

**The Highland Council**  
**No. 6 2022/2023**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 27 October at 10.35 am.

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

**Present:**

Mr C Aitken (pm only)	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 W MacKay
Mr I Brown	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Bruce	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr M Cameron	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie	Mr T MacLennan
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Ms T Collier	Mrs B McAllister
Ms H Crawford	Ms J McEwan
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Millar
Mr J Finlayson	Mr C Munro
Mr D Fraser	Mrs P Munro
Mr L Fraser	Ms L Niven
Mr R Gale	Ms M Nolan
Mr K Gowans	Mr P Oldham
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Graham	Mrs M Reid
Mr D Gregg	Mr A Rhind (am only)
Mr R Gunn	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs J Hendry	Mr K Rosie
Ms M Hutchison	Mrs L Saggars
Mr A Jarvie	Mr A Sinclair
Mrs B Jarvie	Ms M Smith
Ms L Johnston	Mr R Stewart
Mr R Jones	Ms K Willis

**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 M Green, Mr A MacDonald, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr J McGillivray Mr H Morrison, Ms S Rawlings and Mr M Reiss.

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

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

Item 8: Ms B Jarvie and Mrs M Reid

and the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 7 (i): Ms L Johnston

Items 7(iii): Mr A Christie

Item 8: Mr A Christie, Mr K Gowans and Ms J Hendry

Item 11: Mr R Stewart

Item 12: Mr A Christie

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

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 22 September 2022 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

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

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

#### \*Education Committee 29 September 2022

\*Starred Item 12 – Review of the statutory consultation exercise on the relocation of St Clement's School, Dingwall – **AGREED** that St Clement's School be re-located to the site off Dochcarty Brae

\*Starred Item 13 - Review of the statutory consultation exercise on the establishment of a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Glenurquhart Primary School – **AGREED** that a Gaelic Medium catchment area be created for Glenurquhart Primary School on the basis set out at paragraph 1.2 of the report.

\*Starred Item 14 - Review of the statutory consultation exercise on the closure of Roy Bridge Primary School – **AGREED** that it discontinue education at Roy Bridge Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.

\*Starred Item 15.iii – Appointments to Other Bodies – **AGREED** that Mr G MacKenzie be appointed to the Highland Football Academy Trust

Minutes not included in the Volume were as follows -

- i. Investment Sub-Committee held on 21 October 2022 – **APPROVED** and **AGREED**, in relation to Duncraig Educational Trust Scheme 1999, that trust funds be invested with Adam & Co.
- ii. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 20 June 2022 (approved by the Board on 23 September 2022) **NOTED**.

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

The Council **AGREED**:-

- i. Ms S Atkin replace Mr B Lobban and Mrs McAllister replace Mr J Grafton on the Housing and Property Committee;
- ii. Mr A Christie replace Ms S Rawlings on the Education Committee; and
- iii. Mrs T Robertson replace Ms S Rawlings on the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee.

## **6. Question Time Àm Ceiste**

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

### **Public Questions**

#### **Ms C MacRae**

##### **To the Leader**

“Will Highland Council give the PVI sector a fair rate in line with funding they have received from The Scottish Government?”

The response had been circulated.

#### **Ms N Richards**

##### **To the Leader**

“What analysis has Highland Council undertaken to assess the impact upon working parents and carers in Highland in the event that ELC partners exit the 1140 hours provision due to failure of Highland Council to agree a mutually acceptable partner rate?”

The response had been circulated.

## **Member Questions**

### **(1) Mr A Christie**

#### **To the Leader**

“By vacant post please could you detail, explain and provide key statistics including the impact on service users for the Health and Social Care and Wellbeing Service as well as the Education Service for pupil support and specialist non-teaching staff in relation to the current situation on staff vacancies?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how it was possible that there would be no impact on service users from the seventy-five vacant posts.

In response, the Leader of the Council stated that he would come back to Mr Christie with further information in due course.

### **(2) Mr A Christie**

#### **To the Leader**

“With regard to the new Council Programme, at the September Council meeting we were informed that the final Programme would come back to Council for approval on 27th October following engagement with Members, staff and communities. The report to the September Council meeting defined this engagement as sessions with community groups and local engagement visits across Highland localities following September Council and into the first week of October. As at the 13th October I am not aware of any engagement sessions being in place, could the Leader update as to what is actually happening?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried in what broad general areas did the Leader of the Council think that the 6.9% saving targeted by the Administration could be made.

In response, the Leader of the Council deemed it inappropriate to give his personal opinion and stated the importance of listening to others and understanding the priorities and challenges in different areas.

### **(3) Ms J McEwan**

#### **To the Leader**

“With regard to expenditure on road maintenance could the Leader detail the amounts spent versus original budget differentiating between capital and revenue whilst using the Area Committees as geographic boundaries?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what could be done to alleviate problems caused by roads not being fit for purpose and the health and safety risks associated with this.

In response, the Leader of the Council stated that this was a problem that had been developing over a long period of time and that a remedy had been sought as part of a collaborative process over the past two years.

**(4) Ms K Willis**

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

“The EV charging network in Highland, although growing, continues to experience operational problems with many EV chargers, both old and new, regularly breaking down and often remaining out of service for extended periods. How does Council plan to improve maintenance and repair of EV chargers to increase confidence in the EV charging network in Highland?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what was the remaining 20%, in the data received, covering as it appeared there was not a plan for ongoing maintenance and repair.

In response, the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee stated that EV charging fell within the remit of the Climate Change Committee which was meeting on 3 November 2022. However, a full report would be considered at the next Economy and Infrastructure Committee to look at this in more detail and allow Members to contribute.

**(5) Mr R MacKintosh**

**To the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee**

“In 2019, Council agreed to ban glyphosate use in certain areas (all sports and recreation facilities) and to develop a business case for a complete ban on the use of glyphosate-containing products. Please can you provide an update on progress regarding development of the business case for a complete ban, including data on the quantity of glyphosate containing weed killers purchased and used by Council since January 2020?”

