

628  
**The Highland Council**  
**No. 4 2020/2021**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Highland Council** held REMOTELY on **Thursday, 28 October 2021** at 10.35am.

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

**Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

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

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr I Brown, Ms P Hadley, Mrs D Mackay, Mr D MacLeod, Mr J McGillivray, M N McLean, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr P Saggars and Ms M Smith.

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

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

General – Mrs M Cockburn as a Council appointed Board Member of the Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau (Non-Financial) and Mr C MacLeod as a Director of the Skye & Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau (Non-Financial)

Item 5i – Mr A Christie (Financial)

Item 7iv – Mr B Lobban (Financial)

Item 8iv – Mr G Adam (Non-Financial), Mr J Gordon (Financial), Mr C Munro (Financial), Miss J Campbell (Financial), Mrs I Campbell (Financial), Mrs C Caddick (Financial)

Item 9 – Mr A Christie (Financial), Ms L Munro (Non-Financial), Mr D Rixson (Non-Financial), Mr K Gowans (Financial), Mr B Thompson (Non-Financial), Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial), Mr D Macpherson (Non-Financial), Mrs H Carmichael, Mrs C Caddick (Non-Financial), Mr C MacLeod (Non-Financial), Mr G Adam (Non-Financial), Mr T Heggie (Non-Financial)

Item 9vii – Mr D Louden (Financial)

Item 10 – Mr A Christie (Financial), Mr K Gowans (Non-Financial), Mr B Thompson (Non-Financial), Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial), Mr T Heggie (Non-Financial)

Item 11 – Mr D Rixson (Non-Financial)

Item 12 – Mr A Christie (Financial), Ms L Munro (Financial)

At this point in the meeting –

(i)The Convener advised that he would be arranging a Private Members Briefing on future Security Arrangements as soon as possible and he strongly urged all Members of the Council to attend.

(ii)The Convener also confirmed that he had agreed to accept an additional item from Mrs I Campbell and, following discussion, it was **AGREED** that the congratulations of the Council should be conveyed to all at Kinlochshiel Shinty Club following their recent successes in winning the Camanachd Cup and also the MacTavish Cup.

(iii)The Leader of the Council advised that confirmation had now been received from the UK Government that one of the Council's levelling up bids had been successful, namely the Inverness Zero Carbon Cultural Regeneration Bid (which focused on an innovative renewable energy heating system for Inverness Castle and refurbishment of the Northern Meeting Park and the Bught Park) which was very much welcomed.

In addition, further information was being sought from the Council in relation to two other bids (Improvements to the North Coast 500 and Regeneration/Harbour Improvement in Wick) and this was currently being followed up.

Work was also being undertaken at present on another bid which would include the Lochaber and Skye areas and further information in this regard would be provided in due course.

Finally, congratulations were conveyed to the residents of Knoydart who had been successful with a community bid to buy The Old Forge Pub which was excellent news for all concerned.

### 3. **Membership of the Council** **Ballrachd na Comhairle**

#### Mr Ian Ramon

Tributes were paid at the meeting to the late Mr Ian Ramon who had served as one of the Local Councillors for Ward 21 (Fort William & Ardnamurchan) following the Local Government Elections in May 2017.

#### Mr Hamish Wood

Tributes were also paid to the late Mr Hamish Wood who had served as a Highland Councillor from 2007-2017.

In that regard, the condolences of the Council were conveyed to both families and recognition given to the strong and positive contributions which both Councillors had made to the Highland area and specifically their respective communities.

It was also noted that a By-Election had now been arranged for Ward 21 and would be held on Thursday, 2 December 2021.

#### Mr Ben Thompson

At this point in the meeting, it was also noted that Mr B Thompson would be resigning from the Council with effect from 12 November in order to take up a new employment position in the Highlands.

In that regard, Mr Thompson was warmly thanked for his contribution to the work of the Council over the past seven and a half years, not least as Chair of the Housing & Property Committee, and he would be very much missed by all.

Mr Thompson responded accordingly.

### 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 9 September as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – 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 Volume circulated separately.

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded, were, except as undernoted, **APPROVED** – matters arising having been dealt with as follows:-

Audit & Scrutiny Committee, 23 September - Starred Item: 9 – Review of Financial Regulations - **AGREED** adoption by the Council.

## **Minutes not included in the Volume**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr A Christie (as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland) declared a financial interest in Item (i) below but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

(i)Community Planning Board held on 9 June – **NOTED**

(ii)Valuation Joint Board held on 18 June – **NOTED**

(iii)Recruitment Panel (Depute Chief Executive) held on 5 August, 30 August and 3 September – **NOTED**

(iv)Climate Change Working Group held on 20 October – **AGREED**

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

The Council **AGREED** the following changes to memberships –

Valuation Joint Board – Mr D MacKay to be added to the membership  
North Planning Applications Committee – Mr H Morrison to replace Ms K Currie  
Communities and Place Committee – Mr A Baxter to be added to the membership  
Corporate Resources Committee – Mr A Baxter to replace Mr J Bruce  
Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee – Mr A Christie to replace Mr R Gale

## **7. Question Time Am Ceiste**

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance -

### **Public Question - Mr D MacKenzie**

#### **To the Leader of the Council**

The last meeting of Inverness City Committee passed a motion on Academy Street to “Replace the temporary Spaces for People measures currently in place with more accessible and safer measures...”

The councillor who proposed the motion has confirmed it was intended to mean “remove and, later, replace with something better, after consideration and consultation.”

Why are the barriers still in place in Academy Street?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that the obstructions on Academy Street were still causing delays within the City Centre (including for emergency vehicles), damaging businesses and very few people were using the wider pedestrian areas, and in light of the fact that the City Committee had intended that their decision would clear the obstructions and enable the development of an acceptable scheme for Academy Street, it was queried as to why the obstructions were still in place?

In response, it was confirmed that the bollards had been replaced with safer versions and discussion in regard to a more permanent solution was expected at the next City Committee meeting in November.

**(1) Mr C Fraser**

**To the Chair of the Housing & Property Committee**

"How many listed buildings do Highland Council own and where are they located?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether a comprehensive report could be submitted to the Housing and Property Committee in December to detail what could be done with these types of buildings?

Due to connectivity issues, the Chair of the Housing and Property Committee had been unable to provide a verbal response at the meeting but provided the following written response –

Thank you for raising this important topic. A fully comprehensive report on these buildings will, in part, need the information that is being gathered through the asset management process we have embarked on. Bearing that in mind, I can confirm that the topic raised will be initiated at the December Committee meeting but further time will be required to gather sufficient information to respond in detail as requested.

**(2) Mr C Fraser**

**To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee**

When can we expect the updated version of the 'Highland Council Road Verge Maintenance Guidance' which was promised earlier in the year?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether, in keeping with the 2017-2027 Scottish Government Pollinator Strategy, environmental NGO's, such as Nature Scot, BBCT, Buglife etc, would be asked for input into the Council's new verge maintenance guidance as it was being formulated?

In response, it was confirmed that Members would be involved in the development of policy as much as possible, particularly those with a strong interest in this issue, and there would be a particular focus on areas where there was a risk to visibility.

**(3) Mrs I MacKenzie**

**To the Chair of the Education Committee**

How many vacant PSA posts are there in each Highland ASG as of the end of the August to October term?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to how many vacant PSA posts there were in each Highland Associated School Group?

In response, it was confirmed that a commitment had been made to extend all temporary PSA contracts for the first term of the school session to allow for the ASN allocation process for 2021-22 to be completed by the end of the first term. It had not been appropriate to continue with recruitment during this period unless there were exceptional circumstances. That process had now been completed and a review undertaken in the current term and all identified PSA and ASN teacher vacancies would be made within the allocation. Further details could be obtained from Officers if required.

**(4) Mr D Louden**

To the Chair of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee

Funding to Highland Senior Citizens Forum has been removed. Why was this done?

The response had been circulated.

*In terms of a supplementary question, and noting that the Highland Senior Citizen's Forum had provided considerable support for the elderly during the Covid pandemic, it was queried as to what had replaced the funding to them in terms of support for Highland's senior citizens?*

*In response, it was confirmed that this information would be provided outwith the meeting.*

**(5) Mr D Louden**

To the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

When the Council's Transport team alters or cancels bus routes used to carry children to school, are the schools affected and the "Safer Routes to School" team always consulted?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that it was not acceptable that changes could be brought forward without prior discussion with schools and the Safer Routes to Schools team, it was queried as to whether it could be ensured that consultation with schools and the Safer Routes to School Team would be undertaken prior to making any changes in future?

In response, it was confirmed that whenever there was an issue in relation to safer routes to school, consultation was undertaken.

**Declaration of Interest – Mr B Lobban (as a Director of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Limited) declared a financial interest in the following Question (6) and, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would leave the Chair during the item.**

**(On that basis, the Vice Convener (Mr A Henderson) took the Chair).**

**(6) Mr J Bruce**

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

Is the Council in full communication with HIE on the progress of repairing the Cairngorm Funicular and able to provide a date for a fully functioning system?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

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

**(7) Mr J Bruce**

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

How many staff posts have been vacant for three months or more and how many have been removed from the establishment?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(8) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Chair of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee

A key reason given to return children from out of authority care placements was on the grounds of the educational attainment, what has the change in attainment been from children returned?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the educational attainment of returned looked after children was being measured?

In response, it was confirmed that educational attainment was being measured but there was concern that, due to the small numbers involved, children could be easily identified. The Chair would be content to have further discussions with Mr A Jarvie on this matter following the meeting.

**(9) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

When will the Administration be commencing the 2022/23 budget?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to when communities and the public would be involved in the formation of the coming budget?

In response, it was confirmed that consultation would take place with communities in relation to the ongoing budget. The Depute Leader had also already indicated that he intended to have wide ranging discussion in this respect.

**(10) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

When will Opposition Groups be involved in the 2022/23 budget?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what specific details of the budget would be shared with Opposition Groups and when could this be expected?

In response, it was confirmed that the Depute Leader had already advised that he would engage with all groups and individual Members within the Council as a matter of priority.

**(11) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

Can the Conservative Group expect that its competent budget proposals will be voted down again this forthcoming budget, with no reason given?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the budget approach going forward would be the same as currently whereby some Members were not aware of decisions to be made and had not had enough advance notice of content or could a guarantee be given that a collaborative approach would now be taken?

In response, it was confirmed that Mr Jarvie had been given the opportunity to participate in a number of meetings on the budget but unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, he had been unable to attend.

**(12) Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair**

To the Chair of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee

Please confirm the date on which the External Investigator started his investigation into the serious concerns (raised by present and past Members of Staff, CEYP, and Elected Members) into Highland Council Residential Social Care.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that a care experienced young person had recently written to the Chief Executive on this subject and detailed serious concerns within Highland Council residential care provision, pleading for intervention, it was queried as to whether it was considered that a review of the Service was sufficient?

In response, it was confirmed that it was considered that a review was sufficient.

**(13) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Leader of the Council

Last November, this Council reported me to the Standards Commission following myself finding in the Annual Accounts and asking at Committee about a six-figure payment to a former member of staff. I was reported for my mere verbatim reading of this public document in a public meeting as being “inaccurate and misleading” and for allegedly forwarding an email from a Council Officer explaining the breakdown of these costs to the press.

These payments are legally required to be published for public transparency.

Do you find it acceptable that a Member of this Council was reported to the Standards Commission by the Authority on these grounds? Particularly in light of the Commission dismissing the complaint, stating what I did was part of my “customary Councillor duties”.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that 8 Officers had been drawn into drafting the failed complaint to the Standards Commission in relation to Mr Jarvie’s reading of a public document at a public meeting, it was queried as to whether it was now considered that this had been a waste of Officers’ time?

In response, it was confirmed that Mr Jarvie should submit his statements and question in writing to the Leader of the Council and a response would be provided.

**(14) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

What percentage of planning applications over 50 houses have been approved in the last three years, and what percentage of applications of 3 houses or less have been approved in the last three years?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(15) Mr R Bremner**

To the Leader of the Council

You organised a seminar to consider a new vision for libraries in Highland as a progressive, modern, and visionary service. As Leader of the Council I am aware of your very keen personal interest, support and understanding of the need to provide a libraries service for the 21st century. Any initiatives are likely to require a new funding and/or organisational model to facilitate change and grow capacity within the service, to enable libraries to build social and cultural capital, as well as build resilience in every community throughout Highland. Can you advise what progress has been made and what the next stages are in this process, please?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader would give serious consideration to a Library Survey (carried out by independent consultants to ensure impartiality) in line with the Council's ambition?

In response, it was confirmed that a report would be requested from High Life Highland on this subject. Following this, there would be a follow up Seminar and discussion on the next steps and at that stage the possibility of an External Consultant would be considered.

**(16) Mr A Sinclair**

To the Leader of the Council

How many formal complaints have been made to the Information Commissioner for Scotland relating to the Highland Council's handling of Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests within the last twelve months?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(17) Mr A Graham**

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

How many hydrogen refuelling stations for cars are there within the Highland Council area, and where are they located?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(18) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Leader of the Council

What response did the Chief Executive give you in response to the bullying scandal breaking in the press?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what the response was in relation to the GMB staff survey which had confirmed that 60% of staff felt that their complaints of bullying had been ignored?

In response, it was confirmed that the GMB Union and the HR service were currently in discussion regarding this matter.

**(19) Mr A Jarvie**

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

What is the most expensive claim made and the most expensive claim paid out as a result of damage caused by the roads?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what road defect had resulted in a pay out of £45,000 from the Council?

In response, it was confirmed that after a roads repair had taken place, excess roads chippings had not been cleared from the surface and this had resulted in a motorcyclist slipping on the road.

**(20) Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair**

To the Chair of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee

Could you please confirm how many Violent Incident Reports have been submitted by Social Care Staff Members, employed in Arach, Braeside, and Leault facilities?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the number of violent incident reports at Arach included the Crisis Unit & the Emergency Unit?

In response, it was confirmed that clarification would be forwarded to Mrs Campbell-Sinclair with further information following the meeting.

**(21) Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair**

To the Chair of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee

Please confirm how many of our long term registered and qualified Social Care Staff have resigned their posts within the past 6 months?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to how many Highland Council residential care staff had resigned from their positions in the past six months?

In response, it was confirmed that, within the past 6 months, 8 staff in total had resigned from their posts out of a workforce of 122. This equated to 6.5% of the total workforce.

**(22) Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair**

To the Chair of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee

External organisations provide ongoing Social Care support to our Care Experienced Young People, could you please confirm the annual financial costs to Highland Council?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the figure provided in response to the original question related to specialised residential care?

In response, it was confirmed that part of the figure related to specialised residential care.

**(23) Mr C Smith**

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

How much of the £24.7m reserves held aside to meet extra Covid-19 or Brexit costs have been used to meet extra costs caused by Covid-19 or Brexit?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the funding reserved for Covid and/or Brexit would be used to cover the budget shortfall and therefore not for the purpose for which it was intended?

In response, it was confirmed that the agreed level of reserves was based on a wide variety of risks facing the Council, including Covid and Brexit, and that, if anything, the risks and uncertainty were increasing.

**(24) Mr S Mackie**

To the Leader of the Council

What is the total budget (both fiscal and human resource) apportioned to the social media output of the Highland Council?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given the increasing importance of social media to the Council and all other public institutions, it was queried as to whether some degree of budget monitoring would be undertaken for future scrutiny of the Council's external communications?

In response, it was confirmed that this matter needed some thought and would be discussed with the Corporate Communications Manager.

**(25) Mr S Mackie**

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

At the full July 2020 Full Council, the previous Committee Chair made a commitment to review the Highland Councils contribution to the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership would be undertaken.

Given that this commitment was made well over a year ago, what progress has been made in undertaking this review and when can it be expected to be published?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(26) Mr S Mackie**

To the Leader of the Council

Prior to the Standards Commission seminar in February 2021, on how many occasions have Executive Officers undertaken training in respect to the Standards

Commission, the Councillors Code of Conduct and the defined and protected roles of local authority members?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and given the Council's attempts to stifle scrutiny by using reports that were based on unfounded yet serious allegations, it was queried as to whether the Leader had confidence that the numerous threats of being reported to the Standards Commission, based on vexatious information, would not happen again?

In response, it was confirmed that the Leader did not share these views/use of words which it was not felt were appropriate in this case.

**(27) Mr S Mackie**

To the Leader of the Council

Prior to the Standards Commission seminar in February 2021, what Members of the Highland Council attended training on the updated Code of Conduct for elected Councillors as organised by the Standards Commission for Scotland?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that two further invitations had been forwarded to Members between the dates provided in the original question, it was queried as to whether the Leader found it worrying that the only 2 Members who had attended these Workshops were later accused of failing to uphold the Code of Conduct that they had attended training for?

In response, it was requested that further detail be provided on the statements which had been made and where such information had come from.

**(28) Mr S Mackie**

To the Leader of the Council

Can you confirm whether the Highland Council has formally signed the Women in Nuclear Industry Charter, as supported by the Highland Council in March 2020?

The response had been circulated.

*In terms of a supplementary question, it was advised that a further date would be arranged to enable signature of the relevant document in due course.*

*In response, it was confirmed that this was accepted.*

**(29) Mr A Baxter**

To the Leader of the Council

What is the total final cost of The Gathering Place on the River Ness?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader believed from her knowledge of the project that the costs represented a good use of public resources?

In response, it was considered that this was a personal question and as such it was not felt that a personal view was relevant in respect of a project which had been running since 2012.

**(30) Mr A Baxter**

To the Leader of the Council

What is the total financial contribution from the Highland Council towards the cost of The Gathering Place?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader of the Council believed that the other grand project of hosting the Fireworks Display, and ordering people to watch from home, was a good use of public resources for which she was responsible?

In response, it was confirmed that the Leader of the Council was responsible for the resources used for the Fireworks Display along with 22 other Members. It was the Common Good Fund for Inverness which was paying for the Display and she believed that many people would enjoy it.

**(31) Mr A Baxter**

To the Leader of the Council

Will the Union's request of a panel be established to handle the bullying complaints from staff?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the detail of this approach could be provided and how exactly the Union(s) would be involved?

In response, it was confirmed that the HR service would be asked for the detail as to who there were dealing with on this but the Leader's understanding was that they were coming to some level of agreement on it.

**(32) Mr A Baxter**

To the Leader of the Council

What assurance do you have that Audit and Scrutiny is sufficiently independent from the central senior management structure?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to how the Council's Audit and Scrutiny function was independent from the Senior Management structure and what safeguards were in place?

In response, it was confirmed that the Committee was chaired by a Member of the Opposition.

**(33) Mr A Baxter**

To the Leader of the Council

Given the recent spate of allegations concerning institutional bullying within the Highland Council that went unresolved through existing channels, does the Council Leader believe that the internal whistleblowing service is working?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why the Human Resources policy was clearly failing staff with bullying and harassment, so much so that their complaints had had to appear within the local Press?

In response, it was confirmed that the Leader was assured by the HR Team that they were dealing with these concerns as they came forward through the Council's bullying and HR policies. Some were resolved, some were still in the process of being resolved.

**(34) Mr R Bremner**

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

Highland Council has no doubt, over recent weeks, been preparing its fleet for the delivery of winter maintenance. The variable nature of weather conditions in the Highlands, particularly over the winter period, can have a detrimental effect on the budget and infrastructure. As I understand it, the Scottish Government offers support through the Bellwin Scheme to retrospectively support local authorities meeting key criteria in order to mitigate some of the challenges they face. Will you take steps to ensure that all members fully understand the support mechanism of the Bellwin Scheme and how this scheme can support local authorities, including Highland Council?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(35) Mr R MacWilliam**

To the Leader of the Council

How many times have staff members lodged reports under the updated whistleblowing policy since it was agreed by Council on 20 October 2020?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to when Members would see a report on the effectiveness of the new whistleblowing policy?

In response, it was confirmed that there had been a report to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee earlier in the year and there would be annual reports on the effectiveness of the policy. The Leader would take an active interest, with the Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, to ensure that it came forward.

**(36) Mr R MacWilliam**

To the Leader of the Council

What measures are in place to ensure the anonymity and protection of staff members who report wrongdoing under the updated whistleblowing policy?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis of how easy it was to identify staff who made complaints, simply through the information that they were providing, it was queried as to whether the Leader was still determined to deny the staff the protection that would be afforded by an external whistleblowing service?

In response, it was confirmed that this was the policy in place as agreed by the Council and the Unions and it would continue.

**(37) Mr R MacWilliam**

To the Leader of the Council

What was the full final cost of the My Ness artwork installation in Inverness including administrative costs?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and with reference to a decision taken in August 2019 that there would be no further commitment of public funds to these projects, it was queried as to whether the report referred to by the Leader indicated that that commitment had been breached and, if so, who would take responsibility?

In response, it was confirmed that a full report was still awaited on the finances for the artwork and it was hoped that it would come to the next City of Inverness and Area Committee meeting. Reports had indicated that it been delivered within the budget.

**(38) Mr R MacWilliam**

To the Leader of the Council

What budget has Highland Council allocated to cover the ongoing maintenance costs for recently commissioned public artworks?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to which Council budget was currently meeting the maintenance costs, including the cost of employing a private contractor several times already to deal with vandalism?

In response, it was confirmed that the Leader had no knowledge of who dealt with the vandalism (which was simple graffiti) and it had not yet been decided as to what maintenance was required and which budget would be used to meet these costs. Acknowledged that it had been requested previously that maintenance costs should be included in budgets but that this had not been done but it would be in the future.

**(39) Mr R MacWilliam**

To the Leader of the Council

What was the cost to Highland Council of supporting the doomed bid for a STEP fusion reactor in Caithness?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to what could be done to better assess projects for allocation of such staff resources (which could be quite considerable) to ensure that that was time spent in endeavours which stood a reasonable chance of success rather than unfairly, in his opinion, raising expectations of local employment.

In response, it was confirmed that there had been terrific expectations of local employment that would have been wonderful if they had come through and it had been worth the effort. Future decisions on resources would be decided on a project by project basis.

**(40) Mr R MacWilliam**

To the Leader of the Council

Were Members of the political Administration alerted to senior management discussions which led to the submission of vexatious complaints about Elected Member conduct as recently reported in the press?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why any Senior Council Officer would engage with any Elected Member on the subject of an attempt to cause reputational damage or political harm to that Member's political opponent?

In response, it was confirmed that any Senior Officer, if they had concerns and wanted to have a conversation with a Member about behaviour that they thought was damaging in whatever way, for someone's health or otherwise, was at liberty to have that conversation.

**(41) Mr R MacWilliam**

To the Leader of the Council

What sanctions have been imposed on senior management involved in utilising Highland Council resources in the submission of vexatious complaints about Member conduct to the Standards Commission for Scotland?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and on the basis that Highland Council staff, no matter how senior, had standards of their own to adhere to, it was queried as to who a complaint should be submitted to if staff were believed, as appeared to be the case, to be inappropriately involved in political matters?

In response, it was confirmed that that was Mr MacWilliam's personal view but it was not shared by the Leader. If there was a complaint about a member of staff, it should be submitted to the Chief Executive.

**(42) Mr D Macpherson**

To the Chair of the Economy & Infrastructure Committee

Following years of underinvestment by the Highland Council in their annual roads budget, due to a combination of austerity and local authority cutbacks.

This financial year the full Highland Council voted to secure millions in additional funding required to carry out the growing list of essential road repairs and resurfacing projects required to repair the miles of old worn and crumbling roads.

I understand that across Highland there is a shortage of staff to cover all the posts (including HGV drivers) needed in the Roads and Transport Department, and this will result in an unwanted situation, where the Council for once has all the money to spend, however it doesn't have all the necessary staff in place to get all the road repair work done.

How many vacant staff positions are there currently in the Roads & Transport Department across all ward areas? and can you please give an assurance that Highland Council will have the requisite number of staff in place to cover essential winter maintenance duties throughout this winter?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether a commitment could be given that, during winter temperatures when the Council was prevented from tarring and resurfacing roads, the Council would continue to replace the worn out and faded road signs that were on the remote, rural and City roads?

In response, it was confirmed that assurance could be given that the Council would continue to use the available resources to maintain whichever parts of the roads were appropriate, including signage.

**(43) Mr D Macpherson**

To the Leader of the Council

On a recent visit to Kilchoan and while travelling around the Ardnamurchan Peninsula at the most westerly point on the UK mainland, I witnessed the impoverished state of the single track roads, the lack of passing places and the many road signs that were barely legible, browned due to fading and bleaching by the elements with discolouration and rusty poles, where even the Highland Council sign to welcome visitors at the Kilchoan Cal-Mac Ferry Terminal was damaged!

It was therefore of little surprise to me when conversing with local residents around the Ardnamurchan Peninsula (which was formerly in the Argyll Council area), the local residents expressed their desire to once again be part of Argyll & Bute Council, whom they rely heavily on in the neighbouring Isle of Mull or at Oban, (both places involve making 1 or 2 ferry journeys), simply to access everyday services of doctors, dentist, pharmacy, shopping supplies and essential services. The residents I spoke with stated that Argyll & Bute Council seemed better equipped to understand and

support their remote and rural coastal areas, rather than the residents currently feel, as they stated as, “the forgotten and neglected, remote part of Highland Council”.

Would Highland Council be prepared to discuss making boundary changes with Argyll & Bute via the Scottish Government, if it helped the vast majority of the community on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula to feel better connected to a local authority that really understood their circumstances and practiced 'Localism' for its remote and rural communities and constituents?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, and if the constituents in remote and rural areas across the Highlands (in places like Ardnamurchan and Caithness and Sutherland) felt like they had been neglected and forgotten about after seeing roads crumbling as a result of years of underfunding (where visitors could barely read the road signs), it was queried as to when the Leader and the Chief Executive would next visit the community in Kilchoan or drive to Ardnamurchan Lighthouse to see for themselves the extent of the road repairs which were urgently needed and the lack of parking places?

In response, it was confirmed that the Leader intended to be on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula very soon.

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

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

**(1)**The Highland Council are grateful for the great partnership work that has taken place with SFRS over the years. However, we now call upon the Scottish Government and the responsible Minister, Ash Denham, to support SFRS to:

1. Introduce the previously agreed 3 crew minimum on the Rapid Response Units that are now deployed in order to reduce the risk to lives and property by complying with their statutory duty “to improve the safety and wellbeing of people throughout Scotland” (Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland),
2. Review initial training requirements/demands to investigate more modular courses, closer to home. This will improve recruitment in remote and rural areas,
3. In general terms, support SFRS efforts to simplify some methods of work to place more trust in front line firefighters, thereby reducing the likelihood/risk of non-attendance of the local unit(s).

Signed: Mr M Reiss Mr H Morrison Mr A MacKinnon

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- this Notice of Motion had been the subject of much thought in regard to the best way forward with the Council's partners, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) but it was considered that it had to be brought forward now as it was felt that there was a clear-cut risk to life;
- it had to be acknowledged that there had already been discussion over the past few years to try to resolve the specific issues which had been raised but without success;

- as detailed in the Motion, it was currently the case that even if there were 3 firefighters available at each of 2 Fire Stations closest to an accident, including in remote and rural areas, neither Station would be able to respond because there was a rigid and unbreakable rule in place that 4 firefighters had to be present in vehicles before they left Stations;
- it had been thought that much needed changes and flexibilities within this situation had already been agreed but to date they had not been implemented and this meant that the timescales for attendance at incidents remained very concerning, especially in remote areas;
- contrast was made with the Ambulance and Police services who sent the nearest available Units to respond to incidents and this was crucially important in parts of the Highland area;
- as part of this discussion, it was important to recognise that retained firefighters provided an excellent service across the Highlands which was often unseen;
- it was important to note that Ambulance services often referred to the 'golden hour' in which to get casualties to hospital and this could often depend on the attendance of firefighters at the scene of accidents;
- the safety of the public had to be paramount at all times and in this regard reference was made to the current crisis situation in North West Sutherland where the Fire Station in Tongue had not been operational for a 2 year period;
- it also had to be recognised that fire cover across the Highlands was predominantly retained (as opposed to full time) and it was important that local business and the general public in the North West Sutherland area in particular were aware of this (which included Highland Council);
- there had been progress on the issues which had been highlighted through discussion with the relevant parties but it was now time for action to be taken;
- the distances involved in remote and rural areas in terms of responses to incidents had to be recognised;
- whilst there was no problem with the principles of the Notice of Motion which had been submitted, it was felt that these issues were best left to the SFRS and the relevant Unions and in this regard a proposed amendment would be put forward in the following terms – The Highland Council are grateful for the great partnership work that has taken place with SFRS over the years. Council agrees to write to the Head of SFRS requesting an update in respect of plans to: 1. Introduce the previously agreed 3 crew minimum on the Rapid Response Units that are now deployed in order to reduce the risk to lives and property by complying with their statutory duty "to improve the safety and wellbeing of people throughout Scotland" (Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland), 2. Review initial training requirements/demands to investigate more modular courses, closer to home. This will improve recruitment in remote and rural areas, 3. Simplify some methods of work, placing more trust in front line firefighters, thereby reducing the likelihood/risk of non- attendance of the local unit(s). This Council will also help and work with any promotion by the SFRS for recruitment of firefighters;
- there was a need for objectivity in the consideration of the terms of the Motion as it was not felt that the Council should become involved in technical issues as Scottish Government Ministers could not break the Ministerial Code by instructing the SFRS how to employ its staff and the same applied to any review of initial training;
- whilst it was important to acknowledge the joint working with SFRS which had been outstanding over recent years, it was the case that the serious issues detailed in the Motion had to be raised in order to identify a solution;
- it was suggested that liaison with the Fire Master should perhaps be undertaken initially as opposed to including Scottish Ministers;

- there would a 6 monthly update from the SFRS at the next meeting of the Communities & Place Committee in November and it was envisaged that a further update would be provided at that time;
- it was imperative to recognise that the challenges and pressures were very different in remote and rural areas of the Highlands and as such there had to be deep evaluation and action in respect of the issues raised within the Motion; and
- residents in rural areas should perhaps be encouraged to contact Scottish Ministers in order to suggest/identify possible local solutions.

Thereafter, Mr M Reiss, seconded by Mr A MacKinnon, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Dr I Cockburn, seconded by Mr K Gowans, moved the following - that the Highland Council are grateful for the great partnership work that has taken place with SFRS over the years. Council agrees to write to the Head of SFRS requesting an update in respect of plans to: 1. Introduce the previously agreed 3 crew minimum on the Rapid Response Units that are now deployed in order to reduce the risk to lives and property by complying with their statutory duty “to improve the safety and wellbeing of people throughout Scotland” (Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland), 2. Review initial training requirements/demands to investigate more modular courses, closer to home. This will improve recruitment in remote and rural areas and 3. Simplify some methods of work, placing more trust in front line firefighters, thereby reducing the likelihood/risk of non- attendance of the local unit(s). This Council will also help and work with any promotion by the SFRS for recruitment of firefighters.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 39 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 15 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

#### **For the Motion**

Mr G Adam, Mr C Aitken, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mr W Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mr A Sinclair, Mr C Smith, Mr B Thompson and Ms J Tilt.

#### **For the Amendment**

Mr B Allan, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Dr I Cockburn, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Ms E Knox, Mr D Loudon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr A MacInnes, Mr G Mackenzie, Ms L Munro and Mr K Rosie.

#### **Abstention**

Mr B Lobban

#### **Decision**

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

(2) This Council agrees to make all and any necessary preparations to hold the December Full Council meeting in person, providing any restrictions permit.

