

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 17 August 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

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

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr R Bremner (Remote)	Ms A MacLean
Mr A Christie (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson (Remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr D Millar
Ms J Hendry (Remote)	Mr C Munro (Remote)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Interim Depute Chief Executive
Ms T Urry, Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and 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
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead, Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mr D Chisholm, Tourism & Inward Investment Team Leader
Mr A Puls, Environment Team Leader
Mr D Cowie, Principal Planner
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

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**

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr M Green and Mr R Jones.

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

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

Item 18: Mr H Morrison and Mrs T Robertson

and Transparency Statements:-

Item 17: Mr H Morrison and Mrs T Robertson

Item 18: Mr C Munro

**3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaìdh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

**4. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

- **UCI Cycling World Championships 2023 – Downhill Mountain Bike Event
Fort William 3-5 August**

Fort William played its part in making history and helping to stage “biggest cycling event ever” in the world – the UCI Cycling World Championships 2023. The downhill mountain biking event was held over three days at Nevis Range and welcomed almost 20,000 spectators. Across the 13 disciplines covered by the Championships, it anticipated that there would be 1 million spectators and over 1 billion viewers around the world. The Championships had been a fantastic opportunity to showcase what the Highlands and Scotland had to offer and helped to deliver a massive boost to the cycling agenda, with increased awareness and improved infrastructure, such as the brand-new bike park in Fort William.

- **EV Rally of Scotland 16-17 August**

The Highland Council was delighted to be a host authority for the EV Rally of Scotland 2023 which was to take place during 16-17 of August. The event showcased the infrastructure already installed by the Council including over 100 EV charge points with many more planned in the coming months and years as we moved from a government funded model to a sustainable, self-funding model, encouraging a transport transition to electric. The Council and other public sector organisations in the region had an ambition to ensure that access to EV Charging was fair and equitable to all, regardless of where they

lived and worked, being mindful of the challenges of local geography. The ambition now was to accelerate this provision towards the critical mass of charging infrastructure to ensure that range anxiety was a thing of the past.

- **Highland Council Early Adoption 20mph Speed Limit Programme**

The installation of the Highland Wide 20 mph programme delivery continued a pace with, at the time of the Committee, over 75% of installations completed and the remainder of the settlement installation work ongoing. The Highland wide Temporary Road Traffic Regulation Order for the new 20mph limits covering the whole of the Highland Council Area went live on 31 July 2023. In the coming months the team would begin to engage with communities with regards to the new reduced speed limits as part of the statutory consultation process that would be undertaken ahead of decisions that would be made around making these temporary speed limits permanent.

- **Scretan Burn**

Scretan burn active travel route had been completed. The route provided a new active travel route between Cradlehall and the University of the Highlands and Islands.

5. Corran Ferry Operations and Project Update Fios às Ùr mu Obrachaidhean agus Pròiseact Aiseag a' Chorrain

A detailed verbal update on Corran Ferry Operations and Project was given by the Interim Depute Chief Executive during which he updated Members about the current status of the Maid of Glencoul (the Corran Ferry second vessel), the return of the MV Corran, the ongoing work on the replacement vessel project and other alternatives being considered.

Prior to opening the matter up for discussion, the Chair acknowledged the very real concerns and difficulties the outages were causing for the communities and apologised accordingly. It was recognised that this was a legacy issue that should have been addressed many years ago. He gave reassurance that the Council was in consultation with the UK and Scottish Governments and other partners and staff were working tirelessly to arrive at a solution. He expressed his appreciation for the support of fellow Members across the Chamber for their recognition of the challenge and their support.

From a Lochaber Member perspective it was good to hear that the ferry and shoreside replacement programme was progressing and hopefully a Levelling Up Fund bid would be successful, and also that a backup solution was also being investigated. This issue took up a lot of Lochaber Members' time and the frustration and anger of the communities on the Ardnamurchan/Morven peninsula was understandable. There had been repeated requests for regular and clear communication, providing updates on the situation and explaining the reasons for the ongoing delayed return of the MV Corran, the younger and larger of the two ferries. This frustration and anger grew each time it was announced that the return of the MV Corran was further delayed with little information as to why and an example of the level of feeling was provided. If more information

was given there would be greater understanding regarding the problems Highland Council was facing. It was essential information was shared regularly with Lochaber Members and the communities affected.

