

# **Minutes of Meetings**

**To be submitted to the Council**

**On**

**14 September 2023**

**(Supplementary)**

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## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 4 September 2023 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr C Birt  
Mrs I Campbell

Mrs E Kraft  
Mr P Logue

### In attendance:

Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer  
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager  
Mr D Martin, Area Education Manager  
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

### Also in attendance:

Insp. Richard Ross, Police Scotland  
Ms C Hamilton, Chair, Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council  
Mr M Webster, Chair, Torridon and District Community Association  
Ms C Johnson, Torridon and District Community Association Sub-Committee  
Ms S Cook, Torridon and District Community Association Sub-Committee

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

**Ms L Kraft in the Chair**

### Business

#### 1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

#### 3. **Recess Powers** **Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 had not been required to be exercised in relation to the business of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee

#### 4. **Police – Area Performance Summary** **Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/10/23 dated 30 August 2023 by the North Area Commander, Police Scotland.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- in response to a question, Inspector Ross undertook to investigate Police Scotland's role in determining what was classed as a short-term let;
- concern was expressed that no Police Officer had attended Lochalsh Community Council following the violent incident that had taken place in the area last year;
- information was sought and provided on why some detection rates were shown as 0%;
- it was good to hear about the decrease in the number of missing looked after children; and
- it was necessary for Local Members to consider how they could help distribute information to protect local people from fraud.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 3, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

#### **5. Winter Service Plan 2023/24 Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh airson 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/11/23 dated 27 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, it was queried whether routes to school were prioritised. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the filling of grit bins, which it was clarified were usually situated on steep routes that might not be gritted early in the morning.

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

#### **6. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Transport Schemes Sgeama Chòmhdhail Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair is Loch Aillse**

There was a presentation by the Principal Transport Officer on Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Transport Schemes.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- it was queried whether officers were working with the Kyle Development Trust concerning their electric bus service;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the bus shelter in Kyle and on developments concerning the Applecross bus service; and
- it was queried what the process was for commercial bus routes opening in the area and if it would be possible for the route of the 961 Ullapool Ferry Bus to revert to going through Strathpeffer and Dingwall.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

#### **7. Duncraig Educational Trust Report**

## **Aithisg Urras Foghlaim Dhùn na Creige**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/012/23 dated 4 September 2023 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- the Trust should always be for Highland children and those of Highland descent;
- it was queried if there was a way of identifying talented young people who might be eligible for this funding;
- it was queried who had sanctioned the compensation for loss of office payments being taken from the Trust, and the Area Education and Learning Manager undertook to investigate this and report back to Members; and
- in response to a request for details of the grants awarded, it was confirmed that these details were provided directly to Members and not as part of the Committee report due to some information being confidential.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** continuing to hold the trust funds in the deposit account;
- iii. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Area Education and Learning Manager to reopen the grant scheme during the year between September and December 2023; and
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Area Education and Learning Manager to review the grant scheme and propose any changes to Committee.

### **8. Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Development Plan for 2023-28 Plana Leasachaidh Coimhearsnachd Thoirbheartan agus Ceann Loch Iù airson 2023-28**

There was a presentation by Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council on the Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Development Plan for 2023-28.

- this was a very interesting and impressive project;
- it was interesting to see that the priorities in this Plan matched up with those in the Lochalsh Area Development Plan; and
- papers from Strategic Committees could give an idea of what was being done to help combat the issues raised in the plan throughout Highland.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

### **9. Ward Discretionary Grants 2023/24 Tabhartasan fo Ùghdarras Uàird 2023/24**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 1 April 2023:-

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Lochbroom Community Council	Beach Cleaning & Litter Picking	£800
Strathpeffer Primary School Parent Council	Creation of a multi- sensory learning zone – The Den	£1808
Loch Duich Community Council	Kings Coronation Community Celebration	£500
Wester Ross Fisheries Trust	River Catchment Management Workshop	£800
Highlife Highland Skye & Lochalsh Archive Centre	Angus Og Exhibition	£500
Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust	Floating Classroom	£1000

#### **10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, Minutes of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 12 June 2023 which had been approved by the Council on 29 June 2023.