Signed: Mr A Jarvie Mr S Mackie

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was the case that over 50% of other Scottish Local Authorities had now returned to some form of hybrid meeting and in fact some members of the Conservative Group were currently attending this meeting in person in the HQ Chamber. In addition, the Conservative Group had held a Group Meeting in HQ on the previous day which had been very effective, not least in terms of the face-to-face interaction which had been considered to have been extremely helpful for all concerned;
- it was noted that confirmation had been given that there were issues with how Public-i could run such a format but it was still felt that there must be an 'off the shelf' package which could be utilised or a return of the previous VC system whereby some Members attended a meeting in the HQ Chamber and other Members were able to attend Area Offices to take part in that meeting;
- it was also felt that meetings were now taking longer through being held remotely and were lacking the benefits of informal contact;
- whilst acknowledging the savings associated online meetings, it was still considered that longer meetings held in this way were not feasible and as such it was suggested that a date should now be set for a return to some kind of normality;
- there was concern that some Members were currently undermining Public Health messages by sitting in the HQ Chamber for this meeting;
- the potential impact on staff as a result of Members attending the meeting in person from within the HQ Chamber was worrying and particularly unfair;
- it was being assumed that the Members in the Chamber were not going to claim expenses for their unnecessary and unjustified attendance at the Council HQ building;
- it was suggested that this could be viewed as a 'political stunt' and as such it was not likely to find favour with the general public;
- the Scottish Government guidance began with the words 'The Coronavirus has not gone away' and this was something that Elected Members in particular should be more acutely aware of than others in light of the regular briefings received from NHS Highland and Highland Council colleagues;
- it was the responsibility of Elected Members (as community leaders) to set a good example and support people to stay safe;
- the Scottish Government guidance confirmed that (to stay safe) face coverings should be worn when and where required, hands should be washed regularly, meet up with others should be outdoors where possible, windows and doors should be kept open, social distancing should be implemented and working from home should be undertaken wherever possible;
- it was noted that Ward Managers had recently written to all Community Councils to recommend that they should continue to hold their meetings online and as such the wording of the Motion gave the impression that there was one rule for some but different rules for others;
- there was no need for a return to face-to-face meetings and in that regard it was noted that the Members currently attending the meeting from within the Council HQ Chamber were doing so on the TEAMS (online) platform. As such, they had now very effectively demonstrated that Members could attend meetings in that way if they so chose whilst other Members who wished to stay safe could continue to attend remotely from home;

- given the current levels of community transmission, the default position should remain as online meetings and favour those who did not wish to take the risk of attending meetings from the HQ Chamber and especially those who were more vulnerable to the virus or who cared for others in that category;
- in light of the comments which had been made during the debate, it was now intended to submit an amendment in the following terms – that the Council agrees to continue with current arrangements for attendance of the December Council meeting;
- meeting in the Chamber at some point remained an aspiration for everyone. In that regard, a precedent had already been set by the Redesign Board but that had been when it had been considered more conducive to the workshop environment which was necessary at that time and that could be replicated in the right circumstances going forward, perhaps through trials and pilots whilst implementing social distancing guidelines and adhering to the Scottish Government guidelines;
- bringing everyone together in December when so many factors were currently impinging on communities would not be appropriate;
- it had to be acknowledged that Officers would have no choice but to attend if in person meetings were to happen and therefore the Redesign Board process which had been suggested was the right way to take this forward so that the staff would have a voice and their opinions could be heard;
- bringing this Notice of Motion forward in this way had the effect of silencing the staff voice and it was hoped that there could be agreement to defer to the redesign proposal which was being put forward;
- it was suggested the Council Tax payers would rather see the Council saving money as opposed to bringing together approximately 100 people into one single room in December;
- this Notice of Motion had been brought forward on an aspirational basis and as an outward facing sign that the Council was beginning or at least attempting to return to normal;
- there was concern about some of the culture currently being adopted which it was felt was almost being made worse by online meetings;
- it was considered that the majority of meetings were taking four or five times longer than they needed to and would be easier to control in the Chamber;
- the demonstration of Members being able to take part in the meeting from the Chamber was welcomed and in line with what was happening in other Scottish Local Authorities and both the Scottish and UK Parliaments;
- it was felt that the Members attending from the HQ Chamber were being responsible, with the right kind of safeguards in place, and any attempt to politicise their behaviour was not supported;
- it was suggested that the Council was more effective when meetings were in person and that a return to such meetings would be supported by the general public;
- it was unclear as to why this Motion had been brought forward at this time as it concerned an issue which was constantly under review during a pandemic situation which was still ongoing. As such, it was felt that the Chief Executive and her staff (and also Members of the Council) were doing everything possible to ensure the safety of everyone;
- it was imperative that the Council continued to be guided by the science and return to meeting in person only when it was considered safe to do so without any need to force the issue;
- this was a matter for each individual Member to decide upon and they could choose to attend meetings in person or continue to take part through the TEAMS platform;
- there was concern at some of the accusations which had been made during

the discussion in relation to the Members who were currently attending the meeting from the HQ Chamber;

- it was the case that the Scottish Parliament had now returned to meeting in person and it was queried as to whether this would also be questioned in the same way as the terms of the Notice of Motion had been questioned during the debate;
- this was an issue which focused on balancing risks and taking the necessary precautions and in this regard it was noted that some community groups had now returned to meeting in person;
- account also had to be taken of family members who had to be protected by both Members and Officers and this would have a bearing on whether they were able to return to in person meetings;
- using an example of attending funerals was not felt appropriate as there were very different arrangements in place and the timescales for attendance were vastly different in many cases;
- decisions on this issue had to come down to personal responsibility and managed choice, with regular updates for Members on work being undertaken in terms of returning to in person meetings, and account also had to be taken of Officers in this respect;
- above all, there had to be flexibility in terms of allowing those who wanted to return to in person meetings to do so whilst also allowing others to continue to attend meetings through TEAMS and this had to apply to Officers as well as Members of the Council; and
- in any assessment of risk, account had to be taken of the fact that attendance at meetings within the HQ Chamber could often be for in excess of 7/8 hours and this would also impact on the Officers involved in such meetings.

At this point, the Convener advised that, in line with Standing Order 12. the time had now expired for discussion of this Notice of Motion and therefore no decision could be taken at this meeting.

It was confirmed that the Motion could be carried forward to the next meeting on 9 December if requested and/or discussion undertaken before that time if necessary.

Thereafter, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, **MOVED** suspension of Standing Order 12 to allow discussion to continue at this meeting.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr J Gray, seconded by Mrs H Carmichael, moved that there should be no suspension of Standing Order 12.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 13 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 39 votes, with 4 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

#### **For the Motion**

Mr C Aitken, Mr R Balfour, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr A Sinclair and Mr C Smith.

#### **For the Amendment**

Mr G Adam, Mr B Allan, Mrs J Barclay, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Dr I Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr A Henderson, Ms E Knox, Mr D Loudon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr A MacInnes, Mr W Mackay, Mr G

Mackenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr C MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Mr D Rixson, Mr K Rosie, Mr B Thompson and Ms J Tilt.

### **Abstentions**

Mr J Gordon, Mr B Lobban, Ms L Munro and Mr M Reiss.

### **No Decision taken**

**(3)** This Council agrees to commence payments of Self-Directed Support (SDS) to Young Carers by the end of this month and, at the same time, make back-payments for SDS wrongly withheld from Young Carers.

Signed: Mr D Louden Mrs M Cockburn

During discussion, and on the basis that it was now proposed to put forward an amended Motion, appreciation was recorded for the work undertaken by unpaid carers, both adults and young carers, and not least during the pandemic. As such, the importance of this work could not be overstated and it was necessary to also acknowledge the work of the Social Work teams involved. Going forward, it was imperative that support was provided for young carers through the most appropriate mechanisms.

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the following Amended Motion -

Highland Council recognises the amazing job done by Young Carers across the Highlands in caring for their relatives during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We commit to the provision of Self-Directed Support and recognise the burden placed on young people and particularly the additional difficulties they have faced whilst traditional respite facilities were unavailable as a result of the pandemic. We consequently commit to the reintroduction of respite in accordance with Scottish Government guidelines.

The funding to support young carers has been budgeted for and this motion seeks to ensure that young carers have the intended flexibility to enable them to receive the support they need, when they need it. This may include the provision of SDS budget directly to the young person to secure the support they need or to an adult on their behalf.

### **Declarations of Interest – Notice of Motion (4) below -**

**Mr G Adam declared two non-financial interests in this item on the basis of currently being a part-owner of a short term let (although he would not be by the time the proposed legislation came into force) and also as a Director of a glamping business 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 the item.**

**Mr J Gordon declared a financial interest in this item as an Airbnb provider but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the item.**

**Mr C Munro declared a financial interest in this item as the owner of a self-catering business and, having applied the test, confirmed that he would not take part in the item.**

**Miss J Campbell declared a financial interest in this item as the owner of a rented property (not Airbnb) and, having applied the test, confirmed that she would not take part in the item.**

**Mrs I Campbell declared a financial interest in this item as the owner of self-catering accommodation and, having applied the test, confirmed that she would not take part in the item.**

**Mrs C Caddick declared a financial interest in this item on the basis of having a part share in a self-catering unit and, having applied the test, confirmed that she would not take part in the item.**

**(4)** Council strongly urges the Scottish Government to drop its proposed licensing scheme for short-term holiday lets and instead adopt the registration scheme proposed by the Association of Scottish Self Caterers. This would be far less costly for operators and less onerous for the Highland Council to administer, whilst providing proven health and safety protection. The proposed scheme is not appropriate for the Highlands.

Signed: Mr G Adam Mr A Graham Mr C Aitken

Prior to discussion, and on the request of the Convener, the Head of Corporate Governance confirmed that it was clear from the declarations of interest which had been received that a number of Members had already given the terms of this Motion some thought.

As such, he clarified that all Members of the Council should consider their position in terms of whether they might have a financial interest in premises or businesses which operated as short term lets (or were likely to be registered as short term lets) and, if this was the case, they should take appropriate action in accordance with the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Thereafter, and in response to a query as to whether the mover of the Motion (Mr G Adam) had a potential conflict of interest in this issue, Mr Adam confirmed that he had been advised not to bring this Motion to the Council as the owner of a short term let property. However, he would not be the owner of that property after the Summer of 2022 (and before any new legislation came into effect) and on that basis he respectfully disagreed with the advice which had been offered to him and would take part in this item.

He also expressed concern in relation to the Members who had declared an interest as owners of short term let properties and/or B&B properties and who felt (both because of that declaration and the current rules) that they could not take part in the item. It was his opinion that those Members had considerable expertise in this matter and for that reason their views should be heard. As such, it was therefore his intention to raise this situation with the Standards Commission in due course.

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

- this Motion provided Members with a 'last minute' chance to influence legislation being put before the Scottish Parliament over the next few weeks which would fundamentally alter the way that short term lets and B&Bs were

regulated. As such, a licensing scheme was now being proposed which would result in far more bureaucracy, additional cost and significant uncertainty for the approximately 10k short term let and B&B owners in the Highlands;

- the Scottish Government had faced significant opposition on this issue and had made some concessions but not on the key issue which was to replace the licensing scheme with a registration scheme. In this respect, it had been estimated that around 6 new members of staff would be needed by the Council, at least initially, as a result of the new legislation and this would impact on budgets which were already under pressure;
- it was also being proposed that the costs of the new scheme would be recovered from additional charges to operators and it was anticipated that such costs could be considerable;
- the vast majority of such premises in the Highlands were already of a high standard and professionally run so the compromise being offered by the Association for Scottish Self Caterers was that these professional properties should be registered, with licensing reserved for unregistered properties of a lower standard;
- it was also not considered that this legislation should be applied to the Highlands as it was felt that it had been drafted to address problems which had been highlighted in other parts of Scotland;
- this issue mattered because tourism underpinned the Highland economy and was probably the largest private sector employer in the area. As such, the proposed licensing scheme proposed a significant risk on the basis that it might drive a large number of smaller operators out of the tourism business;
- it had to be acknowledged that there were now a considerable number of properties in the Highlands which had been turned into short term lets or AirBnB premises and this was creating a range of issues, including having a detrimental effect on the future development of housing. In this respect, the proposed legislation being brought forward by the Scottish Government sought to address a number of issues, including in relation to tourism, and it was important that the consultation process proceeded as planned in order to allow all opinions and responses to be submitted;
- an amendment would be put forward at the appropriate time for the Council to recognise the Scottish Government proposals for a licensing scheme for short term holiday lets and encourage communities to make their representations through the appropriate channels;
- there was already evidence of social disturbance attached to short term lets, AirBnB premises, pods, etc and a significant increase in the number of properties across the Highlands which were now being classed as 'party houses'. This was having a negative effect in local areas and especially in remote and rural communities where responses to such disturbances could often not be as quick as in urban areas;
- there was absolutely a need for licensing of properties where there was no overall control, not least to provide protection for adjacent properties and communities;
- it was not felt that the proposed legislation was the best way to deal with the issues which had been identified as it would effectively just be 'adding on' to what was considered by some to be an already flawed licensing process and not fundamentally addressing this situation; and
- whilst there were clearly issues with some properties, it was not correct to class all short term let and AirBnB properties in the same way and attribute the same problems/issues to them all.

Thereafter, Mr G Adam, seconded by Mr A Graham, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Dr I Cockburn, seconded by Mr K Gowans, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Council should recognise the Scottish Government proposals for a licensing scheme for short term holiday lets and encourage communities to make their representations through the appropriate channels.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 20 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 18 votes, with 5 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

Mr G Adam, Mr C Aitken, Mrs J Barclay, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr D Fraser, Mr A Graham, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr D Mackay, Mr W Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr D Rixson, Mr A Sinclair and Ms J Tilt.

**For the Amendment:**

Mr B Allan, Mr R Balfour, Mr B Boyd, Mrs M Cockburn, Dr I Cockburn, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Gray, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr A MacInnes, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr C MacLeod, Mr M Reiss and Mr B Thompson.

**Abstentions:**

Miss J Campbell, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr H Morrison and Mrs P Munro.

**Decision**

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

**(5)** The Highland Council is profoundly concerned at the recent escalating energy prices which are having a serious impact on both domestic and business users across Highland.

It is understood that the Scottish Government has been allocated £41m from the UK Government (as a consequence of the Barnett formula) who are providing additional funding for vulnerable households across the country to help them with essentials over the coming months.

Recognising that fuel poverty is a significant issue for many of our Highland citizens, who will be forced to choose between food or fuel this winter, and we need urgent action. The Council asks that the Scottish Government uses these funds to expand the Winter Fuel Payment to include those of working age on Universal Credit, in addition to pensioners who already receive this payment.

The current situation demonstrates the pressing need for a strategic review of our energy supply, market and infrastructure. While the Scottish Government have announced a number of measures to decarbonise our energy needs in their Programme for Government, the Council believes that both the Scottish and UK Governments should work together to commission a Strategic Energy Review to consider the Country's energy requirements with a view to ensuring they are both sustainable and resilient.

Signed: Mrs M Davidson Mr A Henderson

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was now significant concern around the escalation in electricity and gas prices, not least in light of the daunting prospect of further price rises which were expected in the Spring;
- in terms of the short term situation, it was suggested that the Council should now ask the Scottish Government to consider using some of the Barnett Consequentials to increase welfare/winter payments for not only pensioners but also those families who had just lost some of their Universal Credit payments;
- there was serious concern in relation to the substantial difficulties which could now be faced by many people and especially those with illnesses and disabilities who had to stay at home and as a result had to cope with very large energy bills;
- whilst it was acknowledged that new proposals were coming forward to address some of these issues, there was a need for scrutiny of such proposals in the first instance in order to decide on their potential effectiveness and this would be undertaken as soon as possible;
- there was also a need to study the budget settlement (once received) in order to consider whether there was anything that the Council could do to help with current fuel poverty issues and in this respect it was confirmed that a further report on this particular issue would be submitted to the December Council meeting, perhaps as part of a budget report at that time;
- it was hoped that both the UK Government and the Scottish Government would review the current position in relation to wholesale gas prices in order to put measures in place wherever possible to avoid a repeat of this situation in the future;
- it had to be acknowledged that many of the problems across the Highlands in relation to this issue were beyond the control of the Scottish Government. As such, there was now an urgent need for OFGEM (which was only answerable to the UK Government) to speak to both the Scottish Government and the Highland Council in regard to the current situation;
- issues to be followed up with OFGEM included access to the distribution grid (which they controlled), the extra 2p per kw hour on bills in the Highlands, the waste of switched off wind power and opportunities to decarbonise transport;
- this was not about apportioning blame or turning this into a political issue but instead on focusing on mitigating and helping those most affected by the current situation who were often unable to pay energy bills and as a result were cut off by their energy providers which was a serious situation;
- consideration should be given to the siting of wind turbines on land owned by the Council which could generate future income, not least through constraint payments;
- there was a need for a holistic view to be taken on this issue with a further report being submitted to the December Council meeting with proposals for any potential schemes which could perhaps be put in place as a matter of priority;
- there were currently people across the Highlands who had serious health issues as a result of having to live in houses with cold temperatures and experience dietary issues because they could not afford to heat their properties and/or buy food and this was clearly not acceptable;
- the Council had to use whatever influence it had in order to find ways to address what was a human rights issue;
- it was completely wrong that people in the Highlands had to pay the most for energy when the majority of that energy was actually produced in the area;

- it was also felt that more advice and information needed to be provided to encourage people to review and if necessary change their current tariffs;
- it should also be highlighted on the Council Website that the Scottish Government were currently making a payment available in relation to energy needs for families with children who were disabled; and
- it had to be restated that this was a matter under the control of the UK Government who had the power to address the issues which had been highlighted during the debate.

### **Decision**

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

**(6) National Care Service** - This Council is determined to take the lead in promoting the National Care Service development as described in the Scottish Government independent investigation report (Feeley).

We can take the lead and incorporate valuable experiences from the diverse communities in Highlands. It may be appropriate to begin with improvements in adult social care.

Signed: Mr B Boyd      Mrs M Cockburn

(It was **NOTED** at the meeting that this Notice of Motion had now been withdrawn).

## **9. Medium Term Financial Plan – Update Planadh Ionmhasail Meadhan-Ùine**

### **Declarations of Interest –**

**Ms L Munro, 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 their involvement in the discussion.**

**Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest as a Director of Highland Opportunities Investment Ltd and as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust but, having applied the test, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

**Mr D Macpherson, Mrs H Carmichael and Mrs C Caddick, Mr C MacLeod and Mr G Adam declared non-financial interests as Directors of Highland Opportunities Investment Ltd but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.**

**Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest on the basis that a close family member was employed by High Life Highland and, having applied the test, confirmed that if there was any discussion around High Life Highland's budget line then he would not take part.**

**Mr A Christie declared a financial interest as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

**Mr D Loudon declared a financial interest in Recommendation (vii) as a Council appointed Director of Highland Opportunity & Investments Ltd and, having applied the test, confirmed that he would remain & take part in the discussion - but not in respect of recommendation (vii) – and at the outcome of the debate, he would switch off his camera and not participate in any vote.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/26/21 dated 14 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was noted that the Plan would be considered by the Council at this meeting and also the next meeting on 9 December and then finalised in March 2022;
- key factors to be highlighted included the importance of scenario planning, the policy and operational savings proposals and the clearer links between the capital and revenue strategies;
- attention had to be drawn to the support which had been provided by the Scottish Government, especially in relation to Covid-19, which had helped to facilitate the build-up of an unprecedented level of reserves;
- with £1.6bn of ideas for capital investment, it would be important to support communities to facilitate innovative solutions and to prioritise their investment requirements;
- the importance of income generation through commercial activities, rather than through increases in council tax, was emphasised;
- the report covered more than the medium term, as indicated in the title, and it was felt that of the 21 projects for which amendments were being sought, only 5 had appropriately detailed accompanying papers. On the basis that 2022 was likely to be a challenging year for many businesses, and with the Council's current level of reserves, it was considered unjustifiable to reduce funding to close partners and increase levies on businesses;
- it was suggested by some Members that they had not been given sufficient advance notice of the proposals in the report;
- in response to concerns about the proposed budget reduction to High Life Highland, it was highlighted that this was the same percentage reduction being faced by the Council;
- the senior management team were thanked for their recent efforts to provide key worker housing for communities on Rum and Eigg. In this respect, examples were provided of other rural areas where key workers had failed to find accommodation and policies were therefore required to address this issue, not least in terms of its potential impact on rural depopulation;
- noting that Highland Council had the highest number of school buildings in poor condition in comparison with all other Local Authorities in Scotland, it was highlighted that it was important to plan for longer than five years;
- whilst welcoming progress on the ten capital projects for Schools, it was suggested that in some cases refurbishment rather than rebuilding might achieve better value;
- there was concern that further centralisation could erode local democracy;
- it would be important to benchmark the Council's performance against other similar Local Authorities in Scotland;
- the Council's level of debt was of concern and, although interest rates were currently low, it was important not to increase borrowing without fully considering the consequences;
- in comparison with other Local Authorities, Highland Council already had the highest proportion of revenue funding being used to finance capital investment;
- the confirmation that meetings of the cross-party Corporate Resources Budget

Sub Committee were to be arranged again was welcomed;

- the proposed £200k cut to amenities was of concern, particularly given the importance of tourism to the Highlands and the lack of information on how this would be implemented;
- the value of having wilder and more natural areas of land was aspirational and it was welcomed that this would be delivered as part of culture change through engagement with local communities;
- assurance was sought and provided that the gross project budget for Culloden Academy remained at £19.2m;
- disappointment was expressed at various elements in the report relating to the Corran Ferry, including the proposal to raise £100k through fees, insufficient engagement with the local community on the fare structure, the proposals not having been discussed by the Sub-Committee (whose role was to scrutinise such projects), no capital commitment to funding a replacement vessel, smart-ticketing not yet in operation and on the basis that the local community was effectively being asked to subsidise the service. In relation to smart ticketing in particular, it was pointed out that Calmac had been trying to introduce this for 5-6 years without success due to unforeseen complications;
- also in relation to the Corran Ferry, particular concern was expressed at the proposed 3% increase in prepaid tickets for local residents and it was suggested that the £13k which would be raised by this should instead be obtained by increasing walk-up fares by an equivalent amount;
- noting that the North Coast Care facility report was to be considered in private due to commercial interests, it was however important to praise the community and staff engagement on this project in public;
- it had to be highlighted that Highland Council had the smallest revenue budget in relation to its asset base and it was therefore essential that all Members worked together to lobby the Scottish Government for the allocation formula to be rectified in order to be able to facilitate appropriate maintenance and replacement of assets;
- a flexible approach to the Plan was urged, noting the further investment that was required for roads, housing, school buildings, play parks and other areas (some of which were statutory obligations, others more aspirational);
- it would be important for the Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee to consider the merits of projects and commercialisation opportunities in order to mitigate budget pressures and control over-spends;
- challenging decisions required to be made in regard to capital and revenue expenditure as part of the redesign process and this would require appropriate engagement with communities; and
- it had to be acknowledged that the revenue and capital budgets were more complex and inter-connected than they had been in the past.

Thereafter, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr J Gray, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

As a **FIRST AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr S Mackie, moved the removal of recommendation (iii) and the proposed savings items.

As a **SECOND AMENDMENT**, Mr B Allan, seconded by Mr D Loudon, moved an addition to the wording in recommendation (iii) as follows – ‘except there shall be no increase in the cost of pre-paid ticket books for the Corran Ferry and that the shortfall in the overall savings shall be spread over the increase in drive-up fare categories’.

On a vote being taken between the **FIRST AMENDMENT** and the **SECOND AMENDMENT**, the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 10 votes and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 43 votes, with 3 abstentions, and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the First Amendment**

Mr R Balfour, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr C Fraser, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A Sinclair and Mr C Smith.

**For the Second Amendment**

Mr G Adam, Mr C Aitken, Mr B Allan, Mrs J Barclay, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr R Gale, 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, Mr W Mackay, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs P Munro, Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mr K Rosie and Mr B Thompson.

**Abstentions**

Mr L Fraser, Mr J Gordon and Ms J Tilt.

(At this point, the mover of the original Motion indicated that he was willing to incorporate the terms of the Second Amendment into the Motion).

**Decision**

Members:-

- (i) **NOTED** the medium-term planning assumptions as outlined in Section 5 of the report;
- (ii) **NOTED** the potential range for the 2022/23 budget gap as outlined in Section 6.14 and **AGREED** that a meeting of the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee should consider the approaches to be taken should the 'worse case' scenario prevail;
- (iii) **APPROVED** £1.610m of savings to be delivered in 2022/23 as described in Section 7 and Appendix 1, except that there should be no increase in the cost of pre-paid ticket books for the Corran Ferry and that the shortfall in the overall savings should be spread over the increase in drive-up fare categories;
- (iv) **NOTED** the work that had been carried out on the Council's capital strategy and areas of statutory responsibility at Section 8 and **AGREED** that further discussion would be taken forward in the Corporate Resources Sub Committee in advance of the December Council meeting;
- (v) **NOTED** the update provided in relation to the North Coast Care facility, previously approved by the Council, with separate detailed consideration to be undertaken via the separate agenda item on that subject;
- (vi) **AGREED** in principle to progress housing options on Rum and Eigg for key staff; and
- (vii) **APPROVED** that Highland Opportunity Investments Limited (HOIL) should operate the Community Loans Fund for the Council with the Council's Corporate Resources Committee reviewing any appeals against decisions made by HOIL in respect of the Fund.

**10. External Audit Update and Wider Scope Report 2020/21 – Grant Thornton  
Aithisg Bhliadhnaile Sgrùdadh-airgid on Taobh A-muigh 2020/21 – Comas nas Farsainghe**

**Declarations of Interest –**

**Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied 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 B Thompson, Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.**

**Mr K Gowans declared a non-financial interest on the basis that a close family member was employed by High Life Highland (and High Life Highland were noted in the appended report) and, having applied the test, confirmed that if there was any specific discussion around High Life Highland then he would not take part.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/27/21 dated 15 October 2021 by the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager.

It was also noted that Ms J Brown, Grant Thornton, was in attendance and could respond to any questions if necessary.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- this was a very important report which provided an independent assessment of the Council's financial management, governance and delivery of best value and it had been considered in detail by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in September. As such, many positive aspects had been highlighted at that time, as well as the guidance within the report on the areas for improvement;
- there was a need to thank the External Auditors for the support provided to Council staff and the positive report which aligned with internal assessments of progress on the Best Value Improvement Plan;
- key messages included recognition of sound financial management/improved financial performance and good progress in addressing recommendations from the Plan and this was testimony to the hard work and dedication of staff;
- there were still areas for improvement and as such it was important not to be complacent, particularly in light of the increasing levels of challenge and financial risk still to be faced in an uncertain environment, including as a consequence of Covid-19;
- it was noted that the Council would continue to work with partners on commitments within the Future Highlands Strategy;
- it was suggested that the endorsement in respect of governance and transparency within the Council was not necessarily a view shared by all Members whose recollections of the past 18-24 months differed from what was contained in the report;
- it was felt by some Members that decisions had been taken 'behind closed doors' with an element of 'secrecy' and that there had been repeated challenges to any element of scrutiny;
- there was also concern that some Members (who were not part of the Administration) felt that they had been regularly excluded, that dissenting

voices had been quashed in any way possible and questions had been left unanswered;

- following a query, it was noted that the conclusions within the report had been reached as part of a desk top exercise and as such not all Members of the Council had been spoken to as part of the process or given the opportunity to submit their views. In this respect, the External Auditor confirmed that the focus had been on the overall transparency of the Council's governance arrangements and how it had moved within a remote environment through the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of accessibility/availability of information on the Website and through Webcasts;
- requests had previously been made for information on how Elected Members could directly contact the External Auditors and in this regard the detailed contact information which had now been provided within the report was noted and welcomed; and
- the focus on the completion of the Community Planning Partnership review of Locality Planning (which was critical) was also welcomed;

### **Decision**

Members **NOTED**:-

- (i) the overall positive external audit of the Council's progress in delivering the BVAR improvement plan;
- (ii) the positive progress on the Council's financial position and financial management highlighted in the external audit report; and
- (iii) that annual reports would be provided on progress against Best Value duties, including the BVAR through internal assessment and external audit.

### **11. Future Highlands – Health and Prosperity Strategic Partnership Plan SPP1: Green Energy Hub for Scotland Ro-innleachd Com-pàirteachas Ro-innleachdail**

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

There had been circulated Report No. HC/28/21 dated 18 October 2021 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the report represented a summary of the current position but it was likely that this would change in the next 2-3 month period and as such regular updates would be provided;
- the Leader had attended a recent Convention of the Highlands & Islands meeting which had been very useful and informative, including discussion with the Crown Estates on substantial offshore wind leasing which was being undertaken. In that regard, future phases which would be moving North and West and would involve the Highlands for many years to come which was warmly welcomed. There had also been a report from the Consortium of Offshore Wind Providers whose main recommendation was to use the Cromarty Firth and this was extremely encouraging. As such, the Council would continue to discuss the Freeport and Greenport possibilities with both the Scottish Government and the UK Government;

- it was noted that a correction required to be made to Paragraph 2.3 within the report whereby reference should have been made to the time period from November 2021 to May 2022;
- the endorsement of the Cromarty Firth as the top priority for this type of development was a huge boost for the Organisations and Officers involved and represented a strategic investment opportunity for both Scotland and the UK as a whole;
- there was a strong desire to see more of the benefits from this type of resource achieved locally, whether through a share of the income or a share of the capital gains from developments taking place in the Highlands;
- it was suggested that where there was spare offshore wind, it should be brought to the shore to benefit communities by producing hydrogen around the coast. As such, there was a unique opportunity for completely carbon free electricity to be produced right across the Highlands which would have the effect of providing a bigger, cleaner and greener future for all;
- this was one of the most important reports to come before the Council and as such it was imperative that all aspects were considered fully in order to achieve success. In that respect, collaboration, integration and adoption of a shared vision with partners would be key and an update was needed to ensure that the range of partners had now been expanded (as previously requested) to as wide a level as possible;
- thanks were conveyed to the Officers concerned for the extensive work which had been undertaken over many years before reaching this point;
- it was imperative that the Council now moved as fast as it could in relation to the pace of change which would involve many issues, including reducing the size of the Council's built estate;
- the proposals around carbon sequestration with partners were welcomed;
- further reports had been requested on promotion of the Council as a 'carbon sink'/location for tree planting and also in relation to the provision of District Heating Schemes but both reports were still awaited;
- the case study for the Energy Hub at the Longman was very exciting for the future of the area;
- the opportunities which could be made available across the Highlands would have the effect of increasing the reputation of the area as the greenest and healthiest part of the UK;
- there was massive potential now to secure improvements across a range of issues/areas, not least in relation to the template which had been provided to maximise benefits. As part of this, it was crucial to ensure the highest possible levels of local employment going forward; and
- the potential benefits arising from pump storage within the Highlands had to be promoted more fully and pursued at every opportunity by the Council.

### **Decision**

Members:-

- (i) **NOTED** the progress being made to develop the first strand of 'Future Highlands' and **AGREED** the Strategy for SPP1 at Appendix 1 of the report;
- (ii) **AGREED** to re-state the Council's endorsement of Opportunity Cromarty Firth and support their bid for Greenport and Freeport status;
- (iii) **AGREED** that an Action Plan for SPP1 would be developed in partnership with key stakeholders and progress would be reported through the Climate Change Working Group;
- (iv) **NOTED** that further updates on all five Strategic Partnership Priorities would be brought to future Council meetings; and

- (v) **NOTED** that detailed oversight of specific projects would be taken forward through the appropriate Strategic Committees and Boards.

## **12. National Care Service for Scotland Consultation Co-chomhairle Seirbheis Cùraim Nàiseanta**

### **Declarations of Interest –**

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

**Ms L Munro declared a financial interest on the basis of being employed by Carr Gomm as an SDS Advisor and, having applied the test, confirmed that if there was any specific discussion in that regard then she would leave the meeting.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/29/21 dated 5 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- this was the most important and 'future proofing' piece of work to come before the Council as there were few families across the Highlands who would not have been touched by social care in some way;
- what was being proposed were better terms for social care workers, better terms and 'person centredness' in relation to service recognition and fairer deals in person centred care;
- it had to be acknowledged that the current system was 'broken' and there was a genuine clamour for change across Highland communities;
- whilst there was no clear way forward at the moment, it was felt that there should be priority given to adult social care and that the 'steady and sure' approach would be best;
- it was appreciated that every Member of the Council had the opportunity to become involved in the consultation process;
- the Scottish Government were welcoming contributions from all in order to build on what was already in place and improve where necessary and as such Local Authorities should have confidence that they would not lose their influence as a result of this consultation;
- this was an opportunity for the Council to be an active participant and partner throughout the process and there had to be full engagement in order to ensure the best results for the Highland area;
- it was felt that specific areas on which contributions should be made included governance, identification of innovative ways of working, improving care sector conditions for staff and highlighting single point of contact issues;
- thanks should be conveyed to Officers for the report, which had also highlighted potential areas of difficulty and uncertainty within the proposals and would hopefully be helpful for the Scottish Government;
- the priority had to be the provision of better care for service users and better pay/conditions for service providers;
- with reference to Appendix 1 within the report, Question 8 (Establishing a Right to Breaks from Caring), and specifically the section entitled 'A Right for all Carers versus Thresholds for Accessing Support', it was suggested that the box marked 'Universal Right for All Carers' should have been selected. In

response, it was confirmed that this particular issue would be discussed in full at a forthcoming Seminar;

- Also in relation to Appendix 1, Question 13 (Most Important Elements in a New System for Complaints about Social Care Services), it was suggested that the box marked 'Charter of Rights and Responsibilities' should have been selected so that people could know what to expect. In response, it was confirmed that more detail would be sought on this particular issue before coming to a decision;
- it was hoped that the Briefings and Seminars for all Members would continue as they had been very helpful to date;
- the Scottish Government had requested that the Council provide current examples of best practise and clarification was sought in terms of which specific examples had been provided;
- there had to be strong focus on and priority given to the provision of a National Care Record;
- the Council now had an opportunity to co-create and design what was needed on a local basis across the Highlands;
- in relation to local democracy, it had been stated within the Council response that 'As the arrangements are currently set out, the only recourse for an individual to appeal to an elected representative would be to a Scottish Government Minister compared to now, where the public can approach their ward member. This runs contrary to the Christie principles and also the European Charter of Local Self-Government which was recently endorsed by the Scottish Parliament' and clarification was sought on the legal implications in this regard;
- an additional recommendation was now proposed - to ask the Council to resolve that any future legislative reorganisation of Adult Social Care should have at its centre local accountability and local decision making by democratically elected Local Members – which would hopefully help to address the concerns which had been raised during the debate in regard to loss of local accountability;
- there had been significant progress made in relation to integration in the past weeks and months and this would be shared with Members in due course;
- it would be important to focus on looked after children and residential care as part of future discussions;
- there was a need for evidence to confirm that the 'The Promise' was working for children in care and their families;
- a further additional recommendation was now proposed to seek agreement for continuation of Member Update Seminars to enable further consideration of, and in tandem with, Scottish Government updates in respect of a National Care Service; and
- it had to be highlighted that the Scottish Government were listening and very interested in receiving a response from Highland Council.

