

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Thursday 27 April 2023** at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr R Mackintosh
Mr M Baird (substitute)	Ms A MacLean
Mr R Bremer	Mr C Munro
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mrs M Paterson (Remote)
Mr L Fraser	Mr A Rhind
Mr A Graham	Mr K Rosie (Remote)
Mrs I Mackenzie	Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Mr R Gale (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mrs T Robertson (Remote)
Mr D Macpherson (Remote)	Ms T Collier (Remote)

Also in Attendance:

Ms L Richardson, Tenant Representative

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
 Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Housing and Property
 Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management, Housing and Property
 Mr A Maguire, Head of Development & Regeneration, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
 Mr B Cameron, Service Lead - Policy and Performance, Housing and Property
 Mr R Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager, Housing and Property
 Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
 Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance
 Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

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

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs B McAllister, Ms J McEwan, and Mr A Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 5: Mr R Stewart
Item 7: Mr C Munro

Ms S Atkin made a general Transparency Statement as her husband was a private landlord.

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

Members expressed disappointment that staff had been relocated from the Town House building. It was felt that moving approximately 100 staff members away from the city centre should not be classed as a good news item. In this regard, it was clarified that the expressed disappointment was the decision itself, not the hard work carried out by staff to implement the move.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. Communities Housing Trust
Urras Taigheadais Coimhearsnachd

The Communities Housing Trust was a registered charity set up to help rural communities secure long term solutions to their local housing needs. They represented a wide range of interests including communities, local government, landowners, crofters and housing associations, and were funded by the Scottish Government and various charitable trusts and foundations.

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr C Munro replace Mrs M Paterson as the Highland Council representative on the Communities Housing Trust.

5. Workforce Planning
Planadh Feachd-obrach

Transparency Statement: Mr R Stewart made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a close relative was employed by the Council. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare on the basis his relative was not employed by the Housing and Property Service.

There had been circulated Report No HP/06/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that Members would be provided with a breakdown of the functions of all staff within the Service;
- the Service's proposals to meet the challenges around an ageing staff and loss of expertise. It was explained there was an opportunity to review the approach to vacancy management and functions to be delivered in future, bearing in mind the Service had to deliver significant staff savings;

- further clarity was sought and provided on the approved recruitment process for unfilled critical vacancies designed to reduce delays in such posts being filled;
- the importance of continuing to deliver services to the relevant service standards irrespective of the different working practices of staff. Specific Member concerns would be investigated by officers;
- information was sought and provided on the Council's approach to identifying and nurturing talent within the organisation. This was also a key objective of workforce planning;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the relatively high turnover of staff in the Service and the work ongoing in relation to this issue, bearing in mind there was an element of natural turnover;
- the modern and graduate apprenticeships be welcomed as good news and information was provided on the engagement with schools and UHI to help with succession planning, growing the workforce in Highland and developing the right skills to fill vacancies;
- clarity be provided in future workforce planning reports as to where the skills gap existed within the Service;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the support provided to the Service's staff who were due to retire and the Council's guidance in relation to staff experiencing the menopause, copies of which would be circulated to Members. An update was also provided on the support being provided to help people from Ukraine living in the Highlands into employment with the Council;
- the timetable for reporting the results of the most recent staff survey to the relevant Committee would be confirmed to Members;
- the opportunities to engage positively with younger people to promote the benefits of a career in the Service and within their local area. It was confirmed this would be considered as part of the wider recruitment process;
- the potential for the Redesign Board to review its workforce planning project and consider areas of further support;
- it was suggested there was a contradiction around vacancy management, turnover and staff savings targets against the challenges around an ageing staff, skills gaps and recruitment difficulties;
- it was suggested there was a lack of clarity about around some of the wording in the report and querying the statement that the new peripatetic facilities management operational model would have no carbon implications; and
- noting that progress in the current financial year on expenditure on essential repairs would be reported separately to the Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the Housing and Property Service Workforce Plan for 2022 – 2025.

