

**The Highland Council  
No. 1 2021/2022**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Highland Council** held **REMOTELY** on **Thursday, 13 May 2021** at 10.35am.

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

**Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

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

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr J Gordon, Mrs L MacDonald, Mrs P Munro, Ms E Roddick, Mr G Ross and Mrs C Wilson.

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

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

Item 5 – Ms L Munro (Non-Financial)

Item 7 – Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson (both Non-Financial)

Item 8 – Mr N McLean (Financial)

Item 9 – Mr D Rixson and Ms N Sinclair (both Non-Financial)

General – Mr J McGillivray (on the basis of a family member being employed by the Council and would withdraw if considered appropriate at any time)

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

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 25 & 26 March 2021 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

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

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

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

Caithness Committee – Starred Item 12 – Wick Common Good Asset Register

**AGREED** the publication of the Common Good Asset Register for Wick, re-classification of the property included in the Register and creation of a Wick Common Good Fund.

Correction to the Caithness Committee Minutes – to amend wording as follows – Page 273 – 'generate revenue from the Fund's assets for the benefit of the community, for example opportunities to charge for the use of the Wick Town Hall and note the implications for the public consultation around car parking charging'.

Economy & Infrastructure Committee – Starred Item 8 - Coastal Communities Fund

**AGREED** Option 1 from the report as a suitable mechanism to deliver the functions required from the two options proposed, namely that the Chair and Vice Chair of the E&I Committee, along with the Chair of each Area Committee, should form a Sub-Committee to determine project funding.

Correction to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee Minutes – Item 22 – to clarify that Mr D Rixson had declared a non-financial interest but also that he had left the meeting during discussion of the item.

The Council also **AGREED** revised dated for meetings of the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation in the current year as follows:-

Monday, 4 October at 10.30am (was 25 Oct)

Monday, 29 November at 2pm (was 13 Dec)

**5. Question Time**  
**Àm Ceiste**

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

**(i) Mr C Fraser**

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

“How many ground-floor, wheelchair-accessible properties are in the Council estate?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether information on the location of these properties by Ward could be provided for the next meeting of the Housing & Property Committee.

In response, it was confirmed that this would be done.

**(ii) Mr C Fraser**

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

“What is the waiting list for Highland residents who want ground-floor, wheelchair-accessible properties i.e. how many people are on the housing list and have high accessibility need points allocated to them?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether information on the age profile of applications could be provided for the next meeting of the Housing & Property Committee.

In response, it was confirmed that this would be done.

**6. Notices of Motion**  
**Brathan Glusaid**

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

(i) We, the Members of Dingwall and Seaforth Ward 8 have, after due consideration, unanimously agree that, in the best interests of our constituents, we need to be a standalone Area Committee. We are strongly of the view that for effective governance and local accountability, decision making has to be closest to the people for whom our decisions are so important. As we move towards recovery, we will require to work even more closely with our communities and businesses and to have the ability to quickly take decisions working in partnership that will improve the outcomes for the people we represent.

We ask Highland Council to agree to give Dingwall and Seaforth Ward the right to establish an Area Committee to enable local decisions to be in local hands.

Signed: Mr A MacKinnon Mr G MacKenzie Mrs M Paterson Mrs A MacLean

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was felt that the terms of this Notice of Motion were self-explanatory in that they represented a move towards 'true localism'. As such, it had to be highlighted that the Local Members concerned were dissatisfied with maintaining the status quo as they wished to bring about positive change which was beneficial for local constituents;
- bringing local decisions closer to local residents through a smaller Local Committee represented community empowerment and would enable action to be discussed and taken on a level which would be appreciated by all;
- disbursement of funds on a Ward basis would be a further advantage and would be welcomed;
- the local community spirit and resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic and the action taken in this respect had been hugely impressive and had to be recognised and taken forward whenever and wherever possible;
- it was felt that in future there could be significant advantages in joining the Dingwall and Seaforth area with the Strathpeffer area;
- in terms of the previous report from the Commission on Highland Democracy, there had been a clear recommendation for local decisions to be placed in local hands and as such the proposals around participatory budgeting were awaited with interest;
- it had to be accepted that many local residents felt remote from decisions taken by the full Council;
- since the publication of the report from the Commission on Highland Democracy, a number of Wards had taken the decision that they wanted to move in a similar direction to what was now being proposed. As such, this had to be recognised as part of an early review into Local Committee arrangements in order that alternative arrangements/decisions could be implemented/taken wherever necessary in order to enable real devolution for local areas across the Highlands where necessary;
- further clarification was needed as to car parking arrangements/charges across the Highlands, both in this new area and other local areas;
- the Covid-19 pandemic had underlined some significant differences across areas and particularly the strong individual 'sense of identity' in some cases;
- it would be of paramount importance that the level of engagement and volunteering in local areas was continued and supported, not least in terms of allowing local input in the distribution of local funding;
- clarification was sought as to whether there would be a financial saving as a result of this proposal; and
- whilst supporting the proposal, reference was made as to whether this could be considered to be 'true democracy' in terms of the number of Members on the Committee and their control over local budgets/agenda items for future meetings and in this respect comparisons were drawn with the previous District Council arrangements.