### **Decision**

Members:-

- (i) **NOTED** the engagement with staff and Members in terms of informing the response to this consultation;
- (ii) **AGREED** headings set out in section 6 of the report which shaped the Council's formal response and **APPROVED** the Council's response at Appendix 1 of the report;
- (iii) **AGREED** to seek assurances from the Scottish Government that there would be continued engagement with local government in the development of their

proposals so that local needs, challenges and opportunities could be fully represented and reflected;

- (iv) **AGREED** that there would be continuing engagement with COSLA and Solace in terms of the impact the proposals may have had on local authority functions going forward;
- (v) **AGREED** that any future legislative re-organisation of Adult Social Care should have at its centre local accountability and local decision making by democratically elected Local Members; and
- (vi) **AGREED** to continue with Member Update Seminars for further consideration of, and in tandem with, Scottish Government updates in respect of a National Care Service.

### 13. Annual Review of Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings Ath-sgrùdadh air Gnàth-riaghailtean

There had been circulated Report No. HC/30/21 dated 26 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

#### **Decision**

The Council:-

- (i) **AGREED** the revision to Standing Order 12 set out in Section 4 of the report; and
- (ii) **NOTED** that a Members' Survey would be issued in the coming weeks which would include a section on governance arrangements which would help to inform whether to consider further adjustments to Standing Orders.

### 14. Platinum Jubilee Iùbailidh Platanaim

There had been circulated Report No. HC/31/21 dated 18 October 2021 by Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

#### **Decision**

The Council:-

- (i) **AGREED** that the additional public holiday on 3 June 2022 should be taken; and
- (ii) **NOTED** that offices and schools would be closed (subject to Scottish Government approval as per Section 5.2 of the report) with minimal service provision on that day, such as emergency services and waste.

### 15. Timetable of Meetings 2022 Clàr-ama Choinneamhan 2022

It was **AGREED** that a meeting of the Pensions Committee should be held on 14 February 2022.

It was also **AGREED** that further consideration should be given to the scheduling of the South Planning Applications Committee on 3 May 2022 which was still considered to be too close to the date of the Local Government Election (5 May).

**16. 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 9 September 2021 was available on the Council's Website.

**17. 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 item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**18. North Coast Care Facility – Recommended Delivery Option**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/32/21 dated 12 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

Following discussion, the Council **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 5.15pm.

**The Highland Council  
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 3 November 2021 at 10.00am.

**Present:**

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

Mr K Rosie  
Mr A Sinclair  
Ms J Tilt

**Officials in attendance:**

Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Mr M Sutherland, Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Mrs A Donald, North Area Manager, Education and Learning  
Ms H Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School, Education and Learning  
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Dr S Andrews, Flow Country World Heritage Bid Coordinator, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Housing and Property  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

**Also in Attendance:**

Station Commander P Farrell, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

1.	<p><b>Appointment of Chair</b> <b>Cur an Dreuchd Cathraiche</b></p> <p>Mr W Mackay, Vice Chair, invited nominations for the appointment of a Chair of the Caithness Committee.</p> <p>Mr K Rosie seconded by Mr W Mackay <b>moved</b> that <b>Mr R Bremner</b> be appointed Chair.</p> <p>Mr A Sinclair seconded by Mr M Reiss <b>moved</b> that <b>Mr S Mackie</b> be appointed Chair.</p> <p>On the matter being put to a vote, nominations were cast as follows:-</p> <p><u>Mr R Bremner (4)</u> Mr R Bremner, Mr W Mackay, Mr K Rosie, Ms J Tilt</p> <p><u>Mr S Mackie (3)</u> Mr S Mackie, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Sinclair</p> <p><b><u>Decision</u></b> The Committee <b>AGREED</b> to appoint <b>Mr R Bremner</b> as Chair of the Caithness Committee.</p>
----	---

2.	<p><b>Apologies for Absence</b> <b>Leisgeulan</b></p> <p>An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D Mackay.</p>
3.	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b> <b>Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt</b></p> <p>Item 7: Ms J Tilt (non-financial) Item 9: Mr K Rosie (non-financial)</p>
4.	<p><b>Minutes</b> <b>Geàrr-chunntas</b></p> <p>There were circulated for noting Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 12 August 2021, which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021, the terms of which were <b>NOTED</b>.</p>
5.	<p><b>Matters Arising – Action Tracker</b> <b>Gnothaichean Ag Èirigh – Tracair Ghniomhan</b></p> <p>There had been circulated an action tracker which detailed the actions arising from previous meetings.</p> <p><b>Item 6</b> - Mr S Mackie advised that he had written to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the refurbishment of Thurso Fire Station, and following subsequent discussions with the Service he considered that from a Member perspective all courses of action had been taken.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed the remaining actions continued to be ongoing.</p> <p>The Committee <b>NOTED</b> the updates to the action tracker.</p>
6.	<p><b>Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report</b> <b>Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba</b></p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/20/21 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the assistance Members could provide to encourage more recruits to come forward and for employers to release their staff, particularly for the initial training requirements, details of which were provided;</li> <li>• the opportunity for Members to recognise the achievements of employers locally who already accommodated the time off required by firefighters;</li> <li>• confirmation was sought and provided that there had been a considerable level of interest locally in the legislation which required homeowners to have interlinked fire and heat alarms, including referrals from partner organisations; and</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an explanation was sought and provided on the options available for purchasing and fitting the new interlinked alarms. The Service's community safety advocates would also pick up on this issue as part of their home fire safety visits. The Service could provide the interlinked alarms in certain circumstances and was unable to comment on how insurance companies were viewing this issue.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee <b>NOTED</b> following scrutiny, the Area Performance Report.</p>
7.	<p><b>Thurso Associated School Group Overview</b>  <b>Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Inbhir Theòrsa</b></p> <p><b>Declarations of Interest:- Ms J Tilt declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds a family member was employed at Miller Academy and a family member attended Halkirk Primary School, Thurso 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.</b></p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/21/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.</p> <p>The North Area Manager and Head Teacher, Thurso High School provided an update in relation to the report.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the progress in relation to nursery new builds and the ongoing work around developing the young workforce was welcomed;</li> <li>• concern was expressed at the reduction in ASN staffing levels within the ASG and an explanation was sought and provided this had been necessary due to a reduction in the Council's overall ASN budget;</li> <li>• the need for Members to instigate a consultation with the community on the Thurso High School's estate going forward, concern being expressed at the lack of finance and investment over recent years;</li> <li>• The Head Teacher advised that if funding was provided to maintain the existing buildings, there was no significant need for a new build, however there was a need for repairs to be actioned more quickly and for her to be given more support in having outstanding repairs carried out. There was also a need to invest in improving the School's outdoor all weather sports facilities in line with new builds;</li> <li>• it was disappointing that negotiations to acquire land to improve the bus turning area at Thurso High School could not be progressed further;</li> <li>• the Council's budget team were considering whether refurbishments of schools were a lower cost way forward compared to new builds and also comparing the environmental implications of demolishing existing buildings;</li> <li>• Thurso High School was an excellent example of how senior and other staff had consistently looked after an important asset over a number of years and was a credit to all those involved; and</li> <li>• the potential to undertake tree planting at Thurso High School, including through the Queen's Platinum Jubilee scheme.</li> </ul>

	The Committee <b>NOTED</b> following scrutiny, the content of the report.
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>Visitor Management Car Parking and Motorhome Provision</b>  <b>Parcadh Chàraichean Rianachd Luchd-tadhail is Solar Dhachaighean-motair</b></p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CC/22/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an explanation was sought and provided on the rationale for the delivery of Invitation to Pay rather than this being a mandatory requirement;</li> <li>• confirmation was sought and provided that all payment machines had card paying facilities and the option to pay remotely through an app and that when machines were being installed a check would be undertaken to ensure a phone signal could be received;</li> <li>• clarification was sought and provided that the proposal would generate useful data in relation to occupancy levels at sites. The roll out of public space sensors in the Highlands would also generate a map of the visitor journeys. The use of this smart technology would provide for a more strategic approach to visitor management;</li> <li>• an explanation was sought and provided that in terms of the larger bays identified for motorhomes, there was not a one size all fits approach and a reasonable assessment was carried out depending on the size of the car park. The rules relating to Council car parks would apply i.e. all activities must be contained within the vehicle. Related to this was the need for education, enforcement and adequate signage;</li> <li>• the locations of car parks at which invitation to pay would be delivered would continue to evolve, specific reference being made to sites in Thurso;</li> <li>• there would be a level of concern within the community at in relation to the introduction of car parking charges, and the need to provide reassurance to the public that the proposal did not involve and local Members would not support enforced parking charges; and</li> <li>• in regard to the above, an explanation was sought and provided on the difference between enforced parking charges and invitation to pay and that officers were aware of the sensitivities of any sites located on Common Good Land.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee <b>AGREED</b>:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the locations proposed and amend and add to them as appropriate and agree the immediate delivery of Invitation to Pay at the locations in Section 8.1 of the report and charging to be voluntary at this stage; and</li> <li>ii. the approach to motorhome parking at sites identified in Section 8.2 of the report.</li> </ol>
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>Flow Country World Heritage Site Nomination – Update</b>  <b>Ainmeachadh Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne do Dhùthaich nam Fìobhaichean – Fios às Ùr</b></p>

**Declarations of Interest:- Ms K Rosie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Member of the Flow Country World Heritage Site Working Group 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/23/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the main benefits for the area associated with of the Flow Country being designated as a world heritage site;
- the importance of continuing to conserve the Flow Country site going forward and for future generations;
- the fact officers had been invited to present on the Flow Country to COP 26 recognised and reinforced the value of this area;
- the role of local Members could play in lobbying in terms of supporting the nomination process for world heritage site status and securing potential funding streams;
- it was important to reassure local residents that if the nomination was successful it would not adversely impact in terms of planning restrictions on their homes, it being confirmed there was few buildings within the boundary of the site; and
- the potential to open up access through long distance trails and enhancing facilities to attract more visitors to the Flow Country and to incorporate income generation and branding opportunities. It was confirmed the Working Group was seeking to commission a study supported by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to scope this out further.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**10. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021  
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2021 gu 30 Sultain 2021**

There had been circulated Report No. CC/24/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

- an explanation was sought and provided on the status of the choice based letting, it being confirmed that any decision on the future of this initiative would have to be taken in consultation with the Council's Highland Housing Register partners. Discussions had commenced on this matter and there would be consultation with tenants prior to any final decision; and
- confirmation was sought and provided on the work of the tenant participation team in reinforcing the message through publications and in meeting with tenants of the importance of engaging with officers if in rent arrears or experiencing financial difficulties.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

11.	<p><b>Additional Urgent Item</b>  <b>St Georges Park, 'The Dammies', Thurso – Funding</b></p> <p>The Chair <b>AGREED</b> to consider additional urgent item on the grounds of the urgent funding approvals required to undertake the significant works at St Georges Park, 'The Dammies', Thurso which the Committee had previously agreed to progress through Place Based Investment funding and on the basis of the quotations received for the works.</p> <p>Following discussion, the Committee <b>AGREED</b> to provide a further £15,000 of funding towards the works at St Georges Park, 'The Dammies' programme of works. Given the urgent approvals required to undertake the works, funding to be allocated through the use of the Highland Council's COVID-19 Response Fund, and if necessary the Ward Discretionary Budget, for the Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward, giving the project a total allocation of £75,000, made up of the previously committed £60,000 Place Based Investment funding and this new £15,000 commitment.</p>
	The meeting ended at 12.30pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 4 November 2021 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mrs I Campbell  
Dr I Cockburn

Mr A MacInnes

### **In attendance:**

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place

Mr W Mackinnon, Policy and Reform, Communities and Place

Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager (North), Property and Housing

Mr M Crowe, Access Officer, Development and Infrastructure

Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Roads and Transport

Mr T Stott, Principal Planner, Planning and Environment

Ms J Bain, Planner, Planning and Development

Miss S Tarrant, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer, Chief Executive's Office

Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

### **Also in attendance:**

Chief Inspector K MacLeod, Police Scotland

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

## Business

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

Apologies for absence were initiated on behalf of Mr D MacLeod.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

**PP 1 - 10**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/018/21 dated 21 October 2021 by the North Area Commander.

CI Scott MacDonald had been appointed as the North Area Commander. Until he was able to take up his post, Chief Inspector Kevin MacLeod would be covering the post in the interim.

In relation to road users there had been considerably more motor homes this year.

The ranger service had been key to making lives easier and had been commented on and welcomed by the local community. The Rangers were to be retained for next year with seven being retained throughout the winter.

There was a problem with speeding in almost every village and this was the subject of a lot of complaints. It was however apparent that the speeding offences had been mostly from locals and not the tourists. CI MacLeod asked that the Council took this on board and developed traffic calming measures within these villages to slow the traffic down.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 1, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2020 – 31 March 2021.

#### **4. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/019/21 dated 24 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Property and Housing which provides 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 2021.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- there had been increases in rent arrears in previous years, one reason for this had been the impact of universal credit and this has been alleviated by working through payment schedules. There was an increase in stock which resulted in more allocations and sometimes a lag in receiving benefits which added to the rent arrears. Rent arrears may be further impacted by the increase in energy prices and the loss of the £20 additional payment to recipients of universal credit;
- the Ross team works very hard managing a heavy and complex caseload in relation to homeless people with several factors in relation to homelessness to keep an eye on. There was a statutory and a moral duty to assist people in dire circumstances. As affordability becomes more difficult it changes the face of homeless presentations and this would be carefully monitored;
- the Council worked closely with housing associations through the housing partnership which was largely focused on allocation but also considered how to assist struggling households. The housing options team was available to help with housing options if the tenancy was at risk in a housing association property; and
- once a site was identified, the Development Team ask for the Council's input in terms of social housing demand. We look at our register and look at the overall demand for different types of housing and if there was a specific need for example accessibility housing, the housing association would be advised.

The Committee thanked the homeless team for their sterling work.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

**5. Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2  
Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/020/21 dated 14 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- Strathpeffer had 43 houses presently being completed, SP2 not allocated but 7 houses in SP3 was acceptable. There was already a planning application for Nutwood and happy for that to go forward;
- Contin, Marybank and Garve content to leave them as growing settlements; and
- the on-line consultation was beneficial as the large number of comments had been the biggest response for a development plan consultation.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on local/City committee-specific matters and agree the recommended responses to these issues both as detailed at Appendix 1;
- ii. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and officer recommended responses both as detailed at Appendix 2 and recommend to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee the local/City committee's view on these strategic matters;
- iii. **NOTED** additional supporting documents will accompany the publication of the Proposed Plan, including those outlined in section 3 below;
- iv. **NOTED** that minor presentational, typographical and other factual updates and changes will be made by officers, with any material changes to be agreed in consultation and agreement with the chair of the relevant committee(s) prior to publication;
- v. **AGREED**, in line with government guidance, for the published Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan to be treated as a material planning consideration in making planning decisions and providing advice; and
- vi. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in section 7 of this report.

**6. Visitor Management Car Parking and Motorhome Provision  
Parcadh Chàraichean Rianachd Luchd-tadhail agus Solar Dhachighean-Motair**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/021/21 dated 18 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- a report had been completed for the Plockton Community Council which highlighted where waiting, loading restrictions and traffic management could be implemented throughout the village. Assistance was being given to the community to expand the car parking along the foreshore. A full topographical survey was to be undertaken and this would help the community to bid for funds to increase the car parking capacity along the foreshore;

- the car and motorhome parking issue in the Plockton village would not go away. An invitation to pay for Plockton car park would generate funds and help to prove the case, as was done in Skye, this would give access to match funding from multiple sources.
- there was a lot of work required in Plockton before a new car park could be constructed.
- a site visit had been made to Dornie Hall and this site could be added as a site for an invitation to pay car park, this could be based on discussions with the Dornie Hall Committee.
- not sure if Highland Council managed the Battery Park and Golf Club car parks in Lochcarron. Proposal would be brought forward once these car parks evaluated;
- a Traffic Order for cemeteries was a separate issue and was ongoing, collation of information was being undertaken for all the sites to be included in the Traffic Order and a prohibition on all vehicles with a maximum visit time of two hours unless the vehicle is involved in a service; and
- in relation to Rogie Falls, discussions were being undertaken with forestry management to move this forward. A request had been received from Forestry Management to take over control of the site and to give the option for an Invitation to Pay at this site and hope to have this included in the sites that are charged for.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the locations proposed and to amend and to add to them as appropriate and **AGREED** the immediate delivery of Invitation to Pay at the locations in Item 8.1 with the addition of Dornie Hall and charging to be voluntary at this stage; and
- ii. **AGREED** the approach to motorhome parking at sites identified in Section 8.2 of the report.

## 7. **Skye and Lochalsh Access Forum Appointments** **Cur an Dreuchd Fòram Inntrigidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich is Loch Aillse**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/022/21 dated 19 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **AGREED** the appointment of the members of the public who had applied to be members of the Local Access Forum for Skye and Lochalsh as set out in Table 2 of the report.

## 8. **Use of Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Covid Response Funds** **Cleachdadh Maoin Freagairt Covid Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair is Loch Aillse**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/023/21 dated 20 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place.

The Committee:

- i) **AGREED** to allocate £10,000 from the remaining Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh (WRSL) Covid19 Ward Discretionary funds to support the provision of play equipment in the WRSL Ward in consultation with amenities staff; and

- ii) **NOTED** that next steps to progress this work will include confirmation of any other 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 will involve the amenities team and communities.

## **9. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 19 August 2021 and 27 August 2021 which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021 and 18 October 2021 respectively.

The meeting closed at 11.43 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Monday, 8 November, 2021 at 10.30 a.m.**

### Present:

Mr B Allan  
Mr A Henderson

Mr D Rixson  
Mr B Thompson

### In attendance:

Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place  
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber), Communities and Place  
Mr D Manson, Assistant Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager, Housing and Property  
Ms M MacLeman, Principal Customer and Tenant Engagement Officer  
Mr L Macdonald, Repairs Manager, Housing and Property  
Mr D Esson, Area Education & Learning Manager (West), Education & Learning  
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy  
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance Service

### Also in attendance:-

Mr M Colliar, Group Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Item 3)  
Mr C Robb, Station Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (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

### Interim Chairman

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr B Thompson was unanimously appointed as interim chairman for this meeting.

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter and Mr N McLean.

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

Items 4 & 9(f) – Mr D Rixson (non financial)  
Item 11 – Mr B Allan (non financial)

#### 3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus

## Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/21/21 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland which provided performance information for the period July to September, 2021.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- There had been a significant reduction in all deliberate fires in the spring which was very welcome and it was acknowledged that that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had worked hard to deal with the issue of muir burn. The Service would continue their efforts on this, liaising with partners such as the Forestry Commission.
- the Ranger Service had played a part in the reduction of deliberate fires with their engagement with the public;
- The Service was engaging with the community regarding the legislative requirement for all homes in Scotland to have interlinked fire alarms by February, 2022 and guidance was available on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service website.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance report.

#### 4. **Tenant Satisfaction Survey – Lochaber Update** **Suirbhidh Riarachadh Luchd-màil**

**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/22/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property which provided an update on the Highland Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey and provided details of the survey results for Lochaber.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- There had been some negative feedback from new tenants regarding the standard of decoration of empty properties. It was advised that there were high expectations from tenants and during lockdown the majority of viewings were not accompanied by Officers and there was perhaps a lack of understanding what the Council could offer. There would be a financial impact if all empty properties were to be redecorated which would impact on all tenants rents. The Council had an Empty Homes Standard which officers were working to and included tenants receiving decoration allowances where this was appropriate.
- in relation to responses to quality of homes, most of the dissatisfaction was with tenant's view that they were overdue capital programme items, such as new kitchens, new bathrooms and heating. Due to the Covid pandemic work had stopped on the capital programme and it was an ongoing process to address the issues in each particular area.
- The Tenants Scrutiny Group had carried out a review of the Empty Homes Standard and was preparing a report for senior management with recommendations to raise awareness of the standard and improve tenant satisfaction. The preliminary report from the Scrutiny group had been discussed at the senior management team meeting and it was viewed as a positive report with valid recommendations. An officer working group would discuss the report

further and prepare an action plan to improve the customer experience throughout Highland.

- The satisfaction of tenants with the Council's Housing Service contribution to the management of the neighbourhood was very positive and was a result of improved tenant engagement through resident groups who provided information on their priorities.
- For a trial period a Lochaber tenants newsletter would be produced and it would provide information on capital projects, engagement activities etc.

The Committee **NOTED** the results of the Tenant Satisfaction survey for Lochaber.

## 5. **Lochaber High School Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Loch Abar**

There was circulated Report No. LA/23/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Lochaber High School Associated School Group.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The St Columba's RC primary school roll had reduced significantly. It was advised that there were a number of different factors behind this reduction including that the Head Teacher post had been advertised a number of times without success. An Acting Head Teacher was in post and the substantive post would be readvertised after the Christmas holidays. It was hoped that a permanent appointment to this post would provide consistency and reassurance to parents of children attending the school.
- There were a number of schools in Highland where the buildings were in poor condition and the Council was preparing a plan to build 5 new schools across Highland. Apart from Banavie Primary and Inverlochry primary which required upgrading, the condition of school buildings in Lochaber was good.
- In terms of leaver destination information, the data fluctuated from year to year and was impacted by local employment. There was significant further education provision with the West Highland College that benefited Lochaber and West Highland school leavers and the work of the College was commended.
- In terms of free school meal entitlement, schools encouraged and supported the uptake of free school meals.
- The difficulties in recruiting Teachers and Pupil Support Assistants in Lochaber area was acknowledged. It was advised that both locally and nationally there were significant recruitment challenges part of which was due to the Covid pandemic and concerns and anxiety's around this. The workforce planning team were looking at this issue and there was a continual review of recruitment processes.
- Information would be shared with Members on (i) pay rates for Nursery staff and Pupil Support Assistants; (ii) pay rate of the national living wage and the real living wage; and (iii) the cost per pupil for Stramash Outdoor Nursery.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

*At this point there was a comfort break and the meeting resumed at 11.45 a.m.*

## 6. **Area Roads Programme 2021/2022 Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Rathaidean Sgìreil 2021/2022**

There was circulated Report No. LA/24/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy which provided an update on progress achieved with the prioritised list of structural works for the Lochaber Area.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was confirmed that works on Grange Terrace, Fort William was proceeding and would be completed as soon as possible. In addition to surface dressing or overlay, improvements would also be made to pavements and drainage. The estimate for all these works was £300k and this was included in the Area capital roads budget.
- The extra funding for road maintenance was welcomed and had resulted in additional works being undertaken to improve roads in the area.
- Attention was drawn to the following roads that should be considered for improvement:- A861 Ardgour to Drumsallie; bridge repairs in Knoydart and Morar and road repairs in Knoydart, Mallaigvaig; Loch Morar and access to the beach from the road on the B8008;
- By planning and notifying works and engaging with contractors early, meant that contractors had sufficient jobs to do without having to leave the area and then come back again.
- Visitor Infrastructure improvements in the area were highlighted and this was continuous work in progress;

The Committee **NOTED** progress achieved with the prioritised 2021/22 Roads Programme for Lochaber area.

#### **7. Proposed Traffic Calming, Lundavra Road, Fort William Socrachadh Trafaig ga Mholadh, Rathad Lunn Dà Bhrà, An Gearasdan**

There was circulated Report No. LA/25/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy which invited the Committee to approve the installation of 3 sets of speed cushions on Lundavra Road, Fort William, necessary to support the 20mph speed limit on this road.

In discussion, Members expressed their support for traffic calming measures on Lundavra Road given the problems of speeding. Local Police were also supportive of these measures given the history of accidents on the road. An undertaking was given to provide Councillor B Allan with the full speed data for Lundavra Road.

It was queried what plans were in place to put a 20mph speed limit on the full length of Kilmallie Road as requested by the Community Council. It was advised that significant traffic calming measures would need to be put in place along the full length of this road to bring speeds down to 20mph and discussions would be held with Members on this.

A Members seminar was to be arranged to discuss options for a wider rollout of 20mph speed limits to other residential areas in Highland.

The Committee:-

i **NOTED** the background to the temporary 20mph speed limit order and associated traffic calming in Fort William.

ii **NOTED** that, following review, the temporary traffic calming build outs on Lundavra Road have now been removed.

iii **NOTED** the existing mean average speed data for Lundavra Road and note that the existing speeds dictate that some form of traffic calming is required on this road to enable the temporary 20mph speed limit to remain and a permanent 20mph limit to be promoted.

iv **NOTED** the speed cushion traffic calming proposal and rationale behind the permanent form of traffic calming being promoted.

v **APPROVED** the installation of 3 sets of speed cushions on Lundavra Road, Fort William.

## 8. **Use of Lochaber Covid Response Funds Cleachdadh Mhaointean Freagairt Covid Loch Abar**

There was circulated Report No. LA/26/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which invited consideration of proposals for the use of Lochaber Covid Response Funds.

Members were supportive of the proposals for the use of Lochaber Covid Response Funds and thereafter, the Committee:-

i) **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £13,500 from the remaining W11 (Caol and Mallaig) Covid19 Ward Discretionary funds to the Road to the Isles Facilities Group to support additional cost of the construction of new toilet provision in Mallaig.

ii) **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £20,000 to improve play areas in W21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan) in consultation with amenities staff.

iii) **NOTED** that next steps to progress the play area work would include confirmation of any other 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.

## 9. **Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations Maointean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh gam Moladh**

**Declaration of Interest - Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in the Housing needs assessment proposed funding allocation, as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association and would take no part in the discussion or decision on that specific item.**

There was circulated Report No. LA/27/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which proposed funding allocations from Place Based Investment Funds.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocations of Place Based Investment Funds as follows:

- i. Ward 11 – Caol and Mallaig
  - a. Investment in play amenity provision in Caol - £35,000
  - b. Investment in Mallaig play park provision - £30,000
  - c. Investment in a trishaw project - £9,800
  - d. Support for Young Carers - £12,000
  - e. Support for community planning - £8,200
  - f. Housing needs assessment - £5,000

g. Total = £100,000

**10. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 9 August, 2021 which were approved by the Council on 9 September, 2021, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

**11. Place Based Investment Funds – Funding Application  
Maointean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh gam  
Moladh**

**Declaration of Interest - Mr B Allan declared a non-financial interest in this item as he had family members that work and volunteer for Lochaber Hope and would not take part in the discussion.**

There was circulated Report No. LA/28/21 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place which proposed a funding allocation from Place Based Investment Funds.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** a grant of £15,000 to Lochaber Hope to support the 'New Connections' mental-health project within the Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward.

The meeting ended at 12.45 p.m.

## The Highland Council

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

### Present:

Mr J Bruce  
Mrs M Cockburn

Ms P Hadley  
Mr B Lobban

### In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance  
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Mr D Wood, Principal Housing Officer, Housing and Property  
Mr E McIntosh, Localism and Engagement Coordinator, Communities and Place  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance  
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

### Also in attendance:

Mr G Miles, Head of Strategic Planning, Cairngorms National Park Authority (Item 3)  
Mr M Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority (Item 3)  
Inspector V Tough, Police Scotland (Item 4)

**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

#### 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 – Ms P Hadley (financial)  
Item 6 – Ms P Hadley (financial)

#### 3. Cairngorms National Park Authority: Consultation on the National Park Partnership Plan Ùghdarras Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh: Co-chomhairle mu Phlana Com-pàirteachais na Pàirce Nàiseanta

**Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a member of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to take part in the discussion.**

There was a presentation by the Chief Executive of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) on the consultation on the National Park Partnership Plan. During the presentation, Mr Miles reviewed the role and aims of the Park Authority along with the steps of the process for the National Partnership Plan 2022-2027. It was highlighted that the consultation process was underway and they were encouraging as many people as possible to engage.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- partnership working between the Council and the CNPA had vastly improved in recent years and it was hoped that this was a mutual perspective;
- appreciation was expressed for the presentation and the evaluation of the responses to the consultation were highly anticipated;
- in response to a question about local responses to the consultation compared to those of visitors, it was explained that there was no particular mechanism to differentiate these responses and the focus would be on the quality and depth of responses rather than the quantity;
- information was sought, and provided, on the influence of COP26 and initiatives within the CNPA. It was highlighted that it was premature to understand the influence at this stage however, the enthusiasm around COP26 was timely for the consultation work around the Partnership Plan and based on pre-consultation feedback it was clear that addressing the climate challenge and biodiversity was important to people;
- it was hoped that the responses to the consultation would show the importance of affordable housing as it was futile to address employability if there was insufficient affordable housing in the area and this was one of the most important pieces of work that had to be done; and
- Members were encouraged to become involved in the consultation process and to encourage others to do so.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that a copy be circulated to Members.

In accordance with Standing Order 9, the Committee **AGREED** to proceed with the agenda and to return to item 4 on the agenda once the Area Commander was able to join the meeting.

**5. Community Asset Transfer: Burnfield Public Toilets and Car Parking, Grantown on Spey**  
**Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd: Taighean-beaga Poblach is Parcadh Chàraichean Burnfield, Baile nan Grandach**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/**18**/21 dated 14 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- clarification was sought on whether the purpose of use, provision of public convenience, would remain if the property was sold and who would be responsible for the water supply;
- appreciation was expressed to staff for the work undertaken in respect of the project; and

- the project was welcomed and it was indicated that community toilets were often maintained to a very high standard.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. that clarification be sought on:-
    - a. in the event the property was sold, there would not be a change of use and it would continue to remain as provision for public convenience;
    - b. Grantown Initiative would be responsible for all utilities which would include water supply; and
  - ii. the sale of Burnfield public toilets with a footprint of approximately 210 sqm of land to Grantown Initiative for £1, if asked. Terms of transfer to include:
    1. There was a right of pre-emption to Seafield Estates and the Council's ability to sell was conditional on Seafield Estates not taking up the pre-emption;
    2. Toilets were to remain available for use as a public convenience (an existing burden on the legal title for the property);
    3. Highland Council reserves rights for drainage inspection and repair;
    4. Grantown Initiative covers all reasonably incurred property and legal costs associated with the asset transfer process – both the Council's and its own;
    5. Should Grantown Initiative seek to sell the property, Highland Council reserves a right of pre-emption for market value at the time of the event; and
    6. Any other terms to be agreed by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place in consultation with the Area Committee Chair.
- 6. Housing Performance Report – 1 April to 30 September 2021**  
**Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean gu 30 An t-Sultainn 2021**

**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 to participate in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/**19**/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, further information was requested on the number of tenants that were living in accommodation that was too small and further information was provided on how this key challenge was being addressed. It was indicated that Badenoch and Strathspey did not have a large housing stock and therefore the only way to overcome this was to build more housing and to ensure that this comprised of a range of different types and size of accommodation to suit the needs of the area. In conclusion, staff were commended for their efforts which had been reflected in the excellent performance results set out in the report.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

## 7. **Area Roads Programme 2021/22 Update** **Càradh Rathaidean Sgìre 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/**20**/21 dated 19 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- the team was commended for the delivery of the Roads Programme and ensuring that the budget was committed and spent;
- a request was made for clear messaging to the public in respect of what/where the Winter Maintenance Plan covered; and
- discussions with the Strategic Timber Transport Authority were welcome but the need to recover this funding was emphasised. Further information was provided on the lack of officer time to progress projects more speedily but confirmation was provided that work was being undertaken to secure funding for the Boat of Garten Sawmill Link road and the B970 road.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the progress achieved with the prioritised 2021/22 Roads Programme for the Badenoch & Strathspey Area.

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

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/**17**/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- Members expressed appreciation for the update;
- information was sought, and provided, on the ongoing training for police around hate crimes and terrorism and also on the use of drug wipes;
- further information was sought on the use of the non-emergency contact telephone number (101) in the area; and
- in response to a question about drug driving offences, the process to determine levels of drug use in a person's system was explained. It was also confirmed that following testing, a full analysis could be provided of the types and level of drugs contained in the person's system.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 – 2023 Year 2, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2021 – 30 September 2021.