6. **Review of the Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy Ath-sgrùdadh Poileasaidh Clàr Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No HP/07/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- whether a different approach was required in the Policy for local people in remote and rural areas in Highland to help sustain the population and communities. It was explained there was a need to balance the housing needs of locals and other groups of applicants such as key workers. There would be an opportunity to consider this matter in more detail in the annual review of the Policy at the Committee in August 2023;
- the work of housing staff in dealing with the tenants and prospective tenants be acknowledged;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the agencies, partners and stakeholders engaged in the survey of service users. This included engagement with current tenants, tenant groups, and those who currently had an HHR application in the system;
- consideration be given to introducing homelessness into the tenant participation process, noting that the potential to have a homeless service users group was being progressed;
- confirmation that Ms A Maclean would be provided with the Equalities Impact Assessment documentation that had informed the policy review;
- an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the significant issues around key workers including how they were defined. National guidance could impact on the Local Housing Strategy going forward. Information was also provided on the local lettings initiatives undertaken in partnership around key workers;
- anti-social behaviour and the partnership work undertaken when moving the perpetrators to another property to mitigate this behaviour and the need to reinforce the message that the Council required support from other agencies in dealing with this issue;
- concern for those families who due to issues of supply and demand had been on the waiting list for a larger house for a long time. It was hoped the revised allocations policy would prioritise those applicants better in relation to applications and there were incentives to encourage HHR tenants to downsize;
- support for the proposed change to the Caithness Choice-based Letting scheme which sought to reduce the rate of refused offers and the associated staff workload;
- the revised allocations policy achieved the right balance in seeking to address the challenges and it was hoped would deliver positive outcomes for applicants and tenants and officers be commended on the work involved;
- support for the aim of the policy to ensure those in the least secure and suitable accommodation had priority;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the allocations policy in respect of those living with family and friends, extreme overcrowding where there was proven links with damp and mould, substandard accommodation and on the suitability of HMO accommodation; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that a briefing would be provided to the Ward Members in Nairn on the issues raised on the allocation of properties in respect of homeless persons.

The Committee **APPROVED** the updates to the HHR Allocations Policy as contained in the revised policy at Appendix 1 to the report subject to consideration of the proposed change to the Caithness Choice-based Letting scheme by the Caithness Area Committee.

**7. Local Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028
Ro-innleachd Taigheadais Ionadail 2023 – 2028**

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as his family operated a Short Term Let business and he was also was an office-bearer in a local community trust which was co-operating with the local housing association with the intention of building affordable housing.

There had been circulated Report No HP/08/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the need for the Council, partners and private sector to work together to increase the supply of affordable housing in the Highlands given the excess of demand and to meet housing need rather than market demand, particularly for younger people;
- the challenges around influencing the private sector to deliver more flexible models of housing to better meet housing need. It was explained the Strategy fed into the local development plans in relation to future development. The Strategy also sought to ensure a healthy private rented sector that met housing needs;
- the continuing challenges with construction costs. It was reported that currently there was no speculative private sector development on the west coast partly for this reason;
- in regard to the above, reference was made to a pilot project in Broadford being undertaken with a private developer, supported by the Scottish Government, to build houses for the local market, and it was planned to extend this model to Fort William;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the impact of Opportunity Cromarty Firth had been factored into the Strategy and the assessment of housing supply targets;
- the significant additional investment that would be required in relation to energy efficiency and bringing the stock up to the required standards. A report on this matter would be brought to the Committee later in the year;
- an update was sought and provided on the effectiveness of the empty homes initiative which compared favourably with national figures and that there would be a continuing focus on this going forward;
- an assurance was sought and provided that Members would have the opportunity to review the Strategy through the annual monitoring report to be brought to the Committee;
- the potential for the Age Friendly Communities model to be progressed in Highland given the ageing population and the importance of people leading healthy and active later lives. It was confirmed that meeting the housing needs of an aging population formed a central part of the Strategy and the strategy action plan contained a number of outcomes in relation to improving health and wellbeing. The Strategy was also aligned closely with the Health and Social Care Partnership's Strategic Plan;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the membership of the Local Housing Strategy Delivery Group would be circulated to Members; and

- it was critical that 'LHS Outcome 1' set out the report was considered as a high priority, given that the lack of housing was a real barrier to growth in rural areas of Highland and a factor in depopulation.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 as attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

8. **Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2023 - 2028** **Plana Tasgaidh Taigheadais Ro-innleachdail 2023–2027**

