

Minutes of Meetings

To be submitted to the Council

On

14 December 2023

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The Highland Council
No. 7 2023/2024

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 26 October 2023 at 10.35 am.

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

Present:

Mr C Aitken	Mr B Lobban
Ms S Atkin	Mr P Logue
Mr M Baird	Mr D Louden
Mr C Ballance	Ms M MacCallum
Dr C Birt	Mr A MacDonald
Mr B Boyd	Mr W MacKay (Remote)
Mr R Bremner	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr I Brown	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr J Bruce	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr M Cameron	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Ms T Collier (Remote)	Ms J McEwan
Mrs H Crawford	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Mr C Munro (Remote)
Mr L Fraser	Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr R Gale	Ms M Nolan
Mr K Gowans	Mr P Oldham
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Graham	Mrs M Reid
Mr D Gregg	Mr M Reiss
Mrs J Hendry	Mr A Rhind
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)	Ms T Robertson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie
Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)	Ms M Ross
Ms L Johnston	Mrs L Saggars
Mr R Jones (Remote)	Mr A Sinclair
Mr S Kennedy	Ms M Smith
Ms E Knox	Mr R Stewart
Ms L Kraft	Ms K Willis

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Interim Deputy Chief Executive
Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning
Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care
Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance
Head of Corporate Finance
Interim Head of People

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baldrey, Mr M Green, Mr R Gunn, Mr S Mackie, Mrs B McAllister and Ms P Munro.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 4.i – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 6.iii – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 11 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 12 – Mr R Stewart

3. **Confirmation of Minutes** **Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais**

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 14 September (and continued on 3 October 2023) and the Special Council on 3 October 2023 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately which were **APPROVED**.

4. **Minutes of Meetings of Committees** **Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean**

Transparency Statement: the undernoted Members declared connections to item 4i but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr A Christie - as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and a Non-Executive Member of the Inverness BID Board.

Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland and as a Board Member of Inverness Citizens Advice Bureau.

There had been submitted for confirmation as correct records, for information as regards delegated business and for approval as appropriate, the Minutes of Meetings of Committees contained in the Volume circulated separately as undernoted:-

Pensions Committee/Board	21 September 2023
Audit and Scrutiny Committee	28 September 2023
Climate Change Committee	5 October 2023

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded were **APPROVED**.

Minutes of Meetings not included in the Volume were as follows:-

- i. Community Planning Board – for noting – held on 22 June 2023 (approved by the Board on 15 September 2023) **NOTED**; and
- ii. Investment Sub Committee – for confirmation as a correct record - held on 8 September 2023 **NOTED**.

5. Question Time Àm Ceiste

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Legal and Governance.

Public Question

(i) Ms G McMurray

To the Leader of the Council

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?

The response had been circulated.

Member Questions

(i) Mr A Christie

To the Chair 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?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(ii) 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 i.e. 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?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried when the missing sign with the Gaelic translation would be installed as it had been waited for for months.

In response, this Ward Manager.

(iii) Mr D Gregg

To the Chair of Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

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

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how many people were awaiting discharge from hospital this time last year.

In response, it was confirmed that 147 people were awaiting discharge from hospital at this time in 2022.

(iv) 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?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Leader would also engage with the Scottish Old People's Network which is an affiliate of age-friendly communities so that Highland can be put on the map in the United Nations decade of healthy aging.

In response, The Leader of the Council agreed to do so and emphasised that all Members should be champions in their own communities to raise the profile of the elderly within communities and to be able to support them.

(v) 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)?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(vi) Mr C Ballance

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?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given the Council's commitment to Net Zero the Chair of Communities and Place was asked to confirm that when the tender for the transport of residual waste went out could it include a way for providers to show the carbon costs of their services so that a decision could be taken related to the carbon cost as well as the financial cost.

In response, it was confirmed the Communities and Place service was always looking at ways to reduce carbon within the service and would consider all opportunities to do so as they looked at the contract.

(vii) 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 response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether the Council planned to gather feedback from the community regarding the possible implementation of AI in customer service.

In response, it was confirmed that this would be done and that everything would have checks and balances.

(viii) 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?

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what the Council would be bidding for support from the Green Hydrogen Fund and whether more information would be provided on this.

In response, it was confirmed that a report on this would go to either the Economy and Infrastructure Committee or the Climate Change Committee in due course.
In response,

(ix) Mr A Graham

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

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

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how many gullies had been cleared by the Council in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

In response, it was confirmed that this information would be provided. It was also emphasised that a lot of pressure been put on gullies recently and a lot of inspections would need to be done following the recent storm.

6. Notices of Motion Brathan Glusaid

The following Notices of Motion have been received by the Head of Legal and Governance –

- (i) Following concerns raised by the Parent Council of Rogart Primary regarding the PSA hours allocated to the school where they had been reduced by 50% the Sutherland Members requested a breakdown of PSA hours from the Education ASN Manager. This was provided at the ward Business meeting in August and delivered personally by the ASN Manager.

The figures provided were contrary to the information received from parents and as a result there is serious concerns about the allocation of PSA hours not only in Rogart but across the Highlands. There is also concern about the algorithm that is used to assess the need in each school and whether it is right and proper to use such a tool to determine the needs of our most vulnerable children. Furthermore, it is well known that following the pandemic the demand for additional support has increased across the board so to reduce the hours of support staff is clearly contrary to the need that exists.

Given that this support is vital for the wellbeing and education of our most vulnerable children this council will commit to a full review of PSA hours at all schools in consultation with parents as a matter of urgency and to be presented to the first Education Committee in 2024.

Signed:- Mr R Gale Mr J McGillivray Ms J McEwan Mr D Gregg
Mrs A MacLean

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- children across Highland had suffered as a result of the covid pandemic and, as a result, the need for additional support in schools had grown. Some Members had been approached by concerned parents that the Pupil Support Assistant (PSA) provision in Rogart Primary had been cut by 50% despite an increase in demand. An update on the Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision in schools was reported to an East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Business Meeting but gave conflicting information to that provided by the parents;
- concern was expressed that a layer of ASN management had been removed, taking away experience and expertise that directly affected how ASN was administered;
- it was feared that the removal of PSAs on short term contracts was sometimes used as a budget saving measure and did not take into consideration the dedication and commitment of staff and the support and bond developed with the children;
- PSAs were among some of the lowest paid members of staff in the Council but were also some of the most valued;
- there seemed to be a breakdown in communication between what the Education Service thought was happening and the experiences of Parent Councils;
- the Neurological Assessment Service had seen a ten-fold increase in referrals since the Covid pandemic and this would be reflected in the number of children in Highland schools with ASN;

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- Members had a duty to represent the concerns of their constituents whether at Local, Strategic Committee or even Full Council;
- there was a raft of other issues affecting the wellbeing of children including inadequate diet and housing;
- the rationale used to determine additional support was questioned;
- the reasons behind the anomaly which had arisen around PSA provision at Rogart Primary were explained and assurance provided that this had now been resolved;
- there was a degree of unease about naming schools in such a Motion where, when there were small rolls, staff and potentially vulnerable pupils could be identified;
- PSAs was only one way in which children with ASN were supported and there had been no reduction in provision, despite the budget pressures faced by Highland Council;
- the allocation model had only been in place for three months and it had been recognised that it would take three years to fully implement. However, other Members contended that if a process was not working as intended then it was important to be able to change it as and when required;
- the new model, which included local decision making, had been arrived at in response to concerns about the equity and fairness of the previous allocation and the need to develop a more inclusive practise which could react to change as and when required;
- the new model also took into account those children who had exceptional needs;
- Highland Council spent considerably more on ASN than other local authorities; and
- the algorithm used was only a small part of the calculation used to determine the allocation of PSAs. This enabled any discrepancies locally to be addressed by those best placed to make decisions.

Thereafter, Mr R Gale, seconded by Ms J McEwan, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, moved an alternative Motion that “The Council will continue to implement the ASL allocation model which was agreed at the Education Committee in February of this year and any review of PSA hours can only be carried out after full implementation of the model has taken place”.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 21 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 34 votes, with 6 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie; Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Ms M Nolan, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart, Ms M Smith.

For the Amendment:

Ms S Atkin, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Finlayson, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie.

Abstentions

Mr C Ballance, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr H Morrison, Mr M Reiss, Ms K Willis.

Decision

The Council **AGREED:-**

The Council will continue to implement the ASL allocation model which was agreed at the Education Committee in February of this year and any review of PSA hours can only be carried out after full implementation of the model has taken place.

- (ii) Screen Machine is Scotland's mobile cinema and in September 2023, celebrates 25 years of the service, during which time it has travelled approximately 250,000 miles. It visits more than forty communities each year, from Arran to Orkney, where there is little or no other cultural provision. The service brings the latest cinema releases to local communities, offering blockbusters, independent and family films and ensuring it shows the best of Scottish cinema.

This service is now at risk as the existing machine is reaching the end of its lease. A new Screen Machine will cost approx. £1.4m and need between one year and eighteen months to build. RSS needs the Scottish Government to provide 50% of the cost. That will enable them to pay a deposit and begin the build.

This council recognises the importance of this service and agrees that the Leader will write to the Scottish Government and urge them to provide the 50% funding that will ensure that a new machine can be ordered.

Signed:- Mr R Gale Mr M Baird Mr D Gregg Mr A Graham

Decision

The Council **AGREED** this Motion.

- (iii) **Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made Transparency Statement as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and a Non-Executive Member of the Inverness BID Board. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

Mr D Gregg made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as an employee of NHS Highland and as a Board Member of Inverness Citizens Advice Bureau. However, he elected to then leave the meeting and asked that his name be withdrawn from the Notice of Motion.

Highland Council calls upon the Scottish Government to fund NHS Highland sufficiently well to do its job and avoid massive cuts!

1. Review the financial chasm between NHS Highland Services needs to deliver high-quality person-centred care and the associated budget allocated by the Scottish Government.
2. Recognize that:
 - a. As at the last published financial report of the 30th June NHS Highland had submitted a financial plan to Scottish Government for the 2023/2024 financial year, with an initial budget gap of approaching a hundred million pounds, with actual funding cuts of almost thirty million pounds proposed.
 - b. No funding source had subsequently been identified to close the associated residual gap of seventy million pounds.
 - c. The Scottish Government 'Tailored Support' to the NHS Highland Financial Plan entails a review of activities with a view to working with Lead Officers to identify activities that may be reduced or stopped.

Call upon the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to fund NHS Highland sufficiently to do its job.

Call upon the Scottish Cabinet Secretary to acknowledge the devastating effect these cuts will be on a Highland population that is already struggling to access care, dentistry, GP and hospital services across the region.

Signed:- Mr A MacDonald Mr A Graham Mr M Baird Mr D Gregg (withdrawn) Mr J Grafton Ms J McEwan Mr R Gale
Mr R Gunn Mrs A MacLean

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- all Members expressed their appreciation to staff providing healthcare in Highland under challenging circumstances;
- it was contended that the healthcare sector in the Highland suffered from inflationary pressures. These issues required a major increase in funding given that there was a budget gap in annual running costs and major investment was required to replace or upgrade hospitals and care homes;
- the Highland Health and Social Care Partnership (HHSCP) finance report had confirmed that there was a budget gap of £98m for the year 2023/24. Cuts of £29.5m had been proposed but no funding source had been identified for the remaining £68.7m;
- the HHSCP report also highlighted the difficulty in hiring and retaining staff and indicated that locum and agency staffing between 1 April to the end July had cost £22.6m;
- largely due to staffing issues, seven care homes had closed permanently and temporarily since March 2022 with a loss of 161 beds. A major care home company had also exited from their 3 Highland care homes. Independently owned care homes were losing money. However, these were "for profit" companies and it was concerning when profits were put before residents;

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- care home staff were paid less than those in the hospitality sector;
- whilst striving to ensure that the best practise was provided, new facility upgrade requirements for licencing were, it was contended, unaffordable but unless an independent care home was relicensed it could not be sold as a care home;
- ideally care home residents should be placed close to where they had lived;
- there had been a reduction in available commissioned services of 2500 hrs per week over the last two years and consequently this had resulted in delayed discharges from hospitals;
- there was a commitment that 95% of patients at Accident and Emergency would be seen with 4 hrs but in NHS Highland it was only 78.5% and, as at end of May 2023, there were 13,355 people on the NHS Highland waiting list for appointments;
- the current state of Highland hospitals was a matter of concern;
- the shortage of dentists in Highland was particularly acute;
- healthcare services overall in Highland were in a dangerous state and needed a substantial increase in Scottish Government funding;
- similar points raised in the Motion had been questioned in the Scottish Government by Edward Mountain MSP. It was suggested that the Conservative and Unionist Government in Westminster was better placed to properly fund the NHS;
- National Care Service workshops had recently been held where the specific, but unique, healthcare challenges that were faced in Highland had been highlighted and it was important to work together to see health and wellbeing improvements;
- an additional £300m had been announced by the Scottish Government to reduce waiting lists and it was essential that this money was targeted at frontline services and community based services to enable quicker discharges from hospitals. However, at present, this allocation was unfunded and was likely to be taken from other budgets. Furthermore, once £300m was divided up, this would only result in a small award;
- the Scottish Ambulance Service frontline had also been provided with an addition £50m and £12m for Hospital at Home;
- the underfunding of the NHS was a national problem and, in fact, the provision of health services in Scotland was better than elsewhere in the UK;
- it was hoped that the new elective hospital at the Beechwood, Inverness site would soon reduce waiting lists; and
- a strong local health service was important to attract and retain younger people in communities.

Thereafter, Mr A MacDonald, seconded by Ms M Nolan, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr D Fraser, seconded by Ms L Kraft, moved an alternative Motion that:-

“Highland Council recognise the funding challenges faced by NHS Highland and appreciate the work they do delivering health care in extremely difficult times and we fully support the need for them to be fully funded.

The Council will write to the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to welcome the recent announcement of £300m of extra funding to reduce waiting lists. We will ask that as well as funding front line services within the hospitals that the fund be used to increase community based services as that will help reduce discharge times from hospitals”

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 19 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 38 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie; Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart, Ms M Smith.

For the Amendment:

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Balance, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Finlayson, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Ms K Willis.

Decision

The Council **AGREED**:-

Highland Council recognise the funding challenges faced by NHS Highland and appreciate the work they do delivering health care in extremely difficult times and we fully support the need for them to be fully funded.

The Council will write to the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to welcome the recent announcement of £300m of extra funding to reduce waiting lists. We will ask that as well as funding front line services within the hospitals that the fund be used to increase community-based services as that will help reduce discharge times from hospitals

- (iv) In light of the frequency of road accidents, consequent lengthy closures on the A9 North of Inverness and considering that this road is a vital link for all of Highland and Islands to the South; Council instructs the Leader to write to the Scottish Government seeking an early meeting between the Cabinet Minister, the Area Chairs and the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure to discuss the issue.

Signed:- Ms J McEwan Mr M Reiss Mr A Christie Mr R Gale
Mr R Gunn Mrs A MacLean Mr A Graham

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members felt that sections of the A9 and A99 were not fit for purpose due to reduced widths of the road, poor surface water drainage, wear and tear and an extensive number of sharp corners, landslides and increased traffic;
- due to the road conditions, there had been numerous accidents of which some had resulted in fatalities and road closures of more than 7 hours;
- it was felt that there was insufficient infrastructure to support the increased traffic on the NC500;
- vital services relied heavily on these routes and clear access was critical;
- it was clarified that all trunk roads in Highland were affected by the same issues, not just one area of Highland;
- Area chairs were encouraged to write to Transport Scotland or the Cabinet Minister to highlight specific concerns within their own area;
- the Leader expressed that meeting face to face with the Cabinet Minister to discuss the roads concerns would be a more direct and positive means of communication;
- it was felt that when local roads issues were highlighted by local Members, Council should acknowledge the issue and work together to resolve it as a collective;
- Members strongly suggested that the Leader of the Council write to the Cabinet Minister either before or after the face-to-face meeting had taken place; and
- it was hoped that discussions with the Cabinet Minister to include improvements to the far north line would be successful, as this was an essential railway connection serving the remote areas of the North Highlands and Islands.

Thereafter, Ms J McEwan, seconded by Mr M Reiss, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed, also taking into account that the Council also should called for discussions to include improvements to the far north line, as this is an essential railway connection serving the remote areas of the North Highlands and Islands.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr J Finlayson, also taking into account the proposed modification of the Motion regarding improvement to the far north line, moved that Council recognises that road accidents can result in long periods of road closures and lengthy diversions on many trunk roads in Highland which are the responsibility of Transport Scotland. These trunk roads are vital links for all of the Highlands and Islands to and from other areas of Scotland. Council further recognises that there will be an opportunity for the Council Leader to meet with the Cabinet Minister at the Convention of Highlands and Islands which is being rescheduled from Monday of this week as a result of recent adverse weather conditions and, in the capacity as Leader of the Council, will include these particular issues as part of the discussion during their meeting. The outcome of those discussions to be reported back to Members.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 20 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 27 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr A Jarvie, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs A MacLean, Mr A Mackintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart, Ms M Smith.

For the Amendment:

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Finlayson, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms L Johnston, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mr K Rosie, Ms K Willis.

Decision

The Council **AGREED**:-

Council recognises that road accidents can result in long periods of road closures and lengthy diversions on many trunk roads in Highland which are the responsibility of Transport Scotland. These trunk roads are vital links for all of the Highlands and Islands to and from other areas of Scotland. Council further recognises that there will be an opportunity for the Council Leader to meet with the Cabinet Minister at the Convention of Highlands and Islands which is being rescheduled from Monday of this week as a result of recent adverse weather conditions and, in the capacity as Leader of the Council, will include these particular issues as part of the discussion during their meeting. The outcome of those discussions to be reported back to Members.

Furthermore, the Council also calls for discussions to include improvements to the far north line, as this is an essential railway connection serving the remote areas of the North Highlands and Islands.

**7. Memberships of Committees, etc
Ballarachd Chomataidhean, msaa**

The Council **NOTED** that Mr P Logue was no longer a member of the Scottish Conservative and Unionists Group and that a new Group, Highland Alliance, had been formed. On this basis, the political make-up of the Council was therefore now as follows:-

SNP – 22 / Highland Independent – 18 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 14 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 8 / Highland Alliance – 5 / Scottish Green Party – 4 / Labour – 2 / Non-Aligned 1.

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees was therefore now 6/5/4/2/1.

The Council also **AGREED** to appoint Mr R Stewart as Vice Chair of the Audit Committee.

8. Budget Update, Revenue and Capital Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidseat, Teachd-a-steach agus Calpa

There had been circulated Report No. HC/41/23 dated 12 October 2023 by the Head of Corporate Finance, who also provided a verbal summary of his report.

The Council Leader expressed his disappointment at the recent announcement by the Scottish First Minister that Council Tax should be frozen, pointing out that the Highland Council had already agreed a low rise of 4%, which was the second lowest in Scotland, and which recognised the financial challenges being faced by communities. Representations were being made to CoSLA about the perceived erosion of local democracy and the need for the 4% rise in light of the £61.7m budget gap that was forecast for the Council. A letter to this effect had been sent to the Scottish Government from the Leader and the Convener, a copy of which had been provided to Members. The report reflected on the Administration's commitment to set out a clear pathway for engagement for the 2024-25 budget process and some the key points that required to be considered, acknowledging that some areas remained unclear, such as the outcomes of wage negotiation, at the present time.