## 8. **Badenoch & Strathspey Ward Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations** **Maoinean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite Uàrd Bhàideanach is Shrath Spè – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh gam Moladh**

In accordance with Standing Order 8, this item was presented as urgent on the basis that Committee approval was required to establish the Ward Place Based Investment Fund and enable the funds to be allocated/committed within the current financial year.

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/21/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, confirmation was provided that a press release was being prepared in order to inform the public of the fund and seeking expressions of interest. It was emphasised that the press release should use plain English/language and encourage innovative projects to come forward.

In terms of criteria, it was explained that projects had to address the four harms of Covid and focus on recovery. With regard to the funding, it was clarified that the Place Based Investment Programme was capital funding that would be in place for five years thus enabling a phased approach to deliver projects. However, the current funding tranche (£129,222) had to be contractually committed by the end of the current financial year.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** that the remaining balance of the Ward Place Based Investment fund be combined with the Place Based Investment Programme funding to create a challenge fund for Badenoch and Strathspey focusing on community regeneration projects; and
- ii. **NOTED** that reports would be brought back to the Committee as required for future budget allocation in terms of the projects identified.

## 9. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

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

The meeting concluded at 11.45am.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 9 November 2021 at 10.30 pm.

### **Present:**

Mr A MacKinnon  
Mrs A MacLean

Mr G Mackenzie

### **In attendance:**

Mr M Rodgers, ECO Property and Housing  
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager (Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth), Communities and Place  
Mr R MacLeod, Area Housing Manager, Property and Housing  
Mr D Martin, Area Care and Learning Manager  
Mr T Stott, Principal Planner, Planning and Environment  
Ms J Bain, Planner, Planning and Environment  
Mr R Campbell, Estate Strategy Manager, Property and Housing  
Ms S Lamb, EFF Regional Development Officer, Property and Housing  
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

### **Also in attendance:**

Chief Inspector Kevin MacLeod, Police Scotland

Mr R McAulay, Peffery Way Association

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

Item 4 of the agenda was taken before item 3, and item 9 of the agenda was taken after Item 3, the minute however will remain in the original numerical order.

### **Business**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulans**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs M Paterson.

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

Items 5 and 6 – Mrs A MacLean (non-financial).

### 3. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No DSA/008/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the North Area Commander.

CI Scott MacDonald had been appointed as the North Area Commander. Until he was able to take up his post, Chief Inspector Kevin MacLeod would be covering the post in the interim with Inspector Ross as the area Inspector.

The Group Area Commander responded to comments as follows:

- the Promotion of NC500 Visitor Management is led by Highland Council, if the Police circulate any information it would be through their own social media channels and no costs incurred;
- the increase in stolen vehicles had been linked to one non-criminal incident and also one where there is dispute over arrangements for scrapping. The others are ongoing enquires;
- vandalism primarily involved youths, the detection rate across the area was not great as there were rarely any witnesses;
- there was a lengthy process involved in anti-social behaviour orders and often the issues had resolved by the time the order was in place;
- the majority of missing people are from looked after children or children from within the care system, liaisons with care homes had made a difference but this was an ongoing challenge; and
- there was a new team to be set up in Inverness whose primary focus would be on County Lines controlled substances and it was hoped that pro-active work would make a difference.

Mr M Rodgers, stated that there were shared challenges for the Police and the Council in relation to anti-social behaviour. The tenancy agreement was part of tenancy law so any sanctions were civil as opposed to criminal matters. In practice the Courts had a wide area of discretion where there was little that could be undertaken through the Housing Scotland Act. An issue had to be proven before an anti-social behaviour order could be made.

Mr R MacLeod, stated that Housing Services worked closely with Police Scotland on anti-social behaviour and cases going forward could be reviewed with decisions made on possible actions available. There was often a mutual element of dispute and a lot of work had to be undertaken to build an evidentiary case which relied heavily on witness accounts. There was an Anti-social Behaviour Inspector who took statements. Housing Officers can take action where there is a breach of the tenancy agreement.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 2, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2021 – 30 September 2021; and

- ii. Housing Services to work closely with Police Scotland on anti-social behaviour and cases going forward could be reviewed with decisions made on possible actions available.

#### 4. **Peffery Way Association Comunn Slighe Pheofharain**

There was a presentation from the Peffery Way Association.

In discussion, the following responses were given:-

- there is no intention to close any other paths in the area. The plan is to link with then, namely Knockbain road path, Knockbain Farm path and the path to Knockfarrel from Fodderty;
- the Peffery Way path had kept the gradient as gradual as possible to enable greater accessibility for all;
- once the path was fully open, the route would enable children from Strathpeffer to cycle to school in Dingwall and discussions have been ongoing with schools;
- the entire route of the path benefited from access rights; and
- it was an aspiration to raise funds for a trishaw bicycle which could take two people with a bike pilot on the path. A great benefit for people who are lonely and not managing to get out.

The Committee thanked Mr McAulay, the Peffery Way Committee and the volunteers for their exceptional work in the development of the path.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

#### 5. **Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais**

**Declaration of Interest: Mrs A MacLean declared a non-financial interest as a family member was receiving improvements to their Council house 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 DSA/009/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

In discussion, the following responses were given:-

- the actual figure for non-emergency repairs can fluctuate depending on when a job is marked as complete. It was not necessarily the case over the long term that Ross and Cromarty was behind in all cases. Often material shortages, the type of repair and the type of houses delayed repairs. Housing Services can provide more detail on the backlog of repairs and this would be brought to the February Committee;

- Housing Services engage with housing support to ensure people are able to access information on affordable heat programmes and food packages etc which are linked into our management of rent arrears;
- in respect of implications on equality, poverty and climate change issues these would be worth reflecting on and would be brought to the attention of the Management Team and brought forward in the reporting to Committee;
- a figure for repairs carried out at first visit specifically for the Dingwall and Seaforth area would be taken back to Committee;
- we do contact tenants in advance and try to keep appointments. If access is not gained we do follow up visits and liaise with others who may have reported the repairs. In rare cases we have had to undertake a legal forced entry where there are health and safety concerns;
- rent loss through voids were trending up slightly, however over the last year we have had an increase in people moving and in Council house stock; and
- not always possible to tie everything back directly to the effects of covid, indirect effects such as access to, and availability of trades had an impact.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that further detail on repairs would be brought to the next meeting; and
- iii. **NOTED** Housing Services would be asked for more detail on the backlog of repairs and this would be brought to the February Committee;
- iv. **NOTED** in respect of implications on equality, poverty and climate change issues these would be worth reflecting on and would be brought to the attention of the Management Team and brought forward in the reporting to Committee for housing and garages; and
- v. **NOTED** a figure for repairs carried out at first visit specifically for the Dingwall and Seaforth area would be taken back to Committee.

## 6. Housing – Garages Taigheadas – Garaidsean

**Declaration of Interest: Mrs A MacLean declared a non-financial interest as a family member rented a garage from the Council 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 DSA/010/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Housing and Property.

In discussion, the following responses were given:-

- we do hear in communities about demolishing garages for parking, if the amenity of our estates was not appropriate and some action could be taken by removing garages to increase parking amenity it was certainly worth exploring;

- in relation to the repair of the Fraser Road garage mentioned, Housing Services will examine why it has not been repaired; and
- it was requested that an updated review report on garages be brought back to the next Committee.

Mr M Rodgers advised that a general review of the housing revenue capital stock was to be undertaken over the next two years and this could also look at garages and the level of investment required against the ongoing cost of the stock.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** that a report be brought back to the next committee on a review of garages;
- NOTED** in relation to the demolition of garages for parking, if the amenity of the Council's housing estates was not appropriate and some action could be taken by removing garages to increase parking amenity it was certainly worth exploring;
- NOTED** in relation to the repair of the Fraser Road garage mentioned, Housing Services will look into why it has not been repaired;
- NOTED** request for an updated review report on garages be brought back to the next Committee; and
- NOTED** that Mr M Rodgers had advised that a general review of the housing revenue capital stock was to be undertaken over the next two years and this could also look at garages and the level of investment required against the ongoing cost of the stock.

## 7. **Place Based Investment Fund – Proposed Investment Funds** **Maoin Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/011/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Community Services.

The Committee **AGREED** to:

- invest in Village and Town Amenities and Maintenance - £80,000;
- invest in Playparks - £10,000 - Recognising the increased usage of open spaces and supporting local projects to improve play opportunities. Funding to be delegated to the Head of Community Support and Logistics; and
- support Business - £10,000 – to support the Business Community to establish formal representative groups funding to be delegated to the Highland Council's Development and Regeneration Team.

## 8. **Dingwall Common Good Fund** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/012/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer – Resources and Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated information provided in the Dingwall Common Good Fund.

**9. Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust  
Urras Foghlaim Rois is Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/013/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the Area Care and Learning Manager.

There was an update on the covid status of schools in the area.

In discussion, the following responses were given:-

- it was not known where shares in the Trust were invested, details of investments would be brought back to a ward meeting;
- Members may remember that the trust had been modernised, approximately two years ago, under the Ross and Cromarty Committee to now refer to modern monetary awards;
- the Ross and Cromarty Trust was governed by an act of parliament, governed by the Ross and Cromarty Education Act 1961 and was now fully devolved to trustees. Under the terms of the multiple trusts within law we have very strict guidelines relating to capital and we are unable to make any alterations;
- we do rely on monitoring by finance, the Trust had last been reviewed two years ago when no real changes had been suggested; and
- trustees may wish to consider what we are investing in, for example, issues around sustainable companies or fossil fuels or arms and you may wish to scrutinise at some point.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** it was not known where shares in the Trust were invested, details of investments would be brought back to a ward meeting

**10. Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2  
Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/014/21 dated 8 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, the following responses were given:-

- Conon Bridge CB02 site – a Transport Assessment requirement will be added to the developer requirements for the site so if and when an application comes forward then this Assessment would have to look at the A835 junction and possible mitigation such as a speed limit reduction on the A835 but any such limit would be subject to Transport Scotland agreement and community support;

- CB07 is subject to a pre-application proposal and CB05 had a planning permission. The 2015 plan will be the 'approved development plan' for determining planning applications until the new plan is finished. The new plan will be a material consideration when it is issued at the start of next year;
- Dingwall – the flood bund around the Business Park is not adopted by the Council. Investigations have been carried out to see what works are required to bring the bund up to standard, the outcome is still awaited;
- Maryburgh – a Transport Assessment requirement will be added to the developer requirements for site MB04 so if and when an application comes forward then this Assessment would have to look at the capacity of the existing A862 junction and possible mitigation such as a new roundabout or T junction off the A862. It is very likely such a new junction would be required given the scale of the site and likely development;;
- Muir of Ord – content with the recommendations with a call under active travel for a better travel link to Dingwall;
- North Kessock – no comments; and
- Tore – no comments.

Mr R Campbell clarified that flood defences for the St Clements School site were not within the flood risk area.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on local/City committee-specific matters and agree the recommended responses to these issues both as detailed at **Appendix 1**;
- ii. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and officer recommended responses both as detailed at **Appendix 2** and recommend to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee the local/City committee's view on these strategic matters;
- iii. **NOTED** additional supporting documents will accompany the publication of the Proposed Plan, including those outlined in section 3 of the report;
- iv. **NOTED** that minor presentational, typographical and other factual updates and changes will be made by officers, with any material changes to be agreed in consultation and agreement with the chair of the relevant committee(s) prior to publication;
- v. **AGREED**, in line with government guidance, for the published Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan to be treated as a material planning consideration in making planning decisions and providing advice; and
- vi. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in section 7 of this report.

#### 11. **St Clement's School, Dingwall** **Sgoil Naomh Chliamhainn, Inbhir Pheofharain**

There was a verbal report by the Estate Strategy Manager including the following information:-

There had been two reports to Highland Council in June which had prioritised five school projects ahead of the wider review of the Capital Programme. There was a commitment that these would be prioritised for capital investment with a further report brought to Highland Council in September giving details on the full scope, timescale, associated cost and funding options of the projects. The report

in September identified a budget of £13 m for St Clements School. The timescale would be a minimum of three years so an indicative date of August 2025 for occupation was included in the report.

Discussions had been ongoing with the Planning Service for development at the Dochcarty Road site. Pre-planning advice had been received from the Planning Service and they indicated they would generally support an application on the site. Consultants are working with Roads and Transport on the wider road issues including visibility splays and speed limits.

The statutory consultation could take up to a year. A report is likely to be taken forward to the Education Committee in February 2022.

The first meeting of the stakeholder group was hoped to take place shortly when dates suited. Highland Council were now looking to employ a contractor to take the project design forward.

The Committee thanked the Estate Strategy Manager and asked that any slippage to the programme be notified immediately to Members.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

## **12. Highland Coastal Communities Fund – Assessment of Applications Maoin Coimhearsnachdan Cladaich na Gàidhealtachd – Measadh Iartasan**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/015/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **APPROVED** funding for the Dingwall Men’s Shed of £6,000 with a condition for evidence that the site was maintained in a tidy condition.

## **11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Committee held on 16 August 2021 which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021.

The meeting closed at 4.40 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 11.30 am.

### Present:

Mr B Allan	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Balfour	Mr D Macpherson
Mr J Bruce	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs I Campbell (substitute)	Mr H Morrison
Mr C Fraser	Mr C Munro (substitute)
Mr R Gale	Mr A Rhind
Mr A Graham (substitute)	Ms J Tilt
Mr A Henderson	

### Non-Members also present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mr W MacKay
Mr D Fraser	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr K Gowans	Mrs E McAllister
Mr A Jarvie	Mr J McGillivray
Mr D Mackay	Mrs T Robertson

### In attendance:

Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place  
 Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer Transformation  
 Ms A Clark, Head of Service (Community Support and Engagement), Communities and Place  
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Service (Community Operations and Logistics), Communities and Place  
 Mr A McKinnie, Senior Waste Manager, Communities and Place  
 Mr A Yates, Environmental Health Manager, Communities and Place  
 Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, Resources and Finance  
 Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance  
 Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance  
 Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

### Also in attendance:

Mr D Wilson, Local Senior Officer for Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service  
 Ms S Harris, Chair of Knoydart Community Council

**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

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair drew attention to an item of good news, namely the recent completion of Kyleakin Community Playpark. He commended the community for their efforts, which showed what was possible, as well as local Members who had contributed ward discretionary funding to the project. A number

of photographs were then presented which showed the playpark site before any works had taken place, at various stages of completion and, finally, fully completed and being used by local children and young people.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

## **Business**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr G Adam, Mr A Baxter, Ms K Currie, Mr J Gordon, Mr D MacLeod and Mrs M Paterson.

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

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

Item 4 – Mr R Gale and Mr C Munro (both non-financial)

Item 11 – Mr D Macpherson (non-financial)

Item 14 – Mrs I Campbell and Mr C Munro (both financial)

### **3. Presentation from Knoydart Community Council Taisbeanadh bho Chomhairle Coimhearsnachd Chnòideirt**

Ms S Harris, Chair of South Knoydart Community Council, gave a verbal presentation during which it was explained that Knoydart was a peninsula on the west coast of Lochaber, only accessible by boat from Mallaig. There were approximately 110 permanent residents at present, and the majority of the peninsula had been owned and managed by the community through the Knoydart Foundation since 1999. It was very much a working community but it also welcomed thousands of visitors each year.

The various Knoydart Foundation boards had done a fantastic job over the past 22 years of raising community issues and helping to find solutions, but there had been instances where the lack of a local community council had been felt and, when the opportunity had arisen in 2019, South Knoydart Community Council had been formed. Its founding members comprised six local residents, four of whom were women and three of whom were under 35 years of age.

She went on to provide detailed information on Resilient Knoydart, a steering group which had been formed during the first Covid lockdown to identify the challenges facing the community and find solutions, and which had eventually become a formal sub-committee of the Community Council. Information was also provided on the vaccine rollout in Knoydart and the Knoydart Renewables Energy Security Project, which would secure Inverie's electricity supply for the next 50+ years.

Thanks were expressed to local Members for their support over the past two years and, moving forward, it was hoped to work closely with the Council on a variety of issues. Particular reference was made to the recent visit from senior council staff and the joint issue of waste management on Knoydart and the Small Isles. Discussions were progressing regarding possible solutions to reduce the amount of

waste being transported to the mainland, including conducting a feasibility study into zero waste and improved recycling solutions on Knoydart and the Small Isles. It was emphasised that the Community Council would gladly play a role in such a project with the Council.

Another issue which arose regularly, particularly as winter approached, was maintenance of the adopted road. Repairs were desperately needed, particularly at the road end in Airor, and it was emphasised how important it was that the road was maintained as it was the only route that connected outlying communities to the village of Inverie.

Finally, she thanked the Committee for inviting her to speak, and looked forward to working with the Council over the coming years to improve and build upon the services available to the Knoydart Community.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the importance of road maintenance in remote and rural communities, as well as the challenges and significant costs involved, was recognised;
- the Mallaig to Inverie ferry service could not operate without some form of subsidy and it was essential that this continued. However, the ferry was efficiently run and the subsidy was minimal compared to what it had been previously;
- the Knoydart Renewables Energy Security Project demonstrated what could be achieved in terms of fundraising and the Chair offered to put any Members who wished to find out more in touch with the team of volunteers behind it. In addition, he highlighted that the proposed next phase of the project, which the community would be seeking the help of the Council to deliver, was to extend renewable power as far as Airor;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether there were any proposals to develop agriculture and tourism in Knoydart;
- it was uplifting to hear what the Community Council had achieved in a short space of time, and it was interesting to hear about the gender balance and age profile;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether there was any other specific support the Community Council would welcome from the Council to help achieve some of its ambitions;
- Knoydart needed to be a resilient community, and it was interesting to hear how everyone had come together during lockdown;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) fares was an issue that was brought up often by the community and, although Knoydart was not an island, it was hoped the introduction of such fares could be progressed;
- surprise having been expressed that there was not a car ferry service between Mallaig and Inverie, the Chair explained that, whilst the pier at Inverie could accommodate a car ferry, like the Small Isles, the community preferred that people did not take their cars across as this was greener and kept the area in better condition;
- in relation to agriculture, and in his role as Species Champion for the Solitary Bee, Councillor Fraser commented that reducing artificial fertilisers increased pollinators. He drew attention to the Scottish Pollinator Strategy which might have elements that could be applied in Knoydart. He also referred to the Soil

Association and commented that Knoydart would have soil that was particular to the area and that could potentially suit different types of crops;

- in relation to renewables, information was sought, and provided, on proposals to store and utilise surplus energy; and
- information was sought, and provided, on fire cover in Knoydart, whether there were first responders in the community and where the nearest fire appliance and doctor were located.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

#### **4. Increasing community ownership and the role of Community Asset Transfer (CAT)**

**A' meudachadh sealbhadaireachd coimhearsnachd agus dreuchd Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd**

##### **Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr R Gale declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Trustee of a Development Trust which was currently going through an asset transfer process but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

**Mr C Munro declared a non-financial interest as a Director of a local Community Trust which could theoretically request a Community Asset Transfer in the future 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 CP/35/21 dated 15 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was important to ensure that assets, particularly older and/or listed buildings, were in as good a condition as possible prior to transfer, and that any significant repair and ongoing maintenance costs were highlighted to community groups potentially looking to take on an asset;
- in relation to title investigations, Registers of Scotland could provide a significant amount of information on heritable title for a relatively small fee;
- managing expectations in terms of timescales was crucial;
- attention was drawn to a situation whereby the portacabin formerly occupied by Lochcarron Playgroup had been put up for sale by the Council's Estates team without engaging with the community and Community Council, despite a number of local groups having made enquires, pre-Covid, about taking on the portacabin. Through working with officers, the closing date on the potential sale had been extended and it was hoped that what had become a fraught situation would be resolved. However, it demonstrated the need for the Council's Estates team to consult the CAT team and engage with communities on such matters;
- a Member with personal experience of the CAT process spoke to the challenges that had been experienced, including the imposition of legal restrictions which had resulted in a bill of several thousand pounds, a significant burden for a

charitable organisation with no real assets, and taken several months of negotiations to have removed to allow the building to be repaired and brought back into public use. The need to streamline the legal process and for the Council's legal team to work with communities rather than against them was emphasised;

- planning permission for change of use was a potential obstacle to a CAT, as were access burdens;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Community Councils were not eligible to take on community assets;
- concern was expressed that the proposals would not actually lead to an improvement in the speed with which CATs were dealt with, from expression of interest to completion, and an explanation was sought, and provided, in that regard and as to how the success of the proposals would be measured. In addition, the title element of the process could be onerous, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether support would be offered to community groups when title challenges arose; and
- the Chair commented that the Community Loans Fund would help community groups access funding to take forward CAT projects, and that his experience of working with the CAT team was that there were a lot of obstacles for them to overcome but they were on the side of the community in terms of delivering CAT projects as quickly as possible. He added that going forward, due to the value of the assets, most CAT requests would be considered by Area Committees.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (i) **NOTED** note the challenges identified with the current approach to Community Asset Transfer (CAT) and the rationale for improving our processes outlined at section 5 of the report;
- (ii) **AGREED** the broader approach to CAT outlined at 6.3 of the report which included a more streamlined and proportionate application process dependent upon the nature of the CAT request and considered requests outwith the scope of the Act;
- (iii) **AGREED** the stronger Expression of Interest phase proposed at 6.4 including the requirement for a Title Investigation prior to submitting a CAT request;
- (iv) **AGREED** the revised approach to Economic Development Burdens outlined at 6.5 of the report;
- (v) **NOTED** the supporting actions outlined at section 7 of the report that were being progressed to further encourage and support groups to take forward asset transfers; and
- (vi) **NOTED** the transfer approved at the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee on 9 November 2021 and the transfer approved by lease in Thurso by delegated authority, as outlined at section 8 of the report.

## 5. Community Participation and Involvement Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Chom-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/36/21 dated 18 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the approach described in the report was seen as an extension of what had happened over the past 18 months whereby communities had stepped up and, in many cases, the Council had taken a step back and let communities get on with what they knew needed to be done;
- the reference to Community Partnerships was welcomed, as they identified what was needed in their particular areas;
- a place-based approach was useful as it took a variety of factors into consideration, including rurality;
- it was hoped that Community Support Coordinators would work with communities to develop what was needed and, where necessary, take a step back and be there as a guiding hand as and when required. The Chair added that the light-touch additional support Community Support Coordinators would provide was what communities had said they wanted, and he welcomed this stage having been reached;
- the Council had never relied so much on volunteers and voluntary work, whether it be cutting roadside verges, spraying salt on pavements, or grass cutting. Particular reference was made to Caithness where there were many volunteers involved in maintaining cemeteries, which allowed the amenities team to do other important work. There were numerous other voluntary groups, all of which needed a little extra help from the Council with coordination by Community Support Coordinators;
- according to the report, Community Support Coordinators had engaged with 661 groups during the first six weeks of activity, which showed how much people cared and wanted to help across the area;
- the issues identified in terms of recruitment and retention of volunteers and volunteer fatigue were cause for concern;
- in response to a question regarding the availability of funding, the Head of Service (Community Support and Engagement), drew attention to the new Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund, Scottish Government funding which would be administered by Highland Third Sector Interface, and undertook to circulate further details to Members following the meeting; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Community Support Coordinators were there to support community groups across the whole area and could potentially assist Development Trusts in taking forward local projects.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (i) **NOTED** the update on the work of the Community Support Co-ordinators, and the key themes and issues emerging from their work with groups including volunteering capacity, access to funding, assets to deliver local priorities, ongoing covid impacts including financial concerns and mental health and wellbeing impacts;
- (ii) **NOTED** the initial work of the Community Food Growing Co-ordinator in relation to the support and engagement with community bodies and that the Community Food Growing Strategy would be presented to the next meeting of this Committee;
- (iii) **AGREED** the Council's Annual Participation Request reported to the Scottish Government which was found at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- (iv) **NOTED** the areas of work under development as outlined in section 9 of the report.

**6. SFRS bi-annual performance report  
Aithisg Choileanaidh dà uair sa bhliadhna SFRS**

On behalf of the Local Senior Officer for Highland, Derek Wilson, there had been circulated the Local Performance Report for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

During a verbal update, the Local Senior Officer for Highland provided an overview of various performance indicators and trends in relation to the report.

The Committee **NOTED** the Local Performance Report for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

**7. Environmental Health Operational Plan to 31 March 2023  
Plana Obrach Slàinte Àrainneachd gu Màrt 2023**

There had been circulated Report No CP/37/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members commended the important and wide-ranging work undertaken by the relatively small Environmental Health team, often outwith normal working hours, and expressed thanks to all involved. The Environmental Health Manager confirmed that he would convey the Committee's thanks to the team;
- in relation to contaminated land, information was sought, and provided, as to the process if another service within the Council was responsible for the contamination; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the procedure for dealing with noise complaints and the statutory limits that applied.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the Environmental Health Operational Plan to 31st March 2023 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- (ii) that the recent performance of the team in responding to the challenges of Covid19 including carrying out investigations of almost 1000 clusters & outbreaks; support to food businesses through EU Exit (including carrying out inspection of over 300 local fishing vessels and working with over 40 local exporting companies); and the recovery of statutory duties to over 6000 properties on private water supplies, over 5000 food businesses, and responding to almost 10,000 annual service requests on a wide range of public health, nuisance, licensing, safety, dog control, animal health and incivility issues;
- (iii) the work undertaken on preparing for and implementing new regulatory and operational requirements including: licensing for short-term lets, residential caravan sites and new pet and animal welfare activities, supporting the visitor management plan and new requirements for food labelling;
- (iv) that the development of the Communities and Performance performance framework would include environmental health functions and be subject to future reports to Members; and

- (v) that the team was preparing annual reports on local environmental health team performance for Area Committees. The first was provided to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee and the other areas would be provided in 2022.

**8. Revenue Monitoring Report: 2021/22 Quarter 2**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach: Cairteal 2 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No CP/38/21 dated 22 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the Q2 position as shown on Appendices 1 and 2 of the report and that the forecast out-turn position had improved since Q1, with a pressure of £414k reported;
- (ii) that 14 of 16 savings would be delivered this year amounting to £485k as shown on Appendix 3, with £82k at risk of delivery but factored into the out-turn position;
- (iii) that the greatest risk to the Service budget remained the under achievement of income, with work underway to create a dashboard to improve external income monitoring and interventions and to re-set income targets within the overall Service target and to remove unnecessary internal recharge, focusing next on the waste and street cleaning budgets;
- (iv) that the requirement for a further budget feed for visitor management expenditure was noted at the Tourism Committee and to be sought through the Corporate Resources Committee from within the overall funding agreed by the Council for visitor management;
- (v) that mitigation would continue to enable a balanced budget by year end focusing on income achievement, expenditure controls and full draw down of relevant Covid grants; and
- (vi) that good progress was being made to develop a performance framework for the C&P Service to enable improved scrutiny by Members.

**9. Communities & Place Capital Monitoring – Quarter 2 2021/22**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa: Cairteal 2 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No CP/39/21 dated 25 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial position as at 30 September 2021 and the estimated year end forecast.

**10. Membership of Waste Strategy Working Group**  
**Ballrachd Buidheann Obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

The Committee **AGREED** the following:-

Waste Strategy Working Group – Councillor Jill Tilt to fill the vacancy for a Scottish Liberal Democrat Group Member.

**11. Waste projects update**  
**Aithisg às ùr mu ro-innleachd is pròiseactan 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 for a waste transfer station in Fort William, and confirmed that he would not take part in the discussion in that regard.**

There had been circulated Report No CP/40/21 dated 22 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, it was commented that the progress of the waste projects was welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the Aviemore waste transfer station was progressing towards completion;
- (ii) the construction programme for Inverness waste transfer station was underway;
- (iii) Heads of Terms were awaited for the preferred site upon which to develop the Fort William waste transfer station and the new lease for the existing Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) in Fort William;
- (iv) the positive feedback from Zero Waste Scotland on the stage 2 RIF bid submitted to expand garden waste collections to East Inverness;
- (v) the Waste Strategy Working Group was to consider the proposed phasing of work to produce the detailed project plan for the Green Energy Hub at the Longman site using the resource agreed at the Council meeting in September 2021, as part of the medium-term financial plan report. The detailed project plan would provide the evidence for Members to consider how best to proceed;
- (vi) the procurement of waste transfer and disposal services for residual waste, as a medium-term solution, was progressing with early 2022 targeted for the award of contract to be effective from 2023;
- (vii) further information on the scope and engagement methods of the Scottish Government's review into the role energy from waste plants played in Scotland's waste hierarchy, including the need for any new capacity was expected during November 2021. Opportunities for the Council to engage in that review would be taken. The review was expected to run between November 2021 and March 2022; and
- (viii) this report highlighted the risks associated with some of the waste transfer projects and in securing a lease for a HWRC that may incur additional cost and the mitigation in place. There were risks around the development of a green energy hub at the Longman site and as reported to Council in September 2021, the allowance approved by the Council to develop the detailed project plan for the green energy hub did not commit the Council to agreeing this development or the scale of this development on the Longman site, but it provided the route map and information for Members to be able to make decisions with the costs, benefits and risks transparent.

## **12. Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group Geàrr-chunntas Buidheann Obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 1 September 2021 and 5 November 2021 were **APPROVED**.

### 13. Investment in play parks and developing a play parks strategy

#### Tasgadh ann am pàircean-cluiche agus a' leasachadh ro-innleachd phàircean-cluiche

There had been circulated Report No CP/41/21 dated 15 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members expressed appreciation for the report;
- significant work had been undertaken over the past year to reach the stage that playparks were at presently and this was commended;
- the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child underpinned the long-term benefits of play parks for children and the funding mentioned in the report was positive; and
- the confirmation that Area Committees would play a lead role regarding funding allocations and outlining of priorities of playparks was welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the £415,013 local funds committed by Area Committees in 12 Wards by mid October 2021, supported by local place-based discussions and play parks information. Some of this was required to cover the costs of play park to enable play parks and play items to remain open;
- (ii) the national principles, guidance and reporting associated with the Scottish Government investment for play parks renewal for the £234k capital allocated to the Council for 2021/22, with scope to carry this forward into 2022/23 and that future phases of funding were yet to be determined;
- (iii) the play park renewal programme would extend for 4 years;
- (iv) the need to develop wider engagement and evaluation plans to involve children and young people in Wards as well as sharing good practice and annual reporting to Government. This work needed to be supported and coordinated by a time-limited post with full costs recovered from the award; and
- (v) play parks were within scope of the amenities review being considered by the Redesign Board and that as the play parks strategy developed progress reports would be considered by the Board before being finalised.

And, **AGREED**:

- (i) the Council strategy for play parks was developed through:
  - a. the place-based review underway locally. This involved an understanding of the equipment and its condition and the usage of play parks and any potential alternative uses or ownership that may be considered. This would lead to local plans and investment priorities being agreed locally and within the context of Council budget availability alongside any other external resources.
  - b. a recognition that different areas would have different needs and resources available, so consistency in approach for a Highland strategy was supported by adopting Highland-wide principles for:
    - play areas to be safe;
    - play areas to be inclusive – both in design and use; and
    - play areas to be environmentally and financially sustainable.

- c. the evolving local plans and gathering best practice to identify if any other common themes were emerging that could be developed as additional principles
- (ii) that the Scottish Government's play park renewal fund was apportioned to Area Committees as set out in option 3 of Appendix 4 of the report, i.e. a blend of play park conditions and the criteria used by Government which is 95% based on the 0-14 year old population and 5% on rurality.

#### **14. Scottish Parliament Survey of Proposed Licensing Scheme for Short Term Lets**

**Suirbhidh Pàrlamaid na h-Alba de sgeama cheadachdan a thathar a' moladh airson aontaidhean màil gearr-ùine**

**Declarations of Interest: Mrs I Campbell and Mr C Munro declared financial interests in this item on the grounds that they owned self-catering businesses, and confirmed that they would not take part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No CP/42/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, on the criteria used to decide that Badenoch and Strathspey would be the sole area in Highland to be considered for zoning; and
- in response to a question on Control Areas, it was explained that the legislation on Control Areas had been passed in government and guidance was issued in June 2021. The Planning Service would be looking to bring a report to a future meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on how the Council approached Control Areas and it would be the decision of Members to determine implementation in the Highland Council area with evidence-based decision making as a requirement.

The Committee:-

- (i) **NOTED** the update on the proposed licensing scheme; and
- (ii) **AGREED** to homologate the survey response which was submitted to meet the Committee's deadline of 29 October.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held **remotely** on Thursday 11 November 2021 at 10.30am.

