

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held **remotely** on **Thursday, 2 December 2021** at **10.30 am**.

### **Present:**

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

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

Mr G Adam	Ms P Hadley
Mrs J Barclay	Mr A Jarvie
Mr A Baxter	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr R Bremner	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Christie	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs I Munro

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive  
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer - Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure  
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration  
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport  
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager  
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager  
Ms N Wallace, Environment Manager  
Ms F Cameron, LEADER Programme Manager  
Mr F McGunnigle, City Deal Programme Manager  
Mr M Bain, Project Manager, Roads and Transport  
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer  
Mr C Baxter, Planner  
Mr M Hilton, Planner  
Mr D Chisolm, Planner  
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator  
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator  
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

### **Also in Attendance:**

Mr S Reid, Stantec (Item 5)  
Mr S Canning, Stantec (Item 5)  
Mr R Robertson, HITRANS (Item 4)

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

**Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Balfour, Mr B Boyd and Mr D MacLeod.

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

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

Item 8 – Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

Item 10 – Mr D Louden and Mr C Munro (both financial)

Item 11 – Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

Item 16 – Mrs C Caddick and Mr C Munro (both financial)

Item 17 – Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

Item 24 – Mr D Rixson and Mrs T Robertson (both non-financial)

**3. Good News  
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News items, which included a 2-year Shared Biodiversity Post between NatureScot and the Council, an award of £5.93M from the Scottish Government's £32M Local Bridge Maintenance fund 2021-23, and Levelling Up Fund Success.

Mike Mitchell was thanked for his many years of service to the Council and wished well for his retirement.

In terms of Standing Order 9, the Committee **AGREED** to take Item 5 at this point.

**4. Presentation - Corran Ferry  
Taisbeanadh – Aiseag a' Chorrain**

A presentation was given by Mr S Reid and Mr S Canning, Stantec, on the results of Corran Narrows socio-economic study. Key issues covered included funding, usage of the ferry, and implications and costs of a 'no ferry' situation for residents, businesses and visitors. Information on the costs and implications of upgrading the A861 were also covered.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- in response to a question, it was explained that in relation to a 'no ferry' situation, the monetised disbenefit that current ferry users would experience was estimated at £1.9m per annum, giving a Transport Economic Efficiency of £71-78m over 60 years, which was calculated on a decreasing value of benefit over time;
- the detail in the report was welcomed and the strategic importance of the ferry was emphasised, including as a route to and from Mull; and
- the high cost of upgrading the A861 was highlighted.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** the report and presentation be circulated to the Committee.

## **5. Presentation - HiTrans Activity** **Taisbeanadh – Gnìomhachd HiTrans**

A presentation was given by Mr R Robertson, HITRANS Director, providing information and an update on HITRANS activity in the Highland Council area. Areas covered during the presentation included their governance and funding, overall strategies, active travel, aviation, bus, ferry, rail and their new app, 'GO-HI MaaS'.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the wide range of work undertaken by HITRANS was appreciated;
- confirmation was provided that HITRANS would continue to work with Cairngorm National Park Authority on their active travel plans;
- attention was drawn to the importance of providing affordable travel across the Highlands and Islands before trying to provide free travel, and to aim for low carbon options;
- information was sought, and provided, on possible replacement sources of European funding;
- it was confirmed that a feasibility study was planned for the possible reopening of Evanton train station;
- it was important to replace any bus services lost during the Covid-19 crisis;
- it would be ideal if the Kyle to Inverness railway line could be improved for passengers and freight;
- attention was drawn to the value of the Ferintosh Community Bus service and it was hoped the booking system would be streamlined;
- information was sought, and provided, on the possible expansion of the shared bike scheme, and its usage. Promotion of this in spring-time was important; and
- the development of new rail stations could be discussed further outwith the meeting, with suggestions including Tomatin, Culloden Moor and the UHI campus.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## **6. 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. ECI/41/2021 dated 19 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

A presentation was provided on progress to date and the process that would follow for the Plan. Key issues summarised included spatial strategy, settlement hierarchy, housing land requirements, hinterland boundaries, and general policies. Three changes were highlighted from Area Committee feedback: a change to the list of mixed uses for site IN85 (Castlehill, Inverness), a modification to the boundary of NG01 (Nigg) Industrial Land allocation, and a minor adjustment to a developer requirement at Teanallen, Evanton (EV03).

