

**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	Mrs M Paterson
Mr J Finlayson	Mr D Rixson
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs T Robertson
Mr L Fraser	Mr K Rosie
Mr R Gale	Mr G Ross
Mr K Gowans	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Graham	Mr C Smith
Mr J Gray	Mr B Thompson

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 Louden, 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.