### **Present:**

Mrs J Barclay	Mr D Fraser
Mr B Boyd	Mr A Jarvie
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Louden
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr W Mackay
Mr A Henderson (substitute)	Mrs L Munro
Mr J Finlayson	Mr D Rixson

### **Non Members also present:**

Mr K Gowans

### **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  
 Ms D Munro, Lead Officer, Child Protection  
 Mr I Kyle, Head of Improvement and Performance, Health and Social Care  
 Ms J Park, Interim Head of Health, 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

### **Also in Attendance:**

Ms L Bussell, Chief Officer, NHS Highland  
 Mr S Steer, Director of Adult Social Care, NHS Highland  
 Ms R Connolly, Connecting Carers  
 Ms G Newman, Highland Children's Forum

**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, apart from Item 9, which was chaired by Mr D Fraser**

### **Preliminaries - Statement by the Chief Social Work Officer**

Following recent comments in the media alleging a 'crisis in care deepens', the Committee was updated on the processes in place to support children and young people as well as the staff involved in this key area of service delivery.

As detailed in the Performance and Quality Assurance Review Report, there had been an increase in the number of child concern referrals, as well as complexity of needs, across all areas of Highland. Data suggested that the prevalence of county lines and child exploitation had increased, with particular focus on care experienced young people and residential houses. These increases were consistent with experience across Scotland.

When concerns existed, there were a number of options available:

- if there was any suggestion of a child protection issue, contact should be made immediately with either Social Work or the Police. An investigation would be pursued, and any necessary action taken. If there was a potential criminal matter, the Police would investigate;
- individuals could raise complaints within Highland Council or with independent bodies such as the Care Inspectorate or the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) about professional practice; and
- anyone presented with concerns should contact Social Work or the Police who could investigate further.

A number of processes had commenced, including whistleblowing (an independent process); the grievance procedure; and the complaints procedure. To provide assurance of current practice, and to help inform future practice, two independent reviews had also commenced. The first involved two external Social Work professionals being commissioned to engage with staff and examine practice within Children's Services. The second was an independent, and experienced senior Social Work manager who was assessing and reviewing residential services over a 6-month period. He would be talking to young people and staff and his report would provide a full assessment of practice within residential services as well as recommendations to inform future models of practice, appropriate to the needs of our population.

In discussion with the independent chair of the Child Protection Committee (CPC), it had been agreed that a report would go to the CPC on completion of the above reviews. The CPC was responsible for multi-agency child protection policy, procedure, guidance and practice. If any action was required to improve practice and service delivery, this would be clearly stated by the CPC. The CPC would have in place mechanisms for deciding whether or not to initiate a Learning Review. This would give the Committee the assurance it required that services were responding appropriately to the issues impacting on, and the needs of, our young people.

The Chair of the Committee explained that she had received a list of allegations suggesting young people had experienced harm and difficulty and at the conclusion of the meeting she would be providing this information to Police Scotland.

The Committee **NOTED** the statements from the Chief Social Work Officer and the Chair.

## 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Mrs M Davidson (substituted by Mr A Henderson), Mrs D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs M Paterson, Ms E Roddick, Mr K Rosie and Mr C Smith.

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

Mrs L Munro declared a general financial interest (apart from Item 9) as a Specialist SDS Advisor with Carr Gomm Community Contacts Team 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 her involvement.

Item 9 – Mrs L Munro (financial)

## 3. **Good News** **Deagh Naidheachdan**

- Valerie and Reg Tait, Foster Carers in Alness, were thanked for 40 years of fostering with Highland Council; and
- a summary was provided of the work of the Covid Response Team (CRT) which was set up by NHS Highland to support care homes during the pandemic when it became clear that social care providers would be significantly impacted by the pandemic and would have a challenge to deliver care and provide staff at times when staff were shielding and, more latterly, when staff had tested positive. A YouTube clip of an NHS Highland Board meeting was played, showing members of the CRT who described the challenges they faced and the sacrifices they had made in delivering care to – principally – the elderly population in care homes where there had been outbreaks, and now also offering support to Care at Home services.

During discussion, Members thanked the foster carers, Valerie and Reg Tait, and everyone involved in the CRT. In response to an anecdote about care providers travelling in remote areas with no phone reception, it was hoped an innovative solution would be found for this.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News, including recordings of the Covid Response Team, and **AGREED** a letter and card be sent to Valerie and Reg Tait to thank them for their 40 years' service to fostering.

## 4. **Chief Social Work Officer – Presentation** **Àrd-Oifigear Obrach Sòisealta – Taisbeanadh**

A presentation was provided by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care and Chief Social Work Officer, updating the Committee on the Annual Chief Social Work Officer report for 2020-2021 which would be going to Council on 9 December 2021. Issues covered included mental health officers, guardianship orders, criminal justice, child protection, fostering placements, adoption matches, adult protection, care home residents (in-house and independent sector), and care at home data.

The impact of Covid-19 was becoming increasingly apparent and effective joint working with statutory partners and the third sector would be vital to address increasingly complex needs.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- with particular reference to winter pressure and staff shortages, assurance was sought and provided that the corporate and service risk registers were being regularly reviewed and actioned, by the Council and by NHS Highland; and

- information was sought and provided on actions being taken to recruit and train mental health officers, noting the significant numbers who were due to retire soon. A process was in place to recruit three mental health officers per year for three years.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## 5. Performance and Quality Assurance Review Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanaidh is Barantais Chàileachd

There had been circulated Report No HCW/21/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- paragraph 3.1 of the report stated there was no specific resource issues arising out of the contents of this report. However, there were a significant number of vacant posts which might require to recruit people who needed to be trained, and there were a number of young people who had to be placed in out of area placements. More detail on costs would be provided to the Committee in February 2022;
- 70 staff had been interviewed as part of the small scale review, some 1:1, some in groups;
- assurance was provided that social work managers were communicating with front line care workers to build sustainable teams with good two-way engagement, especially in relation to redesign of services;
- it was acknowledged that some care staff had a preference for working with children or with adults, or in a particular sector, while others welcomed variation. Discussion took place on the extent to which all care services were trying to recruit from the same group of people and an outline was provided of some of the measures being undertaken to make a career in care work more attractive, for example limiting split shifts where possible, ensuring adequate equipment, and offering variation if desired. It was suggested the Scottish Government should be lobbied to increase pay rates for care workers and to improve opportunities to recruit from abroad. The need to value care workers and raise the profile of caring as a career was emphasised;
- dual-skilling could be useful and beneficial for the individuals and their employers and communities, especially in remote and rural locations;
- a bank for care workers from all sectors was suggested, as was a Highland-wide care passport, which would allow skills or training gained in one sector to be accepted by others if someone moved post. In particular, a passport system for PVG checks would be helpful to reduce duplication, and a meeting should be held to further discuss this and to consider lobbying the Scottish Government. Attention was drawn to the NHS Highland integrated bank and to the Covid Response Team, which had been presented under Item 3, which had functioned as a type of bank for emergency care staff during the Covid-19 crisis; and
- the Council, NHS Highland, and third sector teams were working closely together in anticipation of a challenging winter, and information was due to be issued shortly about a briefing for Members on a people mobilisation strategy.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the review processes being undertaken in the different services;

- ii. **NOTED** planned use of these findings to help inform practice, service delivery and re-design of services; and
- i. **AGREED** to hold an informal meeting, ideally before Christmas 2021, to discuss lobbying the Scottish Government in relation to the development of a cross-service and cross-agency Highland-wide PVG passport system.

## 6. **Sutherland Pathfinder Project Pròiseact Lorgair-Slighe Chataibh**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/22/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- progress with the project was welcomed and it was hoped best practice from the project would be disseminated to other rural communities; and
- ‘and their families’ should have been added to the end of the following sentence in paragraph 5.1 of the report: ‘Previous funding has been allocated by the Scottish Government (grants of £178k and £534k) for supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people’.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** a Sutherland wide engagement process with communities working in collaboration with Sutherland Community Partnership, Third Sector Organisations and Statutory services;
- ii. **NOTED** an engagement process for working collaboratively with children and young people across Sutherland to enable them to have an active role in shaping the Sutherland Youth Action Plan and the Childs Plan; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the creation of a Sutherland Pathfinder signed up to by Young People, Highland Council, Community Planning Partners and Third Sector Organisations.

## 7. **Commissioned Health Service Assurance Report Aithisg Bharantais Seirbheis Slàinte Choimiseanaichte**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/23/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the fact that there were 250 health professionals demonstrated the scope of the service and support the Council was seeking to offer;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the training for the 10 trainee advanced nurses would be a one-year advanced practice course and this was based on feedback from the Service;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that school nurses qualified to the advanced practitioner level were able to offer advice and guidance to Education staff as well as being the Named Person of the school if there were questions about health and wellbeing for young people;
- in response to a question about Allied Health Professionals (AHP), it was confirmed that there were no recruitment difficulties at the present time;

- Members echoed the concern that there were no electronic Child Health Records used in Highland and in response the Chief Executive explained that there was a Transformation project underway on Digitalisation and there had been agreement with the Digital Office Scotland to complete a digital maturity assessment across the Council as a result of staff feedback. An update on the Transformation work would be taken to a meeting of the Committee in February 2022;
- the positivity and progress outlined in the report was important to highlight and a credit to the staff involved;
- information was sought, and provided, on the role of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and how this was being managed;
- the 11% Health Visitor vacancy rate was worrying and everything that could be done to reduce this was important;
- clarification was sought on school nursing and immunisations and it was explained that over two thirds of the school workforce was advanced nurse qualified and spending 70% of their time on vaccinations which were clinical duties they were overqualified for and this would be examined to ensure their skills were being used appropriately;
- the percentage of children reaching their developmental milestones at their 27 – 30-month health review had not had new data since 2019 and explanation around this was provided;
- it was concerning that there was a long way to go regarding the reduction in the percentage gap between the most and least deprived parts of Highland for low birthweight babies;
- 18 weeks from referral to treatment was a long time to wait for AHP services; and
- regarding comments made about mental health and wellbeing, the Head of Integrated Children’s Services explained that there had been a significant development in this area as a decision had been taken at the Community Planning Partnership Board to establish a whole system mental health strategy as there was a strong need for a reinforced focus from a partnership perspective around mental health and wellbeing. A Stakeholder workshop had been tabled for late November 2021 and the key work was how to produce a strategy taking a keen interest on improving the amount and quality of data for mental health in communities.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. update on service delivery, including measures put in place across the Covid pandemic;
- ii. context of Integrated Children’s Service Planning; and
- iii. update on future plans for service improvement, clinical and professional governance and performance reporting.

## **8. Adult Social Care Assurance Report Aithisg Bharantais Cùram Sòisealta Inbheach**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/24/21 dated 7 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During a verbal update, the Interim Head of Integration Adult Social Care highlighted that in reference to Section 4.3 of the report, all care homes had had a third rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine since the publishing of the report.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- it had been proven how quickly the Council, NHS and communities could mobilise although this could not be done on a regular basis and it was important to establish a way to mobilise by replicating the teams that were put together in Highland. It was explained that the medium and long-term approach for enhancing response teams was underway;
- regarding the data on Adult Support and Protection (ASP) referrals and the investigations chart at Section 9.4 of the report, it was queried what the 'Other' category comprised of and the Director of Adult Social Care, NHS Highland agreed to gather details around this and circulate it to the Committee;
- the report was timely, well thought out, and challenging and the question would be how the Council and communities would respond to the challenge that was presented;
- information was sought, and provided, on the requirement for NHS workers and independent providers to be double vaccinated and it was agreed that Members would be kept apprised of government decision-making around this issue by way of a Members briefing note as information became available.;
- it was emphasised that both the challenges and solutions were to be found in communities; and
- the Council had the funding but required the appropriate staff in order to mobilise; and
- it was agreed that a Committee meeting with a one item agenda should be scheduled on the subject of the Provision of Adult Social Care in Communities and the purpose would be to bring forward solutions and ideas with the invite to include all Members, Third Sector partners and the NHS.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the continued commitment and collaborative actions to sustain service provision, whilst responding to the ongoing pandemic and associated operational pressures;
- iv. **AGREED** that a breakdown be provided to the Committee on the 'Other' category at Section 9.4 of the report relating to ASP Referrals and Investigations;
- v. **AGREED** that a briefing note be provided to the Committee in the event that national decision making occurred around double vaccination requirements for Health workers; and
- vi. **AGREED** that a meeting be convened, with the invitation to include Third Sector partners and NHS Highland, to discuss the single issue of Provision of Adult Social Care in Communities in the coming months.

**9. Revenue Budget Monitoring – Quarter 2 for 2021/22  
Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – Cairteal 2 airson 2021/22**

**Declaration of Interest: Ms L Munro declared a financial interest in this item as a Specialist SDS Advisor with Carr Gomm Community Contacts Team and left the meeting during discussion. Mr D Fraser took the Chair in her absence.**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/25/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- tribute was paid to Mike Mitchell on his forthcoming retirement for his many years of service to the Council;
- information was sought and provided on the overspends in out of authority placements, fostering and adoption, which reflected some of the challenges faced during the preceding 18 months;
- while the underspend in Self-Directed Support (SDS) was understandable during the Covid-19 crisis, due to services being unavailable, assurance was sought and provided that the available funds would now be able to be fully utilised. Assurance was also sought that appropriate feedback had been provided to young carers in relation to SDS concerns. A report on SDS would be presented to the Committee in February 2022;
- information was sought and provided on the reported figures for commissioned children's services income from NHS Highland;
- in response to a query on the management team overspend, this related to carry forward of management structure savings and would be rectified when the budgets were realigned;
- assurance was provided that the cessation of £60k funding for infant feeding was to be resourced elsewhere;
- underspends in the core Looked After Children budget were partly as a result of additional Covid-19 funding received; and
- information was sought on action being taken to address county lines and child exploitation issues, and a summary was provided of the activities governed by the Child Protection Committee, and of joint work being undertaken with Police Scotland and other agencies. Child exploitation had been identified as a key priority of the Child Protection Committee over the coming three years and a bid was being prepared to the Scottish Government for funding to support this work. Barnardo's had produced a report on county lines that could be shared with the Committee.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** forecast revenue position as at Quarter 2 of the 2021/22 financial year, including the management action being taken and the risks and uncertainties set out within the report;
- ii. **NOTED** progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery; and
- iii. **AGREED** a report by Barnardo's on county lines and exploitation would be shared with the Committee.

## 10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The minutes of the Joint Monitoring Committee held on 7 October 2021 were **NOTED**.

The meeting ended at 2.25pm.

## Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 16 November 2021 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr G Adam  
Mrs J Barclay  
Mr C Fraser

### In attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, ECO Property and Housing  
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager (Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth), Communities and Place  
Mr R MacLeod, Area Housing Manager, Housing and Property  
Mr D Martin, Area Care and Learning Manager  
Mr T Stott, Principal Planner, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms S Lamb, EFF Regional Development Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms I MacIver, Housing Options Officer, Property and Housing  
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

### Also in attendance:

Inspector R Ross, Police Scotland

Mr Steve Bramwell, Black Isle Men's Shed

**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. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BI/006/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- disappointed to see the figures for assaults on emergency workers;
- in response to a question on missing people it was confirmed that there were currently no outstanding missing people in the area at this time; and
- an interest was expressed in figures for scams both on-line and by telephone in this area. There had been an increase in figures from the start of the Covid lockdown.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-2021 Year 2, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2021 – 30 September 2021; and
- ii. information on the number of incidents in relation to scams reported to Police Scotland to be provided to Members.

### **Black Isle Men's Shed Presentation**

There followed a presentation from Mr Steve Bramwell of the Black Isle Men's Shed on a community initiative for an electric-assisted mobility trishaw taxi enabling people to get into the fresh air and to interact with other members of their community. This would help combat social isolation and mobility issues for people in the area.

The Committee thanked Mr Bramwell for his presentation and wished the Black Isle Men's Shed every success in their venture.

### **4. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No BI/007/21 dated 16 November 2021 Executive Chief Officer – Property and Housing.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there had been a welcome reduction in rent arrears with concern expressed at the reduction in the £20 uplift payment for people on universal credit. Housing Management Officers were monitoring rent arrears and were in daily contact with Housing Maximisation Service and made referrals to this service. Tenant Support Officers also assisted tenants having trouble paying their rent;
- there was an increase in homeless presentations following a stable period, possibly due to the increased movement of people following Covid restrictions; and
- clarification on the figure for reactive repairs. There was a general issue with contractor availability across all services. There were also in-house tradesmen who carried out some repair work. The figure further reflected when there might be additional work required following an emergency repair. This was the figure for Ross and Cromarty Area and work was being undertaken to disaggregate this figure to the area committees.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

**5. Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust  
Urras Foghlaim Rois is Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No BI/008/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the Area Care and Learning Manager.

In discussion, the following responses were given:-

- it was not known where shares in the Trust were invested, details of investments and possible improvements would be brought back to a ward meeting;
- interested to also learn if, with the size of the capital in the trust, an improved return could be earned while still limiting the liability; and
- the Trust was monitored by the finance service and the Trust had last been reviewed approximately two years ago when no real changes had been suggested.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that details of investments and the possibility of maximising the return be investigated and brought to the Ward Business Meeting.

**6. Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2  
Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh**

There had been circulated Report No BI/009/21 dated 21 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, the following responses were given:-

- Members were appreciative of the work involved in the Development Plan and thanked the Team for the tremendous amount of work undertaken;
- local development plans are only permitted to control development down to low water mark. There was a national Marine Plan and there was also to be a Regional Marine Plan and the Highland Council would be one of many organisations preparing that plan. It will be the policy document to control marine development. Within the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan, NatureScot had requested that planning officers assess any onshore development for any impact offshore.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on local/City committee-specific matters and agree the recommended responses to these issues both as detailed at **Appendix 1**;
- ii. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and officer recommended responses both as detailed at **Appendix 2** and recommend to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee the local/City committee's view on these strategic matters;

- iii. **NOTED** additional supporting documents will accompany the publication of the Proposed Plan, including those outlined in section 3 below;
- iv. **NOTED** that minor presentational, typographical and other factual updates and changes will be made by officers, with any material changes to be agreed in consultation and agreement with the chair of the relevant committee(s) prior to publication;
- v. **AGREED**, in line with government guidance, for the published Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan to be treated as a material planning consideration in making planning decisions and providing advice; and
- vi. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in section 7 of this report.

## 7. Highland Coastal Communities Fund Maoin Coimhearsnachdan Cladaich na Gàidhealtachd – Measadh Iarrtasan

There had been circulated Report No BI/010/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **APPROVED** funding for the Ferintosh Community Hall of £6,557.91, subject to the conditions outlined in the report.

## 8. Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations Maoin Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite

There had been circulated Report No BI/011/21 dated 8 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. £20,000 for Mental Health and Wellbeing with a particular focus on young people, older people and disabled people to reduce increased feelings of anxiety or social isolation. Funding to be delegated to Fortrose Academy - Black Isle Wellbeing Group;
- ii. £25,000 for Community Spaces (Play, Environment, Green Space) Recognising the increased usage of open spaces and supporting local projects to improve play opportunities. Funding to be delegated to the Council's Amenities team for direct delivery.
- iii. £25,000 to establish a grant fund for investment in community-led projects to address the four harms of Covid.
- iv. £30,000 to Support Sustainable Economic Recovery - to address how the pandemic has impacted on the economic recovery; including tourism, training and employment. A proposal on how this will be delivered would be considered at the next meeting of this committee.

## 9. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

There had been circulated Report Nos BI/012/21 – BI/013/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

- a. Cromarty Common Good Fund BI/008/21
- b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund BI/009/21

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

**10. Black Isle Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2021-2022  
Prògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Eilein Duibh 2021-2022**

There had been circulated Report No BI/014/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Housing and Property.

Concern was expressed at the potentially disproportionate cost to the Highland Council of complying with legislation to make buildings wind and water in relation to conservation areas and housing with listed building status. Mr Rodgers advised that regardless of the listed building status of a house the Council had a statutory obligation to ensure Council housing was wind and watertight.

As the service centre was busy with the reporting of Council house repairs, it was requested that the service centre explore caller notification that could indicate the length of time a caller may need to wait on a call or the position the caller had in the queue.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to Black Isle 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 Black Isle Area 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 1; and
- iv. **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; and
- v. **NOTED** that caller notifications for service centre calls would be investigated.

**11. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle Committee held on 5 August 2021 which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021.

The meeting closed at 12:40 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 17 November 2021 at 11.05 am.

### Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A Jarvie
Mr C Aitken	Ms E Knox
Mrs I Campbell	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr S Mackie
Mr D Fraser	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr L Fraser	Mr C Munro
Mr K Gowans	Mrs F Robertson
Mr A Graham	Mr A Sinclair
Mr T Heggie (Vice Chair)	

### Religious Representatives:

Ms S Lamont  
Mr W Skene

### Youth Convener:

Ms A Johnston

### Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Bremner	Mrs E McAllister
Mrs M Davidson	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Henderson	

### In attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning  
Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance  
Ms A Jansson, Head of Service, Primary Education  
Ms F Grant, Head of Service, Secondary Education  
Mr B Porter, Head of Resources  
Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer  
Mr D Martin, Area Education and Learning Manager (Mid)  
Mr R Quigley, Collaborative Lead/Online Safety Officer  
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, Resources and Finance  
Mr R Campbell, Estate Strategy Manager, Property and Housing  
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)  
Ms S Fowler, Thriving Families (Third Sector)  
Mr J Hasson, Highland Parent Council Partnership  
Miss J MacIennan, Principal Administrator  
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator  
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

**Also in attendance:**

Dr T Allison, Director of Public Health, NHS Highland  
 Dr J Wares, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, NHS Highland  
 Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland  
 Mr S Harris, Chief Executive, **sportscotland**  
 Mr G Reid, **sportscotland**  
 Mr G Lindsay, **sportscotland**

**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****Business**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Cockburn and Mr R Finlay.

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

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

Item 5 – Mr C Munro (financial and non-financial)  
 Item 9 – Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)  
 Item 10 – Mr K Gowans, Mr T Heggie and Mr A Jarvie (all non-financial)  
 Item 11 – Mr K Gowans and Mr A Jarvie (both non-financial)  
 Item 15 – Mr K Gowans (non-financial)

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

Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer, summarised the outstanding achievements by pupils and schools since the previous meeting of the Committee as set out on the This is Highland website, a link to which had been circulated to Members in advance of the Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

**4. Covid and Back to School**  
**Covid agus Air Ais dhan Sgoil**

The Chair explained that despite COVID still being prevalent in Highland, school staff and pupils supported by parents and communities continued to show resilience, flexibility and understanding of what was likely to be with the population for some time.

The Area Education and Learning Manager (Mid) gave a verbal update on COVID cases within schools, with cases initially rising in August before gently declining by September. Despite schools reopening successfully following the October break,

COVID numbers had risen again and had culminated in an infection rate exceeding 1000 over the last month. Whilst schools and classes were not generally being shut en-masse, there had been a significant rise in the number of staff contracting COVID or self-isolating pending test results. This had led to schools or classes having partial or complete shutdowns due to high case numbers or a lack of staff. Currently there were 2 primary and 2 nursery schools closed. Across Highland there were around 160 new positive cases in staff and pupils respectively, including much higher numbers still in isolation from the previous week. Whilst schools were well placed to deliver virtual learning, recognition was given to the fatigue of teaching and non-teaching staff, including head teachers who worked late into the evening for several days when outbreaks occurred.

Gratitude and thanks were expressed to NHS Highlands Health Protection Team for their continuing support and managing COVID in schools, and colleagues and other council services who work hard to support communities in keeping schools open and functioning. Much work had been done to undertake monitoring of CO2 levels within classrooms as a key measure of air quality, with monitoring to balance fresh air flow whilst maintaining heat levels in schools throughout the winter to keep schools open. Colleagues in Property and Facilities continued to work closely with schools to manage this.

Covid vaccination plans for 12-15 year olds were well in place for December and flu vaccinations were also underway. The Council's position, based on Scottish Government guidance, had been updated and the current mitigations of face-coverings, hygiene and limits to large gatherings for schools remained in place. Christmas events would be scaled back to avoid large gatherings but partners were in discussion with the service to look at alternative solutions for pantomime season.

Dr Tim Allison, Director of Public Health gave a verbal update on COVID within Highland. The increase of COVID cases trend had been more so in areas that had seen less COVID cases in the past and had now spread to all areas of Highland. NHS Highland was recording approximately 200 cases per day and remained a big issue. Whilst the proportion of people becoming seriously ill with COVID were few, there were still cases of some who became extremely seriously ill. The difference being experienced now in comparison to previous waves of COVID was the preponderance among young people. This was likely due to many young people not being vaccinated and COVID now reaching groups that it had not reached before.

Currently primary school students were the group mainly affected, with the majority of a class becoming infected when an outbreak occurred. There was a good working relationship between the Health Protection Team and Highland Council which enabled both to act quickly and pick up a larger proportion of cases, including the reasons behind the transmission of infection in order to implement further mitigation measures.

The Joint Committee for Vaccination Immunisation (JVCI) had extended its advice and now advised boosters for 40-49 year olds, but also second doses for 16-17 year olds. It was anticipated that the Scottish Government would agree to this enhancement vaccination programme.

Dr Jenny Wares, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, NHS Highland, also gave a verbal update on the close working relationship NHS had with Highland schools. When there was a single COVID case at a school, NHS were informed and a letter

was sent out to the rest of the class. There was an isolation of close contacts at that point, and advice was shared, and information provided to be vigilant for symptoms and seek testing if symptoms developed. If further cases within the same class or year group were identified, NHS undertook a risk assessment to establish if the cases could be linked, and specific advice was provided accordingly depending if the COVID infections were isolated or part of an outbreak. The incubation period of COVID from being exposed to the development of symptoms could take up to 2 weeks.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- as the COVID breakout at Avoch primary involved many pupils who travelled on small buses, a question was raised if this would be a focussed research area for NHS Highland;
- clarification was sought regarding the advice that siblings could continue to go to school despite family members being tested positive for COVID; and
- despite the pantomime being cancelled for children this year at Eden Court, it was questioned if there were possibly mitigations which would allow schools to attend the pantomime.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

**5. Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) – The Highland Council**  
**Aithisg Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus Foghlam Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr C Munro declared a financial interest in this item as his wife worked part-time as a Gaelic Medium teacher. He also declared a non-financial interest as his children attended Gaelic Medium Education. However, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, he concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/21 dated 11 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Members welcomed the inclusion of the Virtual Academy in the report for the delivery of Gaelic education and for new learners;
- it was requested that a report be brought to the next committee meeting on the role of the Virtual Academy in the promotion of Gaelic across Highland, as well as a general overview of the project;
- it was encouraging to see the figures which showed the continuing development of GME and GLE in Highland and the important part which Highland played in Gaelic Education nationally;
- reference was made to paragraph 4.3 which stated that Highland Council had the largest numbers of pupils following GLE in Scotland. Highland Council did not do this alone as numerous other stakeholders contributed;
- future development was deemed critical in the education of young people and sustaining the Gaelic language in both rural and urban Highland communities;

- an update was required on progress for the future 3-18 Gaelic offering in Inverness, including an explanation on any feasibility work which could have implications for the development of GME from 3-18 in other contexts in Highland;
- regarding the discussion paper on the development of GME in Portree High School to Highland Council in November 2019, it was queried if there was going to be an opportunity to engage with this and to seek progress;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on how the GME provision at Glen Urquhart HS could be delivered;
- the recognition that the 3-18 feasibility study might release another school provision in Inverness, providing broader education for English speaking pupils, was welcomed; and
- in anticipation of the census results, it was suggested that Highland Council undertake appropriate preparation and work on a programme for the development of Gaelic across all Highland areas.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the report and the provision of Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Education across Highland;
- NOTED** the areas of current and future development; and
- AGREED** that a report on the role of the Virtual Academy in the promotion of Gaelic across Highland, as well as a general overview of the Virtual Academy initiative, be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

## 6. Highland Attainment and Scrutiny Session 2020-21 Seisean Coileanadh is Sgrùdadh na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/23/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair paid tribute to schools which had done really well over the last academic year, given the many difficult challenges faced. There had been some improvements in attainment over the last 4 years in terms of Highland performance but there remained room for improvement in terms of how Highland was faring with regard to its Virtual Comparator (VC) schools and national comparators, and the report outlined how it was proposed to scrutinise and improve attainment with further reports back to future Education Committees;
- the attainment overview was presented as a positive overview, claiming attainment continued to improve. Whilst this was true in some areas, key detail showed that Highland continued to perform poorly compared to its VC and very poorly compared to the national establishment against key measures;
- it was suggested that one reason for the continued poor performance was the ongoing issue with Secondary School staffing resource as Highland Council had the lowest staffing formula of all 32 Scottish local Authorities. In some of the authority's larger secondary schools, if the same staffing resource was applied, it would equate to an additional 12-14 teachers although it was doubtful if there was even the physical capacity to accommodate this with the school estate which, itself, had been left to deteriorate. The Highland Council's Corporate Plan 2017-2022 had stated that the sustainability of education provision would be

- improved by rebasing school staffing allocation to be transparent and in line with national standards but progress on achieving this was questioned;
- included in the Scottish Government's 100 days commitment priorities was funding to increase teacher numbers by 1000 and classroom assistants by 500. In addition, an extra £65m was to be provided annually from 2022-23 so local authorities could employ additional staff on permanent contracts. Highland Council's share was £2.306m to fund an additional 46 teachers and 23 full time Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs). Consequently, it was questioned (a) how many teachers and PSAs had been recruited since August 2021 outwith Devolved School Management, Additional Support for Learning, Pupil Equity Funding and Scottish Attainment Challenge funding streams; and (b) how much of the £2.306m had been allocated to schools with details of the additional teachers, PSAs and schools also sought;
  - it was questioned how many PSA hours had been reduced following the Additional Support for Learning staffing allocation in October 2021;
  - given the statistics it had to be questioned if the Highland Council was providing the right environment and conditions to help young people achieve their potential;
  - while improvements had been made Highland Council still lagged behind the national average;
  - referring to the graphs showing awards gained by young people in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, particularly in S5, the gap had increased. Every effort needed to be made to close this gap. This was a systemic and strategic problem and a drastic course of action was required;
  - Highland had one of the lowest teacher:pupil ratios, despite the number of small schools, and yet studies showed that smaller class sizes yielded better results;
  - the Council could not claim to be pupil centric if pupils were unable to study the subjects they wanted;
  - it was questioned how much non-contact time teachers had in other local authorities to plan lessons;
  - a meaningful difference would require a new strategy. A Committee setting might not necessarily be the best forum for this and an early seminar was called for where Members and officers could examine the detail, get to the heart of the issues and arrive at the necessary conclusions;
  - there needed to be an acknowledgement of where the deficits lay if they were to be addressed and, similar to what was sought from teachers, there needed to a self evaluation exercise carried out;
  - there had been some improvements but these were a result of the dedication and commitment of the teaching staff who had made an exemplary job in face of diminishing resources; and
  - although there had been a suggestion that the supply list was closed, Members were informed that this was not the case.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Senior Phase Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Attainment for session 2020/21 and **NOTED** the continued positive trends in attainment over four periods;
- ii. **NOTED** that secondary school-based attainment meetings would take place in November and December 2021 and actions for improvement would be agreed; these would then be shared and discussed with Members at ward level and sessions completed by end January 2022 so that a summative report inclusive of

Member and Headteacher feedback could be brought back to the Education Committee in February 2022;

- iii. **NOTED** the specific focus on attainment meetings on raising attainment in S5 at level 6 (Higher) and that a summary of the strategies that were being deployed across the Highlands to accelerate improvement would be brought back to the February Committee;
- iv. **AGREED** that a report containing costed details as to how the Scottish Government funding for extra teachers and Pupil Support Assistants would be allocated in Highland be presented to the next meeting; and
- v. **AGREED** that consideration be given to a Members' workshop/seminar on attainment.

## 7. Consultation on the review of SQA and Education Scotland Co-chomhairle mun ath-sgrùdadh air Ùghdarras Theisteanasan na h-Alba agus Foghlam Alba

There had been circulated Report No EDU/24/21 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In addition, a Members' workshop had taken place prior to the Committee to enable an initial discussion on the consultation on the Future Implementation Framework for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Review of Curriculum for Excellence, including the replacement of SQA and the Reform of Education Scotland. to take place. The Chair thanked those who had attended and explained that a draft response to the consultation would be brought to Council in December.

The Committee **NOTED** the terms of the consultation and:-

- i. the main themes and conclusions reached in the OECD reports that were being consulted on as part of the review of SQA and Education Scotland;
- ii. the proposed engagement with internal and external stakeholders to help inform the response to the consultation; and
- iii. that the draft response would be brought to full Council in December.