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the extensive consultation and engagement with the public and local Members was welcomed;
- the sustainability of developments for which the local infrastructure and facilities were not in place in a timely manner was of concern was. A summary was provided

of the processes in place to tackle this, including the use of developer briefs and early links with the capital programme;

- some of the local Members for Easter Ross spoke in favour of the adjustment to the industrial land allocation at Nigg but asked that the hinterland policy in their Wards be amended, as requested at their recent Area Committee meeting, citing lack of affordable housing and lack of housing for key workers;
- information was sought, and provided, on the housing need and demand assessment figures for Nairn, with particular reference to the increase in the projected number of units;
- the increase in the affordable housing requirement from 25% to 35% was welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on the process for developer amendments to housing requirements;
- the securing of land for Affordable Housing was important;
- information was sought, and provided, on the expansion at IN80 (Inverness), which had been considered recently by the City of Inverness and Area Committee;
- it was important there was adequate provision for small self-start business units as well as housing to support local economies;
- there was keen community interest in growing food at Knocknagael Farm, Inverness (IN60), currently owned by the Scottish Government, and, given the need to protect any food growing opportunities, concern was expressed by Mr MacWilliam at its allocation for community use and housing, which had been agreed by the City of Inverness and Area Committee; and
- it was suggested that in the spirit of localism, the Committee should pay more attention to the views of local Members than officials.

Mrs T Robertson, seconded by Mrs C Caddick, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr D Louden, seconded by Mr A MacInnes, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, an alteration to the first recommendation (i), 'To roll the Hinterland Policy back in Easter Ross and Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh in the way proposed by the local members, as detailed on page 17, column 3 of the report.'

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 8 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 6 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the motion: Mrs C Caddick, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr J Gray, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mr W MacKay, Mr D Rixson and Mrs T Robertson

For the amendment: Mr I Brown, Mr K Gowans, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacInnes, Mr C Munro and Mr P Sagers

The Committee **APPROVED** the Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan for consultation, including:-

- i. **AGREED** the officer recommendations on strategic issues outlined in Appendix 1 of the report, noting the issues raised by respondents and Local/City Committees;
- ii. **NOTED** the place-specific changes agreed by the Local/City Committees as set out in Appendix 2 of the report as amended by paragraph 6.11 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in section 7 of the report;
- iv. **NOTED** that the Proposed Plan for publication would include additional supporting documents and minor factual updates, with any material changes to be agreed with the chair of the relevant committee(s) prior to publication; and

- v. **AGREED** for the published Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan to be treated as a material planning consideration, in line with government guidance.

## **7. Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS)- Highland Council Membership Urras Inntrigidh Blàr A-muigh na h-Alba- Ballrachd Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/42/2021 dated 11 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

As Members sought further information on Directors' liabilities and other legal issues, which was not available at the meeting, the Committee **DEFERRED** consideration of the report pending further information being obtained.