During discussion, other Members raised the following main points:-

- it was important to acknowledge the hard work of the crew that had gone in to keeping the service going as long as possible and to the Interim Depute Chief Executive and his officers to try and arrive at a suitable solution;
- alternative vessels had been considered but there were Health and Safety issues to take into account as well as the constraints of the infrastructure in place;
- although this was a problem inherited from multiple previous Administrations, the Council could no longer put temporary solutions in place;
- it was reassuring that communication was to be addressed and this would allay feelings of abandonment and scepticism. The language in the updates was important and the honesty that Members had heard from the Interim Depute Chief Executive was to be encouraged. It was suggested that some of the misunderstandings which had arisen was because the Council was in a very dynamic and challenging environment which changed, at times, at very short notice;
- information to the communities was also needed as regard transport links, shuttle services, how to drive in convoys and the current status of the previously promised 40mph signs;
- improvements to the slipway and replacement vessels could no longer be met from the Council's Capital Programme and every possible avenue of future funding needed to be investigated for what was an essential lifeline to the Ardnamurchan/Morven peninsula;
- with the suggestion of an Emergency Action Plan being put in place Members were assured that, when the Corran Ferry was back in operation, a "lessons learnt" review would take place and which might include the Council investing in a passenger vehicle. However, mitigation measures had been in place and there had been relative confidence in these before;
- further details as to the delay would help explain the situation to the community and would hopefully move away from a blaming approach; and
- working across the political scene was essential.

The Committee **NOTED** the current position.

**6. Revenue Budget Monitoring Final Outturn 2022/23 and Quarter 1 to 30 June 2023 and Service Performance Reporting for 2022/23
Suim Dheireannach Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2022/23 agus Cairteal 1 gu 30 Ògmhios 2023 agus Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson 2022/23**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/35/2023 dated 24 July 2023 Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- regarding paragraph 4.4 of the report, it was highlighted that figures on infrastructure and roads were incorrect;
- in relation to paragraph 4.4.6 of the report, it was queried if staff received a full staff payment increase when appointed to acting up roles;
- regarding 4.4.8 of the report, it was queried why there had been a winter maintenance overspend as it was felt that the weather had not been too adverse;
- it was queried if the Freedom of Information timeline of 20 days could be increased to allow collation of relevant information. However, it was explained this was a Corporate target;
- if the roads service had a weather forecaster, it was queried why the winter weather had been so unexpected and if contingencies had been in place for the additional winter maintenance expenditure;
- regarding school transport and increased costs associated with new contracts, it was queried if these increased costs were non-negotiable and due to increased fuel costs. In this regard, it was also queried if school taxi service costs had increased and were contributing to high charges, as it was felt that this service was a huge overall cost to Council school transport;
- reassurance was sought regarding the increased time to process planning applications as this was a statutory service which only the Highland Council could provide. In this regard it was queried what action plan was in place to improve the service;
- regarding 5.3 of the report, Corran Ferry had forecasted an overspend of just over £1m due to the loss of income. In this regard, information was sought on how much lost income there had been and to provide Members with a breakdown of costs for loss of income, repairs and maintenance and overhaul costs;
- Members welcomed section 4.4.8 of the report regarding the underspend on lighting fees due to the installation of LEDs and reducing carbon emissions. In this regard it was queried when the LED streetlighting programme would be completed, especially as these works generated a saving and contributed to decarbonisation;
- information was sought regarding the reduction of income at car parks, as Members expected an increase due to more car parks being built; and
- as the A836 road had been closed last winter for several days due to gritter breakdowns, it was queried if gritters were reviewed to meet the standard during the off-season in full preparation of the upcoming winter.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Service's revenue monitoring position; and
- ii. the Service's performance and risk information.

**7. Capital Monitoring– Quarter 4 2022/23 and Quarter 1 2023/24
Sgrùdadh Calpa – Cairteal 4 2022/23 agus Cairteal 1 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/36/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the financial position for financial year 2022/23 with the yearend totals; and
- ii. the financial position as at 30 June 2023 and note the estimated year end forecast.