## 8. Online Internet Safety and Child Protection Sàbhailteachd Eadar-lìn Air-loidhne agus Dion Chloinne

Introducing the presentation, the Chair explained that, arising from the Child Protection Seminar on 17 September 2021, he had been of the opinion that some of the presentations from the day needed to come back to the Education Committee. Across Highland Schools, digital learning had played a significant role in ensuring that access to learning continued as smoothly and as uninterrupted as possible during the pandemic. The Council had significantly increased the number of Chromebooks that children had access to, including providing 1:1 devices for over a 100 smaller primary schools. To support this and provide reassurance to pupils, schools and families, a high emphasis was placed on providing support around digital/online safety which, it was hoped, would also be transferred to other aspects of our young peoples' digital safety.

Mr R Quigley, Collaborative Lead/Online Safety Officer, gave a presentation on progress that had been made in Highland in relation to this and outlined some of the key issues that were facing children and schools, as well as the next steps which were planned.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- there were prominent vloggers and YouTubers online who had a lot of influence over young people;
- gaming devices were also used to communicate with friends and limiting time on such devices therefore also resulted in restricting access to classmates;
- in-game purchases were a frequent feature;
- a careful balance had to be made between regulation and education in what was a dynamic and everchanging environment and partnership working with other local authorities and stakeholders was important;
- Parent Councils would benefit from hearing the presentation;
- peer to peer support and engagement would help inform discussion and there was merit in senior stage pupils taking more of a leadership role in developing strategies to protect younger children; and
- the manner in which adults and children communicated online was different and the impact on a young person's mental wellbeing could be considerable. A lot of bullying could now take place online as opposed to what used to happen in the playground.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that it be circulated to Members.

## 9. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Thràth-ionnsachadh is Cùram-chloinne

**Declaration 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.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/25/21 dated 8 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair highlighted that, as indicated in the report, over 4300 child places were now being accessed for provision of up to 1140 hours across Council, partner and blended placements, and he thanked all stakeholders for the positive progress that had been and continued to be made. Positive progress has also been made in relation to ongoing capital works, and a number of new or refurbished facilities had been opened since the last meeting of the Committee.

He welcomed the recommendation that the Committee agree to an interim uplift in the rate paid to partners for funded ELC places, and that the uplift be backdated to August 2021. As the report indicated, there was an ongoing process taking place around a permanent rate and he would shortly be inviting Jaci Douglas, Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, who sat on the associated working group, to speak on the matter. He added that there was ongoing engagement and positive working with

partners through the working group which would lead to further recommendations coming back to the Committee in the new year.

Ms Douglas, Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, commented that it was important to recognise the incredible dedication, skills and hard work of all ELC staff, particularly over the past year, who played such a vital role in supporting the early learning and development of young children and ensuring they achieved their best potential. She also expressed appreciation for the partnership approach to the delivery of 1140 hours in Highland, commissioned services being a mixture of third sector, private, local authority and childminders to provide children and parents with a quality service across the whole region.

In relation to partner rates for funded ELC, it was important to say that she sat on the Committee as a representative of third sector children's services and was not representing the views of all the partners on the working group. The working group itself was to be welcomed and it was important that the current robust, honest and respectful dialogue continued. However, she expressed disappointment at the low interim rate proposed in the report, especially considering the ask of partners of £6.50 as an interim rate as well as the predicted £266k underspend detailed in the Revenue Budget monitoring report later on the agenda.

The proposed rate, even as an interim measure, meant that partners would struggle to cover the recently announced 40p increase in the Living Wage to their lowest paid staff. Additionally, if partners were unable to offer wages that matched the higher rates paid to local authority staff it could compound current recruitment and retention challenges for the sector, and she asked if the interim rate could be reconsidered and increased, especially as it could be covered by the predicted one-off underspend.

However, she welcomed the commitment in the report to backdate the interim rate to August 2021 and to undertake the Ipsos Mori survey as soon as possible, working with partners on the shape and scope thereof. This work would be vital if a true sustainable ELC sector was to be achieved.

Whilst she appreciated it was covered in the report, she sought a commitment from the Council to also backdate any new agreed rate arising from the Ipsos Mori survey to August 2021 as if partners were not being paid the correct rate then it had been incorrect for the entire year.

Finally, she reiterated her appreciation of the partnership approach being taken and looked forward to continuing to work with partners and Council officers to ensure a thorough and transparent consultation exercise by Ipsos Mori which would provide robust data to inform the rates moving forward and ensure a thriving sustainable mixed provider sector that met the specific and unique challenges and needs of Highland communities.

In response, the Chair explained that it was not possible to ask the Committee to commit to backdating any new agreed rate arising from the review when the review had not concluded and the outcome and impact were not known.

During further discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to Kinmylies Primary Nursery, information was sought, and provided, on stage 3 of the design process. The Estate Strategy Manager undertook to keep Ward Members updated on progress going forward;
- the disparity between the rates paid to local authority and partner ELC staff appeared to be getting wider and was cause for concern;
- an update having been sought in respect of Avoch Primary Nursery, it was confirmed that the building was complete and had been handed over;
- Members welcomed the progress that had been made in respect of Milton of Leys Primary Nursery, and expressed thanks to those involved; and
- an update having been sought in relation to accommodation provision for an ELC practitioner on the Isle of Rum, the Chair confirmed that a meeting to discuss the matter was taking place that day and a member of the team would contact Councillor Henderson to advise him of the outcome.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update and positive information provided in relation to the number of settings and children benefiting from funded ELC provision;
- ii. **NOTED** the current status of the remaining ELC capital projects and work being taken forward to progress project delivery;
- iii. **NOTED** the update provided in relation to local and national developments;
- iv. **NOTED** the work being taken forward in relation to the review of the rate of payment for funded ELC to the Council's partners; and
- v. **AGREED** an interim rate for funded ELC to apply effective August 2021, as outlined in section 8 of the report.

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

### **Declarations of Interest:**

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

**Mr T Heggie declared a non-financial interest 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.**

**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/26/21 dated 24 October 2021 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

The Chair explained that Steve Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland would introduce parts one and two of the report covering performance, recovery and general updates. Part three of the report, which focussed on the partnership work between

**sportscotland** and High Life Highland, would be introduced by Stewart Harris, Chief Executive, **sportscotland**, who had been a strong supporter of the Council for many years, **sportscotland** having made significant investments in Active Schools, Community Sports Hubs, capital investments and Sports Travel Grants amongst others. Indeed, he had been in the Highlands as recently as last month to speak with stakeholders and had visited Skye which would have confirmed for him the breadth of challenge but also the breadth of opportunity that made up living in such a large, mainly rural, local authority area. He was particularly keen to get feedback from Members in order to promote conversations around how partnership working could be improved and also how **sportscotland**, working alongside High Life Highland and other partners, could achieve strategic alignment with the Council's priorities as they continued to develop and emerge.

During discussion, the following comments were made in relation to High Life Highland recovery and general updates:-

- it was highlighted that it was the City of Inverness Area Committee, not the Council, that had requested High Life Highland to act as the managing agent of the Inverness Events and Festivals programme, which was funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund; and
- the greatly improved financial position was a credit to all involved, particularly the staff. However, cost controls had largely been achieved through the furloughing of staff and it might not be comfortable for them to hear that capital investment was a priority for High Life Highland at this stage. Information was sought, and provided, as to what reassurance would be offered to staff that management valued their contribution, and whether there were any plans to reward those members of staff who had been impacted financially during the pandemic.

The following comments were made in relation to partnership working with **sportscotland**:-

- the Chair expressed support for the proposed in-depth partnership and emphasised the need to ensure that the necessary strategic conversations took place, looking at both the Council's capital programme and its ambitious and progressive school-build agenda. He also welcomed the focus on inclusion and equality and the recognition of issues such as rural poverty, alcohol misuse and suicide, which were particularly relevant in Highland;
- Highland had been an area of great change over the past ten years and there was a huge deficit in terms of sports facility provision. Further information was sought on the discussions that had taken place so far in terms of strategic priorities and which geographical areas in Highland were considered to be key priorities. In that regard, reference was made to the Notice of Motion to the City of Inverness Area Committee on 18 November 2021 seeking agreement to begin work looking at the provision of a major new sports facility in the east of Inverness, an area which had seen significant housing development in recent years. However, it was recognised that such a facility would have to fit in with need across the whole of Highland and provide benefit for all;
- anything that brought resources to communities and stretched capital as far as possible was to be welcomed, and Members were encouraged by the proposals;
- in relation to equality, reference was made to the difference between rural and urban areas in terms of provision of and access to quality sports facilities, and the potential for smaller schools to include sports facilities for the benefit of the whole

community was welcomed. The Chair added that different parts of Highland had different pressures and needs, and what might be seen as a small investment in a city would make a huge difference in a rural area;

- appreciation was expressed for the Active Schools model which worked well in Highland, there being an Active Schools Coordinator in every Associated School Group. It was added that an Active Schools Coordinator could make a greater difference in a remote rural area than in Inverness where there might be other opportunities; and
- despite their success, having won both the Camanachd Cup and the MacTavish Cup in 2021, Kinlochshiel Shinty Club had no showers or changing facilities, and any enhancement in that regard would be appreciated.

In responding to the points raised, the Chief Executive, **sportscotland**, explained that the discussions so far around strategic priorities had been very open, looking at the options available across the whole of Highland. It was added that the discussions were preliminary pending confirmation from the Scottish Government and the National Lottery as to the financial position. It was emphasised that what was proposed was a longer-term approach, and that strategic discussions and prioritisation of projects were critical. **sportscotland** would maintain its existing commitments and would ensure that any paperwork in respect of any plans agreed upon was proportionate.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED**:-

- i. the information on the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period 1 April to 30 September 2021;
- ii. the general updates provided in section two of the report;
- iii. that in light of the above and the restrictions which had been imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, HLH was on target to meet the revised outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with The Highland Council for the operating period to March 2022;
- iv. the positive partnership working between HLH and **sportscotland** in section 3 of the report; and
- v. the new approach to sports facilities investment being taken by **sportscotland** and its willingness to support The Highland Council's strategic priorities for sports facility development as the Council developed its capital programme.

## **11. Revenue Budget Monitoring for Quarter 2 of 2021/22 Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – Cairteal 2 airson 2021/22**

### **Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr K Gowans declared non-financial interests in this item, both as an employee of Inverness College/UHI and on the grounds that a close family member 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 interests did not preclude his 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.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/27/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair welcomed the further improvement since the Quarter 1 position had been reported, much of which related to High Life Highland as described during the previous item. He added that it was necessary to be mindful of the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the risks and challenges still being faced across the service.

He went on to highlight that Mike Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, would be retiring in December and this would therefore be his final meeting of the Committee. On behalf of the Committee, the Education and Learning Service and himself as Chair of the Committee, he thanked Mike for his clear and concise advice and wished him well for his retirement.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the underspends on the ELC, Schools General and Specialist Additional Support Services budgets and an explanation was sought, and provided, as to why, at a time when so many budgets and services were in demand, the largest overspend was on the Service Management Team budget;
- projections were often much higher than the overspends ultimately were and the reductions were then presented as a success, but they were still overspends. However, it was necessary to be realistic and a 1.2% overspend across the entire Education and Learning budget was not considered to be unreasonable in the circumstances; and
- Members echoed the Chair's thanks and best wishes to the Service Finance Manager.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecast revenue position for the 2021/22 financial year, including the additional scrutiny and management action being taken and the risks and uncertainties set out within the report; and
- ii. the progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery.

## **12. National Improvement Framework Annual Reporting and Education Service Plan Plana Bliadhnail Frèam-obrach Leasachaidh Nàiseanta na Gàidhealtachd 2021-22**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/28/21 dated 8 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair explained that the National Improvement Framework (NIF) had been launched by the Scottish Government in January 2016. The Framework set out a vision for Scottish education based on achieving excellence and equity for all learners, regardless of social background and circumstances. A revised NIF and Plan were published each year in December, and the Council's response was set out in the report. The national publication set out four key priorities that everyone in Scottish education was working towards, namely:

- improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy;

- closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children;
- improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing; and
- improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people.

These priorities clearly continued to be important as the Council recovered from Covid and looked to ensure it was working collectively to improve life chances for Highland children and young people. The NIF also identified six key drivers of improvement and progress that were needed to deliver the desired improvements for learners, namely school leadership; teacher professionalism; parental engagement; assessment of children's progress; school improvement; and performance information.

The ongoing work which had continued throughout the pandemic within the Council's nurseries and schools reflected the features of the framework and, like all Local Authorities, the Council was required to produce a NIF improvement plan to demonstrate how it would work towards achieving the four main priorities stated earlier.

The Highland improvement plan outlined key actions that would be taken to address the excellence and equity agenda as well as the negative effects of Covid, particularly around health and wellbeing for all Highland children and young people. The central team continued to work with schools and communities to drive these improvements to ensure that better outcomes for young people was at the heart of everything the Council did.

The key aims within the improvement plan were building relationships, promoting empowerment and leadership and ensuring entitlement and equity. Appendix 1 of the document set out many areas of progress and success which should be celebrated. Some specific areas worth highlighting were:

- the work of the leadership and empowerment team who had been collaborating with all staff, including middle leaders and Head Teachers, to promote the empowerment agenda;
- the approach taken to establishing a whole systems approach in relation to mental health and wellbeing;
- the sector leading practice with some of Highland's most vulnerable young people through the Highland Virtual Academy; and
- the updating of safeguarding procedures that reflected 21st century society.

There was much to be proud of in the report, and the improvement plan for 2021-22 built on good practice and captured a combination of key strategic areas for improvement as well as specific elements of practice that would deliver the NIF priorities. Updates on progress would continue to be provided to the Education Committee over the next year.

During discussion, Ms S Fowler, Service Manager, Thriving Families, introduced herself to the Committee, it being her first meeting as a third sector representative. In relation to the improvement plan, she commented that there were few references to children and young people with additional support needs (ASN), who often faced multiple additional barriers to learning. She welcomed the nine-point Additional Support for Learning review being highlighted as a service priority and requested that the third sector, children, young people and families be involved in the review. With

regard to the Virtual Academy, information was sought, and provided, as to whether the “at risk” category included young people with ASN and whether the Virtual Academy was or could be part of a blended learning model for young people with ASN who were not currently in full-time education. She added that many young people with ASN had coped better with learning during lockdown, as evidenced by Highland Children and Young People’s Forum’s Letters from Lockdown project as well as feedback from families accessing Thriving Families and The Pines.

The Chair thanked Ms Fowler for her input and commented that, as agreed under item 5, more information on the Virtual Academy would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress made in Highland Council in session 2020/2021;
- ii. the key activities planned for session 2021/2022 to further improve outcomes for children, young people and families; and
- iii. the National Improvement Framework Report.

**13. Statutory Consultation: Gaelic Medium Catchment Area for Glenurquhart Primary School**  
**Co-chomhairle Reachdail: Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig airson Bun-Sgoil Ghlinn Urchadain**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/29/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal attached to the report.

**14. Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School**  
**Co-chomhairle Reachdail: Iarrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairle mu dhùnadh foirmeil Bhun-Sgoil Dhrochaid Ruaidh**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/30/21 dated 15 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal attached to the report.

**15. Membership of Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers**  
**Ballrachd na Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail airson Thidsearan**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr K Gowans declared a non-financial interest in this item as a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland Union and the General Teaching Council for Scotland 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 the discussion.**

The Committee **AGREED** the following change to the membership of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers:-

- Mr A Graham to replace Mr A Christie

**16. 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 and Ordinary Meeting of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 9 November 2021.

The meeting concluded at 3.10 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Thursday, 18 November 2021** at 10.00am.

### Present:

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

### Officials in Attendance:

Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure  
 Mr C Baxter, Planner, Planning & Environment  
 Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Roads & Transport  
 Mr J Taylor, Roads Operation Manager, Roads & Transport  
 Ms A Clark, Head of Policy & Reform  
 Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager  
 Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance  
 Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager  
 Mr M MacDonald, Corporate Improvement Project Manager  
 Miss K Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator  
 Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator

### Also in attendance:

Mr R Nixon, Local Senior Officer for Highland, 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 Committee.**

### Mrs H Carmichael in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, tributes were paid to former Councillors Mr R Lyon and Mr H Wood who had recently passed away and condolences were conveyed to their families.

## Business

### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs I MacKenzie, Ms E Roddick and Mr C Smith.

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

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

Item 4: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 5: Mr A Christie (financial) and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 13: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 16: Mr K Gowans (financial) and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 16(c): Mr A Christie (financial and non-financial) and Mr A Graham (non-financial)

## 3. **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Area Performance Report** **Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/34/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, an explanation was sought and provided on the anticipated impacts of the new legislation requiring domestic properties to have interlinked fire and heat detection systems. In that regard, it was confirmed that the Service would continue to educate and target behaviour which was the main cause of domestic fires.

At this point, and due to technical difficulties, the Inverness City Area Manager confirmed that he would seek responses offline to any remaining questions from Members.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the Area Performance Report as presented.

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

**Declaration 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, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

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

This Committee recognises the unprecedented scale of housing developments in the east of Inverness and lack of amenities to serve a growing population. In the next 5 years, over 5,000 new homes are planned and two new primary schools and one secondary school are already planned. It has already been acknowledged by this Committee and the public, there is a significant absence of indoor public sports facilities in the east of Inverness, to satisfy the growing demand from people of all ages and abilities.

This Committee recognises the need for major sports centre in the east of Inverness as a key element of any strategic plan for the city. In addition, the

Committee recognises the very real benefits of establishing a major sports centre in the east of Inverness in terms of building communities and promoting social, cultural capital and wellbeing.

This Committee agrees to prioritise and take forward the ambition and provision of a major sports centre on the east of Inverness, agree to set-up a five-to-seven-member cross party “Inverness East Sports Centre Working Group”, with support from officers, to liaise with stakeholders and partners to identify possible locations, range of facilities and to identify and progress funding opportunities.

Signed: Ken Gowans Glynis Sinclair Ian Brown

During discussion, there was general support from Members for the Motion and in particular it was highlighted that there had been thousands of houses built in the last few years and many thousands proposed to be built in future in the east of Inverness with currently no new sports facilities, other than the private gyms which had been built. There was therefore a need for new sports facilities for the majority of residents and these were long overdue.

In that regard, a proposal was submitted with the aim of strengthening the terms of the Motion which had been presented, including specific reference to the inclusion of High Life Highland in the Working Group given that they operated other sports facilities on behalf of the Council across the Highland area and would contribute valuable knowledge and experience to this project. It was also proposed that the first meeting of the Group should be held before the end of 2021 in order to progress the project more quickly.

It was also suggested that there was a need to be more specific about which sports facilities were needed and realistic and could be provided quickly with support from partners.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the terms of an amended Notice of Motion as follows:

This Committee recognises the unprecedented scale of housing developments in the east of Inverness and lack of amenities to serve a growing population. In the next 5 years, over 5,000 new homes are planned and two new primary schools and one secondary school are already planned. It has already been acknowledged by this Committee and the public, there is a significant absence of indoor public sports facilities in the east of Inverness to satisfy the growing demand from people of all ages and abilities.

This Committee recognises the need to establish major new sports facilities in the east of Inverness as a key element of any strategic plan for the city and recognises the very real benefits this would bring to the City in terms of building communities by promoting physical health, mental health and general wellbeing for all.

This Committee agrees to take forward the ambition to construct major new sports facilities on the east of Inverness by:

- setting up a cross party “Inverness East Sports Facility Working Group” with support from officers from the council and our High Life Highland partners;
- holding the first meeting of the group before the end of 2021 and agree that the working group will set its own Terms of Reference to reflect the powers delegated to the City Committee;
- liaising with stakeholders and partners to analyse work already underway and to identify potential locations for the new sports facilities;
- identifying the range of facilities to be delivered and progressing potential funding opportunities, including Sports Scotland;
- ensuring the plans are embedded in the Local Development Plan and City Strategy and make representations to the Council requesting that they are added to the Highland Council Capital Plan; and
- the Working Group reporting back to the City Committee on a regular basis to provide progress reports.

The Committee also **AGREED** that Officers should consult with political Group Leaders on the final composition of the Inverness East Sports Facility Working Group.

## 5. Inverness Strategy

### Declarations of Interest –

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

**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, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/35/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Economy & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the potential for the City and Area Recovery Group to become the City and Area Development Group with a scrutiny role in relation to the further delivery of plans contained in the Strategy and reports being brought back to the City Committee as required;
- the Strategy provided a blueprint for a healthier, safer and greener Highland capital which would attract tourists and businesses to the area. It provided an opportunity to create a separate and dedicated active travel network to provide low carbon, accessible and people focused travel infrastructure;

- a key issue was to connect the existing active travel routes into the City Centre and make them safer for users;
- the need to consider the carbon reduction plans for the City and wider area so there was a local as well as a Highland wide perspective;
- the need for more extensive planned consultation on the Strategy and the opportunity for Members to be fully involved in that consultation;
- it was important that the document was aligned with other strategic plans for the City;
- there was concern at the reference in the document to a one-way system in Castle Street, Inverness which Members had agreed should not be progressed. It was confirmed the document would be checked and corrected in this regard;
- the opportunities through the Strategy to deliver better quality jobs for those on low incomes and experiencing in-work poverty;
- the investment planned in reducing the domination of traffic, renewable energies and in creating new employment opportunities be emphasised in the summary section of the document;
- an update was sought and provided on the opportunities to redevelop Viewhill House which was currently in private ownership;
- creating housing, supporting independent traders and bringing new events and attractions was key to enhancing the vibrancy of the City Centre;
- the Strategy was an ambitious and forward thinking long terms vision and had the potential to be transformative. Members should be bold and show leadership in taking it forward;
- officers be commended on the exceptional work undertaken on the Strategy and on the major projects which had already been delivered;
- how the principles of community empowerment and public consultation would be applied to any major redesign to improve the City, and in particular the City Centre, for both visitors and residents; and
- the potential to undertake external painting works to the buildings at upper Bridge Street in the short term to improve the ambience of the City Centre. It was confirmed the costs of the works and associated planning issues were being actively considered.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Draft Inverness City Centre Masterplan for public consultation; and
- ii. **NOTED** the ongoing role of the Rethinking Inverness Report, including engagement undertaken, and Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan in shaping and delivering the Inverness Strategy.

## 6. Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2 Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail 2 Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/36/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- there was concern that site IN85 was designated for 'housing' given the significant traffic management implications of this and other proposed housing developments in the area and the newly formed local Community Council should be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed designation;
- there was a need to consult with Knocknagael Limited in relation to the proposed 'mixed use' site in this location. This was an active community group and it was important to ensure their community aspirations could be realised through the Local Development Plan;
- consultation with the above-mentioned community groups could proceed and their views incorporated into the content of the proposed Plan under recommendation iv in the report, before the Plan was issued for consultation. It was confirmed that Officers would reach out to both community organisations;
- the importance of the next stage of the consultation process and of the views of public being sought;
- the extensive consultation on the draft Plan to date had generated responses from the public in relation to a number of issues and these had been reflected in the proposed Plan;
- this was an excellent document and Officers should be thanked for the significant amount of work undertaken to date;
- there was large unmet demand for affordable housing in Inverness and the need to provide associated infrastructure and services to build communities in partnership with other organisations such as NHS Highland. An explanation was provided on the work ongoing to align the Local Development Plan and Capital Programme to ensure a co-ordinated approach in relation to where infrastructure was required;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the Council's annual targets for housing and how this compared to the targets set out in the proposed Plan;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the fact that a number of sites in Tomatin had been removed from the proposed Plan. It was considered the proposed modest levels of growth in this area would be more sustainable and sufficient for the settlement rather than on the strategic scale previously proposed;
- there was concern that the policy requirements set out in the Plan were restrictive and might make smaller developments unviable. In this respect, it was noted that each proposal would be considered in terms of its contribution to the evolving policy position in terms of climate change. It was considered those policies were proportionate and would have no undue impact on development; and
- a proposal that Site IN85 be changed from 'housing' to 'mixed use' encompassing housing, green space, community, office and business use on the basis this would give more flexibility in relation to the uses of the site.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on Local/City Committee-specific matters and **AGREED** the recommended responses to these issues as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;

- ii. **\*NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and Officer recommended responses as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report and **TO RECOMMEND** to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and the Local/City Committee's view on these strategic matters;
- iii. **NOTED** that additional supporting documents would accompany the publication of the Proposed Plan, including those outlined in Section 3 of the report;
- iv. **\*NOTED** that minor presentational, typographical and other factual updates and changes would be made by Officers, with any material changes to be agreed in consultation and agreement with the Chair of the relevant Committee(s) prior to publication;
- v. in line with government guidance, **AGREED** for the published Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan to be treated as a material planning consideration in making planning decisions and providing advice; and
- vi. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in Section 7 of the report, subject to Site IN85 being changed from 'housing' to 'mixed use' encompassing housing, green space, community, office and business use.

## 7. Presentation – Ness Hydro Scheme Taisbeanadh – Sgeama Dealan-uisge Nis

A Presentation was undertaken at the meeting on the progress of the Ness Hydro Scheme.

During discussion, Members thanked the Officers for an excellent presentation and raised the following main points:-

- the potential for the Ness Hydro Scheme model to be replicated in the Highlands if funding was identified;
- it was hoped that the involvement of local school children and UHI students in the scheme would inspire them in their future pursuits;
- this was an exciting, inspiring and accessible green project located in the heart of the City and would deliver significant legacy benefits going forward and provide a focal point on the River;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the condition of the weir on the river and that it would not be compromised by the Hydro Scheme;
- details were sought and provided on the assessments carried out and statutory approvals in place to ensure the Scheme would not have a detrimental impact on wild salmon; and
- the potential for the Inverness Ice Centre to tap into the electricity generated by the Scheme. In this respect, it was confirmed that due to restrictions in relation to grid capacity, Officers had been advised that the project could only connect to the Inverness Leisure Centre.

Thereafter, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the presentation which had been provided.

## 8. Inshes Junction Improvements – Update Leasachaidhean Ceann-rathaid nan Innseagan

There had been circulated Report No CIA/37/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the need to move forward with the recommended improvements to the junction as soon as possible following the lengthy consultations held to date and given traffic volumes at this junction would increase as a result of major housing developments and investment in roads infrastructure in the area;
- Officers be commended on the work undertaken on the design of the scheme to date;
- the need to be realistic in terms of the barriers that existed in achieving a modal shift to more active travel and changing in driver behaviour;
- concern that the proposals involved additional sets of traffic lights and this combined with housing development in the area and improvements to the link road from the A96 would result in the junction becoming more congested. It was explained that the traffic signals in the area would be linked to give more certainty around journey times through the junction at peak times;
- the impact of the improvements on the Drakies Estate and the inclusion of a proposal to close the Old Perth Road link to traffic which had previously been rejected;
- further consideration be given to the options for the junction at the Raigmore Motel and concern that the proposed traffic lights at Drumossie Avenue would result in increased traffic and queues and impact on local residents;
- whether a project of this importance justified carrying out a full detailed census of traffic to ensure future forecasts were evidenced based. it was confirmed that extensive traffic modelling had been undertaken, details of which were provided;
- confirmation was sought and provided that modelling had been undertaken and plans drawn up for an underpass for pedestrians and cyclists to run from Beachwood Business Park to Inshes Retail Park and consideration was being given to the associated safety issues;
- it was important developer contributions towards the junction improvements be requested and collected; and
- the report provided a solution to a heavily used stretch of road and the only means by which to improve traffic flow was to close some junctions and install more traffic lights for the benefit of the majority of the population.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** to proceed with the statutory approvals, planning permission and detailed design of the scheme based on a revised Option 1 as amended by Section 6.2 the report.

## 9. **Ballifeary Residents Permit Scheme** **Sgeama Cheadan Luchd-còmhnaidh Bhaile na Faire**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/38/21 dated 26 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was queried as to what the process would be if it was discovered after time that there were knock on effects with parking restrictions on Ballifeary Road and it was felt necessary to amend the parking restrictions. In this respect it was advised that the proposed parking restrictions would be subject to review. If a change was deemed necessary, then there would be an advertisement and consultation to have the restrictions altered.
- in relation to the rationale for these parking restrictions, it was advised that there had been increased usage of Ballifeary Road by non-residents as free parking to access nearby facilities such as Eden Court Theatre, the Tennis and Squash Club and Highland Council HQ; and
- it was advised that the proposals for parking restrictions had been subject to full consultation and supported by the majority of local residents.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** to support the making of the Traffic Regulation Order amended as follows:-

- i. reduce the Permit Scheme to only cover that length of Ballifeary Road from its junction with Bishops Road and its junction with Ballifeary Lane;
- ii. reduce the restricted hours to Monday – Friday 10am to 5pm;
- iii. abandon the Permit Scheme proposed for Ballifeary Lane; and
- iv. abandon the waiting and loading restrictions from a point in line with the boundary of number 28/30 Ballifeary Road Southwards to its junction with Glenurquhart Road.

## 10. **Ross Avenue Residents Permit Scheme** **Sgeama Cheadan Luchd-còmhnaidh Chraobhraid Rois**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/39/21 dated 29 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, it was confirmed that parking zones for residents could change if it was felt necessary as this was an administrative process and there was no need to amend the Traffic Regulation Order.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** to support the making of the Traffic Regulation Order as follows:-

- i. introduce “No Waiting at Any Time” restrictions on the south side of Ross Avenue and also at locations on the north side of Ross Avenue at its junction with Fairfield Road, between Nos 15 & 17; between Nos 33 & 35 and at the junction on Ross Avenue and Kenneth Street; and

- ii. introduce a Parking Permit Holder restriction bays on the North side of Ross Avenue between Nos 1& 15, 17 & 33 and Nos 35 & 49.

## 11. Inverness City Active Travel Network – Riverside Way Report

There had been circulated Report No CIA/40/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need for more ‘listening’ to the local community and perhaps consideration of a new outline design as this was a very complex situation;
- strong feelings had been expressed by local residents and there had been widespread support for a review paper which had been drawn up by Ballifeary Community Council and sent to Elected Members;
- it had been suggested that there were serious omissions in regard to Council reports on this issue, specifically in terms of consultation responses/results, and this should be investigated/followed up as a matter of priority;
- there was a strong local feeling that changing from 2-way to 1-way traffic was not the right thing to do for the area;
- whilst acknowledging that this was a very complex project comprising different sections of road, the section from the Cathedral should be viewed differently (not least as it did not form part of the Traffic Regulation Order) in terms of finding the best possible solution;
- there was alarm at the strength of local feeling on this matter and particularly the claims which had been made in respect of inaccurate information having been provided;
- there was need to focus on the detail within the proposals for all sections in order to identify and deliver the best possible outcomes for the local community in particular. In this regard, it was suggested that there might have to be a choice between active travel and 2-way traffic;
- there had been some concern expressed by the Royal British Legion in respect of the section from the Ness Bank Church to Cavell Gardens and these had to be addressed; and
- an amendment would be put forward if necessary for the full consultation responses which had been received to date (including those prior to the formal process) to be submitted to the February meeting of the Committee in order to be able to see what had come through and how this had developed, including what options had been looked at (not just formal responses) in order to be able to see the transparency in the process.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. that the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) statutory process was underway and that any outstanding objections would be brought to the City of Inverness Area Committee in February 2022;
- ii. that concept designs based on stakeholder feedback would be progressed to detailed and technical design, including further stakeholder engagement on the Riverside Way proposals, which would

come back to a future meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee for approval; and

- iii. **AGREED** that – for the February meeting – the report should also include full consultation responses which had been received to date, including those prior to the formal process, in order to be able to see what had come through and how this had developed, including what options had been looked at (not just formal responses) – this to be added on in order to be able to see the transparency in the process.

## 12. HRH The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee – Lord Provostship Competition Iùbailidh Platanaim na Banrigh – Farpais an Àrd-Phrobhaist

There had been circulated Joint Report No CIA/41/21 dated 2 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- having checked the Lieutenancies Act from 1997, it was queried as to whether there was a need to have both a Lord Lieutenant and a Lord Provost for Inverness and what the perceived benefits and associated costs would be if any application in this regard was successful;
- it was noted that other areas within Scotland of a similar size were currently discussing/considering this application process but the proposed expenditure in this respect was queried;
- it was felt that Inverness had had the position of Provost for over 400 years and as such it was not considered that there was any valid reason for changing that status to Lord Provost as there were other issues which were considered to be more important in terms of the use of the proposed funds;
- in contrast to the views already expressed, it had to be highlighted that this represented a unique opportunity to apply for a title which would enhance the status of the City and potentially deliver wider benefits in regard to profile and reach;
- in terms of the process, it was confirmed that this required a substantive application to be produced by 7 December and as such it was suggested that the use of consultants with wide experience in these matters offered the best possible chance of success;
- it was important to note that this application was based on a position (and not an individual) and was appropriate for a City which had grown and continued to grow dramatically. As such, it was suggested that there was no reason for not wanting to achieve higher status for the area;
- this represented an outstanding opportunity for Inverness, not least in achieving a higher status which had the potential to deliver significant benefits, including through town twinning;
- Inverness was viewed by many as a city of history and this application represented another opportunity for it to make history;
- it was considered that the general public would support this application being made for the area;
- there was a need to take pride in the City status which had already been granted and taking forward this proposal would build on that status;
- whilst acknowledging the comments which had been made during the debate, it was still felt that the recommendations within the report should

be rejected and the proposed funding for the application process used for another purpose, such as street cleaning within the City; and

- it was also suggested that, in agreeing to the processing of the application, there should be an acknowledgement of the day to day needs of citizens and that for every pound spent in developing this, one pound should be given to the roads budget for Inverness.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the terms of the application form and process detailed within Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** that the title of Lord Provost would not change the status of the Provost of Inverness within the context of the Council;
- iii. **NOTED** that, if successful, the additional title would act to enhance the profile of the City and that of the Highlands in the context of Inverness having the same status as other leading Cities within Scotland;
- iv. **NOTED** that the sum of £2,000 had been allocated by the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee, together with a further sum of £1,500 from the Infrastructure and Environment budget, for the provision of support in preparation of the application (noting the tight timeframe); and
- v. **AGREED** to an application being made for the grant of Lord Provostship status, which would attach to the title of the Provost of Inverness, to the HRH Queen's Platinum Jubilee Lord Provostship Competition.