## **8. Revenue Monitoring- Quarter 2 to 30 September 2021 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach – Cairteal 2 gu 30 Sultain 2021**

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

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/43/2021 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, concerns were raised about reported deficits in relation to grants and external contractor overspends. It was explained that these were profiling issues related to reporting timescales for which a clearer picture would be obtained at the end of the financial year.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the more detailed reporting of gross income and gross expenditure to improve scrutiny of net budgets as set out in the Appendices of the report;
- ii. the revenue monitoring position for the period to 30 September 2021;
- iii. net spend at the end of Quarter 2, totalled £11.514m;
- iv. based on the best available information to date, a service budget gap of £1.618m was forecast to end of 2021/22
- v. many areas of the Service relied on income to pay for services, and this continued to be affected in 2021/22 because of Covid-19 impacts. A loss of income and Covid-19 related costs was the key driver of the Service's budget gap;
- vi. the budget gap might change positively or negatively depending on applying expenditure and recruitment controls, aligning services to meet budget savings agreed and income recovery in 2021/22; and
- vii. further adjustments would be made in future quarterly reporting to reflect the updated apportionment of costs and savings across the new structure.

## **9. Capital Monitoring – Quarter 2 2021/22 Sgrùdadh Calpa – Cairteal 2 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/44/2021 dated 12 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- further detail was required for future reports and this was being worked on. Specific reference was made to the need to include an original budget line;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the reprofiled expenditure on car parking in Portree. Fuller detail on local projects was provided to Area Committees;
- attention was drawn to the poor road conditions in Highland and it was suggested the Council leadership was not taking adequate responsibility for tackling this. Reference was made to reported underspends on road maintenance during the summer months. In response it was explained that this was due to an unavoidable lag in budget reporting. The underspend delivery strategy was highlighted and information was offered on road maintenance projects which had been undertaken. The Council's Redesign Board were holding workshops to which all Members were welcome to attend and input to; and
- the difference in salary and qualifications required for LGV and HGV drivers was highlighted, and it was suggested that a useful project would be to improve and repair some of the faded and damaged road signs in Inverness.

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

## **10. Highland Coastal Community Fund - Update and Next Actions**

### **Maoin Coimhearsnachd Cladaich na Gàidhealtachd – Cunntas às Ùr agus na h-Ath Ghnìomhan**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr D Louden and Mr C Munro declared financial interest in this item as a Director of Tain Heritage Trust which had received support from the Fund for Tain Picture House and as a Director of an organisation which had also received an award respectively and confirmed that they would leave the meeting for that item.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/45/2021 dated 12 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the large number of expressions of interest in the fund were welcomed and, as the fund was over subscribed with applications, it would be preferable if the administration cost could be reduced to 7.5%, rather than the 10% proposed, to maximise the amount of money available for projects and noting that much of the initial set-up administration had already been undertaken. It was explained that the administration costs covered ongoing project monitoring and assistance, but that 7.5% was acceptable. It was suggested any outstanding administration monies be reinvested into projects;
- a breakdown was sought of where the funds were generated but it was thought that for various reasons, including commercial sensitivity, this was unlikely to be available; and
- it was suggested the Council should revise its decision on the distribution of the funds, noting that Sutherland was receiving around 60 times more funding than the Black Isle. The Chair reminded Members that the Council had made the decision to allocate the funds in the manner being used, against officer recommendation.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the content of the report at Appendix 1 of the report and in particular the recommendations in section 11:-

- a. to consider setting of priorities within their area in order to focus and direct the funds available and to manage the expectations of applicants;
  - b. to explore the opportunity to develop a streamlined monitoring and evaluation framework to support the evidencing of impact through the scheme;
  - c. to consider the retention of a strategic pot of funding that allows for projects that deliver benefit across multiple areas with a focus on addressing the climate and nature emergency; and
  - d. to consider the resourcing requirements of the scheme and the added value to applicants and Members that can be achieved with adequate investment into the administration of the fund and **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to council that up to 7.5% of the £3m allocation was ringfenced for this purpose to ensure appropriate and adequate resourcing of the scheme.
- ii. **NOTED** the full list of projects funded to date contained within Appendix 2 of the report; and
  - iii. **AGREED** that the distribution of the overall allocation across Highland was taken forward on the same basis as agreed for the allocations already received (ie in line with the Scottish Government methodology around sea area).