**8. Developer Contributions
Tabhartasan Luchd-leasachaidh**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/37/2023 dated 25 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- following a presentation in amplification of the report, it was expressed that local residents needed to know that the developer contributions had been spent on mitigating the impact of a new development;
- to reduce the potential of community groups proposing a project for developer contributions, but which had already been identified and discussed by the larger community as part of a local place plan, it was queried how this type of scenario could be avoided as it could lead to disappointment;
- leisure contributions generally seemed to be directed towards properties owned by Highland Council and run by High Life Highland and it was queried if this would preclude any other development in the locality from taking place;
- disappointment was expressed that developer contributions from Ward 17 had been spent outwith the Ward. In this regard, it was queried why contributions were not spent within the Ward they originated from;
- it was queried who would determine when decisions regarding local developer contributions would be referred to the Area Committee. In addition, it was queried how decisions were made regarding spending the contributions in each area;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding developer contributions towards a new secondary school in the Inverness South area;
- thanks were expressed to Officers for their hard work towards the Portree Link Road and the substantial developer contributions which allowed the project to take place;
- updates would be welcomed at future Ward Business Meetings on what exemptions there were for developer contributions so Members could better understand the process;
- information was sought on who set the rates for developer contributions, whether it was national government rates or local councils;

- communities felt they were not part of the decision-making process regarding the distribution of developer contributions;
- it was queried how NHS Highland fitted into the Place Based Plans and Development Plans;
- it was queried if the Capital Programme Board was made up of just officers, or if there were also representatives from the Highland Third Sector and younger persons present;
- Members requested that the main points of the changes be summarised in bullet-points so Community Councils were able to clearly review and discuss them;
- it was queried if developer contributions were set at the start of a project or if they could be increased due to inflation or other factors; and
- it was confirmed that WOC mentioned within the report referred to Woodside of Culloden.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** the minor addition to the protocol for monitoring and managing developer contributions in relation to how members and local communities can shape developer contribution decisions;
- NOTED** the corresponding governance arrangements agreed by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in February;
- AGREED** for developer contribution monitoring balance sheets and forecasting to be reported to the capital programme board, alongside the delivery programme acting as a coordination tool, to better align developer contributions with the capital programme and the programme of development; and
- NOTED** the current balances of all active developer contribution pots for information, and the governance arrangements already in place to coordinate their use.

9. Dornoch Business Improvement District (BID) Roinn Leasachadh Gnothachais Dhòrnaich

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/38/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the assessment made in appendix 1 of the report relative to the Dornoch BID proposal; and
- AGREED** not to exercise the council's right of veto.

10. Grantown-on-Spey Conservation Area Management Plan and Strathpeffer Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan Plana Stiùiridh Sgìre Glèidhteachais Bhaile nan Granndach agus Measadh agus Plana Stiùiridh Sgìre Glèidhteachais Shrath Pheofhair

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/39/2023 dated 18 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** and adopt the Grantown-on-Spey Conservation Area Management Plan; and
- ii. **APPROVED** and adopt the Strathpeffer Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, including an amended Strathpeffer Conservation Area Boundary.

11. Adopted Tree Management Strategy Update Fios às Ùr mu Ro-innleachd Stiùiridh Chraobhan fo Urra

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/40/2023 dated 27 June 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were expressed for the updated report and the hard work that had gone into making the requested adjustments;
- whilst Members welcomed the additional measures, concern was raised that routine tree maintenance strategy was still lacking;
- it was requested that section 5.5 of the report be changed to confirm that the Council would dispose of prunings of Council owned trees. In this regard caution was expressed at this proposal as there were implications on resources which the Council might not have available;
- regarding section 1 of the report, veteran trees being afforded extra protection, it was queried if this would be applied as tree preservation orders;
- regarding section 9 of the report concerning the planting of as many trees as possible to replace a tree which had been removed, it was queried how this would be monitored and recorded;
- regarding paragraph 5.7 of the report, it was felt that flailing roadside verge trees was not a welcome method due to the damage they inflicted to trees and further clarity was requested on this issue to limit it as a possible method;
- information and clarification were sought regarding residents pruning trees and leaving the arisings on communal land and whether there might be cases where these would not be removed by Highland Council, but left as dead-wood; and
- it was emphasised that the HC needed to be a good neighbour with residents affected by trees growing adjacent to their properties and not just focussing on the monetary aspect of maintenance requests. In this regard, it was felt that the Policy required further consideration of this matter.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed amendments as detailed in Section 5 of the report and their incorporation into the adopted Tree Management Strategy.