The Leader of the Opposition echoed the Leader's points and referred to the need to reduce Scottish Government interference in local democracy, and to seek fairer funding. He felt that the Scottish Government's decision to freeze Council Tax did not accord with the Verity House Agreement which was intended to forge a stronger partnership between local and national government. He expressed concern at the lack of hope for the school projects that had previously been included in the Council's capital programme and that a decision was still awaited on the LEIP (Learning Estate Improvement Programme) 3 funding from the Scottish Government. He suggested that a special Council meeting in January 2024 might be helpful to allow the Council's Administration and Opposition to collaborate on these issues.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- many Members expressed disagreement with the Scottish Government's decision to freeze Council tax;
- with particular reference to Park Primary School, it was suggested that mixed messages about the status of the school capital projects were being given to communities. A clear and well-communicated prioritisation strategy was required for when funding became available. It was considered inappropriate that three schools had been gathered into one funding bundle as it was not clear which would receive priority if the total amount of funding required was not forthcoming;
- it was felt that the report did not adequately cover the implications of the loss of the school projects for the communities affected, although it was pointed out that the previous capital programme report had included the appropriate implications of those decisions, which had been taken at the previous meeting;
- it was disappointing that the promised stakeholder meetings with schools about the implications of the decision to amend the capital programme for schools were not being held promptly enough;
- several Members expressed concern at security issues at Beaully Primary School and it was asked when the Council had last reviewed guidance in this respect. The Chair of the Education Committee advised that any safety or security concerns would be raised with the Education and Housing & Property Services and would be investigated;

- concern was expressed about various issues being faced at Charleston Academy, including the investigation of the use of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). It was suggested that parents were not being provided with sufficiently specific information and it was queried how long the refurbishment of the Academy had been postponed for;
- it was clarified that historic debt could include debt incurred in the last 10-12 years;
- in relation to the review of existing fees and charges mentioned in the report at paragraph 7.4, it was queried when this would be reported back to Members;
- reference was made to the possibility of selling housing stock where it was not cost effective to bring it up to the required energy efficiency standards;
- it was suggested that the report covered three separate topics, these being the letter from the Leader and the Convener to the Scottish Government, the revenue budget, and the capital programme;
- localism should be more highly valued at government level and reference was made to government decisions that resulted in local authorities incurring long term debt;
- the multi-year budget approach in the report was welcomed;
- it was suggested the Council's Administration should have been more transparent about the budget challenges in March 2023;
- examples of possible income-generating or self-funding budget streams were sought and provided;
- gratitude was expressed for the clarity and honesty in the report;
- information was sought, and provided, on Public Works Loan Board and on the possibility of reprofiling some of the historic Housing Revenue Account debt;
- the importance of prioritising children's education was emphasised and it was suggested that, should the LEIP 3 funding not be forthcoming, the Council should consider borrowing the £45m required to continue with the urgent school projects that had been in the capital programme;
- information was sought, and provided, on progress with the issues detailed in paragraph 7.4 of the report, including the review of fees and charges, council services being made available to private and public sector organisations and possible outsourcing of services;
- the report on the review of Housing Revenue Account, detailed at paragraph 7.7.4, did not have a timescale but it was clarified this would be taken through Member briefings;
- concern was expressed at the impact the reduction in the capital budget for Culloden Academy and other schools in the east of Inverness would have on children's education;
- increased levels of budget ring-fencing by central government was contrary to local democracy;
- information was sought on actions taken by the Council's Administration to obtain a decision on the LEIP 3 funding for schools;
- it was clarified that a Council Tax freeze would not directly impact Housing Revenue Account maintenance work;
- the current conditions at St Clemens school were inappropriate for vulnerable children and the removal of the school refurbishment from the capital programme was causing distress in the community;
- the Highland school estate was suffering due to long-term lack of investment and planning, and should be considered strategically alongside other essential infrastructure such as bridges. LEIP funding for schools could only be considered a sticking plaster on the wider challenges which required a strategic and holistic approach and for public expectations to be appropriately managed;

- it was vital that Local Members were a key part of the budget engagement process;
- tackling poverty was a significant challenge and while maintaining low rent increases was helpful for tenants, this had implications for the maintenance budget, therefore it was important to consider unintended consequences of budget decisions. Strategic decisions should be weighted against their impact on communities;
- in relation to community engagement, it was important to include the voices of younger and older people, and to ensure there were offline opportunities to engage. Consideration should be given to National Planning Framework 4 and community-based planning issues, and examples of redesign projects could be included in the engagement process;
- Members were reminded that budget briefings would provide opportunities for Members to seek additional information;
- the appropriate framing of questions during the engagement process was emphasised, noting that some statutory expenditure was critical but might only impact a small number of people;
- the budget strategy should be aligned with climate change and carbon clever initiatives, and should have provision for emergency or unexpected necessary expenditure;
- it was suggested that more could be done to reduce costs, with procurement policy being provided as an example, and that there were previous budget saving measures that had been proposed but not pursued;
- with reference to the £370k savings achieved by vacating the Inverness Town House, information was sought on whether the Town House was receiving that income from elsewhere but it was explained the Town House income was a matter for the Inverness Common Good Fund budget;
- information was sought on the cost of the public inquiry into the Red John hydro scheme and this could be provided to Mr Macpherson outwith the meeting if required;
- the challenges facing the Scottish and UK Governments were highlighted, including legacy costs from Covid and possible RAAC costs. It was hoped the money saved by the halting of the HS2 project would be redistributed for other projects;
- it was suggested the Housing Revenue Account debt should have been written off when the housing stock had been sold;
- it was clarified that the schools' projects in the capital programme had not been removed, only deferred pending funding being available;
- the Council's statutory responsibility to set a balanced budget was reiterated; and
- Members should work as one for the benefit of the Highlands, regardless of political allegiance.

Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** to agree the recommendations as set out in the report along with the following additional recommendation:-

- v. that Council notes the letter sent to the First Minister, dated 25th October, stating the Council's disappointment at both the way the announcement of a Council Tax freeze was made and the implications it will have on the Highland Council as it seeks to prepare a balanced budget.

Mr Christie asked if Mr Bremner would accept his amendment into the motion, and Mr Bremner declined.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr R Stewart, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that, in addition to the recommendations as set out in the report, and the additional recommendation from Cllr Bremner, that the following additional recommendations be added:-

- vi. that Council formally records its extreme disappointment that the First Minister chooses to announce at a party conference the intention to remove the ability of individual councils to set the level of Council Tax without interference, dictatorial control or penalties from the Scottish Government; and
- vii. Council notes the severe underfunding of Local Government, now made worse through the Council Tax freeze policy and issues a press release calling for the First Minister and the Scottish Government to ensure fairer funding is provided which in turn will avoid damaging cuts in services, job losses, whilst ensuring services continue to vulnerable residents and those impacted by the cost of living crisis.

On a vote being held, the motion received 38 votes, and the amendment 30 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion:

Ms S Aitkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr A Rhind, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Ross.

For the amendment:

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Ms M Nolan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

Decision:

The Council:

- i. **NOTED** the update provided in relation to the capital programme;
- ii. **NOTED** the update provided in relation to revenue budget and financial outlook;
- iii. **AGREED** the budget timetable as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iv. **NOTED** the draft sample survey questions as outlined in Appendix 2 to the report which will be accompanied by a budget simulator; and
- v. **NOTED** the letter sent to the First Minister, dated 25th October, stating the Council's disappointment at both the way the announcement of a Council Tax freeze was made and the implications it will have on the Highland Council as it seeks to prepare a balanced budget.

9. Members' Learning and Development Programme Prògram Ionnsachaidh agus Leasachaidh Bhall

There had been circulated Report No. HC/42/23 dated 12 October 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- there was a need to improve accessibility and a number of requests were made for a more blended approach to training. In order to increase attendance, which had sometimes been low, and enable live participation it was requested that all training sessions, workshops and briefings should be made available in hybrid format. In addition, these sessions should also be recorded with a view to developing a library of training that could be accessed at Members' convenience. Members were urged to regularly check the Traineasy e-learning site, the content of which was constantly being increased. It was further suggested that each session should also have a blog which would provide a forum for Member engagement to capture and record relevant questions/points raised;
- consideration be given to scheduling sessions in the evening delivered by external training providers;
- further information was sought, and provided, on how the Programme would be taken forward during which it was explained that the Framework would be reviewed annually and the outcome reported. However, the Framework was a live document and the points raised at the meeting would be incorporated;
- it was suggested that there should be more accredited learning which could be provided by working with other local authorities thus reducing costs. This would also help to attract younger people as they would gain transferable skills which could help to progress career development opportunities. Confirmation was provided that this would be investigated;
- there was a need for a more holistic approach to be adopted noting that everyone learnt in different ways. Emphasis was made to the importance of the learning experience, i.e. ensuring there was blended learning opportunities, training was relevant and the need for outcomes to be evidenced. References were made to the importance of evaluating training and seeking feedback;
- each Member should have a personal training record comprising of all training undertaken internally and externally and provision of this would be investigated;
- following a request, confirmation was provided that High Life Highland Awareness Raising and Information training would be provided;
- consideration should be given to developing an in-house Training and Development team thereby having dedicated trainers therefore reducing the pressure on staff to deliver training and avoiding potential staff conflicts of interest particularly in respect of governance and scrutiny;
- confirmation was provided that the initial training schedule following election had been quite intense and consequently a more phased approach was being adopted. It was also recommended that more information should be available prior to election including an Elected Member Job Description as well as greater information on the level of commitment required in to undertake the role. The information pack that was provided to Members on election was very helpful;
- the Head/Depute Head Teacher recruitment training video was helpful but a number of Members indicated that they were not aware of this resource. It was stressed that Head/Depute Head Teacher recruitment training was

mandatory and Members must not join recruitment panels until this training had been completed. Although the importance of training in respect of this issue was recognised, it was felt that the recruitment process was outdated;

- it was queried whether the Council was learning from other local authorities and if there were any off-the-shelf products that could be used;
- there was a need to check training links to ensure they worked when issued to Members; and
- a request was made for Members to have more involvement in who provided the training.

Thereafter, the Council **AGREED**:

- i. the Members' Learning and Development Framework - Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. Members' Learning and Development Programmes for 2023 and 2024 - Appendix 2 and 3 respectively to the report;
- iii. that a mid-year review of the Members' Learning and Development Framework and Programme with Working Group input is reported to Council in August 2024; and
- iv. that an annual report is taken to Council each December on the effectiveness of the Members' Learning and Development Framework and Programme.

10. Governance Review Ath-sgrùdadh Riaghlachais

There had been circulated Report No. HC/43/23 dated 10 October 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- whilst Members welcomed the revisions, in regard to the proposals in relating to Planning Application Committees as detailed in Appendix 3, it was contended that the suggestion that Members could only speak in applications in their Ward was not appropriate. There were many planning applications which could affect much wider areas such as city centre, out-of-town retail developments and large scale housing applications which, in turn, affected Associated School Groups and transport infrastructure;
- the revision relating to the financial assessments of Notices of Motion would streamline the process;
- it was important to be mindful of the staff time taken in making financial assessments if and when Notices of Motion were not reached and then not automatically resubmitted;
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to who and when financial implications of Notices of Motion were determined;
- it was recognised that, with single Ward Area Committees, there were sometimes problems in ensuring that meetings were quorate and it would be interesting to see Council proposal in this regard to enable Area Committees to effectively progress important local issues;
- it was suggested that Notices of Motion be taken at the end of a Council Agenda once all other public items had been debated and before any Private items. However, it was pointed out that Notices of Motion could last over 2 hours, therefore delaying often very important and substantive Private Items;
- there was a danger that Notices of Motion might be repeatedly not reached under the current arrangements;

- the work of the Governance Review Steering Group was commended but it was suggested that it reconvene to review the manner in which Members' Question Time was conducted by exploring, among other options, the Scottish Parliament model. A report on this review could then be considered by the Council at its meeting on 14 March 2024; and
- it was hoped that Members had a comprehensive understanding of Standing Orders and that, when raising a Point of Order, they should make specific representation as to which Standing Order they were referring to. However, this would negate the ability of Members to raise matters of concern instantly and it would be for the Chair of the meeting to agree, or not agree to accept it.

Following debate, Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr P Oldham, **MOVED** the recommendations detailed in Appendix 2 with the exception of the proposed changes in relation to Planning Application Committees detailed in Appendix 3.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr C Ballance, seconded by Mr R MacKintosh, moved to add in to the proposed changes to Standing Order 1, detailed in Appendix 2, "8. Matters in Private".

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 39 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 25 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Finlayson, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr D Loudon, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mrs M Ross, Mr K Rosie, Mr A Sinclair.

For the Amendment:

Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr A Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:

Mr B Lobban, Ms M Smith.

There then followed a second vote with Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr P Oldham, again **MOVING** the recommendations detailed in Appendix 2 with the exception of the proposed changes in relation to Planning Application Committees detailed in Appendix 3.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr C Ballance, seconded by Mr R MacKintosh, moved to that the proposed change to paragraph 8 of Standing Order 12 whereby "If a Notice of Motion is not reached, it will require to be re-submitted in terms of paragraph 1 of the Standing Order" be removed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 52 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 6 votes, with 8 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitken, Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr J Finlayson, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr D Louden, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Ms M Nolan, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mrs M Ross, Mr K Rosie, Mr A Sinclair.

For the Amendment:

Mr C Ballance, Mr A Jarvie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Ms M Smith
Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:

Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mr L Fraser, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr B Lobban, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs L Saggars. Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Council **AGREED:**

- i. the revised wording of Standing Orders – Steering Group Appendix 2 to the report;
- ii. that the status quo in relation to Planning Application Committees, referred to in Appendix 3, remain;
- iii. that officers format Standing Orders and include definitions and guidance notes in terms of paragraph 5.6 of the report; and
- iv. that the Governance Review Steering Group reconvenes to review Members Question Time exploring, among other options, the Scottish Parliament model with a report on the review being presented with any observations to Council on 14 March 2024.

11. Annual Review of the Scheme of Delegation**Ath-sgrùdadh Bliadhnail dhen Sgeama Thiomnaidh**

Transparency Statement: the undernoted Members made a Transparency Statement in respect to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr A Christie - as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and a Non-Executive Member of the Inverness BID Board.

Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland and as a Board Member of Inverness Citizens Advice Bureau.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/44/23 dated 18 October 2023 by the Head of Legal and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- i. the inclusion of the Joint Monitoring Committee in the Scheme was welcomed given it's increasing importance and the ongoing work between Highland Council and NHS Highland. However, clarification was needed around the description of the governance arrangements for children and

adult social care services within the Scheme to ensure that the roles and remit of both the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing and the Highland Joint Monitoring Committees were clearly set out completely and accurately;

- examples of when covert surveillance was undertaken was sought, and provided, together with the scrutiny arrangements in place;
- in relation to the minute of 28 September, clarification was provided that the removal of “Scrutiny” had been from the title of the then Audit and Scrutiny Committee, not from its remit;
- disappointment was expressed that the Audit Committee had agreed to remove “Scrutiny” from its title and it was feared that this would damage the Council’s reputation. However, it was explained that this decision had been made in light of guidance from CIPFA Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which aimed to strengthen the role of the Committee. Scrutiny was something which all Committees should be undertaking;
- a request was made that Members be kept informed of amendments to Senior Management Structures and interim appointments of Executive Chief Officers;
- concern was expressed that there was an additional power being delegated to officers to write off Housing Revenue Account bad debt. However, clarification was provided that this amendment was a result of an internal audit and was simply a transfer of authority from Finance to Housing staff. It was in no way removing any powers from Members;
- now that the Highland Council had a Net Zero strategy, it was hoped that paragraph 14 of the General Duties exercisable by all the Headquarters Strategic Committees could be amended from “climate change/carbon clever” to “climate change/Net Zero”;
- clarification was sought as to why the policy and development of work relating to Community Councils had been removed from the Communities and Place Committee’s remit. In addition, it was also queried why that Committee now had responsibility for Common Good Policy rather than the Full Council; and
- Youth Development should be part of the Education Committee’s remit.

The Council **AGREED**:

- ii. the changes to the Scheme of Delegation as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iii. to undertake a review of the description of the governance arrangements for children’s and adult social care services within the Scheme of Delegation to ensure that the roles and remit of both the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing and the Highland Joint Monitoring Committees were set out completely and accurately;
- iv. in Part II Strategic Committees at paragraph 14 the words ‘climate change/carbon clever’ be replaced with ‘climate change/Net Zero’
- v. defer agreement of the proposed changes to Part II Communities and Place Committee being the deletion of paragraph 2.10 in respect of community councils and inclusion at paragraph 2.3 point 12 and 2.5 reference to Common Good until the Council meeting on 14 December 2023 to allow an explanation to be offered on the justification for the proposed changes;
- vi. In Part II Education Committee to add the words ‘Youth Development’ after the word ‘Sport’ in the remit of the Committee;
- vii. further adjustments to the Scheme of Delegation will be brought forward if required, to reflect any changes arising from the budget setting process; and

- viii. that amendments to post titles could continue to be made without recourse to Council as long as the level of delegation remained unchanged; and

NOTED:-

- ix. that page references will be updated once the substantive changes to the Scheme have been approved.

**12. Staff Survey
Suirbhidh Luchd-obrach**

Transparency Statement: Mr R Stewart made Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a family member was an employee of Highland Council. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/45/23 dated 16 October 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

Prior to the debate, the Convener drew Members' attention to the Councillors' Code of Conduct and associated advice from the Standards Commission which provided guidance on what was appropriate for public discussion and covered former and existing employees. However, it was important that the Council was open and transparent and that lessons were learnt from the survey and actions taken as a result demonstrated the high esteem and value placed on council employees.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- disappointment was expressed around the relatively low level of employee engagement compared to other local authorities, with some job categories being markedly lower. In this regard it was reassuring that the Chief Executive was committed to improvement and that there would be a pathway for Highland Council to make improvements and to become a better organisation;
- the Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officers taking time out to work at the front line would re-engage the connection between staff and senior management;
- there had been a significant gap between staff surveys, the survey currently before Members itself being 18 months old, and it was hoped surveys would be undertaken more regularly in future. The delay in reporting the outcomes of this survey was disappointing;
- the interpretation of responses had to be taken into account, especially around "neutrality". The level of such responses suggested that many staff were disengaged and uninterested and/or had concerns that the survey was not anonymous and that negative responses could adversely impact on them;
- the response rate from teachers was particularly disappointing but there could be various reasons for this. A more in-depth analysis should be reported to the Education Committee;
- it was hoped that staff had been given time and support to fill in the survey as not all were IT literate or would not necessarily have regular access to a computer;

- whistleblowing was an important tool to establish what was taking place on the ground but it was unfortunate that one of the links on the Council's website to help staff report concerns was broken. However, the whistleblowing route was not the right mechanism to report bullying;
- whilst it was recognised that bullying could never be totally eradicated, it was concerning that one in ten staff reported they had suffered bullying and/or harassment and some had felt unable to come forward to report it either to Human Resources or to their Trade Union. Even more disappointing were the instances of bullying behaviour by Elected Members who should, in fact, lead by example. There was no place for bullying and discrimination in Highland Council;
- training was needed to confirm the standards of behaviour required and to give clear direction about what was needed when bullying behaviour was witnessed;
- the Council had agreed in August 2022 to become a trauma informed organisation and had appointed two Trauma Champions. It was time to engage with the work being done by the Trauma Champions Network, which consisted of senior leaders from Local Authorities, Health Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships and other key community planning partners, to help progress trauma-informed practice in local areas and share learning across geographical and professional boundaries;
- many of the issues that had been highlighted in the survey suggested that Highland Council was a traumatised organisation, thus making it an ineffective organisation;
- in addressing the concerns raised by the survey it was essential to take cognisance that all staff need to be treated professionally with kindness, courtesy and respect. Often staff were deterred from reporting bullying given the stigma associated with it;
- a call was made for the Council's Bullying and Harassment Policy to be circulated to all Members;
- exit interviews were an important tool to look at why quality staff left and to address urgently any concerning issues;
- it was important to clearly differentiate between "managing" and "bullying";
- the survey had been carried out by an external organisation and it was felt this had given a more accurate picture;
- many staff felt overworked, overwhelmed, distressed and upset. It was important that staff knew that they were valued and it was suggested that Committee reports should also include "staffing" under its implications section;
- the Council's staff were an integral part of communities and it was important therefore to use the information the survey had provided to make improvements; and
- there was a need to provide staff with the ability to report concerns, to be better engaged and for the Council to be a "listening" Council.

The Council:

- i. **NOTED** the Survey results attached at Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the engagement with staff that has taken place in recent months;
- iii. **AGREED** the next steps at section 8 of the report, including the commitment to further investment in developing positive employee engagement; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a copy of the Staff Bullying and Harassment Policy be circulated to all Members.

13. Appointments Cur an Dreuchd

i. Highland Reserves and Cadets Association

The Council **AGREED** to appoint **Ms Morven-May MacCallum** to the Highland Reserves and Cadets Association.

ii. UHI Local Advisory Committees

The Council **AGREED** to appoint:-

- (a) **Mrs Maureen Ross** from Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 or 8 to the North Highland Local Advisory Committee; and
- (b) **Dr Chris Birt** from Wards 5, 10, 11 or 21 to the West Highland Local Advisory Committee.

14. Timetable of Meetings for 2024 Clàr-ama Choinneamhan airson 2024

The Council **AGREED** to hold a Special Meeting of the Audit Committee on 24 January 2024.

15. Deeds Executed Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

There had been circulated a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 14 September 2023 which was **NOTED**.

The meeting was closed at 6.40pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday, 30 October 2023, at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms T Collier
Mr D Louden
Mrs P Munro
Ms M Nolan

Mr A Rhind
Ms M Ross
Ms M Smith

Participating Officials:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Mr D Martin, Area Education & Learning Manager
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead (Investment & Building Maintenance)
Ms F Richardson, Corporate Improvement Project Manager
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Planning, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Area Inspector Stephen Mezals, Police Scotland (Item 3)

**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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

There were none.

3. Police – Area Performance Summary Report Poileas – Geàrr-Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/18/23 by the Area Commander.

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were raised during discussion:

- assurance was sought and provided that recent incidences of violence were being investigated, and the public were urged to report any information that might help, either to the local police or through Crimestoppers;
- it was possible that increased detection rates of drink and drug driving offences in Easter Ross compared with in Caithness and Sutherland could be the result of increased deployment of resources in Easter Ross;
- police officers were thanked for their assistance tackling a recent incident of vandalism in Invergordon; and
- concern was expressed that a number of vehicles were being abandoned in residential parking places and it was requested that this be tackled by joint working between the Police, the Council and the DVLA.

The Committee:

- NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 3, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2022 – 31 March 2023; and
- AGREED** to liaise, through the senior Ward Manager, with the Police and DVLA on the issue of long-term abandoned vehicles in residential areas.

4. Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2023-27 Prògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd a-steach Taigheadais 2023-27

There had been circulated Report No ERA/19/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- information was sought for future reports on the number of houses impacted by funding streams, with particular reference to climate change adaptations, to help understand how long projects were likely to take;
- a breakdown was requested, for ward business meetings and in future reports, of figures at ward and / or estate level;
- information was sought and provided on progress with Scottish Government's new Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) and whether air source heat pump heating was the preferred option. It was explained this was often the case but depended on individual circumstances. Communication had been undertaken with tenants on changes to heating tariffs;
- in relation to environmental projects, officers would be reminded to attend ward business meetings to engage with local Members;
- concerns were raised about housing stock which was coming to the end of its useful lifespan and further refurbishment would not be cost effective. The challenging balance between repairing existing homes versus building new ones was summarised, and attention was drawn to the budget restrictions. The importance of not raising public expectations was emphasised;
- Members thanked the Housing team for their work and assistance with customers; and
- concern was expressed that in rural areas the mobile signal was sometimes not strong enough to support the use of smart meters and suppliers and the government should be lobbied about this.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the summary update on the HRA Capital Programme at section 5 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the HRA Capital resources identified for Easter Ross area at paragraph 6.7 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed investment priorities in the HRA Capital Programme for Easter Ross 2023-27 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- iv. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme will continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee;
- v. **AGREED** to provide a breakdown, to ward business meetings and in future reports, of figures at ward and / or estate level; and
- vi. **AGREED** to provide information in future reports on the number of houses impacted by funding streams, with particular reference to climate change adaptations.

The Committee **AGREED** to take item 6 before item 5.

6. Associated School Group Overview (ASG) Foir-shealladh air Buidhnean Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

a) Alness Academy ASG Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Alanais

There had been circulated Report No ERA/21/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning.

During discussion, with reference to the poor attainment figures for several primary schools, and secondary being behind Highland and national levels, information was sought and provided on improvement work being undertaken. A summary was provided of the levels of support being offered to each school, including support from Collaborative Lead Officers and for the Head Teacher. The figures presented were for 2021-22 and it was expected that attainment will have increased in more recent figures.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

b) Invergordon Academy ASG Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning. An updated report had been circulated to Members with a correction to the figures in the table in section 6.2, 'Destinations of Pupils (%)'

During discussion, Members expressed disappointment at the drop in attainment for Invergordon Academy and information was sought on what was being done to address this. Newmore and Park Primaries were commended for their performance and, while acknowledging that adequate facilities were

being provided at the Academy, it was also important to give honest and realistic information to families about the problems the Council was facing with the capital programme and its inability to fund a new school for Park at this time. It was clarified that the schools project on the capital programme had been deferred, not removed.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

**c) Tain Royal Academy ASG
Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/23/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Hilton of Cadboll interim Head Teacher and staff were thanked for their work;
- it was suggested that writing attainment at Tain Royal Academy was a concern and information was provided on the improvement plan, and work being undertaken by the Collaborative Leads, including sharing good practice from other schools;
- concerns were expressed in relation to conditions on the site for the new campus, and the impact on local residents, and a meeting should be arranged to address these issues, including the possible need for a drainage ditch; and
- in response to questions about the management structure for the new campus, it was explained that the interim Head Teacher was in post until Easter 2024 when it was intended a permanent Head Teacher would be in post, with 4 or 5 deputy Heads for both secondary and primary. More detail, including on a name and uniform for the campus would be considered through stakeholder meetings and could also be addressed at ward business meetings.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED** to arrange a meeting with local Members, affected local residents, and representatives from Kier Construction to consider issues related to Tain Campus.

**5. Place Based Investment Programme (PBIP) Grant Award 2021/22: Tain Streetscape
Duais Tabhartais Prògram Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite 2021/22: Cruth-sràide Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/20/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

Members expressed disappointment that the project costs had escalated beyond the £100,000 allocated to the Tain Streetscape project at by the Committee at their meeting on 17 February 2022, with the shortfall being around £110,000. Various options were discussed including retendering the project, phasing the project, or seeking funds from elsewhere to cover the difference.

The importance of the project was emphasised but due to the risks of the Scottish Government withdrawing the funds if amendments were sought to the project, Members spoke in favour of seeking agreement to carry forward the funds as recommended, and to discuss the project with the Roads team in the meantime.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to formally withdraw the offer of grant of £100,000 PBIP from the Tain Streetscape Project;
- ii. pending agreement of the Scottish Government, **AGREED** to carry forward the £100,000 PBIP funding into the available Community Regeneration Fund allocation for Easter Ross for 2023/24; and
- iii. **AGREED** to arrange a meeting with Roads officers to discuss the project.

7. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated joint Report No ERA/24/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

During discussion, it was proposed that support be offered to the group dealing with the application for Invergordon Naval & Heritage Museum for the Community Asset Transfer of Invergordon Town Hall, which had been paused for a minimum of 4 months. The reported investment interest was low but was anticipated to be higher by the year end. Members were reminded that the Common Good Fund was responsible for the upkeep of its assets.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Q2 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund; and
- ii. that the Community Asset Transfer application received from the Invergordon Naval & Heritage Museum has been paused for reasons due to instability in the applicant group as outlined in section 5 of the report.

8. Tain Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich

There had been circulated joint Report No ERA/25/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

During discussion, clarification was sought and provided that ringfenced money from the sale of the mussel boat would be shown separately on the annual accounts. Disappointment was expressed that from time to time additional funds required to be spent on minor repairs to the Alexandra swing bridge.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund; and
- ii. the update on current Tain Common Good issues.

**9. Easter Ross Area Place Plan – Progress Update
Plana Àite Sgìre Rois an Ear – Cunntas air Adhartas**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/26/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

A presentation was provided covering key local, regional and national drivers for Easter Ross, the scope and target audience of the plan, methodology, progress, draft priorities and areas for action. A workshop was scheduled on 2 November 2023.

Members commented that, given the strategic importance of Easter Ross, it was hoped funding streams would be made available for local initiatives.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the emerging themes and priorities for action identified so far at Section 5.2, and the further background and information shared by the Officer through a verbal presentation on the day; and
- ii. the next steps for progressing this work and broadening participation, including the launch of online engagement, aligning community-led activity and establishing governance model.

**10. Invergordon Common Good Fund - the bust of Sir John Gordon by Edmé Bouchardon.
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain – ìomhaigh-bràghad Shir Iain Ghòrdain le Edmé Bouchardon**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/27/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance.

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were raised:

- there had been speculation online about what would happen if the bust was sold but it was clarified that a decision was only being sought at this stage on whether to proceed with a consultation on whether to sell it;
- if the bust were to be displayed locally, the costs of insurance and security to display it would be prohibitive;
- in response to comments, a summary was provided of the statutory consultation process. There was no legal requirement for a public meeting but a public awareness raising session, with a defined agenda, could be beneficial. The permitted uses of Common Good Fund assets and who was permitted to benefit from them was outlined, as was the lengthy legal process that would be undertaken if a sale was the preferred option from the consultation, and that any investment decisions on the proceeds would be taken in line with legal procedure, at the appropriate time;
- the importance of clear communication with regard to the consultation was emphasised;
- Members were keen to hear the public's view on the possible sale of the bust;

- assurance was provided that the bust was being stored in a safe and appropriate location; and
- Members thanked all involved in the process over the previous 25 years and asked that they be involved in the preparation of the consultation document.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the update on the work undertaken to explore the potential of selling the Bouchardon Bust;
- NOTED** the assessment of the various sale options and the advice from Sotheby's that a sale by private arrangement might be most beneficial in financial terms; and
- in light of this information, **AGREED** to commence a Community Empowerment consultation to inform the decision making in respect of a proposal to sell the Bouchardon bust.

11. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the Ward Discretionary Projects that had been approved since 1st April 2023.

12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 7 August 2023, which had been approved by the Council on 14 September 2023.

13. Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Reallocation of Funds Maoinean Stèidhichte air Àite – Ath-riarachadh Mhaoinean ga Mholadh

There had been circulated Report No ERA/28/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** to repurpose the remaining £12,000 from the £20,000 allocated to the Invergordon Social Club for its Feasibility Study, to a Ward 6 Community Grants stream set up to address one or more of the four harms of Covid.

The meeting ended at 2.40pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on 30 October 2023 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mr M Green
Ms B Jarvie
Mr P Oldham

In Attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Ward Manager, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

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

Mr M Green in the Chair**Business****1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the following items of Good News:-

- the Harbour Options Appraisal had been awarded to consultants Wallace Stone in Dingwall and was being funded by the regeneration fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise;
- the Reuse, Repurpose Recycle feasibility study was coming to completion; and
- there would be a public meeting on 16 November 2023 at 7.30pm in the Community Centre where groups and organisations would be invited to provide news for the Nairn Community Newsletter.

During discussion Members added the following items of Good News :-

- congratulations were extended to Nairn Academy pupils for their fundraising efforts for Mikey's Line and to senior pupil Ryan Hernandez who was named senior phase student of the year;

- the new Highland Council Chief Executive, Derek Brown would be visiting Nairn in the near future; and
- thanks were extended to the Yarn Bombers for decorating post-boxes for Remembrance Day.

4. **Nairn Common Good Fund – Community Engagement Model Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Modail Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No Report No NC/18/23 dated 20 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion the following points were raised: -

- it was clarified that decision making still rested with Members as a statutory duty and that the purpose of the Nairn Common Good Fund Engagement Group was to involve the community in the Common Good Fund;
- on the point being raised it was confirmed that Common Good Fund tenants had been included twice as possible group members and that this would be corrected and that Nairn Community Enterprise was also known by the name NICE and that this would be clarified in the future;
- it would be helpful if meetings could be scheduled as issues arose rather than the twice-yearly meeting schedule referred in the report;
- it was suggested that an elderly representative be included in the group membership;
- it was emphasised that training and induction would be important and it would be preferable to hold the first meeting soon after the training;
- on the point being raised it was suggested that it would be better not to have nominated persons as members but rather to have places for representatives of organisations to allow for substitutes to attend when necessary;
- it was suggested that two members from busier organisations such as Police Scotland be invited to attend the training sessions; and
- concern was expressed at the possibility of large numbers of representatives from a single group attending together and trying to control proceedings.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update provided in the report;
- ii. **AGREED** that the draft Framework for a Nairn Common Good Fund Engagement Group at Appendix 1 be issued for consultation; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the outcome of the consultation be reported back to Committee in January 2024 with further proposals for next steps.

5. **Nairn Common Good Fund - Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Report 2023/24 Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ionmhasail Cairteil 2, 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No NC/19/23 dated 20 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance

Confirmation was provided that Members had access to detailed accounts for the Common Good Fund.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of the NCGF as shown in the Quarter 2 Revenue Monitoring Statement against Budget for 2023/24.

6. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that no Ward Discretionary Fund payments had been approved since the previous meeting of the Committee.

During discussion disappointment was expressed at the lack on applications to the Ward Discretionary fund.

7. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 8 August 2023 which were approved by the Council on 14 September 2023

Arising from the Minutes, it was indicated that details of the works at the Ardersier Port Junction on the A96 had not yet been provided by the Interim Executive Chief Office Infrastructure and Environment and the Ward Manager undertook to come back to Members with an update on this.

The meeting concluded at 10.55am

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held remotely on **Tuesday, 31 October, 2023 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Ms S Fanet
Mr J C Grafton
Mr A MacDonald

Mr T MacLennan
Ms L Siggers
Ms K Willis

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber), Communities and Place

Ms M Macdonald, Area Education & Learning Manager, Education & Learning Service

Mr A Bruce, Service Delivery Manager, Resources & Finance

Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance Service

Also in attendance:-

Chief Inspector R McCartney, Area Commander, Police Scotland

Mr M Colliar, Group Commander (Highland West), Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, representing Lochaber Community Partnership

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Baldrey.

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

There were none.

3. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/14/23 by the Area Commander.

There was commentary on the report by the Area Commander and in particular the work of the local Mountain Rescue team was commended and the support of the team members' families was also acknowledged. Budget constraints on Police Scotland and their impact on the implementation of technology was highlighted. There had been a significant investment in Police housing across Lochaber which was welcomed. There were challenges faced in relation to road policing and anti social behaviour and disorder within local

communities and Police Scotland were committed to tackling these issues, working alongside its Partners.

In relation to anti social behaviour and disorder in Fort William which had a significant detrimental impact on the town centre, there was a need for more Police foot patrols after schools closed to act as a deterrent to this. Particular reference was made to vandalism of public toilets and e-bikes for hire. It was advised that reporting of incidents of anti social behaviour could be made to the Police 101 contact number and on the Police Scotland website. There was a commitment by Police Scotland to increase patrols in the town centre and this was being monitored and any feedback on this from Members would be welcomed. There were also early intervention youth offending mechanisms to tackle anti social behaviour. It was requested that data be provided in the next report showing increases in Police patrols in the town centre. HITRANS had responsibility for the E-bike scheme and they would be contacted in order to support them to introduce measures to make it more difficult for these bikes to be taken and vandalised. It would be suggested to HITRANS that, working alongside the Crime Prevention Officer, a system be put in place to identify e-bikes for hire in order to deter vandalism of these bikes.

It was advised that there was CCTV on the High Street, Fort William and this was monitored by a full-time member of staff on a rota basis. When not being monitored there was the facility to review any incidents reported. An undertaking was given to check who was responsible for the CCTV system and liaise with them to see if there was scope for more staff resources to increase the CCTV monitoring in order to target Officers to problem areas.

There were 2 Accident Investigation Officers in Fort William and a third officer was in training which was welcomed given how long it could take Officers outwith the area to attend road accidents.

At a national level there was ongoing work to tackle cyber crimes and fraud and put in place banking protocols to deal with these crimes. In terms of protecting vulnerable people in the community from these crimes, the NHS did have a vulnerable persons list and there were pathways to communicate any concerns to the Police.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 3, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2022 – 31 March 2023;
- ii data would be provided in the next report showing increases in Police patrols in Fort William town centre;
- iii it would be suggested to HITRANS that, working alongside the Crime Prevention Officer, a system be put in place to identify e-bikes for hire in order to deter vandalism of these bikes; and
- iv it would be checked who was responsible for the CCTV system in Fort William town centre to see if additional monitoring could be undertaken.

4. Lochaber Community Partnership Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd Loch Abar

There was circulated Report No. LA/15/23 by the Group Commander, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, representing Lochaber Community Partnership. The

report provided an overview of the Lochaber area plan. The plan was still in a development stage and the challenges of Partner agencies in resourcing the development of the plan given their operational priorities was highlighted. There were clear ideas of how the Lochaber Community Partnership should move forward and the scrutiny and governance that should be in place. Further, Community Action Groups (CAGs) worked extremely hard to deliver to local communities and an update was provided on the work being undertaken by each of the 3 CAGs in Lochaber:- Fort William (Plantation, Upper Achintore and Town Centre, Caol North and Kinlochleven.

A suggestion that local Elected Members being represented on the Lochaber Community Partnership would be discussed with the Partnership and a further update on the community plan was requested for a future meeting.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i the information contained in the report;
- ii that the suggestion of local Elected Members being represented on the Lochaber Community Partnership would be discussed with the Partnership; and
- iii an update on community planning would be provided at a future meeting.

5. School Inspection Reports Aithisgean Sgrùdaidh Sgoile

There was circulated the following school inspection reports by the Education and Learning Manager:-

- a. Acharacle Primary School and Nursery Class (Report No LA/16/23)
- b. Banavie Primary School Nursery (Report No LA/17/23)
- c. Rum Primary School and Nursery (Report No LA/18/23)
- d. Spean Bridge Primary School and Nursery (Report No LA/19/23)
- e. St Brides Primary School and Nursery (Report No LA/20/23)

The Area Education and Learning Manager provided an overview on the school inspection reports to Members.

In terms of the support available to schools so they could improve their gradings, the Council had Collaborative Lead Officers who worked closely with schools and there was a programme of universal, focused and intensive support for schools. An update was provided on the number of children at Rum Primary and Nursery and the accommodation for staff at that school. It was also confirmed that interviews for a Head Teacher and Depute Head Teacher at Kinlochleven would take place soon.

There were Teachers on fixed term contracts and after a period of time they would have permanent employment rights to a contract with the Council. Workforce Planning were continually looking ahead as there may be Probationer Teachers assigned to the Highland Council area, so there was always a requirement for flexibility in the workforce to employ Probationers.

Stability in staffing in schools was important and this was challenging to achieve in some schools.

Following further discussion, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i the findings in relation to the school inspection reports;
- ii a list of schools in the area and how often they had been inspected would be provided to Members;
- iii future reports would include links to the full school inspection reports included on the Education Scotland website;
- iv information be provided on the reasoning behind whether a short or full inspection of schools is carried out by the Inspection team; and
- v information would be provided on what happens to unoccupied school houses that were retained in case they were required in future for use by school staff.

6. **Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund grant awards 2023/24.

Ward 11

HLH Archive Centre – contribution to travelling exhibition costs Tir nan Og - £750

Lochaber Wheeled sports society – for purchase of bikes & helmets - £1000

Knoydart Trading Limited – purchase of freezer - £2,350

Ward 21

Kinlochleven Primary School Council – School trip - £250

South Lochaber Community Association – Contribution to Bus repairs - £1750

Lochaber wheeled sports society – for purchase of bikes & helmets - £1000

West Ardnamurchan Community Council – for purchase of IT kit - £450

7. **Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 8 August, 2023 which were approved by the Council on 14 September, 2023, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

Urgent Item of Business – *the following report was taken as an urgent item of business as the Islands Winter Boost funding required to be spent by end of March, 2024.*

8. **The Islands Winter Boost Fund 2023/24**

There was circulated Report No. LA/17/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Following a summary of the report by the Service Delivery Manager and discussion by Members, feedback would be given to the Scottish Government that the peninsulas of Ardnamurchan and Knoydart faced the same cost of living challenges faced by Island communities and should be included in the Islands Winter Boost funding; and payments for those eligible for the funding

had been reduced this year compared to last year, but as the cost of living challenges were still the same, the funding to eligible households should be increased. The wider challenges faced by communities living in peninsulas would be discussed at a future Area Business meeting.

Thereafter the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Council has received Islands Winter Boost funding for 2023/24 to help alleviate the impacts of the cost crisis for island communities; and
- ii. **AGREED** that this funding be used to automatically make non-recurring cost crisis payments of £127 per eligible household by 28 February 2024 where the Council holds current bank details, in accordance with the eligibility criteria set out in section 4 of the report.

The meeting ended at 12.20 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie, Golspie on Tuesday 31 October 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Baird

Mr R Gale

Ms M Hutchison

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Niven (remote)

In attendance:

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager

Ms A Jansson, Area Education & Learning Manager

Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operation Manager

Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Manager

Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer

Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander M Leavey, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service

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 R Gale in the Chair**Business****1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report
Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There been circulated Report No SCC/17/23 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- further information was sought on the nature of the deliberate fire highlighted in the report;
- concern at the station availability in the Lochinver, Scourie and Tongue areas. In response, an update was provided on progress to resolve the issues with staffing including creating a virtual station to provide for joint mobilisation between areas and continuing targeted recruitment efforts;

- the need to better understand the issues around the retention of firefighters to address the loss of staff experienced over the past ten years;
- an issue with water pressure in hydrants in Durness be further investigated;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Service had been allocated a flat rate budget for the next four years and decisions on any reductions in resources would be made by the Local Senior Officer for the Highland area;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Group Commander had addressed the issue around the Service being represented at the Sutherland Community Partnership going forward;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the reasons for the station availability at Bonar Bridge and the work ongoing to improve the situation;
- concern there would be no immediate replacement for the station commanders particularly given the issues with availability in some areas and that this point be raised with the Service's Group Commander and Local Senior Officers; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that where no ambulance was available the Service would respond locally to calls for slips, trips and falls in communities.

The Station Commander confirmed that he would provide Members with responses to the points raised where he did not have the information to provide an answer at the meeting.

Thereafter, the Chair wished the Station Commander a long and happy retirement and wished him well for the future.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

**4. Education HMI Update – Sutherland
Tongue Primary and Nursery Class
Cunntas às Ùr Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlaim – Cataibh
Bun-Sgoil agus Clas Sgoil-Àraich Thunga**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/18/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members congratulated Tongue Primary School and Nursery Class on the excellent report received.

In response to a question, the Area Education and Learning Manager advised that while there had been no specific mention in the report of the fact the School was part of the North Coast 3-18 Campus, further information on this aspect would be provided at a ward business meeting and the Headteacher invited to attend.

The Committee **NOTED** the key strengths and next steps for Tongue Primary School and Nursery Class as reported by Education Scotland on 6 June 2023.