## **11. Annual Report under Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2020/21**

### **Aithisg Bhliadhnaile fo Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde Bhuidhnean Poblach 2020/21**

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

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/46/21 dated 5 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance.

- Councillor Loudon asked for a revised version of the energy consumption 2011-12 to 2020-21 tables on page 218 of the report as the text was slightly distorted;
- feedback was sought for the Committee on interaction being undertaken with schools to embed climate change into the curriculum;
- the Highland Adapts approach to embed low carbon policies was partly being undertaken via the Community Planning Partnerships and it was pointed out that not all CPPs were functioning as they should be. A brief summary was provided of other means by which Highland Adapts was being taken forward; and
- the increased use of solar panels was welcomed as was the small hydro scheme being constructed on the Rover Ness with the intention of providing energy for Inverness Leisure. It was hoped that this or similar schemes could be used to provide energy for other buildings in future.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the return submitted for reporting year 2020/21 under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties and **AGREED** that feedback be provided to the Committee on interaction being undertaken with schools to embed climate change into the curriculum.

## **12. Consultation Response – Building Regulations: Energy standards – EV Charging Provision**

### **Freagairt Cho-chomhairle – Riaghailtean Togail: Inbhean Iùtha – Solar Teàirrdsidh Charbadan Dealain**

There had been circulated report No. ECI/47/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance.

The response had rightly highlighted the issues associated with charging provision on island communities. A number of islands were off-grid but still had vehicles on them and it was suggested that such complexities should be further explored and included in the response.

Taking on board the above, the Committee **AGREED** to homologate the response to this consultation.

### **13. School Transport Transformation Project (Review of school transport) Pròiseact Cruth-atharrachaidh Còmhail Sgoile**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/48/2021 dated 12 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the TAS Partnership were commended for their well conducted report but they had not taken into account the Scottish Government's free travel scheme for persons under 22. The TAS Partnership would be present at the next Economy and Infrastructure Committee and they would be able to provide more commentary on this aspect. Rather than considering the withdrawal of services as part of the review it was suggested that the potential savings which were likely to arise from the free travel scheme should be taken into account;
- the free travel scheme for persons under 22, to be introduced from 1 February 2022, could also result in a better service bus network making it easier for people generally travelling to work;
- the free travel scheme could impact on school bus contracts and it was suggested that there was an opportunity for the Council itself to invest in buses;
- the catchment area for Tain Royal Academy had been adjusted and there was uncertainty what process had been followed. Revision of school catchment areas should be done in a statutory manner;
- assurances were sought, and provided, that the appeal process for road safety conditions would remain;
- the provision of bicycles as an alternative means of transport was welcomed but the inclement Highland weather needed to be taken account off;
- incentivising parents was a cost effective approach, especially if they grouped together. The Council was also very receptive to community transport and the initiatives that could be sustained there;
- the TAS Partnership had commented that the Council's Excel approach used for planning school transport arrangements was the most sophisticated development that they had ever encountered in work with over 50 other UK education authorities and this was to be commended. In addition, the Partnership had highlighted that the approach the Council adopted in relation to community transport was more innovative and integrated than any other local authority they had observed;
- clarity was sought, and provided, as to what was meant by applying existing policy to further Gaelic Medium catchment areas as they were defined;
- an update was sought, and provided, in regard to using rail to transport pupils from Aviemore to Kingussie High School. Not only would this option be more cost efficient, it would reduced the Council's carbon footprint> However, it was acknowledged that this too would have a fixed capacity;
- a rerouting of school transport for some of the rural areas feeding into Plockton High School was requested. This had been raised by pupils themselves, some of which