12. National Planning Framework (NPF)4 and the Development Plan in Highland

Frèam Dealbhadh Nàiseanta 4 agus am Plana Leasachaidh anns a' Ghàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/41/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- following a presentation and during discussion, Members thanked the officers for the report;
- some additional points had been added to recommendation vi, since the report had been written and comments submitted to the Scottish Government, which Members might wish to consider. In addition Members were also advised of a typographical error in recommendation v where “Section 6” should read “Section 7”;
- it was stressed that local conditions, transport and infrastructure would play a significant factor in contributing to the 20 minute neighbourhoods and this should be taken into full consideration. In this regard, it was pointed out that certain parts of Highland would never be able to meet the criteria of a 20 minute neighbourhood;
- concern was expressed about the pace of progress for the Local Development Plans and it should be a priority to push forward this work. In this regard, Members felt that they could assist with this progress by working with community groups to develop Local Plans;
- buses should be a consideration factor for 20 minute neighbourhoods as they could contribute to healthier living for persons by walking to and from bus stops; and
- information was sought whether Community Councils and community development trusts were directly contacted for consultation and discussion about the Local Development Plans.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** Scottish Government’s publication of regulations and guidance for Development Planning and commencement of the relevant legislative provisions, including the extracts of guidance showing overview and key stages of the Local Development Plan process at Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** that further to i) above and to Item 15 of this Committee’s meeting on 2 February 2023, the Council’s formal invitation to communities to prepare Local Place Plans was issued on 30 June 2023 with a deadline of 28 June 2024 for Local Place Plans to have been submitted, cleared validation checks and been registered;
- iii. **NOTED** the progress update at Section 5 of the report on the formal commencement of work on the new, single Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) and the corporate status that the HLDP must have and agree the next steps, anticipated milestones and timescales for Evidence Gathering outlined, including work with the Key Agencies Group;

- iv. **NOTED** the resource implications for preparation of the HLDP outlined at Section 5 of the report;
- v. **NOTED** the corresponding governance considerations at Section 7 of the report, including outline of arrangements envisaged for Member involvement and that key changes were expected to be sought to the Council's Scheme of Delegation in October;
- vi. **AGREED** to homologate the Council's submitted response to Scottish Government's consultation, which closed 20 July 2023, on "Local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods: draft planning guidance" at Appendix 2, and submit additional comments as agreed as Committee, to seek explanation of the relationship of Policy 15 with other NPF4 policies, in particular Policy 17 Rural Homes, Policy 27 city town, local and commercial centres and Policy 28 Retail; and
- vii. **AGREED** for submission the Council's draft response to Scottish Government's consultation, which closes on 13 September 2023, on "Effective community engagement in local development planning guidance" at Appendix 3 of the report.

13. Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) 2023/24 Maoin Ath-shlànachadh Nàdair 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/42/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

Having highlighted the importance to prioritise this in communities, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** update on 2023/24 NRF scheme;
- ii. **AGREED** the funding proposals as set out in paragraph 6 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that funding decisions in respect of the grant scheme be delegated as set outlined in paragraph 7 of the report.

14. New National Parks in Scotland Appraisal Framework Frèam Measaidh airson Phàircean Nàiseanta Ùra ann an Alba

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/43/2023 dated 18 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was hoped that somewhere in Highland would be considered as a new National Park but the process was still less defined. Some groups elsewhere in Scotland were already preparing to campaign in their communities to become a National Park and it was important Highland didn't lag behind;
- there was a group of volunteers in Lochaber preparing a campaign but they needed support from Highland Council, even if it was a point of contact or professional advice. Wards might wish to financially support bids through their Discretionary Budgets;
- any bid to become a National Park needed the approval of Highland Council and well-defined timescales needed to be considered;

- in regard to Question 7 of the Consultation Response, it was suggested that it could have included how National Park designation supported visitor management, what had worked elsewhere and to raise concerns about inappropriate behaviour of some tourists. Any bid approved by the Highland Council would provide an opportunity to highlight these issues but the Chair also referred to Item 17 on the Agenda, Tourism Development, which could take these concerns into consideration;
- the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland was hopefully progressing towards World Heritage status and it was questioned if National Park status would also be appropriate. The cooperation of both Area Committees would be necessary; and
- Ward 10, Eilean a' Cheo, would be an ideal location for a National Park as it had very clear boundaries. It was acknowledged that National Plan status also brought disadvantages but in Ward 10 these would be outweighed.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** to **HOMOLOGATE** the response to the New National Parks in Scotland Appraisal Framework and the Nomination Process and Draft Appraisal Framework;
- AGREED** that the Council promotes the pre-registration process within Highland (as per 7.1 paragraph of the report); and
- AGREED** the governance procedure for the Council to provide support to nominations for National Park designation as outlined in paragraph 7.2 of the report.

