

**The Highland Council
No. 5 2022/2023**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 22 September at 9.35 am.

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

Present:

Mr C Aitken	Mr S Kennedy
Ms S Atkin	Ms E Knox
Mr M Baird	Ms L Kraft
Mr A Baldrey	Mr B Lobban
Mr C Ballance	Mr P Logue
Dr C Birt	Mr D Louden
Mr B Boyd	Ms M MacCallum
Mr R Bremner	Mr A MacDonald
Mr I Brown	Mr W MacKay
Mr J Bruce	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr M Cameron	Mr S Mackie
Mrs I Campbell	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr A Christie	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms K MacLean
Ms T Collier	Mr T MacLennan
Ms H Crawford	Mr D Macpherson
Ms S Fanet	Mrs B McAllister
Mr J Finlayson	Ms J McEwan
Mr D Fraser	Mr J McGillivray
Mr L Fraser	Mr D Millar
Mr R Gale	Mrs P Munro
Mr K Gowans	Ms L Niven
Mr J Grafton	Ms M Nolan
Mr A Graham	Mr P Oldham
Mr M Green	Mrs M Paterson
Mr D Gregg	Mrs M Reid
Mr R Gunn	Mr M Reiss
Mrs J Hendry	Mr A Rhind
Ms M Hutchison	Mr K Rosie
Mr A Jarvie	Mr A Sinclair
Mrs B Jarvie	Mr R Stewart
Ms L Johnston	Ms K Willis
Mr R Jones	

In Attendance:

Chief Executive

Acting Depute Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care

Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy

Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

BUSINESS

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr G MacKenzie, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms S Rawlings, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggors and Ms M Smith.

2. Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth A Mòrachd a' Bhanrigh Ealasaid nach Maireann

The Convener led tributes to Her Majesty the Queen and a minute's silence was observed. Thereafter tributes were paid to Her Majesty commencing with the political group leaders during which Members recognised the lifetime of her service. Members made reference to the Queen's strong connection with the Highlands and memories were shared of her many visits to the area. Attention was drawn to the Queen's support and patronage of organisations such as the Royal Scottish Country Dancing Society, The Scouts and the Girl Guides and her support of the Gaelic language was also highlighted. Condolences were extended to the royal family and best wishes given to King Charles for his reign.

3. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 10.iii: Mr M Green
Item 11: Mrs M Reid

and the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 10.i: Mr A Christie
Item 11: Mr A Christie
Item 12: Mr A Christie
Item 19: Mr A Christie
Item 25: Mr A Christie

4. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

It was **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at the meeting on 30 June 2022 had been used as follows - Change of Highland Licensing Committee and Board date from 2 August to 9 August 2022.

5. Appointments Cur an Dreuchd

a. Scotland Excel

Members recalled that they appointed Mr D Loudon to the Scotland Excel Joint Committee. Scotland Excel had now informed us that Highland Council could appoint an additional Member to their Executive Sub Committee.

The Council **AGREED** to appoint Mr C Munro to Scotland Excel's Executive Sub Committee.

b. CoSLA Appointments

The Council **AGREED** to appoint the following Members to each of the CoSLA Boards as detailed below:-

- i. Health and Social Care – Mr D Fraser
- ii. Children and Young People – Mr J Finlayson
- iii. Environment and Economy – Mr K Gowans
- iv. Community Wellbeing – Mr G Mackenzie

6. Confirmation of Minutes Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Special Council held on 29 June 2022 and of the Meeting held on 30 June 2022 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

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

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

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

*Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee 24 August 2022

Starred Item 4.2 – Appointments - Family Nurse Partnership Board – **AGREED** to appoint Ms Leslie-Anne Niven

Starred Item 12 - Appointment of Champions for Older People and Children - **AGREED** to appoint Mr Bill Boyd, as Older People's Champion

*Economy & Infrastructure Committee 25 August 2022

Starred Item 5 - Appointments to Sub-Committees/Working Groups

- i) Education Transport Review Committee – **AGREED** the membership of the Education Transport Review Committee as follows - Mr D Millar
- ii) Harbours Management Board - **AGREED** the Harbours Management Board membership as follows - Ms S Atkin and Mr C Munro

Starred Item 6 - Appointment to Outside Bodies

a) HITRANS Tier 1 Ferry Users Consultation Groups

- i) the Argyll Ferry Users Consultation Group – **AGREED** to appoint Ms S Fanet;
- ii) the Lochaber and Skye Ferry Users Consultation Group - **AGREED** to appoint Mr D Millar and Mr C Munro; and
- iii) the Hebrides Ferry Users Consultation Group – **AGREED** to appoint Mr C Munro.

- f) Flood Area Risk Management – Local Plan District Executive Steering Groups – **AGREED** to appoint Ms S Fanet to the “Highland and Argyll Local Plan District” Steering Group

Minutes of Meetings not included in the Volume were as follows -

- i. Redesign Board held on 7 September 2022 - **APPROVED**;
- ii. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 18 February and 7 March 2022 (approved by the Board on 20 June 2022) - **NOTED**; and
- iii. Recruitment Panel held on 1 March, 17 March and 30 March 2022 - **NOTED**.

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

The Council:-

- i. **AGREED** that Mr J Bruce replace Mrs H Crawford on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee; and
- ii. **NOTED** that Mr C Ballance had been appointed to South Planning Applications Committee in respect of Ward 12.

9. **Question Time** **Àm Ceiste**

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

Public Question

Ms L Boyle

To the Leader

“Given the plethora of issues at Beauly Primary School, not limited to, but including, asbestos in the roof of the canteen, being pecked off by birds and dropped on the ground; freezing cold classrooms and canteen facilities whereby children have to keep jackets, hats and gloves on to stay warm; damp and mould spores that are evident on the walls and ceilings and the smell of dampness which hits you in the face when you walk into the gym hall; unsafe buildings and an unsecure school site in general given that there is a road running through the school and the perimeter fence is unlocked as there is a public footpath running through the whole school site. Can the Leader of the Council confirm if, and when, construction of the new school will begin onsite?”

The response had been circulated.

Member Questions

(1) Mr A Christie

To the Leader

“Please could the Leader detail occasions since the establishment of the Administration up to the current date where he or the Chairs of the Strategic Committees have represented the Council in meetings with elected members of the Scottish Government or UK Government including the main topic of the meeting and the outcome?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader would agree to publishing his diary on the Council webpage?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that this would be done.

(2) Mr A Christie

To the Leader

“Could the Leader update Council as to the activity the Administration has undertaken since the 30th June in developing the new Council Programme, developing a strategy for the next revenue budget 2023/24, and working towards finalising a revised affordable capital programme and when this will be presented to Council?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Leader would name which quarter or which Council meeting the Capital Programme would be presented to Council, rather than ‘in due course’?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the Capital Programme would continue to be under review and the Council would be informed once further details had been agreed.

(3) Mr A MacDonald

To the Leader

“Scottish Government have confirmed in response to recent enquiries that active consideration is being taken to connect Hebridean Islands by tunnels with distances far in excess of the short length to cover the Corran Narrows.

Would the Leader agree to write an open letter to Jenny Gilruth, The Minister of Transport urging that the Corran Narrows is added to the tunnel program?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to whether the Highland Council had set aside the needed £60m for the replacement Corran ferries. If not, would Transport Scotland provide the funds?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that there were ongoing discussions under the remit of the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure.

(4) Mr A Baldrey

To the Chair of Communities and Place

“What is the Council doing to encourage more allotments and food growing projects? Given the waiting list for these is long and the availability of current allotments is limited, and given the Council’s statutory duty to provide allotments, as well as Government policy to promote local food growing, how many new sites does the Council plan to open in the next twelve months?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if an area-based waiting list would be supplied so focus and attention could be applied where land was urgently required for more allotments.

In the absence of the Chair of Communities and Place, the response would be circulated amongst Members.

(5) Mr D Gregg

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

“Does the Administration support the Cycling by Design 2021 guidelines produced by Transport Scotland?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to why the Council had not followed the Transport Scotland Cycling by Design Guidelines for the proposed scheme at Bridge Street and Academy Street in Inverness at a number of places?

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure confirmed there was ongoing consultation for Academy Street and agreed to involve Councillor Gregg in these discussions.

(6) Ms J McEwan

To the Leader

“What are the lessons learned from the “carefully planned closure” of Avonlea Children’s Home in Wick in terms of the impact on service users, the wider community, staff and the best practice in media handling?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried as to when the Leader first knew about plans for Avonlea and why senior managers had not been open and transparent with local Councillors, staff and service users regarding these plans?

The Leader of the Council confirmed there would be a follow up response in due course, after the Chief Executive had carried out a visit to the area.

(7) Ms A MacLean

To the Leader

“The Highland Council has had a longstanding commitment to replace St Clement’s School. The school provides for some of the most vulnerable children in Highland and is based in Dingwall. The current school accommodation has been rated poor for both Condition and Suitability and the limitations of much of the facilities that the pupils require including the outdoor space. The 2014 HMIE inspection made a number of recommendations and highlighted “The buildings do not provide a satisfactory range or quality of facilities. Corridors and doors are narrow and challenge pupils with limited mobility. One classroom can only be accessed through the staff room and there is a lack of space and specialist facilities.” The current school is not suitable in its condition or layout as a special needs school.

I welcome the report to the Education Committee on 15th September 2022 with the outcome of the statutory consultation and also reaffirming that Highland Council has identified £13m for the project within the capital plan. All the stakeholders, including the voice of the pupils have been working towards the new St Clement's School for many years, however there is a concern that given Budget pressures that some projects may not be taken forward or that there will be slippage in some.

Will the Leader confirm the replacement school for St Clement's School is proceeding with haste and what are the planned start and completion dates?"

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(8) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader

"As the first Caithness Leader of the Highland Council, how will you specifically reverse the unfair funding methodology and ensure Caithness receives what it deserves?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if the first Caithnessian Leader believed that the great county of Caithness received a fair deal from the Council?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that Members were aware of his hard work over the past few years to ensure that Caithness got a good deal.

(9) Mr C Ballance

To the Chair of Corporate Resources

"In view of the announcement in the Holyrood Programme for Government that Councils will be empowered in the next year to introduce a Transient Visitor Levy, will you agree to commission a feasibility study by officers into the practicalities of introducing such a tax on visitors in hotels, larger b & bs, self-catering rental properties and mobile homes, including the possibility of exempting patients attending Raigmore or other medical appointments, and suggesting levels at which the tax could be levied, and projected income from it, so that this Council be ready to initiate such a tax as soon as it is possible."

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if the TVL (Transient Visitor Levy) would be in place for summer 2023?

In response, the Chair of Corporate Resources confirmed that commitment for TVL would go ahead although no exact date for implementation was available.

(10) Mr R Gunn

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

"Is the Chair in favour of the proposed National Care Service and what does he see as the biggest challenges to its introduction in Highland?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how our national care service would improve the recruitment and retention of the increased number of care workers required to allow for care at home and residential care?

In response, the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing confirmed that whilst the Council supported the national care service, at this stage no answers could be provided.

(11) Mrs H Crawford

To the Leader

“What criteria will Highland Council apply when deciding which of the new school building projects, as contained in the current capital plan, will take priority over the course of the session?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what was the backup plan if LEIP funding was not forthcoming for these schools?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed commitment was in place from the Council.

(12) Mr M Reiss

To the Leader

“Respite Care at Thor House in Thurso has been stopped/massively reduced over the Pandemic period and, instead, the premises are now being used as a Residential Children’s Home. The Unit specifically provides services for those with disabilities and was highly regarded in this respect, being described as a “purpose built 4 bedded residential respite facility offering support to children up to 18 years of age with a learning disability”. It also provided day care support for up to 15 adults, some of which is continuing. Now those same Respite Service Users are being told to make alternative arrangements (sometimes at their own expense) in Inverness, 110 miles from Thurso or in Moray. When will the Administration fully reinstate this vital service for the benefit of families in Caithness and North Sutherland?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if it was felt that the Leader’s written answer complied with ECHR legislation in reference to the recent court of session decision regarding closure of a council care home in Hawick?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that, if the answer did not comply, the Leader would add to it for further clarification.

**10. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid**

Declaration of Interest: Mr M Green declared an interest in item 10.iii as Chair of Inverness Ice Centre, a music hosting venue with a capacity of 2000, and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for that item.

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of item 10.i as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland and as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

(i) “Council recognises:

- we are in the middle of the worst cost of living crisis for 50 years. Inflation is forecast to hit 18% next year.
- The Highlands is already one of the worst areas in the country for fuel poverty with 1 in 3 of our households already in it, double the national average.
- Many households are already at the brink and will struggle to pay their heating bills with prices as they are, even if the October price increase is frozen.
- As well as heating and electricity costs, the costs of the daily commute have increased with active travel and public transport being non-viable options for many Highland residents given the distance they have to travel.

Therefore council shall write to the UK Government with the following asks:

Urgently provide details of the support scheme for households reliant on heating oil and other domestic fuels previously excluded from their proposed plans

Extend the Rural Fuel Duty Relief Scheme to 10p a litre, and expand the scheme to cover all postcodes in the Highland area

Reduction in the standard rate of VAT to 17.5%, saving the average Highland household £600 a year

A re-introduction of the pensions triple lock to support the Highland’s pensioners, saving elderly residents an additional £300.

Restore the Universal Credit supplement of £20, which was cancelled by the UK Government in September 2021, and double to £40/week

Write to the Scottish Government with the following asks:

Cancel the 3.8% rise in rail fares, and expand coverage of the Highland Railcard Scheme to all Highland postcodes and all Highland rail services

Increase disability benefits to the maximal allowable amount as opposed to the current plan to copy the UK Government which will leave benefits lagging up to 4% behind inflation

Fund urgent insulation schemes to help keep people warm this winter, and protect them from massive price rises, noting even the pre-pandemic rate of insulation in Scotland would take 164 years to insulate every vulnerable household”

Signed: David Gregg Angela MacLean Alex Graham

The motion, detailed above, was tabled as an amended motion, as issues contained in the original motion and which had already been discussed at Item 11, had been removed.

During discussion, the amended motion was welcomed, as were the terms of the motion, as long as there were no financial implications. Reference was made to the particular benefits of restoring the Universal Credit supplement and increasing disability benefits to the maximum allowable amount.

Decision

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

(ii) “Hundreds of thousands of young people across Scotland have signed up for free bus travel since the Young Persons Free Bus Travel Scheme launched in April this year. Registration is higher in some local authority areas than others, and Highlands ranks very low with a registration rate of only 28%, compared to a high of 91% in Inverclyde, and 78% in Western Isles (data from 20th June). This Council wants to ensure that all young people under 22 in Highland can access their right to free bus travel, and has identified that more young people are accessing free bus travel in areas where local authorities are working closely with schools and public libraries to facilitate registration. This Council recognises that many young people and families need help to register, especially if they do not have easy access to the required ID documents to apply for free bus travel. This Council recognises it needs to provide information and support for young people and their families to apply online and offline, and will work further with schools, Council support services, and public libraries to help facilitate registration so that all young people, including refugees and those seeking asylum, can access the free bus travel scheme. This Council undertakes to encourage greater take-up rates of the under 22s free bus passes in Highland”.