There had been circulated Report No HP/09/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern at the range of issues constraining the affordable housing development programme as outlined in the report such as schools capacity in Inverness and the need to have further dialogue with the Scottish Government;
- In relation to the above, it was confirmed that the Council's target for the provision of affordable homes had not been reduced. The focus was on building homes in Inverness in areas where there was school capacity;
- as per the Corporate Plan, the target for the number of houses built or purchased per year during the period 2022 to 2027 was dependent on the review of the Capital Programme in July 2023;
- the need for the Council to have more influence over the planning process in terms of the wider services and infrastructure required as a result of housing developments;
- further clarity was sought and provided on complexities of dealing with long term empty homes in communities. Compulsory Purchase Orders would be used where necessary and discussions were being held with the Scottish Government on the potential to streamline the process;
- in regard to the above, the Council's initiative to purchase properties had been successful, and it was intended to run another promotional campaign in the near future;
- information was sought and provided on the funding secured in respect of vacant contaminated land to make it viable for housing, and that bids would continue to be made to the appropriate funding rounds for this purpose;
- noting that the Council was proactive about land acquisition and explored all opportunities and information from local Members on potential sites would be welcomed;
- the conversion costs in terms of purchasing churches was prohibitive, however where church land was available this would be explored;
- the opportunities to deliver modular housing given construction costs and to benefit from the economies of scale this could bring. There was a commitment to this in the Council Programme and it was confirmed that discussions were ongoing on a pilot project using one of the off-site manufacturers and a potential site had been identified;
- the need to explore the opportunities for strategic investment in housing in town centres in Wick and Thurso and other areas, reference being made to the importance of such regeneration projects being progressed to the stage they were funding ready;

- a proposal that the first recommendation in the report be amended so that Members were being asked to approve the Strategic Housing Investment Plan attached as Appendix 1, for submission to the Scottish Government;
 - confirmation was sought and provided that a report on the Landbank Fund and the Evergreen Infrastructure Fund would be brought to a future Committee; and
 - frustration that land for housing could not be identified particularly in the remoter areas given that geography of the Highlands and its relatively sparse population.
- i. **APPROVED** the Strategic Housing Investment Plan attached as Appendix 1 to the report, for submission to the Scottish Government; and
 - ii. **AGREED** the indicative planned investment programme to 2028 contained in Appendix 2 to the report, subject to further discussion by Area Committees.

9. **Housing Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No HP/10/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was queried if officers felt confident that there were sufficient resources to maintain or even improve on current levels of good performance, or if it was felt that levels of resources were deemed insufficient; and
- regarding paragraph 7.5 of the report on rent arrears, Members requested further information on how many tenants made up the remaining amount of arrears aside from the 353 with arrears over £2,250.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance during the period 1 April 2022 – 31 December 2022.

10. **Performance Monitoring Q4 to 31 March 2023 Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh C4 gu 31 Màrt 2023**

There had been circulated Report No HP/11/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was felt that UFSM (universal free school meals) uptake of 67% was quite low. In this regard further information was sought, and an update would be provided;
- regarding early intervention of rent arrears, it was confirmed that officers were working hard to tackle this as early as possible; and
- it was queried if there was any correlation between rent arrears and properties with a low energy efficiency rating. In this regard it was confirmed that an analysis would be undertaken.

The Committee **NOTED** the Directorate's performance information.

The meeting was closed at 1:35pm.

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The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 4 May 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken (Remote)	Ms J McEwan (Remote)
Mr M Baird	Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Mr I Brown	Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr M Cameron	Mr A Rhind
Mr K Gowans	Mrs T Robertson
Mr M Green	Mr K Rosie
Mr R Jones	Mr R Stewart
Mr P Logue (Remote)	Ms K Willis
Mr W MacKay (Remote)	

Non-Members also present:

Ms S Atkin	Ms L Kraft (Remote)
Dr C Birt	Mr B Lobban (Remote)
Mr R Bremner	Mr G MacKenzie (Remote)
Mrs I Campbell	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr A Christie (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson (Remote)
Ms S Fanet (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr D Millar
Mr R Gale (Remote)	Mr C Munro (Remote)
Mr A Graham (Remote)	Mr P Oldham
Ms J Hendry	Mrs M Paterson (Remote)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)	Mr M Reiss
Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Interim Depute Chief Executive
Ms T Urry, Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration
Mr A McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead, Environment, Development and Active Travel
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager
Ms H Martin, Programme Manager (City Region Deal)
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead, Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mr D Chisholm, Tourism & Inward Investment Team Leader
Ms J Gair, Employability Team Leader
Dr S Andrews, World Heritage Project Co-ordinator
Mr J Watson, Coastal Planning Officer
Mr D Cowie, Principal Planner
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

Also in Attendance:

Mr C Mather, Mather & Co (Remotely)

Ms F Hampton, High Life Highland

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

Mr K Gowans in the Chair

Business

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

An apology was intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce.