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(6) Mr R Gale**

**To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee**

“Following the Council’s decision on the 22nd of September to prevent Members from having access to printed copies of the papers, can you give details on when a full Display Screen Equipment assessment will be carried out on the desks, chairs, workspace, and lighting in the chamber to ensure that Members’ health does not suffer as a result of prolonged DSE use?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given the original answer only addressed obligations of the User and not the context of the question relating to chairs, workspace and lighting in the Chamber, it was queried if a Display Screen Equipment assessment would be arranged to be carried out in accordance with Health and Safety Executive guidance.

In response, the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee advised that this request would be discussed with Officers and a response provided to all Members.

**(7) Mr A Graham**

**To the Leader**

"What percentage of all Highland premises have access to the fibre network and what percentage are able to order superfast broadband speeds of 30mbps and above?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether the Administration thought it was good enough that one house in six in Highland did not yet have access to superfast broadband or fibre broadband.

In response, the Leader of the Council advised that there was a desire to see the whole of the Highland Council area provided with improved broadband and broadband efficiency.

**(8) Mr M Baird**

**To the Leader**

"Can the Leader confirm that the planned North West Sutherland Care Facility will receive a funding allocation by the Administration for building works to start in line with original projected dates?"

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(9) Mr C Aitken**

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

"Given the current roll pressures at existing secondary schools in Inverness, can the Chair give the Council a fixed timeline for construction of a new secondary school in the east of Inverness?"

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(10) Mrs H Crawford**

**To the Chair of the Education Committee**

"During the Early Years Briefing on 6th October 2022 in Chambers, a slide was presented entitled ELC Budget/Funding. It discloses the ScotGov ringfenced funding for ELC and it discloses the funding allocated to ELC from the Council's General Budget.

Why has Highland Council reduced the allocation for ELC provision from the General Budget from £15.6 million in 2017/18 to £6.8 million in 2022/23?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether, given there was confirmed ringfenced funding for the expansion element, was it fair on ELC partners that the Council had reduced the net budget contribution from £15.6m to £6.8m.

In response, the Chair of the Education Committee stated the services were being delivered within the required envelope, and that ELC were being funded appropriately using Council budget and the ringfenced funds from the Scottish Government.

**(11) Mrs I MacKenzie**

**To the Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee**

“It has been UK Malnutrition Awareness Week recently. Malnutrition is a key public health problem that has a significant impact on individuals' health and wellbeing and costs the NHS billions per year. It is often a silent and hidden issue, with low awareness amongst the public and health professionals. There are 1 in 10 older people who are at risk or have malnutrition in Scotland. Although we need less food/energy as we age, older people still need a nutrient rich diet. Since the onset of the pandemic this will have had a huge impact on health and social care services and third sector organisations. What measures can you take to improve this situation?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what would be done within Highland with the variety of relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of the prevalence, signs, symptoms and consequences of malnutrition in older people.

In response, the Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee confirmed that the Council would be working with all partners, including the Champions for Younger and Older People and Community Planning Partnerships to continue to disseminate relevant information.

**(12) Mr P Logue**

**To the Chair of the Education Committee**

“Highland Council receives ringfenced funding from the Scottish Government to enable it to fully fund the provision of the Scottish Government's 1140 early learning and childcare policy. Is it your understanding that this ring-fenced funding is intended to cover the full cost of the implementation of said policy or is it intended to cover the cost of the additional 540 hours element?”

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(13) Ms M Nolan**

**To the Leader**

“Will the Leader of the Council confirm that a new campus for Park Primary School will remain a priority in the Administration's Capital Programme in the event that the Highland Council's LEIP bid is unsuccessful?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question the timeline for rebuilding Park Primary School was queried.

In response, the Leader of the Council indicated an absolute timeline could not be given but confirmed that the Council would try and deliver on those commitments within the Capital Programme.

**(14) Mr A Jarvie**

**To the Chair of the Education Committee**

“What would the budget shortfall be, or how would the Council deliver 1140 hours of childcare on a budget of £5.43 per child an hour?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was indicated that the Council’s equivalent budget was more than £5.43 per child per hour and it was queried if the Council could run the service itself for that budget.

In response, the Chair of the Education Committee confirmed that ELC had many other overheads and Highland was a diverse community therefore the costs of delivering ELC across Highland varied.

**(15) Mrs A MacLean**

**To the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee**

“At a meeting of The Highland Council on 22 September 2022, Councillors approved the creation of a Highland-wide grant fund of up to £450,000 to help alleviate the cost-of-living crisis for vulnerable households through community-led initiatives.

Third Sector voluntary and community organisations are invited to apply for grants under the value of £10,000.

The Council launched this fund on World Health Day as we recognise the marked impact that the cost-of-living crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and wider global factors are having on everyone’s health. In addition to the provision of food, we are encouraging community groups to use this funding to provide practical solutions that will help protect our vulnerable residents’ physical and mental health. The supports being provided by voluntary and community groups with this grant funding must complete before the end of June 2023 where practicable. Applicants must demonstrate that they will achieve one or more of the following:

- provide community support initiatives that provide food/activities;
- enhance existing provision through extending local hours or introducing/increasing food provision;
- adapt existing provision to meet identified local needs;
- strengthen or establish food larders or food table provision.

Application forms are available from [www.highland.gov.uk/costoflivinggrant](http://www.highland.gov.uk/costoflivinggrant) and should be submitted by email to [policy6@highland.gov.uk](mailto:policy6@highland.gov.uk) with applicants encouraged to contact their Ward Manager for advice and guidance in advance of applying as this could help progress applications quickly.

I welcome the introduction of this grant funding as it will make a huge difference to our local communities. However, since its launch there have been a number of questions raised with me that I would seek clarification on which I am unable to find in the online guidelines. Given that Highland Council is committed to the Community Empowerment Act and that decisions should be



taken as close as possible to the communities that are affected and that the application is an amended ward discretionary budget form –

What role with local Councillors have in deciding which of their local community groups are successful in receiving funding?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if this fund happened again, would the Council be looking for lived experience being involved in the decision-making rather than just Council officials.