**6. Review of Winter Gritting Route Priorities in Lochinver Area
Ath-sgrùdadh air Prìomhachasan Slighe airson Sailleadh Geamhraidh ann
an Sgìre Loch an Inbhir**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/19/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the challenges in providing the winter service in Assynt were recognised and the fact there was not the available resources to re-prioritise the classification of a section of the C1003 Lochinver to Inverkirkaig road to secondary route status;
- the above proposal had been raised on the basis it was considered there would be no cost implications as it was hoped the route could be done in the early morning rather than as an 'other' route later in the day;
- the request for the route to be re-prioritised had been brought to local Members by Assynt Community Council and it was disappointing this could not be achieved. The Community Council had also indicated that the re-prioritisation of the U1053 Achmelvich Road from "Secondary" to "Other" was unacceptable and it was proposed this recommendation be deleted from the report;
- the aim of the proposed re-prioritisation had been to ensure school pupils and teachers could travel to school in a safe environment. It was vital there was safe access to school, work and social opportunities in terms of the wider issue of attracting young families to live in the area and concern was expressed around the equity of the winter service provision in the area;
- the policy was flawed as there were fragile communities that did not have a public bus service and therefore Members request that the Council's Winter Service Policy be reviewed in respect of Sutherland to prioritise school routes;
- it was important to recognise that the Roads Operations Manager and Team were operating within resource and policy constraints; and
- the status quo in terms of the classification of a section of the C1003 Lochinver to Inverkirkaig road be maintained in the Winter Service Plan 2023/24 as presented to the Committee in August 2023.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the impact of increasing "Secondary" route priorities for the delivery of the winter service to "Other" routes and pre-treatment routes;
- ii. **NOTED** the additional plant and labour resource required to deliver the increase in Secondary routes as detailed in Section 9 of this report;
- iii. **NOTED** that following extensive review of winter maintenance operations, it is not possible to re-prioritise the classification of a section of the C1003 Lochinver to Inverkirkaig road to secondary route status, in view of the impacts on other routes, and the resource implications as highlighted in the report, and therefore **AGREED** that the status quo be maintained in relation to this route in the Winter Service Plan 2023/24; and
- * iv. **AGREED** to request that the Council's Winter Service Policy be reviewed in respect of Sutherland to prioritise school routes.

**7. Old Caithness Road, Helmsdale – One Way Traffic Regulation Order
Seann Rathad Ghallaibh, Bun Ilidh – Òrdugh Riaghladh Trafaig Aon Slighe**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/20/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members commented that Helmsdale Community Council and other parties had been involved in the proposal for some period of time and a significant amount of work had been undertaken to date to deliver a solution that would allow children to safely cross the road at this location.

Thereafter, a point was raised in relation to the positive impact Helmsdale Hostel had on the local tourist and hospitality economy and the opportunity to have on-site parking at the Hostel. This would be on an extensive area to the west of the premises with a permissible access onto Old Caithness Road to mitigate against any negative effects on the business associated with the Order, subject to the owners obtaining planning consent.

The Road Safety Manager advised this was a Transport Scotland scheme and they had offered to provide a signage route to the Hostel through Helmsdale. The Order would result in the road being one way and this would free up space to allow marked parking bays on Old Caithness Road to be provided as part of the scheme for use by the Hostel. She provided an assurance that the provision of these marked parking bays would be delivered at the same time as the overall scheme and that they could be provided without compromising safety.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed One-Way System Traffic Regulation Order and the representations received;
- ii. **NOTED** and considered the objections made to “The Highland Council (C1019 Old Caithness Road), Helmsdale (One Way), Traffic Regulation Order 2022” and **APPROVED** the making of the One-Way System Traffic Regulation Order; and
- iii. **NOTED** the intention to monitor the area after the introduction of the One-Way System including commissioning a traffic survey to determine effectiveness of the new road layout.

**8. Sutherland HRA Capital Programme Update and 23-27
Programme
Prògram Calpa HRA 2023-2027**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/21/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, an update was sought on the performance of new air source heating systems in Council houses and the benefits being delivered to tenants. It was confirmed that specific examples of recent installations would be brought to a future ward business meeting. Significant uplifts in the energy efficiency associated

with recent installations in the area had been observed and Mr J McGillivray would be provided with further information in this regard.

Thereafter, Members queried whether any resistance was being encountered or concerns raised from tenants being asked to convert to air source heating. In response, an update was provided on the advice and information being provided to tenants in advance of systems being installed. Tenants were also referred to a third party energy advice organisation to ensure they were maximising the benefits from the system. Feedback was gathered from tenants who had received this type of installation and this was used to help explain the benefits to other tenants.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the summary update on the HRA Capital Programme at section 5 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the HRA Capital resources identified for Sutherland area at 6.7;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed investment priorities in the HRA Capital Programme for Sutherland 2023-27 as set out in Appendix 1; and
- iv. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme will continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee.

9. **Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ràitheil Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the community projects may go into abeyance pending the community council elections and formation of the new Dornoch Area Community Council and consideration of their priorities;
- following investment in some major projects there may now be a lull in major outlays from the Fund;
- in terms of income, it was anticipated the turf for the new Royal Dornoch Golf Club Clubhouse would be cut in November 2023 and therefore the payment of additional rent of up to £25,000 was expected, dependent on a minimum threshold of visitor numbers;
- the major risk to the Fund was the Dornoch Burn which was a burden and had to be maintained; and
- the Fund had been well managed and delivered best value and significant benefits for Dornoch as a whole. The Ward Manager and other officers were thanked for their work in relation to the Fund.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. position of Dornoch Common Good fund at the end of the second quarter FY 23/24; and
- ii. update on current Dornoch Common Good issues.

**9. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

**North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget
applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved since 1 April 2023:

Lairg Community Council - Lairg Bird Hide upgrade: £2,000.00
 Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds: £800.00
 Farr Youth Development – High Life Highland - Day Trip to Durness: £240.00
 The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange:
 £500.00
 Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust - Kyle Feeds: £1,000.00
 Lairg & District Community Initiative - Replace Flag Pole: £500.00
 North West Training Centre - Learning Programme 23-24: £1,750.00
 TYKES - Programme of Residential Respite: £1,240.00
 Farr Edge 2000 - Continue Service: £2,500.00

**East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications
approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved since 1 April 2023:

Clyne Heritage Society – Aultcraggie Roundhouses Archaeological Excavation:
 £500.00
 Dornoch Bowling Club – Victorian Benches: £700.00
 East Sutherland Camera Club – Highland Challenge 2023: £600.00
 Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds: £800.00
 Go Golspie - Caretaker Post: £500.00
 The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange:
 £500.00
 Dornoch Academy - Edinburgh Book Festival Literacy Trip: £1,175.00
 The Embo Trust - Old School Reset: £600.00
 HLH Dornoch Youth Services Summer Activity Programme: £1,000.00
 Tykes - Programme of Respite Residential: £3,000.00

**12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 8 August 2023, which were approved by the Council on 14 September 2023.

The meeting concluded at 11.50am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on 6 November 2023 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mrs G MacKenzie

Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing
Mr D Martin, Area Education and Learning Manager, Education and Learning
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr P Young, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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 G MacKenzie in the Chair**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests/Transparency Statements.

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/15/23 dated 10 October 2023 together with the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- given significant changes over the past ten years within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), the relevance of the KPIs, arrived at following ward and community consultations in 2013, was questioned and it was asked when these KPIs would be revisited;

- the station was commended for the rate of 99% availability of first appliance and an explanation was provided regarding the availability of the second appliance, namely a recent retirement and staff sickness;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding staffing and facilities and the Committee was advised that the station was due for refurbishment, which would include an improved decontamination area;
- a visit to the station by Members would be welcomed at any time;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding home fire safety visits, including methods of referral to the SFRS and to whom a visit could be offered;
- an update was requested, and provided, regarding the Driving Ambition programme;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the purpose of the SFRS attendance at road traffic collisions;
- concern was expressed regarding nationwide cutbacks and the impact was questioned in relation to local wildfires earlier this year;
- an update was requested regarding the implementation of the Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal procedure and it was confirmed that it had been very successful since it commenced in July, freeing up the SFRS Officers to complete training, exercises, and home fire safety visits; and
- Members commended the SFRS report and asked for their grateful thanks to be passed to the local officers for their continued services in the community.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Report.

4. Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary budget applications approved since last meeting
Iarrtasan buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàrd Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort air an aontachadh bho choinneamh mu dheireadh

The Committee **NOTED** the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved since its last meeting.

- HLH 'Dingwall Youth Forum' – Health and Wellbeing Project - £1,500
- Highland Rugby Club – Under 16s Legacy Tour to Italy in October 2023 - £200
- Dingwall Fire Brigade Community Group – Replace and Upgrade the PA system for town - £1,000
- Killearnan Public Hall – Upgrading Killearnan Public Hall (Tore) - £1,000
- Maryburgh Community Woodland Group – Removal of Dangerous Trees - £800
- Maryburgh Amenities Company Ltd – Senior Citizens Christmas Lunch - £500

5. Dingwall Common Good Fund 2023/24
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No DSA/16/23 dated 5 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place, and Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- regarding paragraph 4.3.1 surrounding the anticipated increase in staff costs, clarification was sought as to the reasons for this;
- Members expressed their concerns regarding the community hub, including;
 - a) comments had been made on social media as the property continued to sit empty;
 - b) the delay in advertising despite local interest. It was acknowledged that applications had been received from two community groups but they had pulled out and this partly contributed to the delay; and
 - c) it was important to ensure best value for the public purse.
- frustration was expressed at the number of empty buildings in the town including the premises previously used by Edinburgh Woollen Mill, the former High Life Highland Offices and Pefferside Park Kiosk. It was said that interest had been received in renting each of the buildings but, to date, they had not been marketed;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding Highland Council asset rationalisation;
- Members looked forward to the upcoming removal of the scaffolding surrounding the Town Hall, upon completion expected mid-November;
- an enquiry was made regarding the old Common Good Coal Fund having previously been provided to senior citizens at Christmas and it was asked if there was any potential this could happen again. Further enquiries were necessary as procedures might have changed, such as conditions and assessment of need; and
- it was asked if an application had been received from Dingwall Community Council for meals for the vulnerable at Christmas.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position of Dingwall Common Good Fund as shown in 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Statement;
- ii. **AGREED** that information be provided to Committee Members regarding the anticipated increase in staff costs; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the position regarding the old Common Good Coal Fund would be reported to a Ward Business Meeting.

**6. Inspection Report of Dingwall Primary School by HMle
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh air Bun-Sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain le
HMle**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/17/23 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was felt that the report was fair and balanced and confidence was expressed in the newly appointed Head Teacher who would be building upon the recommendations of the inspection; and
- the Chair asked the Area Education and Learning Manager to pass on their congratulations to the newly appointed Head Teacher, Mrs Sara Macaskill,

and offered her an invitation to attend a Ward Business Meeting to outline her visions for the school, as well as offering their full support to her and her team moving forward.

Although not involved in the inspection, discussion subsequently moved to the closure of the Croileagan Nursery and the effect it had on Dingwall Primary, to where some of the children were moved. In particular, the following points were raised:-

- the children had been split between two schools and concern was expressed that Gaelic language development would be lost as they integrated more with English speaking peers;
- it has been the Croileagan organisation's decision to cease business and the Education Service was keen to support the continuation of Gaelic nursery provision, and although Dingwall Primary did not have capacity to continue this in the long-term, there were plans to develop the Croileagan premises up to Care Inspectorate standard and it was hoped that this would be completed by Easter next year;
- Members had received concerns from parents but, with no complete list of families affected, the Early Years team had been challenged in communicating with them. They had since been in contact with Croileagan staff and endeavoured to contact all parents/carers to keep them informed; and
- it was intended that peripatetic teaching staff would be employed in the interim.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the report.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 14 August 2023 which were approved by the Council on 14 September 2023.

The meeting ended at 10.40 am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held remotely on **Monday, 6 November, 2023 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr J Finlayson
Mr D Millar

Mr C Munro
Mr R Stewart

Officials in attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead – Environment, Planning and Sustainable Travel
Mr A Puls, Environment Team Leader, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
Ms M Macdonald, Area Education & Learning Manager, Education & Learning
Mr M Bailey, Programme Manager, Economy & Regeneration
Ms A Smith, Project Manager, Strategic Improvement
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services
Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Community Regeneration
Ms M Gray, Project Officer Community Regeneration, Infrastructure & Environment
Mr A Bruce, Service Delivery Manager, Resources & Finance
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

Also in attendance:-

Inspector A Mackenzie, Police Scotland
Ms J Gibbons, Team Leader, National Parks, Scottish Government
Mr N Breslin, National Parks team, Scottish Government
Mr T Nabi, National Parks team, Scottish Government
Mr G Hogg, Director, Lateral North

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

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were none.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

Transparency Statement: Item 4 – Mr D Millar
Transparency Statement: Items 5 & 6 – Mr C Munro

**3. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 14 August, 2023 which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 14 September, 2023, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

In terms of Standing Order 9, with the consent of Members, item 10 was taken at this point in the meeting.

**10 Islands Infrastructure Fund 2021/22: Sleat Motorhome Facilities
Maoin Bun-structair nan Eilean 2021/22: Goireasan Dachaigh-mhotoir Shlèite**

There was circulated Report No. SR/23/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

Following commentary on the report by the Programme Manager, a point was made that given the competitive nature of bids for funding, account should be taken of how deliverable projects are.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to formally withdraw the offer of £109,992 from the Sleat motorhome project;
- ii. subject to agreement from Scottish Government and Highland Council Corporate Finance, **AGREED** that £109,992 is rolled into the 2023/24 Community Regeneration Fund allocation for the Isle of Skye & Raasay and administered in line with the approved procedures for this fund; and
- iii. **NOTED** that Members would be updated on discussions on this matter with Scottish Government.

**4. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba**

Transparency Statement: Mr D Millar made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as his son was a serving Police Officer outwith the Highland area. Mr Millar wished to record a connection to the item but having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No SR/18/23 by the Area Commander for Police Scotland.

Following a summary of the report by the Inspector, Police Scotland, a comment was made that percentages shown in the report should be a maximum of 100% to make it easier to understand. In terms of drugs misuse there appeared to be a discrepancy between the statistics and the anecdotal evidence of drug misuse in the area. The Police did receive information from various sources about drug misuse which would suggest a significant problem. However, this information related to a small minority of people in the community which the Police did focus on.

In relation to road traffic collisions, the process of recording incidents and police attendance at collisions was explained. There were more accidents known in the community than what was recorded in statistics, as only more serious road accidents were shown in the statistics in the report and not all accidents required Police attendance.

The statistics did show increases in road safety offences/sexual crime offences reported over a five year period as there had been an increase in calls and interaction with the public following the Covid lockdown period. In particular, the public were encouraged to report sexual crimes to the Police or through third party reporting.

Police Scotland had a set budget, and expenditure had to be maintained within this budget which did affect policing and at times a judgement had to be made on what police activities it was reasonable for officers to attend, as they had a large geographical area to cover. Police Scotland had reduced the number of Officers due to budget constraints and there had been restructuring within the Highland division to make best use of its resources.

It was confirmed that the detection rate for serious assaults was very good and it was understood that any assault was traumatic for the victim and the Police did all they could to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

There were problems with shoplifting and challenges with security in larger shops, such as supermarkets where there was more use of self service payment methods and this reduced a barrier of security that used to be in these shops.

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 01 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

5. **New National Park(s) in Scotland - Presentation** **Pàirc(ean) Nàiseanta Ùra ann an Alba – Taisbeanadh**

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a co-opted Director of SkyeConnect, but as the item was for information purposes, Mr Munro wished to record a connection to the item but having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

By way of introduction, the Chair advised of plans to create at least one new national park in Scotland and currently areas which might wish to be involved were submitting expressions of interest. Through communication with local residents, Skye and Raasay was considering submitting an application and representatives from the new national parks team had been invited to the meeting to provide an update and what needs done so any application from Skye and Raasay can progress.

The team leader, national parks, Scottish Government was in attendance to give a presentation on the new national park(s) nomination, appraisal and designation process and covered the following areas: -the bute house agreement commitment to designate at least one new national park in Scotland by 2026; background on national parks in Scotland, what they are designed to do and the flexibility in the legislation to tailor a new national park to the circumstances and needs of the area; the nominations process and timeline; the criteria for new national parks; the support that is being made available to groups: Lateral North support, film, technical workshop, FAQ document; and what happens after 29 February 2024: appraisal, Ministerial decision, statutory reporter process, preparation of designation order.

Following the presentation, the main points raised in discussion were as follows:-

- One of the aims of a new national park was to support sustainable land use which was very important in Skye and Raasay;
- Consultation and debate amongst stakeholders in the communities on a proposal for a national park in Skye and Raasay was very important in order to ensure the best way forward;
- There was good practice already in the area of nature friendly farming and crofting and there may be opportunities to share this good practice across communities in Scotland;
- There was a strong belief that Skye should be the number one candidate for a new national park. Skye had many areas designated as areas of special scientific interest and Raasay was part of a project for it to become a carbon neutral island.
- It was encouraging that Lateral North had been awarded the contract to provide support to nominating groups, as they had a lot of experience in this area.
- The decision on a new national park would ultimately be taken by Scottish Government Ministers and it was difficult to know at this stage if more than one park proposal went forward for consideration, but it was a possibility.
- Lateral North will have a range of ideas that would be explored with Members on engagement work that could be undertaken with stakeholders and communities;
- It was important that the public and communities did not try and compare what might happen on Skye and Raasay with other national parks in Scotland as there was flexibility and opportunity to almost design your own national park, within certain criteria, so it did reflect the individual nature that the people of Skye and Raasay live in.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation on the new national park(s) nomination process and that the presentation slides would be sent to Members.

6. School Inspection Report

Kilmuir Primary School and Nursery/ Bun-sgoil Chille Mhoire agus Sgoil Àraich Chille Mhoire

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he had a family member who worked in Kilmuir Primary school. Mr Munro wished to record a connection to the item and would not take part in discussion on it.

There was circulated Report No. SR/19/23 by the Education and Learning Manager.

The Education and Learning Manager highlighted the clear strengths in the school inspection report, within Kilmuir Primary school, particularly in the development of gaelic. It was unusual to have included in a school inspection report practice worth sharing more widely and the Head Teacher and staff at the school were commended for the very positive statements made. The areas for improvements were also very clear in terms of long term planning, raising attainment and self evaluation. The school had been working very closely with the Education and Learning Manager, the Collaborative Lead Officer and other officers on these areas for improvements, prior to a return visit by school inspectors around April/May, 2024. The management support for the school and Head Teacher was very important. Improvements were being made and there was confidence that when

school inspectors return they would see good progress on improvements to have confidence in the Head Teacher.

There had been 2 supply teachers in post at the time of the inspection and their work was commended. Other updates in staffing at the school were provided and the importance of stability in staffing was vital to continued improvement at the school. An update on staffing, following meetings this week, would be provided to Members.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the report's findings in relation to the School;
- ii. the report's findings in relation to the Nursery;
- iii. an update on staffing at Kilmuir Primary School would be provided to Members;
- iv. an update would be provided to a future meeting on progress being made on improvements at the School following the next visit by school inspectors.

7. The Storr Progress Update 23/24 Cunntas às Ùr mu Adhartas aig An Stòr

There was circulated Report No. SR/20/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

By way of introduction, the Chair thanked Officers for their work on the Storr project and the engagement they had carried out with local communities in Skye and Raasay over the last few years to move forward all the developments at the Storr. The success of the project had been that it had been managed at a local level with a strong team of Officers supporting the project.

The Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place thanked members for their support on the developments at the Storr which had very much been a team effort to progress. There was a summary of the report following which points raised at the meeting included:-

- Developments at the Storr aimed to provide improved visitor management and protection of the environment. This had been achieved at minimum costs to the Council which had been a huge success. It was also important to be flexible in the approach to future developments as there was potential for further income streams, for example, holding weddings at the site, and the importance to retain the income generated from the site to support the project was highlighted.
- The Storr was an internationally renowned visitor site and it was appropriate that facilities were provided and that there was the ambition to match such an important site. It was highlighted that the communication and governance on the project had been excellent. Also, emphasis on the gaelic language and culture in the project was welcomed as this had a big part to play in what was offered to tourists.
- Guided walks at the Storr would provide good visitor management;
- Developments at the site would provide increased business from tourists for local businesses in the area. Local products would be promoted at the new centre and local products from Raasay should also be promoted. Alcohol products perhaps could be considered for sale in future to take advantage of the many local alcohol products produced in the area.
- The work of the countryside rangers was commended;

- There had been a saving of £16k in the waste contract agreement. This was a significant saving and the work by all those involved in achieving this was acknowledged.
- the overstay charges for use of electric vehicle destination chargers would be reviewed as people could park for the whole day and only pay £1 for this;
- electric vehicle chargers at Bayfield car park, Portree were not working and this would be investigated. Also, the importance of robust agreements for maintenance of electric vehicle chargers at the Storr was highlighted.
- the centre would have cashless sales and perhaps it would be a missed opportunity to not allowing cash sales at the centre. However, it was advised most people paid by card and from a business point of view security concerns were reduced when cash was not held on site.
- There had been delays in the supply of the digital display screen at the site, which highlighted, for example, car parking availability, and an update on this was due this week.
- The close working on the site management plan with NatureScot was very important as NatureScot was reassured that the protection of the environment at the site was a priority.
- Costs were continual increasing, including costs to manage the site. Income from the site may need to be increased, but this had to be balanced against ensuring increases in prices did not affect visitor numbers. It was believed there was current capacity to increase charges at the site not only to meet costs but to maintain investment in the site.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the ongoing local Member involvement and established governance through an Officer-led cross-Service Project Board;
- ii. the ongoing Partnership working including with Skye Iconic Sites Project, NatureScot, SkyeConnect, and local community;
- iii. the significant achievements delivered by the Project and the continued progress being made;
- iv. the future growth opportunities for the site for both Council and local economy;
- v. the commitment to measuring performance including regular reports to the Skye & Raasay Area Committee;
- vi. that the overstay charges for use of electric vehicle destination chargers would be reviewed; and
- vii. that electric vehicle chargers at Bayfield car park, Portree were not working and this would be investigated.

At this point the meeting was adjourned for a short break and it resumed again at 12.30p.m.