**2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

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

Item 6: Mrs J Hendry

and Transparency Statements:-

Item 10: Mr H Morrison

Item 14: Mr K Rosie

Item 17: Mr H Morrison

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair informed Members of a number of items of good news as follows:-

- Corran Ferry - the MV Corran Repairs were expected to be completed by early June and the repair to the Maid of Glencoul was also progressing. Meanwhile, contingency measures remained in place at Loch Linnhe. The normal timetable was running at the Corran Narrows for foot passengers and bicycles were using a temporary passenger vessel service. In addition there were increased sailings at the Camusnagaul crossing and a direct service up Loch Linnhe to Fort William for commuters. Any measures that could also be taken to enhance arrangements for buses were currently ongoing. In addition, overnight works to improve passing places were taking place on the A861 single track route around Loch Linnhe. Regarding the site visit by the Ministry of Defence in April, an initial report had been prepared and the Council was currently assessing options with them as well as exploring any additional possible commercial possibilities. Community engagement was taking place with Local Members by way of face-to-face meetings and online, the latest online meeting having been held on 27 April with another one taking place on 4 May. The feedback from communities was being incorporated wherever possible.
- Film Service –2022 had been a boom year for Highland with direct spend in the Highland region reaching over £3m, with both national and international productions filming across all parts of Highland. The in-house team were

hopeful that 2023 would be another successful year with several largescale shoots already planned.

- Business Gateway – in the last financial year the Council – through its business start-up and growth finance, and Business Gateway advisory services - had helped over 2000 Highland businesses to grow. Also, through the Council's start-up grant 315 new businesses had received help to set up.
- The opening ceremony of the new £6million Invercoe Bridge took place on Thursday 27 April 2023 was attended by the Convenor, the Chair and pupils from Kinlochleven and Glencoe Primary Schools. Council staff and contractors were thanked for making the project a huge success.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Presentation – Inverness Castle Visitor Experience Taisbeanadh – Turas tro Chaisteal Inbhir Nis

The Senior Responsible Officer for the Project, Mr Allan Maguire, gave a brief update on the progress of the construction work to date. The construction update was followed by a short film presented by Mr Chris Mather, Chief Executive of Mather & Co, who has used stories and content from all areas of the Highlands to design the visitor experience within the Castle and in its grounds on the esplanade. The film showed Members how the design of the visitor experience was progressing.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were expressed for the video presentation, and also to Council staff, CEO Chris Mather and the High Life Highland team for their integral parts on the project;
- this was a world class event which advertised the whole Highlands, but was based in Inverness Castle; and
- it was anticipated that up to 500,000 visitors would attend to enjoy the experience.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal Annual Report Aithisg Bhliadhnail Cùmhnant Baile-Roinne Inbhir Nis agus na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/19/2023 dated 11 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members highlighted the importance and successes of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal in such projects as the West Link, the Newton Rooms, Life Sciences, Assisted Living, Fit Houses and Inverness Castle;
- the Longman Junction Project was highlighted as a future good news project to alleviate traffic north bound especially at the end of the working week;

- information was sought, and provided, regarding when works on-site would commence on the Inshes to Smithton scheme, especially as planning permission had now been submitted;
- it was felt that the report did not include the more rural remote areas of Highland. In this regard it was queried what the Council would do to readdress this;
- a progress update was requested on the digital project referred to on page 17 of the report;
- it was queried what businesses in Sutherland had been supported as referred to on page 24 of the report;
- it was highlighted that no access for Sutherland schools to the Newton Rooms had been mentioned in the report; and
- regarding renewable energy heating installations, as a skills shortage to install and maintain air and ground source heating systems had been identified, it was queried what was being done by the Council to make school children aware of this fantastic industrial opportunity. Also it was questioned what was being done to encourage firms to offer apprenticeships to school leavers to help them meet the demands of the renewable industry and retain a workforce in the Highlands.

The Committee **APPROVED** the report as a record of the activity and delivery during 2021/22.

**6. Nairn Business Improvement District (BID) Renewal
Ùrachadh Roinn Leasachadh Gnothachais Inbhir Narann**

Declaration of Interest: Mrs J Hendry declared an interest in this item as Nairn BID was a business customer and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, she left the meeting for this item.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/20/2023 dated 11 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

Members expressed their support of the work carried out by Nairn BID especially the work completed in its first term to the High Street and other local tourist areas. In this regard it was confirmed that BID had already been working on new proposals for the next term.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the assessment made in Appendix 1 of the report relative to the Nairn BID Proposal; and
- ii. **AGREED** not to exercise the Council's right of veto.