### Decision

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

(ii) Highland Council calls for a fairer share of the income derived for the development of the Highlands natural resources. At a time when massive profits are being made by private energy companies who use the abundant natural resources of wind and water in the Highlands, the basic road infrastructure that the communities of the Highlands rely upon is failing due to the lack of invest over a number of years.

Roads are just one example where the people and the overall environment of the Highlands would benefit from a reasonable share of the income being re-invested in the wider community. There are many other areas where the quality of life of Highland people would be enhanced from the re-investment of a share of the profits made from the development of the Highlands natural resources.

Asking for a share to invest back in the community for the overall benefit of the people of the Highlands is reasonable beyond challenge and the norm in many other countries across Europe. This initiative would be a major driver in improving infrastructure and communications the length and breadth of the largest local authority in the UK and a third of the land mass of Scotland.

Signed: Mrs M Davidson Mr J Gray

In this regard, there had also been tabled additional wording to suggest that an expert group should be set up consisting of Finance, Planning, Legal and Energy to look at the options around this proposal, reflecting on whether an updated Highland Renewable Energy Strategy was needed and considering how the Highland Council area as whole could benefit in a sustainable manner from its substantial natural resources.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that the Highland area had been the centre for energy research, development and production for nearly 100 years but in terms of onshore and offshore renewables, the area had not seen anything near the benefits (in either employment or financial terms) that it would have been reasonable to expect;
- recent reports had confirmed that the North of Scotland held the greatest renewable resource in the United Kingdom and therefore provided the greatest opportunity to meet targets. However, unless a fundamental change was made in relation to how developments were taken forward in the Highlands, the area would continue to lose out on what could reasonably be expected from those developments. As such, it was feared that the Highlands could be meeting zero carbon targets with zero benefit for the region if changes were not made in this respect;
- it was noted that the Shetland area had fared considerably better than the Highlands over a number of years in this regard and it was suggested that lessons should perhaps be learned from their example;
- it was imperative that the future of renewables was seen as a potential income source for the area;
- it was regrettable that despite being a net exporter of energy to the rest of the country, the Highland area currently paid 5% more than the average on business electricity rates for small businesses (which was the highest business rate bracket in the United Kingdom);
- it was essential that future changes ensured that wealth generated in the Highlands stayed in the area;
- as a result of the pandemic, a new economic model had to be implemented to ensure social, economic and environmental justice (including a redesign of

the local economy and adapting to environmental challenges/opportunities) with net zero carbon targets at the core;