8. Bereavement Services – Project Updates Seirbheisean Caoidh – Cunntas às Ùr air Pròiseactan

There was circulated Report No. SR/21/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Following commentary on the report by the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services, the following main points were raised during discussion:-

- There was difficulty in finding suitable land for burial grounds, however the Service was looking to progress burial grounds where it could;
- it should be possible for people to advance purchase lairs that they wished to be buried. But if there was limited capacity, advanced sales would be paused, so that there was capacity for current burials.
- It was disappointing that the next phase of the Portree burial ground had taken so long to progress and it was costing significantly more money now than it should have done, had the extension been progressed many years ago. Ideally it would be better to be ahead of the capital programme as much as possible, so that land was identified and consideration given to the formal processes, for example, planning permission for burial grounds.
- It took 6 months for lairs to settle prior to being used for burials and there was between 15 and 16 months capacity in the existing Portree cemetery. Reassurance was sought that there would be capacity in the Portree cemetery. It was confirmed that there would be capacity at this site up to 2026 once the works had been completed and it was possible to accelerate the use of new lairs if required.
- An update on arrangements for a new Skeabost burial ground was requested. It was advised that one site was currently considered a good option and this was looked into.
- an update on progress with the Cill a' Bhealaich cemetery extension would be provided to Councillor C Munro; and
- that a strategic approach to maintaining historical cemeteries and their value to ancestral tourism would be discussed further.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in the Skye and Raasay area; and
- ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

9. The Islands Winter Boost Fund 2023/24 Maoin Èiginn Cosgais Bith-beò nan Eilean 2023/24

There was circulated Report No. SR/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Following a summary of the report by the Service Delivery Manager and discussion by Members, it was noted that feedback would be given to the Service on the increase in costs to administer the scheme compared to last year and that this money would be better spent on providing support to eligible households.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Council had received Islands Winter Boost funding for 2023/24 to help alleviate the impacts of the cost crisis for island communities; and
- ii. **AGREED** that this funding be used to automatically make non-recurring cost crisis payments of £127 per eligible household by 28 February 2024 where the Council holds current bank details, in accordance with the eligibility criteria set out in section 4 of this report.

**11. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund Grants for Ward 10 in the financial year 2023/24:-

Highlife Highland Skye & Lochalsh Archive Centre £500
Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association (2) £500
Skye Youth Pipe Band £1,000
Waternish Community Garden £500
Portree & Braes Community Trust £1,500
New Pads for Tigh na Sgìre Defibrillator £55
Helping Hands Skye & Lochalsh £2000
Skeabost & District Community Council £530
SEALL £500

The meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday 7 November 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin
Ms L Johnston

Ms M MacCallum

In attendance:

Mr B Cameron, Service Lead – Housing Policy and Performance
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Mr M Greig, Ward Manager
Ms J Wileman, Assistant Ward Manager
Mr A Coyle, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr P Young, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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 Johnston in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Performance Report
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn**

There had been circulated Report No BI/13/23 dated 25 October 2023 by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the procedure when there was an automated fire alarm during the night; progress with recruitment of firefighters in Fortrose; the cause of the deliberate fires that had taken place; and the location and cause of the road traffic collisions that had taken place, which were above average;
- it was reassuring that there had been no accidental dwelling fires in this reporting period;

- appreciation was expressed for the work of the SFRS in the communities of Fortrose and Cromarty. In particular, Members commended the outstanding work that had taken place in respect of the Halloween community event in Cromarty;
- the SFRS had had an extremely challenging summer, and appreciation was expressed for their heroic efforts in tackling the unprecedented wildfires that had taken place;
- reference having been made to a vehicle fire that had taken place in Cromarty, concern was expressed regarding appliance availability, not only in the Black Isle but across Highland, and information was sought, and provided, in that regard and on minimum crewing levels. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that Cromarty Community Response Unit staff were not respiratory trained. However, the Cromarty appliance dealt with road traffic accidents and wildfires, and had been a great asset at the recent incidents in Cannich and Daviot; and
- in response to a question, it was explained that the joint mobilising arrangements that were in place in some remote areas were at the pilot stage. However, the scheme was under constant review, and it was possible it could be rolled out to other areas going forward.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. Black Isle Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved since 23 May 2023

Iarrtasán Buidseit fo Ùghdarras Uàird an Eilein Duibh air an Aontachadh bho 23 an Cèitean 2023

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Black Isle Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 23 May 2023:-

- Fortrose Academy Parent Council - Duke of Edinburgh Awards Expedition - £1,000
- Chanonry Sailing Club SCIO - Quest to Develop: Purchase of two RS Quest Sailing Dinghies - £500
- Knockbain Community Council - North Kessock Underpass Community Artwork & Youth Competition - £2,300
- Highland Rugby Club - Under 16 Legacy Tour to Italy in October 2023 - Multi Ward - Lead Officer Mark Greig - £400
- First Scottish Searching Services - Legal Report Munlochry Tennis Court - £76
- Avoch and Killen Community Council - to support the running costs for the local public bathrooms - £1,000.
- Ferintosh Community Council - contribution towards the cost of maintaining equipment and insurance - £250.

In relation to the North Kessock Underpass Community Artwork and Youth Competition, Members commended the artist involved and the impact of the artwork on the underpass. Members also praised the efforts of parents at Fortrose Academy in relation to Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

It was highlighted that, since the above applications had been approved, the maximum award had been reduced to £1000 to ensure that the funding went as far as possible. A small amount of money at community level made a huge difference and it would be great to support more community projects going forward.

5. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

a. Cromarty Common Good Fund – Quarter Two Monitoring Report

There had been circulated joint Report No BI/14/23 dated 4 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

In introducing the report, the Senior Ward Manager drew attention to the proposed budget changes as a result of the reclassification of the Victoria Hall. In relation to the options set out in the report in respect of the grants budget, it was explained that the officer recommendation was to set a nil budget.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members were content to set a nil grants budget in the short-term with the caveat it could be reinstated if the position of the fund was to change or if there was a project that had significant community impact that merited support; and
- the East Hall remained empty and it was necessary to consider the impact that might have on the fabric of the building in the long-term. Impetus was needed to bring it back into use so it could serve the community and generate income for the Common Good Fund. The Senior Ward Manager confirmed that she had noted Members' comments and suggested the matter be picked up following the Community Support and Engagement Team restructure when the officer appointed to support the Black Isle would be looking to build relationships with community groups. Members welcomed the suggestion, added that the Cromarty community was resourceful and it was amazing what could be achieved with some creativity.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position of Cromarty Common Good Fund as shown in the 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Statement; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed budget changes outlined in paragraph 4 of the report in order to reflect the reduced income now available to the fund as a result of the reclassification of the Victoria Hall and to avoid a deficit budget; and
- iii. **AGREED** to set a nil grants budget on the basis that it could be reinstated if the position of the fund was to change or in exceptional circumstances.

b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund – 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Report

There had been circulated joint Report No BI/15/23 dated 5 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

The Senior Ward Manager highlighted that, due to a miscommunication, there was an error in the report in that the contract for the urgent safety works to the gabions on the coastal area running from the Golf Club House towards Rosemarkie had not yet been awarded. The recommendation was therefore that the Committee approve expenditure estimated at £90,000 to deliver the urgent safety works required.

A detailed discussion took place during which Members expressed concern regarding the devastating impact of coastal erosion, not only on the gabions, as detailed in the report, but on surrounding areas which were beyond the scope of the Committee. In relation to the gabions, whilst the proposed expenditure was significant relative to the size of the Common Good Fund, the works were essential given the safety risk. However, the effectiveness of gabions having been questioned, it was emphasised that the urgent nature of the repairs was about making them safe, not more effective.

With regard to the surrounding areas that were beyond the scope of the Committee, and noting the need for urgency, the Senior Ward Manager undertook to liaise with Members and appropriate officers and arrange an initial meeting on the earliest possible date. It was noted that wider engagement with stakeholders would also be needed.

Thanks having been expressed to the Senior Ward Manager for her efforts in respect of this and the preceding Common Good report, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position of Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund as shown in the 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Statement; and
- ii. **APPROVED** expenditure estimated at £90,000 to deliver urgent safety works to the gabions on the coastal area running from the Golf Club House towards Rosemarkie.

6. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle Committee held on 15 August 2023 which had been approved by the Council on 29 June 2023.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Thursday 23 November 2023** at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mrs I Mackenzie
Mr B Boyd	Mr R Mackintosh
Mr I Brown	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mrs B McAllister
Mr A Christie (substitute)	Ms J McEwan (remote)
Mr L Fraser (remote)	Mr C Munro
Mr A Graham	Mr A Rhind
Mr S Kennedy (substitute)	Mr K Rosie (remote)
Ms L Kraft (substitute)	

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Mr J MacGillivray(remote)
Mr R Gale (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mr K Gowans	Mr R Stewart

Tenant Representatives in Attendance:

Ms L Richardson, Tenant Representative
Mr A Dick, Tenant Representative

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property (remote)
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management, Housing and Property
Mr B Cameron, Interim Head of Housing & Building Maintenance
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

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

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chair referred to the sad passing of former Highland Councillor Mr Graham Ross who had been Deputy Provost and Leader of Inverness and Area and extended the Committee's condolences to his family and friends. She and other Members paid tribute to Mr Ross, advising that he had been a staunch supporter of his local community and had proactively supported community development in his Ward for many years, and would be sadly missed.

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Bremner, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs M Paterson and Mr A Sinclair.

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

Items 7, 8 and 11 – Mr A Christie

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

**4. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget Monitoring
Statement to 30 September 2023
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus
Neo-thaigheadais gu 30 Sultain 2023**

There had been circulated Report No HP/19/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- information be provided to the next meeting on the backlog of non-essential repairs and their total value to help frame the discussion on the HRA Estimates for 2024/25;
- concern at the condition of some general amenity areas in housing estates due to the suspension of non-essential repairs and the Council's policy not to use glyphosate weedkiller with no decision on a substitute;
- noting that officers were to meet with the Amenities Service to consider priorities for next year which would be on areas where there was the most impact on communities;
- confirmation was sought and provided that in terms of national benchmarking, the Council was about average on supervision and management costs. Discussion on these costs would form part of the HRA Estimates considerations at the Committee in January 2024;
- in regard to the underspend on staffing, information be provided on the Building Maintenance staffing establishment and where the recruitment gaps existed;
- the shortage of skilled trades was a national issue and confirmation that the Council was continually training its own staff with a focus on skills gaps;
- discussions be held with the UHI on the potential to provide more courses for the hardest to recruit trades on the basis the Council would provide a commitment for future employment;
- the number of empty Council houses at varying stages of the void process and the regeneration options considered for long term empty properties;
- highlighting that performance on re-lets had improved and compared favourably with the national benchmarking figures;

- a more holistic approach be taken to savings on maintenance given this might result in a higher cost to another Service or public agency, for example NHS Highland in the case of falls or trips on paths;
- concern at the postponement of cyclical maintenance on the basis this was preventative spend;
- a pilot project be considered to provide tenants with materials for free so they could undertake repairs and any current models adopted by other social landlords be researched. It was suggested this would be an appropriate issue for discussion at the next Tenants Forum;
- concern some offers for Council houses in Caithness were being refused as they were below the empty homes standard. It was noted that in such circumstances the offer could be considered unreasonable and any specific cases be shared with officers;
- further clarity was sought and provided that the opportunities around garages across Highland was a delegated matter and should be considered locally by Members at a ward business meeting and by the Area Committee, potentially at the same time garage rents report was considered;
- confirmation that the current Council housing stock would be provided to Mr D Macpherson outwith the meeting; and
- further information was sought and provided on the one-off individual purchase scheme supported by Scottish Government funding, and acknowledging this also formed part of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's remit.

The Committee **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account and non-Housing Revenue Account 2023/24 for the period to 30 September 2023.

5. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report Quarter 2 Monitoring Report to 30 September 2023
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais Cairteal 2 gu 30 Sultain 2023

There had been circulated Report No HP/20/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- noting that responsibility for repairs to heating installations in Council houses rested with the Service. Specific details of the individual case involved be shared with officers;
- further clarity was sought on a number of issues in connection with the new build programme in terms of location, the delivery of affordable housing and future projects. It was confirmed that the Strategic Housing Investment Programme was to be submitted to the Committee in January 2024 and it was proposed that a Members workshop be arranged in advance to discuss the issues around new builds;

- the ongoing challenges in the construction industry with trade capacity and material delays and impact on the cost of new builds. It was explained that the slippage on the HRA Capital Programme was reflected nationally. The current situation was effectively the new normal and this would form part of the debate on the next new build programme and the Capital Programme review for the next financial year; and
- confirmation that Members would be provided with details of the cost of different types of new build properties.

The Committee **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2023/24 for the period to 30 September 2023.

6. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Monitoring Statement Quarter 2 to 30 September 2023
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Sheirbheisean Rianachd Cuid-seilbh & Ghoireasan gu 30 Sultain 2023

There had been circulated Report No HP/21/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- noting that the Service was duty bound to meet certain nutritional standards on school meals and the Team were considering the issues around reducing food waste;
- concern at the overspend on utility consumption and how to encourage behaviour change to reduce costs, for example by making individual services responsible for their bills. It was noted that a Members and services workshop on net zero had been arranged at which there would be the opportunity to consider this issue in more detail;
- highlighting the discussions held with High Life Highland on the issue of energy consumption in its premises;
- community and other groups that supported health and wellbeing were struggling to afford the cost of school and other lets and whether this was having an impact on income generation;
- in regard to the above, it was suggested that as part of the budget setting process a Member workshop be held to discuss how the service could be delivered going forward while ensuring the effective and safe management and security of buildings;
- the potential to introduce incentives to encourage lets to move from primary schools in Inverness to more community based secondary schools on the basis this would generate substantial savings on the budget; and
- the potential for a corporate view to be taken on letting fees and the greater benefits to the Council in terms of the educational, health and wellbeing associated with these lets.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the position for the second quarter of the 2023/24 financial year, and the predicted year-end position;

- ii. that the budget gap might change positively or negatively depending on the application of expenditure and recruitment controls, filling fee earning posts in an extremely challenging job market, adjusting services to meet previously agreed budget savings; in-year income recovery, identifying new income and procurement opportunities; and
- iii. the progress update provided in relation to corporate budget savings delivery.

7. Property Capital Monitoring Statement and Progress Update Aithris Sgrùdaidh Calpa Seilbhe agus Cunntas às Ùr air Adhartas

Transparency Statement: 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 HP/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- noting that Scottish Government funding had been secured for the gypsy/traveller site scheme at Longman Park and that tenants would pay Council tax and rent. The rental income would pay for the ongoing costs of operating the site;
- further clarity was sought and provided that the funding received from the Scottish Government for the Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Programme was ringfenced specifically for the approved projects detailed at section 5.4 of the report which included Kinmylies Primary;
- an update was sought and provided on the conversion of Avonlea to provide accommodation for the Wick High School Campus as a lower cost alternative to a modular building. An update would be provided to Ward Members on timescales in due course;
- an update was sought and provided on potential improvements to Wick High School Campus. Funding priorities for the next financial year would need to be considered and engagement with Ward Members would follow on specific projects as required;
- further clarity was sought and provided on progress with the acquisition of the site or the new St Clement's School, Dingwall and an update would be provided to Ward Members and a meeting with parents would be arranged in the coming weeks;
- further information was sought and provided on the potential relocation of staff from the former Merkinch Family Centre. Work was ongoing with Children's Services and an update was to be brought to the Redesign Board. An update would be provided to Ward Members ahead of that meeting on its likely future use; and
- highlighting the positive news at section 5.2 of the report that in the revised Capital Programme funding was also included in 2024/25 for a new access road at Dunvegan as part of the overall design masterplan for an eventual new school building, a housing development on adjacent land, and a community playing field.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. position at the end of the second quarter of the 2023/24 financial year, and the estimated year-end position;
- ii. progress on the projects referred to in the report; and
- iii. current position on the remedial works underway at Charleston Academy and Nairn Academy.

**8. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023
Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2023 – 30 Ògmhios 2023**

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he had a connection in his capacity as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizen's 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 HP/23/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- concern at the level of rent arrears, the impact on tenants and loss of rental income to the Council to spend on the housing stock and an assurance was sought that follow up action was being progressed with tenants. It was explained the Council's rent management policy included a detailed escalation process for rent arrears which was essentially a constant follow up process for engagement between officers and tenants;
- in regard to the above, the focus was on early intervention, providing advice and support and a reasonable approach to repayments and technical arrears arising from benefit payments;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Service worked closely with other Council services and various agencies in relation to debt management, financial health checks, energy advice and benefit maximisation;
- the vast majority of tenants with arrears did not want to be in debt and often these tenants had experienced a change in their life circumstances were in low paid jobs, had been impacted by the cost of living crisis or changes to the benefits system;
- it would be helpful in future reports for a historical information to be provided on the arrears figures in terms the number of weeks and years it represented;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the figures for households in temporary accommodation and confirmation the wording 'not cumulative' would be removed from future reports;
- it was recognised the number of homeless presentations increased in Quarter 4 and the actions that could be taken in conjunction with other agencies to prevent this increase. It was explained that further clarity was awaited from the Scottish Government on the forthcoming prevention duties and that once known a Members workshop would be arranged in 2024 on homelessness;

- it would be helpful for Members to receive information on the reasons for the spike in homelessness in Q4, the age profile of homeless applicants, and the specialist advice and support available to former armed forces personnel and older people. The opportunity to further raise awareness of the range of Council and external services available also be considered;
- the fact performance was improving on the average re-let times was welcomed and the opportunity to deliver further improvements through smarter working;
- the opportunity for the Council to offer tenant payment holidays for rents, noting that currently rent payments were based on a 48 week period and the feedback from tenants was that they were content with the status quo; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that there would have been prolonged engagement processes with tenants for high level arrears cases. In some cases legal action was required with evictions being a last resort, the number of cases being historically low.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023.

9. Service Performance Monitoring Report: Quarter 1 2023/24
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Seirbheis: Cairteal 1 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No HP/24/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

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

10. Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator
Aithris Bharantais Bhliadhnail do Riaghladair Taigheadais na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No HP/25/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that Mr D Macpherson would be circulated with the policy statement that explained the process in respect of sole tenants who had received a prison sentence.

The Committee **NOTED** the Annual Assurance Statement for 2023 detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

11. Highland Housing Register Allocations Annual Monitoring Report
2022/2023
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Bhliadhnail Sònrachaidhean Clàr Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd 2022/2023

Transparency Statement: 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 HP/26/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Committee **NOTED** the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on housing allocations which demonstrated that the policy was achieving its objectives.

The meeting was closed at 12.55pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in the Courtroom, Grantown Courthouse, Grantown-on-Spey/Remotely on 13 November 2023 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Mrs M Cockburn

Mr R Jones
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Ward Manager (Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey)
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr N Nethercott, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr M Ferguson, Direct of Planning & Place, Cairngorms National Park Authority
Mr C Simpson, Head of Visitor Services, Cairngorms National Park Authority

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 R Jones in the Chair**Business****1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

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

Item 4 – Mr R Jones, Mr B Lobban

Item 5 – Mr B Lobban

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Sgìreil Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No NC/15/23 dated 30 October 2023 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- information was sought on station availability, the low availability of the second Grantown appliance, the number of homes complying with new fire alarm requirements, the different contracts for volunteer and retained firefighters, the use of the Community Asset Register and management of resources and personnel when fighting wildfires and the use of Community Resilience Plans;

- it was queried what more the Council and other partners could do to help with recruitment; and
- disappointment was expressed at the low number of female firefighters, and it was queried what could be done to encourage more women to join the Scottish Rescue and Fire Service and whether the Service had tried targeting seasonal workers for recruitment.

The Committee **NOTED** the Performance Report.

4. Cairngorms National Park, Visitor Management Review Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh, Ath-sgrùdadh Stiùireadh Luchd-turais

Transparency Statement: Mr R Jones and Mr B Lobban declared connections to this item as members of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There was a presentation on visitor management in the Cairngorm National Park by Mr Murray Ferguson, Director: Planning and Place, Cairngorm National Park Authority.

During Discussion the following points were raised:-

- surprise was expressed that only 3 out of 11 identified visitor hotspots were in the Badenoch and Strathspey Area;
- certain hot spots such as Glenmore or Loch Morlich could be de-advertised to avoid them becoming even busier than they already were;
- information was sought and provided concerning the roadside parking at Cairngorm Mountain and the Highland and Islands Enterprise feasibility study around the creation of an active travel route;
- Council Members need to be given more information in order for partnership working to be effective;
- although progress had been made in Glenmore, over a nine year period, not enough progress had been made;
- in response to a question it was confirmed that Rangers played a part in educating the public about avian flu;
- the need to monitor campervans was emphasised; and
- information was sought and provided on the use of Police Patrols in the National Park, the access rights on the River Spey and the construction of new public toilets at Glenmore.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Appointments to Outside Bodies Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean on Taobh A-muigh

Transparency Statement: Mr B Lobban declared a connection this item as a member of the Board of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

During discussion it was suggested that the local area committee should have two Members appointed to the Cairngorm and Glenmore Group.

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr R Jones and Mrs M Cockburn be appointed to the Cairngorm & Glenmore Group.