**7. Community Regeneration Programme
Prògram Ath-bheòthachadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/21/2023 dated 14 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were expressed to officers and the team for their hard work producing the report;
- attention was drawn to page 67 of the report which Members were delighted to confirm that funding had been sourced through the strategic allocation of funds to a number of groups who previously had a reduction in funds. In this regard it was queried if the funding for those groups would be provided from a central budget, or their geographical area budget;
- appreciation was expressed regarding the number of successful works in Nairn and Lochaber areas. In addition funding allocation was welcomed for Skye and Raasay from the Coastal Communities Fund which had helped to support some transformational projects across the ward;
- regarding the Coastal Communities Fund allocation process, clarification was sought, and provided, on how the groups mentioned on page 67 of the report met the fund objectives;
- it was queried if Lochaber Music School project could be included in the funding allocation list as funding had also previously been cut. In this regard it was confirmed that the School could submit an application to the fund;
- regarding the Place Based Investment Programme and the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund clarification was sought on the allocation process as Ward 10 would receive less than 4% of these funds;
- in relation to the Local Place Plans process, it was queried what resource the Council could provide to support local communities deliver their Local Place Plans or if communities were expected to deliver these Plans on their own; and
- whilst the funding allocation process had been difficult, Members were pleased with the outcome and recognised that the local organisations needed the Council's continued support;

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** work underway to develop and extend the Highland approach to Community Regeneration including the preparation of Area Place Based Plans and inclusion of UK Shared Prosperity Fund into the Community Regeneration Programme;
- ii. **AGREED** arrangements, as detailed in Appendices 1,2,3 and 4 of the report, for the management of the Highland Coastal Communities Fund, the Place Based Investment Programme, the Community Led Local Development Programme and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund;
- iii. **AGREED** the process for dealing with other funds over and above those included in this report, as outlined in Appendix 5 of the report; and
- iv. **AGREED** to homologate the decision to submit two applications to the Scottish Government's Islands Infrastructure Fund as outlined at paragraph 5.8 of the report.

8. Employability Services Seirbheisean So-fhastachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/22/2023 dated 18 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were conveyed to officers for their hard work on this report and for their dedication towards improving employability within Highland communities;
- information was sought regarding the quality and sustainability of the 257 jobs which had been generated and the last two years budget for the Employability Service to provide greater value for money context; and
- Members requested information on client satisfaction information as it was not contained within the report. In this regard it was queried if the Council had conducted any surveys.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the 'No One Left Behind' policy and financial agenda which was supporting the design and development of a Highland unique employability service including the increasing focus on tackling child poverty and the drive to raise as many parents as possible out of poverty, including in-work poverty;
- AGREED** the Operational and Investment Plans for 2023/24; and
- AGREED** to the establishment of a Skills Challenge Fund to deliver the UKSPF Skills Interventions and request to partners on the Highland Economic Recovery Partnership to collaborate with the Council on the design and delivery of the Challenge Fund.

9. **Performance Monitoring Quarter 4 to 31 March 2023** **Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Cairteal 4 gu 31 Mart 2023**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/23/2023 dated 4 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

The Committee **NOTED** the Directorate's performance information.

10. **Roads Strategic Capital Allocation** **Riarachadh Calpa Ro-innleachdail Rathaidean**

Transparency Statement: Mr H Morrison made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item a family member was employed by the Council's Road team. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/24/2023 dated 12 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members expressed thanks to Officers and staff for their tremendous amount of work producing the report in a sensible and pragmatic manner;
- it was welcomed that the planned expenditure of £7.7m which would be spent strategically across the Highlands road network;
- it was felt that the decision to increase the roads budget was the right decision and works were welcomed across Highland, especially as it was felt the roads network condition had substantially deteriorated over the last 18 months;

- it was hoped that the distribution of roads repairs and maintenance resource was prioritised to meet the needs of all Highland, which in turn would support local businesses;
- Members welcomed the £1.3m planned roads investment for Ward 5 (Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh);
- it was queried if the Roads Service had sufficient workforce resources to carry out the planned works or if many works would be subcontracted out;
- whilst welcoming the £1.8m strategic investment for Skye and Raasay, it was highlighted that the remaining capital roads budget allocation was less than 7%. Therefore, it was felt that this disparity was unacceptable and the Committee were urged to reconsider the budget allocation formulae;
- appreciation was expressed for the recent ongoing and planned roads repairs programme in Caithness;
- it was requested that Strathroy Bridge and High Bridge at Midfearn on the B9176 be considered for future roads investment;
- concern was raised that many Skye and Raasay roads now had very high volumes of traffic and many of these roads had not been engineered for this amount of heavy use. In this regard it was also highlighted that increased numbers of heavy goods vehicles extracting timber and rock had accelerated the deterioration of the roads network across Highland;
- an update was sought on plans to create a rapid response pot-hole repair team;
- thanks were conveyed to the Administration for backing this programme, and to the roads operatives in all areas for their continued hard work. It was recognised that road operatives had to endure occasional abuse from members of the public regarding the poor quality of Highland roads;
- it was felt that Lochalsh area had been overlooked for roads investment;
- attention was drawn to recent financial statistics highlighting that the Council's reserve levels would only last another two or three years. It was essential that the Council managed roads investment funds accordingly;
- it was queried if the £102,000 roads investment project for the C1053 Lybster to Achavanich road would be programmed after the Golticlay wind farm had been constructed due to the amount of heavy good vehicles which would use the road to remove tons of rocks;
- information was sought whether feedback from communities had been taken into consideration when formulating the programme;
- it was felt that there had been an underinvestment in roads for a long time. However, hard work at the Redesign Board was ongoing to reform the whole approach regarding roads infrastructure. In this regard it was stressed that the money needed to be spent in the areas highlighted, in order to make the identified improvements; and
- Members were encouraged to support and work with each other for the benefit of the whole Highlands roads infrastructure.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the strategic capital allocation as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that schemes may require to be adjusted for operational reasons or following further discussion with local Members.