- were facing 10 hour days. A meeting had been held that week where alternatives were considered and there was a role for HITRANS to become involved; and
- challenges regarding school transport had been reported to the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board on 4 October and one of the mitigations was a review of processes around determination of ASN transport eligibility and appropriateness of transport modes offered, taking costs into account and with a view to increasing personal independence. Details of what discussions were being held around ASN were sought, and provided.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the summary report from the TAS Partnership would be supplemented by a detailed final report;
- ii. **AGREED** to the following recommendations from the TAS report:-
  - continue to develop community transport solutions for school transport where appropriate;
  - apply existing policy to further Gaelic Medium catchment areas as they were defined;
  - develop parental budgets and/or shared parental arrangements where these were found to be cost-effective;
  - support or develop child protection awareness training for drivers;
  - support or develop wheelchair safety training for drivers and escorts;
  - provide schools with transport site risk assessment tools and guidance;
  - transport Unit staff to assist the Education Service in reviewing school catchment areas where there was potential to reduce transport costs; and
  - procure a contract management software system.
- iii. **AGREED** that the following items should be reviewed in detail, involving staff of other Services as appropriate, and a further report be brought to Committee:-
  - conditions of contract, and contract monitoring capacity and processes;
  - analysis of ASN transport policy, costs and processes;
  - scope for expansion of in-house transport provision;
  - feasibility of providing bicycles as an alternative to transport provision for some pupils;
  - appeal process for road safety decisions; and
  - environmental and sustainability implications of the school transport policy.
- iv. **AGREED** to invite TAS to make a presentation on their report to the next meeting of the Committee;
- v. **AGREED** that a bid be made to the Change Fund to support the staffing resource required to implement the recommendations above; and
- vi. **AGREED** that future budget reporting should identify the element of public transport costs which were attributable to school transport.

#### **14. Free Bus Travel for Persons Under 22 Siubhal Bus An-asgaidh Dhaibhsan fo Aois 22**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/49/2021 dated 11 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was questioned if there would be recovery of the full cost of the free travel scheme for persons under 22. In response, it was explained that this matter was still under discussion between CoSLA and the Scottish Government;
- there was a danger that there would not be enough buses available, given the shortage of drivers, to meet increased demand;
- the entitlement card should be encouraged for free home to school travel from the commencement date of the scheme. This would also help with attending after school activities and it was important therefore to work with partner agencies to look at timetables and routes;
- this provided an opportunity to improve service buses across Highland, especially in remote and rural areas;
- young people using service buses would generate large savings for the Council;
- this scheme would provide clarity as there were instances where some young people were not entitled to free school transport but where others close by did, Inverness South and Culloden being cited as examples;
- originally Stagecoach had wanted to introduce free bus travel to young people under 25. They felt that if they could make bus travel habitual in this age group then it would continue into the future; and
- this scheme would be warmly welcomed by the working poor, hard pressed families and parents who had children attending a school in a different catchment area and who currently had to pay for transport.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the introduction of the free travel scheme from 31 January 2022;
- NOTED** that discussions between COSLA and Transport Scotland were ongoing and that no conclusions had yet been reached on the impact on the financial settlement between the Scottish Government and Councils;
- AGREED** that where pupils used public bus services to travel to and from school, the entitlement card under the national free travel scheme should be encouraged for free home to school travel, with effect from the commencement of the scheme;
- AGREED** that the Council's current policy be maintained of not incurring additional expenditure on contracts (or enhancements to contracts) specifically for transport of pupils to and from school who were not entitled under the Council's existing school transport policy;
- AGREED** that charging for privilege places on school buses be discontinued after Easter 2022, but that charges for privilege places on taxis should continue; and
- AGREED** to continue to support COSLA in reaching a satisfactory financial settlement with the Scottish Government which did not adversely affect the Council as a result of the scheme.