The meeting concluded at 12.15 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Wednesday 6 September 2023 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr A MacDonald
Mr R Bremner	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr S Mackie (Remote)
Mr A Christie	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr C Munro
Mr S Kennedy	Mr P Oldham
Mr D Louden	

### Non-Members also present:

Mr C Ballance	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson (Remote)
Ms S Fanet (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms L Kraft (Remote)	Mr M Reiss

### Officials in Attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive  
 Mr P Nevin, Interim ECO Performance and Governance  
 Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Resources and Finance  
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Community Operations, Communities and Place  
 Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources and Finance  
 Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance  
 Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT and Digital Transformation, Performance and Governance  
 Ms M Mackenzie, Strategic Commercial Manager, Commercial & Procurement Shared Service  
 Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance  
 Ms A MacRae, Senior 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 D Louden in the Chair**

### BUSINESS

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr M Green and Mr B Lobban.

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

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

Items 5a, 6c, 7, 12, 13 and 14 – Mr A Christie

### **3 Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Corporate Resources Committee.

### **4. Good News Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news stories:-

- the Council's 2022/23 unaudited annual accounts had been completed by the 30 June 2023 deadline;
- the Induction and Employee Review and Development (ERD) documents had been reviewed, relaunched and promoted via Traineasy (the on-line training system) to ensure staff and Managers were effectively using these documents. There had been improved recording of ERDs;
- the Central Safety Committee had heard a presentation from PAM (People Asset Management OH) who were the new Occupational Health (OH) provider. This would include absence management, health surveillance, fitness to work assessment and wellness monitoring;
- the in-year Council Tax collection rate exceeded the budget by £0.726m generating additional income for the Revenue Budget;
- 86.8% of Sundry Debts were collected overall compared with 83.81% for 2021/22, which supported reduced Bad Debt Provision;
- there were top quartile performance indicators relating to the processing of Housing Benefit New Claims and Changes in Circumstances;
- following on from the award-winning pathway development during 2021/22, Welfare Advice and Health Partnership services were launched in 2022/2023;
- across the team a number of Staff Awards had been won, recognition for the hard work and key roles in service delivery and initiatives;
- a number of significant legislative changes had taken place necessitating the adaptation and development of processes and reviewing priorities to deliver in both lead and support roles; and
- there had been significant expansion of delivering activities for benefits and entitlements. This had involved managing 9 additional entitlements, which was absorbed, wherever possible, within existing staff resources and by making best use of existing technologies, to achieve value for money and implementation at pace.

### **5. Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring - 2022/23 Near Final Outturn and Quarter 1 2023/24 Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh Calpa gu 30 Ògmhios 2023**

#### **a. Corporate Revenue Monitoring to 30 June 2023 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu Ògmhios 2023**

**Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/18/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was questioned which of the agreed savings with a RAG status of amber had been taken into account in the forecasted overspend of £3.055m. Specific reference was made to what appeared to be a disconnect between the near balanced position shown for Health and Social Care and the level of amber savings highlighted for that budget. It was confirmed Members would be provided with more detailed information on this matter outwith the meeting;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that the level of overspend due to the extended outage of the Corran Ferry was considered to be a reliable assessment based on the available information available to officers;
- information was also sought about the cost of the repairs to the MV Maid of Glencoul and MV Corran and whether the latter would be repaired given the age of the vessel. It was confirmed that Members would be provided with further information on this matter outwith the meeting;
- details were requested on the fee earning vacancies and the earnings that would be made if those vacancies were filled and reference to the need to refer to the Housing & Property Service for this information;
- it was questioned what the impact of the rent increase agreed for the current year in terms of the overspend on the Housing and Property Service budget would be. It was noted that the HRA was based on the rent level set by the Council and other factors were impacting on the variance shown and officers were actively seeking to manage the position; and
- it was recognised that budgets were fluid at this stage of the financial year, however it was important to deliver as much in-year savings as possible.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the near-final 2022/23 out-turn position as set out in this report;
- ii. the financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 June 2023 and the estimated year end forecast;
- iii. the status of budgeted savings in the year; and
- iv. that Members would be provided with further details on (a) the savings with a RAG status of amber detailed in Appendix 7; and (b) the cost of repairs to the MV Maid of Glencoul and MV Corran