In response, the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee confirmed that, if there was a recurrence of this particular fund, that he would be willing to consider this if time permitted.

**(16) Mr J Bruce**

**To the Chair of the Education Committee**

“In the event that the Highland Council is unable to agree a mutually acceptable rate with our ELC partners, what third party dispute resolution provision exists to enable independent, third party arbitration in this matter?”

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

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

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

- (i) “Carers Rights Day is on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022 and aims to ensure carers are aware of their rights, the help and support that is available to them and promote the needs of carers.

**Transparency Statement: Ms L Johnston made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item on the basis of her employment in giving support to unpaid carers. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

This Council meeting notes that:

- Carers – young and old, paid and unpaid whether in receipt of Carers Allowance and Carers Supplement or not do a truly remarkable and vital job. They are an integral part of our Highland community. They deserve our thanks and support, but are far too often forgotten, ignored and unrecognised.
- Carers across the country face big challenges every single day, challenges that have been made even harder by the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis. Most are having to spend more time looking after loved ones as we emerge from the pandemic and many haven’t been able to take a single break since it started and as a consequence are simply exhausted.
- Life changing events requiring care interventions can happen suddenly with little or no warning. Often the care givers have to reduce their working hours or give up work totally to adapt and cope with competing demands.
- The pressures on young carers can negatively impact on their experiences and outcomes in education, having a lasting effect on their life chances.

- All too often carers are unaware of their entitlement to financial support, a carers' assessment or break, and the support services available.
- A significant number of full-time unpaid working-age carers in across Highland rely on Carer's Allowance.
- At just £69.70 a week, Carer's Allowance is totally inadequate.
- Many unpaid carers are facing extreme financial hardship brought on by the cost of living crisis. A recent survey by Carers UK found that Just under half (45%) of unpaid carers reported that they are currently unable to manage their monthly expenses and that any further increases in energy bills will negatively affect their own physical and mental health or that of the person they care for. They are often relying on foodbanks to feed themselves and the people they care for.
- The Carers UK survey found that 43% of carers felt that a rise in Carer's Allowance would help them, given the financial pressures they are facing.

Council resolves to:

- Recognising the importance of embracing the culture and aims of being a Carer Friendly Organisation and Council and undertakes to bring a detailed report to the March meeting of Council on how this can be achieved with support from the Community Planning Partner Organisations.
- Asks the Chief Executive to ensure that Highland Carers are made aware of Carers Rights Day and also made aware of existing support that is available including improving the information available through the council's own website and other resources.
- Write to the Chancellor requesting an increase Carer's Allowance and other benefits so they rise in line with current inflation predictions.
- Write to the Scottish Government and UK Government requesting an immediate extension of the Warm Home Discount scheme to ensure that it include carers on the lowest incomes. This would recognise the additional energy costs often faced by unpaid carers and provide targeted support to those most in need.
- That COSLA be lobbied with a view to achieving a campaign to see a rise in the earnings limit for those claiming Carer's Allowance, so that it is at least equal to 16 hours work at the National Living Wage."

Signed: Ron Gunn                      Alasdair Christie      Richard Gale  
                  Angela MacLean      David Gregg              Trish Robertson

Ms L Johnston suggested the following amendment: to note that Connecting Carers are commissioned by NHS Highland to provide Carer Services across Highland and welcomes the fact that the organisation is holding a series of public open sessions and online events to mark Carers Rights Day on 24th November.

While initially Ms Johnston proposed that her amendment replace the original motion, in response to several Members speaking against this proposal, and suggesting that the amendment was not incompatible with the motion, Ms Johnston and Mr Gunn both agreed to the amendment being amalgamated into the original motion.

Other points raised during discussion included the following:

- the contribution made to society by both paid and unpaid carers was commended, and attention was drawn to the rising number of carers, largely due to the increasing pressures on Adult Social Care. It was important to improve career opportunities for carers and to support the social care sector to future-proof their services;
- the particular needs of young carers were highlighted and should be appropriately funded; and
- attention was drawn to the value of an organisation such as the Council having a carers' register for staff who were carers, to support them in their duties.

## Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the amended Notice of Motion as detailed, with the addition of Ms Johnston's amendment to note that Connecting Carers were commissioned by NHS Highland to provide Carer Services across Highland and welcomed the fact that the organisation was holding a series of public open sessions and online events to mark Carers Rights Day on 24 November 2022.

### (ii) "Energy Crisis

Following the refusal of the Westminster Government to offer any advice to UK residents to help reduce their energy bills, Highland Council;

Regrets that no action is being taken to recoup some of the vast profits being made this year by energy companies;

Notes that the cost of generating renewable energy is the same this year as last year;

Notes that there are more opportunities for households to receive energy advice in Scotland than in England;

Agrees that Highland Council should provide an information campaign over the next four months to advise households of ways of reducing energy bills and to give sources of advice in the Highlands on how to do this, through social media, the press, and information for councillors to disseminate,

And requests that all relevant officers take immediate action to reduce energy use and maximise energy efficiency across the Highland Council buildings estate and report back on progress to Properties and Housing Committee."

Signed: Chris Balance            Kate Willis

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- disappointment was expressed at the lack of government financial help towards energy efficiency with neither of the two Energy statements received from Westminster in 2022 mentioning it;
- many constituents would face poverty this winter in cold homes and the Council had to work towards alleviating that by ensuring residents had access to information to reduce their energy bills;
- Highland Council currently spent around £15m per annum on fuel bills and predictions were that this would increase by £8m over the next 2-3 years. By turning heating down by one degree and/or fixing faulty radiator valves it would help to reduce costs and enable the Highland Council to contribute towards minimising climate change;
- the accuracy of statements contained in the first four paragraphs was questioned;
- the Motion reinforced much of the hard work already underway in the Council;
- Scotland – and particularly Highland – produced a lot of energy and yet this was unable to be put on the grid and this had been raised with Senior Government Ministers and Ofgem. It was disappointing that such Motions had to come forward to support the population of the Highlands and the Leader undertook to raise this issue with the UK Government; and
- to demonstrate the help available from the Welfare team within the Council it was proposed that this form part of the Motion.