6. Street Naming - Carrbridge & Cromdale Ainmeachadh Sràide – Drochaid Chàrr & Crombail

There had been circulated Report No NC/16/23 dated 2 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- Dolly's Way was not an appropriate street name;
- Buchan Way was suggested due to the area's Jacobite history; and
- Spey road was suggested as an appropriate alternative.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the:-

- i. names Gordon Place and Spey Road for the two new streets in Cromdale shown attached on Appendix 1 to the report; and
- ii. name Struan Court for the new flatted development in Carrbridge shown attached on Appendix 2 to the report.

7. Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved since the meeting on 29 May 2023:-

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Project</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Newtonmore Camanachd Club	Safety Padding for Clubhouse	£964
Newtonmore Business Association	Centenary Garden Project Consultation	£750
Strathspey Works	Grantown Remakery	£880

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 29 June 2023 which were approved by the Council on 29 June 2023.

The meeting concluded at 12.10pm.

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held remotely on Monday 13 November at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mr W Mackay (arrived 10.40am), Mr S Mackie, Ms J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mr K Rosie

Officials in attendance:

Mr M Sutherland, Ward Manager
Mr R Macleod, Service Lead (Investment & Building Maintenance)
Ms I MacMillan, Project Manager, Climate Change and Energy Team
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer (Community Regeneration)
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

In Attendance:

Inspector S Mezals, Police Scotland

Mr R Gunn in the Chair.

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Liesgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr W Mackay.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 21 August 2023 which were approved by the Council on 14 September 2023.

**4. Police – Area Performance Summary
Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No CC/18/23 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Inspector and officers be thanked for the excellent work carried out in the area;
- further clarity was sought and provided around the reporting and self-referral process for sexual crimes;
- concern the statistics appeared to show that drink/drug driving offences were almost equal to the number of speeding offences in the area which differed to the statistics for some other areas. The Inspector advised that the under detection of

- speeding was the issue rather than there being an equality of risk. A visible Police presence on roads immediately influenced driver behaviour in relation to speeding;
- concern at the high proportion of missing persons in the area who were looked after children in comparison to some other areas. The Inspector advised that while it was difficult to draw any conclusions from the figures which included repeat incidents, the availability of partner support services was probably a factor;
 - the additional pressure being placed on officers dealing with the high number of missing person cases and a point that the closure of Avonlea children's care home in Wick may impact on the figures in future reports. The Inspector advised that looked after children also included those on supervision orders residing at home with family members. The majority of missing persons cases involved vulnerable adults, many of which had travelled into the area;
 - concern at the significant reduction in Police Scotland's budget and an update was sought and provided on the implications in respect of the roll out of new technology projects such as body worn video, overtime and training, and reduction in officer numbers in Sutherland. The staffing establishment in the area had not been reduced, albeit there were ongoing challenges with filling vacancies;
 - clarification was sought and provided around the 101 Service and the initiatives being undertaken locally to improve the interface between the Police and public;
 - the Contact Commander Control C3 Division required to be reinforced to give prompter responses to the public and address concerns with the current 101 Service;
 - noting there was no indication as to Police Scotland's budget for the next financial year, and while there was a recruitment freeze, applications for positions in Caithness were being sought and efforts made to resolve any conflicting messages around staffing;
 - the increase in hate crimes statistics was disappointing and the severity by which the Police had dealt with the repeat incident in Thurso was appreciated;
 - further clarity was sought and provided that Police Scotland had a zero tolerance approach to hate crime and on the follow up action taken and range of prevention and intervention mechanisms in place to tackle this form of crime in the area and nationally;
 - it would be helpful to have figures for officer time spent dealing with out of hours mental health cases and when attending court, noting there were challenges in providing the former and a system was being developed to track court attendance; and
 - the significant improvement in detection rates for homicides and reduction in these crimes nationally was welcomed and an explanation was sought and provided on the approach taken by Police Scotland to investigate homicides and deaths that required further investigation.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23.

5. Wick District Heating Project - Housing Pròiseact Teasachaidh Sgìre Inbhir Ùige

There had been circulated Report No CC/19/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- this was an excellent initiative and a good news story and the feedback from tenants on the benefits of the scheme had been very positive;

- the Project Team be commended on the excellent work being undertaken in relation to the project;
- as the scheme was extended, the potential to include difficult to let void properties to boost demand for these houses, for example where one of those properties was located within a block of tenanted properties;
- there was a potential benefit to owner occupiers of former Council houses through the ability to extend the scheme to their properties;
- the project was also seeking to incorporate as many commercial buildings as possible to assist with costs and also the potential to roll out the scheme to other parts of Caithness, specific reference being made to Thurso, and the wider Highlands;
- consideration was being given to minimising the risk factor of introducing tenants and properties to one particular heat source and the options in the event of system failure, albeit there was the same risk factor with any heating system;
- it was important to have tenants and communities engaged in expanding the scheme and to understand the meaningful benefits of the project for those tenants most in need to mitigate the impacts of fuel poverty and the cost of living crisis;
- reducing energy demand was a key target towards the Council achieving net zero and there were excellent tranches of work across the wider organisation around local energy heating strategies in terms of insulating homes, improving energy efficiency and reducing costs; and
- improved collaboration and cooperation from renewable energy companies was being observed and there were opportunities for private sector investment in local heating networks that would help accelerate their roll out in Caithness, the Highlands and nationally.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. contents of the report outlining the benefits to tenants;
- ii. progress for Phases 1 and 2 of the District Heating Expansion Project; and
- iii. potential for further expansion of the domestic heating network dependent on infrastructure expansion and connection of public buildings.

6. Renewable Energy Investment Opportunities in Caithness Cothroman Tasgadh ann an Lùth So-ùrachaidh ann an Gallaibh

Isla MacMillan, Project Manager, Climate Change and Energy Team, gave a local area update on the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- noting that a report on the Area Based Scheme would be brought to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in the first instance and thereafter cascaded to local committees for an area based focus. Members looked forward to a substantive paper being brought to a future Caithness Committee;
- the need to identify redundant Council land for renewable energy projects that would generate income for the Council and provide benefit to local communities. Such initiatives included solar farms, battery storage for other renewable energy projects, and schemes that would complement the district heating project and other projects being taken forward by partner agencies and local stakeholders;
- confirmation was sought and provided that information would be provided to a future Caithness Committee on the scope of the Area Based Scheme and reference was made to the external funding opportunities;

- the huge range and scale of opportunities at the Council's disposal and the need to move forward with due diligence to ensure the right decisions were made taking account of net zero implications;
- there was a significant volume of work ongoing within the Council and through the Climate Change Committee around renewable energies, reference being made to the development of a strategy and action plan;
- the above included bringing forward information to the Climate Change Committee and Council on the investment and funding opportunities around solar energy and the potential to generate significant levels of income;
- discussions had been held in relation to the shared ownership of wind farms with a private company where they absorbed the risk and the potential to generate significant returns from such developments;
- reference to pilot projects around hydrogen as a heating source, considerations around transport and expanding the EV charging network in Highlands and the use of data collection technologies to provide EPC ratings for the Council's domestic properties; and
- it was important to continue to drive investment in renewable energy opportunities and keep pace with new technologies to generate much needed income for the Council, and for projects to be ready to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arose.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on this item.

7. **Wick Common Good Fund Quarterly Monitoring Report** **Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ràitheil Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige**

The Chair advised that this item had been withdrawn as there were outstanding matters around finance and property that required to be explored more fully in order to provide a full report. An update to an Area Business Meeting would be provided as matters were progressed.

The Committee **NOTED** the item had been withdrawn.

8. **Community Regeneration Funding Update 2023-24** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Mhaoineachadh Ath-bheòthachadh Coimhearsnachd 2023-24**

There had been circulated Report No CC/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the delivery plan of the Community Regeneration Fund for 2023/24; and
- AGREED** to ringfence the allocation of £50,000 Community Regeneration Funding towards Wick Town Centre Regeneration, which should be brought back as a full application to a future committee for consideration.

9. **Ward Discretionary Awards** **Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

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

Wards 2 & 3

Association of Caithness Community Councils (ACCC) - Village Officer Fund -
£3,753.00 (£1,876.50 each Ward)

Ward 2

Pennyland Primary School - Project: Pennyland Wellbeing 60

(Painting of 10m x 10m area of playground in preparation for marking installation) -
£580.00.

The meeting ended at Noon.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 15 November 2023 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken (remote)	Ms L Kraft
Mrs M Cockburn	Mrs I Mackenzie (remote)
Mr D Fraser	Ms K MacLean
Mr R Gale (sub for Ms A MacLean)	Mr T MacLennan
Mr R Gunn (remote)	Mr D Macpherson (sub for Ms M Smith)
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)	Mrs M Reid
Ms L Johnston	Mrs T Robertson
Ms E Knox (remote)	

Non-Members present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Ms S Fanet (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)

NHS Highland representatives:

Dr T Allison, Director of Public Health, NHS Highland
Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing, NHS Highland

Third sector representatives in attendance:

Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance
Mr H Tedstone, Highland Hospice

Participating Officials:

Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care and Chief Social Work Officer
Ms F Malcolm, Head of Integration Adult Social Care, Health and Social Care
Mr I Kyle, Head of Performance and Improvement, Health and Social Care
Ms J Park, Strategic Lead Child Health, Health and Social Care
Ms M McIntyre, Head of Children and Justice Social Work, Health and Social Care
Ms J Baughan, Programme Manager, Whole Family Wellbeing Programme
Ms J Hutchinson, Strategic Lead Care and Support, Health and Social Care
Ms L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

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

Mr D Fraser in the Chair

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Dr C Birt, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs P Munro, Mrs M Paterson and Ms M Smith.

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

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

Item 6 – Ms L Johnston

Item 7 – Ms L Johnston, Ms L Kraft, Mrs M Reid

**3. Service Achievements
Coileanaidhean Seirbheis**

The Committee **NOTED** updates on the following issues:

- North Highland Baby Friendly Re-Assessment
- Family Nurse Partnership 10 Year Anniversary
- Social Work Forum
- Age Scotland's 80th Anniversary

**4. Adult Social Care Assurance Report
Aithisg Bharantais Cùram Sòisealta Inbheach**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/17/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- third sector representatives referred to the importance of community hubs if generic services were to be delivered to diverse communities;
- with reference to the value of community hubs, it was important they were securely funded, and the Head of Integration Adult Social Care would raise this with NHS Highland partners;
- the report highlighted that services did not operate in isolation and emphasised the importance of partnership working, with particular reference to the impact of the actions of one sector on the workings of another, for example trying to recruit from a limited pool of staff;
- gratitude was expressed to all involved in care work and the need to increase the profile of the care sector as a career was emphasised;
- bespoke local solutions for adult social care were essential, especially in remote and rural areas. Attention was drawn to the need for a holistic whole system approach, and to the value of Self-Directed Support and the flexibility it offered;
- information was sought and provided on work being undertaken to address the challenges finding housing for carers as key workers, especially in remote and rural areas. The Chair offered to raise with the Chair of Housing and Property the need for more collaborative working in this respect and asked that a report providing an update be presented to the Committee in 2024;
- it was queried whether there was any scope to improve on the nationally agreed care home contract rates, with a suggestion that this be worked on jointly with the Western Isles Council which faced similar challenges to Highland. Attention was drawn to the work involved in negotiating individually with care home providers;

- information was sought and provided on the work that was required in the lead up to the planned Care Inspectorate inspection, with this being led by NHS Highland officials. Further detail would be covered in a future report;
- assurance was provided that a project board for the North Coast Care Facility was considering all associated issues, such as housing, education and childcare, and details of their meetings could be provided to Mr R Gale if required by the Head of Integration Adult Social Care, who was a member of that board;
- information was sought and provided on community-led support projects, with pilots being undertaken in Fort Augustus, Nairn and Caithness;
- attention was drawn to the importance of reducing the number of Housing voids and ensuring home modifications were possible for people leaving acute care. Other suggestions to tackle the housing crisis included freeing up larger houses for families rather than single occupancy, ensuring visitor space was available in sheltered housing, and seeking funding for 'granny flat' extensions;
- the need to shift the balance of care from acute hospitals to the community was acknowledged by all; and
- innovation, enthusiasm, and a holistic community-based approach, were key to tackling the challenges ahead.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- NOTED** the contents of the report;
- NOTED** the continued commitment and collaborative actions to sustain service provision, whilst responding to the ongoing operational pressures arising as a result of workforce challenges and also the position in relation to the preparation of the Strategic Plan; and
- NOTED** that the Chair would raise with the Chair of Housing and Property the need for more collaborative working in respect of providing housing for carers as key workers and **AGREED** that a report providing an update on this would be presented to the Committee in 2024.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring – Quarter Two Monitoring and Performance Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – Sgrùdadh agus Coileanadh Cairteil a Dhà

There had been circulated Report No HCW/18/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with quality of care remaining of paramount importance, it was key that long term savings were achieved through service redesign and that sufficient resources were in place to deliver the redesign;
- in response to various requests, the following information would be provided to the Committee outwith the meeting:
 - the reasons behind the increases in reported staff absences; and
 - whether the 52.9% of adults receiving care at home was a percentage of those requiring care at home;
- assurance was sought that although vacancies were assisting to balance the budget, this was not intended to contribute to savings on a recurring basis, but rather the outcome of the challenges being faced in recruitment;

- the reduction of the predicted overspend – now an underspend - for Looked After Children was welcomed, and it was queried whether more children had been taken into care since the cessation of respite care services at The Orchard, which was not the case;
- the impact of an issue being added to the Corporate Risk Register was queried, with regular review of the issue by the Audit Committee being a significant factor;
- in relation to foster care payments, the difference between Council and private payment rates was queried and it was confirmed that the latter were significantly higher;
- in relation to the positive outlook for the numbers of children and young people in residential placements outwith the Highland area, it was hoped this would continue despite the challenges with resources and the need for specialist services for some children. This reduced number was reflected in the underspend in Looked After Children;
- the risks to future years' budgets as a result of depleting the reserves of £9.8m for Adult Social Care were highlighted; and
- in response to a query, it was explained that some kinship care arrangements were without formal recompense, and if the carers required payment, they would need to undergo an approval process.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. forecast revenue position as at Q2 of the 2023/24 financial year;
- ii. progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery; and
- iii. Service's performance and risk information.

6. Young Carers Luchd-cùrainn Òga

Transparency Statement: Ms L Johnston declared a connection to item 6 as an employee of Highland Community Care Forum but was not involved in the Young Carer Service and, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No HCW/19/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the excellent support provided to young carers by third sector organisations was welcomed;
- the proactive identification and support of all young carers, and awareness raising of their challenges, was important, while also acknowledging that some young carers did not wish to be identified;
- many young carers missed out on opportunities and education due to their responsibilities, and could develop a difficult relationship with their school as a result. It was important to identify and support young carers who were not in education;
- the value of young carers, and other unpaid carers, to society could be considered by calculating what the cost would be to provide that care;

- information was sought on the last time the young carers steering group had met, which had been February 2023. Work was underway to get the group up and running again; and
- in response to a query, it was confirmed there was no policy in place at present to allocate a specific percentage of the carers budget to young carers but work was underway to understand the resources available and their uses.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. content of the background information in relation to the statutory duties for The Highland Council in relation to Young Carers; and
- ii. progress being made in ensuring that Young Carers and their families received appropriate support.

7. Update on Disability Services in Highland including Self-Directed Support and Respite

Taic Fèin-Stiùirichte, Seirbheis Ciorramachd, agus Faochadh

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to item 7 but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Ms L Johnston, as an employee of Highland Community Care Forum but not involved in the Young Carer Service;

Ms L Kraft as the financial appointee for a close family member who was in receipt of a Self-Directed Support package for several years which she managed but this package had closed the previous month; and

Mrs M Reid as a private respite provider.

There had been circulated Report No HCW/20/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought and provided on the process for transitions from child to adult services, with particular reference to the challenges sharing electronic information between the Council and NHS Highland. These were planned for years in advance, but work was still required to understand barriers in the process;
- information was sought and provided on the flexibility of SDS with regard to paying family members for support, access to banks of workers, and safeguarding issues for employed carers. Increased flexibility for SDS usage was being sought from the Scottish Government;
- it was queried whether children with acknowledged but not officially diagnosed neuro-developmental issues could access support;
- information on the caseload and numbers of staff available for child disability teams would be provided to the Committee outwith the meeting;
- the table at section 8.2 of the report did not indicate how many parents had responded to the survey;
- it was important to expedite the scoping exercise currently being carried out in relation to the services available for children with disability in Highland;

- attention was drawn to the links between Health & Social Care, and Education, including how Education could provide parents and carers some respite;
- it was clarified that PMWH stood for Primary and Mental Health Workers;
- SDS could facilitate creative, meaningful and cost-effective solutions for families, noting that families might need a break from providing care but not wish to be separated from the person being cared for. Families choosing care at home should be able to use their SDS flexibly for respite care if required, and there should be a move away from building-based respite care. It was important, in relation to families making direct payments, there was an understanding of employment rights and obligations;
- the importance of the size and type of respite care accommodation was highlighted;
- lack of spaces in care homes could cause harm and was a significant challenge, and reference was made to Boleskine Community Care project, which had worked innovatively to bring together the private and voluntary sectors to deliver care and support services. Clustering care requirements in communities could be helpful, and attention should be paid to issues that were blocking the process; and
- information was sought and provided on scoping work being undertaken in relation to the provision of care in the far north of Scotland.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the scoping exercise being carried out in the terms provided for in the report noting which required engagement with NHS Highland in terms of Transitions and Education for those young people with a Disability who might not be known to the Children's Disability Service in Highland, as well as third Sector partners.

8. **Workforce Update Report** **Aithisg Ùrachaidh Feachd-obrach**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/21/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

A recruitment promotion video was shown and, during discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the video, and progress made on workforce planning since issues had been highlighted by an audit report, were welcomed, though it was acknowledged that more work was still required;
- the importance of a 'grow your own' recruitment policy was highlighted;
- it was vital that new staff were appropriately supported, and it was suggested that, given the high cost of agency staff, a bank for care sector staff be developed, perhaps in conjunction with neighbouring local authorities;
- the aim to provide additional administrative support for social workers was welcomed as it would free them to concentrate on their core role. The need for support to be available to staff to stay healthy and look after their mental health was emphasised; and

- when planning service delivery, it was important to consider the totality of resources available, with particular reference to third sector involvement.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- on-going recruitment and retention challenge across all social work services, whilst acknowledging the significant impact this was having on the delivery of 'front-line' children's services;
- positive shift in recruitment and reduction in Children's Services vacancies from Q1 (41%) to Q3 (34%); and
- actions and overall workforce strategy to tackle the recruitment and retention challenges.

**9. Child Health Service Performance Update (balanced score card)
Cunntas às Ùr mu Choileanadh Seirbheis Slàinte Chloinne (cairt-sgòraidh chothromaichte)**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought and provided on service delivery for the homeless, travelling, and Forces communities, which could be more challenging to reach and required more flexibility;
- with reference to Indicator 7, which reported that 90% of CAMHS referrals were seen within 18 weeks, it was queried what happened to the other 10%. This would be followed up with NHS Highland and a response circulated to the Committee outwith the meeting, although it was pointed out that the figure indicated that there were no outstanding referrals over 2 years;
- also in relation to Indicator 7, it was pointed out that a difference in Highland was that some referrals came to the Neuro Developmental Assessment Service, rather than to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and this was reflected in the figures. A significant challenge was in attracting the specialist workforce required;
- concern was expressed that in relation to Indicator 10, the percentage of children and young people referred to AHP Service waiting less than 18 weeks from date referral was currently only 51%. In addition, there had been a reduction in ASN support in schools, and representations should be made to Education and Learning in this regard. It was explained that work was ongoing and the issues would be picked up in future. Previously, allied health professionals had been closely aligned with schools, and it was important, post-covid, that this relationship was maintained and enhanced;
- the importance of a well-resourced, collaborative, whole school approach to speech and language, ASN, and neuro-diversity therapies was emphasised;
- it was queried whether the slow decrease in vaccination uptake was reflected in a comparable decline in school vaccination rates, and this would be circulated to the Committee outwith the meeting;
- concern was expressed at nicotine addiction in the teenage community as a result of vaping, rather than smoking, and that it was not included as a performance indicator. Reference was made to recent work on the joint strategic needs assessment with public health, which was identifying potential new indicators.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the range and function of services within the devolved child health service;
- ii. **NOTED** the purpose and background to the development of the balanced scorecard and range of data contained at Appendix 1 to the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that there be further discussion with the Education Service with regard to Indicator 10.

10. Whole Family Wellbeing Programme Prògram Soirbheas an Teaghlaich gu Lèir

There had been circulated Report No HCW/23/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

The Programme Manager for the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, gave a presentation on the following topics:

- Programme Governance
- Drivers for Change
- Route Map and National Principles
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Locality Approach
- Next Steps

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the early intervention and the transformational nature of the programme were welcomed, and it was expected to improve outcomes;
- assurance was sought and provided that grandparents were included in the whole family approach; and
- concern was expressed that the project was already significantly through its two year period, with no definitive continuation of funding, and information was sought on what results had been achieved to date. It was clarified that these points had been raised with the Scottish Government, the funding was ring-fenced, and that there was some flexibility with expenditure of the funding. The focus of the project was building long-term, self-sustainable community capacity.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. content of the report and the decision taken by the Community Planning Partnership Board to agree that the additional resource provided through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund be utilised to drive forward the proposed programme as previously agreed by the Community Planning Partnership Board;
- ii. decision taken by the Community Planning Partnership Board to identify and fund a Programme Manager post to plan and implement the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme across Highland; and

- iii. decision taken by the Community Planning Partnership Board to establish a Programme delivery team and plan, to develop this partnership approach, using the [Scottish Government's Route-map and National Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support](#), that would report on progress to the Integrated Children's Service Board and ultimately to the Community Planning Partnership Board.