- it was noted that the land ownership pattern in the Highlands had not changed much in recent years and it was now time to look closely at community wealth building in the area in order to retain more of the money made from local natural resources through the creation of a Highland Renewable Fund;
- in terms of the lack of investment in Highland roads over recent years, and despite the fact that they had now been prioritised for investment, it had to be highlighted that this situation was now being made considerably worse as a result of these roads having to bear the weight of heavy vehicles involved in work associated with natural resources. As such, the setting up of a Highland Renewable Fund was strongly supported, not least in order to retain a share of the income derived from such projects for reinvestment in local infrastructure which would greatly benefit local communities;
- it was felt that the Highlands had often been exploited by profit driven companies who had harvested the Highland environment and this had been considerably assisted by a complex and baffling planning system. In this regard, it was hoped that the Scottish Government would re-examine the currently planning arrangements in the near future to create a fairer system for all;
- whilst supporting the aims of the Notice of Motion, reference was made to the situation which had existed in the Lochaber area from the 1930s to the 1980s whereby power generated in that location had been used locally. As such, it was suggested that this should be the focus for the future (as opposed to concentrating on trying to retain/gain a share of profits) which would have the added benefit of creating/retaining local jobs as part of a 'levelling up' agenda;
- there was a need for further detail on action to be taken, including any lobbying activities, and as such it was suggested that a full and detailed report with a list of implications (including information on the resourcing of the proposed new Group) would have been preferable and would have benefitted discussion on the issue;
- capital (as well as revenue) issues needed to be highlighted as at least £10bn in capital gain had been realised over the previous cycle and if the Council had received even 10% of that there would now be no Council debt;
- the Highland area had gone from having the cheapest electricity in the United Kingdom to the most expensive as a result of changes made in the 1980s (with fuel poverty increasing markedly over that period at the same time as companies profited hugely) and as such there was a need for urgent discussions to be held with Ofgem and both the UK and Scottish Governments on this issue; and
- it had to be acknowledged that very few local jobs had been created and very little financial benefit gained by local communities as a result of recent developments in the Highlands. It was therefore suggested that it would be imperative for urgent consultation to be undertaken in the first instance with both the UK and Scottish Governments, relevant MSPs in particular and civil servants at the highest government level to seek a political commitment at a national level to address the issues which had been raised during the meeting in order to increase the expectation of success.

### **Decision**

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

It was also **AGREED** that an expert group be set up consisting of Finance, Planning, Legal and Energy to look at the options around this proposal, reflecting on whether an updated Highland Renewable Energy Strategy was needed and considering how the Highland Council area as a whole could benefit in a sustainable manner from its substantial natural resources.

(iii)The Climate Change Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament as a direct response to the Paris Agreement which requires parties to increase action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while taking into account “the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs.

In this regard, the Scottish Government formed a Just Transition Commission and they reported back last year with their findings - Advice for a Green Recovery.

Some of the findings of note are as follows:-

- We have an opportunity to reset our progress towards a net-zero economy in a way that also actively tackles inequality and promotes regional cohesion;
- Young people are especially at risk;
- Patterns of transport use have changed but there is great uncertainty about the permanence of these changes;
- There is an accelerated transition unfolding in the Oil and Gas sectors; and
- Some rural sectors and regions are especially hard hit.

We propose that Officers involved with climate change and our poverty strategies bring forward a paper on how we can bring together our thinking on these issues and how our current policies may need to change.

Signed: Mrs M Davidson      Mrs T Robertson

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be acknowledged that climate change was going to impact on the poor and those on the lowest incomes as they were most likely to struggle to adapt their lifestyles to it so it was imperative that consideration of climate change issues was combined with consideration of poverty issues;
- it was noted that a full and detailed report would be submitted to the Climate Change Working Group initially as part of a cross-Service initiative;
- it would be important to highlight the risks to Highland communities in terms of achieving climate change targets and in this respect the pandemic had accentuated the specific risks for remote and rural areas, including reduced public transport, fuel poverty and food insecurity;
- in moving towards recovery from the pandemic, it would be important to ensure that actions taken on meeting climate change targets did not detract from action on poverty;
- it was felt that it would have been more appropriate for a report on this issue to be submitted in the first instance as opposed to a Notice of Motion as this would have allowed more informed debate;
- in dealing with this issue, alongside matters related to Brexit and Covid-19, it would be important to focus on recovery and future opportunities and in this respect reference was made to retaining energy locally (when it was produced locally) which would also have the added advantage of retaining jobs in the area;
- in focusing on transition issues, there was a need to include action in relation to the Council's housing stock/home energy usage as it was a fact that

tenants were often in the worst position in terms of being able to address climate change issues. In this regard, it was imperative that dialogue was undertaken with the Scottish Government on the current funding available to Local Authorities for the building of houses;

- whilst solving fuel poverty was paramount, there was also a need to focus strongly on improving economic development for the whole area as part of discussion with the Scottish Government, perhaps by learning lessons from the 'Norway example'; and
- focusing on and encouraging input from young people across the Highlands would be highly advantageous for all concerned.