## **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion – subject to the deletion of the first four paragraphs and the addition of the following information highlighting the support and information the Council’s Welfare team offered:-

Contact Highland Council's Welfare Team:

Tel: 0800 090 1004

Email: [welfare.support@highland.gov.uk](mailto:welfare.support@highland.gov.uk)

### **Energy Advice**

- Home Energy Scotland
- Energy Advice Scotland
- Energyadvice.scot
- Citizens Advice

### **Welfare Advice**

- Welfare Support Team
- Citizens Advice

### **Money/Debt advice**

- Citizens Advice
- Stepchange
- Christians Against Poverty

### **Housing Advice**

- Shelter
- Citizens Advice

### **Access to Food**

Localised advice on food access in each service user's area.

(iii) “The new Belford Hospital was opened in 1965; 47 years ago.

**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.**

In 2006, following the Kerr report, the Belford was designated a ‘Rural General Hospital’. In November 2009 the surgical and medical wards were merged to form a combined assessment unit.

In 2015 the site for a new hospital was purchased by Highland Council. The announcement stated that this “would be the site of a new hospital to replace the crumbling Belford in Fort William which is Scotland’s busiest rural general and the main centre for mountain trauma.”

In 2017 – then Health Secretary Shona Robinson said – “The work on a planned new hospital in Fort William is progressing.”

Recently it was revealed by the Scottish Government that the Belford Hospital is not on the current Capital Programme which takes us up to 2026.

Council recognises:

The period of time that has passed since the idea of a new hospital was first discussed and the discouraging effect this delay may have had on the communities which are relying on this.

The excellent work that has been done by the stakeholder group to deliver a project of this size and importance to the area which will greatly improve health outcomes for all residents.

The only clear way that Lochaber communities can be assured that the hospital is going to become a reality and provide upgraded health facilities is through a clear statement from the Scottish Government.

To progress the project it is agreed that:

Council will write to Scottish Government requesting that the building of the new Belford Hospital is included in the current programme of capital projects. That an update report be provided at an early meeting of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee.”

Signed: John Grafton                  Ron Gunn

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in moving the terms of the Notice of Motion, reference was made to the fact that there had not been progress with the building of the new Belford Hospital in the seven years since the Council had purchased the site. The Scottish Government had approved the building and the NHS Highland Project Design Board had been progressing the work, which had included undertaking detailed consultation and engagement, and it was anticipated that this work would be concluded by 2025 which was one year prior to the end of Government’s current Capital Programme to the period to 2026. There was a need for the building of the new Belford Hospital to be included in the Government’s current Capital Programme and thus give assurance to the people undertaking the work and the local community that the project was coming to fruition. Support was therefore urged for the motion;
- it was acknowledged that many local residents must feel disappointed that this Capital Project had not been further progressed. Raigmore Hospital was at capacity and there was a desire for NHS Highland to use rural hospitals to alleviate pressures. A new hospital in Fort William would help with this. A quote was read out from the Health Secretary indicating that the Scottish Government recognised the challenges facing remote and rural Health Boards and worked to ensure services were developed in a flexible way whilst recognising local population needs and geographical challenges;
- the Belford Hospital was very old fashioned and antiquated. Concern was expressed at the message this portrayed to tourists who generated over £60m to the local Lochaber economy. Support was expressed for the motion and the need for a modern hospital prior to 2026;
- this was not just about building a new hospital but about reorganising the health services in Fort William. This was a very ambitious project. It was explained that the project was currently at the design stage but it was acknowledged that progress had been slow. There was a need to engage in order to ascertain how the project could be accelerated and seek regular updates from NHS Highland on the business model. Whilst being sympathetic to the aims of the Motion, it was suggested that the Motion was premature as the project was not yet ready for the capital stage, therefore, an amendment was put forward;
- support was expressed for the amendment during which it was indicated that the priorities for health service development were improved services for prevention and long term care for the chronically ill. However, there was a need to maintain treatment and diagnostic services to modern standards. The developments in diagnosis and treatment had led to increased demand for services which caused delays/waiting lists. It was suggested that the way forward was not large scale general hospitals but to have smaller diagnostic and treatment centres within local communities with online support to specialist consultants and a smaller hospital for accident and emergencies. It was hoped this could be achieved over time but,

to make this a success, attention was drawn to the need for more health professionals in Highland and growing our own;

- further information was provided on the background to the project during which it was indicated that initially the hospital was going to be relocated to Oban until the geography of the wider area for which it served was highlighted. It was also indicated that Fort William and Lochaber was the outdoor capital of the UK and population levels trebled due to the high volume of visitors to the area;
- it was acknowledged that, although very experienced in trauma care, the current hospital was particularly outdated. The Council was commended for its foresight in securing the site for the new hospital and the development opportunities that would arise for the old site once the new hospital was built were highlighted. Tribute was paid to the local stakeholder group for their diligent and steadfast efforts and in view of their progress to date, it was felt that they should be entrusted to bring the project to fruition;
- reference was made to the need for more collaborative working and further information was sought on the role of the agency working through the Community Planning Partnership. Also, the amendment made reference to Members working with partners and it was queried who these Members would be and if the amendment was a duplication of work that was already undertaken by the Council;
- the frustration to bring the new Belford Hospital to completion was recognised and there was common cause for the communities of Caithness, Lochaber and Skye and Rassay to support each other in regard to health care provision. The Belford Hospital also supported residents in the wider west Highland area of Skye and Rassay. However, it was felt that the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee should be kept informed of progress and scrutinise NHS Highland's redesign of health care services. The mutual benefits of doing this were highlighted;
- the wording of the Motion and Amendment were very similar in terms of sentiment and outcome. It was felt that the final paragraph of the Motion, to ensure the project was included in the Scottish Government's Capital Programme, was key and it was suggested that the Motion and Amendment should be combined so the Council had a unified position. However, the proposer of the Amendment was not supportive of this approach;
- it had taken Caithness a very long time to secure investment for two new health care facilities and redesign of the local hospital services. It was felt that asking the Scottish Government to add the building of the new Belford Hospital to the Capital Programme was not an effective way forward. It was explained that it was the work of the local stakeholder group and they process that they had followed that had been key to getting the project recognised and achieving qualification from the Scottish Government for investment funding.