(At this point, Mr A Jarvie asked for his dissent to be recorded in relation to the decision which had been taken).

### 13. Inverness City Arts – Annual Report Prògram Pròiseact Ealain Baile Inbhir Nis – Aithisg Bhliadhnaid

**Declaration 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, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/42/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

At this point, and following discussion undertaken at the meeting of the Inverness City Arts Working Group held on 12 November in terms of the exclusion of the public at that time, the Head of Corporate Governance confirmed that he had now reviewed the Minutes of a number of previous meetings of the Working Group (going back as far as 2013).

In that regard, he confirmed that on every occasion a resolution had been agreed by the Members of the Working Group to exclude the public from these meetings in terms of Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

As such, the resolution to go into private at the meeting on 12 November was considered to be appropriate and in accordance with the Act and reflected not

only the Council's longstanding practise but also the longstanding practise of the Working Group.

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

- there were a number of concerns in relation to the breakdown of costs which had been provided within the report and it was therefore necessary to seek clarity for the general public on the allocation of these funds. Specifically, a cost of approximately £260k for the Gathering Place had been identified within the report but the appendix quoted a cost of approximately £360k and there was therefore a need for clarity on the difference of approximately £100k;
- serious issues had now been highlighted in respect of accessibility and although it had previously been agreed that a turning circle with at least a 1.2m area was to be provided, it did not appear that this is what had been provided. As such, and on the basis that a number of users had now complained of difficulties with access, clarification was required on the exact dimensions of what had actually been provided;
- it had been stated within the report that the construction of the Gathering Place had been completed in compliance with the adjustments made following recommendations from a Special Meeting of the City Committee when reservations had been voiced that the plans at that time were not acceptable, especially for wheelchair users. Assurances had been given that relevant Equalities Groups would be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes and that the finished design would be 'fully accessible' but this was not the case and some wheelchair users could currently not even access this structure;
- there was now a need for reassurance to be given on the steps which had been taken to make the structure as accessible as possible as had been previously promised and information on which Equalities and/or Diversity Groups had been consulted;
- clarification was also sought on whether wheelchair users had been involved in the design decisions;
- information was also sought on how exactly the additional £27k of funding had been spent through an itemised breakdown of the allocated funding to enhance the disabled access;
- there were lessons to be learned from this project, not least in terms of public perception/engagement and governance as it was the case that the general public did not understand what had happened and how funds had been spent;
- it was queried as to whether a maintenance budget was currently in place and if so how much had been spent already;
- information had been received to the effect that the area around the turning circle (which it had been agreed should be at least 1.2m) was in fact 1.06m and it was queried as to whether this was correct;
- a number of members of the public were not happy with the structure which had been provided and wanted the riverside returned to its previous natural state. As such, there was concern at any further expenditure in this regard;
- it was not felt that the structure provided any enhancement to the area in terms of its current location and was considered by many to be a 'lost opportunity' for the area;

- there had been previous attempts to disband the Working Group by individual Members and regret was expressed by them that this had not been done at that time and in advance of the recommendation now within the report in that regard;
- it was hoped that Members would not have to resort to the submission of Freedom of Information requests again in order to obtain a breakdown of current funding as this was not acceptable when it was the case that Elected Members were responsible for such budgets on behalf of the people of Inverness;
- it was questioned as to who would take responsibility and/or apologise for this situation and also clarify as to whether the agreement at a meeting in August 2019 to not commit any further public funds to this project had been breached since that time;
- it had been confirmed recently that this project had come in on budget and it was queried as to whether this had been correct;
- it was considered that public engagement had been inadequate throughout this project and this was regrettable;
- in response to questions of responsibility, it was advised that the City Committee had made the decision to go forward with the project and had agreed the Minutes of the Working Group meetings (to whom power had been delegated) as and when submitted and on that basis it was considered that collective decisions had in fact been made on each occasion and throughout;
- it was felt by some Members of the Committee that they had no part in any collective responsibility for this situation as they had repeatedly expressed concerns over past months on a number of issues; and
- it was suggested that the following should now be shared with all Members of the City Committee in confidence – Item 6 from the November meeting of the City Arts Working Group (including appendices) to detail all full costs incurred and payments made – also to break down these costs at a high level to not breach confidence to publicly publish as much detail as was possible.

In response to the issues which had been raised, the City Manager advised that governance for this project programme had been set by the City Committee and as such Officers had adhered to that governance throughout. Financial management issues had been the subject of regular reports in an open and accountable manner through the City Arts Working Group, although it was the case that some detail had not been able to be provided as it had been classed as exempt information in terms of the Act.

Minutes of Meetings of the City Arts Working Group had been regularly provided for the City Committee, in addition to annual reports and budget updates, and on 20 August 2019 a full report had been presented which had detailed the spend which had been undertaken on every aspect of the project programme. At that time, Members had agreed to instruct Officers to deliver the project programme in line with the revised budget and in doing so Officers had proceeded to build budget to deliver the Gathering Place. In this respect, and as detailed in the report, this cost had amounted to approximately £260k with the sum of £360k highlighted in the appendix representing the total sum for the project and including aborted costs that Members had previously decided to absorb (at the meetings on 1 July 2016 and 20 August 2019).

Specifically, in relation to maintenance, and in line with discussions in August 2019 and ongoing, it was advised that such costs were minimal. In that regard, the only sums spent to date had been in relation to the Gathering Place for the removal of graffiti (£275 plus VAT).

In terms of further work to be undertaken, this would include putting in place a maintenance programme for the artwork to ensure that it was safe for people to use during the Winter months and was kept clean and in a proper and fit state and condition. In that regard, £5k had been set aside from a Common Good budget but it was not expected that that level of expenditure would be needed.

In regard to accessibility for the Gathering Place, it was confirmed that consultation had been undertaken with representatives from the former Inverness Disability Access Panel but no objections had been submitted.

Council Officers had received assurances that the adequate turning space had been provided but this would now be investigated to ensure that the exact specifications had actually been met and further action taken if necessary.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that construction of the Gathering Place Art Installation had been completed in compliance with the adjustments made, following recommendations agreed at the Special Meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee held on 20 August 2019 and as further reported to the Committee on 21 November 2019;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Inverness City Arts Working Group had discharged all its functions within the rules of governance set by the City of Inverness Area Committee;
- iii. **NOTED** that all other approved and fully funded projects under the Inverness City Arts Project Programme had been concluded, all in terms of governance set by the City of Inverness Area;
- iv. **NOTED** that governance remained in place in terms of the usual monitoring of contracts and expenditure under the Inverness Common Good Fund to the City of Inverness Area Committee;
- v. **AGREED** to dissolve the Inverness City Arts Working Group with immediate effect; and
- vi. **AGREED** to share with all Members of the City Committee, in confidence, Item 6 from the November meeting of the City Arts Working Group including appendices detailing full costs incurred and payments made and to also break down these costs at a high level to not breach confidence to publicly publish as much detail as is possible.

#### 14. Place Based Investment Programme

There had followed Report No. CIA/43/21 dated 16 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy and the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the proposal for investment in the Inverness Campus Sports Development project had to be given a high priority, not least in light of earlier discussion on this very important issue for the East of Inverness, and it was expected that it would be greatly welcomed by residents in that area;
- it was noted that overall the funds which had been identified within the report required at present to be committed by the end of March 2022 but it was proposed to enter into formal engagement with the Scottish Government to seek flexibility in this respect in view of the circumstances over the past 18 months; and
- it was also noted that the funds could only be used as capital expenditure and again the aim was to commit by the end of March 2022 (or by any extended date agreed with the Scottish Government).

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. in principle, to investing £79,000 in the Victorian Market, Market Hall and Fish Market refurbishment project;
- ii. in principle, to investing £335,499 in the Inverness Campus Sports Development project; and
- iii. to operate a Challenge Fund for remaining budget.

#### **15. Inverness Wards Place Based Investment Funds and COVID-19 Fund – Proposed Funding Allocations**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/44/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocations of Place Based Investment Funds as follows:

##### i. Ward 14

- a. Investment in Play Parks (Merkinch)- £55,000
- b. Investment in Community based Mental health and wellbeing projects in Merkinch - £35,000 with direct awards to:
  - Merkinch Partnership - £8,750
  - Rokschool - £8,750
  - The Clay Studio - £8,750
  - Merkinch Nature Reserve - £8,750
- c. Investment in Community based projects in Dalneigh £10,000
- d. Total = £100,000

##### ii. Ward 16

Investment in Play Parks allocated as follows:

- a. Crown & City Centre Community Council - £13,750
- b. Culcabock & Drakies Community Council - £13,750
- c. Hilton, Milton & Castle Heather Community Council - £13,750
- d. Raigmore Community Council - £13,750

- iii. Ward 17
  - a. Investment in Play Parks (Croy) - £50,000
  - b. Investment in GoodNess Community Garden - £30,000
  - c. Investment in Ardersier Community Garden Project - £20,000
  - d. Total = £100,000

And, **AGREED** the reallocation of the following COVID-19 funds:-

- i. Ward 15 & Ward 16 – Hilton Covid Fund
  - £6,500 from the COVID-19 Hilton Fund, which was allocated for both Wards, and £750 each from Inverness Ness-side Ward and Inverness Millburn COVID-19 Funds towards the Hilton Family Support project.

**16. Inverness Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis**

**Declarations of Interest –**

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

**Mr 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, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

**a) Financial Monitoring  
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail**

There had been circulated Joint Report No. CIA/45/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance and the Inverness City Area Manager.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 30 September 2021 as detailed and that overall expenditure was within agreed budgets.

**b) Capital Projects Update Report  
Pròiseactan Calpa**

There had been circulated Joint Report No. CIA/46/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy and Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the current status of capital projects and the adjustments being made to the allocations within the Victorian Market, Market Hall and Fish Market Refurbishment project as detailed.

**c) Grants Applications over £10,000  
Iarrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000**

**Declarations of Interest –**

**Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and a non-financial interest as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau 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 the discussion.**

**Mr A Graham declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that a family member was a volunteer for Blythwood Care 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 the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/47/21 dated 8 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance. A copy of supporting documentation had also been circulated as Booklet A.

The Committee determined the current grant applications as follows:-

- 1) Blythwood Care – **APPROVED** a grant of £20,000;
- 2) Inverness Ice Centre Limited – **APPROVED** a grant of £30,000;
- 3) Inverness Botanic Gardens, High Life Highland – **APPROVED** a grant of £22,470; and
- 4) City Flowering Projects and the Queen's Green Canopy – **APPROVED** a grant of £21,200

**Additional Agenda Item**

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

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr D Macpherson to the Inverness Town Twinning Committee.

**17. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes of the City of Inverness Area Committee held on 26 August 2021;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 20 September 2021;
- iii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the City and Area Recovery Group held on 19 August 2021 and 18 October 2021;
- iv. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Inverness City Arts Working Group held on 19 August 2021 and 12 November 2021; and

- v. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 8 November 2021.

The meeting ended at 5.45pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Thursday, 18 November, 2021, at 10 am.

### **Present:**

Mr M Finlayson  
Mr D Louden  
Ms P Munro

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

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mark Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer - Property & Housing  
Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER  
Tim Stott, Principal Planner, Development Plans Team  
Julie-Ann Bain, Planner, Development Plans Team  
Douglas Chisholm, Planner, Development Plans Team  
Rory MacLeod, Housing Manager  
Hayley Cameron, Interim Education Officer – Mid Area  
Sara Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer  
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

### **Also in Attendance:**

SC Paddy Farrell, 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 Committee.**

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

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Mrs C Wilson.

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

There were none.

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

There had been circulated Report No ERA/21/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members welcomed the comprehensive and reassuring report, the good engagement that had taken place with communities, and the improvements made to the recruitment process;

- information was sought and provided on the uptake of advice on new regulations in relation to domestic fire alarms and the provision of interlinked alarms;
- Members asked if there had been any incidents of fire engines being unable to source the minimum of four firefighters required, but data on that was not available at the meeting; and
- employers of retained firefighters were thanked for their valued support.

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

#### **4. Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2 Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail 2 ga Mholadh airson Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/22/21 dated 14 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

The Development Plans Team were thanked for their work on the consultation which had attracted a record number of comments. The process for the Development Plan was summarised, with the next stage being approval by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 2 December 2021, followed by a further period of consultation in early 2022, seeking any formal objections, which would be heard by the Scottish Government.

A presentation was provided for each area of the Proposed Plan, with particular attention drawn to two issues:

- since publication of the report, an additional expansion to the industrial allocation boundary at 'Nigg Energy Park NG01' was now proposed, following late receipt of a representation which had been circulated to Members and published on the Council's website; and
- the report did not recommend a change to the Hinterland Boundary within Easter Ross because of the council's commitment to tackle climate change and due to the additional expense incurred providing services to single properties outwith settlements.

During discussion, Members raised issues on the following areas:

##### **Hinterland Boundary**

It was confirmed that of the 28 comments received during the consultation period on proposed changes to the Hinterland policy, only two were from Easter Ross wards. Members spoke in favour of removing Hinterland restrictions in Wards 6 and 7. It was confirmed that the provision of public services outwith the boundaries of settlements was more costly, but exact figures for this were not available.

##### **Alness**

Clarification was sought and provided on the allocation of AL07 for community use.

## Evanton

Members voiced an aspiration for a future road bridge over the River Sgitheach at Teandallon, Evanton, in addition to an active travel link. Discussion took place on how this might be funded. A Developer Requirement to reference an active travel link and the aspiration for the bridge would be added to the Development Plan although Members also queried whether these requirements would be viable for the developer.

## Invergordon

- clarification was sought and provided on the proposals for IG02 and IG08, which were allocated, in part with a view to supporting possible growth in the area from the renewable energy industry, though it was not anticipated that during the proposed Plan term all of the allocation would be required for development;
- IG04 was allocated for a wide range of uses including housing, business, community and industrial use to allow for flexibility in its redevelopment;
- IG06 and IG07 were allocated for industry as there was remaining development potential within them, noting an application was pending for an anaerobic digester plant on IG06; and
- IG10, IG11 and IG12 were currently in the Hinterland, so if the Hinterland boundary was removed, there would be more flexibility for development in those areas. The Council would not been seeking to support larger scale housing developments in those areas, unless there was a significant surge in demand and allocated Housing areas were fully developed. Assurance was sought and provided that there would be no capacity constraints in respect of developments related to anticipated rise in Cromarty Firth economic activity, and it was pointed out that the LDP was updated every five years, and that applications could also be considered outwith the requirements of the LDP if there was sufficient justification.

## Tain

- in response to concern about the Grove, a disused Victorian property in the centre of Tain which was in a poor state of repair, it was explained that planning permission had been granted for housing but significant investment was required to renovate the property. In the first instance, a meeting was proposed between the Senior Ward Manager, the Executive Chief Officer - Property & Housing, and the Principal Planner to consider what support could be offered to the owners to develop the site for the benefit of all; and
- it was confirmed that TN06 was not being proposed for housing but would remain within the Settlement Development Area (SDA).

## Nigg

- A late representation in relation to Nigg had been received and had been circulated to Members and added to the Council's website. This had contributed to a proposed change to the land allocations detailed in the committee report, namely the additional expansion to the industrial allocation boundary at 'Nigg Energy Park NG01' to meet the anticipated pressures to

support the expanding renewable energy industry, with a comprehensive rationale being provided during the presentation; and

- Members expressed disappointment that this change would prevent the creation of a golf course in that area, which was of benefit to local communities and visitors. However, the anticipated expansion of the renewable energy industry at Nigg was likely to bring significant economic benefits to the area, including a variety of permanent long-term jobs and higher retention of young people in the area. Although supportive of the proposed changes, Members urged engagement with the local community and highlighted the further 8-week consultation period in early 2022 during which formal objections to the LDP could be made.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on Area committee-specific matters and **AGREED** the recommended responses to these issues both as detailed at **Appendix 1, but including the additional expansion to the industrial allocation boundary at 'Nigg Energy Park NG01' as shown during the presentation;**
- ii. **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and officer recommended responses both as detailed at **Appendix 2 and AGREED TO RECOMMEND these to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee**, with the exception that the Area Committee wished the Hinterland Boundary for Wards 6 and 7 to be removed to exclude any areas of Hinterland within those wards;
- iii. **NOTED** that additional supporting documents would accompany the publication of the Proposed Plan, including those outlined in section 3;
- iv. **NOTED** that minor presentational, typographical and other factual updates and changes would be made by officers, with any material changes to be agreed in consultation and agreement with the chair of the relevant committee(s) prior to publication;
- v. in line with government guidance, **AGREED** for the published Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan to be treated as a material planning consideration in making planning decisions and providing advice;
- vi. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in section 7 of the report;
- vii. **AGREED** a meeting be arranged between the Senior Ward Manager, the Executive Chief Officer - Property & Housing, and the Principal Planner to discuss possible support for the owners of the building in Tain referred to during discussion, which was currently out of service and in a poor state of repair, then provide feedback to local Members; and
- viii. **AGREED** that a Developer Requirement to reference to an active travel link and the aspiration for a road bridge over the River Sgitheach at Teandallon, Evanton, would be added to the Development Plan.

## 5. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Coileanadh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No ERA/23/21 dated 5 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

**6. Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust  
Urras Foghlaim Rois is Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/24/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

**7. Proposed Award of Cromarty Firth Repurposed Covid Response Funds  
Moladh Maointean Freagairt Covid Ath-stiùirichte Linne Chromba a Thoir Seachad**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/25/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £14,750 from the Cromarty Firth reallocated Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to purchase a play multi-unit and associated surfacing selected by Saltburn & Westwood Community Council representatives in consultation with amenities staff. The unit would be installed and maintained by the amenities service subject to ongoing maintenance budget being available

**8. Tain & Easter Ross Place Based Funds – Proposed Funding Allocation  
Maointean Stèidhichte air Àite airson Bhaile Dhubhthaich is Rois an Ear – Riarachadh Maoin ga Mholadh**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/026/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocation £5,000 of Easter Ross Place Based Funds to Seaboard Memorial Hall to allow the harbour toilet refurbishment to be completed despite increased costs.

**9. Use of Tain & Easter Ross Covid Response Funds  
Cleachdadh Mhointean Freagairt Covid Bhaile Dhubhthaich is Rois an Ear**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/27/21 dated 14 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £10,000 from the remaining Tain & Easter Ross Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to support investment in

- play in the Tain & Easter Ross Ward in consultation with amenities staff and local communities; and
- ii. **NOTED** that next steps to progress this work would follow on from upcoming play equipment inspection reports and local communities would require to be involved in discussions around future provision along with amenities staff.

**10. Invergordon Common Good Fund – Consultation on the proposal to dispose, by sale or lease, of Invergordon Town Hall**  
**Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain – Co-chomhairle mun mholadh faighinn cuidhteas, tro reic no aonta-màil, de Thalla Bhaile Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/28/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- there had been no responses to the second consultation, which suggested a significantly decreased level of public interest in the building;
- in response to a suggestion the Council take over the building and use it as part of its building rationalisation initiative, the high costs of restoration and ongoing maintenance were highlighted, along with the significant pressures already on the Council's capital budget;
- it was disappointing the Town Hall had fallen into a state of disrepair and it was hoped that funding could be found to improve and maintain the building. Mr D Louden made reference to the bust of landowner and MP Sir John Gordon, which had been sculpted by the French artist Edmé Bouchardon in 1728, and recently valued at around £1.4m, and he suggested investigation into selling the bust and using the proceeds to repair and maintain the Town Hall, pointing out that the bust was of little benefit to the people of Invergordon, whereas the Town Hall was of considerable value. In response, it was explained that consideration would have to be given to the possible implications of the Common Good Fund selling the bust, as well as the process for doing so, which would likely require public consultation. It was possible that other UK or Scottish Government funding streams could be available and these should be investigated, along with likely ongoing maintenance costs once the building had been restored;
- the community group which had been trying to save the Town Hall had no longer felt able to take it on in face of the significant challenges to restore and maintain the building;
- reference was made to the successful refurbishment project of Tain Picture House, but it was also pointed out that this had the ongoing benefit of a community group; and
- it would be ideal if a local project officer could take on the Town Hall project, but it was not known if that would be possible.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report; and

- ii. **DEFERRED** the decision for 6 months to allow investigation of the possibility of alternative sources of funding.

#### 11. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/29/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund; and
- ii. the current position in relation to the Invergordon Town Hall.

#### 12. Tain Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich

There had been circulated Report No ERA/30/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

- it was clarified that local contractors would be sought for the Tain Golf Club Road project once a budget had been agreed; and
- in relation to mussels, the Senior Ward Manager drew attention to the latest survey results showing the forestry area as stable in terms of the presence of spat but with the sub tidal survey showing limited recovery and few areas with a high mussel density, therefore a full stock survey at this stage was not planned. In terms of the Green Accelerator project referred to in paragraph 6.3 of the report, the Highland Council's Climate Action Coastlines project had been selected as one of the pathfinder projects under the Scottish Government's Green Growth Accelerator programme. This was a significant and long term programme under which the Scottish Government would provide up to £1 million to support the pathfinders through the development phase, which was mostly about developing a business case and doing research on the best methods to employ once there was access to the full GGA funding. A mussel bed restoration project could align with the criteria set for the Green Growth Accelerator programme and it was possible that work on mussel beds could begin in 2023 and could take place over the following 25 years. This was, however, entirely dependent on whether the pathfinder process identified this work as a priority. Future reports would provide Members with information on this as it developed.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Quarter 2 monitoring statement; and
- ii. **APPROVED** a budget of £20,000 to allow work to be carried out to the Tain Golf Club Road as outlined in section 5 of the report.

#### 13. Minutes

**Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 12 August 2021.

The meeting ended at 1.05pm.

**The Highland Council  
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held remotely on Monday 22 November 2021 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Ms K Currie  
Mr R Gale

Mr J McGillivray  
Mr H Morrison

**Officials in attendance:**

Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care  
Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms A Donald, North Area Manager, Education & Learning  
Mr M Evans, Head Teacher, Golspie High School, Education & Learning  
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Dr S Andrews, Flow Country World Heritage Bid Coordinator, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Performance and Governance  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance & Governance

**Also in Attendance:**

Chief Inspector K Macleod, Police Scotland

Mr R Gale in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs D Mackay and Ms L Munro.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Review of Speed Limit between Ardgay and Bonar Bridge  
Ath-sgrùdadh air Crìoch-astair eadar Àird Ghaoithe agus Drochaid a' Bhanna**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/17/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Council's speed limit policy required to be revisited as a matter of urgency as it was out of date and did not reflect current traffic volumes, particularly the increase in heavy goods vehicles;
- national policy also required to be reviewed on the basis communities should have the ability to change how traffic flowed through their localities;
- there had been a fatality and a number of near misses on the stretch of road between Ardgay and Bonar Bridge and the need to improve road safety in this location;
- concern that many heavy goods vehicles were travelling faster than the national speed limit on this section of road and the need to raise this issue with the Police;
- the potential for a compromise solution and a proposal that the remainder of the national speed outwith the proposed 30mph limit between Bonar Bridge and Ardgay be reduced to 40mph;
- confirmation was sought and provided that a 40mph speed limit could be imposed in accordance with the current speed limit guidance on the basis traffic calming measures be undertaken. It was explained there were cost implications associated with traffic calming and that while such measures tended not to be popular with the travelling public, they were proven to be effective in slowing down vehicle speeds;
- it was important for Members to represent the views of the local communities and to place the safe travel of the significant number of pedestrians and cyclists using the route as a priority. It was hoped that a compromise solution as proposed would be recognised and supported by the local communities; and
- it be referred to officers to determine the traffic calming measures to be included in the Traffic Regulation Orders without the requirement to report back to Members.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to the promotion of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in respect of a reduction in the 60mph speed limit to 30mph by extending the Bonar Bridge 30mph speed limit by 270m or thereby generally westwards towards Ardgay; and
- ii. that the TRO also include that the remainder of the national speed limit between Bonar Bridge and Ardgay is to be reduced to 40mph with appropriate traffic calming measures.

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/18/21 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- in relation to the narrative for the figures for the number of breach of the peace/threatening and abusive behaviour crimes, the Chief Inspector confirmed he would report back to Members on this matter;
- an explanation was sought and provided that the Council was responsible for taking the lead in terms of anti-social behaviour orders

in respect of private tenants/homeowners and reference to the challenges involved in progressing orders;

- the fact Police stations in North and West Sutherland were now fully staffed was welcomed; and
- the importance of the Police and partners continuing to be proactive in their response to increasing traffic levels on the North Coast 500.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 2 for the period covering 1 April 2021 – 30 September 2021

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/19/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Head Teacher of Golspie Primary School and Rogart Primary School was thanked for the excellent work undertaken during his time in the post;
- an update was sought and provided in regard to staffing levels and the impact of Covid-19 and the ongoing challenges in this regard;
- concern that the school roll projections reflected a wider depopulation issue across Sutherland and the need for the Scottish Government and the Council to take early action on this matter;
- the need to deliver a programme of repair and maintenance for schools to ensure they continued to be fit for purpose given the Council's ability to build new schools going forward would be constrained due to budgetary restrictions; and
- an update was sought and provided on the positive progress made in relation to attainment at Golspie High School over the period from 2019 and the Head Teacher and staff be commended on this achievement.

Thereafter, it was reported that both Golspie Primary School and Dornoch Primary School Parent Councils had expressed concern at the situation which has arisen over PSA provision. It was proposed that the Committee calls on the Council to reinstate the lost PSA hours in Schools across Sutherland. The impact of the lost hours was having a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable children and a knock on effect for the schools as a whole. From information received from Parent Councils, and former PSA's who were dismissed without notice, there had been no consultation on the reduction of PSA hours and parents have not been informed. In addition when approached to ascertain how many hours have been lost staff have declined to answer on the grounds that they feared for their own position. Given all of the above it was the opinion of the Committee that PSA hours should be reinstated with immediate effect.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** following scrutiny, the contents of the report; and

- ii **\* AGREED** to call on Highland Council to reinstate the lost PSA hours in Schools across Sutherland. The impact of the lost hours was having a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable children and a knock on effect for the schools as a whole. From information received from Parent Councils, and former PSA's who were dismissed without notice, there had been no consultation on the reduction of PSA hours and parents have not been informed. In addition, when approached to ascertain how many hours have been lost staff had declined to answer on the grounds that they feared for their own position.

Given all of the above it was the opinion of the Sutherland County Committee that PSA hours should be reinstated with immediate effect.

6. **Sutherland Place Based Investment Fund and COVID 19 Ward Discretionary Funds**  
**Maoin Stèidhichte air Àite Chataibh agus Maointean COVID 19 fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/20/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In discussion, Members welcomed the benefits the proposed allocation of funds outlined in the report would bring to the area and raised the following main points:-

- whether the budget of £31,000 for repairs and maintenance of existing playparks and equipment in Ward 4 was robust. It was confirmed that the estimates had been costed and that clarification would be sought from Amenities as to whether a contingency would be appropriate and the information shared with Members in considering applications; and
- whether the additional £8,900 from other sources to complete the repairs to existing play parks and equipment in Ward 1 had been identified. It was confirmed that to date no other funding sources had been identified but that further clarification would be sought from Amenities on this matter and shared with Members.

The Committee **AGREED** the:-

- i. proposed allocations of the Place Based Investment Fund for Ward 1 as follows:
  - a. Support for playparks £50,000
  - b. A grant fund to support mental wellbeing initiatives £40,000.
  - c. A grant fund to support provision of defibrillators £10,000;
- ii. proposed use of both Ward 1 and Ward 4 allocations for playpark funding as set out at sections 5.7 and 5.8 of the report; and
- iii. proposed allocation up to £10,000 from each of Ward 1 and Ward 4 COVID 19 Discretionary Funds to address fuel poverty.

7. **Visitor Management Car Parking and Motorhome Provision**  
**Parcadh Chàraichean Rianachd Luchd-tadhail is Solar Dhachaighean-motair**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/21/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the Council could legally prohibit motorhomes from parking in its off-street regulated car parks;
- concern at the potential for pay machines to be vandalised and how this was to be addressed. It was confirmed that the machines were smart meters and would alert officers to any issues;
- the potential to restrict overnight parking at Dornoch Beach car park to restrict wild camping on the beach;
- confirmation was sought and provided that mandatory payment for parking to respect the interests of the Dornoch Caravan Park would require a full statutory and road traffic order consultation;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the scope of the Council's powers in respect of the proposed regulation of the Dornoch Airfield Car Park within the Off-Street Traffic Regulation Order; and
- the need for prior consultation to be undertaken with the local community council in respect of the proposal for invitation to pay in Durness Village and that this location be removed from sites identified in Section 8.1 of the report meantime.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the locations proposed subject to Durness Village being removed and to the immediate delivery of Invitation to Pay at the locations in section 8.1 of the report *subject to Durness Village being removed pending consultation with the local community council* and charging to be voluntary at this stage;
- ii. **AGREED** the approach to motorhome parking at sites identified in Section 8.2 of the report;
- iii. **APPROVED** the recommendations regarding Dornoch Beach traffic management in section 9.1 of the report: and
- iv. **APPROVED** the regulation of the Dornoch Airfield Car Park within the Off-Street Traffic Regulation Order as per section 9.2 of the report.

## 8. Highland Poverty Strategy

The Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care gave a verbal update on this item during which she advised that the Council was developing a Highland Poverty Strategy and was in the process of recruiting an officer to map the current approaches across all service areas that helped to reduce poverty inequalities. This information would then be analysed to help assess the effectiveness of the approaches and inform the corporate approach to poverty and a strategy going forward. She outlined the range of targeted support being delivered across Services within the Council and through the Scottish Attainment Fund and implementation of the Cost of the School Day Toolkit. Currently, Highland wide data was collected but the aim was to have this data narrowed down to local areas to help inform Local Committees in terms of taking action within their local area.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern that while it was recognised there was significant work ongoing, this was not addressing the issues around poverty in rural areas;
- an issue in relation to the lack of access to services in Sutherland for children with a disability and the need to target this significant issue going forward. It was confirmed that this issue was actively being considered in conjunction with colleagues in the Education and Learning Service;
- it was important that in gathering data, this did not duplicate data that had already been collected by other organisations;
- information was sought and provided on the equalities perspective of the Strategy to ensure there was a focus on gender, disability and other areas of equalities and to learn lessons from the pandemic in terms of hidden harms; and
- an assurance was sought and provided that best practice across other local authorities was being considered in terms of providing support and access to services.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

**9. Flow Country World Heritage Site Nomination - Update**  
**Ainmeachadh Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne do Dhùthaich nam**  
**Flòbhaichean – Fios às Ùr**

There had been circulated Report no SCC/22/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members commended those involved in taking the bid for World Heritage site status forward and that the value of the Flow Country was being fully recognised, particularly in the context of climate change.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**10. Dornoch Common Good**  
**Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

**(a) Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdadh Ràitheil Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/23/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. position of Dornoch Common Good fund at the end of the first quarter; and
- ii. update on current Dornoch Common Good issues.

**(b) Consultation on Proposal to Dispose, by Sale, of Land at 1 River Street, Dornoch and Well Street, Dornoch**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/24/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

In discussion, support was expressed for the disposal of land at 1 River Street, Dornoch as it involved a small area of land and there was an opportunity to correct the anomaly explained in the report and therefore it was considered special circumstances applied in this case.

In relation to Well Street, concern was expressed at the potential onward sale of this larger area of land in future for potential personal benefit and at the precedent this may set for potential future requests to purchase Common Good land. This area of land should continue under a lease arrangement and officers should also consider the case for an economic development burden if a request to purchase this area of land came forward in future.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at **Appendix 1**;
- ii. **APPROVED** the responses to the issues raised in connection with both proposals set out in **Appendix 1** for publication;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposal to dispose, by sale, of 49m<sup>2</sup> or thereby of land at 1 River Street, Dornoch;
- iv. **NOTED** and assessed the representations received in connection with the proposal to dispose of 164m<sup>2</sup> or thereby of land at Well Street, Dornoch and **AGREED NOT** to proceed with the sale.