### **Decision**

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

## **7. Proposal and Update on Senior Leadership Redesign Ath-dhealbhadh Structaran/Àrd-Cheannardais**

### **Declarations of Interest**

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

There had been circulated Report No. HC/11/21 dated 4 May 2021 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Convener reminded Members that it would be preferable not to discuss individual staff members during the debate to avoid having to exclude the public from the discussion;
- the Depute Leader of the Council spoke in favour of Option 2, as detailed in the report, and considered that this option would provide the best structure for the Council to support its staff, to deliver services to communities, to build on partnership working and to maintain financial stability. He also emphasised the importance of not delaying a decision on the redesign;
- some Members expressed disappointment that although the new structure had originally been approved in May 2019, much of it had not yet been implemented, despite the Covid-19 crisis not having started until March 2020. It was also felt that the report lacked important detail and therefore a postponement would be proposed to allow improved scrutiny. Key issues were missing from the job description / person specification for the proposed Depute Chief Executive, such as the need to engage with Members, although it was explained that this aspect of the role was referred to in the job description and was also considered to be implicit in a senior management role;
- information was sought and provided on why 15 Heads of Service were being proposed when the Council had agreed, in May 2019, to reduce Head of Service posts from 17 to 10. In response, it was highlighted that the rationale for this was provided in the wider context of the overall structure redesign and the savings target;



- clarification was provided as to why an Executive Chief Officer post had been advertised without prior Member review and why the Education Service now required two Heads of Service. In this respect, the Chair of the Education Committee summarised feedback from Head Teachers which had indicated the support they required from having specialist Heads of Service for primary and secondary levels;
- it was noted that discussion had taken place on the redesign proposals between Members and senior management prior to the report being presented to the Council and as such it was suggested Members had been given sufficient opportunity to seek further information if required;
- the Council's current position of financial stability was welcomed and Members thanked all staff and management for their dedication in achieving this in addition to coping with the Covid-19 crisis. In this regard, it was felt that it was important to trust Officials to fulfil their roles, given the high levels of competence which had already been demonstrated;
- the importance of a strong and appropriate leadership team was emphasised, as was the need for a Depute Chief Executive post, especially given the size of the organisation;
- in response to a query as to how the £500k savings target would be achieved, it was explained that this would be worked on once the overall management structure had been agreed/implemented;
- information was sought and provided on other options that had been considered prior to the two options in the report being short-listed and assurance provided that this had included a model that required a Managing Director;
- it was suggested that the proposed salary for the Depute Chief Executive post was high and that money could instead be directed towards tackling the backlog of road maintenance, with particular reference to the poor state of repair of the roads in Caithness. In response, other Members supported the need for a senior post at this level and referred to the £20m of capital which was being allocated to road maintenance;
- it was stressed that the achievements and financial savings realised by the Council to date should be better publicised;
- concern was expressed that 'experience in a public sector organisation' was primarily being sought from applicants for the post of the Depute Chief Executive and this appeared to not give equal prominence to the benefits of private sector experience;
- it was felt that reference should be made in the job description/person specification for the Depute Chief Executive post to localism or 'place-based planning', given the importance of this to Council policy going forward;
- additional managerial support was required at Area / Ward level to help facilitate meaningful community empowerment and a future debate on how this could be achieved would be welcomed;
- in response to a query, it was explained that staff members undertaking a role on an interim basis were not required to specify whether they were permanent or interim while attending meetings;
- it was noted that the Trade Unions were supportive of the proposals in the report and considered the proposed leadership redesign to be necessary for the Council; and
- the effect of the Covid-19 crisis on the management restructure which had been agreed in May 2019 was summarised and noted.

Thereafter, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr J Gray, **MOVED** Option 2 as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr A Sinclair, moved that agreement should be given to bringing forward recommendations on the Senior Management first to a Member Seminar and subsequently to undertake a piece of work before coming back to the next Council meeting for consideration, thus allowing the final decision to be open and transparent while responding with agility and ensuring future sustainability.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 48 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 10 votes, with 4 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion**

Mr G Adam, Mr B Allan, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr B Boyd, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Ms K Currie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr D Fraser, Mr L 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 B McAllister, Mr A MacInnes, Mrs D Mackay, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs L Munro, Mrs M Paterson Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Ms N Sinclair, Ms M Smith and Mr B Thompson.

### **For the Amendment**

Mr J Bruce, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mr W Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr P Saggars, Mr A Sinclair and Mr C Smith.

### **Abstentions**

Mr A Baxter, Ms P Hadley, Mr J McGillivray and Mr D MacLeod.

