 December 2020
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2020

There had been circulated Report No HP/04/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- noting that a Members seminar on new builds would be held on 26 March 2021;
- the commitment to report back to each Committee on any delays and mitigating actions on the Capital Programme be welcomed;
- clarification was sought and provided on the status of the Strategic Housing Investment Programme in terms of the number new build approvals and completions and progress against targets, and noting that a more detailed update would be provided to the next Committee;
- clarification was sought and provided that medical adaptations would be prioritised and works undertaken once the guidelines permitted; In the meantime, adaptations essential for the immediate wellbeing of a tenant would continue to be undertaken;
- in relation to modular and modern methods of construction, this would be covered in the Members seminar on 26 March 2021;
- the need to actively consider the potential impacts of increasing contractor costs on the Council's future new build programme;
- the benchmark figure for the cost of new build units to allow comparisons to be made with conversions costs, specific reference being made to community interest in re-purposing properties on the High Street, Nairn for domestic use. It was confirmed Members would be provided with the Council's benchmarks costs for different sizes and types of new house builds;
- the need to make clearer the link between the level of spend and the number of houses delivered and it was confirmed further clarity would be provided on the borrowing requirements for individual new Council house builds;
- the impact of Brexit on supply chains of materials and therefore costs, noting this was not currently impacting on the Programme;
- an update was sought and provided on progress with compulsory purchase orders in relation to derelict properties;
- the Council's housing development team and partners be congratulated for delivering significant investment in affordable housing in Lochaber; and
- a query in relation to the start date for the affordable housing development at Upper Achintore, Fort William. The Housing Development Manager confirmed he would respond directly to Mr B Allan on this matter.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme Monitoring Report;
- ii. **NOTED** that any slippage in the current year's programme would be carried forward to the 2021/22 programme; and
- iii. **AGREED** that further clarification be provided to Members on the:-

- a. borrowing requirements for individual new Council house builds; and
- b. Council's benchmarks costs for different sizes and types of new house builds.

**7. 2020/21 Capital Programme – Update on Education and Property Projects
Prògram Calpa 2020/21 – Fios às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Foghlaim agus Cuid-
seilbhe**

Declarations of Interest: Mr B Thompson and Mr A Jarvie 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 interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HP/05/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of school capital projects was noted. In this respect recognition and praise was given regarding the completion of new builds and refurbishment works of many Highland schools. Members hoped for continued success for the anticipated Nairn, Tain and Broadford school projects;
- congratulations were expressed regarding the success in delivering bids and receiving acceptance by the Scottish Government Early Learning and Childcare/School Estate Investment Programme and the Learning Estate Investment Programme;
- assurance was sought and provided regarding the future school's capital programme, that correct resources were in place, particularly in terms of staff to drive forward the building and maintenance of schools, stakeholder engagement, procurement and communication aspects;
- Members queried if Portable Appliance Testing would be undertaken in addition to the routine property maintenance regime;
- it was questioned if schools could be ranked in the same way as was used for condition of buildings (A,B,C,D), taking into account the climate change emergency and their energy efficiency;
- information was sought and provided that if school boiler replacements would be on a like for like basis or if energy efficient alternatives would be considered;
- it was requested that further information be provided to Members on Phase 2 of Merkinch Primary School and when works at Dalneigh Primary School would commence;
- Members expressed that Merkinch Primary school appeared to have been built well in excess of anticipated pupil capacity. In this respect an explanation was sought and provided;
- an update was sought and received, as to the current situation in relation to the completion of Wick Campus and status plan for the old Wick High School;
- concerns were raised regarding the old vacant buildings which were deemed surplus to requirements after new construction projects, on that basis a seminar was suggested to address this issue. The importance on agreeing an outcome for vacated buildings at the same time as the capital planning process was emphasised;

- it was requested to have an additional fourth column included in the Appendix 1 and 2 within the list of Education and Property projects indicating the target completion date; and
- a request was made to reuse building materials from the demolition of Alness academy for the new sports barn proposed for Dornoch.

Thereafter, the Committee;-

- NOTED** the progress made during the current financial year with the Education and Property projects in the Council's capital programme; and
- AGREED** that an update be provided to Members on Phase 2 of Merkinch Primary School and when works at Dalneigh Primary School would commence.

8. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Monitoring Report to 31 December 2020
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Sheirbheisean Rianachd Cuid-seilbh & Ghoireasan gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2020

There had been circulated Report No HP/06/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, it was confirmed that Scottish Government funding, to cover Covid-19 expenditure, would remain in a centralised budget rather than be disseminated to service budgets, and no ongoing implications for next year's budgets were anticipated.

In addition, clarification was sought and provided regarding the non-domestic rates budget if funds could be shared between schools or third party sector organisations.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- net spend at the end of quarter 3 totalled £50.008m;
- based on the best available information to date, a service budget gap of £7.359m to the end of 2020/21 was presently forecast, largely due to continued Covid responses. (This was an improving outturn position from Q2 as the year end budget gap was now forecast to reduce from £8.417m to £7.359m);
- almost every area of service relied on income to pay for services and this was significantly disrupted this year because of Covid impacts. Ongoing spend addressing Covid related issues was the key reason for the service's forecast budget gap;
- the budget gap might change positively or negatively depending on the application of expenditure and recruitment controls, adjusting services to meet previously agreed budget savings; in-year income recovery, identifying new income and procurement opportunities, drawing down any further Government grant support and any new Covid related recovery costs; and
- further adjustments would be made in future quarterly reporting to reflect the updated apportionment of costs and savings across the new Service structure.

9. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No HP/07/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried if the third sector reduction in temporary housing accommodation statistics included housing tenants that left property's due to having issues such as mould;
- it was agreed that further information be provided to Members on the legislation for Private Landlords in respect of evictions due to rent debt and the length of time spent in temporary accommodation;
- reassurance was sought and provided regarding the commencement of Garden Aid as soon as possible despite the impact of Covid-19, and having the property list up to date;
- request was made for Housing staff to inspect the housing stock at least once per year as this would offer additional support to vulnerable tenants. Members thanked housing officers for supporting vulnerable tenants so far during the pandemic;
- Members questioned and received reassurance concerning Highland Council mechanisms in place for supporting housing officers when dealing with extremely challenging circumstances on the front line; and
- in response to a query, it was suggested that the central contact number should be circulated to members to provide to tenants when they required to speak with a housing representative.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update on the delivery of housing services during the Covid-19 emergency;
- ii. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 – 31 December 2020; and
- iii. **AGREED** that further information be provided to Members on:-
 - a. the legislation for Private Landlords in respect of evictions due to rent debt; and
 - b. the length of time spent in temporary accommodation.

The meeting was closed at 1.41pm.