Signed: Kate Willis Ryan MacKintosh

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the motion was welcomed and consideration given to the possible reasons for variation in take-up rates;
- several Members made reference to inadequate, irregular and unreliable bus services and timetabling across the Highlands, and suggested that a review of bus services would be beneficial. HITRANS was proposed as a possible organisation to take this forward;
- the free bus travel scheme should be extended to under-25s;
- it was reported that some people had found the administrative and identification requirements for the concession card to be complex and it was hoped this could be streamlined in future, and possibly undertaken in schools at the same time as Young Scot cards were issued; and
- it would be useful if there was a reliable way of knowing in advance if a bus was going to be accessible.

Thereafter, Ms K Willis, seconded by Mr R MacKintosh, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed above.

Ms R Gale, seconded by Mr A Graham, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Council commit to carrying out a review of all bus services across the Highlands to ensure that they were fit for purpose for all communities.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 34 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 28 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion: Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Balance, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacDonald, Mr W MacKay, Ms K MacLean, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie and Ms K Willis

For the Amendment: Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Ms B Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Ms B Jarvie, Mr S Kennedy, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D MacPherson, Mrs B McAlister, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Ms M Nolan, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Sinclair and Mr R Stewart.

Decision

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

(iii) "Council notes that, following the planning decision of 18th August 2022, the Ironworks in Inverness will be forced to suspend a number of its operations, including live music performances, unless it can secure a new venue. Council further notes that failure to find a new home for the Ironworks will leave the Highlands without a purpose-use live events venue with a capacity of over 1000 attendees. Council affirms its support for the Ironworks to continue its operations in Inverness. It agrees that cultivating the Highlands as a cultural hub is both desirable and necessary for the retention and recruitment of the working-age population, as well as being key for mental health and wellbeing across the Highlands.

Council directs the administration to work with the management of the Ironworks to ensure that this cultural asset is not lost to the Highlands".

Signed: Molly Nolan Morven-May MacCallum

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the first sentence of the motion was inaccurate as it suggested the decision of the South Planning Applications Committee had resulted in the Ironworks being unable to continue in operation. In fact, the owners of the building occupied by the Ironworks had sold the premises to a company that wished to build a hotel, which had been granted planning permission in accordance with policy;
- the social, cultural and economic benefits of having a live music venue like the Ironworks for Inverness and the wider Highlands were emphasised;
- caution was urged in relation to supporting individual private enterprises, including possible staff time required;
- some Members spoke in support of establishing a Working Group with stakeholders and partners to review the creative and cultural importance of music and creative arts in all of the Highlands, while others felt that this could be too long term for the specific and urgent need to help to source an alternative venue for the Ironworks. It was also proposed that a Working Group could work in parallel to the more urgent need to rehome the Ironworks; and
- it was pointed out that discussions about the future of the Ironworks were also being undertaken at Area level.

Ms M Nolan, seconded by Ms M MacCallum, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed above, but amended by Mr A MacKintosh as follows: the words, 'The Council notes that...new venue,' be deleted from the first sentence, and the word "further " be deleted from the second sentence.

Mrs M Reid, seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that Highland Council agrees to assist with the formation of a Stakeholder Group and invite partners and stakeholders to review the creative and cultural importance of music and creative arts in all of the Highlands towards sustainable outcomes.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 20 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 37 votes, with 5 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion: Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A McLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Mr M Reiss and Mr A Sinclair.

For the Amendment: Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Ms M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr W Mackay, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Millar, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie and Ms K Willis.

Abstentions: Ms B McAllister, Mr R Stewart, Mr S Mackie, Ms H Crawford

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Amendment as detailed.

(iv) "This council notes that tax-payers of Highland pay the fifth highest council tax as a percentage of average annual average income out of all 32 Scottish local authorities and recognises that The Highland Council are failing to meet its key performance targets as outlined in the customer service charter. In the interest of providing an acceptable level of service to taxpayers this Council instructs the Executive Chief Officer for Performance and Governance to present a Customer Service improvement plan to the next full Council Meeting outlining what action must be taken to meet these targets and what monitoring will be in place to continually measure performance. This Council instructs that a new customer charter is drafted to reflect the level of service that can be expected in the interim period".

Signed: Ruraidh Stewart Helen Crawford Isabelle MacKenzie

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- some Members expressed concern at the tone of the motion and voiced support for staff who had dealt with customers to the best of their abilities during extraordinary circumstances and with limited resources. Other Members pointed out the motion was not a criticism of any staff but of the systems and resources in place to deal with customers;
- particular reference was made to the long waits experienced by some customers for phone calls to be answered and it was important this was addressed, noting the stress caused by this to both customers and staff;
- attention was drawn to the digital reorganisation project being considered by the Council's Redesign Board, which would improve customer care; and
- in relation to the use of the word 'instruct', it was clarified that the Council was responsible for making policy decisions which the Chief Executive would instruct staff to follow.

Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mr J Bruce, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed above.

Mr K Gowans seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, moved as an **AMENDMENT** to reject the motion.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 22 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 39 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Ms J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Sinclair and Mr R Stewart.

For the Amendment

Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr R Bremner, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr W MacKay, Ms K MacLean, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr T MacLennan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie and Ms K Willis.

Abstentions: Mr S Kennedy, Ms M Nolan

Decision

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

(v)“It is Council policy to achieve more efficient business practices, and to work towards reaching net zero carbon pollution across its operations by 2025.

“Previous Council practice of providing printed paper copies of all committee papers and associated documents to all members was halted a few years ago. Up until then some half a million sheets of paper were printed out for members each year at a significant cost to council tax payers.

“To reduce consumption in this current climate emergency, save staff time, and save money, this Council therefore reaffirms the policy that officers will not print out papers for members where the material is available online.

“Recognising that some members will be less computer literate than others, this Council agrees that ICT runs a workshop, or series of workshops, on navigating, annotating and working with PDFs, the SharePoint facility and other Council software and Council smartphones to help members transition from paper’.

Signed: Chris Ballance Bill Lobban

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the financial and carbon cost of paper production was explained;
- whilst acknowledging the need to reduce the use of paper, some Members considered it discriminatory to deny Members paper copies of reports when requested, particularly for

medical reasons. Reference was made to the need to restrict screen time, and the need for Members to have papers available in the format they required to allow them to properly undertake their duties as councillors to scrutinise reports;

- the use of recycled paper for printing committee reports was suggested;
- the production of high quality, glossy leaflets and brochures was highlighted as potentially more detrimental than plain print outs of committee papers;
- attention was drawn to the difficulties of scrutinising A3 plans for planning committees on an A4 size screen;
- Members felt that additional ICT training was urgently required, including one to one if necessary. The availability of ICT training information on YouTube was also highlighted, as was occupational health assistance to ensure workstations were appropriately set up;
- the ability to make notes on confidential committee papers was hampered because they could not be downloaded from SharePoint; and
- Members were able to print papers at their own cost if they wished.

Mr C Ballance, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed above, with amended wording from Mr T MacLennan for the last paragraph to read, 'ICT runs a workshop, or series of workshops, *or one to one training...*'

Mr R Gale, seconded by Mr M Reiss, moved as an **AMENDMENT** to replace the second half of paragraph three with, 'when papers are available online officers will provide printed copies of papers only when requested by individual members.'

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 32 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 31 votes, with 1 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr W MacKay, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Millar, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie and Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr J Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr S Kennedy, Mr P Logue, Mrs M Paterson, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Ms M Nolan, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Sinclair and Mr R Stewart.

Abstention: Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair

Decision

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

- (vi) "Council recently gave the President of Ukraine the Freedom of the City of Inverness as a mark of solidarity with the struggle of the Ukrainian people. This Council now wishes to offer further, more practical, support for Ukrainian people in Inverness. This Council therefore instructs E & I committee to investigate a study into the feasibility and cost of offering a free one year bus pass to all refugees and asylum seekers who have arrived in Highland Region

since March 2022, and to report on this to the next full Council meeting for a decision then on whether to implement the scheme.

Signed: Ryan MacKintosh Chris Ballance

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the motion was welcomed but considered restrictive for being only applicable to one group of refugees; and
- it was noted that a minor amendment would be required as the next meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee would be after the next Council meeting.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed, with the following amendments:

- the motion was remitted to appear as an item at the next meeting of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and, in preparation for this, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure would collaborate with the movers of the Motion to determine the recommendations to be presented at the committee; and
- reference to Inverness would be replaced with the Highlands.

(vii)“This Council restates its acceptance of a climate and ecological emergency, as agreed in May 2019. The success of the Archimedes screw on the River Ness has demonstrated the potential to produce renewable energy using Council-owned assets and funding streams such as Salix. In July National Grid announced a £7bn upgrade in transmission systems in the north of Scotland to deal with the expected growth in renewable electricity. (National Grid ESO ‘Pathway to 2030’ July 2022). It is vital that the Council maximises its involvement in the growth of renewables to ensure that the benefits of increased renewable generation support the council tax-payer, rather than the shareholders of multinational developers. It is time for the Council to develop an ambitious, bold and courageous strategy, to match Tom Johnston’s visionary Power from the Glens project of the 1940’s, by using Council land and resources to maximise income to the Council. In recognition of the need to move to Net Zero as quickly as possible, Council agrees that, working with the ongoing outsourced review into income possibilities from renewables, senior service leaders formulate a strategy, Power to the People, to maximise the use of Council-owned buildings, car-parks and land for the production of renewable energy, by solar, wind, water, and ground and water-source heating, a strategy which identifies all potential appropriate locations for power production, and outlines potential funding opportunities, for presentation to the Climate Change Committee for consideration at its first meeting in 2023”.

Signed: Chris Ballance Kate Willis

Decision

The Council **DEFERRED** consideration of this Notice of Motion, should the signatories so wish in terms of Standing Order 12, to the next meeting of the Council due to lack of time.

11. Financial Crisis – Our Council and Our Communities Èiginn Ionmhasail – Ar Coimhearsnachdan agus Ar Comhairle

Declaration of Interest: Mrs M Reid declared an interest in this as a commissioned partner of Highland Council who would be affected by ELC partner funded rates and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, she left the meeting for this item.

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/22/22 dated 14 September 2022 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there had never been a time of greater pressure on public finances, as the scale of the challenges were unprecedented an appeal was made for collaborative working in order to support Highland businesses and communities. Assurance was provided that work would be undertaken to increase income generation, reduce costs, manage workforce planning and asset rationalisation. There was also a need to demonstrate confidence. The Council had strong reserves and with the use of sustainable and flexible plans, that comprised of achievable budgets/targets and practical solutions, the Council could overcome the challenges ahead. The Chair of Corporate Resources indicated that all ideas/suggestions in regard to savings/efficiencies would be welcome;
- although collaborative working was welcome, there was a need for earlier engagement and a request was made to reflect on how this would be undertaken going forward to ensure it was meaningful. Confirmation was provided that efforts would be made to improve collaborative working. Attention was drawn to the change in Council policy i.e. to protect jobs where possible, which emphasised the seriousness of the current situation. However, concern was expressed regarding the recommendation to implement budget strategies as detailed in section 8 of the report and it was suggested this should be expanded with an update being provided to the next meeting of the Council. It was suggested that hundreds of posts would have to be deleted to close the budget gap and a plea was made for no compulsory redundancies. There was a lot of work to be undertaken and it needed to be worked through in a systematic and transparent manner;
- recognition was expressed of the invaluable collaborative working between the Welfare Team and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB);
- aside from the Workplace Parking Levy and the Transient Visitor Levy, further information was sought on the new areas of income generation and on the categories that would be regarded as no longer being a priority for the Council. Implementation of the Transient Visitor Levy was welcome and the importance of prioritising increasing income generation was emphasised;
- this was an extensive and complex report which set out the challenges being faced by the Council, Highland businesses, partners and residents. In view of this, it would have been helpful to have had separate reports on these key issues. It would also have been of benefit to have had an earlier report regarding addressing increasing energy prices given that winter was soon approaching but it was highlighted that this would not have been feasible without the knowledge of the UK Government support which had only recently been announced. A request was also made for future reports to be in plain English. The £3.224m Cost of Living Support package set out in the report, was in addition to the £3.429m welfare support package agreed at the meeting of the Council on 30 June 2022;

- contrasting views were expressed in regard to the Council providing warm spaces. Concern was expressed at the welfare issues that could arise as a result of elderly residents having to travel on public transport to get to a heat hub and then returning home to a cold space and also in regard to the potential for Covid and/or flu to be spread in these settings. Reference was made to the local solutions that had been adopted in response to the Covid pandemic and it was suggested that a similar approach should be taken with the Council supporting local groups to help people to stay warm at home. However, although the impacts of Covid were recognised, there were serious welfare issues if people were left in cold houses. It was therefore felt that there should be an alternative solution and it was suggested that the establishment of heat hubs should be investigated;
- although the allocation of £3.223m targeting those in need was welcome, concern was also raised regarding reserves being reduced to 1.5% of the annual revenue budget. It was suggested that a request should be made to the Scottish Government for more financial support and assurance was provided that the Council was lobbying for more assistance;
- a number of concerns were raised regarding the recommendation in the report proposing that there should be no change to the current hourly rate of £5.43 for the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) partner rate. Concerns were expressed that if the rate remained at this level, then providers would not be able to continue and facilities would be closed. Reference was made to the wider economic impact of this, particularly on working families that utilised these essential wraparound services. Further concern was expressed that the hourly rate, had only received a small uplift (12p per hour) in August 2021 whilst providers had to cope with increasing energy and food costs. A survey had indicated that this rate should be £7.25 per hour to enable providers to pay the Living Wage and avoid the risk of losing staff. A request was made for further information on the amount of ELC funding the Council had received from the Scottish Government and how much had been allocated to partners. It was felt that there was a need for transparency in regard to this and to ensure that a fair rate was being paid. It was also queried what the risks on provision would be if the ELC partner funding rate was not increased. It was suggested that the Council should continue to work with providers and examine the funding rate options with a report on the outcome to the next meeting of the Council. However, it was explained that it was not feasible for the Council to provide a further uplift in recurring funding at this stage due to the current financial crisis and as set out in the report the review was continuing. The Council was also under pressure with significantly increasing costs and pay awards yet to be determined, therefore it could not make unaffordable financial commitments. Assurance was provided that the Council recognised this was an essential service for Highland communities and the contributions from partners were valued. Nonetheless, concern was expressed that third sector partners did not feel valued and it was therefore queried how this would be overcome and partner relations rebuilt. Confirmation was provided that there had been engagement with partners and the Chief Executive would provide a briefing on this;
- further information was sought on the initiatives being undertaken to close the budget gap and it was queried when Members would be engaged in regard to this. There was a need to make changes and increase efficiency, implementing a number of 'quick wins', with some examples provided, which could have an immediate impact on the budget gap. Concern was expressed that the report recommendations were too vague, particularly in regard to reviewing the Devolved School Management (DSM) scheme and whether this would be rolled forward to 2023/24 and the ELC partner rate. Further clarity was sought on their objective i.e. was it to cut these budgets or to ensure they were receiving a fair rate. Assurance was provided that the recommendations in the report had been developed with the aim of providing support to those most in need;
- regular promotion via social media of information on Energy Advice was welcome but the elderly was one of the most vulnerable groups in regard to this aspect and many of them did not have internet access. It was therefore queried what action would be taken to ensure access to information for these people. Referral pathways across the Council's

Directorates, with public sector partners and other organisations were in place to identify those in need of support;

- there was a need to ensure that the temporary suspension of green levies did not become a long term strategy and it would be resumed as soon as possible;
- there was no reference to support for students in the report and it was clarified that this was provided by their university/college;
- the need to review the Capital Programme was acknowledged but it was requested that changes were mindful that they did not impact those most in need. The Capital Programme currently had £75.8m assigned for new major road improvements and consideration should be given to reducing this to essential maintenance only in view of the Council's commitment to net zero. However concern was expressed at the impact this would have and the importance of procurement, particularly in the local economy across the Highlands, was stressed;
- further information was sought on the powers of the Section 95 Officer and the Chief Executive advised that details would be circulated to Members via email;
- the difficulties ahead were recognised and there was a need to be open and honest with the public and ensure that changes were fully communicated in advance;
- assurance was provided that the Welfare Team had mechanisms in place to connect with hard to reach groups and the expertise to navigate the complex welfare systems;
- the financial challenges had been looming for quite some time, in particular there should have been more foresight when making provision for the pay award;
- the Council had to mitigate against the financial challenges whilst retaining the ability to be agile to changing priorities; and
- Highland residents would be impacted more by the cost of living crisis, therefore there was a need to consider all available options and implement different solutions across the Highlands to support those most in need. There would be many constituents that would be struggling to cope that would not qualify for welfare support. Therefore, it was critical that there were community initiatives, similar to that implemented during Covid, which would ensure local resilience.