### **Decision**

The Council:-

- (i) **AGREED** Option 2 to re-structure the Senior Leadership Team to include a Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) post and reduce the number of ECOs from 8 to 7 permanent ECO posts. The DCE post to have responsibility for major Council initiatives and strategies as well as deputising responsibilities for the Chief Executive. This appointment to attract a salary of £122,812;
- (ii) **NOTED** the ECO remits as set out in Appendix 2 of the report and that the remit areas for the ECO Transformation would be allocated to the Depute Chief Executive;
- (iii) **AGREED** the Heads of Service structure as set out in Section 5.2 and the remits set out in Appendix 4a and 4b of the report;
- (iv) **NOTED** the Heads of Service implementation process as set out in Section 7.5 and the timelines as set out in Appendix 6 of the report; and
- (v) **NOTED** that the Senior Leadership Redesign would contribute to the senior management savings of £0.500m approved by the Council in March 2020 for the financial year 2021/2022 and that this saving would be fully implemented as the Strategic service reviews were completed within the current financial year.

## 8. Living Wage Area Status for Highland Tuarastal Bith-beò

### Declaration of Interest

**Mr N McLean declared a financial interest in this item as Director of Geo-Rope Limited 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 meeting and take no part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/12/21 dated 12 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be highlighted that a living wage afforded a decent standard of living and this should be able to be attained by all Highland residents;
- there was evidence to prove that a living wage was beneficial for all, not least in terms of staff recruitment/retention and improved staff morale, productivity and positivity, and as such lessons had to be learned from elsewhere where necessary and engagement with businesses undertaken in order to develop an Action Plan in this regard;
- it was expected that terms of this report would be widely welcomed in that it conveyed an important message to the wider community that there was confidence in the Highlands;
- the Council, along with most of the major employers in the Highlands, was a living wage employer and it was of the utmost importance that encouragement was given to other companies in the area in this regard;
- the progress being made on this issue was welcomed, not least in terms of the need to try to ensure the provision of dignity for employees across the Highland area. In this respect, reference was made to a previous Member of the Council, Mr Richard Laird, who had consistently raised this issue and had championed disadvantaged residents not only in his own Ward but across the Highlands;
- the particular challenges posed in regard to seasonal work across the area had to be recognised;
- it was felt that the proposals in the report could help to address various issues associated with both the Covid-19 pandemic recovery and also any implications arising from the Brexit process across the area;
- thanks should be conveyed to Mr Gowans in particular for raising this issue initially through the City of Inverness Area Committee;
- whilst the need to encourage businesses across the area to become 'living wage employers' was supported, it had to be acknowledged that adopting these proposals in the post pandemic period might not be sustainable for all employers across the area at this time;
- in terms of the duty of care to all Highland residents, it was imperative to ensure the designation of 'living wage' status;
- there was a need to provide further information/clarification in respect of the current arrangements for the payment of employees by cash or card;
- it would be important to ensure that it was not just 'white collar' employers who were involved;
- in terms of the relative cost of living in more rural communities across the Highlands, there was a need for further work to be undertaken to establish whether it was possible to allocate a 'weighting' in this respect, similar to the 'weighting' currently in place for London;

- clarification was needed as to whether the proposals within the report would also apply to part-time contracts across the area;
- it was suggested that it should be queried as to whether there were any plans by the Scottish Government to look at the salary levels for Local Councillors in comparison with MSPs in the post pandemic period;
- the opportunities to be progressive had been highlighted by the proposals within the report and this was welcomed; and
- it was imperative that the Council demonstrated its full commitment to supporting hard working communities across the Highlands and the terms of this report conveyed that message of support for all.

### **Decision**

Members **AGREED**:-

- (i) the proposed next steps set out in the report;
- (ii) that engagement be carried out with Living Wage Scotland and Dundee City Council to identify the opportunities and challenges in achieving Living Wage area status and to engage fully with businesses to ensure buy-in;
- (iii) that a bid for a dedicated Project Officer might be necessary to fully support the work; and
- (iv) that regular progress reports be brought back to the Council.

## **9. Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund Maoin Chothromachaidh**

### **Declarations of Interest**

**Mr D Rixson and Ms N Sinclair declared non-financial interests in this item as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre and Director of Wick Development Trust respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/13/21 dated 12 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the work undertaken to date;
- contact was now being made with MPs and MSPs in relation to the issues/projects which had been detailed within the report and this would be continued in order that further action could now be taken, including submission of a Community Renewal bid;
- a Members' Seminar would also now be arranged and discussion undertaken with the Chairs of the Local Committees before bids were finalised and in this regard all Members of the Council were encouraged to submit advice and ideas to feed into this process in order to deliver positive change;
- clarification was needed in terms of what lobbying had been undertaken to date and specifically in the 18 month period prior to January 2021 as Borders Council was very similar and (in terms of the methodology which had been used) had been placed in the top band;

- on the basis that other Local Authorities (including Borders Council) appeared to have had more success, it was suggested that there was perhaps a need for a dedicated Policy & Research Team to be set up within Highland Council to anticipate and take forward future work in relation to the early submission of similar bids (including through more detailed research on methodologies/metrics to be used);
- it was noted that half of the projects which had been ranked as 'A' were in Inverness and had been given more detail than projects in other areas of the Highlands and it was hoped that this could be changed;
- in terms of the loss of EU funding, it had to be noted that this included ERDF funding (approximately £10m per year), European Social Fund (£4.5m per year), European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (£1.6m per year), Common Agricultural Policy (£43m per year in direct support and £28m per year in rural development grants), Horizon 2020 (£0.5m per year) and the LEADER Programme (£2.5m per year) which totalled approximately £90m per year and as such it was vital that action was taken to address the serious implications for the area;
- all Wards across the area would welcome additional investment and therefore needed further information on how to progress projects in this respect;
- in relation to the Levelling Up Fund (Scotland's share in the region of £432m) and the Community Renewal Fund (£200m for the whole of the United Kingdom – with Scotland's share approximately £17m/£18m and therefore realistic to assume a few hundred thousand pounds for the Highland area), it should be noted that the latter would act as a 'pilot' for the Shared Prosperity Fund. As such, there was no merit in arguing that the UK Government should have followed a different set of rules in terms of the methodology to be used and instead the case should be made that relevant/essential data for the Highland area had not been taken into account due to unavailability at the time but should be considered now;
- it appeared that the Highland Council had been effectively 'outmanoeuvred' by other Local Authorities and as such it was imperative that political differences were now set aside with all Members working together to work with MPs and MSPs in particular whenever and wherever necessary so that the best possible outcome could be achieved/delivered for all areas of the Highlands;
- the investment priorities which had already been set out in the report were welcomed and it was hoped that they could be expanded to include other areas wherever possible;
- it was noted that the Leader and the relevant Executive Chief Officer would attend future Local Committee meetings to hear about community priorities and this was welcomed;
- consideration also had to be given to farming priorities and to future action needed in that regard;
- there was a need to take account of outcomes from previous local Charrettes in order to guide future processes;
- as part of a future Ward management review, it would be essential to consider how 'shovel ready' bids at Ward/Area level could be in place and as such ready to be submitted as part of any future and similar processes, perhaps through the creation of an Area prospectus; and
- it was necessary to also acknowledge the Gaelic culture and its connection with all bids to be submitted by the Council.

## **Decision**

Members **AGREED**:-

- (i) that the Council should continue to lobby for a different methodology on the metrics to be used for the priority areas for the Shared Prosperity Fund and that external analysis be carried out to strengthen the case in responding to the UK Government consultation proposed for later in the year;
- (ii) that bids be prepared for the Levelling Up Fund and the Community Renewal Fund and that external support be brought in to support the bid writing process;
- (iii) the proposed content of bids being considered as set out in Section 12 and 13 of the report, recognising the need for large scale projects that could be delivered within the spend period and that fitted with the criteria set by the UK Government;
- (iv) that Officers should continue with the preparation of the final bid submission, involving discussion with Area Chairs on an ongoing basis over the following month;
- (v) that an all Member Workshop be set up prior to the bids being submitted to report on progress and allow input to the detailed content of the bid submission;
- (vi) that, recognising the very challenging timescales to submit bids, the final bids be agreed by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, in consultation with the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment; and
- (vii) that a report on the final bid submission be brought back to the Council meeting on 24 June 2021 for homologation.

## **10. Deeds Executed Sgriobhainnean 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 25 and 26 March 2021 was available on the Council's Website.

The meeting ended at 4.25pm.