## **15. Car Parking Roll Out Project** **Pròiseact Parcadh Chàraichean ga Sgaoileadh A-mach**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/50/21 dated 23 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- appreciation was expressed for the work that officers had invested. A collaborative approach had been adopted and there was now the clarity that had been sought;
- there was acknowledgment of the effect the Covid 19 pandemic had had on car parking income. However, the public and shopkeepers had also been badly hit;
- as a result of the impacts of Covid 19 a budget feed of £454k had been provided to the Service for the current financial year and, on legacy key car parks, the impact of

the pandemic had been significant and would take time to adjust. It was questioned why such funding had not come out of the Covid Fund. In response it was explained Covid Funding could only be used as a one-off while this was a recurring funding gap;

- there was concern that the Council was sending put mixed messages. For example, free car parking was being offered at certain sites in Inverness to encourage shoppers into the city centre but by putting car parking charges in town and city centres then this was a disincentive;
- it was questioned if it was the City of Inverness Area or this Committee which had governance over the Rose Street Car Park. In this regard, it was commented that the parking charges there were very reasonable;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that all parking pay meters also took contactless payments;
- the Council had introduced “voluntary” car parks where users were invited to pay but were there was no compulsion to do so. However, many of these car parks did not look “voluntary” with “Pay Here” signs and users were unaware it was discretionary. Improved signage to ensure users knew what the status of the car park was needed;
- car parking charging was a tool in traffic management, especially in areas where tourism was a significant part of the economy. The use of “voluntary” car parks would allow tourists, in particular, to contribute where they thought appropriate with local people having the option to contribute if they so wished. It was also a sensible approach to restore the income of the service. However, this should not be used as a step towards introducing compulsory charging;
- the key to the roll out of car parking charges was to incentivise communities and, as part of the process, the involvement of Area Committees. When income came in it was suggested that this be advertised so it was clear how it was going to benefit the community;
- there was a lot of work required to get the invitation to pay car parks up and running by next year
- it was queried if qualifying costs for car parks at visitor sites included maintenance commitments for the environment, paths, toilets etc that had been created. The example cited was, as part of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund grant for the Old Man of Storr, Skye, the Council had a 20-year management and maintenance agreement for the paths that had been developed on land not owned by the Council. If these facilities were not maintained then tourists would not visit such sites;
- following on from the above, as all of Skye’s on-street income was from new parking at visitor sites, it was acknowledged that this could only be spent on traffic/transport related projects. However, it was queried if consideration could be given for it to meet some of the borrowing costs/ongoing maintenance costs at the tourism sites;
- in response to a question regarding qualifying costs as a percentage, it was explained this would be different for each car park;
- key stakeholders, including Members and Community Councils, would be consulted to help design the proposals for their local area but this should also involve community associations and businesses;
- given Covid restrictions it was questioned how such consultations would be supported. In response, it was confirmed additional resources would be required and provided to deliver this;
- it was queried if corporate costs were removed first before the remainder was shared to Area Committees;
- the invitation to pay for car parking in Caithness was welcomed and the success of a previous scheme in John O’Groats was highlighted. With increased tourism, Caithness Members were in favour of an invitation to pay for car parking but, again, it was not to be seen as a means to an end. Time was needed to review the position;

- Channory Point had introduced car parking charges before the Committee's decision in October 2019. This car park attracted a considerable amount of revenue and the community would be disappointed if they didn't receive 50% of the revenue. It was asked if there could be some discretion in this case; and
- mention was made of a specific community group operating a "voluntary" car park scheme to use the contributions to keep the public toilets open and the effect this report would have on them. However, this would be discussed directly with the Executive Chief Officer.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the current context and the need for a refreshed approach to car parking strategy following the Covid-19 Pandemic;
  - ii. **AGREED** the refreshed approach and policy and associated strategy for the roll-out of new car parking locations throughout Highland, noting the immediate focus on visitor related car parks;
  - iii. **AGREED** the arrangements for the local/strategic split of net income (once all qualifying costs have been deducted);
  - iv. **AGREED** that the increase in any agreed parking charges at existing car parks were subject to a local/strategic split (once all qualifying costs have been deducted); and
  - v. **NOTED** the proposal at paragraph 4.4 to rebase the Service budget for car parking income to reflect the long-term impact on changing patterns of car parking usage on income received from car parks; and
- \* iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to Council that the above proposal comes to Council in March 2022 to be considered as part of the budget setting process.