**b. Corporate Capital Monitoring to 30 June 2023  
Sgrùdadh Calpa Corporra gu Ògmhios 2023**

There had been circulated Report No RES/19/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was argued that it was not appropriate for the Corran narrows crossing to continue to be the Council's responsibility but it should form part of Scottish Government's services. The Chair advised that it was a matter for the full Council to consider its policy on the best way forward; and
- an explanation was sought for the significant underspends shown on Heating/Energy Efficiency budgets on the HRA and as to why expenditure



was not being maximised. It was confirmed that the Council's Energy Team would be asked to respond directly to Mr C Ballance on this issue.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. near final outturn for the 2022-23 financial year;
- ii. net spend for Q1 2023/24, the forecast year end outturn and the funding profile; and
- iii. updated position of approved major capital projects.

## 6. Revenue and Performance Monitoring – 2022/23 Near Final Outturn and Quarter 1 2023/24

### a. Depute Chief Executive's Service Seirbheis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigeir

There had been circulated Report No RES/20/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

- further clarity was sought, and provided, that the chart at section 6.3 of the report reflected that no complaints had been received over the period. A zero figure would be provided in future reports where this was the case;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the action being taken towards meeting the target for responses to Freedom of Information requests set by the Scottish Information Commissioner. It was noted this was a challenging target for the Council and other local authorities and was subject to regular monitoring and assessment;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that the target for 'percentage of satisfied customers' had been increased in respect of performance on the in-house ICT Service Desk; and
- an explanation was sought, and provided, on the action being taken to improve the Council's performance generally on the investigation resolution of complaints within 20 days and escalated resolution. This information was also reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

Thereafter, it was suggested that it would be helpful for the Committee to be provided with an analysis of FOIs received in terms of the subject matter, where they originated from, and an indication of the financial cost and resource involved in dealing with such requests. Reference was also made to the need for a continued focus on improving the availability of information to reduce the number of requests.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position and performance and risk information; and
- ii. **AGREED** that an analysis of Freedom of Information request be provided to a future Committee.

### b. Performance and Governance Service Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais

There had been circulated Report No RES/21/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position and performance and risk information.

**c. Resources and Finance Service  
Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais**

**Mr A Christie made Transparency Statement in respect of this item as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and as a Non Executive Director of the Inverness BID Board. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had circulated Report No RES/22/23 by the Interim Chief Executive.

In discussion, it was requested that the data in the above revenue monitoring and performance reports be presented in the same format for ease of reference.

Thereafter, it was confirmed that for each tender exercise a view was taken on the appropriate level of insurance required. This should be reflective of the nature of risk and contract. On receipt of further details, the specific case referred to by Mr A MacDonald would be considered outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position and performance and risk information.

**7. Service Plan - Performance and Governance Service  
Phlanaichean Seirbheis - Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais**

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/24/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

In discussion, it was suggested there was a need to improve compliance with the Standing Order requirement to issue Committee papers 10 days prior to meetings. In response, a commitment was given to ensuring that wherever possible papers were issued within the specified timeframe.

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

**8. Workforce Planning - Performance and Governance  
Plana Sgioba-obrach - Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais**

There had been circulated Report No RES/25/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Performance & Governance Workforce Action Plan at Appendix 2.