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

Ms S Fanet, seconded by Dr C Birt, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that Council agree that Members would work as partners with NHS Highland consultees and stakeholders and request regular updates on the progress of the business model which was key to delivering and securing funding for this project currently referred to as "The New Belford" in Fort William.

Council noted that more clarifications and guidance were expected to emerge from future discussions including a meeting scheduled on 1 November in Fort William which the Vice Chair of the Health and Well-being Committee would be attending.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 25 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 38 votes, with no 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, Mrs H Crawford, 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 W MacKay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Siggers, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith and Mr R Stewart.

## **For the Amendment**

Ms S Aitkin, Mr A Baldrey, 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 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 Louden, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr C Munro, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie and Ms K Willis.

## **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** that Members would work as partners with NHS Highland consultees and stakeholders and request regular updates on the progress of the business model which was key to delivering and securing funding for this project currently referred to as "The New Belford" in Fort William.

Council noted that more clarifications and guidance were expected to emerge from future discussions including a meeting scheduled on 1 November 2022 in Fort William which the Vice Chair of the Health and Well-being Committee would be attending.

**(iv)** "The A9 north is the main arterial route to and from Caithness. In recent weeks there have been two consecutive days when the road between Brora and Helmsdale has been closed for more than 6 hours due to life threatening accidents. This stretch of road consists of many blind bends and a narrow bridge that cannot accommodate two commercial vehicles and as such has a high accident rate.

To be clear, the closing of this road results in the virtual isolation of the north from Helmsdale to Wick, Thurso and indeed Orkney as there are no practical means of diversion. The result is that essential services cannot reach their destinations in either direction.

The A9, Scotland's second most dangerous road and part of the NC 500, is very busy with tourists and locals.

There are over 6000 appointments in Raigmore for Caithness residents each year, which is an average of 24 appointments per day and in this scenario that equates to 48 people who could not attend their appointment, many of which may have involved a wait of more than a year to get.

The Scottish Ambulance Service have over 500 patient transfers a year between Wick and Inverness. That's more than one trip a day and these are patients who need transportation in an Ambulance often requiring a 'blue light' journey.

Wick has a CMU (maternity unit) but very few mothers give birth there with over 90% of mothers having to travel to Inverness or further to give birth. Last year alone 170 mothers had to travel to Inverness and 5 further afield. The majority, over 60%, have to travel south in a private car as very few go by Ambulance. As a result, any delay could have serious consequences for a woman in labour, as they could be forced to give birth at the side of the road with no medical support.

Given that this vital link is prone to disruption at any time and that Transport Scotland have allocated zero funding for improving this section of road, the Leader of this Council will write to and arrange meetings with Transport Scotland and Scottish Government Transport Ministers and press them to commit to an urgent upgrade of the road between Brora and Helmsdale as a matter of priority.”

Signed: Richard Gale          Matthew Reiss          Ron Gunn

Mr K Rosie, while supporting that the A9 be upgraded between Brora and Helmsdale, was of the view that the Council could not limit its desire to see improvements only to this section of the A9 and should seek an updated timescale for the completion of the Dualling Works between Inverness and Perth along with an understanding of the trunk road upgrade and maintenance programme.

During discussion, some of the points raised by Members were as follows:-

- there was a need to tackle depopulation and attract young people to come and live and work in the Highlands and improving road infrastructure would assist with this;
- over the last few months the Badenoch and Strathspey area had seen an appalling number of accidents on the A9 resulting in deaths and injuries and there was a need to know when the long awaited dualling works between Inverness and Perth would be completed;
- further road building was not going to address climate change and instead there should be an upgrade of the far north railway line as a matter of priority;
- there was not an infinite amount of money available and there were choices on whether to improve the public transport network or the road network. Improving public transport was key to the future enjoyment of the Highlands and had to be the first priority;
- drivers were getting confused from moving from single carriageway to dual carriageway along the A9 and this was causing accidents;
- when there were accidents road closures were often lengthy and diversion routes along the A9 were significant;
- there were improvements that could be made to roads alongside dualling that could make road travel better and safer. The policy of the Scottish Government to improve active travel would require significant investment, for example, to provide proper cycle paths;
- if electric vehicles were to be stopped by road accidents for lengthy periods of time, it was queried how this would affect the range of these vehicles and whether emergency vehicles would have priority thereafter to re-charge; and
- all roads in Highland were in need of an upgrade and the issues with the A9 in Caithness were the same as in other areas along the A9.

Mr R Gale, seconded by Mr R Gunn, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed above.

Mr K Rosie, seconded by Mr A Baldrey, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that, given the vital importance of the A9 to the economy of the Highlands and the role the road played in terms of road safety as has been recently demonstrated by the appalling death toll in Badenoch & Strathspey, the Leader engage with Transport Scotland, Scottish and UK Government Ministers and press them to receive an updated timescale for the completion of the Dualling Works between Inverness and Perth along with an understanding of the trunk road upgrade and maintenance programme and the upgrade of the far north railway line as a matter of priority.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 25 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 35 votes, with 4 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 J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith and Mr R Stewart.

### **For the Amendment**

Ms S Aitkin, Mr A Baldrey, 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 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 Louden, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr C Munro, Ms P Munro, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid and Mr K Rosie.