## **16. Establishing a Short-Term Let Control Area for Ward 20: Badenoch and Strathspey A' Stèidheachadh Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-Ùine airson Uàrd 20: Bàideanach agus Srath Spè**

**Declarations of Interest: Mrs C Caddick declared a financial interest in this item as an owner of a Short Term Let in Aviemore and confirmed that she would not take part in the discussion.**

**Mr C Munro also declared a financial interest in this item as a owner of a Short Term Let but as this was in his own Ward, Eilean a' Cheò, he would remain to participate in the item.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/51/2021 dated 18 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Speaking to the report the Convener highlighted the housing crisis in Badenoch and Strathspey. Residents encountering problems with Short Term Lets (STLs) frequently contacted the Police. House prices in Aviemore were particularly high with one development currently underway selling a one-bedroom flat at £190,000 or a three-bedroom house in excess of £350,000. These prices were unaffordable to local people who were priced out of the market by speculators looking to profit from the STLs boom. There had been unanimous support both at the Full Council and the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee for the proposal to introduce a Control Area.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in addition to the high rents, available accommodation was hard to find and this exacerbated the Area's existing housing issues. It was now proving difficult to staff ambulances schools and GP surgeries and Option 3 was proposed;

- local hotels were having to accommodate staff in caravans as previous accommodation had been sold and redeveloped in to STLs with rents ranging from £500 to £2,000 per week;
- Option 3 offered a place-based solution. It was hoped, in future, it could be rolled out to other affected areas. This could act as a pilot as the issue was not unique to Aviemore;
- it was queried why a Control Zone across the Region wasn't being considered especially as when the Scottish Government first took evidence on this matter five areas had been looked at, two of which were Fort William and Skye;
- it was contended that there were also cheaper properties in the Badenoch and Strathspey Ward;
- empty homes were also a scourge, particularly as they, unlike STLs, did not generate any economic activity; and
- it was though the tourism sector would welcome regulation.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the new and emerging legislation to control and manage Short-term lets (STL);
- ii. **NOTED** the potential implications STL already had on Highland communities, the Council, and its partners;
- iii. **NOTED** the detailed information and evidence of the number of tourist accommodation units across Ward 20 (Badenoch & Strathspey);
- iv. **AGREED** to proceed with the statutory process to establish a Control Area for Ward 20 (Option 3):-
  - a. **AGREED** to delegate authority to Officers to undertake the STL Control Area Consultation as summarised in Appendix 2 of the report; and
  - b. following consultation as specified in (a) above, **AGREED** to bring back a further report to committee, summarising the feedback and outlining the final steps for the establishment of a Ward 20 STL Control Area for approval.
- v. **AGREED** to delegate authority to Officers to research and consider drafting 'non-statutory planning guidance' covering STL within a Control Area, final approval of which would be brought back to a later Committee; and
- vi. **AGREED** to ring fence a proportion of fees generated to resource the additional workload associated should option iv above be approved.

## 17. City Region Deal – Annual Report Cùmhnant Baile Roinne – Aithisg Bhliadhnaid

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

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/52/2021 dated 12 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion the following comments were made:-

- concern was raised that only £26 million out of £188 million had be spent at the halfway mark of the 10-year programme, this was 14% of the total budget;

- as the Joint Digital Programme of £20 million was at red R.A.G status, it was questioned how this could be improved to bring it back online for completion;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, when the site at Longman for the Land Remediation project would be available, adding that there was £10 million in the budget with little expenditure acknowledged;
- in relation to the Longman junction project, information was sought, and provided, on the level of involvement by SEPA for making land available and providing approvals for land use. In addition, it was also queried, what was the next step if permission was not granted by SEPA to avoid funding being lost; and
- as the WiFi programme had been rolled out across 14 towns in Highland, an update was sought on how successful this project had been, including local business feedback.