**9. Treasury Management  
Rianachd Ionmhais**

**a. Annual Treasury Management Report – 2022/23  
Aithisg Stiùiridh Bhliadhnail an Ionmhais – 2022/23**

There had been circulated Report No RES/26/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Annual Treasury Management report for 2022/23

**b. Summary of Transactions  
Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/27/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions reports for the period from 1 April to 30 June 2023.

**10. Financial assessment of Notices of Motion – ‘No Mow May’  
Measadh Ionmhasail air Brathan Glusaid**

There had been circulated Report No RES/28/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Chair advised that the standing order for the referrals of notices of motion was subject to an ongoing governance review, on the basis it was not considered by Members to be operating in a way that was helpful.

In relation to the financial assessment, points raised included the potential for staff to undertake surface dressing in May; to reduce costs from the disposal of waste arisings in some areas such as roadside verges by leaving the grass to mulch; and to reconsider the Council’s grass cutting policies as a whole.

It was pointed out that under the current referral process the debate on this Notice of Motion should take place at the full Council. It was hoped the governance review would recommend a more satisfactory process in terms of the best way to deal with the financial assessment and debate relating to notices of motion.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the financial assessment of the Notice of Motion relating to No Mow May.
- ii. the estimated additional costs associated with the motion were assessed as £348,240 consisting of the hire of specialists Mowers and the cost of dealing with Waste Arisings. There were likely additional but unquantified additional costs relating to roadside verge maintenance contacts also.
- iii. that further to these additional costs, there would be the implications of existing staff salary costs during May, and the standing charge cost of machinery, which would represent costs that were being incurred regardless of the cessation of mowing activity. Steps would be required to consider options to minimise such costs or identify other productive activity to be undertaken.
- iv. the financial risks and implications as set out in the report, and that a clear and agreed funding solution would need identified for the Notice of Motion to progress; and

- v. that the Notice of Motion and the financial assessment will be considered by Council on 14 September 2023.

**11. People and Finance Systems Programme  
Prògram Daoine agus Siostam Ionmhais**

There had been circulated Report No RES/29/23 by the Interim Chief Executive.

The Committee **NOTED** the update provided regarding the People and Finance Systems Programme.

**12. Annual Procurement Report  
Aithisg Sholair Bhliadhna**

**Mr A Christie made Transparency Statements in respect of this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/30/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In considering the strategy it was important to monitor and review procurement of Highland Council going forward and it would be good practise and good governance to do so more often. This would generate improved procurement practises and identify benefit, particularly for Highland.

At this juncture, the Committee had a short adjournment to consider a matter raised by a Member. However, as it was not specified on the agenda or included in the report, it was not debated (Standing Order 8 refers).

Returning to debate, it was observed that 68% of Regulatory Projects did not have requirements in relation to Fair Work Practices and it was queried if this would decrease. In response, it was explained that this would decrease, in conjunction with the newly appointed Community Benefits Manager for the Highland Council, the plan being to support a Policy on Community Benefits and Fair Work.

The Committee **APPROVED** the content and publication of the Highland Council Annual Procurement Report 2022-2023 (Appendix A of the report).

**13. Joint Procurement Strategy  
Ro-innleachd Solair nan Seirbheisean Co-roinnte**

**Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/31/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the Joint Procurement Strategy 2023–2026 (Appendix A of the report); and

- ii. **NOTED** that the Joint Procurement Strategy 2023-2026 would be published once also approved by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council.

**14. Scottish Government Consultation: Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill  
Co-chomhairleachadh Riaghaltas na h-Alba: Am Bile airson Briseadh-creideis  
is Dìcheallachd (Alba)**

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/32/23 dated 18 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

It was disappointing that 700,000 people in Scotland were in, or were at risk of, debt and Members welcomed the response submitted. One of the proposals of the Bill was to introduce a “mental health moratorium”, meaning debt enforcement could be frozen for someone with serious mental health problems. However, if certification was required by an approved mental health practitioner, this could result in delays given the waiting times to access these health practitioners.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the policy matters raised in this consultation;
- ii. **AGREED** by homologation the response detailed at Appendix 1 to the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** to highlight to the Scottish Parliament the Committee’s concerns that waiting lists for mental health assessments might delay access to the proposed moratorium for individual debtors.

**15. Equalities Reporting  
Aithris Co-ionannachd**

There had been circulated Report No RES/33/23 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

There was concern regarding equality monitoring of protected characteristics, particularly sexual orientation and gender reassignment, where, by their very nature, some individuals might not wish to answer these questions. As a result there was a danger that the data collected would be inherently biased and therefore the benefit of asking these questions was queried unless there were sound reasons to do so.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the analysis of protected characteristics and steps being taken to improve the collation of equalities data;
- ii. **NOTED** the improvement and changes in the Gender Pay Gap; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the Equal Pay Statement.

**16. Sexual Harassment Policy  
Poileasaidh Sàrachadh Gnèitheasach**

There had been circulated Report No RES/34/23 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the standalone Sexual Harassment Policy at Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** that the existing Bullying and Harassment and Grievance policies would be modified to reflect the separate Sexual Harassment Policy; and
- iii. **NOTED** the training planned for Nominated Bullying & Harassment Senior Officers and HR Officers, and the availability of this training for all staff.

**17. Minutes of Meetings**  
**Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan**

The following Minutes of Meetings had been circulated and:

- i. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee – 16 June 2023;
- ii. **APPROVED** - Staff Partnership Forum – 17 August 2023;
- iii. **NOTED** Employment Release Sub Committee – 26 June 2023;
- iv. **NOTED** Non Domestic Rates Appeals Committee – 30 June 2023.

The meeting was closed at 12.35 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 7 September 2023 at 10.35 am.

### Present:

Ms S Atkin	Ms M Hutchison
Mrs I Campbell	Ms L Johnston
Mr A Christie	Ms L Kraft
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr P Logue (remote)
Ms S Fanet	Ms M MacCallum
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mrs I MacKenzie (remote)
Mr D Fraser (substitute)	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs P Munro
Mr R Gale (substitute)	

### Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Mr I MacDonald

### Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms O MacLeod

### Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mrs B McAllister
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)	Mr C Munro (remote)
Mr D MacPherson	

### In attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning  
 Ms F Grant, Head of Education, Learning and Teaching  
 Ms A MacPherson, Head of Resources  
 Ms B Brown, Senior Lead Manager, Performance and Improvement  
 Ms T Stones, Senior Lead Manager, Professional Learning and Development  
 Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist  
 Mr J Cook, Head Teacher, Cawdor Primary School  
 Ms H Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School  
 Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)  
 Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer  
 Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

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

**Mr J Finlayson in the Chair**

### Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair welcomed the new Youth Convener, Orla MacLeod, to her first meeting of the Committee. He wished Orla well in

her new role and confirmed that she would outline her action plan for the coming year at the November Committee.

## **Business**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms H Crawford, Mr D Gregg, Mrs M Reid, Ms S Lamont and Mr W Skene.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 5: Mr A Christie

Item 7: Mr A Christie

### **3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

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 Education Committee.

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

The Chair explained that, as it was so early in the new school session, schools had not been asked for achievements to date. However, a video had been produced which outlined how the targeted "Get Into Summer" funding from the Scottish Government had been used to build a range of opportunities for children and young people to have access to playful, creative, and engaging experiences during the summer holidays. The Council had received £177k which had supported 34 projects across Highland.

Education staff, working with partners, had offered a wide variety of activities which had also supported childcare and provided food for children from low-income families. The programme had seen approximately 1400 individuals attend sessions with more than 11,700 total registered attendees as some pupils had attended multiple sessions. There had been over 1100 individual youth work and play sessions on offer and 23 jobs had been created or extended in voluntary youth clubs. Additionally, approximately 11,500 meals had been provided to attendees.