### **Abstentions**

Mr C Ballance, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms L Niven and Ms K Willis

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** that given the vital importance of the A9 to the economy of the Highlands and the role the road played in terms of road safety as has been recently demonstrated by the appalling death toll in Badenoch & Strathspey, the Leader engage with Transport Scotland, Scottish and UK Government Ministers and press them to receive an updated timescale for the completion of the Dualling Works between Inverness and Perth along with an understanding of the trunk road upgrade and maintenance programme and the upgrade of the far north railway line as a matter of priority.

#### **8. Financial Crisis – Valuing Partners Through Collective Budget Strategies, Redesign and Co-production**

**Èiginn Ionmhasail – A' Cur Luach air Com-pàirtichean tro Ro-innleachdan Buidseit, Ath-dhealbhadh is Co-sholarachadh Coitcheann**

**Declarations 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 Mrs B Jarvie as an employee of an ELC partner provider and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, they left the meeting for this item.**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-**

**Mr A Christie – as a non-executive director of NHS Highland, as a director of Eden Court and as general manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau**

**Mr K Gowans – on the basis that a close family member was an employee of Highlife Highland**

**Mrs J Hendry – on the basis that a close family member was an employee of Highlife Highland**

**Suspension of Standing Orders – the Council **AGREED** to suspend Standing Order 34 to allow consideration of this item.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/36/22 dated 17 October 2022 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the economic crisis and the impact of reductions in public expenditure on the Council including the possibility the forecasted budget gap of at least £40.9m in the next financial year might increase depending on national decisions. Services across the Council had been asked to identify plans to reduce their budgets by 6.9%;
- it was recognised that many of the Council's partners would be experiencing similar cost pressures and an update was provided on partner discussions being held with the Early Learning Childcare (ELC), High Life Highland, NHS Highland in respect of care home provision, and Eden Court and officers were commended on their hard work in this regard;
- funding for ELC partners in 2023/24 would continue to form part of the Council's ongoing financial planning and formal budget setting for next year and considered in the context of the wider budget envelope and pressures;
- the Council remained committed to working proactively, constructively and in partnership with ELC partners to co-produce and redesign services that were sustainable into the future;
- the recommended ELC rates had been developed in accordance with Scottish Government guidelines and through partner engagement using information that partners had presented on the approach of other Councils to their funding rates;
- concern at any approach to close the budget gap by applying a 6.9% reduction in Service budgets across the Council uniformly given that some budgets were statutory and others optional, specific concerns being expressed the impact this approach would have on Education and schools and the Adult Social Care budgets;
- the requirement to suspend Standing Orders to consider an uplift to ELC partner rates was due to the action of the Opposition in requisitioning a special Council meeting which had been withdrawn following assurances from the Administration there would be a substantive paper presented to full Council;
- the need for more meaningful engagement and collaboration with Opposition Members going forward to ensure a collective response to the financial crisis. In turn, the Opposition was willing to engage, help and offer advice and guidance;
- the paramount importance of early education in a child's development and the role of ELC providers in this regard and in enabling the Council to deliver its statutory obligations could not be overemphasised. ELC partners wished the Council to engage with them in a fair and transparent way that met the aims of Scottish Government guidance, recognised the agreement in place with CoSLA, used the full funding available and ensured that the one off payment was the starting point for further negotiations for 2023/24;
- the opportunities to learn from best practice in other local authorities to improve processes and engagement. A significant number of other local authorities paid higher rates, noting they were facing similar challenges to the Council;
- this was a positive report and the fact that a fair uplift in ELC rates was being proposed in the financial climate should be welcomed. If further uplifts were agreed then other budget savings would have to be identified to fund the additional cost;
- the engagement process to this point had been agreed with partner providers and it was unfortunate that some providers had chosen to express discontent at this stage of the process. Officers were commended to their diligence and work with the sector for over a year;
- the paramount importance of the ELC sector in early education of children was recognised and there was a clear commitment in the report recommendations that engagement with the ELC Sector would continue;
- a significant number of local authorities were paying lower ELC rates at the current point in time and confirmation that all the ring fenced monies and additional funds from the Council's reserves had been allocated to the sector;
- the Scottish Government was awaiting confirmation of its settlement from the UK Government and therefore the uncertainty around the Council's settlement was impacting on discussions with the ELC sector in terms of future funding rates;

- the Council should explore all options to deliver more for less, working together with partners to address the financial challenges including investigating all options to achieve efficiencies and consider new ways of working before focusing on partner rates or setting the tone for cuts to services;
- the potential collapse of the care home sector in the Highlands represented a serious risk and concern that a reduction in the Adult Social Care budget of the level proposed would make this more likely and have a significant impact across NHS Highland and the need for collaborative dialogue on this matter;
- within the term of the Council it was anticipated there would be a significant increase in the over 75s population which would require an additional 240 spaces in care homes. Risks to ongoing service delivery included the inability to recruit and retain staff which resulted in high agency costs, accommodation affordability issues, short notice closures and insufficient capacity to relocate;
- the cost of living crisis was adding to an already difficult situation and there had been managed care home closures and ownership transfers, with others known to be on the market. There were also issues around the loss of health and social care staff as a result of Brexit and pay rates for care workers;
- a significant amount of work was being undertaken by officers in partnership with NHS Highland and the Scottish Government to develop at pace the strategic redesign for adult social care with a report being brought to a special Highland Council/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee in November/December 2022 and thereafter brought to the full Council at the earliest opportunity;
- concern at the impact of budget reductions in terms of taking communities further away from the Council. A wider network of collaborators was required to work with communities and to take a different approach and to involve communities more in delivering outcomes;
- there was potential for High Life Highland to generate significantly more income through smarter working and exploring new business opportunities, for example, by offering incentives and discounts to the Council staff, partners and tenants and also local employers and businesses; and
- the work to achieve savings in a targeted and sustainable way was immense and there must be collaboration and engagement across the Council and with partners to manage expectations, find solutions and achieve a balanced budget in the current and next financial year.