Thereafter, the Mr Louden, seconded by Mr R Bremner, **MOVED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr D Gregg moved the following recommendations:-

- i. note the financial position for financial year 2022/23 and the forecast budget gap of £40.9m for 2023/24;
- ii. note the content of the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy regarding the Spending Review as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iii. note the Scottish Government's financial position with regard to the pay award as set out in the Depute First Minister's letter at Appendix 2 to the report, which includes "All areas of the public sector will have to make challenging savings to live within existing budgets";
- iv. work on reviewing both the DSM scheme and ELC partner rate to continue in light of the financial crisis facing the Council and a report be presented to the October Council Meeting on options available to be implemented;

And agree:

- i. to develop budget strategies as detailed in section 8 of this report and present the strategies to the next meeting of Council together with a detailed financial appraisal;
- ii. allocate £3.223m from the Council's non-earmarked reserves to:

- a. provide non-recurring cost of living support payments of £145 to each household in receipt of council tax reduction and specified council tax exemptions as set out in this report. This would require £2.523m to be provided;
- b. extend the existing Monday to Friday free school meal holiday payments to include weekend provision up to and including Easter 2023. This would require £0.200m to be provided;
- c. provide grants to individual organisations of up to £10k for community-led initiatives. Non-recurring funding of £0.450m was to be provided; and
- d. provide non-recurring funding of £0.050m to FareShare to purchase food for distribution across the Highlands;
- iii. that the Council collaborates with the Scottish Government with a view to engaging with utility companies to seek more preferential energy tariffs for social tenants;
- iv. that a Member workshop be held in October in order to consider future capital investment for council housing in more detail;
- v. that the council will investigate the feasibility of setting up 'heat hubs' in council owned and leased buildings to provide warm spaces for those struggling to heat their homes and bring an implementation plan back to Council in October;
- vi. that the council will facilitate local Emergency Cost-of-Living Summits to explore localised mitigation measures for the cost of living crisis with invites to all relevant parties including advice agencies , housing providers, food banks, local trade unions, public transport operators, NHS Highland, and MP/MSPs;
- vii. that the council will review its food waste strategy to reduce consumable food from council premises, including schools, that ends up in landfill;
- viii. that the council will, or identify an appropriate local partner organisation, to provide a clear route for anyone who wishes to return or donate support scheme money they have received e.g. Winter Fuel Payment; and
- ix. that the council will, or identify an appropriate local partner organisation, to coordinate the donation and collection of warm clothes to be distributed to households in extreme fuel poverty.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 37 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 28 votes and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr W MacKay, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mr K Rosie and Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Ms M Nolan, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Sinclair and Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Council:

NOTED:-

- i. the financial position for financial year 2022/23 and the forecast budget gap of £40.9m for 2023/24;
- ii. the content of the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy regarding the Spending Review as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iii. The Scottish Government's financial position with regard to the pay award as set out in the Depute First Minister's letter at Appendix 2 to the report, which included "All areas of the public sector would have to make challenging savings to live within existing budgets";
- iv. that the current schools DSM scheme, and current ELC partner funding rate would apply, with work on reviewing both the DSM scheme and ELC partner rate to continue in light of the financial crisis facing the Council;
- v. that the Statutory Responsibilities of the Section 95 Officer would be circulated to Members via email;
- vi. that a Briefing would be circulated in response to the emails that Members had received regarding ELC partner funding rates; and
- vii. a response would be circulated to all Members in respect of answers to any questions raised that had been missed during the meeting;

and **AGREED:**

- viii. budget strategies be implemented as detailed in section 8 of the report;
- ix. £3.223m be allocated from the Council's non-earmarked reserves to:
 - a. provide non-recurring cost of living support payments of £145 to each household in receipt of council tax reduction and specified council tax exemptions as set out in the report. This would require £2.523m to be provided;
 - b. extend the existing Monday to Friday free school meal holiday payments to include weekend provision up to and including Easter 2023. This would require £0.200m to be provided;
 - c. provide grants to individual organisations of up to £10k for community-led initiatives. Non-recurring funding of £0.450m to be provided;
 - d. provide non-recurring funding of £0.050m to FareShare to purchase food for distribution across the Highlands; and
- x. that the Council collaborated with the Scottish Government with a view to engaging with utility companies to seek more preferential energy tariffs for social tenants and that a Member workshop be held in October in order to consider future capital investment for council housing in more detail.

12. Update on the Highland Response to the Ukraine Displaced Persons Scheme Cunntas às Ùr mu fhreagairt na Gàidhealtachd do Sgeama Dhaoine Fuadaichte an Ùcrain

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland and as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/**23**/22 dated 8 September 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- reference was made to an instance of a refugee family being placed at the hotel at Inverness Airport where there was no access to school transport, shops etc, and it was suggested that refugees should be allocated to areas where there was a community. In response, it was explained that this was not within the gift of the Council, contingency hotel

contracts having been awarded by the Scottish Government. However, the issue was the subject of ongoing debate at COSLA;

- appreciation was expressed for the report and the dedication of education staff and the various other teams supporting refugees in Highland. It was necessary to continue to provide such support and welcome refugees into communities;
- it was important to be honest about the challenges and rewards in terms of educating Ukrainian children in Highland;
- it was difficult to recruit EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers across such a large geographical area and it was queried whether there were any plans to provide EAL training to support staff so they could help refugee children integrate and learn English. In response, it was confirmed that information on supporting teachers and pupil support assistants would be brought to the Education Committee on 29 September 2022. Area Managers and Collaborative Leads were engaging with all schools where there were children from Ukraine and there was a commitment to continue to offer support where it was needed;
- some Members had become aware of refugees moving into their area by chance or through the local press. A call was made for better communication with Ward Members, and it was requested that a message be conveyed that Members were keen to help in whatever way they could. A lot of third sector groups would also be able to help. It having been queried why welcoming parties were not taking place, the Convener explained that, in the majority of cases, it was not known that refugees had arrived. It was added that refugees were traumatised, many of them not being ready to engage with communities, and it was suggested that Members get in touch with their local Resettlement Officer;
- it having been queried whether the Council was kept informed as to the location of contingency hotels, the Convener undertook to find out. However, it was understood that Members were not encouraged or advised to visit;
- whilst some of the frameworks that had been put in place might be frustrating, it was hard to criticise the pace at which they had been mobilised. The volume of refugees arriving in Highland, which had exceeded initial expectations, was an indication of what had happened in Ukraine, and continuously hearing the news of further atrocities being uncovered as Ukrainian forces reclaimed territory must be incredibly traumatic in addition to the trauma of having to leave their home country. Whilst it was fair to continue to emphasise that Members were here to help, support was best provided by the relevant partner agencies and it was of paramount importance that any funding was fully met by the UK or Scottish Government, through the schemes that were in place, with the hope that refugees that wanted to return home did so in the best possible condition and mindset;
- given recent news reports regarding the mobilisation of additional Russian troops, it appeared inevitable that Russia was going to try and make significant advances into Ukraine and that refugee numbers would continue to increase over a number of years. That being the case, it was hard to ignore that there was a surplus of Council housing in Caithness that could potentially be offered to refugee families rather than a hotel room, and it was queried what the route would be to do so;
- further to earlier comments regarding EAL teachers/training, it was suggested that there were probably volunteers that would be able to help and support schools with teaching English; and
- reference was made to an anonymous letter from a refugee mother who was moving to London for work but whose children were desperately sad to leave Highland and their school because of the huge effort local people had made to welcome them. Highland was doing a lot right and it was important to be proud of that.

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the responsibility that we had to Ukrainian refugees arriving in the Highlands to continue to support the effort in the way those fleeing conflict deserved;
- ii. **NOTED** the current support given and the costs incurred to date, however further clarification on grant conditions was still being sought to confirm that we would be recompensed appropriately for the costs incurred; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a letter be submitted to Scottish Government requesting clarification on the Grant spend conditions of the £1.037m Homes for Ukraine scheme and requesting that further funding be made available for spend set out in paragraph 11.3 of the report connected to the Super sponsor scheme.

13. Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) Update Phase 3 Priorities Prògram Tasgaidh na h-Oighreachd Ionnsachaidh

There had been circulated Report No. HC/24/22 dated 12 September 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Local Members expressed concern regarding the poor state of repair of St Clement's School, which it was suggested should be at the top of the list of priorities. Whilst the school was in Dingwall it was for vulnerable children throughout the area and it was the Council's duty to ensure the proposal to build a new school went ahead without further delay. Members were urged to visit the school to see it for themselves, and their support was sought to expedite matters. A number of other Members voiced their support for St Clement's School being prioritised;
- in response to a question as to why St Clement's School was back before Members yet again and when construction was going to begin, the Chair of the Education Committee highlighted that a paper relating to the statutory consultation exercise on the relocation of St Clement's School was on the agenda for the Education Committee on 29 September 2022. He went on to state that budgets for all the projects covered by the LEIP report had been agreed by the Council as part of the capital programme agreed in December 2021. However, things had changed significantly since then with the impact of the war in Ukraine, the lasting effects of Covid and the huge rise in construction costs that had been seen in recent months. In June, the Council had acknowledged the need to review the capital programme to identify projects that might need to be deferred or looked at differently in terms of how they might be funded and that was what had happened in terms of the LEIP 3 recommendations before Members today. It was important to keep as many as possible of the previously identified projects in the capital programme live as the communities where new schools had been promised still needed to be supported and their expectations realised as far as possible. What made the projects identified in the report the right ones was that work on them had been ongoing for some time and they were deliverable in the timescale expected by the Scottish Government, which was by December 2027, while of course taking away some of the financial burdens the Council would struggle to meet because of the many issues Members had already heard about today. Another key issue had to be getting the best value for money which would support being able to fund other projects the Council wanted to complete. Because of this, taking Beauly, Dunvegan and Park Primary Schools forward as a bundle made sense and, as the report highlighted, there were many benefits to this approach. In terms of St Clement's School, all Members were aware of the need for it to be replaced and, as such, it was a no brainer to include it in the LEIP 3 bid. Finally, the third project recommended was the new primary school at Tornagrain. While the approved capital programme currently had a delivery date of 2030/31 for this project it was likely to be required well before then and could be delivered before December 2027. Importantly, there was a significant amount of developer contributions to be drawn down which would help offset the capital cost of the project. In terms of issues around secondary school rolls in Inverness, officers had been looking at

roll forecasts and he had been assured that there were no capacity issues in terms of the LEIP 3 timescales and the extension work happening at Culloden Academy would provide space for any pressures in east Inverness. Should that change in any way it was hoped that LEIP 4 would support any issues that arose. Given the closeness of the date to submit the Council's recommendations, the work that had been ongoing and the commitment to deliver projects in the current capital programme, he asked Members to support the recommendations in the report;

- if the same level of indexation was applied to the Nairn Academy and Broadford Primary School projects as had been applied to the Tain 3-18 Campus project the costs would increase by some 50%. Similarly, the St Clement's School project would now cost significantly more than originally specified in the capital programme;
- in relation to the pressures on Inverness schools, including Culloden Academy, Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy, it was necessary to get data back quickly and start working up the costs. It was important to keep a close eye on the situation and it was requested that update reports be brought forward in the future. Approving the capital programme was critical as, even if LEIP funding was awarded, none of the projects would become a reality without capital funding in place. It was hoped that a report on the capital programme would be brought forward in the near future so as not to delay the construction of much needed schools;
- in relation to Beaulieu Primary School, feedback from parents was that there had been a lack of communication and consultation, and the need to provide information and be clear about the decision-making process was emphasised. In addition, parents would like the stakeholder group to meet in person on occasion, and it was suggested this would help bring people along as difficult decisions had to be made;
- it was necessary to understand, and ensure parents and teachers understood, whether the recommended projects were dependent on LEIP funding;
- the importance of managing expectations and being fair and open was emphasised;
- it was queried when it was anticipated Beaulieu Primary School was now likely to be built;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the projects listed in the recommendations were not in order of priority - the Council was bidding for all of them as a group. The Chief Executive apologised that the narrative in the body of the report was not clear and emphasised that the Council's ambition was to be successful with all five projects and not to separate them out;
- there was a real urgency to establish what was doable and what was not and communicate that to the public in simple and unambiguous terms;
- no one underestimated the challenge the Council faced in terms of its school estate, there being a large number of schools in condition category C, and it was necessary to remain coherent and united about taking forward the proposed package of projects;
- adding demountable classrooms at Culloden Academy created a mismatch between pupil numbers and facilities, and Charleston Academy had building fabric condition challenges that had to be addressed;
- in relation to stakeholder meetings, there had been a hiatus due to the local government elections and school holidays but officers were committed to them and there was an ongoing programme of delivery;
- the report was the result of the hard work of officers to put together a package of projects that were most likely to be successful and it was hoped Members would support the recommendations;
- the Council did not want to be in a position where projects became unaffordable due to increasing indexation. Officers had determined the strongest bids so that the Council could then look at its own funding options to supplement LEIP funding. There might be difficult decisions to face in the near future but at present it was important to commit to the five proposed projects;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that, of the six projects at pre-construction stage set out in section 4.7 of the report, Charleston Academy did not form part of the proposed LEIP bid; and

- acknowledging the ambition to submit a bid for five schools in total, an additional recommendation was proposed to the effect that, should the total bid not be successful, the replacement for St Clement's School would become the top priority. However, it was explained that the Scottish Government would determine which projects were funded and it was not within the gift of the Council to prioritise a specific project.

Decision

The Council:-

- NOTED** the award of the contract for the LEIP Phase 1 Tain 3-18 Campus project as per paragraph 4.5 of the report;
- NOTED** the Council's commitment to the LEIP Phase 2 projects at Broadford Primary School and Nairn Academy as per paragraph 4.6 of the report;
- NOTED** the approach to reviewing the roll pressures across the school estate in the Inverness area and the progress made to date as outlined in section 5 of the report; and
- AGREED** the recommended priorities to be nominated for consideration by the Scottish Government for Phase 3 of the LEIP as set out in section 6 of the report, namely:
 - A single bid consisting of a bundle of three primary schools; Beauly, Dunvegan and Park;
 - An ASL school, St Clement's; and
 - Tornagrain Primary.

14. Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) Improvement Plan Progress Report 2021/22 Aithisg Adhartais Plana Leasachaidh Aithisg Bharantais an Luaich as Fheàrr 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No. HC/**25**/22 dated 31 August 2022 by the Chief Executive.

Decision

The Council:-

- NOTED** the progress reported; and
- AGREED** the revisions to timelines required to complete the delivery of the improvement plan as detailed in *Appendix 1 in italics*.

15. Annual Corporate Performance Report 2021/22 Aithisg Choileanaidh Chorporra Bhliadhnaidh 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No. HC/**26**/22 dated 6 September 2022 by the Chief Executive.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- the report on the final year of the current Corporate Plan for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022;
- a further report on Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework was awaited no later than March 2023;
- that the Annual Performance and Attitudes Survey (APAS) would be carried out over Autumn 2022 using a hybrid approach to securing public opinion; and
- that Service Plans would be updated to reflect the new Corporate Plan and submitted to the first cycle of Strategic Committees in 2023/24.

16. The Highland Council Programme Development Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Leasachadh Prògram

There had been circulated Report No. HC/27/22 dated 14 September 2022 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there would be opportunities for engagement and collaboration with Members, staff and communities on the Council Programme prior to it being submitted to the Council on 27 October 2022 for approval and on ongoing basis to inform priorities going forward. Dates for engagement sessions would be confirmed following the meeting;
- the Programme had to be affordable, deliverable, sustainable and ambitious and there was confidence this could be delivered through sound financial management and a focus on redesign and continual improvement. There was a need to be clear about the outcomes that the Programme aimed to achieve and to measure delivery over the lifetime of the document;
- concern at the use of corporate language in relation to the Programme and the need for more clarity and focus on the issues that mattered in terms of changing and delivering improvements to Council services;
- concern that the climate and ecological crisis was not a central focus of the Programme and had not been identified as a key consideration and a higher priority. The Council had declared a climate and ecological emergency in May 2019 and urgent mitigating action was required to achieve net zero carbon targets as early as possible;
- the Administration's commitment to climate change formed a fundamental part of the Council's Programme and was referenced throughout the document;
- the opportunity for further Member engagement and scrutiny as the Programme was developed and refined was welcomed and it was hoped this would be carried out in early course;
- the importance of people in the Highlands being at the heart of the Council's Programme and it being tailored to meet the unique needs of communities in the area;
- commending the use of the research data being gathered as part of the development of the Programme including from other local authorities across the UK; and
- the Programme should be respected as being a work in progress and it was suggested that a longer timeframe be allowed for the engagement sessions with Members, staff and communities to achieve a more meaningful consultation.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- i. the approach and work to date in developing the Programme;
- ii. the next steps and the approach to engagement;
- iii. that the final Programme would come back to Council for approval on 27 October 2022; and
- iv. that the Corporate Plan would come forward for approval later in the year, and Directorate Service Plans would be updated thereafter, aligning outcomes with the Programme priorities.

17. Business Intelligence Vision Ro-innleachd Innleachd Gnothachais

There had been circulated Report No. HC/28/22 dated 15 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the importance of business intelligence and linking systems across the Council to provide the data by which to make informed strategic decisions with all the relevant information;
- business intelligence had a crucial role in terms of achieving best value and in making the Council more efficient and delivering continual improvements;
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to how business intelligence would be taken forward within the Council and within Service and Corporate Plans and the Council's Programme and how it would be used at senior officer level to inform reports; and
- the Council's data should be regarded as an asset and the need in the first instance to look at weighting the reliability and useability of all of the Council's data and from that develop a single version of the truth.

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **APPROVED** the priorities and principles set out in the Business Intelligence Vision as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report and in the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to the development of a detailed and costed implementation plan for business intelligence for submission to a future meeting of the Council.

18. Draft Remit - Climate Change Committee Dreachd Raon-ùghdarras – Comataidh Atharrachadh na Gnàth-shìde

There had been circulated Report No. HC/29/22 dated 12 September 2022 by the Acting Depute Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- appreciation was conveyed to Members and officers who contributed to the climate change workshop;
- it was crucial that the Council maintain focus to achieve net zero as a priority;
- it was felt that the Climate Change Committee was just a continuation of the Climate Change Working Group with zero decision making powers; and
- it was requested that the term 'Net Zero' be replaced and reviewed for future Climate Change Committee meetings.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the Terms of Reference for the Climate Change Committee.

19. National Care Service for Scotland Consultation Co-chomhairle mu Sheirbheis Cùraim Nàiseanta airson Alba

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/30/22 dated 7 September 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Council's response to the consultation was supportive of many of the findings of the independent review of adult care which had led to the Bill. The response also identified a number of areas of concern. These concerns were shared by COSLA and Social Work Scotland;
- the Council was seeking assurances that care would be provided as close as possible to where it was needed and for it to be person centred and community based;
- concern that a National Care Service would result in the centralisation of services and that solutions would be applied across remote and rural areas of Scotland in a one size fits all approach;
- the centralisation of NHS, Police and Fire and Rescue services had resulted in a loss of local autonomy, budget, scrutiny and accountability and therefore the need to safeguard against the loss of local services in communities in terms of the proposals;
- there was a lack of clarity and detail as to how a National Care Service would deliver improvements and concern it might introduce further problems into the system, reference being made to the transition point between children's and adult services and outcomes for looked after children and others;
- the need for more recognition and support for young and unpaid carers in the proposals;
- a National Care Service would deliver benefits for all members of society in terms of care at home. There were currently issues within the NHS around delayed discharges and the elderly and others having access to local services;
- there was a shortage of care workers locally and a need to change the narrative about how care workers were described. Care workers were highly valued and skilled and core to the ageing population in the Highlands;
- issues around transparency and lack of scrutiny in relation to the fact the Bill was to be introduced by secondary legislation;
- while the Administration was supportive of the concept and principles set out in the Bill, it was actively making representations to COSLA on the areas of concern detailed in the report. Many other local authorities had expressed similar concerns;
- the balance of care had shifted and the current system was unsustainable and a fundamental change was required in how services were delivered to improve the standard and quality of care and support provided in communities in Highland;
- the report was part of an ongoing consultation on the Bill following on from the independent review of adult care. A workshop for Members with professional input would be held going forward;
- the issues around how to provide care to a rapidly ageing population were extremely difficult and reference to a professional officer view in the report that the proposals would not improve services; and
- in the context of the ongoing financial crisis, it was not the right time to take a risk with vulnerable people's care and the proposals should be resisted on that basis.

Decision

Having considered the terms of the consultation, the Council:-

- i. **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the terms of response which had been issued to the consultation; and
- ii. **AGREED** that there be continuing engagement with CoSLA and SOLACE in terms of the impact the proposals might have on local authority functions going forward.

**20. Community Asset Transfer Request – Playing Fields at Inverness Royal Academy
Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhain Coimhearsnachd – Raointean-cluiche aig Acadamaidh
Rìoghail Inbhir Nis**

There had been circulated to Joint Report No. HC/**31**/22 dated 12 September 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

One of the proposals from Caledonian Thistle Community Development Trust was that Inverness Royal Academy (IRA) would have dedicated daily use from 10am-12 noon and 1-3 pm Monday to Friday but, to make this more flexible for the school, it was suggested that discussion take place as to the possibility of extended the afternoon session.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the transfer of the playing fields at Inverness Royal Academy by lease to Caledonian Thistle Community Development Trust, noting the Council would retain ownership, subject to:-

- i. the conditions set out in the report being met; and
- ii. negotiation surrounding the possible extension of the dedicated daily times for use by IRA.

**21. Timetable of Meetings 2022/23
Clàr-ama Choinneamhan 2022/23**

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the:

- i. following changes to the current timetable:
 - North Planning Applications Committee from 13 September to 27 September
 - City of Inverness Area Committee from 14 September to 26 September
 - Education Committee from 15 September to 29 September
 - South Planning Applications Committee from 20 September to 4 October
 - Pensions Committee/Board from 29 September to 30 September
 - Planning Review Body from 4 October to 5 October
 - Sutherland Area Committee from 31 October to 7 November
- ii. Timetable of Meetings for 2023 as circulated.

**22. State Funeral – Monday 19 September 2022
Tìodhlacadh Stàite – Diluain 19 Sultain 2022**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/**32**/22 dated 13 September 2022 by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to **HOMOLOGATE**:-

- i. that as a mark of respect, the Council observed the state funeral of her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth on Monday 19 September 2022 and designated the day as a bank holiday for all staff;

- ii. that Offices, Schools and Service Points were closed to the public on 19 September;
- iii. that time off was given only for staff due to work on 19 September; and
- iv. that staff who were required to work that day were recompensed with an enhanced payment.

**23. Deeds Executed
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh**

Members **NOTED** a circulated list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 30 June 2022.

**24. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill**

The Council **AGREED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**25. Care Home Provision
Solar Dhachannan-Cùrain**

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/**33**/22 dated 6 September 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

Decision

Following private discussion, the Council **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report subject to the amendment of the second recommendation detailing the total cost of purchase.

**26. Awards of Contract for Public and School Transport
Duaisean cùmhnaint airson còmhdhail phoblach is sgoile**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/**34**/22 dated 13 September 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

Decision

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

The meeting was concluded at 7.05 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of **City of Inverness Area Committee** took place **Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness** on **Monday 26 September 2022** at **10.00 am**.

Present:

Mr C Aitken (remote)	Mrs J Hendry
Mr C Ballance	Ms E Knox
Mr B Boyd	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr I Brown	Mr R MacKintosh (remote)
Mr M Cameron (remote)	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie	Mr D Macpherson
Ms H Crawford (remote)	Mrs B McAllister
Mr K Gowans (remote)	Mrs M Reid
Mr A Graham	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Gregg	Mr A Sinclair (remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
 Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Economy & Environment
 Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
 Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
 Mrs S McKandie, Interim Head of Revenues & Business Support
 Mr G Munro, Policy & Assurance Officer, Resources and Finance
 Mr J Taylor, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
 Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
 Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in Attendance:-

Chief Inspector Judy Hill, Police Scotland

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

Preliminaries

The Committee **NOTED** the following awards:-

- William John Dingwall, Vice-President and Standard Bearer, Inverness Branch, Royal British Legion Scotland received a Medal of the Order of the British Empire for his voluntary service to veterans; and
- Lindsay Graham, Deputy Chair, Poverty and Inequality Commission Scotland received an Order of the British Empire for services to Tackling Children's Food Insecurity.

Mr I Brown in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

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

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 5: Mr A Christie

Item 7 (xiii): Mr A Christie

Item 8: Mr A Christie

**3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 30 June 2022 had not been required to be exercised in relation to the business of this Committee.

Additional Item

The Leader explained that, following the death of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the need to revise the date of the meeting, a number of key officers had been unable to attend due to other commitments.

As the Committee's approval was required to truncate the agenda, Mr I Brown, seconded by Ms E Knox, **MOVED**, to consider only the items that required a decision today, namely item 1-4, 7-9. 10d, 12 and 13. An email had been sent to Members with regard to this proposal.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr D MacPherson, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, to continue with the full agenda.

Following a vote, the Motion received 10 votes and the amendment received 11 votes, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion:

Mr M Cameron, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mrs J Hendry, Mr B Boyd, Mr C Ballance, Mr I Brown, Ms E Knox, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Reid.

For the amendment:

Mr C Aitken, Mrs H Crawford, Mr A Sinclair, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs E McAllister, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr D MacPherson, Mr D Gregg, Mr A Christie, Mr A Graham, Mr A MacKintosh.

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

There was circulated Report No CIA/17/22 by the Inverness Area Commander.

During discussion the following issues were raised and responded to:

- Members welcomed the new format of the report, the 'Coffee with a Cop' initiative, and the monthly newsletter to Community Councils, and it was asked if the newsletter could be extended to Community Councils in outlying villages and settlements;
- it was disappointing that some of the 20mph zones around schools were not being enforced. Additional road furniture to slow traffic was helpful but costly. This was an area which would benefit from further consideration in future;
- cold calling and fly tipping were areas of concern to residents and specific incidents should be reported to the Police. Concern was expressed that the response times could be lengthy;
- concern was expressed at the high level of drug deaths in Scotland, and the antisocial behaviour that resulted from drug activities. Information was provided on initiatives to tackle this, including a Harm Prevention Officer funded by Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership;
- concern was expressed at the response times to 101 calls and a call back or call waiting information service was proposed;
- information was sought ,and provided, on the CCTV provision in Inverness;
- the increasing numbers of disappearances of Looked After Children and young people were a concern and it was hoped more local people would consider fostering to help keep young people in the Highlands. Information was provided on the process and resources for dealing with missing people, and for suicide-related issues; and
- many online crimes were dealt with by national units and work was being undertaken with pupils in the senior phase of secondary school to raise awareness of online issues.

The Committee thanked the Chief Inspector for her attendance and **NOTED** the report.

5. Inverness Strategy Update Ro-innleachd Baile Inbhir Nis

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland and as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No. CIA/18/22 dated 29 August, 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

In discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- the strategy was welcomed and considered comprehensive, with many projects having been discussed for a considerable length of time. The challenges around modernising the layout of an old town centre were acknowledged;
- it was hoped that linkage between the train and bus stations and Academy Street would be improved;
- the proposals in relation to active travel, with particular reference to central Inverness, were not sufficiently ambitious or transformative enough in light of the climate change emergency and examples were provided of further improvements that could be made, such as one-way systems, segregated

- active travel routes and clearly marked safe cycle routes. The importance of cycle tourism, and adequate links to long distance routes, was pointed out;
- assurance was sought that there would be no loss of employment as a result of the redevelopment of freight yards and depots;
 - it was hoped feedback on the consultations held in July, August and September 2022 would be made available in due course;
 - the development of the strategy was so important it was suggested a separate meeting might be required. The formation of a stakeholder group was also suggested, as well as a timeline and ragging system, and information on progress with this was provided;
 - assurance was sought and provided, that the engagement strategy would include all stakeholders, including charitable outlets in the city centre which were not part of the BID, and would include physical as well as online engagement;
 - it was hoped efforts could be made to encourage the use of empty buildings and to improve employment opportunities in the city centre;
 - in addition to active travel issues, it was important to consider access to the city centre for people unable to walk or cycle;
 - visitor engagement and/or feedback in relation to the strategy should be encouraged;
 - the planned redevelopment of various schools by 2025 was ambitious but welcomed. It was important the strategy was developed in conjunction with improvements to the school estate;
 - it was disappointing the Inshes junction upgrade was not anticipated until 2030;
 - consideration was given to possible future uses of Farraline Park, Inverness;
 - concerns were raised about gaps in the roll out of City Fibre broadband;
 - inward investment to improve the city centre should be included; and
 - it was important to communicate what was happening to the wider public and also to be honest about what was achievable.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress made to date, including the commitment to appointing a Project Manager to coordinate place-based work across Inverness
- ii. **NOTED** the list of delivered, live and emerging projects set out in Appendix 1;
- iii. **AGREED** for officers to undertake engagement on the Inverness Strategy incorporating outcomes / vision, the key projects, and a new masterplan for the City Centre, with feedback and next steps to be reported to a future Committee;
- iv. **AGREED** that the Inverness One City, One Vision as set out in Appendix 2 was integrated into the overall vision for the city and that the projects being taken forward will be viewed in that context, and timescales, subject to funding opportunities being identified;
- v. **NOTED** that in advance of the consultation officers will brief the Community Planning Partnership on the work to date and the proposed consultation to ensure a collaborative cross-Council and cross-sector approach; and
- vi. **NOTED** that in partnership with Corporate Communications and Digital Services, Officers will develop a branding and communications strategy for the Inverness place-based work, including the development of a dedicated 'Inverness portal' webpage for all Inverness workstreams and consultations.