Special thanks were extended to the 504 young leaders, volunteers and staff who had supported the programme.



The video was then shown which, it was explained, included activities at The Field in Alness where a full summer programme had been held. This was just one example of the great work that had taken place across Highland.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and accompanying video regarding Get Into Summer Funding.

At this stage, the Chair explained that, as part of its Youth Programme, the Council's Elections Team had held a logo design competition across Highland schools. The aim of the competition had been to encourage pupils to be creative and become curious about how democracy worked and what taking part in political elections was all about.

The new and winning logo from the competition would be used at the upcoming Community Council Elections which take place in November 2023. It would also be displayed on ballot papers, nomination forms and widely used to encourage participation in the Community Council Elections.

The winner of the logo competition was Calum Torrens of Inverness Royal Academy whose design would now be used in all branding for the Community Council Elections.

The Senior Elections Officer then presented Calum Torrens with his certificate and prize.

## **5. Education and Learning Service Plan – Final Plana Seirbheis Foghlaim agus Ionnsachaidh – Deireannach**

**Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/23 dated 1 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the encouraging, positive and forward-looking Service Plan;
- the importance of getting it right for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) was emphasised and it was suggested that, where the Service Vision referred to raising attainment and achievement for all, especially for children and young people from disadvantaged circumstances, specific reference be made to children with ASN;
- given that the Plan referred to lifelong learning, it would be helpful to include some targets and measures in respect of adult education;
- the only way to tackle child poverty was to tackle poverty generally, and it was suggested that page 17 of the Plan, which referred to tackling child poverty including promoting access to welfare support, be re-worded and expanded upon, and that consideration be given to what schools could do to help parents who were in poverty that would then benefit their children. In addition, it would be helpful to build in the aspect of both young and adult carers;

- information was sought, and provided, on the proposed improvements in admissions procedures for special schools and enhanced provision;
- in relation to the improvement action to establish a performance and achievement tracking system in primary schools, concern was expressed that primary teachers were going to spend a significant amount of time tracking and monitoring, and further information was sought, and provided, in that regard. The Chair added that tracking and monitoring progress was at the core of the teaching role and supporting young people; and
- the specific reference to Looked After Children was welcomed, and it was commented that when a child was in care their educational setting might be the only stability in their life. The importance of Coordinated Support Plans in terms of keeping The Promise was emphasised and clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether there was any conflict where a child had a Coordinated Support Plan and a Child's Plan at the same time.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Service Plan for 2023/24; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the points raised during discussion regarding children with Additional Support Needs, adult education, poverty, and young and adult carers would be taken into consideration.

## **6. Excellence and Equity Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Shàr-mhathas agus Chothromas**

The Chair explained that feedback from Members had shown that sometimes the best way to understand the impact of things like Covid on schools and to better understand what was being done to both close the poverty attainment gap and improve attainment through quality learning and teaching was to hear directly from schools about what was happening on the ground and what challenges they faced, as well as what positive work was taking place and how Pupil Equity Funding was being used to support the challenges associated with delivering both Excellence and Equity.

He then welcomed James Cook, Head Teacher, Cawdor Primary School, and Hannah Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School, who gave presentations detailing how Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) funding was being utilised in their schools and sharing their experiences around striving to achieve excellence, improve attainment and support equity in educational establishments.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the use of the Child Poverty Action Group toolkit and the steps being taken to tackle the costs of the school day, which could be crippling for some families, were welcomed;
- there were a lot of good initiatives taking place in schools, and information was sought, and provided, in terms of sharing best practice;
- it having been commented that the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation did not reflect rural poverty in Highland, it was confirmed that representations continued to be made to the Scottish Government in that regard;
- it was queried how the high-quality lessons being delivered in Cawdor Primary School could be replicated across the authority and what infrastructure was needed to facilitate that;

- tackling the costs of the school day addressed family poverty, as mentioned under the previous item;
- poverty was easier to identify in towns and cities than in rural areas, and it would be helpful to do some work in terms of identifying and measuring poverty across Highland. It was added that local knowledge was key in terms of identifying hidden poverty, and it was necessary to empower communities to use local knowledge, with discretion, to help families;
- inclusivity was key;
- the importance of play was emphasised and information was sought, and provided, in that regard. The Chair added that it was hoped to have a Members' Workshop on play in the future;
- the breadth of support and activity taking place and the innovative work being done to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds was impressive; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the interventions in place to secure positive destinations for young people from disadvantaged groups; whether there was a specific strategy for involving staff in implementing and evaluating the work taking place in Thurso High School; and, in relation to S6 pupils mentoring younger pupils, whether there were benefits for the S6 pupils such as accruing volunteering hours for Saltire Awards and recognition for their CVs and personal statements.

Thanks having been expressed to Mr Cook and Ms Flavell for their inspiring presentations, the Committee **NOTED** the presentations.

## 7. Counselling in Schools Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Chomhairleachadh ann an Sgoiltean

**Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/16/23 dated 24 July 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that since Covid there had been an increased demand for counselling to support young people with the many challenges they faced, including issues with mental health. The report showed that while counselling was an important service in schools it was also just one piece of a bigger whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing that was required to support young people, families and school communities.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was sad to see the impact the Covid pandemic had had on what were now S2 pupils, which was an international issue, and it was queried whether the counselling service was helping those young people;
- information was sought, and provided as to whether trauma-informed practice was embedded in universal training for staff dealing with children and how counselling was delivered to children with language issues where a non-verbal form of communication was required;
- of the total number of young people accessing counselling in schools approximately 25-35% identified as male, and it was queried whether there was

- scope to increase that percentage as young men could be a vulnerable group in terms of mental health. It was added that when they did access counselling in school they were the most likely to recommend it so it was clearly working;
- it was queried what action was being taken to future-proof the service in the event Scottish Government funding was withdrawn;
  - information was sought, and provided, as to what could be done to reduce the causes of anxiety given that it was the main reason for referral for counselling;
  - it was queried whether there were any plans to address the fact that there were currently no Gaelic-speaking counsellors in Highland schools;
  - 70% of deaths by suicide were male, and it was important to ensure that there were no gender obstacles and that everyone who needed help sought it;
  - there was a perception by some that schools referred children for counselling when their behaviour became a problem. However, a child who needed counselling might not necessarily be disruptive and could be suffering in silence. It was queried whether this was considered to be an issue and, if so, how it could be addressed;
  - in relation to the table at section 8.2 of the report, clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether the figures represented the number of individuals accessing the service or the number of contacts. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the average number of interactions with a counsellor and the number of onward referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the Neuro Developmental Assessment Service;
  - on the point being raised, the Chair undertook to have a further update on Counselling in Schools at the Committee in May/June 2024;
  - it was queried whether pupils in small rural schools, where it was more difficult to be anonymous, were less likely to come forward and, if so, how that could be addressed;
  - officers were commended for implementing an in-house counselling service so quickly and providing continuity where possible;
  - the use of Kooth to provide online counselling and support was welcomed;
  - having counselling in schools normalised seeking help for mental health issues and reduced stigma; and
  - the Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, spoke to the importance of gender equity and providing gender-equal play, and undertook to share an e-learning module in that regard with Members of the Committee; and
  - it was good to have a debate on what had, in the past, been a taboo subject.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress made on embedding a school counselling service across Highland and the data gathered to date in relation to this service;
- ii. **NOTED** that counselling was one part of the available supports for promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing across Highland;
- iii. **NOTED** the training available in relation to Promoting Positive Relationships, Mental Health Awareness and Becoming Trauma Informed and **AGREED** to signpost this as appropriate to schools and services within communities;
- iv. **NOTED** and **AGREED** to promote the use of the website created for parents/carers, pupils and practitioners in Highland to support mental health and wellbeing: <https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/> and;
- v. **AGREED** that a further update on Counselling in Schools be presented to the Committee in May/June 2024.