11. Highly Protected Marine Areas Consultation Response Freagairt Co-chomhairleachadh nan Sgìrean Mara Fìor Ghlàidhte

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/25/2023 dated 5 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was generally accepted that the marine environment needed attention but the Scottish Government proposals were not the way to do it. The impact on communities had to be gauged;
- disappointment was expressed with the response to the Scottish Government's consultation on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) as it failed to adequately acknowledge the effect on communities. The policy would have a devastating impact on ways of life, culture and language. As an example, it was pointed out that the Portree district had over 110 registered small boats and families relied on marine resources for their economic and social survival and the proposals would have a disproportionate and detrimental bearing on island communities by putting their very existence at risk;
- the impact on this policy on the Gaelic language and culture was likely to be significant, further eroding the Highland heritage and identity;
- it was important that Highland Council, given the area's reliance on its coastal economy, made reference to the issues the proposals would have, not just for fishing, but for aquaculture, seaweed harvesting, recreational use, tourism, oil and gas, renewable energy, ports, harbours and Space Ports;
- not all Members had had the opportunity to formally discuss the response despite there having been a number of meetings which had taken place since the consultation had opened in December 2022 and calls were made for the Committee not to homologate the response but to note it. In reply, the Leader explained the process that had been followed and the reasons for the delay in submitting the response. He assured Members the normal process had been followed;
- disappointment was also expressed that the Highland Council's response to the HPMA consultation had not highlighted unacceptable socio-economic impacts despite the Chair acknowledging that the Highland Council had recognised the need to take action in response to the biodiversity crisis. It was contended that the marine environment was in a highly degraded state due to over-exploitation and Scotland's existing network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) were wholly ineffective, offering little protection for the marine environment;
- Scotland's fishing industry had declined and this exemplified the need to act to restore Scotland's marine environment and secure a future for coastal fishing communities in the Highlands. There was international evidence to draw on that clearly detailed the benefits of HPMAs for the environment and where inshore fishing industries had not disappeared in areas where protected marine reserves had been established but had, in fact thrived; and
- marine reserves protected important habitats, preventing further degradation and restoring the productivity of inshore waters. They were sites for scientific study and generating income through sustainable fishing and nature-based tourism and the aim of HPMAs in Scotland would not be to destroy local coastal

communities but to protect the resources that they depend on and thereby secure their future.

Following discussion, Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr I Brown, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mr P Logue moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Committee:-

- i. note the details of the HPMAs and the proposals put forward by Scottish Government;
- ii. note the private political group of a select few of SNP/Independent group within Highland Councils response to the consultation; and
- iii. agreed the next steps proposed for engaging with the process.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 15 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 2 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitkin Mr M Baird, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mr R Jones, Mr W MacKay, Ms J McEwan, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr A Rhind, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr P Logue, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the details of the HPMAs and the proposals put forward by Scottish Government;
- ii. **AGREED** to homologate the Council's response to the consultation; and
- iii. **AGREED** the next steps proposed for engaging with the process.