15. Infrastructure, Economy and Environment Service Plan 2023-2024 Plana Seirbheis Bun-structair, Eaconamaidh agus Àrainneachd 2023–2024

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/44/2023 dated 18 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- in addition to the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan, there was also a Net Zero Strategy and climate change needed to be central to decision making and action embedded across all Thematic Groups and Services. It was disappointing therefore that there was no direct reference to Net Zero in the Service Plan and it was contended that it was insufficient to say that the Climate Change remit would continue to be driven through the Climate Change Committee. There was also no risk identified if Net Zero targets were not achieved. In response, it was contended that Net Zero was implicit in a lot of the work of the Service;
- Service Complaints responded to within 5 days in Quarter 4 in 2022/23 was 92%, the target being 80%, and it was important to strive for continual performance. However, concern was expressed that Service Complaints responded to within 20 days was only at 29% and it was suggested a more realistic target should be set. In response, it was explained that the reason the Service had only achieved 29% was due to the complex nature

of some of these complaints but, as the targets were set at a Corporate level, it was not possible to change this;

- the target date of September 2024 for the Service Priority “Supporting Parents into Work” was questioned;
- in relation to the Service Vision of Place Based Strategy for Highland, where the Service would work with communities, partners and the private sector to prepare long term, sustainable strategies for development in Highland, it was questioned how it was proposed communities would be involved; and
- the improvement action associated with the promotion and enhancement of Highland’s rich heritage and culture referred to Cultural and Heritage events including Archaeology Festival, Highland Heritage Trail and Blas Festival but it was important to also promote the other various heritage sites throughout Highland.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Service Plan for 2023/24.

16. Rapid Road Repair Team Update Fios às Ùr mu Sgioba Grad-Chàradh Rathaidean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/45/2023 dated 19 July 2023 by Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an additional £2.66m had been allocated to the Rapid Road Repair Team and the report evidenced the benefit of that;
- once up and running the Team would make a significant difference to the speed, as well as the numbers, of repairs. It would also free up time for Area Teams all over Highland to focus on other key priorities and it was important to promote this;
- assurances were sought, and provided, that the Team would complement the Area Teams;
- Members and communities were looking forward to seeing the Team on the ground and some initiatives, such as branding and/or livery, would help to make them more visible;
- information was sought, and again provided, as to how priority of repairs was to be determined;
- concern was expressed at the distances the Team might had to travel but it was confirmed that allowances had been made for travel and accommodation;
- delays had been encountered in recruitment but the Team would be operational shortly. In addition, in regard to the weather deteriorating as time went on, it was explained that, while some patches might be weather dependent, not all were and work could continue;
- it was important to ensure efficient use of time and that there was a reporting system in place to help effectively deploy the Team. In this regard, there was a communication challenge to inform communities how to report potholes; and

- any additional improvements to help Area Teams bring roads up to acceptable standards was to be welcomed. These Teams were to be commended for the work they did with the resources available and improvements were already evident and would be enhanced further by the Rapid Road Repair Team.

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

17. Tourism Development Leasachadh Turasachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/46/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- across Highland there were a number of interested parties and stakeholders but there was also a degree of fragmentation and this was an opportunity to coalesce to develop a strategic pan Highland approach;
- it was disappointing that while one Service was putting in new public conveniences, another Service was closing theirs. It was hoped that the ones referred to in the report would be well taken care off. Reference too was made of the lack of maintenance of signage but the Chair reminded Members that the aim of this report was not about infrastructure but developing strategic priorities;
- tourism was one of the biggest industries in Highland and therefore a coordinated approach was necessary;
- some areas were suffering from “over” tourism and a strategy suitable for the Highlands was to be welcomed. Officers were encouraged to start involving stakeholders as soon as possible; and
- many groups had good ideas and these should be tapped into.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the current context and policy framework for the tourism industry in Highland and Scotland;
- NOTED** the important and wide-ranging role of the Council within the tourism industry, particularly in terms of service and infrastructure provision; and
- AGREED** to the commencement of work on a tourism plan for Highland and to the proposed key next steps set out in Section 5 of the report.

18. Visitor Levy Bill Bile Cis Luchd-tadhail

Declaration of Interest: Mr H Morrison and Mrs T Robertson declared financial interests in this item as a holiday let provider and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, they left the meeting for this item.