## 8. National Discussion and Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Deasbad Nàiseanta agus Ath-sgrùdadh Neo-eisimeileach air Teisteanasan is Measadh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/17/23 dated 1 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that it was often said that education was an area of continual change. However, because society was changing so quickly it was necessary to continually review what learning, teaching and assessment looked like and ask if they were fit for purpose in a world where the profile of employment for the future would look so different from what it was today and where every young person deserved the chance to achieve and have their successes at every level acknowledged.

As Members would be aware, two main consultations had taken place in recent times and, following the recent successful workshop about current qualifications, the report provided an opportunity to hear about and discuss some of the proposals that had been put forward for the future as part of The National Discussion on Education and the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised in respect of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment:-

- concern was expressed that the suggested form of assessment could lead to instances of pupils leaving school after S4 with no qualifications;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Highers and Advanced Highers would continue and National 5 certificates would be internally assessed;
- National 5s being internally assessed could reduce the confidence of employers in these qualifications and would lead to pupils sitting Highers and Advanced Highers with no prior experience of externally assessed exams;
- Scotland was going in a different direction regarding qualifications than the rest of the UK which could lead to confusion for employers and universities;
- exams could be intimidating to some young people causing them not to do well, and the importance of having an inclusive education system was emphasised;
- the reference to lifelong learning was welcomed; and
- the need for further consultation and teacher engagement having been emphasised, it was explained that teachers would be given the opportunity to consider and provide feedback on the recommendations at the forthcoming inset day.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the update report on education reform in Scotland; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the actions set out as Next Steps in section 7 of the report to support engagement opportunities of our teachers with the information set out in the National Reports.

**9. Revenue Budget Monitoring Final Out-turn 2022/23 and Service Performance Reporting for Quarter 1 – 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023**  
**Fior Shuim Dheireannach Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2022/23 agus Aithris Coileanaidh Seirbheis airson Cairteal 1 – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 30 Ògmhios 2023**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/23 dated 11 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, the Chair explained that any underspend due to industrial action by teaching staff would be used across the Education Service and the Council generally;
- following concerns being raised around the poor condition of Inverness High School, the Chair commented that there had been significant investment in Inverness High School and officers from both Housing and Property and Education had visited the school. He reminded Members that the Capital Programme Review would be considered at the next meeting of the Full Council;
- the Devolved School Management Scheme disadvantaged schools in older buildings, and it was queried whether the review of the Scheme was ongoing and whether Members would have an opportunity for input; and
- it would make sense, from an educational needs perspective, for the Education and Learning Capital Programme to be reported to the Education Committee for scrutiny and monitoring purposes, as had taken place historically, rather than the Housing and Property Committee. The Chair undertook to investigate this and report back.

The Committee:-

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

**10. Statutory Consultation: Gergask Primary School – Proposal to Proceed to Consultation on Closure**  
**Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Bun-Sgoil Gharbhghaisg – Moladh a Dhol air Adhart gu Co-chomhairleachadh a Thaobh Dùnadh**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/19/23 dated 1 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal attached to the report.

**11. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Struan Primary School**  
**Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Dùnadh Bun-Sgoil an t-Sruthain**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/23 dated 23 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, Local Members made the following points:-

- Struan Community Council was fully supportive of the closure of the school and should be commended for their hard work to keep the school building in good condition; and
- it made sense for the catchment area to be transferred to that of Dunvegan Primary School.

\* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Dunvegan Primary School. Struan Primary had not been operational since 2022 and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

## **12. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Torridon Primary School Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Dùnadh Bun- Sgoil Thoirbheartan**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/23 dated 23 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

\* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it discontinue education provision at Torridon Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Shieldaig Primary School. Torridon Primary School had not been operational since 2012 and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

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

The draft Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 13 June 2023 had been circulated and were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 12.50 pm.