6. Notion of Motion Brath Gluasaid

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

(i) “The venue for Area Committee meetings is a decision for councillors. The Town House has been the centre of Inverness local government for centuries and is well capable of continuing to fulfil this role. The Committee resolves that meetings of Inverness City Area Committee return to the Town House forthwith”.

Signed: Alex Graham Alasdair Christie Mr C Aitkin Mrs T Robertson

During discussion a number of Members spoke in support of the Motion, raising the following points:-

- the Town House was the natural home of the City of Inverness Area (CIA) Committee;
- if the CIA Committee met at Glenurquhart Road there was a fear it would lose its identity and become just like any other Headquarters Committee. It was vital that there was a distinction;
- in determining the matter, it was important to bear in mind what was best for the CIA Committee and, in this instance, it was for it to return to the Town House;
- the Town House had been the focus for local government for hundreds of years and – whether it be the Burgh, Town or District Council – they had all met in the Town House. Members had a sense of pride meeting there, in what was recognised widely as a Municipal Building;
- the change of venue to Headquarters should have been discussed by the Committee. There had been no consultation and no Business Plan showing the reasons for the relocation;
- the Town House had recently undergone an £8m refurbishment. Currently it was under used but there was scope for attracting other organisation to use its facilities, thus generating an income, something very important at this time;
- the investment to upgrade the technology to facilitate hybrid meetings should be made, although it was questioned why this hadn't been included as part of the refurbishment to future proof it for the 21st Century;
- MS Teams was available in the Town House and Members were reminded that meetings had previously been webcast from there;
- it was essential, as part of the Council's localism agenda, meetings be held in the Town House and the decision should not be based simply down to cost. The City of Inverness Area Committee was the largest Local Committee, in fact bigger than some other Local Authorities, and it was right for it to have pride of place in the Town House;
- the people of Inverness would want the CIA Committee to be held in the Town House;
- in response to questions about available parking at the Town House it was pointed out that there were various car parking options in Inverness;
- parts of Headquarters were also difficult to navigate for those with mobility issues;
- if it was argued that the Town House was not DDA compliant, then there was possibly an issue that, and was suggested that the Provost consider, it was also unsuitable for Civic functions. If it was used less there was a danger it would close;

- it was reported that others with mobility issues had reported no difficulty with access to the Town House
- for those using public transport, the town centre was much more accessible than Council Headquarters in Glenurquhart Road; and
- it was suggested by a Member had been advised that it had been possible for the Committee to meet in the Town House and the reasons for the move were called into question.

Other Members, however, spoke against the Motion, making the following points:-

- whilst the Town House might be convenient for those living in Inverness, for those Members living in the outlying areas it wasn't so accessible, especially if using public transport;
- it was acknowledged that the Town House was a beautiful civic building, an undoubted asset to Inverness. It also had historical, architectural and artistic significance but it was not fit to use as a venue for holding CIA Committee meetings;
- the money spent in upgrading the Town House was not solely for the purposes of holding Committee meetings there - it was for the public to visit and appreciate the building;
- the Town House was difficult to navigate if one had sensory or mobility impairments with its narrow corridors and stairs;
- a lift was available but it small, difficult to manoeuvre in/out off and only went as far as the first floor;
- a hearing loop system was only available in the Town Hall but not in the Town House Chamber whereas the Headquarters Chamber did have this facility;
- there was limited parking at the Town House;
- the ICT infrastructure at Headquarters was considerably better with a number of Members able to join the meeting on MS Teams. This had become the norm for many meetings and, if meetings reverted to the Town House, then it would go against the Council hybrid working policy. Also, joining the meeting remotely from home was more environmentally friendly;
- the Town House Chamber was cramped for CIA Committee meetings;
- adaptations would cost in the region of £75k and it was argued this was not the best use of Common Good money;
- the Committee was the sum of the Members and the decisions made, not the venue; and
- due to the Covid 19 pandemic the Committee had met remotely for two years and the issue of loss of identity had not been raised.

Mr A Graham, seconded by Mr A Christie, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed above.

Ms E Knox, seconded by Mr M Cameron, moved as an **AMENDMENT** to reject the motion.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 11 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 11 votes, with no abstentions. In terms of Standing Order 29, the Chair had the casting vote and elected to vote for the **AMENDMENT** which was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr C Aitkin; Mr A Christie; Mrs H Crawford; Mr A Graham; Mr D Gregg; Mrs I MacKenzie; Mr A MacKintosh; Mr D Macpherson; Mrs B McAllister; Mrs T Robertson; Mr A Sinclair

For the Amendment

Mr C Ballance; Mr B Boyd; Mr I Brown; Mr M Cameron; Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair; Mr K Gowans; Mrs J Hendry; Ms E Knox; Mr R MacKintosh; Ms K MacLean; Mrs M Reid.

Casting Vote

Mr I Brown – Amendment

Decision

The Committee **REJECTED** the Motion.

7. Appointments to Outside Bodies

Suidheachadh Dhreuchdan gu Buidhnean on Taobh A-muigh

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of item 7 (xiii) as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The Committee **APPROVED** the appointments to the following Outside Bodies:

- (i) **Addictions Counselling Inverness** – Ms K MacLean and Mr A Graham
- (ii) **Dr Forbes Trust** – Provost, Mr M Cameron, Mr C Ballance, and Mr D Gregg
- (iii) **Highland Disability Sport** – Mrs E McAllister
- (iv) **Inverness and Nairn Local Access Forum** – Mr M Cameron and Mr R MacKintosh
- (v) **Inverness BID** – City Leader
- (vii) **Inverness Civic Trust** – Mr D Macpherson and Mrs I MacKenzie
- (viii) **Inverness Community Safety Partnership** – Mrs E McAllister
- (ix) **Inverness Festival Association** – Provost, Mr D Macpherson and Mr R MacKintosh
- (x) **Inverness Partnership (Chair)** – City Leader. While others had expressed an interest, it was clarified Members were welcome to attend the meetings.
- (xi) **Visit Inverness Loch Ness** – City Leader
- (xii) **Inverness Town Twinning Committee** – The Committee **AGREED** to increase the number of nominees from 5 to 7 and appointed the following: Provost, Mrs M Reid, Mrs J Hendry, Ms K Maclean, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs E McAllister and Mr D Macpherson.
- (xiii) **Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens' Advice Bureau** – Mr D Gregg
- (xiv) **Ness District Salmon Fisheries Board** – Mr C Ballance
- (xv) **Victorian Market Stakeholder Group** – City Leader and Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, Mrs E McAllister, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr D Macpherson
- (xvi) **City Area Development Group** – 12 political balanced places were available and the appointments were made as follows:- Mrs M Reid (Highland Independents); Mr I Brown, Mrs J Hendry, Ms K MacLean (SNP); Mr D Gregg (Lib Dems); Mrs B McAllister (Labour); Mrs I MacKenzie (Scottish Conservatives); Mr C Ballance (Scottish Greens) and, with the remaining Lib Dem place being provided to Mr D Macpherson.

- (xvii) **East Inverness Sports Facilities Working Group** – The Committee **AGREED** to increase the number of available places from 7 to 8 as follows – Mrs M Reid, Mr D MacPherson, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr K Gowans, Mr D Gregg, Mrs E McAllister, Mr R MacKintosh. It was clarified that all Members were welcome to attend meetings.

The Committee **NOTED** that appointment to Item 7(vi), Inverness City Heritage Trust, had been deferred meantime.

8. Inverness Common Good Fund: Discretionary Scheme for Winter Payments Plan 2022/23
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis: Sgeama fo Ùghdarras airson Plana Pàighidhean Geamhraidh 2022/23

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No CIA/19/22 dated 20 July 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, that the £50 winter payment mentioned at the Council meeting the previous week was a Scottish Government benefit-based scheme to replace the previous cold weather payment, and was not something that impacted on Council or CGF budgets;
- it was proposed that the £97 be approved today but increased to £150, subject to a satisfactory financial assessment being presented to a next meeting of the Committee;
- consideration should be given to also helping those just above the threshold for benefits, many of whom would struggle financially over the coming winter;
- it was confusing, even for professionals, to understand what benefits were available, who was eligible and what the route to apply for them was, and a flowchart depicting this was requested;
- assurance was sought, and provided, that payments could be made to people without bank accounts if required. A summary was provided of who was eligible, how they would be identified, how the scheme would be publicised and how people would receive the money; and
- Members thanked the welfare team for their work.

The Committee **AGREED** the following recommendations for the 2022/23 Inverness Winter Payments Discretionary Scheme:-

- i. accept applications from 1 December 2022 to 28 February 2023 inclusive;
- ii. propose an increase to the single tier payment to £150, subject to a financial assessment report brought back to the next City of Inverness Area Committee Meeting, and pending this assessment, agree to the £97 amount specified in the report to those applicants that satisfy the eligibility criteria;
- iii. provide a budget of £200,000 as agreed by Members at Committee on 17 February 2022 to accommodate the continuing demand as a result of the

- cost of living crisis, ongoing welfare reforms and fluctuations in energy costs, with provision for the budget to be increased pending the outcome of the full financial impact, this decision being deferred to the meeting of the Committee in November 2022. Also noting that payments for Landward Areas would be sourced from available income within the Inverness Benevolent Funds first, with the ICGF being utilised for the Landward Areas in the event that officers decided it financially prudent to do so;
- iv. that the criteria utilised for the 2021/22 scheme as set out in paragraphs 11.2 to 11.6 shall be used as the basis for the 2022/23 scheme;
 - v. this discretionary scheme was to be made available to residents in the City of Inverness and the Landward areas of the seven City Wards;
 - vi. BACS payments were to be used for this discretionary scheme as this is the most secure method of payment for recipients of the payment and the Council alike;

and:-

- vii. **NOTED** that for 2022/23 applications for grants to support Foodbank provision would be considered under the ICGF Grants Budget. All as more particularly referred to in Para 10 of the report; and
- viii. **AGREED** a flow chart be prepared for Members showing benefit information sources and routes.

9. **Winter Service Plan 2022/23** **Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh 2022/23**

There was circulated Report No. CIA/20/22 dated 17 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

In discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- Members expressed their appreciation for the hard work of the team;
- information was sought, and provided, as to the mechanism of communicating any changes to the arrangements to Members and the general public, whether it to be as a result of Covid 19 or other factors;
- concern was expressed that the Whiteness route, as a school bus route, had been, excluded. It was explained however that Whiteness was in the Nairn Area;
- the new development at Ness Castle only showed gritting up to the first roundabout but, with the proposed new school coming online, it was requested, as in similar areas, if this could be extended as a secondary route;
- concern was expressed at footpath clearing, especially at the periphery of the city centre, as many Members had received complaints about this;
- to encourage use of grit bins it was suggested plastic scoops be provided. However, in response, it was explained that, given how heavy grit was, steel scoops would be required;
- with many housing developments now taking place on the hills surrounding Inverness, it was important to reassure these residents that they would receive the service they deserved;
- flexibility was called for, especially when bad weather hit on a Sunday, whilst still recognising the need to comply with driver regulations;
- details were sought, and provided, as to the budget for the Winter Service as it was felt it was under funded and under resourced;

- information was sought, and provided, as to the extent of liabilities which the Service received;
- the Service Plan supported a number of other Council Committees and outside bodies and it was suggested that contact also be made with Third Sector Groups, especially those concerned with elderly people;
- a request was made for Members to be sent the contact details of the officer who community self -help groups could get in touch with;
- it was queried what contact was made with Stage Coach and exploring the possibility of them assisting with clearing routes;
- there needed to be a clear message that AMEY now managed the A96 route and were responsible for the gritting of the A96 Trunk Road footway/cycleway from the Raigmore Interchange to the Smithton Roundabout; and
- details were sought as to what Primary Cycleways were classed as. The provision of maps would help cyclists to chose safer routes during times of bad weather.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for Inverness Area; and
- ii. **NOTED** that Covid-19 and driver's hours regulations will potentially have an impact on the winter service provided.

10. Inverness Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

a) Financial Monitoring Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail

There was circulated Report No CIA/21/22 dated 25 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Members felt there was a need to look at how expenditure might be redirected, particularly in relation to Appendix 1, towards poverty alleviation measures but this would require detailed reports. Accordingly, it was suggested that a special meeting of the Committee be held in October to review this expenditure with a view to redirecting it to facilitate this end.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that overall expenditure was within agreed budgets excepting the estimated outturns detailed in Appendices 1 and 2;
- ii. **AGREED** to homologate expenditure of £0.045m incurred in respect fly tipping at the Longman Landfill Site to date as outlined and **NOTED** that additional works referred to would be undertaken and reported to Committee in due course; and
- iii. **AGREED** a special meeting of the Committee be held in October to review expenditure with a view to redirect resources to poverty alleviation measures.

b) Capital Projects Update Report Aithisg às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Calpa

There was circulated joint Report No CIA/22/22 dated 23 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing & Property and Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the current status of capital projects.

**c) Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee Annual Report 2021/22
Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis
2021/22**

There was circulated Report No CIA/23/22 dated 25 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

It was hoped a Press Release would be considered, highlighting the Annual Report, to explain, in detail to the general public, what the Common Good Fund had undertaken during 2021/22. The Members of the Common Good Fund Sub Committee were thanked, particularly former Councillors Carmichael and Ross who had chaired the Sub Committee in the previous Administration.

The Committee **NOTED** the work of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub Committee as described within the report.

**d) Grant Applications over £10,000
Iarrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000**

There was circulated Report No CIA/24/22 dated 22 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee determined the current grant applications as follows:-

- 1) Free North Church – **REFUSED**; and
- 2) City Decorative Lighting – **DEFERRED**.

**11. Appointments to Events and Festivals Working Group
Suidheachadh Dhreuchdan gu Buidheann-obrach nan Tachartasan is nam
Fèisean**

Mr D Macpherson was nominated by Mrs I MacKenzie and this was seconded by Mrs T Robertson.

Mr A MacKintosh was nominated by Mrs B McAllister and this was seconded by Mr A Graham.

Ms K MacLean was nominated by Mrs J Hendry and this was seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair.

On a vote being taken, Mr Macpherson received 6 votes, Mr MacKintosh received 5 votes and Ms MacLean received 10 votes the votes having been cast as follows:-

Votes for Mr Macpherson

Mr C Aitkin; Mrs H Crawford; Mrs I MacKenzie; Mr D Macpherson; Mrs T Robertson; Mr A Sinclair.

Votes for Mr A MacKintosh

Mr A Christie; Mr A Graham; Mr D Gregg; Mr A MacKintosh; Mrs B McAllister.

Votes for Ms K MacLean

Mr M Cameron; Mr R MacKintosh; Ms K MacLean, C Aitkin; Mr A Christie; Ms H Crawford; Mr A Graham; Mr D Gregg; Mrs I MacKenzie; Mr D Macpherson; Mrs T Robertson; Mr A Sinclair.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms MacLean to replace Mrs I MacKenzie on the Events and Festivals Working Group.

(N.B. Incomplete vote – item to be revisited at Committee on 24 November 2022)

12. Inverness Local Holidays 2023/24
Saor-làithean Ionadail Inbhir Nis 2023/24

The Committee **AGREED** the following dates as Local Holidays for the City of Inverness for years 2023 and 2024.

2023

Monday 2 January 2023 (New Year's Day)
 Tuesday 3 January 2023 (2nd January Holiday)
 Monday 6 February 2023
 Monday 6 March 2023
 Monday 10 April 2023 (Easter Monday)
 Monday 1 May 2023 (May Day Holiday)
 Monday 3 July 2023
 Monday 2 October 2023
 Monday 6 November 2023
 Monday 25 December 2023 (Christmas Day)
 Tuesday 26 December 2023 (Boxing Day)

2024

Monday 1 January 2024 (New Year's Day)
 Tuesday 2 January 2024 (2nd January Holiday)
 Monday 5 February 2024
 Monday 4 March 2024
 Monday 1 April 2024 (Easter Monday)
 Monday 6 May 2024 (May Day Holiday)
 Monday 1 July 2024
 Monday 7 October 2024
 Monday 4 November 2024
 Wednesday 25 December 2024 (Christmas Day)
 Thursday 26 December 2024 (Boxing Day)

13. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** City of Inverness Area Committee held on 8 June, 2022;
- ii. **APPROVED** Inverness Common Good Fund Sub Committee on 27 June and 15 August, 2022; and
- iii. **APPROVED** Events and Festivals Working Group held on 15 August, 2022

The meeting ended at 3.05 pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit and Scrutiny Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 28 September 2022 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Ms T Collier (substitute) (remotely)
Mr C Ballance	Ms J McEwan (remotely)
Mr B Boyd (remotely)	Mr P Oldham
Mr L Fraser	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie (remotely)
Mr R Jones	Mr A Sinclair (remotely)
Mr S Kennedy	

Non Members in attendance:

Mr A Christie (remotely)	Mr D Macpherson (remotely)
Mr B Lobban	Mr C Munro (remotely)

Officials in Attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Acting Depute Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
 Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
 Mr E Foster, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance
 Miss D Sutherland, Corporate Audit Manager, Performance & Governance Service
 Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance, Performance and Governance
 Ms E Barrie, Head of People, Resources and Finance
 Mrs M Grigor, Finance Manager (Corporate Budgeting, Treasury & Taxation), Resources & Finance
 Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Performance & Governance Service
 Mr P Hankinson, Senior Auditor, Performance & Governance Service
 Mr M Watters, FOI and Data Protection Manager, Performance & Governance
 Mrs F Malcolm, Interim Head of Integration, Adult Social Care, Health & Social Care
 Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
 Mr T Usher, Harbours Manager, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
 Ms D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
 Mr A McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
 Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
 Ms S Barrie, Programme Manager, Housing & Property
 Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy & Investment Manager, Housing & Property
 Ms R Mackinnon, Principal Policy Officer, Communities and Place
 Mr A MacGregor, Senior Investigator, Performance & Governance
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Committee Administrator, Performance & Governance
 Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance & Governance

Also in attendance:

Ms J Brown, Audit Partner, 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.**

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Fraser and Mr G Mackenzie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 30 June 2022 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

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

The following External Audit Report had been prepared by the Council's External Auditors (Grant Thornton) and issued since the last meeting:-

- a) Annual Report 2021/22 to Elected Members and the Controller of Audit (Report No. AS/5/22);
- b) Letter of Representation (Report No. AS/6/22).

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the Governance Section of the report could be expanded to provide further information on the Highland Council/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee governance model;
- an explanation was sought and provided that climate change was an area of increasing focus by the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland. External Auditors had been specifically asked to focus on the approach of local authorities to climate change in 2022/23 and it was expected the effectiveness of the Council's recently established Climate Change Committee would be reviewed as part of that focus; and
- further consideration was required in response to the External Auditor's comment that a more consistent approach be adopted to the carrying out of impact assessments across the Council. In this regard, specific reference was made to a situation where the failure to undertake a full impact assessment on a project had made engagement with the local community more difficult.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Annual Report 2021/22 to Elected Members and the Controller of Audit (Report no. AS/5/22);

- ii. **APPROVED** the Letter of representation (Report No. AS/6/22) subject to the successful conclusion of the audit work remaining outstanding, including the deliberation of the reporting of infrastructure assets;
- iii. **NOTED** that the Governance Section could be expanded to provide further information on the Highland Council/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee governance model; and
- iv. **AGREED** that further consideration was required on a more consistent approach being adopted to the carrying out of impact assessments across the Council.

5. Audited Accounts 2021/22 Cunntasan Sgrùdaichte 2021/22

There was circulated Report No AS/7/22 dated 23 September 2022 by the Head of Corporate Finance. The audited accounts had been circulated separately.

During discussion, it was confirmed that a further update would be provided to Members on trade union facility time for staff in other local authorities once more responses were received. However, based on previous information it was not considered the Council was out of sync with other local authorities on this issue.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Audited Accounts 2021/22 for signature subject to the successful conclusion of the audit work remaining outstanding, including the deliberation of the reporting of infrastructure assets; and
- ii. **NOTED** that a further update would be provided to Members on trade union facility time for staff in other local authorities.

6. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report Ath-bhreithneachaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated Report No. AS/8/22 dated 15 September 2022 by the Corporate Audit Manager which detailed the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Section since the last report to Committee in February, 2022 as follows:-

- Communities & Place – Review of Ward Fund Schemes (Substantial Assurance)

It was confirmed that Ward Managers worked with applicants in cases where applications were not compliant to ensure all the required information was received by which the risk and financial assessments could be undertaken. Training and guidance for officers was also being updated on this item.

- Infrastructure, Environment & Economy/Property & Housing/Resources & Finance – Review of Capital Projects (Reasonable Assurance).

In discussion, concern was expressed at the proportion of projects sampled where there had been issues with the procurement process and in relation to the specific issues which had been identified.

It was confirmed that procurement training and presentations were to be refreshed throughout relevant services. An exercise was to be undertaken to examine whether all projects above £2m had used the correct procurement route and existing arrangements would be reviewed following the findings and revised if necessary.

- Infrastructure, Environment & Economy – Harbours Fuel Sales (Reasonable Assurance)

In discussion, it was suggested there was an over reliance on officers calculating the fuel price taking account of the wholesale price and prices of competitors. There was no agreed formula for setting the fuel price and a recommendation should be added to remove some of the human element from this task. The margin per litre remained unchanged from 2017/18 and required to be reviewed given the increases in oil prices in the interim.

It was explained that a key issue for the Council was to be flexible in setting its prices and margins in common with the approach of competitors. A balance had to be achieved on the basis the risk did not relate only to the income and margins for the Council, but also the livelihoods of the harbour users and the fragile communities which benefited from the trade generated by the harbours. This was particularly relevant in the current cost of living crisis.

- Infrastructure, Environment & Economy – Highland Coastal Communities Fund (Reasonable Assurance)
- Infrastructure, Environment & Economy – Review of Covid-19 Grants (Substantial Assurance)
- Performance & Governance – Review of Local Democracy (Reasonable Assurance)

It was confirmed the motion on improving local democracy had been agreed by the full Council in December 2021. Thereafter, it was suggested that some of the former larger area committees had been less successful than the current 3 and 4 Member structures due to the amalgamation of areas. There was a need for the Council to look again at the issues around area committees.

- Performance & Governance – Effectiveness of Out of Hours Arrangements (Reasonable Assurance)

It was confirmed that in terms of the high priority action, a Tactical Group had been established.

- Transformation – The Council's Approach to Recovery (substantial Assurance)

The Committee **NOTED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at section 5 of the report and the final progress against the 2021/22 audit plan in section 6.

7. Action Tracking Report Aithisg a' Leantainn Gnìomhachd

There was circulated Report No. AS/9/22 dated 14 September 2022 by the Corporate Audit Manager.

During discussion, Members expressed concern at the number of outstanding actions and lengthy extensions to completion target dates and cases where there had been no management response to action tracking requests, and clarification was sought on the action being taken to address these issues.

It was confirmed that Members concerns would be raised with the Executive Leadership Team and the Performance Governance Board. The Board was meeting on a weekly basis and outstanding actions were discussed with lead officers. The Chief Executive or Acting Depute Chief Executive followed up on cases where there had been no management response. It was anticipated that an improved position would be reported to the next meeting.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the action tracking information provided including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions; and
- ii. that Members concerns on the number of outstanding actions and extensions to completion target dates would be raised with the Executive Leadership Team and the Performance Governance Board.

8. Internal Audit Annual Report 2021/2022 Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh In-Sgrùdaidh 2021/2022

There was circulated Report No. AS/10/22 dated 14 September 2022 by the Corporate Audit Manager.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and the audit opinion provided.

9. Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 Plana In-Sgrùdaidh 2022/23

There was circulated Report No. AS/11/22 dated 12 September 2022 by the Corporate Audit Manager.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23.

10. Review of Corporate Risks Ath-Sgrùdaidh air Cunnartan Corporra

There was circulated Report No. AS/12/22 dated 12 September 2022 by the Strategic Lead Corporate Audit and Performance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- In terms of the risk relating to care home viability, the risks for the Council related to financial and service delivery. Actions to meet target dates were ongoing and there was liaison with the Scottish Government about this work. Progress was monitored by the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and progress was to be considered again by the JMC at a meeting next week.
- In relation to Action CR7 Climate Change, it was queried why there was some slippage in the target date to develop a net zero strategy. It was explained that the net zero strategy had been approved in December 2021 and therefore this action was complete. The issue was about target dates and this would be considered by the Climate Change Committee and any revisions made would be reported to this Committee. This was a challenging piece of work given there were thousands of properties to measure against. In this respect, it was requested that Action CR7 Climate Change be investigated to ascertain if ragged correctly.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the revised Risk Management Strategy at Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 2 to the report and the risk profile at Appendix 3 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that Action CR7 Climate Change be investigated to ascertain if ragged correctly.

11. Annual Report of Scottish Public Service Ombudsman Cases determined in 2021/22

Cùisean Ombudsman Sheirbheisean Poblach na h-Alba a Fhuair leas a' Chomhairle – Aithisg às Ùr

There was circulated Report No. AS/13/22 dated 7 September 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the low numbers of complaints regarding the Council considered by the SPSO.

12. Code of Corporate Governance

Còd Riaghladh Corporra

There was circulated Report No. AS/14/22 dated 12 September 2022 by the Head of Corporate Governance.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress on delivering the 2021/22 Code of Corporate Governance; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the 2022/23 Code of Corporate Governance.

13. Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act (RIPSA)

Achd Riaghladh Chumhachdan Sgrùdaidh (Alba) (RIPSA)

There was circulated Report No. AS/15/22 dated 14 September 2022 by the Head of Corporate Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Council continued to be a modest user of the powers and that a further report would be forthcoming to the March 2023 meeting.

14. Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life/Standards Commission: Councillors' Code of Conduct – Investigation into Complaints

Coimiseanair airson Inbhean Beusail ann am Beatha Phoblaich/Coimisean nan Inbhean: Còd Giùlain nan Comhairlichean – Sgrùdadh Ghearanan

There was circulated Report No. AS/16/22 dated 12 September 2022 by the Head of Corporate Governance.

During discussion further information was sought and provided as to whether the change in the way complaints were handled by the Commissioner was indicative of an overall shift and whether the Council would be more involved in policing conduct and behaviour.

The Committee **NOTED** that, in respect of any complaints against Highland Council Members, concluded during 2021/22, the ESC/Commission had investigated one complaint and, following investigation, decided to take no further action.

15. Review of the Internal Audit Charter **Ath-sgrùdadh dhen Chairt In-sgrùdaidh**

There was circulated Report No. AS/17/22 dated 15 August 2022 by the Corporate Audit & Performance Strategic Lead.

The Committee **APPROVED** the amendments to the Internal Audit Charter outlined in the report and contained in the revised Charter in Appendix 1 of the report.

16. 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 Paragraph 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

17. Internal Audit Review and Progress Report **Ath-bhreithneachaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais**

There was circulated to Members only Report No. AS/18/22 by the Corporate Audit Manager which summarised a final confidential report issued since the date of the last meeting as follows:-

- Health & Social Care – Investigation into missing monies from Residential Units, control weaknesses (Limited Assurance)

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the final report into Health & Social Care – Investigation into missing monies from Residential Units, control weaknesses (Limited Assurance); and
- ii. that measures would be considered to reduce cash handling within all Highland Council Residential Units.

The meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 29 September 2022 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr A Graham (substitute)
Mrs I Campbell	Ms M Hutchison
Mr A Christie (substitute)	Mr A Jarvie
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms L Johnston
Ms H Crawford	Ms L Kraft
Ms S Fanet	Ms M MacCallum
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Reid

Religious Representatives:

Ms S Lamont
Mr I MacDonald (remote)
Mr W Skene

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt (remote)	Ms J McEwan (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)	Mr C Munro (remote)
Mrs I MacKenzie (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mrs A MacLean	Mrs M Paterson
Mr D Macpherson (remote)	Mr A Rhind (remote)

In attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning
Ms C Macklin, Head of Service, Primary Education
Ms F Grant, Head of Service, Secondary Education
Mr B Porter, Head of Education Resources
Ms T Mackie, Strategic Manager, Digital Learning and Service Transformation
Ms M Beaton, Collaborative Lead Officer
Ms F Jamieson, Collaborative Lead Officer
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr J Ross, Acting Head Teacher, Fortrose Academy
Ms V Paterson, Depute Head Teacher, Fortrose Academy
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer
Ms S Fowler, Thriving Families (Third Sector)
Mr J Hasson, Highland Parent Council Partnership (remote)
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Pupils from Fortrose Academy

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Preliminaries

The Chair welcomed Members to the first Education Committee of the new session of the Council and hoped that the recent workshop had helped new Elected Members understand the role of Committee and the responsibility they had to both support and monitor the work of all the Council's educational establishments and those working in them.

He thanked Members who had fed back areas where it was considered more training or awareness-raising was needed and, as agreed, workshops on those and any additional areas that arose as things changed and developed would be hosted as time progressed.

Given that educational establishments were about children and young people, he intended, at every opportunity, to have young people and staff from schools presenting at the Committee as there was no better way to appreciate what was happening in education.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Gregg, Mr P Logue, Mrs P Munro, Ms S Rawlings and Ms C Munro.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 7: Mrs M Reid
Item 11: Mrs M Reid
Item 14: Mr W Skene

and the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 5: Mr A Christie
Item 7: Mr A Christie
Item 8: Mr A Christie

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 30 June 2022 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Committee.

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

The Chair explained that Members had already been emailed a digital presentation summarising recent successes from Highland schools, early learning and childcare (ELC) centres, colleges and third sector partners, and he was sure it would be agreed there was a lot to celebrate. It was important to highlight the innovative digital tools being provided to schools to support learning for all pupils including those for whom English was an additional language, and he encouraged Members to interact with the slides and click on the audio and links when they viewed the presentation.