12. The Flow Country Candidate World Heritage Site Planning Position Statement

Aithris air Suidheachadh Planaidh airson Làrach Dualchais na Cruinne airson nam Flòbhaichean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/26/2023 dated 3 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- there was unanimous support from the Highland Council and the Scottish and Westminster Governments for this outstanding universal natural resource to be recognised as a World Heritage Site and which was of international importance;

- the position now reached had taken a long time and had involved representation at senior levels of government to ensure it was well supported as a bid;
- the statement would provide clarity and guidance and was an importance step forward in framing future consideration of proposals in and around the Flow Country;
- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) policy would provide protection against developments that would damage the Outstanding Universal Value for which the site had been nominated;
- it was important, in facing the climate emergency, that this resource was recognised but it formed just one part of a wider strand of measures including renewable energy generation;
- World Heritage Status of the Flow Country would bring enormous benefits for Caithness and Sutherland and would benefit both Climate Change and the biodiversity of the peatlands. World Heritage Status would also help to care for the peatlands;
- in the meantime, caution was urged when considering any developments under NPF4 affecting this area;
- the area was practically surrounded by the NC500 and it was anticipated that tourists would now remain longer in the area;
- when awarded World Heritage Status, the Flow Country would be joining other sites such as the Grand Canyon and the Great Barrier Reef; and
- the population of the Flow Country was small and the demographic was of an older age range and it was hoped the boundary line defining the area would be interpreted in a smart, intelligent and flexible way so not to discourage viable economic development.

The Committee **APPROVED** The Flow Country World Heritage Site Planning Position Statement within Appendix 1 of the report.

13. Highland Council Airfields Raointean-adhair Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/27/2023 dated 3 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- no mention was made in the report regarding the reintroduction of commercial flights using the Ashaig airfield, despite previous historical discussions. If there was officer capacity available, it was hoped this issue could be reignited or, otherwise, to avoid continued uncertainty, a decision made as regards to the Council's position one way or another;
- previous approaches to the Scottish Government concerning Ashaig airfield had included the proposal that, if it was to be used commercially, it would be carbon neutral;
- Skye would be the only island without access to an airstrip;
- the storage of wind turbine components at the Ashaig airfield brought in revenue to the Council;
- Ashaig airfield would need considerable investment to be brought back up to standard and it was questioned, given climate change and limited available resources, if this was the best way to move forward;

- there were community implications involved when considering the future of airfields. For example, Ashaig was the only airfield within 100 miles capable of landing a fixed wing air ambulance;
- considerable private investment was being made in the Dornoch area and it was hoped that either a private investor or community group would come forward so that the airfield could continue to operate independently from the Council. Perhaps, it was suggested, as a gesture of good will, the Council would take responsibility for the administrative and legal costs of any lease transfer;
- it was hoped any lease or transfer of ownership of the Dornoch airfield would be done in consultation with the Sutherland Area Committee; and
- a recent transport workshop had explored the possibility of aviation using hydrogen and electric and this merited further investigation for Highland; and
- it was hoped that before any sale or long term lease was concluded for Plockton airfield, community consultation take place and it be reported back to the Committee as it was important to be mindful of the safety implications surrounding the disposal of such assets.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** that the current resource committed to the operation and maintenance of the airfields was not sufficient to meet all of the maintenance liabilities and legal requirements;
- NOTED** that in light of this a decision was required as to the future operation and management of Dornoch, Plockton and Ashaig airfields;
- APPROVED** a Risk Register presented as Appendix 1 of the report and the ongoing plan to address and reduce risk across the airfields e.g. by updating signage and repairing boundary markers;
- APPROVED** the implementation of online PPR system at Ashaig and Dornoch, based on the conclusions presented in Appendix 2 of the report;
- AGREED** that the Council should continue to operate Ashaig airfield in a manner which meets all necessary legal obligations and ensures the airfield was maintained to a level which would support operation of commercial services until such time as further developments with regards to scheduled air services were made;
- AGREED** that the Council should seek to offer a lease on Dornoch airfield to one of the interested parties in the local community; and
- AGREED** that the Council should explore opportunities for either the sale or the long-term lease of Plockton airfield.

14. Establishing a Short-Term Let Control Area for Ward 20: Badenoch and Strathspey

A' stèidheachadh Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine airson Uàrd 20: Bàideanach agus Srath Spè

Transparency Statement: Mr K Rosie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as an owner of a short-term let in Caithness. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/28/2023 dated 31 March 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

There was a housing crisis in Badenoch and Strathspey and this meant businesses could not recruit staff and young local people were unable to find a home due to unaffordable accommodation. It was hoped that by introducing a Short Term Let Control Area this would help redress the balance between short term let holiday accommodation and housing stock available for longer term rentals and ownership. The move towards a Control Area was, however, coming into being at the same time as a national licensing scheme was being introduced, bringing additional stress to the valued holiday let operators, so the public engagement sessions proposed to support these operators was welcomed as would any additional help and information.

The Committee:-

- i. based on the Scottish Ministers approval of the Council's application to establish a Short-Term Let Control Area for Ward 20 (Badenoch and Strathspey), **AGREED**:-
 - a. to delegate authority to officers to undertake the final legislative arrangements to establish the Short-Term Let Control Area for Ward 20 (Badenoch and Strathspey), including the necessary press advertisement, notification of interested parties and other publication work;
 - b. for Officers to hold information session(s) to inform existing (& perspective) operators of the requirements the Control Area had across Ward 20 (Badenoch and Strathspey); and
 - c. that the commencement date of the Short-Term Let Control Area for Ward 20 (Badenoch and Strathspey) would be 18 June 2023.
- ii. **NOTED** the consultation feedback and the potential implications the draft Non-statutory Planning policy would have on the determination of planning applications for Short-term Secondary lets, as set out in Appendix 2 and summarised in Section 6 of this Report and agree to adopt the draft Non-statutory Planning policy (as amended) (Appendix 3) as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for Short-term Secondary let planning applications.

15. Culture and Speed Limit Compliance Cultar agus Gèilleadh ri Crioch-astair

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/29/2023 dated 20 March 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

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

16. Developer Contributions Tabhartasan Luchd-leasachaidh

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/30/2023 dated 18 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

As it was proposed to review this in line with the Highland-wide Development Plan, a call was made to ensure that provision was included in the Plan that contributions were spent locally to the development. Local Area Committee were well placed, at the appropriate stage, to act as a sounding board to advise as to where such contributions could be best directed.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the requirement for this factual update to more fairly reflect updated costs for school and community facility developer contribution rates;
- ii. **AGREED** the updated school and community facility developer contribution rates and note the updated evidence and refinements for calculating school contributions;
- iii. **NOTED** that these costs and factors would be applied to all planning advice and new planning applications received from the date of the committee onwards; and
- iv. **NOTED** that a full review of Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance and parent developer contributions policy would be carried as part of the new Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) in compliance with new national policies.

**17. Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey 2022/23
Suirbhidh Staid Obair-càraidh Rathaidean na h-Alba 2022/23**

Transparency Statement: Mr H Morrison made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item a family member was employed by the Council's Road team. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/31/2023 dated 14 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

There were a number of ways by which the roads infrastructure in Highland could be measured and acknowledged, the Scottish Condition Road Indicator Matrix Report being one of them. Members were encouraged to look in detail at what information and advice was taken into consideration in formulating this report, which could be found on the Audit Scotland website, and which would inform the Redesign Board in its deliberations. However, this was just one tool and, to complement this, was detailed information from officers. This provided the Redesign Board with as much evidence as possible to recover the area's infrastructure and how it should be maintained going forward.

On a separate issue it was also suggested that perhaps the Council should consider using a liquid format rather than grit, as used in some other countries, to prevent damaging road surfaces.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2022/23 and that our relative ranking has improved from 26th to 25th position amongst Scottish Local Authorities, with a road condition index (RCI) of 36.5% which represents the percentage of the road network which was considered to be in need of maintenance treatment;

- ii. **AGREED** that the overall Road Condition Indicator result for Highland can be published on the Council's website before a paper was presented to Committee, due to the increasing number of requests for information that had been received from Members, the public and the press; and
- iii. **AGREED** to utilise the report as a useful source of information while determining the future capital allocation programme, noting that without sustained funding, the condition of the road network would deteriorate and, as such, our ranking amongst the other Scottish Local Authorities may drop.

**18. Membership of Committees, Working Groups, Outside Bodies etc
Ballrachd Chomataidhean, Bhuidhnean-obrach, Bhuidhnean air an Taobh A-muigh etc**

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** that Mr J Bruce replace Mr A Jarvie on City Region Deal Monitoring Group as put forward by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group;
- ii. **NOTED** that Mr R Jones had be appointed to the Highland Strategic Local Advisory Group at the Committee's last meeting; and
- * iii. in **NOTING** Mrs T Robertson remained on the Board, also **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to the Highland Council that Mrs M Reid be appointed as a director to the board of Tornagrain Conservation Trust as the Highland Council's representative.

**19. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Minutes of the Planning Applications Committees (PAC):-

- i. North PAC – 6 December 2022
- ii. South PAC – 13 December 2022
- iii. North PAC – 25 January 2023
- iv. South PAC – 8 February 2023
- v. North PAC – 7 March 2023

and, **APPROVED** the following Minutes:-

- vi. Harbours Management Board – 29 March 2023

**20. 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 items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act, the relevant paragraphs being shown in the reports.

**21. Property Transactions Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/32/2023 dated 31 March 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

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

**22. Housing Development Initiatives
Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/33/2023 dated 5 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

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

**23. Land and Property
Fearann agus Cuid-seilbhe**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/34/2023 dated 31 March 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

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

The meeting ended at 2 pm