The Chair of the Education Committee proposed an additional recommendation that in keeping with the ethos of partnership that the Council had promoted in recent weeks, an additional and significant 30% uplift backdated from August 2022, be provided until the end of the financial year with regard to meals' provision. This would mean the current rate of £2.30 per meal would rise to £3.00 per meal at a total additional cost to the Council of £98,000 which would be paid for from reserves.

Thereafter Members indicated that they were content with the additional recommendation proposed by the Chair of the Education Committee and detailed above. Members also indicated that in terms of the recommendations the additional ELC payment should apply from August 2022, at a cost of £365,000. In the course of further discussion, Members confirmed they were content that an update on progress with the review of ELC re-design to be taken forward be brought to the Education Committee in November 2022 prior to further reports being brought to the Committee in February 2023.

### **Decision**

The Council:-

**NOTED:-**

- that the Council's grant funding settlement from the Scottish Government was unlikely to be known before December 2022;
- that the pay awards for 2022/2023 were not concluded and the associated financial pressure unknown;
- the ELC budget position set out in 4.6 of the report;
- that further engagement with the Early Learning and Child Care (ELC) Sector would continue, and that further recommendations relating to the ELC funding rate for the 2023/24 financial year would be considered as part of the Council's budget for next year;
- the steps High Life Highland were taking to mitigate their in-year and ongoing budget pressures;
- the work to be taken forward in partnership with High Life Highland in relation to redesign and contract review (this included legal involvement);
- the work completed by Eden Court to mitigate in year pressures in light of the financial crisis and the consequential impact on their income (Appendix 2 of the report);
- that Council officers would be reviewing all payments to external providers – whether grants, procured or commissioned services – with the Council's ongoing financial sustainability in mind;

and **AGREED:-**

- i. the principles for partnership working set out in paragraph 1.3 of the report;
- ii. in the light of budget uncertainty and the potential impact on all aspects of the Council's operations, whether delivered internally, externally or arms' length, recurring funding commitments should be avoided in advance of the budget setting meeting of the Council in March 2023;
- iii. one-off support funding for ELC Partners in the current financial year based on the payment of an additional funding amount calculated as 32p per hour for 3-5 year old provision, and 53p per hour for 2 year old provision;
- iv. for the additional ELC payment to apply from August 2022 at a cost of £365,000;
- v. in keeping with the ethos of partnership that the Council had promoted in recent weeks, an additional and significant 30% uplift backdated from August, would be provided until the end of the financial year with regard to meals' provision. This would mean the current rate of £2.30 per meal would rise to £3.00 per meal at a total additional cost to the Council of £98,000 which would be paid for from reserves;
- vi. to conclude the current review of ELC partner rate funding for August 2022;
- vii. recommendations would be considered by the Council in March 2023 relating to ELC funding for 2023/24;
- viii. a review of ELC re-design to be taken forward, with an update on progress being brought back to the Education Committee in November 2022 and further reports back to the Committee in February 2023;
- ix. to increase the Council's earmarked balance held to support HLH by £0.4m to £1.4m. This funding to be drawn down at financial year end to ensure HLH avoid entering a negative reserves position and provide assurance that they could implement the SJC pay award for HLH own staff in the current year;
- x. that work would be taken forward in partnership with HLH in relation to redesign and contract review (this includes legal involvement); and
- xi. that redesign work would move forward at a pace regarding Adult Social Care and be reported in detail at an exceptional JMC Committee in November 2022.

## **9. Capital Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mun Phrògram Chalpa**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/37/22 dated 17 October 2022 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- there were a multiplicity of issues impacting on the Capital Programme as a result of Brexit, Covid, fall in the value of the pound, rise in inflation to its highest level in over 40 years, and higher interest rates. There were problems with the availability of contractors and sub-contractors, staff and materials;
- the reality was that the current Capital Programme might not be affordable now and into the future. The review being brought forward would be realistic and consideration was being given to the approach in terms of whether to remove projects or whether to extend the life of Programme;
- the need for collaboration and dialogue with Members across the Chamber as part of the review as soon as possible and prior to the report being brought back to the Council meeting in December 2022;
- in terms of the review, it should be recognised that a large Capital Programme stimulated the economy, instilled life into the communities, created jobs and tackled depopulation in the Highlands;
- clarification was sought on the Administration's proposals for delivering improvements to schools in Inverness to address capacity issues and the impact of new housing development and to ensure children in the area had first class facilities and learning environments which was key to improving attainment. An update to the Education Committee was requested on the position with Inverness schools going forward;
- all possible options for capital schemes for schools across the area should be investigated including the opportunities for modular construction;
- concern at the impact of the review on the school building projects at St Clement's School, Dingwall and Park Primary School, Invergordon on the basis that both projects were critical for the pupils, teachers, parents and carers;
- clarification was sought in relation to Thurso High School where part of the campus had been closed to staff and pupils and where this would fit into the capital programme if funding was required to resolve the issue. It was confirmed there would be continued engagement between officials with local Members in regard to this issue;
- all possible options be explored in collaboration to minimise the impact on the Capital Programme and to deliver current Programme. Specific suggestions included Members being more involved in the scrutiny of capital projects to ensure best value, private bonds for investments, private sector borrowing, role of the pension fund, potential measures within the control of the Council to alleviate the issues with the poor availability of trades and reducing material costs;
- it was important Members remained optimistic and positive and that the Council was ambitious, courageous and creative in addressing the challenges with a focus on commercialisation, spend to save, investment to generate income, innovation and reducing building costs through modular construction to deliver all of the essential projects contained in the Programme. This included harnessing opportunities around the significant income being generated through renewables and cruise ships including investment in the quayside;
- local authorities had managed with much higher than the recent historic low interest rates for many years and it was hoped rates would stabilise in the coming months;
- a request that the report on the Capital Programme review to be brought back to the Council in December 2022 include details of the impact of inflation on the Council's borrowing;
- the Administration's ambition was to deliver the Capital Programme as agreed, however cognisance had to be taken of the financial and other pressures and therefore it was important to be prudent and responsible and review the Programme in collaboration; and
- the crucial role of the Redesign Board in relation to the report and the importance of its work being taken forward at pace.

## **Decision**

The Council **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress with the review of the Capital Programme;
- ii. the challenges affecting the affordability and delivery of capital projects;
- iii. the impact of rising interest rates on the cost of funding capital spend;
- iv. the future revenue budget pressures of funding capital spend;
- v. the ongoing risks within the Capital Programme;

and **AGREED**:-

- vi. that the capital programme was brought back to December Council meeting following a full review.

## **10. Highland Council Programme - Progress Report Aithisg Adhartais mu Phrògram na Comhairle**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/38/22 dated 12 October 2022 by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

The Leader of the Council summarised the report, and the following issues were raised during discussion:-

- the Leader of the Opposition suggested the Administration was not being sufficiently proactive in seeking engagement on the Programme. It was disappointing that finalisation of the Programme was being postponed until December 2022, and it was suggested the survey did not use 'plain English' and was too vague;
- a strategy for the retention of young people in Highland was required, with particular reference to the care sector;
- there was insufficient reference in the Programme to the climate and ecological crisis, which should be at the heart of everything undertaken by the Council. Reuse and repair should be encouraged ahead of recycling, and there should be reference to community-owned renewable energy in the final document;
- consideration should be given to producing an audio version of the Programme and to ensuring it was suitable for people from diverse neurological backgrounds;
- partnership working with the third sector should be included;
- the importance of community transport initiatives, local priorities and place-based plans was emphasised;
- the source of funding for essential road repairs should be clarified;
- clarity on partnership working for visitor management, especially in relation to the NC500, would be welcomed;
- local Members should be involved in the planned walkabouts in November 2022;
- connectivity was welcomed as a principle, and information was sought, and provided, on whether the Council had detailed information on the current status of fibre networks and broadband initiatives;
- attention was drawn to the importance of giving local communities a voice and reference was made to roles of the Champions for Young and Older People in this regard. Accessible housing and transport issues required attention and it was hoped Highland could become the first 'age friendly' community in Scotland;
- the need to encourage young people to stay in, or return to, the Highlands was emphasised;
- it was important to build schools and other infrastructure to service new housing developments;

- traffic calming was required in many communities and local solutions should be sought as often as possible. Reference was made to the poor state of many Highland roads;
- it was important to have specific, measurable actions in the Programme; and
- the effect of rising sea levels on coastal communities was a concern that should be taken into consideration.

### **Decision**

The Council **NOTED**:-

- the approach and work to date in developing the Programme;
- the next steps including the ongoing programme of engagement;
- that the final Programme would come forward to Council for approval on 8 December 2022; and
- that the Corporate Plan would also come forward to Council for approval on 8 December 2022, and Directorate Service Plans would be updated thereafter, aligning outcomes with the Programme priorities.

## **11. People Strategy Ro-innleachd Dhaoine**

**Transparency Statement: Mr R Stewart made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item on the basis that a family member is an employee of Highland Council. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No. No. HC/39/22 dated 17 October 2022 by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Human Resources (HR) team and the Trade Union representatives were thanked for their work to find creative and consensual solutions for the future;
- concern was expressed at the potential far-reaching repercussions of the report and whether the HR team were sufficiently well resourced to manage the proposals. The resource implications would be brought back to the Council in due course;
- the importance of having a cohesive strategy was emphasised and support was voiced for the proposals;
- Members praised the Council staff and urged full engagement with them, with appropriate cognisance of their safety and wellbeing;
- information was sought, and provided, on current staff turnover and possible timescales for implementation of the strategy, which was still evolving;
- protecting jobs remained a priority for the Administration, using natural turnover, strict vacancy management and the promotion of agility to reduce the workforce; and
- the Chief Executive outlined planned staff engagement activities.

### **Decision**

The Council:-

- APPROVED** the People Strategy as contained in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- AGREED** the approach and immediate priorities and focus for People Services in sections 4.2 and 5 of the report.

## 12. Review of Scheme of Delegation Ath-sgrùdadh dhen Sgeama Thiomnaidh

**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/40/22 dated 13 October 2022 by the Acting Depute Chief Executive and Executive Chief officer, Performance and Governance.

Members having reviewed and commented on the Scheme of Delegation, the Council:-

- i. **AGREED** the changes to the Scheme of Delegation as detailed in Appendix 1 and 2 of the report, subject to the following points of clarification being included or provided to Members separately:-
  - Corporate Resources Committee remit para 2.6 – reference to welfare related matters related to national welfare system and national welfare strategy;
  - Climate Change Committee – Terms of Reference be updated as agreed at the full Council meeting on 22 September 2022;
  - Any repetition in the Scheme be reviewed and brought forward to the next review on the Scheme;
  - The reason for large scale planning applications no longer being submitted to full Council be provided to all Members;
  - Joint Monitoring Committee/Integration Scheme – greater clarity required on delegation for the next review of the Scheme;
- ii. **AGREED** that amendments to post titles could continue to be made without recourse to Council as long as the level of delegation remained unchanged; and
- iii. **NOTED** that page references would be updated once the substantive changes to the Scheme had been approved.

## 13. Member Attendance at Meetings Làthaireachd Bhall aig Coinneamhan

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 required that if a Member of a Local Authority failed, throughout a period of six consecutive months, to attend any meeting of the Authority, they should, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the Authority, cease to be a Member of that Authority.

The Council **APPROVED** Ms S Rawlings ongoing absence as a result of illness on the basis that the position would continue to be reviewed and an update provided for the Council meeting on 9 March 2023.

## 14. Deeds Executed Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

The Council **NOTED** a circulated list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 22 September 2022.

## 15. Special Meeting of the Council Coinneamh Shònraichte dhen Chomhairle

The Council **AGREED** that a Special Meeting of the Council be scheduled to consider the Capital Programme, the date to be determined following consultation with Senior Officers and Political Group Leaders.



The meeting was concluded at 5pm.