11. Champions Updates Cunntasan nan Curaidhean

The Committee **NOTED** the short presentations by the following Champions on their work:

Adult

Mr Thomas MacLennan gave a presentation about dementia, which demonstrated what could be done to help people suffering from dementia to stay in their own homes for longer by creating a dementia friendly living space. Members were urged to visit the Dementia Service Development Centre, Iris Murdoch Building, University of Stirling.

Children's

Dr Chris Birt had submitted his apologies and would present his update to the next meeting.

Trauma

Mrs Morven Reid summarised the work of the Trauma Champions Network, which consisted of senior leaders from Local Authorities, Health Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships and other key community planning partners, with the aim to progress trauma-informed practice and share learning across geographical and professional boundaries. Reference was made to the Council's commitment to becoming a trauma informed organisation, and to the Trauma summit that was being organised in Inverness in 2024, which would bring together senior leaders, business owners, officers, councillors from across the Highlands to engage at a very strategic level to promote the benefits of Trauma Informed Practice.

12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The minutes of the Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 21 June 2023 had been circulated and were **NOTED**.

The meeting ended at 3.15pm

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 Declarations 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. 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-

- i. **NOTED** the Service’s revenue monitoring position;
- ii. **NOTED** the Service’s performance and risk information; and
- iii. **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** **Cìsean Barantas Togail: Freagairt Cho-chomhairleachaidh**

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 Còmhdhail Coimhearsnachd**

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 Tadhail 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

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Monday 20 November 2023 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken	Mrs J Hendry
Mr C Ballance	Ms E Knox (Remote)
Mr B Boyd	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr I Brown	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr M Cameron (Remote)	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Remote)	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie	Mr D Macpherson
Mr D Fraser (Remote)	Mrs B McAllister
Mr K Gowans (Remote)	Mrs M Reid
Mr A Graham	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Gregg	

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
 Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
 Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager, Communities and Place
 Mr B Cameron, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Property and Housing
 Mr S Fraser, Head of Legal and Governance, Performance and Governance
 Mr G Smith, Strategic Lead – Infrastructure, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
 Mr K Forbes, Senior Property Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
 Mr M Greig, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
 Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Performance and Governance
 Ms D Sutton, Amenity Services Manager, Communities and Place
 Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
 Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance
 Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr J Thrower, Group Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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 I Brown in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair reflected on the recent sad passing of Mr Graham Ross, former Councillor and Depute Provost of the City of Inverness Area. Elected to Ward 13 (Inverness West) in 2012, he resigned in May 2021 but during his tenure he proved to be an excellent Councillor for his Ward, the City and the Council as a whole. Other Members also reflected on his achievements, both as a Councillor and as a former Council employee. Having been involved in setting up the Charleston Community Complex he helped to establish the Management Committee, extending the building and battling for better facilities for the Scorguie and Charleston communities. He gained the respect of fellow Elected Members and acted both as a mentor and a role model to them. He was a big loss to of all and the Committee sent their thoughts and prayers to his family and friends.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs H Crawford and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Item 8b – Mrs J Hendry and Ms M Reid

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

Item 8 – Mr A Christie

Item 8b – Mr A Graham

Item 12 – Mrs J Hendry

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Area Performance Report Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba – Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No CIA/28/23 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- aware that the community were encouraged to install interlinked smoke alarms, information was sought, and provided, regarding the benefits generated;
- it was asked if there remained time and resource to provide the wellbeing care to staff when needed and levels of debrief were explained from local support to external referrals;
- a breakdown of incident types was requested, namely the percentage of calls devoted to fire and to rescue, and Members were informed that this information could be provided;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding recent wildfires and it was asked how Members could advise their constituents as to how to avoid wildfires from starting in the first place;
- in relation to unwanted fire alarm signals and that fire had to be evidenced by the reporter, it was asked if there had been any delay in sending an appliance if the reporter had been, for example elsewhere;
- that in addition to partnership working with Police, Ambulance and Social Care, Members would also be able to refer a constituent for a Home Fire Safety Visit, and it was asked if those applying for benefits, such as disability allowance, would be offered a visit as part of the application;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the target for availability of retained staff and if the service was taking active measures where staffing was low;
- it was queried if calls that appliances did not attend were recorded, to gauge the level of malicious calls;
- the number of female officers in the fire service was low, and holding meetings in the community or schools could encourage more to join. Members requested contact details to arrange such meetings and the details were to be provided; and
- information was sought, and provided, regarding Fire Safety Visits to Short Term Let properties.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. **Visit Inverness Loch Ness (VILN) Business Improvement District (BID) Renewal Urachadh Sgìre Leasachadh Gnothachais Tadhal Inbhir Nis Loch Nis**

There had been circulated Joint Report No. CIA/29/23 dated 2 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer Economy and Regeneration.

Members welcomed the report and felt it was excellent value for money regarding the £20k per annum amount. It was confirmed that a briefing session by Inverness BID had taken place on Friday 17 November 2023 and the intention was to carry out another briefing session in 2024/25.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Proposal for the renewal of the VILN BID; and
- * ii. **AGREED to RECOMMEND** to full Council at its meeting on 14 December 2023 that the Council supported the VILN BID Ltd Proposal in the BID ballot.

5. **Whin Park Redevelopment Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Ath-leasachadh Pàirc a' Chonaisg**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/30/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Whin Park was the responsibility of the Highland Council and the amount of money needed from the Common Good and Discretionary Budgets was disappointing. To prevent deterioration there should have been continuing maintenance over the years and there could not be a reliance going forward on Ward budgets;
- it was not disputed that Whin Park needed investment and the benefit of open spaces to the wellbeing and mental health of all citizens had become apparent during the Covid pandemic;
- the report suggested that Wards 13, 14, 15, 16 and 19 were allocating funding of £51,247 but it was clarified that the Ness-Side Ward (Ward 15) had chosen to allocate £30,000 instead, taking into account the number of other parks and play areas in the Ward which also required investment both now and in the future;
- although described as a City Park, the Culloden and Ardersier Ward (Ward 17) had been asked for a contribution. However, it was contended that constituents from all areas used Whin Park;
- concern was expressed that the Inverness Millburn Ward (Ward 16) had allocated the full £51,247 as some of this funding could have been used to re-open two other play parks in the Ward;
- a holistic approach covering all “strategic” parks across the city was called for to arrive at a strategy for investment;
- the Council had still to approve its Play Strategy and it was hoped there was flexibility within the redevelopment plans to adhere to any requirements that might arise as a result; and
- Whin Park should not just be a children’s park but an inter-generational facility to encourage those of all ages and abilities to access it.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the vision for the park;
- ii. **AGREED** the Scottish Government Play Park funding allocation for this Project as detailed in the report subject to the revision of an allocation of £30k from Ward 15;
- iii. **NOTED** the completed work to revitalise the boating pond;
- iv. **NOTED** the toilets were to be redeveloped in winter 2023 and funding was already secured for this;
- v. **NOTED** the feasibility study outcomes and costs for a full park redevelopment to be undertaken as per the scope of works detailed in the report to Committee on 24 November 2022; and
- vi. **NOTED** that funding opportunities would continue to be explored.

6. Inshes Junction Improvements – Proposed Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) and Stopping Up Orders

Leasachaidhean Snaidhm-rathaid nan Innseagan – Òrdugh Ceannach Èigneachail ga Mholadh agus Òrdughan Stad a Bhith na Rathad-mòr

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/31/23 dated 30 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- improvements to the Inshes Junction had been part of the Capital Plan since 2012 but there was a feeling locally that there had been poor public communication, which, in recent years, could be partly attributed to the Covid pandemic. Whilst the improvements would benefit all of Inverness there would be an impact on the local community;
- there was doubt, with a reduced Capital Plan, if improvements would ever take place. Confirmation was sought, and provided, that the report considered by the Highland Council on 14 September 2023 had deferred this £5m project. Consequently, it was questioned why, without an approved scheme or planning application in place, this was being pursued now, causing alarm and distress. Confirmation as to the budget position for this project would be confirmed;
- clarification was sought as to the various areas which could be the subject of a Compulsory Purchase Order. Some businesses had only been notified as recently as September, suggesting that they were unaware of what was going to take place;
- concern had also been voiced by some businesses regarding access and how this would impact on them. Much of the land identified as being required was on key access routes and it was queried when perpetual rights of access would be discussed with affected parties;
- one business had, as a planning requirement, needed to address flood defences and it was queried how the improvements would impact on this;
- one landowner had emailed Members with a list of valid questions and concerns and it was hoped that officers would respond to these questions, copying Members in to the response; and
- the ownership of one area identified on the maps appended to the report, identified as Plot 17, had still to be determined and it was queried why Plot 4, some distance away, was required.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- * i. **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to The Highland Council that plans for Inshes Junction Improvements as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, were taken forward for use in progressing Compulsory Purchase Orders for the scheme;

- ii. **NOTED** the plans for Inshes Junction Improvements as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report, which were to be taken forward for use in progressing Stopping Up Orders for the scheme; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a private Members' Briefing be held to provide an opportunity to discuss the finer details of the proposed improvements.

7. Inverness Common Good Fund - Reclassification of Inverness Town House car park
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – Ath-sheòrsachadh Pàirc Chàraichean Taigh Baile Inbhir Nis

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/32/23 dated 25 October 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance.

During discussion, it was proposed the reclassification of the car park, from Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF) to the Council, should take place on 1 January 2024 to allow the ICGF to benefit from the income in December 2023. However, it was explained that, legally, the transfer should take place as soon as possible after the discrepancy became known. It was then proposed that the Council be asked if the car park income until 31 December 2023 could be retained by the ICGF even if the asset was transferred earlier. It was also proposed that the ICGF buy the car park from the Council, however due to the complex legal situation between the Council and the ICGF, this would not be possible unless by way of a notional legal agreement.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. investigations undertaken in connection with the legal title for the Town House car park;
- ii. reclassification of the Town House car park from Common Good to General Fund;
- iii. consequent impact on the financial position for Inverness Common Good Fund;

and **AGREED**:-

- * iv. to **RECOMMEND** to the Council that, although ownership of the car park would be reclassified as early as possible, the income from the car park continue to benefit the Inverness Common Good Fund until 31 December 2023; and
- iv. to investigate the possibility of the Inverness Common Good Fund entering into a notional agreement with the Council to retain ownership of the Town House car park.

8. Inverness Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Board Member of Inverness BID. 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.

**a. Financial Monitoring
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/33/23 dated 3 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

The Committee **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 30 September 2023 and that overall expenditure was within agreed budgets excepting estimated outturns detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

**b. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee Report
Aithisg Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Math Choitcheann Inbhir Nis**

Declarations of Interest: the undernoted Members made Declarations of Interest and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, they left the meeting for this item:-

**Mrs J Hendry – as a family member played rugby at Highland Rugby Club
Mrs M Reid – as a family member attended the TFX Performing Arts Academy**

Transparency Statement: Mr A Graham made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a family member was a volunteer at Blythswood. 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. CIA/34/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In this connection, there had been circulated separately a copy of supporting documentation as Booklet A.

Although support was expressed for both applications for civic hospitality, the Inverness Burns Club and Inverness Hospital Radio, concern was expressed about the provision of civic hospitality in general, given the budget was already overspent and in light of the cost of living crisis. Information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the overspends, including rising costs, and the levels of scrutiny given to the IGCF budgets.

Mr I Brown, seconded by Mr A Graham, **MOVED** to approve the applications as recommended.

Mr D Gregg, seconded by A Christie, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, to approve all applications except the two for civic hospitality, which would be postponed until 2024-25, subject to the Committee agreeing a budget in early 2024.

On a vote being taken, the motion received 15 votes and the amendment received 3 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Aitken, Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr D Fraser, Ms E Knox, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister.

For the amendment: Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg, Mrs T Robertson.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED:**
 - applications for funding totalling £133,108.60 had been received;
 - £55,231 remained in the Poverty and Inequality grant budget;
 - £125 remained in the Other grants budget; and
 - the City Vibrancy budget had been over committed by £31,242.
- ii. **APPROVED** the applications received based on the recommendations made by the Sub-Committee;
- iii. **APPROVED** the application for £150,000 towards the Whin Park Refurbishment Project as detailed in the application, which would be drawn from ICGF Reserves in addition to any sums agreed ii above;
- iv. **NOTED** the decisions taken in ii and iii above, and **AGREED** the allocation of further sums to the Grants and City Vibrancy budgets from reserves, which, if approved in accordance with the recommendations made by the Sub-Committee would total £77,752.60, for Grants and City Vibrancy and £150,000 for Whin Park; and
- v. **AGREED** to close the Grants and City Vibrancy budgets for further applications for the remainder of financial year 2023/24.

9. Ward Discretionary Budget Applications Iarrtasan Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following City of Inverness Ward Discretionary Budget applications which had been approved since 28 August 2023:-

- **Ward 12**
 - Dopamine Dolls: Outreach & Awareness - Purchase Initial Publicity Material - £200
 - Beauly Community Council: Christmas Lights Replacement and Upgrade - £1,500
- **Ward 13** – None
- **Ward 14**
 - Inverness Women's Aid: Operation Love Your Refugee - £2,520
 - Inverness Festival Association: Inverness Music Festival - £750
- **Ward 15** – None
- **Ward 16**
 - HLH Millburn Active Schools: Associated Schools Football Groups Ward 16 - £1,751
- **Ward 17**– None
- **Ward 19** – None

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

- i. The Committee **NOTED** the minutes of City of Inverness Area Committee held on 28 August 2023.

- ii. The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 9 October 2023 and 30 October 2023; and
- iii. The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 4 September 2023, 9 October 2023 and 10 November 2023.

11. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

12. Inverness Common Good Fund – Sites and Premises Transaction Report Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – Aithisg Gnothachais Làraich is Thogalaichean

Transparency Statement: Mrs J Hendry made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Shareholder of Teclan, who worked for two of the businesses listed in this item. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed her position in relation to the item and any personal connection, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated to Members only Joint Report No CIA/35/23 dated 30 October 2023 by the Head of Economic Development & Regeneration and Property Manager.

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

13. Notices of Motion Brathan Glusaid

The following Notices of Motion had been received by the Head of Legal and Governance –

- (i) “That the artwork transfers of footprints and paw prints that have sprung up in Lombard Street, Drummond Street and Union Street be removed. They do nothing to improve the appearance of our city or increase the economic performance of town centre traders.”

Signed: Mr A Christie Mrs T Robertson

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion was anticipated to have a financial implication. Officers have estimated the cost of cleaning/removal as £2,800. The risk has been highlighted that this approach, given the nature of the materials, may not prove successful. If so, it was estimated that costs of full replacement of the slab stones and associated labour and materials would be in the region of £12,000. This was an estimate and with the potential that costs might differ, and might be higher, given the specialised and made to order nature of the materials.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the artwork had been implemented without the Committee's agreement or consultation with traders and did nothing to improve the appearance of the city centre. Some traders had the artwork right outside their premises and they didn't want it there. The motion was to remove the artwork and it was appreciated there would be costs associated with this;
- significant funding had been put to upgrade the Victorian Market to make it look attractive and these bright coloured objects on the pavement were not attractive and did nothing for the city centre and should be removed;
- it was requested that a decision on the artwork be deferred until the February 2024 meeting to allow time for an enquiry into changing the colour or removing the artwork at minimal cost;
- it was confirmed that the decision to implement the artwork was sanctioned by the Inverness City Area Manager following decisions taken by businesses within the Victorian Market to attract footfall into the market and a catalyst to encouraging people into the city centre. The bright colours had been used for the benefit of people with sight disabilities. The project had cost £800. Ways of improving the artwork could be looked at and proposals brought back to this Committee for consideration;
- reference was made to anecdotal evidence that young people did enjoy having a path to follow into the market. However, the view was expressed that in doing so people were not visiting other shops on the way to the market and this was why businesses did not like the artwork outside their premises;
- there had been a lack of communication on the artwork and this needed to be improved going forward and lessons learned from the project;
- it was suggested that the metal motifs that were missing from the city centre pavements should be replaced at the same time as the work to remove the footprints/pawprints, when funding was available. It was advised that this suggestion was not within the terms of the motion and therefore was not for consideration by the Committee at this time. However the suggestion could be looked at separately outwith the meeting; and
- the funding to remove the artwork would require to come from the Inverness Common Good Fund.

Thereafter, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, **MOVED** that the artwork transfers of footprints and paw prints that had sprung up in Lombard Street, Drummond Street and Union Street be removed. They did nothing to improve the appearance of our city or increase the economic performance of town centre traders.

Ms K MacLean, seconded by Mrs J Hendry, moved as an **AMENDMENT** to defer any decision about the 'footsteps' printed around the city centre until the February 2024 meeting, with the aim to increase footfall, especially to the Victorian Market. This will allow time for an enquiry into the changing of their colour, or even their removal. Damage to slabs was a risk. The latter had been costed at £12.5k, which was deemed not an acceptable risk given the financial constraints on the budget at present.

On a vote being taken, the motion received 7 votes and the amendment received 14 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Aitken, Mr A Christie, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs T Robertson

For the amendment: Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms E Knox, Mrs M Reid, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs B McAllister, Ms K MacLean

Decision:

The Committee **AGREED** to defer any decision about the ‘footsteps’ printed around the city centre until the February 2024 meeting, with the aim to increase footfall, especially to the Victorian Market. This would allow time for an enquiry into the changing of their colour, or even their removal. Damage to slabs was a risk. The latter had been costed at £12.5k, which was deemed not an acceptable risk given the financial constraints on the budget at present.

- (ii) “That the City of Inverness Area Committee notes the decision by Council on 14th September to defer the Capital funding allocation for the following schools. In order that the Area elected members can better understand the impact on the educational experience and attainment of our pupils, the impact on capacity limitations at all Area Schools and any health and safety risks posed by the deferral that a seminar be arranged as soon as possible”.

Charleston Academy £13M deferral in funding
 Culloden Academy £6.5M deferral in funding
 Ness Castle Phase 2 £7.7M deferral in funding
 Stratton Primary £22M deferral in funding
 East Inverness New Academy £59M deferral in funding”

Signed: Mr A Christie Mr D Gregg Mr A Graham

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council. There might be ancillary costs, or opportunity costs, associated with the calling of a seminar and officer time involved in preparing for such a meeting.

During discussion, it was highlighted that good educational facilities had an impact on good educational attainment and the motion sought a seminar for Members to understand what the deferral of capital funding allocation to the schools would mean for learning and experiences of children in these schools. Children were being taught in temporary accommodation and building environments that were far from ideal compared to those being taught in standard permanent accommodation. The City of Inverness was affected disproportionately by this deferral in capital spend than any other area of the Council. There was a need for more information to Members, the public and parents on the impact of the deferral.

Other views expressed were that everyone was aware of the distress and frustration at the inability to allocate capital funding to the schools set out in the motion. The immediate priority was to allocate funds for essential repairs and £5m had been set aside for this. The situation would continue to be monitored as would dialogue with the Scottish Government to try and obtain additional funding. Irrespective of whether to have a seminar or not, this would not achieve any more funding and therefore the Council could not meet any more expectation. The budget situation in the Council was very challenging and difficult decisions would have to be made and a seminar would not assist the situation. Therefore, an amendment to the motion was proposed as shown below.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr D Gregg, **MOVED** that the City of Inverness Area Committee notes the decision by Council on 14th September to defer the capital funding allocation for the schools listed above. In order that the Area elected members can better understand the impact on the educational experience and attainment of our pupils, the impact on capacity limitations at all area schools and any health and safety risks posed by the deferral that a seminar be arranged as soon as possible.

Mrs J Hendry, seconded by Mr B Boyd, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the City of Inverness Area Committee notes that £5m has been set aside in the 5-year capital budget to enable any urgent maintenance, repair or health and safety issues in Charleston and Culloden Academies, and further notes the report agreed by Council in September that latest population projection and other data is suggesting a lower school capacity impact from new housing development. As a result, for a few capacity driven school investment projects, including new school builds, current assessment is that the need for full capital replacement is not expected to be required within the life of the new 5-year capital programme. Full replacement projects assessed as not being required within the 5-year programme are Ness Castle Primary Phase 2, Stratton Primary School and East Inverness Secondary. In all cases there is a recognition that school roll forecasts continue to be kept under regular review, and if circumstances change and the need and timescale for delivery alters, future capital programme reviews provide the opportunity to revisit assumptions.

On a vote being taken, the motion received 9 votes and the amendment received 12 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Aitken, Mr D Macpherson, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs B McAllister, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr D Gregg, Mr A Graham, Mr A Christie, Mrs T Robertson.

