

AGENDA ITEM 5

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

Public Question

(1) **Ms G McMurray**

To Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Key aspirations of NHS Highland and Highland Council are to improve the health of their citizens by reducing loneliness and improving uptake of exercise.

The levels of pavement parking in the town and villages in the NHS/Council area means that disabled and other pavement users are prevented from getting out and about easily and also these obstructions are costing NHS Highland monies in Do Not Attend/cancelled appointments

Why is Highland Council tolerating this level of discriminatory behaviour

On the 15th of November 2019 the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 was granted Royal assent. Within Part 6 of the Act specific provisions were made for Pavement Parking restrictions.

Transport Scotland have undertaken consultations with Local Authorities and the public to deliver Regulations that are required to enforce the Act. These will be laid before parliament on December the 11th 2023. After approval by parliament, Local Authorities, only then, will be able to enforce these prohibitions.

Member Questions

One supplementary question will be allowed in each case which will be answered by the recipient of the original question.

(1) **Mr A Christie**

To the Leader of the Council

“Budget process and engagement

13.1 This report is a key step in the Council’s budget planning for 2024/25 and the medium term. The scale of the challenge and financial outlook for those years means a significant organisational focus on achieving financial sustainability will be necessary. While the Council will continue its focus on income generation, new opportunities and transformative activity, there is a very clear need to make significant and difficult decisions relating to cost reduction and a fundamental shift in the services and priorities the Council can provide for on a sustainable basis going forward. Reports to subsequent Council meetings will set out further specific actions and timetables for budget planning for 2024/25 and beyond.

13.2 The Council’s budget strategy and plans for the coming year(s) needs to be underpinned by a clear approach to budget engagement. Some initial planning for options, and the form that might take, is set out in this part of the report.

13.3 Planning for engagement on developing the 2023/24 budget is currently underway. At this point, a two phased approach is proposed:

- Phase 1 is proposed to seek views from our communities on areas for service change and income generation. This would include a mix of broad public engagement alongside targeted feedback sessions with partners and key third sector and community representatives to consider inter-agency working opportunities. A range of methods are proposed to gather views including online/face to face focus groups, surveys and online forums. Existing forums with partners and key groups will be utilised wherever possible.
- Phase 2 is proposed to focus on seeking views on specific proposals coming forward. At this point, it is anticipated this is likely to be targeted at subject matter/community experts, directly related to the specific proposals. Broader public engagement would be deployed depending upon the nature of the proposals”

What has the Administration actioned since the 14th September regarding these points?

There is a budget update report being considered at this meeting of the Council which provides an update on the actions that the Administration is undertaking in terms of engagement over the 2023/24 budget.

(2) Mr M Baird

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

The replacement of any road signs and Village name plates now needs to be bilingual ie. Gaelic and English.

We have waited for one village sign board which disappeared through rotten uprights to be replaced. The trouble to get a Gaelic translation in the first place and then a company to make the sign surely is not worth the huge expenditure involved.

Can the Chair please justify the necessity to have bilingual signs.

On 29 June 2023 Highland Council homologated the submission of the most recent iteration of the Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan to Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Highland Council commitment to bilingual signage is carried over from previous iterations of the Plans by Strategic Priority 3.1, which commits the Highland Council to – ‘Use Gaelic in business and social enterprises, and as an economic asset in Scotland.’ Actions under Strategic Priority 3.1 include: -

- Continue to work with Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba to promote the economic benefits of place-names and signage.
- Continue to promote the economic benefits of implementing The Highland Council’s bilingual policy, which includes the use of bilingual signage.

Both the Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28 and Highland Council Bilingual Policy can be found on the Highland Council website. Under the ‘Road Signs’ section of the policy, Highland Council commitments include:-

1. ‘Town, city and village welcome signs and Council road signs will be bilingual. Signs will incorporate historic village, town and city crests where appropriate.

2. Gaelic will be green and English in black on these signs.
3. When new signs are being erected or existing signs are being replaced, bilingual signs will be erected.'

Therefore, the justification for bilingual road signage flows directly from The Highland Council's statutory obligations and their commitment to afford the Gaelic language equal respect with the English language by normalising the use of Gaelic in the day-to-day fabric of life in the Highlands of Scotland.

(3) Mr D Gregg

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee

How many people are currently waiting for either a package of care or a care home space within the Highland Council area?

There are currently 361 people awaiting Care at Home packages, and 42 people delayed in hospital awaiting a care home placement.

(4) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Leader of the Council

We know we have an increasingly ageing population, so it is important that we adapt to this change and ensure people can have better later lives.

Being more age-friendly would have major benefits for our area, helping us to be a community where everyone can feel confident to be out and about in public spaces, to volunteer or stay in work, and to stay well and connected to family and friends. Age-friendly Communities ensure that the local environment, services, and social networks enable people to age well and support intergenerational relations. Becoming an age-friendly community is not just about starting new things, it's a way to bring together and make visible all the work that is already happening in our community which is age-friendly.

Please could you tell me what you will do to make our Highland Council area more age-friendly and take the lead to make Highlands become a member of the Age-friendly Communities?

I do recognise that we have an aging population in the Highlands, and this will require both the Council and our public sector partners to consider how best to support age-friendly communities. I and the Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee would be happy to meet with you and the other Older People Champions to discuss this further.

(5) Mr M Reiss

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

With reference to the recently completed review of Highland Council buildings, excluding the school estate, what is the approximate estimated financial cost of carrying out repairs that have been identified as necessary within the next 18 months (to the end of the financial year 2024/25)?

This question should have been addressed to the Chair of Housing and Property, as this issues you raise are not within the remit of the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure.

However, I have been advised that the 18-month timescale requested is not explicitly captured in the condition survey data, so in response to this question the timescale has been taken to mean all works identified in the property condition surveys categorised as Priority 1 or 2, whereby the priorities are defined as:

- Priority 1: Urgent work that must be completed at the earliest opportunity.
- Priority 2: Essential work required within two years to prevent serious deterioration of the fabric or services and/or address a medium/high risk to the health and safety of occupants and/or remedy a breach of legislation.

The condition survey programme is ongoing, 37% of the estate has been surveyed to date. For this reason, we have included in the figures below the recorded backlog costs from the surveys completed to date and the projected backlog costs expected at the completion of the survey programme. Projected backlog costs will be subject to change as the survey programme progresses.

Therefore, the projected cost of carrying out repairs to the non-school estate over the next 24 months is set out in the table below.

Property Element Group	Priority 1&2 Projected Backlog Maintenance Costs
	Non-Schools
01 Roofs	£4,259,077.96
02 Floors and Stairs	£991,232.09
03 Ceilings (Ground and Upper Floors)	£354,675.03
04 External Walls, Windows and Doors	£3,981,759.92
05 Internal Walls and Doors	£667,298.10
06 Sanitary Services	£84,015.09
07 Mechanical	£996,798.00
08 Electrical	£3,591,717.12
09 Redecorations	£750,797.93
10 Fixed Internal Facilities, Furniture and Fittings	£89,268.58
11 External Areas	£6,773,761.84
12 Outdoor Sports Facilities and Permanent Fixed Furniture	£21,434.50
Total	£22,561,836.17

(6) Mr C Balance

To the Chair of Communities and Place

I understand that preliminary discussions on moving the transport of residual waste from Inverness to Dunbar from road to rail have taken place. Can you update us on the progress of these talks?

Exploratory discussions have taken place as to whether any upcoming waste transport contract could incorporate a rail freight option. The existing residual waste haulage contract expires in Autumn 2024 and the Council will commence a procurement process to secure a haulage solution in early 2024. Any solution will be assessed in accordance with the tender which will not preclude a supplier offering transport through a rail solution.

(7) Mr R MacKintosh

To the Leader of the Council

What is Highland Council doing to investigate the possible uses of AI, particularly in relation to customer service?

The Highland Council's MyCouncil Programme, being taken forward by the Redesign Board, has been developed to facilitate improved service outcomes through data-led decision making. Central to this is the creation and maintenance of robust datasets in line with the Council's Digital Strategy that was approved at the Corporate Resources Committee in September 22. Possible uses of AI in relation to customer service using these datasets will be considered within this programme. The next report to the Redesign Board is due on 8th December 23.

The Council is also committed to providing a sustainable approach to the stewardship of data in alignment with the recommendations within National Digital Strategy and Audit Scotland recommendations.

(8) Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

I note that the Green Hydrogen Fund will be launched by Scot Gov by the end of this year, as part of the Hydrogen Action Plan. What will we be bidding for from it?

The Administration, and indeed this council and its committees, considers all opportunities to bid for external funding for projects that will be beneficial to the Council's Net Zero ambitions. This will be no different.

(9) Mr A Graham

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Please provide number of road gullies on the Highland Council road network, analysed by ward, failing which by operational area

The information requested is set out below.

Area	Ward	Name	Total Number of Gullies
Sutherland	1	North, West and Central Sutherland	887
Caithness	2	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	1827
Caithness	3	Wick and East Caithness	3002
Sutherland	4	East Sutherland & Edderton	1604
Ross & Cromarty	5	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	1821
Ross & Cromarty	6	Cromarty Firth	2864
Ross & Cromarty	7	Tain & Easter Ross	1583
Ross & Cromarty	8	Dingwall & Seaforth	3293
Ross & Cromarty	9	Black Isle	1960
Skye and Raasay	10	Eilean a Cheo	878
Lochaber	11	Caol & Mallaig	1361
Inverness	12	Aird & Loch Ness	1062
Inverness	13	Inverness West	1939
Inverness	14	Inverness Central	2425
Inverness	15	Inverness Ness-side	2663
Inverness	16	Inverness Millburn	3218
Inverness	17	Culloden & Ardersier(- Nairn)	2210
Nairn	18	Nairn and Cawdor	2041
Inverness	19	Inverness South	3020
Badenoch & Strathspey	20	Badenoch & Strathspey	2653
Lochaber	21	Ft William & Ardnamurchan	2295
Total			44606