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as an accommodation provider. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/47/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members welcomed the well-structured report and looked forward to future updates as the Tourism Plan was being developed, especially as there were numerous infrastructure issues affecting different tourist hotspots around the highlands;
- it was felt that the visitor tourist levy would enable the HC to undertake desperately required infrastructure improvements and this in turn would help both tourists and the local community;
- assurance was sought that existing tourist funding provided by Highland Council would not be withdrawn when the levy costs were implemented, as it was felt that communities would otherwise see no real difference on tourist infrastructure expenditure;
- it was queried what engagement there was with other local authorities in terms of setting the levy rate;
- Members stressed the need to ensure that everything was in place to meet the target date of 2026 for the tourist levy implementation;
- a significant effort should be made to ensure Highland communities were aware of the tourist levy concept and the investment benefits it would bring to the highlands;
- whilst the report at paragraph 4.4 stated that the levy would not include campervans, it was felt that this should be changed to include campervans, caravans and motorhomes due to the wear, tear and significant damage they impacted on roads and verges, including leaving waste in fields and roadsides. In this regard, the Ranger Service observed 3,286 motorhomes parked outwith official campsites on Skye between May and end of July 2023;
- it was suggested that, in relation to the Scottish Parliament's Call for Views (Questions and Recommended Responses) Q9 could be extended to include digital infrastructure. In this regard, it was also suggested that Question 10 could be extended to include online travel agents as it was felt that this would remove a significant proportion of the administrative burden on small and microbusinesses;
- regarding tourist levy revenue raised locally, it was felt that expenditure of the levy should be decided locally and spent locally;
- it was queried if the tourist levy would include VAT and, if so, what would be the implication on local businesses;
- the levy's purpose was not only to assist in promoting tourism but also to assist in mitigating the inconvenience that tourism brought to communities. In this regard it was suggested that infrastructure have signage displayed to confirm that it was built with tourist levy; and

- clarification was sought regarding the governance procedure on spending the tourist levy income.

The Committee

- NOTED** the introduction of the Local Visitor Levy Bill to the Scottish Parliament and the summary of the content of the Bill;
- NOTED** the proposed key issues which would inform the Council's response to the Scottish Parliament's consultation on the Bill as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- AGREED** to extend Questions and Recommended Responses to 9 and 10, of the Scottish Parliament's Call for Views, to include digital infrastructure and online travel agents respectively.

19. UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Maoin Soirbheachas Co-roinnte na RA

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/48/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the successful pull down of the 2023/24 and 2024/25 UKSPF allocations and delivery progress across the programme; and
- AGREED** to the proposed Skills Programme as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

20. Highlands and Islands Enterprise Strategy 2023-28 Ro-innleachd Eaconamach Roinneil Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/49/2023 dated 24 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Draft Final Highlands and Islands Enterprise Strategy 2023-2028; and
- AGREED** to homologate the Highland Council Officer response to the Draft Final Highlands and Islands Enterprise Strategy 2023-28.

21. SSEN Community Benefit Fund Consultation Co-chomhairleachadh Maoin Sochair Coimhearsnachd SSEN

There had been Report No. ECI/50/2023 dated 8 August 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

In commending the strong balanced response to the consultation, it was important a degree of balance was applied if it was something Highland Council was to administer to ensure that the communities who housed the majority of SSEN's infrastructure received the majority of the benefit. Highland was

advocating for a much more localised approach than perhaps SSEN were proposing.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the draft consultation response prepared; and
- ii. **AGREED** to submit a Council response, including an offer to continue to actively engage with SSEN as they develop their Community Benefit Fund.

21a. Appointments to Sub-Committees/Working Groups Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidhean/Buidhnean Obrach

- * The Committee **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to the Highland Council the membership of the Wildfires Working Group as follows:-

Mr M Baird, Mr C Birt, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Mr P Logue, Ms K MacLean, Mrs T Robertson, Mr R Stewart.

22. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

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

- i. South PAC – 22 March 2023;
- ii. Joint North PAC & South PAC – 22 March 2023;
- iii. North PAC – 19 April 2023;
- iv. South PAC – 3 May 2023;

and

- v. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the City Region Deal Monitoring Group 18 January 2023, 18 April 2023; and
- vi. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Coastal Communities Fund:- 16 June 2023

23. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

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 involved 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.

24. Property Transactions Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/51/2023 dated 18 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

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

25. Housing Development Initiatives
Iomairtean Leasachadh Taigheadais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/52/2023 dated 21 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

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

26. Land and Property
Fearann agus Cuid-seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/53/2023 dated 20 July 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

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

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm