

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 16 November 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken	Mr R Jones
Ms S Atkin (Substitute)	Mr W MacKay (Remote)
Mr M Baird	Mrs T Robertson (Remote)
Mr I Brown	Ms L Niven
Mr J Bruce	Mr M Reiss (Substitute)
Mr M Cameron	Mr A Rhind
Mr A Christie	Mr K Rosie
Mr K Gowans	Mr R Stewart
Mr S Kennedy (Substitute)	Ms K Willis (Remote)

Non-Members also present:

Ms S Fanet (Remote)	Ms J McEwan
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson (Remote)
Mr D Fraser (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr B Lobban (Remote)	Mr P Oldham (Remote)
Mr R MacKintosh	Mrs M Ross

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead, Environment, Development and Active Travel
Mr D Chisholm, Tourism and Inward Investment Team Leader
Mr A Puls, Environment Team Leader
Mr M Bailey, Programme Manager (City Region Deal)
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager
Ms H Cameron, Housing Development Manager
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Manager
Mr J McHardy, Housing Development Manager
Ms A MacKay, Business Manager
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer
Ms L Carpenter, Senior Transport Office
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer, Performance and 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 M Green, Mr H Morrison and Ms M Smith.

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

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

Item 8: Mr S Kennedy

and Transparency Statement:-

Item 9: Mr W MacKay

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

- **Retirements**

Mr John McHardy, Housing Development Manager was to retire at the end of the month having started working for the then Ross and Cromarty District Council in September 1973. He started as a trainee architectural technician and, over his career, worked as a housing development officer before gaining promotion to Housing Development Manager. For the past 50 years he had worked tirelessly to help the council, the public and private sector partners to deliver housing solutions throughout the Highland. He had delivered directly, or enabled the delivery of, high-quality affordable housing throughout Highland and his proactive attitude meant Councillors and Community Councils would approach him to unlock housing constraints and deliver new homes for their communities.

He was also instrumental in setting up:-

- The Rural Partnership for change to tackle housing shortages in remote rural areas;
- The Highland Housing Bub, a partnership vehicle which increased the number of affordable homes delivered from 100 per annum to over 600 per annum; and
- Firm Foundations, a standardised affordable housing specification for all affordable housing providers in Highland, making it easier for contractors and creating efficiencies in the supply chain.

Ms Ailsa MacKay, Business Manager was also retiring. Ailsa had worked with the Council for 47½ years in a variety of different roles, culminating in the Business Manager post in the Infrastructure, Environment and Economy

Service. Details of her progression through the Council were provided and this was a good example of growing your own and supporting staff with their development.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked John and Ailsa, wished them a long and happy retirement and presented with gifts as a token of appreciation.

- **Logie Burn Bridge, Muir of Ord**

In September, the U3009 road was closed following the partial collapse of Logie Burn Bridge, which had been struck by a vehicle. Thanks to a repair promptly arranged by the Council and carried out by Highland Building & Conservation Ltd., the Council was able to reopen the road. Credit was given to all involved, given the difficulty to find experienced stone masons at short notice.

- **Conon Braes, Conon Bridge**

At the August 2023 Committee the proposal for a Design and Build Contract to deliver 27 homes was approved and the plan was to start on site in November. This reflected the hard work of the team working collaboratively to agree specification, facilitate Scottish Government grant approvals and land purchase in a short time frame.

- **Coulhill, Alness**

18 one-and two-bedroom flats had been successfully completed at the start of October 2023. They were built on the site of the former janitor's house and a children's home which were demolished to make way for much needed homes.

- **Registration of First Local Place Plan in Highland**

Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council was one of the first across Scotland to prepare a Local Place Plan for their community and have it formally registered with the Council. It was hoped this would inspire others to proactively plan for their future and shape services and the future of their area.

4. Quarterly Revenue and Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2023/24

Aithisg Ràitheil Teachd-a-steach agus Sgrùdadh Coileanadh Cairteil 2 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/54/2023 dated 24 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Corran Ferry should be excluded given the exceptional set of events which had distorted the overall figures. In this regard it was queried if the vessels had received a completely clean bill of health or if there were still outstanding maintenance and repair advisories;
- Members requested copies of the paperwork which was sent to the Scottish Government to request financial support for the Corran Ferry;
- regarding 4.3.4 of the report, further explanation was sought regarding how vacant staff salaries would be recovered as they were unable to be recharged to the capital programme budget;
- an update on the Bus Transformation project was requested to be circulated to Members of the ECI Committee. In this regard it was queried if school transportation demand had gone up due to Drummond school, or mainstream schools;
- regarding 5.2 of the report, further information was sought regarding staff absenteeism and if it was attributable to pressure of workload or stress related absences;
- complaint handling KPIs were significantly below the Council average, therefore concern was raised that this may be due to staff workload. If this was the case, then Members could take this into account for budget planning;
- an update on general recruitment was requested;
- it was queried if any increase in backpay had been included in the staff costs calculations within the report;
- it was requested that appendix items containing spreadsheets be provided to Members in excel format to allow a greater level of scrutiny;
- regarding 4.3.10 of the report, it was queried if the less than expected income for public carparking was due to pricing. In this regard information was sought why carparking income was not as high as expected; and
- regarding 4.3.7 of the report, clarification was sought on the phrases ‘the budget fee held centrally’ and ‘at this stage unable to confirm the amount the Service will receive’.

The Committee-

- NOTED** the Service’s revenue monitoring position;
- NOTED** the Service’s performance and risk information; and
- AGREED** to bring a report to future committee on Bus Transformation for information and update.

5. Capital Monitoring – Q2 2023/24 Sgrùdadh Calpa – C2 2023/24

There was circulated Report No. ECI/55/2023 dated 13 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion it was queried what percentage of the Highland road network had been completed according to the roads capital programme and thanks were expressed for road improvement works to the C1029.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Service's the financial position as at 30 September 2023; and
- ii. the estimated year end forecast.

6. Draft Biodiversity Planning Guidance Dreachd Stiùireadh Dealbhadh Bith-iomadachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/56/2023 dated 2 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- appreciation was expressed to officers for the report;
- disappointment was expressed that the report had not taken into account the additional costs on the local developers. It was felt that additional transparency should be offered when discussing costs associated for community developers and if indicative costs could be provided for a small housing development additional to the cost of building and planning application fees;
- caution was raised that developers might choose not to include biodiversity works if they were optional;
- the recommendations should identify a date of completion for the consultation process;
- clarification was sought on how the Council would deal with any representations which came back as part of the process. In this regard it was queried if officers or Members at the Economy & Infrastructure Committee would review and decide on these issues;
- it was queried if the Council had resources to deliver the project and future resources to maintain progress;
- concerns were raised regarding the financial compensation and off-site compensation. In this regard it was queried if guidance would be produced on this and if compensation areas would explicitly be in Scotland or the UK; and
- it was queried if there were circumstances where a development application would not be passed due to irreversible loss of biodiversity.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** that the draft Biodiversity Planning Guidance (BPG) was released for minimum 4 weeks public consultation; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a date be set for the end of the community consultation process.

7. Tackling the Nature Emergency: Consultation on Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity – Proposed Council Response A' Dèiligeadh ris an Èiginn Nàdair: Co-chomhairleachadh air Frèam Ro-innleachdail na h-Alba airson Bith-iomadachd – Freagairt na Comhairle ga Moladh

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/57/2023 dated 16 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- whilst there was unanimous support of protecting biodiversity, it was important to be mindful of unintended consequences. Prior to submission of the consultation response, it was important that views of Members previously expressed were clarified;
- it was contended that the response somewhat backtracked on the previously agreed position regarding Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) and it was important to represent the best interest of the farming and inshore fishing communities
- in remote and rural communities there was a dependence on fishing and farming and care needed to be taken on anything that could impact on depopulation, especially those of working age;
- tackling the nature crisis would, however, have far reaching positive effects across Highland. Nature restoration would also help protect rural population;
- there would be challenges in resourcing the actions proposed with many being the responsibility of local authorities and it was hoped the Scottish Government would recognise this;
- the proposal to hold a Members' Workshop was supported to discuss the powers devolved to National Parks so there was a greater understanding of the options and opportunities available;
- concern was expressed about the proposal to pass the powers over the Rights of Way and, from experience, with it being a complex issue, it was best retained by local authorities; and
- if nature positive actions were to be embedded cooperation of external existing organisations and stakeholders was necessary.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed Council response to Tackling the Nature Emergency: Consultation on Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity.

8. **Building Warrant Fees: Consultation Response** **Cisean Barantas Togail: Freagairt Cho-chomhairleachaidh**

Declaration of Interest: Mr S Kennedy declared a financial interest in this item as an applicant for a Building Warrant and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/58/2023 dated 12 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the details of the Building Warrant Fees Consultation Responses noted in Appendix 1 of the report;
- AGREED** to **HOMOLOGATE** the Council's response to the consultation; and
- AGREED** further participation by the Council if further consultation was requested for strengthening and sustaining building standards within Highland.

9. **Award of Community Transport Grants**
Toirt Seachad Tabhartasan Còmhhdhail Coimhearsnachd

How

Transparency Statement: Mr W MacKay made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a voluntary Director of Caithness Voluntary Group. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/59/2023 dated 13 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- this was good news for communities across Highland;
- the award to Community Support and Information, Ross-Shire was commended. This was a cross-Ward car scheme co-ordinating with the Ferintosh Wee Bus;
- it was queried if car schemes considered leasing vehicles as an alternative to purchasing but this was a matter for individual organisations to decide;
- it would be helpful if details of the amount bid for could be included in the report; and
- in regard to those organisations ineligible, information was sought, and provided, as to the support provided to encourage them to reapply.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the grant award recommendations as set out in Table 1, Paragraph 5.5 of the report, with awards proposed to 28 Community Transport groups, including four new recipients;
- ii. **AGREED** that the £7,000 annual budget to support driver training and emergency repairs for Community Transport organisations continued;
- iii. **AGREED** that a proportion of the funding made available by Transport Scotland's Community Bus Fund (CBF) was used to ensure vehicle provision to a number of groups, as capital funding was not accommodated by the Community Transport grant budget; and
- iv. **NOTED** that:-
 - a. issuance of grant payments in line with award recommendations would be dependent upon groups' submission of regular claim forms and progress reports;
 - b. grant awards might be withdrawn, withheld or reduced in instances where claim forms and progress reports were either persistently not submitted, or where they reflected that a group's activity did not match that which was outlined in their application; and
 - c. alternative funding sources were being sought for Ferintosh Community Council's application.

10. Visit Inverness Loch Ness (VILN) Business Improvement District (BID) Renewal
Ùrachadh Roinn Leasachadh Gnothachais Tadhair Inbhir Nis Loch Nis

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/60/2023 dated 17 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **APPROVED** the assessment made in Appendix 1 of the report relative to the Visit Inverness Loch Ness BID Proposal and **AGREED** not to exercise the Council's right of veto.

11. UK Share Prosperity Fund Programme (UKSPF) - Update
Prògram Maoin Soirbheis Cho-roinnte na RA – Cunntas às Ùr

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/61/2023 dated 23 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the redirection of £148.3k UKSPF 2023/24 monies within the People & Skills priority to allocate to the Science Skills Academy for spend during the first quarter of 24/25 financial year;
- ii. **NOTED** that a third round of the Community Regeneration Fund Programme with funding secured from the UKSPF, was to be launched before end November 2023 and **AGREED** that round three CRF grant award decisions was taken by the existing Economy and Infrastructure Committee Community Regeneration Fund Programme sub-group, comprising the Chair and Vice Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and the Chair of each of the Area Committees; and
- iii. **AGREED** to utilise up to £100k from the UKSPF to support costs associated with the 2024 Fort William Mountain Bike World Cup Event.

12. Early Adoption of 20mph Speed Limits in Highland Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhith a' Gabhail gu Tràth ri Crìochan-astair 20msua anns a' Ghàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/62/2023 dated 23 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was important to clarify the situation as there had been a degree of misinformation. The Chair explained that there would be full consultation with communities and, once all the responses had been collated, it would be brought to Area Committees for recommendations. There would undoubtedly be changes to the proposals before it was finalised in the next 15-18 months;
- when reported back to Area Committees it was requested that comments submitted also be filtered down to Ward level;
- a number of requests had been received from communities for the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit;

- the differing speed limit signs, road markings and radar signs caused confusion, particularly to Learner Drivers. It was recognised that there were some anomalies but this was due to the speed the 6,500 signs had been put up. Engagement with schools and Parent Councils would also be a positive move;
- some examples of concern regarding signage were expressed on behalf of communities and these would be drawn to the Road Safety Team to address. Irregularities, including the size of signage, would, as they arose, be ironed out;
- whilst there was a culture change now in accepting 20 mph zones there would always be some who resisted it;
- evidence had been provided on the safety benefits of 20 mph limits and, where they had been introduced, they were working well. The reduction in speed had encouraged more pedestrians to use towns and villages in a safer environment;
- there was the risk that, where 20 mph zones were put in place, an argument could be made about streets and lanes then needing 10 mph zones;
- information was sought as to the cost of the scheme, taking into account it was being funded by Transport Scotland, but also Council officers' time involved. There was a suggestion the officers employed on this scheme might have been used for road maintenance instead; and
- the Road Safety team were congratulated for their hard work, particularly assessing all the 211 settlements with the emphasis on safety and the desire to improve the quality of life in communities.

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

13. Road Structures Annual Report Aithisg Bhliadhnail Structar Rathaidean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/63/2023 dated 23 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Concern was expressed at the deteriorating condition of Wick Harbour and, should it collapse, the significant impact it would have on the economy of the town and Caithness as a whole. However, it was explained that the Harbour was not within the Council's ownership but efforts had been made to direct the local community to possible sources of help. The bridge near to the Harbour was on the Major Bridge Priority list and, while the scoring matrix was accepted, it was hoped with recent developments at the Harbour, and that it was as important as the Naver Bridge, it could be significantly placed higher up on the list.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the updated 'Structures Inspections' policy;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Bridge Stock Condition Indicators in Highland; and
- iii. **NOTED** the current position in Highland in relation to the number of structures inspections undertaken.

14. City Region deal Monitoring Group– Change of Membership
Buidheann Sgrùdaidh Cùmhnant Baile Roinne – Atharrachadh Ballrachd

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr A Christie be appointed to the City Region Deal Monitoring Group to replace Ms J McEwan.

15. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

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

- i. South PAC – 27 June 2023;
- ii. North PAC – 9 August 2023;
- iii. South PAC – 23 August 2023; and
- iv. North PAC – 12 September 2023.

Arising from the Planning Application Committee minutes, assurances were sought that, once Applications were approved, decision notices were issued.

The Committee also **APPROVED**:-

- v. Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group of 18 August 2023 and 22 September 2023;
- vi. City Region Deal Monitoring Group of 5 September 2023;
- vii. Education Transport Entitlement Review Sub-Committee of 18 September 2023;
- viii. Wildfires Working Group of 5 October 2023;
- ix. Harbours Management Board of 3 November 2023.

16. 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.

17. Property Transactions Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/64/2023 dated 16 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

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

18. Housing Development Initiatives
Iomairtean Leasachadh Taigheadais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/65/2023 dated 11 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

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

19. Inverness & Highland City Region Deal - Project Options
Cùmhnant Baile Roinne Inbhir Nis & na Gàidhealtachd – Roghainnean Pròiseict

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/66/2023 dated 1 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Having welcomed the flexibility proposed in budgets, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 12:25 pm