He then handed over to Ms T Mackie, Strategic Manager, Digital Learning and Service Transformation, who showed an edited and sped up version of the presentation which highlighted outstanding achievements by the following:

Glenurquhart Primary School pupils
Carlo at Airport House
Niamh Ross, North Kessock Primary School
Thriving Families
Care and Learning Alliance
Oliver Stewart, Charleston Academy
Culloden Academy: a group of S2/3 pupils; Juliet Johnson; Jodie Gordon; S5 pupils Owen Martin, Liam Munro and Peter Wilson; Marvellous Igbinidu; and Emily Tan
Dingwall Academy: Caitlyn Heggie and Zak Fearn
Nathan MacDonald, Glenurquhart High School
Lily Kelman, Inverness High School
Highland Deaf Education Service
Cobey MacQuarrie, Inverness Royal Academy
Muirtown Nursery and Primary School
Beth Fuller, PT at Muirtown Primary
Kyle and Kyleakin Primary Schools
Lochardil Primary School
Sienna Kellacher, Millburn Academy
Daisy Mackenzie, Mulbuie Primary School
Nairn Academy: Kieron Willox; Iona MacArthur; Tyler McPherson; Darcey Woodman; Adam Mitchell; Archie Herbert; Finlay Smyth; Ella Connelly; and Team Love Cheer
My Future, My Success Team
"A Difference in MY Community" - Pat Munro Foundation, Social Enterprise Academy, Invergordon Academy and Alness Academy

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

5. **Highland Attainment Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuileachadh is Choileanadh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd**

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement to the effect that he had a connection to this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/9/22 dated 18 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that the previous item had demonstrated the breadth of experience and skills development in Highland schools. Attainment, which was important at every level, had been topical in recent times and the Council had made a strong commitment to improving attainment at all levels and looking at improvement in a Covid-free environment which allowed a degree of normality to return to schools.

The report clearly showed the work taking place and the positive results that had come from this work which would continue as the Raising Attainment Action Plan that was included in the report was implemented.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the pre-meeting with Opposition Members at which the report had been discussed in detail;
- the improvement in literacy and numeracy attainment at P1, P4 and P7 levels was welcomed. However, it was understood this was due to a quality assurance programme being rolled out across Highland. Whilst this was important it was very much about how teachers assessed, and what Members would like to see was a Highland-wide strategy with details of the content of the literacy and numeracy lessons being delivered;
- it would be helpful to provide more detail on literacy and numeracy in future attainment reports so the Committee fully understood what was happening;
- even with the improvement in performance, only 54% of P4 pupils and 59% of P7 pupils had attained literacy. These were sobering statistics which it was essential to improve upon, and it would be helpful for Members to come together cross-party and drill down into the issues. In that regard, it was confirmed that Member workshops could be provided on the work taking place on literacy and numeracy attainment, and the Chair suggested it would be helpful to have a workshop on formative and summative assessment so there was an understanding of the difference;
- there was much to be proud of, and Members were confident that further improvement could be driven;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the order of the figures in the table on page 4 of the papers;
- in general, when comparing the national and Highland statistics, Highland's position had not changed in that it was still in the bottom quartile. A target had previously been set to get up to the top quartile, and information was sought, and provided, as to what made the Raising Attainment Action Plan appended to the report different to the Action Plans that had come before it and how it was going to deliver results when others had not;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, regarding the process of validation, quality assurance and adjustment that would take place during the analysis of the national data, as referred to in section 4.1 of the report;
- further to the earlier comment regarding the need for a strategy, it was highlighted that the Emerging Literacy programme was explained in quite a lot of detail in the report;
- the previous year had been the most challenging in schools since the pandemic had begun, and tribute was paid to teachers and school staff for their efforts;

- it was queried whether the return to schools and nurseries had made a big difference in terms of the transition from nursery to P1 due to children having more social skills and being more ready for school;
- a model was emerging that was much more bottom up than top down, and there was more of a focus on the Associated School Group (ASG) model for improvement which was strategic and different to what had come before. The report was promising, and Head Teachers were confident they were able to work together as an ASG to achieve the improvements needed but it would take a long time;
- Fortrose Academy was commended for its spectacular senior phase results in the current year;
- it was necessary to increase the pace of the improvement journey and close the attainment gap between Highland and other local authorities;
- officers had indicated that Highland had previously been marking to a higher standard than the national level, and it would be helpful to understand why that decision had been taken and what the implications were moving forward;
- in terms of reporting, it would be helpful to exclude Highland from the national results, if possible, to show the true gap between Highland and the national situation;
- during the previous cost of living crisis there had been a surge in university admissions because people could not find employment. If that happened again, Highland needed to improve its position in terms of attainment or young people from Highland would not be selected;
- it would be useful to understand the top five Key Performance Indicators officers looked at on a regular basis to see whether attainment was improving, and it was queried whether they could be shared with the Committee or built in to one of the proposed workshops;
- attainment was so important that all Councillors needed to discuss it and it was suggested there should be an item at full Council. However, other Members commented that the Education Committee had strategic responsibility for education and all Members of the Council could attend the Committee and contribute to the debate on attainment. It was suggested that non-Members should be encouraged to attend via Teams which enabled participation without any travelling or expenses being incurred;
- the most critical thing was that officers had identified a pathway to recovery which would be monitored, scrutinised and supported, and it was necessary to work together to ensure young people were getting every advantage and support those tasked with delivering improvement;
- the proposed workshops were welcomed and would provide a base of knowledge that would assist Members when answering questions from constituents or the press;
- Highland had been fortunate in that pupils had had Chromebooks to work with during the pandemic. However, some had not been as dedicated to using them as others; and
- Highland differed from other Scottish local authorities due to its largely rural nature and the associated number of small schools.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the initial attainment report;
- ii. **NOTED** the key successes, areas of progress and action being taken by schools and the Education Service to improve pupil attainment during the current school session 2021-22 and planned for session 2022-23;

- iii. **APPROVED** the actions and key areas of focus as part of the development of a Raising Attainment Strategy focused on improving outcomes for all;
- iv. **AGREED** that a further attainment paper with more detailed analysis of SQA attainment data following publication of national attainment information be brought to the November Committee;
- v. **AGREED** that analysis of the Broad General attainment be brought to the February Committee following release of the national data in December 2022; and
- vi. **AGREED** that Member workshops be arranged on formative and summative assessment and the work taking place on literacy and numeracy attainment.

6. Presentation – Collaborative Leads – Supporting our Schools to Improve Outcomes

Taisbeanadh – Stiùirichean Co-obrachaidh – A’ Toirt Taic dha na Sgoiltean Againn gus Builean a Leasachadh

In introducing the item, the Chair commented that to deliver on both attainment and the Service Plan the Council needed staff supporting its schools and teachers. To that end, there were nine Collaborative Lead Officers who supported primary schools, secondary schools and ELC settings across Highland. They worked with Head Teachers to implement strategies designed to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people. They managed the Quality Improvement Framework and ensured that Head Teachers and school staff collaborated on their school improvement agendas. Each Collaborative Lead Officer had a cross-phase, pan-Highland, strategic remit. The remits were: Literacy; Numeracy; Health and Wellbeing; ELC; Additional Support for Learning; Self-Evaluation; Curriculum; Assessment and Moderation; and Closing the Poverty-Related Attainment Gap.

To give Members a better understanding of the work of the Collaborative Leads a presentation would follow focussing on their role in delivering the Raising Attainment Action Plan and how they would be implementing rigorous and integrated quality assurance systems that effectively supported and challenged schools to improve; improving the quality and consistency of learning, teaching and assessment; and ensuring there was effective use of data.

He then introduced Ms M Beaton and Ms F Jamieson, Collaborative Lead Officers for Literacy and Assessment and Moderation respectively, who gave a presentation as described.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- based on feedback from Head Teachers, the Collaborative Lead Officer model seemed to be working and Head Teachers felt well supported;
- information was sought, and provided, on the proposed numeracy project which it was confirmed was across five ASGs, primary and secondary, and would provide some standardisation in terms of teaching/what was being taught;
- the Collaborative Lead Officer model and strategic action plan were welcomed. Members needed to be on board, and information was sought, and provided, in terms of what was needed to support the process, whether all staff were in place and whether there were enough of them, how often Collaborative Lead Officers would be going into schools and speaking to Head Teachers, and how much could be expected to come from the initiative;
- it was important to ensure there was no additional bureaucracy or red tape; and

- in terms of whether the model was a step change, the Chair explained that it was an evolving process, Collaborative Lead Officers having been preceded by Quality Improvement Teams. In terms of support, he explained that there would be peer support and support from Education Scotland as well as self-evaluation.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

**7. Education and Learning Draft Directorate Service Plan 2022/23
Dreachd Phlana Seirbheis an Fhoghlaim agus an Ionnsachaidh**

Declaration of Interest: Mrs M Reid declared an interest in this item as a commissioned partner of The Highland Council who would be affected by ELC partner funded rates and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for this item.

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement to the effect that he had a connection to this item as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/22 dated 17 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- with reference to the importance of play, and especially outdoor play, to health and wellbeing, information was sought, and provided, on why new schools were provided with play equipment through the capital plan, while existing schools did not have a budget for play equipment. Concern had been expressed about this by the parent councils of Dingwall and Ben Wyvis Primary Schools, who had been informed that they would be required to fund raise to obtain new play equipment. It was hoped strategic solutions could be found through partnership working and that play be included in the final plan;
- in response to a question, it was explained that a new SEEMiS (Management Information System for school data) for Early Years was due to go live in August 2023. There were plans to upgrade the existing school SEEMiS but no target dates for this had been decided and it was likely to be a few years away;
- the focus on cultural change and improving the use of positive language in schools in relation to mental health was welcomed; and
- it was important to seek and utilise meaningful stakeholder feedback and work in a collaborative partnership. In relation to Priority 1.3, 'Addressing poverty related attainment gap', third sector organisations would welcome the opportunity to work on this in partnership with schools.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the draft Directorate Service Plan for 2022/23;
- ii. **AGREED** that play be included in the final plan prior to it being presented to the Committee in November;
- iii. **NOTED** that the draft plan would be subject to review following the approval of a new Council Programme and Corporate Plan and completion of development work outlined in section 5 of the report.

8. Developing a Whole Systems Approach to Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing for our Children and Young People

A' Leasachadh Dòigh-obrach Shìostaman Iomlan airson Taic a thoirt do Shlàinte Intinn is Sunnd airson ar Cloinne agus ar Daoine Òga

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement to the effect that he had a connection to this item as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/22 dated 17 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- three key impacts on mental health and wellbeing highlighted were the cost of living crisis, COVID and issues around welcoming Ukrainian children into Highland schools, many of whom had experienced trauma;
- the whole system approach was welcomed and the links between attainment and mental health and wellbeing were highlighted. Attention was drawn to the value of paragraph 3.5 in the report which summarised the risks of not adopting a whole system approach;
- it was hoped the contribution of third sector organisations towards wellbeing and tackling poverty-related issues would be covered in future reports;
- in relation to counselling in schools, this could be requested by pupils, as well as by school staff and parents. It was preferable if staff or parents could be made aware of possible solutions that might come up during counselling sessions, but only if this would not breach confidentiality requirements;
- assurance was sought, and provided, that recent trauma training provided to PSAs would be extended to all school staff, and information was provided on plans for the roll out of this;
- it was important to engage with children and young people who were not attending school on a regular basis, and to work with partners other than schools. Information was provided on work being undertaken with third sector organisations, Community Planning Partnerships, community psychologists and NHS based professionals, especially at local level. It was essential that conversations that took place with children and young people were meaningful and appropriate;
- attention was drawn to the increasing numbers of young people affected by the impact of the cost of living crisis on their parents or carers. It was worrying that rising interest rates would lead to increases in home repossessions and exacerbate the housing crisis, which could be particularly difficult in remote and rural areas, where alternative housing was scarce. Interventions were required to assist young people in this situation and this might include providing training for a system of peer support. Further discussion on this topic was urged;
- it was important children and young people could approach teachers or other professionals without fear of being judged. It was suggested that young people in such circumstances should have options on who to approach to seek assistance with their mental health and wellbeing. It was hoped professionals would develop appropriate listening and advisory skills to facilitate open and trusting communication; and

- it was vital the Council prepared for the challenges ahead in relation to the cost of living crisis and developed a holistic approach to wellbeing.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the range and scope of the work undertaken by the Highland Council Psychological Services in supporting a whole systems approach to mental health and wellbeing for children and young people;
- ii. **NOTED** the development of a framework for self-evaluation in relation to wellbeing that could support schools in their work on creating a positive ethos;
- iii. **AGREED** to promote the use of the website created for parents/carers, pupils and practitioners in Highland to support mental health and wellbeing: <https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/>
- iv. **NOTED** the progress made on embedding a school counselling service across Highland and the data gathered to date in relation to this service;
- v. **NOTED** the training available in relation to Promoting Positive Relationships, Mental Health Awareness and Becoming Trauma Informed and **AGREED** to signpost this as appropriate to schools and services within communities;
- vi. **NOTED** the direct work undertaken by psychological services in supporting children and young people and the feedback received from service users (including children and young people);
- vii. **NOTED** the next steps suggested to support this area of development in schools and early learning and childcare settings and the provision of specialist support for children and young people; and
- viii. **AGREED** to become aware and familiar with the Improvement Service document "Elected Member Briefing Note – Trauma is Everybody's Business".

9. Presentation – How has our Wellbeing Curriculum contributed to our Improvement in Outcomes at Fortrose Academy
Taisbeanadh – Ciamar a tha an Curraicealam Sunnd againn air cur ri Leasachadh nam Builean againn aig Acadamaidh na Cananaich

Members of Fortrose Academy community gave a presentation outlining their wellbeing journey to support the raising of attainment and achievement.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- congratulations were expressed to the Fortrose Academy representatives and pupils for their remarkable achievements and excellent presentations;
- it was welcomed the school programme to identify and assist pupils who required additional support on an individual basis to assist them to perform to their full potential;
- Members commended the Head of Fortrose Academy for balancing wellbeing and attainment during their tenure, and in supporting staff and pupils in a remarkable way; and
- it was acknowledged that young persons had thrived with support from within their local community. In addition, thanks were expressed to previous Black Isle Councillors who assisted the local community and played vital roles in setting up the Youth Club.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

10. Consultation on the proposed merger of UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI West Highland
Co-chomhairle mun mholadh UHI na Gàidhealtachd a Tuath, UHI Innse Gall agus UHI na Gàidhealtachd an Iar a thoirt còmhla

The three UHI colleges had formally launched a 10-week public consultation on this strategic development which would end on 14 October 2022. Due to the late Queen's funeral and subsequent change of committee date, the presentation could not go ahead as planned. A copy of the presentation and links to enable Members to take part in the online survey would be sent out after Committee, and another presentation would be planned for the next Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

11. Revenue Budget Monitoring – Final Outturn for 2021-22 and Quarter 1 Forecast for 2022-23
Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach airson 2021-22 agus Ro-aithris Cairteil 1 airson 2022-23

Declaration of Interest: Mrs M Reid declared an interest in this item as a commissioned partner of The Highland Council who would be affected by ELC partner funded rates and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for this item.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/22 dated 17 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- regarding the briefing session for ELC providers, it was questioned what information the session would contain and discuss. In response the Chair confirmed that the Chief Executive would discuss this subject with Partners that afternoon;
- as the 2022/23 financial budget expenditure appeared optimistic, Members queried if there was a corporate contingency being held for the 2022/23 financial year. It was suggested that financial monitoring statements for the end of July and August 2022 should be made available to Members. In this regard it was confirmed that a further briefing would be provided out with the Committee;
- in relation to the education and monitoring statement 2022, there was a predicted increase of underspend for ELC. In this regard it was questioned if the underspend could be used to increase partner rates;
- Members felt the ELC provision should be discussed in further detail at full Council; and
- it was confirmed that a school hostel was also referred to as a school residence and these provisions provided term time midweek accommodation for students from outlying communities. In this regard it was queried if school hostel provisions could be rented out during the tourist season to generate income.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the final out-turn for the 2021/22 financial year, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;

- ii. the forecast revenue position for Quarter 1 of the 2022/23 financial year, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report;
- iii. there were significant risks and uncertainties relating to current financial year forecasts, relating to pay award, inflation and other pressures; and
- iv. the progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery as set out in Appendix 3 of the report.

12. Review of the statutory consultation exercise on the relocation of St Clement's School, Dingwall
Ath-sgrùdadh air Obair Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail airson Sgoil Naoimh Chliamhainn

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/22 dated 1 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

Members welcomed the move forward with replacing St Clement's School and that, as agreed at Full Council the previous week, it was to be included as one of the projects put forward for the funding from the Scottish Government's Learning Estate Improvement Programme 3. The local community had been lobbying for a new school for years and the pupils were excited to see what the future held.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that St Clement's School be re-located to the site off Dochcarty Brae to allow the construction of a new school building.

13. Review of the statutory consultation exercise on the establishment of a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Glenurquhart Primary School
Ath-sgrùdadh air Obair Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail airson Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig a stèidheachadh airson Bun-Sgoil Ghlinn Urchadain

There had been circulated Report No EDU/14/22 dated 17 August 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that a Gaelic Medium catchment area be created for Glenurquhart Primary School on the basis set out at paragraph 1.2 of the report.

14. Review of the statutory consultation exercise on the closure of Roy Bridge Primary School
Ath-sgrùdadh air Obair Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail mu dhùnadh foirmeil Bun-Sgoil Dhrochaid Ruaidh

Declaration of Interest: Mr W Skene declared an interest in this item as a local resident who had had a family connection to Roy Bridge Primary School and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for this item.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- despite having been mothballed, there were reports that lights had been seen on in the demountable units and it was queried what process was in place, when schools were mothballed, to ensure they were properly closed. In response, the

Chair reminded Members that even when a school was mothballed there were still on-going checks and maintenance required;

- it was hoped that local communities could be encouraged to use mothballed schools;
- although there was no parental demand for the school, the local community had not wanted to see the school closed. The Council needed to be mindful of this in the process; and
- there was a multi-use games area adjacent to the school in quite good condition and it was hoped this could continue to be used by the community.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it discontinue education at Roy Bridge Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.

15. Appointments to Other Bodies Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean Eile

i. Food and Health in Schools Group Biadh agus Slàinte ann am Buidhnean Sgoiltean

The Food and Health in Schools Group had replaced the former School Meals Stakeholder Group which had been in place between 2011 and 2015. The Group now covered a broader remit about overall child health and healthy eating and made recommendations on food, nutrition and health policies for pupils and staff in Highland schools.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms S Atkin and Mrs P Munro to the Food and Health in Schools Group.

ii. Highland Disability Sport Spòrs Chiorramach na Gàidhealtachd

Highland Disability Sport co-ordinated all activities in sport and leisure in the Highlands for individuals with physical, learning or sensory disabilities. They arranged sporting activities Highland-wide and encouraged people to participate and compete, regardless of their ability or age, in various sports such as athletics, badminton, boccia, bowling, football, golf, swimming and ten pin bowling.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms B Campbell, Mr A Jarvie and Mrs M Reid to Highland Disability Sport.

iii. Highland Football Academy Trust Urras Acadamaidh Ball-coise na Gàidhealtachd

The Highland Football Academy Trust had three principal partners, namely, the Highland Council, Inverness Caledonian Thistle FC and Ross County FC. It provided leisure and sports recreation facilities to a wide range of groups and operated a Football Academy at Victoria Park, Dingwall, the Bught/Charleston areas of Inverness and such other alternative locations as the Trustees might determine.

- * The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms M Hutchison and **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that Mr G MacKenzie be appointed to the Highland Football Academy Trust.

**iv. SEEMiS Board of Management
Bòrd Stiùiridh SEEMiS**

SEEMiS Group was an Education Management Information System provider. It was a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) comprising all 32 Scottish local authorities. The Board of Management directed SEEMiS on behalf of the members of the LLP.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr D Millar to the SEEMiS Board of Management.

**16. Minutes of Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers
Geàrr-chunntas na Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail airson Thidsearan**

The draft Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 28 June 2022 were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 2.45 pm.

**The Highland Council
Pensions Committee and Pension Board**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Pensions Committee and Pension Board** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Friday 30 September 2022 at 10.30am.**

Present:

Pensions Committee

Mr C Ballance
Mr R Gale
Ms L Kraft
Mr D Louden
Mr T MacLennan
Mr P Oldham
Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Sinclair (remotely)

Pension Board

Mr C Munro, The Highland Council (remotely)
Mr K Macleod, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (substitute)
Ms E Johnston, GMB

Officials in attendance:

Mr E Foster, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources & Finance Service
Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance, Performance & Governance Service
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Performance & Governance
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance & Governance Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance & Governance Service

Also in attendance:-

Mr B Morris, Audit Director, Grant Thornton

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

Mr T MacLennan in the Chair

BUSINESS

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Lobban and Mr A MacDonald of the Pensions Committee, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr N MacDonald, Mr R Fea, Mr D MacSween and Mr D Main of the Pension Board.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 30 June 2022 had not been used in respect of this Committee.

**4. Governance Policy Statement 2022/23
Poileasaidh Riaghlaidh 2022/23**

There was circulated Report No. PC/9/22 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In particular, the regulatory framework for the Pension Scheme and the role of the Trustee was highlighted.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Highland Council Pension Fund Governance Policy Statement.

**5. Pension Fund Contributions and Administration
Tabhartasan agus Rianachd Maoin Peinnsein**

There was circulated Report No. PC/10/22 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

It was highlighted that an Annual Benefits Statement 2022 Newsletter had been circulated to Members of the Committee/Board. This contained information on annual allowances, pension scams and other information about the Pension Scheme.

Also, investment management costs were the largest part of the Pension Fund expenditure. These costs varied according to the value of assets in the Fund and represented circa 85% of the management costs of the Fund.

It was noted that Highlands and Islands Enterprise were to merge membership across other Local Government Pension Schemes and bring them into the Highland Pension Fund. This consolidation transfer would mean the assets and liabilities relating to those employees would transfer to the Highland Council Pension Fund. Highlands and Islands Enterprise's employer contribution rate to the Fund would be set accordingly to ensure they met all liabilities for their employees in the Pension Scheme.

In relation to Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs), this was available to Scheme members should they wish to pay additional contributions towards their pension. The provider for AVCs was Prudential who administered AVCs on behalf of the Pension Fund. There had been some administration issues with the new scheme, with it taking some time for members contributions to be shown in employees records and these issues had now been resolved.

It was highlighted that a cost of £50k in relation to the guaranteed minimum pension comparison exercise was a one off cost.

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

**6. Highland Council Pension Fund: Monitoring of Retirements
Maoin Peinnsein Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd: Sgrùdadh Cluaineis**

There was circulated Report No. PC/11/22 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In particular, in terms of ill health retirements there were two levels of award and this depended on the nature of the ill health. This would mean access to unreduced pension in certain circumstances and this cost would fall on the Pension Fund. This cost would be recovered through Employer contributions to the Fund.

In terms of redundancies, it was explained that when there was a redundancy there was a cost that was met by the Employer but this would be offset by the salary saving for the post. It was also highlighted that the number of voluntary redundancies for the Council and other Employers was at its highest level for 10 years and was reflective of the age of the workforce and other demographic changes.

It was requested that information on death in service benefits would be provided for Councillor T MacLennan.

The Committee **NOTED** the details of the retirements as outlined in the appendices to the report.

7. **Training Policy and Training Plan 2022/23** **Poileasaidh Trèanaidh agus Plana Trèanaidh 2022/23**

There was circulated Report No. PC/12/22 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The importance of training for Members on Pension Fund matters was stressed and there were a number of ways that this could be provided such as using online tools and this could be supplemented with specific training for Members. In particular, Members were encouraged to complete the self-assessment to identify particular areas Members felt they might need training and development. Thereafter, a number of training courses would be provided for Members covering different aspects of the Fund.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** and adopted the LGPS Skills and Knowledge Statement which had been updated in line with the CIPFA Knowledge and Skills framework (2021);
- ii. **NOTED** the assessment and training resources provided by The Pensions Regulator and the requirement for newly appointed Board and Committee members to complete induction training (section 6 and section 8);
- iii. **NOTED** the adoption of the CIPFA Local Pensions Boards Technical Knowledge and Skills framework (section 7), including the self-assessment matrix and the guide for local pension boards issued by CIPFA (section 9 and Appendix 2);
- iv. **NOTED** the training delivered to date on pension fund matters (Appendix 3);
- v. **AGREED** the training policy and programme for 2022/23 set out within the report (section 11); and
- vi. **NOTED** that details of individual attendance at Pensions Committee, Investment Committee and training would be reported in the Pension Fund Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2022/23 (section 12).

8. **Risk Management Update** **Fios às Ùr mu Rianachd Chunnairt**

There was circulated Report No. PC/13/22 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The report identified the most significant risks to the Pension Fund and in particular the risks on staffing for the Pension Fund was highlighted. This was a specialised area and there were challenges in staffing recruitment and retention. The Council was addressing this by training existing staff, but given the specialist nature of the job this did take some time.

In terms of staff retention, it was queried how the Council compared with the private sector in relation to wages and terms and conditions in the pension fund sector. It was explained that when staff were leaving it was for personal reasons rather than to do with wages and terms and conditions. There was no market for pension jobs in Highland and it was important that staff were paid appropriately for the skills and knowledge required in this specialised area. Therefore, the staffing structure and remuneration would be reviewed in order that the remuneration was sufficient to attract staff.

In terms of the funding risk on investment returns, currently there was significant volatility in investment markets and inflation was becoming a significant factor. It was emphasised that pension fund investments were for the long term and the value of the fund would increase and decrease over time depending on what was happening in investment markets. The Pension Fund had a good range of different investments and over the long term had delivered very good investment returns.

In relation to climate change and responsible investment risks these had become increasing areas of focus for the Fund. The Fund had a Responsible Investment Policy and a training session on this would be arranged for Members. Further, work would be undertaken to develop reporting on climate risk as part of the work to implement the Responsible Investment Policy.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated risk register extract and compliance with the Pension Fund Regulator requirements.

9. Internal Audit In-Sgrùdadh

9a Highland Council Pension Fund Internal Audit Annual Report 2021/22 Aithisg In-Sgrùdaidh Maoin Peinnsein Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd 2021/22

There was circulated Report No. PC/14/22 by the Corporate Audit Manager.

It was highlighted that the report included an assessment of the Pension Fund's framework of governance, risk management and control and the associated opinion which provided information for the Fund's Annual Governance Statement.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and the audit opinion provided.

9b Pension Fund Internal Audit Annual Plan 2022/23

There was circulated Report No. PC/15/22 by the Corporate Audit Manager, which provided the audits contained in the 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Internal Audit Annual Plan 2022/23.

**10. External Annual Audit
Sgrùdadh Bliadhnaidh on Taobh A-muigh**

**10a External Annual Audit Report to Members of the Pensions Committee and the Controller of Audit
Aithisg In-sgrùdaidh Bhliadhnaidh on Taobh A-muigh do Bhuill de Chomataidh nam Peinnsean agus Rianadair an Sgrùdaidh**

There was circulated Report No. PC/16/22 by the External Auditor, Grant Thornton.

It was highlighted that while the audit was largely complete some testing still required to be completed in relation to pooled investments in order to understand how these valuations had been obtained. Other than this there were no issues identified in relation to the Pension Fund accounts and no amendments made to the reported financial position. Once the testing referred to above had been completed the external audit opinion would be provided.

It was noted that one fund manager (BentallGreenOak) had a qualified opinion with their internal controls report to 31 December 2020. The report had been reviewed and the External Auditor was satisfied that the qualification did not have a direct impact on the controls around the investments held by the Pension Fund and would have no impact on the valuation of its investments. By way of clarification, it was explained that all of the Fund Managers reports were scrutinised to ensure the control environment was working effectively in the Fund. Where a qualified opinion had been issued, this meant that either the control environment had not been designed effectively or was not operating effectively. In terms of the qualified opinion given in the report, as this related to a matter out with the valuation of the Fund and the investment fund, assurance could be given that whilst management needs to address the deficiency in the control, it was not something to be concerned about in terms of the valuation of the Fund or the security of the underlying investments. The Fund Manager had provided an update on the action they were taking in relation to the qualification.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

**10b Letter of Representation 2021/22
Litir Riochdachaidh 2021/22**

There was circulated Report No. PC/17/22 a copy of the annual audit letter of representation 2021/22.

The Committee **AGREED** that the letter be signed on behalf of the Highland Council.

**10c Audited Accounts 2021/22
Cunntasan Sgrùdaichte 2021/22**

The Audited Statement of Accounts (Report No. PC/18/22) for the financial year 2021/22 was circulated.

The Accounts provided an overview of all matters relating to the Pension Fund.

It was highlighted that the Pension Fund was now in a position where it needed its investment returns to pay for its annual outgoings, as the Fund was now paying out

more, than it was receiving in contributions. The Fund was in a good financial position and there was currently no need to sell any investments to meet its liabilities as the annual return on investments was sufficient to meet annual outgoings.

In 2020/21 the return on investments was circa £526m and in 2021/22 the return was circa. £100m. It was explained that the significant difference in returns was due to 2020/21 being an exceptional year for the Fund's investment returns mainly in terms of strong growth in equity stocks.

It was noted that the Fund's management expenses had increased significantly in the last year. These mainly related to Investment Manager costs, which in the most part related to the value of the investment, so as the value of investments increased, so did management costs and if they reduced management costs should reduce accordingly.

In response to a query, the Fund's Statement of Investment Principles would be provided to Councillor P Oldham.

It was highlighted that over the last six years, there was only one year in which there had been a negative return on the Fund's investments, so the Fund had performed very well.

Further, in terms of the transfers in and out of the Fund over the last three years, more had been paid out than received. It was queried how long it was envisaged this would continue. It was explained that if more people were retiring, then there would be more outgoings for the Fund. Also, life expectancy and whether this would continue to increase or not had a bearing on outgoings. In terms of money coming into the Fund from active members, this would depend on the number of employees of the Council and other Employers in the Fund. There were financial challenges facing the Council which might result in a reduction in staff and if this happened the contributions from active members would reduce. However, the positive annual investment return of the Fund should continue to fund liabilities for the foreseeable future.

The Committee **APPROVED** the accounts.

11. Membership of Investment Sub Committee Ballrachd na Fo-Chomataidh Tasgaidh

The Committee **APPROVED** the membership of the Investment Sub-Committee as circulated in Report No. PC/19/22, subject to noting that Councillor C Ballance had been nominated by the SNP Group to take one of their places on the Sub Committee. The Membership was as follows:-

- Investment Sub-Committee (7 Highland Council Members (voting):

Mr D Loudon, SNP; Mr P Oldham, SNP; Mr C Ballance, Green;
Mr B Lobban and Mrs M Paterson, Highland Independents
Mr R Gale and Mr A MacDonald, Liberal Democrats

- One representative Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, (non-voting):

Mr N MacDonald

- One representative for the trade unions (non-voting):

Mrs E Johnston, GMB

The meeting ended at 11.50 a.m.