The Committee **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the report as record of the activity and delivery for 20/21.

## **18. Road Structures Annual Report Pàipear Bliadhna Structaran**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/53/2021 dated 18 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Following a summary of the report and during discussion, it was queried if Wick Service Bridge would be considered for cleaning and lighting to improve its appearance between now and its replacement date. Also if the Service Bridge would be considered for relocation to another viable position nearer the harbour area.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the position of the Bridge Stock Condition Indicators in Highland;
- NOTED** the current position in Highland in relation to the number of structures inspections undertaken;
- NOTED** that the Levelling Up Fund application for road and bridge improvements in Highland had been unsuccessful;
- NOTED** that the Local Bridge Maintenance Fund application had been partially successful with £5.927M awarded for 9 schemes; and
- AGREED** that structural assessments could be included in the capital programme.

## **19. Scottish Roads Maintenance Condition Survey Results 2020-21 Suirbhith Staid Cumail Suas Rathaidean na h-Alba**

There is circulated Report No. ECI/54/2021 dated 25 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion the following comments were made:-

- disappointment was expressed concerning Highland Council's Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) which had dropped significantly. This resulted in HC falling from 11<sup>th</sup> in 2011/12 to the current position of 26<sup>th</sup> in 2020/21 out of 32 Scottish Local Authorities;
- appreciation was expressed for the hard work undertaken on Caithness roads by the roads team and operators, utilising all available resources;
- an update was sought in future reports on the 'steady state' for Members to convey accurate roads information to the public and to make a comparison of progress over time;

- regular monthly meetings between local Officers and Members to discuss relevant roads issues were deemed essential in reprioritising resources to maintain roads;
- additional roads budget allocation was imperative to continue roads recovery; and
- the importance that all Members attend the upcoming workshop on 20 January 2022 to provide input for their respective areas within Highland was highlighted.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2020-21 and that our relative ranking is 26th position amongst Scottish Local Authorities with a road condition index of 39.1, representing the percentage of the road network is considered in need of maintenance treatment; and
- ii. that without further and sustained funding the condition of the road network will continue to deteriorate and as such our ranking amongst the other Scottish Local Authorities may drop further.

## 20. Minutes

### Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes had been circulated for noting or approval as appropriate: -

- i. North Planning Applications Committee held on 10 August 2021, and 14 September 2021 - **NOTED**;
- ii. South Planning Applications Committee held on 17 August 2021, and 21 September 2021 - **NOTED**;
- iii. Education Transport Entitlement Review Sub-Committee held on 17 September 2021- **NOTED**;
- iv. Highland Coastal Communities Fund Sub Committee held on 27 September 2021 and 29 October 2021 - **NOTED**;
- v. City Region Deal Monitoring Group held on 1 November 2021 - **APPROVED**; and
- vi. Harbours Management Board held on 16 November 2021 - **APPROVED**.

## 20.A Ofcom Consultation on Regulation of Public Call Boxes – Council Response Co-chomhairle Ofcom mu Riaghladh Bhogsaichean Fòn Poblach – Freagairt Comhairle

There had been circulated Report No ECI/58/21 dated 23 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** Ofcom's consultation and proposed changes for the regulation of public call boxes;
- ii. **NOTED** the change to the criteria proposed for the protection of important public call boxes, particularly for rural areas; and
- iii. **AGREED** the Council's draft response to the consultation which could be found at appendix 1 of the report.

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

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on

the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

## **22. Property Transactions Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/55/2021 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

## **23. Land and Property Fearann agus Cuid-seilbh**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/56/21 dated 5 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

## **24. Housing Development Initiatives Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr D Rixson and Mrs T Robertson declared non-financial interests in this item as the Council's representatives on the Lochaber Housing Association and Highland Housing Association respectively. Having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, they concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/57/21 dated 8 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 4:20 pm