## 11. Minutes

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 16 August 2021 which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021.

The meeting closed at 12.40pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held **remotely** on Wednesday 24 November 2021 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr A Henderson (substitute)
Mr B Boyd	Mr B Lobban
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Louden
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Christie	Mr S Mackie
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr M Reiss
Mr A Graham (substitute)	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gray	Mr P Saggars

### Non-Members also present:

Mr G Adam	Mr J Bruce
Mr R Balfour	Mr C Munro
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs T Robertson

### Officials 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 A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer Transformation  
 Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning  
 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, Interim Head of ICT & Digital Transformation, Resources and Finance  
 Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Resources and Finance  
 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:

Mr C Innes, Head of Commercial and Procurement Shared Service, Aberdeenshire Council  
 Ms M Mackenzie, Strategic Procurement Manager, Aberdeen City Council

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

**Mr J Gray in the Chair**

## BUSINESS

### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gale and Mr A Mackinnon.

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

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

Item 4: Mr A Christie (Financial) and Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)

Item 5: Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)

Item 6: Mr A Christie (Non-financial)

Item 17.iii and 17.iv: Mr A Christie (Financial)

**3. Appointments to Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee  
Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidh Buidseat nan Goireasan Corporra**

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr Graham Mackenzie replace Mrs Glynis Campbell-Sinclair and Mr Bill Lobban replace Mr Tom Heggie on the Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee.

**4. Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report to 30 September 2021  
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 30 an t-Sultainn 2021**

**Declarations of Interest**

**Mr A Christie (Financial) and Mr D Rixson (Non-Financial) declared interests in this item on the basis of being a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and a Council appointee on the Lochaber Housing Association respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/**34**/21 dated 11 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:

- the current level of reserves was strong but attention was drawn to the planned level of reserves to be used as well as funding the projected year end overspend of £1.5m. Thus, there would be a significant reduction in reserves and ongoing monitoring would be required;
- assurance was provided regarding the invoicing to NHS Highland for Children's Services and this income would be reflected in the Quarter 3 monitoring report;
- reference was made to a number of the significant overspends on individual budget lines at the mid-point of the financial year but overall it was felt that the monitoring position was good;
- concern was expressed that the overall quantum to offset the impact of removing instrumental music tuition fees would be not be sufficient and further information was sought on the reason for this;
- further information was sought on the impact on services due to the time lag in recruiting to new/vacant posts;
- progress of the Property Asset Management saving was disappointing and it was felt that there were a number of 'quick wins' which could be achieved;
- the report was presented in a negative manner with reference to financial pressures but funding had been allocated for these. The overall financial position was good and officers should be commended for this. The Council had

unprecedented levels of reserves, Members were reminded that only a few years ago the Council's reserves were below Audit Scotland's recommended minimum level, and a request was made for reports to be more positive in future. This point was acknowledged, however, it was highlighted that there were earmarked reserves of £53m and the planned investment of this had been phased. There were also further significant issues to be managed through reserves such as the staff pay award (which had yet to be agreed) and the increasing rate of inflation;

- there was a need to show details of the movement in reserves and the projected reserves levels at year-end. Confirmation was provided that this information would be captured and appended to future reports;
- further information was sought on the Corran Ferry Fares Income saving during which the reason for the amber status was queried, particularly as it had been a very busy summer. Concern was expressed as to whether this was due to the smart ticketing not being implemented; additional repair works required to the ferry; fares being increased and becoming cost prohibitive; or a carry forward from the previous financial year. Confirmation was provided that the report indicated that the budget saving was not currently being delivered but the Quarter 1 and 2 Monitoring reports that had been submitted to Economy and Infrastructure Committee advised that the overall position had improved due to an increase in visitor numbers. A request was made, and the Budget Leader provided confirmation, that he would attend a meeting with local Councillors and community councils to undertake a review of the Corran Ferry fare structure;
- although the Council was in a secure financial position, caution was urged as there was still uncertainty in respect of the Local Government Revenue Grant settlement and significant pressures on Social Care. In addition, there was also the need for a good capital settlement to enable a strong Capital Programme to be developed to invest and improve on a range of infrastructure, such as roads and Visitor Management, and boost local employment. Therefore, there were big challenges ahead and there was a need for planned use of reserves to ensure investments were maximised; and
- overall there was a need to achieve a balance and it was felt that the recommendations from officers achieved this. There were still substantial risks to the Council, reference was made to the report which indicated the risk of unforeseen events that could result in an additional cost burdens, risks to demand led services, and the impact of Covid during the ongoing pandemic. In addition, there was also the ongoing need to achieve £15m of annual savings on the revenue budget and the increasing loan charges. The Highland Council was the local authority with the highest proportion of their revenue budget being used to finance capital investments.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 September 2021 and the estimated year end forecast;
- ii. the status of budgeted savings in the year;
- iii. that future reports would contain an additional appendix setting out details of the ear-marked reserves and year end projections; and
- iv. the Budget Leader provided confirmation that he would meet with local councillors and Lochaber community councils regarding exploring options for income generation and fee setting for Corran Ferry.

5. **Corporate Capital Monitoring Report to 30 September 2021**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 30 an t-Sultainn 2021**

**Declarations of Interest**

**Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis of being a Council appointee on the 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 him from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/35/21 dated 10 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:

- concern was expressed at the format of the report, particularly in regard to the reprofiling of Appendix 1, the final column of which indicated that there had not been any over/under spends. Members had difficult decisions to make in regard to spending and it was therefore important that they had detailed information to enable them to make informed decisions. In addition, in order to ensure openness and transparency, this information must also be available to the public. Comments were made in terms of the type of information and the way it should be presented, e.g. project budget, actual spend and project variance were suggested to enable ongoing scrutiny and monitoring of projects. Detailed monitoring of projects would be undertaken at the relevant strategic committee and in view of this it was these reports that needed fuller details. It was further suggested that the Capital Programme should be indexed to take account of issues such as inflation and build costs. It was also highlighted that the report related to capital for the current financial year but the programme related to multiple years. The Budget Leader welcomed further discussions with Members regarding the format of future reports;
- in terms of the Capital Programme, reference was made to the different types of discussions that had been held at the recent meetings of the Corporate Resources Budget Sub Committee. In view of the this and the difficult decisions ahead in terms of affordability, the need for cross party dialogue to develop a collaborative budget for the people of the Highlands was emphasised. The continued commitment of a collaborative approach by the Budget Leader to budget setting was welcomed; and
- reference was made to the £11.403m variance in the HRA Capital Programme, and although the reason for the slippage was recognised, it was stressed that this funding needed to be spent and this was acknowledged. A plan to recover the HRA Capital reserves to an appropriate level was requested. It was also suggested that contractors should be utilised to hasten this process and help alleviate the need for housing.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. financial position of the General Fund and HRA capital programme as at 30 September 2021 and the estimated year end forecast; and
- ii. format of the report would be further developed in collaboration with Members.

**6. Resources and Finance Service Revenue and Performance Monitoring – Quarterly Performance Report to 30 September 2021**  
**Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais gu 30 an t-Sultainn 2021**

**Declarations of Interest**

**Mr A Christie declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis of being the General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/36/21 dated 29 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- the contributions in the report, particularly the work on the Defence Employers' Recognition Scheme, and comparisons with other local authorities was welcomed;
- data on fuel poverty and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), particularly at a local level for Ward 11, was appreciated. Further work on rural deprivation and information on fuel consumption levels in exposed and rural areas would be helpful;
- attention was drawn to rural transport and the increase in connectivity issues that had arisen due to diminishing services. It was stressed that removal or reduction in services impacted most on the poorest members of society and a request was made for transport links for SIMD and peripheral areas to be reviewed;
- confirmation was provided that further information would be provided to Mr D Loudon on the reason for the overspend on the subscriptions budget;
- further information was sought on the trend, i.e. was it improving or getting worse, in regard to the Highland data on fuel poverty as referenced a paragraph 9.8.3 of the report. It was also queried what contribution the Council could make to mitigate against this and reduce these harsh statistics;
- the Council had to build houses with low heating requirements and to invest in the existing housing stock to ensure their heating standards were of a similar level to new builds; and
- the information contained the report in regard to fuel poverty was hugely concerning and there was a need to address and effect change. Costs in Highland were disproportionately high and it was suggested that a Just Transition could be utilised to make houses more energy efficient and ensure local areas were treated more fairly and equitably.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. Revenue position for the Quarter 2 period to 30 September 2021;
- ii. statutory performance indicators, local key performance measures and where available, comparisons to Scottish averages;
- iii. effectiveness of the standard and level of services provided by the Resources & Finance Directorate and alignment with the Council's commitment to Best Value and continuous improvement;

- iv. analysis of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation as set out in Appendix 7 to the report, the limitations of the Index and the advantages of combining data available from a range of sources, including the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and the Social Economic Performance Index to measure deprivation;
- v. progress on the Procurement & Contract Management Transformation Project and the ongoing engagement with Directorates; and
- vi. issues raised regarding Fuel Poverty and that this was the subject of a report being submitted to Council on 9 December 2021.

**7. Performance and Governance Service Revenue Monitoring to 30 September 2021  
Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais – Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach gu 30 an t-Sultainn 2021**

There had been circulated Report No RES/37/21 dated 12 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- further information was sought and provided in relation to subscription expenditure;
- appreciation was extended to the work of trainees that had contributed to committee reports and it was requested that this be conveyed to them; and
- the level of reporting in terms of measuring and analysis of performance was praised and it was suggested that this be referred to the Gaelic Committee which had previously indicated the need to strengthen this information.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. revenue monitoring position for the period 31 March 2021 to 30 September 2021;
- ii. Directorate was on track to deliver all approved savings by the end of the financial year;
- iii. Directorate's performance information; and
- iv. actions for the Directorate on the Recovery Action Plan.

**8. Transformation Service – Revenue and Performance Monitoring to 30 September 2021  
Seirbheis Cruth-atharrachaidh – Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach is Coileanaidh 30 an t-Sultainn 2021**

There had been circulated Report No RES/38/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. 2021/2022 revenue monitoring position for the period to 30 September 2021 and latest forecasted outturn;
- ii. progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery; and
- iii. performance information.

**9. Corporate Resources Capital Monitoring to 30 September 2021 – Resources and Finance, Transformation and Performance and Governance Services**  
**Seirbheis Ghoireasan is Ionmhais, Seirbheis Coileanaidh is Riaghlachais agus Seirbheis Cruth-atharrachaidh – Sgrùdadh Calpa 30 an t-Sultainn 2021 - Seirbheisean Ghoireasan is Ionmhais, Cruth-atharrachaidh agus Coileanaidh is Riaghlachais**

There had been circulated Report No RES/39/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

A request was made for future reports to contain more detail on the Capital Programme expenditure and reference was made to the comments made earlier in the meeting regarding reprofiling of budgets. It was suggested that Members should give consideration to the most appropriate level of information required.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial position as at 30 September 2021 and the estimated year end forecast.

**10. Treasury Management**  
**Rianachd Ionmhais**

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/40/21 dated 10 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

**b. Mid-year Treasury Management Report 2021/22**  
**Aithisg Stiùireadh Ionmhais Meadhan-bliadhna 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No RES/41/21 dated 10 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- praise was provided to Officers for managing to reduce net external borrowing;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether it would be useful to rid long-term borrowing debt and replace it with a higher amount of new debt due to lower interest rates on new loans;
- reassurance was sought, and provided, on strategies to manage a rapid increase in interest rates on short-term loans and to ensure that there was the right level of debt in short-term loans;
- Member training on Treasury Management had proven valuable at the last opportunity and all Members were encouraged to become involved in any future training offered for the new Council as it gave reassurance that the Council's Treasury Management team was monitoring changes on an hourly and daily basis to ensure the Council was in the best financial position possible;
- the Treasury Management report was amongst one of the best Council reports and gave great confidence to Members;
- concern was expressed regarding the risks of inflation and interest rates rising, however, reassurance was provided that the Treasury Management team would be keeping a close watch on this and also sought advice from Treasury Advisors that were available to the team;

- in response to several comments, the distinction between the net external borrowing position and the capital financing position was explained and it was emphasised why this distinction was important; and
- confirmation was provided that following debt retiring in the current financial year, the interest burden would be further reduced for any new borrowing.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 July to 30 September 2021; and
- Mid-year Treasury Management report for 2021/22.

#### 11. **Highland Council – Annual Procurement Performance Report Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd – Aithisg Choileanaidh Bhliadhnaidh an t-Solair**

There had been circulated Report No RES/42/21 dated 5 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was requested that information on the identification of commercial opportunities, including income generation, be shared with Members;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether there were any opportunities to offset the cost of utilities and energy by generating power in-house due to rising costs and pressures. Further information would be provided to Members on the national utilities contract expiry date;
- in response to a question about the cost-benefit of the Commercial & Procurement Shared Service, it was explained that the Shared Service provided value for money, an ability to combine resources to maximise efficiencies and engagement with the local supply chains which had been exceptionally good and focussed on net zero priorities. There was intent to report to this Committee annually to increase transparency around the cost versus return analysis and it was confirmed that the overall cost of the team was just under one million pounds to the Council;
- regarding the Teaching Agency Framework contract, it was explained that it was a collaborative agreement with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils for the provision of any agency teachers that were required;
- in response to a question, the Strategic Procurement Manager with Aberdeen City Council agreed to provide further information about the length of the Residual Waste contract to Mr A Graham;
- assurance was sought and provided that the procurement process ensured that as much butcher meat and fresh fruit and vegetables products as possible were sourced from the Highland area; and
- it was highlighted that this report would be taken to the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board on 29 November 2021 which would allow an opportunity to delve into the report in greater detail, on issues such as contract extensions, how procurement could help generate savings and/or income, and cost-benefit analysis.

The Committee:

- APPROVED** the content and publication of the Highland Council Annual Procurement Report 2020-2021 as presented at Appendix A to the report; and

- ii. **NOTED** that further information would be provided to Members on the national utilities contract expiry date

## 12. **Minimum Income Guarantee Barantas Teachd-a-steach as Lughha**

There had been circulated Report No RES/43/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- appreciation was expressed to the Head of Revenues and Customer Services and the team for the effort put into the well written and well-balanced report;
- it was highlighted that the report was timely as the winter season approached with rapidly increasing energy prices, the disappearance of Universal Credit and National Insurance rates rising which made those in need less able to manage;
- the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) was a better model than Universal Basic Income and it was hoped that MIG became a reality to make the lives of the most underprivileged of society more manageable and for the improvements in physical and mental health that would follow as a result;
- MIG could help mitigate an exodus from remote and fragile communities and should be thought of in conjunction with housing because it was crucial to maintain these populations;
- regarding financial decision-making being a key life skill best nurtured from a young age, it would be important to liaise with the Education Service to ensure money management classes were available to children and youth, recognising the difficulty with competing pressures in schools; and
- the sentiment behind the report was important, though it was queried how it would be funded and highlighted that in some areas in Highland there were residents that were asset rich but cash poor which created an additional burden and might not protect some of the most vulnerable in society.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the Scottish Government's commitment to initiating work in the current Parliament to provide a Minimum Income Guarantee for all; and
- ii. Officers' response to the Scottish Government's "Share Your Views, Open Dialogue Engagement".

## 13. **The Impact of COVID-19 on Benefits Administration Buaidh COVID-19 air Rianachd Shochairean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/44/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members echoed gratitude for the incredible performance of the Revenues and Customers Services (RCS) team generally and through the course of the pandemic, led by the Head of RCS and it was highlighted that a significant amount of people relied on their support;

- concern was expressed for the staff workload on the RCS team due to the increasing pressures residents would be facing over the course of the winter and spring due to increasing energy prices and it was important to monitor the pressure on the team and reassurance was sought that they would be supported in this area; and
- the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau and their teamwork with the RCS team was commendable.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- key messages and recommendations provided by the Accounts Commission; and
- continuing strong performance of the Council's benefit services and agility to sustain such high levels of performance remotely.

**14. Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2020/21 and Plan 2021/22  
Aithisg Bhliadhna 2020/21 agus Plana 2021/22 Slàinte, Sàbhailteachd is Sunnd  
Corporra**

There had been circulated Report No RES/**45**/21 dated 20 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, and in response to a question, it was confirmed that there was a system in place to provide reminders about appointments. The system had been in place for a number of years, improvement was still required to reduce the number of missed appointments and this would be addressed as part of the Annual Plan.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report and Plan 2021/22.

**15. Project Dòchas Progress Report  
Pròiseact Dòchais – Aithisg Ùrachaidh**

There had been circulated Report No. RES/**46**/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, it was highlighted that the transition of Project Dochas and the fact that the process had proceeded smoothly without impact on Council services was credit to the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation and the team.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- the report and the Project status; and
- that reports would continue to be provided to this Committee to deliver governance.

**16. Transformation Programme: Digital Transformation Project  
Prògram Cruth-atharrachaidh: Pròiseact Cruth-atharrachadh Didseatach**

There had been circulated Report No. RES/**47**/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the use of technology and digital solutions had enabled the Council to advance 10 years in the last 20 months from making use of new systems, to learning how to use the technology and thanks was given to the Digital Transformation team, Council staff and Members for their commitment to grasping the new technology. It was highlighted that everyone had moved forward to new ways of working and it was hoped that this would continue; and
- appreciation was expressed to the Executive Chief Officer of Transformation for all his efforts in respect of the Digital project and opportunities that had arisen from this.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. overall progress to date including that the project status was being delivered on-time and within budget; and
- ii. project activities that were being undertaken that collectively supported the ongoing development and delivery of Digital Transformation.

## 17. Minutes of Meetings Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

### Declarations of Interest

**Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in items 17.iii and 17.iv on the basis of being 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.**

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Head of Service Recruitment Panel held on 2 August 2021, 30 August 2021, 7 September 2021 and 8 September 2021;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Central Safety Committee held on 15 September 2021;
- iii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Staff Partnership Forum held on 5 November 2021; and
- iv. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Corporate Resources Budget Sub-Committee held on 12 November and 19 November 2021.

The meeting was closed at 1.15pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit and Scrutiny Committee** held REMOTELY on Thursday, 25 November 2021 at 10.30am.

### Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr B Boyd	Mr S Mackie
Mr R Bremner	Mrs A MacLean
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr P Saggars

### Officials in Attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance  
 Mr E Foster, Head of Finance and Commercialism, Resources and Finance  
 Ms E Johnston, Corporate Audit & Performance Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Miss D Sutherland, Corporate Audit Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Service (Community Operations and Logistics), Communities and Place  
 Mr S Carr, Corporate Performance Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Mr M Watters, Freedom of Information and Data Protection Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Mrs M Grigor, Finance Manager (Corporate Budgeting, Treasury & Taxation), Resources & Finance  
 Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Infrastructure, Economy & Environment  
 Mr A Collins, Strategic Procurement Manager, Resources & Finance  
 Ms M Mackenzie, Commercial & Procurement, Resources & Finance  
 Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Performance & Governance Service  
 Mr P Hankinson, Senior Auditor, Performance & Governance Service  
 Ms A Morrison, Customer Resolution & Improvement Team Leader, Communities & Place  
 Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance  
 Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance & Governance

### Also in attendance:

Ms J Brown, Audit Partner, Grant Thornton  
 Ms C Connor, Manager, 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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr G Adam.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There had been circulated Report No. AS/22/21 by the Council's External Auditors (Grant Thornton) on the Annual Report 2020/21 to Elected Members and the Controller of Audit – Wider Scope and letter of representation Report No. AS/23/21.

Representatives from Grant Thornton presented the reports and key messages for the Committee.

During discussion, Members considered the following issues:-

- It was highlighted that a building had been demolished and was of nil value, but it was queried if the land would be worth something. It was clarified that where buildings/land were less than £20k, it was not recorded on the asset register in line with the CIPFA code. It was recommended in the audit report that a formal process be introduced to validate the continued existence and classification of an asset as the nature and use of assets could change over time. It was confirmed that work was ongoing to ensure that the Council's asset register was up to date.
- Progress on the list being prepared on what property/land assets the Council owned was requested. Also, under the Community Empowerment Act it was understood that the Council was to register online all assets in its ownership that could be taken over by communities.
- The Covid-19 pandemic had showed how important it had been for the Council to work with communities and the Services that communities had been able to provide. It had been 10 years since the Christie Commission report and not much progress was evident in the Council disaggregating its budgets to Area Committees and communities in order that they could be more involved in decision making on spending budgets.
- The work the Council's Business Gateway team had undertaken in disseminating Scottish Government business grants of circa £136m was commended. It was important that the Council supported local businesses and communities in providing services.
- The process of Councillors and Senior Officers confirming related parties disclosures had been highlighted for an action in the audit report and this was to be completed by April, 2022. Given that there were Local Government elections in May, 2022, there would be merit in looking at how related parties transactions were confirmed and controls in place to maximise returns by Councillors and Senior Officers.
- It was noted that Wick High School had been advertised by the Council at a price of only £50k. This was a significant building and the land on its own would be worth a considerable amount of money. Therefore, information on the process for the valuation and sale of properties was requested to be shared with Councillor Macpherson. By way of information, it was advised that the value of this building was impacted by its condition, age and asbestos issues and the building had now been sold.

- Further, when tenders were being issued for a new school for example, the budget for this was publicly available and therefore may give an advantage to potential bidders. It was queried if this budget information could be made confidential.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the External Auditors and Finance team for all their work on producing the accounts which showed that the Council was in a very positive position and thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the terms of the report;
- APPROVED** the Letter of Representation;
- NOTED** that information on the process for the valuation and sale of properties would be shared with Councillor D Macpherson; and
- NOTED** that consideration would be given to budgets set aside for new Council buildings being classified as confidential, given the potential advantage this information could give to bidders in the tendering process.

#### **4. Audited Accounts 2020/21 Cunntasan Sgrùdaichte 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No AS/24/21 dated 11 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance which presented the audited accounts of The Highland Council for financial year 2020/21.

Following consideration, the Committee **APPROVED** the audited accounts for signature.

#### **5. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais**

There had been circulated Report No. AS/25/21 by the Corporate Audit Manager which summarised the final reports issued since the date of the last meeting, together with details of work in progress and other information relevant to the operation of the Internal Audit Section.

The final reports were presented as follows:-

- Resources & Finance/Housing & Property – Procurement: Off contract spend and reporting (Reasonable Assurance)
- Performance & Governance – Compliance with Data Protection Legislation (Substantial Assurance)
- Infrastructure, Environment & Economy – Leader Programme 2020-21 (Full Assurance)

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- It was highlighted that the reports on the Leader Programme over the years had always been very good and recognition was given to the tremendous work of all staff involved in the Leader Programme;
- Leader funding had provided a significant financial and positive impact on Highland over the years, particularly in rural areas, but it was uncertain what would replace this funding. Details were still to be provided on how

the UK Shared Prosperity fund would operate as the intention was, that this would replace European funding.

The Committee **NOTED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at section 5 of the report and progress against the 2021/22 audit plan in section 6.

## **6. Action Tracking Report** **Aithisg a' Leantainn Gnìomhachd**

There is circulated Report No. AS/26/21 dated 11 November 2021 by the Corporate Audit Manager which provided action tracking information.

In particular, the completion date for the review of information management had been rescheduled a few times and was now 31 March, 2022. The training on information management was part of a wider rollout of staff induction and had been impacted by a change in online learning systems. An undertaking was given to ask the Service if this action could be completed sooner than the revised target date, given the importance of staff induction and training to the organisation.

The actions relating to repairs and maintenance were originally planned for completion by March, 2018 and was now rescheduled. It was advised that there had been relaxations on action target dates due to Covid, but the Service had been advised that the target date for this action of April, 2022 was the final revision that would be agreed.

It was queried if there was liaison with other Council's in relation to fraud so that lessons could be learned. It was advised that Corporate Audit Manager was a member of the Scottish Chief Auditors group at which information was shared on incidents of fraud. The Council was also part of the national fraud initiative scheme and Audit Scotland produced reports on fraud, irregularity and highlighted particular cases which were reviewed.

In response to concerns that it may be possible to split contracts in order for Officers to approve contract awards under delegated amounts, it was highlighted that there were delegated sums given to Officers for award of contracts. The delegated sums related to individual contracts and therefore there should be no splitting of contract awards. Contract awards were made public and Management and the Procurement team should be monitoring award of contracts to ensure the process of award had been done correctly.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i the action tracking information provided including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions; and

ii that it would be requested that the mandatory staff training on information management which was to be included in the staff induction process be completed sooner than the revised target date of 31 March, 2022.

## 7. Review of Corporate Risks Ath-Sgrùdaidh air Cunnartan Corporra

There had been circulated Report No. AS/27/21 dated 3 November 2021 by the Corporate Audit and Performance Manager which identified the Council's key strategic risks and the actions being taken to mitigate these.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- In relation to flooding it was advised that while this was not a corporate risk, each Service did have their own business continuity plans in place should a flooding incident happen and there was also an escalation process.
- The Climate Change risk was in the process of being reviewed to ensure it was up to date. A report on Climate Change would be submitted to the next full Council meeting and an action plan would be produced. A revised audit risk on Climate Change would be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee.
- In terms of access and egress plans in Schools, it was queried if there would be any support provided to Head Teachers on this.
- In relation to corporate risk 5 – effective governance in local decision making, the timescales for the mitigating actions was queried. An undertaking was given to provide timescales for these actions.
- Discussions were ongoing as to whether participatory budgeting required to be monitored through the corporate risk process.
- in relation to the City Region Deal there should be a review of all the business plans to ensure they were deliverable.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1 and the risk profile at Appendix 2; and

ii an update would be provided to the Committee on the support available to Head Teachers on access and egress plans.

## 8. Corporate Complaints Performance Monitoring Adhartas Ghearanan Corporra

There had been circulated Report No. AS/28/21 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities & Place which provided performance information on complaints for the period 1 April, 2021 to 30 September, 2021, along with comparison data for 20/21.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Councils 6-monthly complaint performance for frontline and investigation complaints under the Model Complaints Handling Procedure;
- ii. **NOTED** the continued and significant improvement in performance in Q2 across the Council corporately; and
- iii. **AGREED** to continue support the Council in handling complaints by signposting their constituents to the most appropriate channel for their query or complaint - [https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/591/council\\_and\\_government/535/customer\\_services](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/591/council_and_government/535/customer_services)

## 9. Members Survey on the Effectiveness of Audit & Scrutiny Committee Suirbhídh Bhall mu Éifeachdas Comataidh an Sgrúdaidh

There had been circulated Report No. AS/29/21 dated 11 November 2021 by the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager which presented key findings on the Members survey on the effectiveness of Audit & Scrutiny Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee

- i. **NOTED** the key findings of the survey;
- ii. **AGREED** the survey continues to be conducted annually;
- iii. **NOTED** that training modules on internal audit, risk and performance management are available for online learning and these are being migrated to the new online learning system;
- iv. **NOTED** that a corporate training programme for Members is being finalised and will support Member's training, development, and induction in 2022/23; and
- v. **AGREED** to 2 informal meetings for Members each year. The first meeting in late March 2022 to provide an early opportunity to input to the development of the Internal Audit Plan due to Committee in June 2022.

The meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.

## The Highland Council

**Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held REMOTELY on Monday, 29 November 2021 at 10.30 am.**

**Present:**

Mr John Finlayson  
Mr John Gordon

Mr Calum MacLeod  
Mr Calum Munro

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Transformation  
Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Mr M Bailey, Business Change Team Manager, Transformation  
Mr M Crowe, Access Officer (Skye and Lochalsh), Infrastructure, Environment & Economy  
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager

**Also in Attendance:**

Group Commander Mike Colliar, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Item 4)

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

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Item 7 – Mr C Munro (Non- Financial)

**3. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated for information Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 30 August, 2021 (which had been approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 9 September, 2021).

The Committee **NOTED** the terms of Minutes as circulated.

**4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report  
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus  
Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No SR/19/21 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Following a summary of the report by the Group Commander, and in noting the current staffing levels within Stations, there was concern about smaller and more remote stations in particular. In this regard, it was suggested that lowering the current age limit for applications as part of a wider strategy to encourage more young people to come forward might perhaps be advantageous if possible. It was also felt that more local training initiatives, as well as off-Island training, could help in this respect.

With particular reference to Uig, it was hoped that the current position would change favourably as the community developed and there was work ongoing in that regard. As part of this proactive approach, it was also suggested that consideration should be given to any opportunities for cross-staffing with other areas, such as Staffin.

In noting that the Service worked closely with employers to support an improvement in availability, whilst recognising the challenges faced by individuals who had to combine primary employment and operational availability, it was suggested that options should be investigated where available in terms of the provision of enhanced financial payments. Further discussion with employers as to whether increased flexibility could be achieved was also seen as a positive way forward.

Finally, and in light of Scottish Government legislation in relation to future smoke alarm systems within properties, it was confirmed that community engagement was being undertaken at present to highlight these new requirements and also the economic benefits to householders in taking measures now to address these measures.

Having scrutinised the report, and having thanked the Group Commander for his presentation, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the Area Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report as circulated.

**5. Skye and Lochalsh Local Access Forum Appointments  
Cur an Dreuchd gu Fòram Inntriageadh Ionadail an Eilein Sgitheanaich is Loch Aillse**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/20/21 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy, which detailed the work of the Local Access Forum and sought approval for the appointment of 4 new forum members.

The Committee **APPROVED** the appointment of Ms C McIntyre, Mr A Murray, Mr M Harrison and Ms S Sutton who had all applied to be members of the Local Access Forum for Skye and Lochalsh as set out in Table 2 of the report.

**6. Storr Future Development  
Leasachadh an Stòir san Àm ri Teachd**

There had been circulated Report No. SR//21 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy, relating to a business case for a retail outlet at the Old Man of Storr.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- this was a really important report which showed the ambition of the area and as such thanks had to be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the substantial work which had been undertaken to date;
- management of the entire site would be needed to ensure sustainability for the future and as such all opportunities had to be taken forward as and when they arose, not least to support the local economy;
- there had to be a focus on all issues in regard to car parking as this could also represent a potential income stream for the local area;
- this work fully supported and enhanced the work already undertaken in relation to the Council's 'Future Highlands – Health & Prosperity Strategic Partnership Plan and the Committee's Skye & Raasay Future proposals which had already been adopted;
- there had already been considerable local interest in this issue and also local investment in advance of future investment/opportunities and this was warmly welcomed;
- it was hoped that the Corporate Resources Committee would support the recommendation within the report which sought approval in regard to the required set up funding to deliver the installation on the retail module at Storr which had the potential to act as a blueprint for the rest of the Highlands;
- this report clearly set out the ambition of the Local Members for the area and it was hoped that it had been read by all local constituents;
- in relation to continuing to develop this world class site wherever possible, there had to be a strong focus on digitisation, not least in terms of the potential for future employment opportunities;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Ward Manager for the extensive work which he had undertaken in relation to this issue;
- this project had the potential to lead the way for all future projects across the Highland area and there was great pride in what had already been achieved;
- this was a world class site with the potential to deliver a world class experience;
- in terms of the timeline for this to be taken forward, it was noted that it was envisaged that a report would be submitted to the Corporate Resources Committee in January but other aspects of this work would start immediately and would be the subject of regular reports to both the Local Committee and Ward Business Meetings; and
- all opportunities for sponsorship (whether at local, Council or national level) should be progressed as a matter of urgency.

Thereafter, the Committee: -

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

ii. **AGREED** to consider investment from disaggregated Ward funds towards the delivery of on-site management and income generation at the Old Man of Storr site, through future Reports to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee;

\*iii. **AGREED** that a report should be presented to a future Corporate Resources Committee seeking approval of the required set-up funding to deliver the installation on the retail module at Storr;

iv. **NOTED** that further reports would be presented to this Committee in respect of future funding opportunities (as detailed at Section 14) and further development opportunities taking forward the Council's "Future Highlands – Health and Prosperity Strategic Partnership Plan" and this Committee's "Skye & Raasay Future".

**7. Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations  
Maointean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh  
gam Moladh**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr C Munro declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Council appointed Director of the Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations 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. SR//21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place relating to proposals for the allocation of Place Based Investment Funds.

During discussion, thanks were conveyed to the Ward Manager for the level of work which had been undertaken in relation to this report.

In that regard, it was highlighted that the proposed allocations would make a huge difference to both local residents and tourists and represented considerable investment in communities at every level.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocation of Place Based Investment Funds as follows:-

- (i) Investment in site management and income generation at the Old Man of Storr - £57,000
- (ii) Investment in Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations, Befriender Scheme to help address social isolation and loneliness - £20,000
- (iii) Investment in Braes Village Hall - £2,000
- (iv) Community Resilience & Support - £7000

The meeting ended at 11.30am.