For the amendment: Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms E Knox, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mrs M Reid

Decision:

It was **AGREED** that the City of Inverness Area Committee noted that £5m had been set aside in the 5-year Capital Budget to enable any urgent maintenance, repair or health and safety issues in Charleston and Culloden Academies, and further noted the report agreed by Council in September that latest population projection and other data was suggesting a lower school capacity impact from new housing development. As a result, for a few capacity driven school investment projects, including new school builds, current assessment was that the need for full capital replacement was not expected to be required within the life of the new 5-year capital programme. Full Replacement Projects assessed as not being required within the 5-year programme were Ness Castle Primary Phase 2, Stratton Primary School and East Inverness Secondary. In all cases there was a recognition that school roll forecasts continued to be kept under regular review, and if circumstances changed and the need and timescale for delivery altered, future capital programme reviews provide the opportunity to revisit assumptions.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 23 November 2023 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr D Gregg
Mrs I Campbell	Ms M Hutchison
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms L Johnston
Ms H Crawford	Ms L Kraft
Ms S Fanet	Ms M MacCallum (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mrs I MacKenzie (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs P Munro

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Ms S Lamont
Mr I MacDonald
Mr W Skene

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms O MacLeod

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R Bremner (remote)	Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr A Christie	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr K Gowans (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)	Ms M Ross (remote)

In attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning
Ms B Brown, Senior Lead Manager, Improvement and Performance
Ms T Stones, Senior Lead Manager, Professional Learning and Development
Ms F Shearer, Area Education Manager – South
Ms A Jansson, Area Education Manager – North
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Ms J Sikkema, HR Business Partner
Dr J Vance, Rector, Culloden Academy
Ms E MacCallum, Head Teacher, Aviemore Primary School
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr F Dunlop, CEO, **sportscotland**
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Mr D Wilby, Director of Corporate Performance, High Life Highland
Ms L Bauermeister, Head of Health and Wellbeing, High Life Highland
Pupils from Aviemore Primary School

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

Business

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

There were no apologies for absence.

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 9: Mr D Gregg

Councillor McGillivray made a general Transparency Statement as a retired member and former Highland District Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements
Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting. To formally recognise the outstanding achievements at the Committee, the presentation was shown.

The Chair added that good news had been received from the voluntary youth sector in that Youth Highland had recently submitted a portfolio of evidence to be reviewed by a national panel of assessors and were delighted to have had their Community Learning and Development Standards Mark renewed for the third time, having held the Standards Mark since October 2015.

There was also good news from Care and Learning Alliance's (CALA) Foundation Apprenticeship team who were attending an SDS event in Glasgow today to present on their work, specifically how the risk of learners leaving the programme was managed, what proactive activities were undertaken to engage with learners who might be thinking about leaving the programme and how CALA worked with local authority education colleagues and schools to support learners.

Congratulations having been extended to both organisations, the Committee **NOTED** the good news and outstanding achievements.

4. Highland Youth Convener Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Neach-gairm Òigridh na Gàidhealtachd

Orla MacLeod, Highland Youth Convener, updated the Committee on her Action Plan, which included Mental Health, LGBT+ bullying and The Highland Youth Convener

Roadshow, and the Highland Youth Parliament Conference which had taken place in June 2023.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Highland Youth Parliament Conference was a fantastic event and it was inspiring to see young people engaged in important issues;
- it was queried whether the impact of Covid was still a discussion point among young people and whether this could be worsening other issues such as mental health and bullying;
- the inclusion of home-educated young people was welcomed as many young people might be homeschooled due to bullying, mental health or neurodivergence, and it was queried how links would be formed with these young people;
- mental health and LGBT+ bullying were very closely linked and 60% of LGBT+ young people felt unsafe or unwelcome in rural communities;
- on the point being raised, it was suggested that teachers needed more training on issues surrounding LGBT+ bullying so they felt more able to help, and that while there was significant support for the LGBT+ community in Highland it was often silent and did not always translate to meaningful progress;
- the Youth Convener's visit to S5 and S6 pupils at Plockton High School had been very inspiring, and Members were encouraged to invite her to more school visits in the future;
- the issues of vaping and limited subject choices in smaller schools were highlighted;
- future reports on expanding subject choice in smaller schools and LGBT+ bullying were requested, and the Chair confirmed this would be considered; and
- the Chair undertook to discuss possibilities for Member engagement with the Youth Convenor and report back to Members, and invited the Youth Convenor back to present to the Committee in 2024.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the update.

5. Highland Scottish Credit & Qualification Framework (SCQF) Attainment and Scrutiny (Session 2021-22)
Buileachadh is Sgrùdadh Frèam Chreideas an is Theisteanasan na h-Alba airson na Gàidhealtachd (Seisean 2021-22)

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/23 dated 25 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

In addition to the report, Dr J Vance, Rector, Culloden Academy, gave a verbal presentation during which detailed information was provided on what Culloden Academy had done to try and maximise the attainment and achievement of young people, much of which had been replicated in the other 28 secondary schools in Highland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the improvement in S4 attainment was welcomed. However, looking at the whole picture, Highland was consistently below the national average and the virtual comparator and, given the excellent work taking place by hardworking teaching staff, it was questioned why that was the case;

- information was sought on the extent to which the poor condition of the school estate was impacting on learning outcomes, staff and pupil morale and officers' ability to drive raising attainment;
- in relation to the further actions for improvement set out in the report, information was sought, and provided, as to how much confidence officers and teaching staff had that a renewed focus on teaching approaches to support the delivery of learning and teaching was going to make a step change so that attainment in Highland was not below average but above;
- the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation was an indicator for larger towns and conurbations and did not reflect poverty and deprivation in rural areas;
- current S4 pupils had been the worst affected by Covid, having missed out on important rites of passage in P7 and having had a difficult first year in secondary school;
- the importance of positive destinations, and of providing data thereon, was emphasised. However, it was questioned whether the young people involved viewed their destination as positive and it was suggested it would be helpful to carry out a survey of school leavers to gather further information in that regard;
- concern was expressed that percentages could be misleading when pupil numbers were small, such as in rural schools, and it was queried whether some form of equality rating could be applied in such instances to make the figures more meaningful. However, the Chair responded that the percentages in the report were Highland-wide;
- the most concerning figures in the report were in respect of Level 6 in S6 where Highland was consistently below both the national average and virtual comparator. However, it was good to see that being recognised in the report and that solutions were being sought;
- teachers generally had an idea what pupils might achieve prior to their exams and, it having been queried whether there was a way of presenting such data, information was provided on tracking procedures and the data collected by schools;
- it was queried whether Guidance Teachers received sufficient training and support, and whether the local authority had enough teachers with the right skills to deliver the service it was endeavouring to provide;
- the report and presentation showed the direction of travel, that learners were at the centre, and that education was about learning in a variety of ways;
- more data was needed to have a real sense of what young people in Highland were achieving. Particular reference was made to literacy, numeracy and, in relation to the opportunities associated with the Green Freeport, STEM subjects, and it was confirmed that information in that regard could be provided in future reports;
- greater subject choice in S4 and delivering Nationals over two years would serve young people in Highland well, particularly after the Covid pandemic;
- as indicated in the presentation, knowing the story of the young people behind the data was crucial;
- the importance of reflective practice was emphasised;
- Members commended the Rector of Culloden Academy in relation to attainment and achievement at the school, particularly given the challenges associated with Covid and classroom capacity;
- achievement was different for different cohorts of pupils;
- it was questioned whether the data captured everything Members needed to be looking at – for example, it did not reflect non-academic subjects;
- attention was drawn to an error in the graph on page 10 of the papers in that the attainment gap in 2022/23 was 32%, not 22%;

- information was sought, and provided, on the four Scottish Attainment Challenge schools referred to in the report;
- Members owed it to young people in Highland to give them the best possible education and, if the graphs in the report were correct, young people from other local authorities were more likely to be accepted to the top universities; and
- whilst Highland was improving in terms of attainment, other local authorities were improving by a greater margin and, if the trajectory continued, Highland would never catch up. In that regard, it was questioned whether all local authorities were treating the statistics in the same way or were there some anomalies that were impacting the results.

Following discussion, Ms H Crawford, seconded by Mr R Gale, **moved** an addition to the recommendations in the report as follows:-

“and the Committee requests that the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning:-

- contact the top-ranking Councils in Scotland to identify whether they have examples of best practice which might be taken forward by this Council with a view to improving our attainment, and report back to this Committee accordingly; and
- assess the impact, adverse or otherwise, that our poor school estate is having on attainment across Highland and report back to this Committee accordingly.”

As an **amendment**, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, moved the recommendations as set out in the report.

On a vote being taken, there were six votes for the **motion** and ten votes for the **amendment**, with no abstentions. The **amendment** was therefore **carried**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Gregg, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie.

For the Amendment:

Mrs M Cockburn, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Ms L Kraft, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mrs P Munro.

Decision:

The Committee:-

- scrutinised and **NOTED** Highland’s Senior Phase SCQF attainment for session 2022/23 and specifically **NOTED** the improvement in S4 attainment;
- NOTED** that secondary school-based attainment meetings would take place in November and December 2023 and actions for improvement would be agreed. At these meetings stretch targets for session 2023/24 would be set with each school; and
- NOTED** that the Raising Attainment Action Plan agreed at the September 2022 Education Committee continued to be used as a key driver to progress the attainment agenda in secondary schools and reduce the attainment gap.

It was also **AGREED** that a survey of school leavers be carried out to gather further information in relation to positive destinations.

**6. Children's Rights and Participation – Progress on implementing The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Promise
Còraichean is Com-pàirteachas Chloinne – Adhartas a thaobh a bhith a' buileachadh Cunradh nan NA air Còraichean Chloinne agus A' Gheallaidh**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/23/23 dated 2 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the encouraging report which showed a collaborative and holistic approach was being taken to children's rights and participation;
- the commitment to keeping The Promise was welcomed, and the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the SHANNARI principles were emphasised;
- for children in the care system school might be the core structure in their lives, and the target of no more school exclusions for care-experienced children was welcomed;
- it was Carers Rights Day, and the importance of recognising young carers was emphasised. Many young people in Highland were juggling a caring role with navigating school, relationships and pathways in life, and Ms L Johnston, as one of the Council's Children's Champions, stated that she would like to work with officers to ensure that all young carers, especially those not currently in education, could access a Young Carers Statement. The Principal Educational Psychologist suggested that the Young Carers Steering Group would welcome Member involvement;
- there was a huge amount of working going on in communities across Highland that was not captured in the report and it would be good to find a way to look at the totality of work taking place in schools, youth clubs, early learning and childcare settings etc, not only to assure the Committee that children's rights were being upheld and promoted but to ensure that best practice was being shared so improvement could be sustained. In that regard, the Principal Educational Psychologist undertook to work with the Chief Executive, CALA, to draw up a framework/template that could be shared with third sector partners and other organisations to try and gather a much more holistic view of the work taking place and share best practice.
- the report showed a positive trend in terms of children engaging in their rights;
- profoundly deaf people presented with significantly higher mental health issues than their peers, and the reference to British Sign Language as a method of reaching out to young people was welcomed;
- the formation of an LGBTI+ subgroup was welcomed;
- the collaborative work that was taking place around trauma-informed practice was positive, and Members looked forward to next year's summit in that regard;
- training was key and it was important that staff, particularly teachers who were committed to class time, were given time to attend;
- in response to a question regarding the recommendations in the report, it was explained that the Committee could only agree to have in mind the rights of children and young people in consultations, discussions and decision-making within the Committee's remit. Other matters would require to be considered by Full Council or the relevant Strategic Committee;

- information was sought, and provided, as to what the mechanism for having children's rights in mind in future discussions would be, and whether children's rights could be included in the "implications" section of future reports;
- information was sought, and provided, on how much support was given to children facing bereavement and how need was identified;
- in relation to Article 12, the right to be heard, not all parents agreed that some aspects of the curriculum should be taught, and information was sought, and provided, on how that was handled consistently across Highland to ensure there was equal access to the curriculum;
- the information on the work taking place and the next steps was welcomed; and
- as mentioned by the Youth Convener in her earlier presentation, there was a need for equality in terms of subject choices in schools, some small rural schools having limited choices. Similarly, lack of transport in rural areas was a barrier to accessing after school activities which were a vital part of the social element of the school experience, and information was sought, and provided, on how it was intended to address these issues going forward.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the examples of progress to date and future actions proposed;
- NOTED** the information prepared specifically for Elected Members in relation to children's rights; and
- AGREED** to have in mind the rights of children and young people in consultations, discussions and decision-making within this Committee, with specific consideration to care-experienced children and young people.

7. Presentation: Aviemore Primary School – Rights Respecting Schools Gold Award and Makaton Accreditation
Taisbeanadh: Bun-Sgoil na h-Aghaidh Mòire – Duais Òir agus Barantachadh Makaton Sgoiltean a' Toirt Spèis do Chòraichean

The Chair welcomed pupils and staff from Aviemore Primary School to the Committee, commenting that when he and the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning, had recently visited the school they had been impressed by how the pupils were driving forward so many agendas around equality, inclusion and rights.

Whilst reports could provide valuable information, the best way to understand how schools were approaching things was to hear it from the schools themselves. He then handed over to the pupils who, accompanied by Ms E MacCallum, Head Teacher, gave a presentation on their journey to becoming a Gold Rights Respecting School and attaining Makaton Friendly accreditation.

The pupils then sang, and signed in Makaton, the Skye Boat Song.

Members having commended the school's ethos, and the pupils and Head Teacher for their excellent presentation, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

8. Community, Sports and Leisure Facility Strategy
Ro-innleachd Goireas Coimhearsnachd, Spòrs agus Cur-seachad

There had been circulated Report No EDU/24/23 dated 25 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Chair explained that the strategy that was the subject of the report had been developed in partnership with **sportscotland** and High Life Highland, and he hoped it would allow the Council to move forward its aspirations for facilities across Highland in a strategic and understood way.

He welcomed Forbes Dunlop, CEO, **sportscotland**, to the Committee, explaining that Mr Dunlop had been in post since February and had visited Highland several times since, which he was sure had highlighted the unique challenges the Council faced across its vast rural area.

Following an introduction by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning, and the Director of Corporate Services, High Life Highland, the CEO of **sportscotland** provided an overview of the priorities and vision for sport in Scotland, drawing particular attention to the importance of service co-location, the role of sport in the health of people and communities, the importance of schools in encouraging sport and physical activity for young people, the need for community empowerment and partnership with the voluntary sector, and the importance of collaboration with other agencies to improve health and wellbeing across the area.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was important for The Highland Council to lead the way with this strategy given its unique challenges and geographical makeup;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the Associated School Group model allowed for leisure facilities to be located in Primary Schools as well as Secondary Schools;
- the importance of partnership and collaborative working with organisations such as NHS Highland and the Green Health Partnership was emphasised;
- the Fingal Centre in Portree and the Aviemore community facility both showed the benefits of having multiple facilities located together;
- it was queried what support would be available for communities to develop a Community Hub in their area;
- it having been proposed that a review of letting charges be carried out to ensure that children and communities were not being disadvantaged as a result of excessive charges, the Chair confirmed that a review of letting charges was already underway as part of the Council's budget-setting process;
- it was queried how people who had had to stop taking part in sport due to illness or a major life change could be encouraged to remain active;
- not all leisure facilities were run by the Council or High Life Highland - there were many community-run facilities such as village halls which provided sport and leisure activities to schools and the wider community;
- support was expressed for the Active Schools programme;
- co-location could lead to more effective communication between services;
- it was queried whether NHS Near Me rooms could be located within Community Hubs;
- the difference in approach in Inverness and rural areas was welcomed;
- the importance of having good travel links to Community Hubs, and leisure facilities based in schools being open 52 weeks a year and not just during term time was emphasised; and
- information was sought, and provided, on how the conflict between finance and diversity and inclusion was managed.

* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council:-

- i. the community/sport and leisure facility strategy set out in the report; and
- ii. subject to (i) above, that a report(s) be considered at a future Education Committee meeting which details plans for each Associated School Group area.

9. High Life Highland Progress Report Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd

Transparency Statement: Mr D Gregg declared a connection to this item as an employee of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/25/12 dated 18 October 2023 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

As part of a presentation, Members were provided with the six-monthly update which covered areas including performance against the Service Delivery Contract (SDS), general updates and High Life Highland's (HLH) Health and Wellbeing work, much of which was delivered in partnership with NHS Highland. The latter was covered by HLH's Head of Health and Wellbeing whose post was jointly funded by NHS Highland, and this joint investment demonstrated the value that Public Health placed upon the work that HLH undertook in delivering health prevention work across the Highlands.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- HLH's work in regard to health prevention was evident, with fewer people attending hospital as a result of falls;
- expanding Health and Wellbeing work, with partners, would generate cost savings as, as well as preventing falls, it would improve enablement. There was a range of outreach work provided with partners including cardiac rehabilitation, those with Parkinsons, the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association etc. To access these it was important to highlight social prescribing opportunities to GPs. Not only was it important to keep people out of hospital but to have people living well, both mentally and physically, in communities. Furthermore, it was hoped more people could live independently for longer;
- the mobile library service was valued, especially in remote and rural areas, but the fleet was aging;
- music tuition had been a particular success of HLH and it was hoped this would not be negatively affected due to the budget constraints;
- it was difficult for Community Councils to develop relationships with seasonal Rangers and ideally continuity could be established;
- the improvements in efficiencies, reach and engagements were welcomed, especially where these tied in with the Council's aims and objectives;
- there still remained a sizeable budget gap and there was potentially a risk that HLH would have to reduce public service levels. Information was sought as to when and how this would occur, the effect on the current review of the SDC and the impact on HLH-run facilities. Particularly in relation to the latter, assurances were sought that, should community centres be disposed of, communities would be given the opportunity to take them on;
- the Council had formed HLH as an Arms Length Organisation in 2011 to deliver public service obligations through a SDC. It had saved the Council £2m per annum through rates relief. It covered a range of services including Adult

Learning, Archives, Arts etc. Before the formation of HLH many of these services were constantly under threat during budget rounds;

- there was an annual adjustment to HLH's funding from the Council in line with the Scottish Government Grant settlement but, over the years, this grant had reduced thus also reducing HLH's funding. However, HLH's costs had increased in terms of staff salaries and pensions, and it had accepted 43 new services and facilities. This had resulted in savings to the Council but, for HLH, this was becoming unsustainable. The Service fee to HLH in 2023/24 was £16.1m but, due to factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis, the Council had had to help meet costs from its Reserves. HLH faced another budget deficit this year but, through various mitigating actions, this had been significantly reduced. Nevertheless, additional support would again be required from the Council but, given the Council's own financial position, it was likely to be reflected in the review of the SDC;
- the range and quality of work of HLH was commended and it was important that all Members were aware of their achievements. In that regard, the Chair confirmed that a workshop was to be held in December detailing exactly what HLH was involved in, and Members were encouraged to attend in advance of the budget setting; and
- given the seriousness of the upcoming budget, it was important Members and the public were aware of which Services the Council and HLH, on behalf of the Council, delivered.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 30 September 2023, including HLH's contributions to the implementation of the Council Corporate Plan in Appendix A of the report;
- ii. the general updates provided in section 2 of the report;
- iii. that HLH continued to deliver Public Service Obligations on behalf of the Council as set out in the Service Delivery Contract;
- iv. the progress on the Service Delivery Contract review; and
- v. the information in Appendix B of the report on the health and wellbeing work delivered by HLH.

10. Service Performance Reporting and Quarter 2 Monitoring July 2023 to 30 September 2023

Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis agus Sgrùdadh Cairteal 2 Iuchar 2023 gu 30 Sultain 2023

There had been circulated Report No EDU/26/23 dated 25 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Committee:-

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

11. Education & Learning Service Workforce Plan 2023-2026

Plana Feachd-obrach Seirbheis an Fhoghlaim agus an Ionnsachaidh 2023-2026

There had been circulated Report No EDU/27/23 dated 10 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Committee **NOTED** the Education & Learning Service Workforce Plan 2023-2026.

12. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Thràth-ionnsachadh is Chùram-chloinne

There had been circulated Report No EDU/28/23 dated 25 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the geography of the Highlands demanded creative problem solving and partnership working, and thanks were expressed to officers for their ongoing work in that regard;
- the forthcoming changes in the ELC sector were massive and their impact should not be underestimated;
- ELC partners provided a core service, and the importance of hearing their voice at the Education Committee and working with them on a more co-productive basis was emphasised;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that meetings with ELC partners to discuss rate-setting and the process to be followed in that regard would commence the following week. The Chief Executive, CALA, explained that she sat on the Scottish Government Childcare Representative Working Group. A meeting was scheduled to take place the following week at which an update would be sought regarding the Scottish Government commitment of £12 per hour for staff delivering funded ELC, and she undertook to relay Members' comments and share the outcome; and
- the Chair reminded Members that budgetary decisions were a matter for Full Council.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the purpose and principles to support ELC settings for ongoing improvement through the draft Collaborative Improvement Framework;
- ii. **NOTED** Scottish Government childcare commitments as outlined in the Programme for Government; and
- iii. **NOTED** the intention to re-engage with PVI (Private, Voluntary, Independent) ELC partners and other Highland Council directorates to develop and implement the required changes.

13. Appointment to Highland Disability Sport Cur an Dreuchd gu Spòrs Chiorramach na Gàidhealtachd

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr D Millar to replace Mrs I Campbell on Highland Disability Sport.

14. Membership of Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers Ballrachd Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail do Thidsearan

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr R Gale would replace Mr A Christie and Mrs I MacKenzie would replace Mr P Logue on the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers.

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

The draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting and Ordinary Meeting of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 14 November 2023 were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 3.20 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 29 November 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)	Mrs J Hendry
Mr J Bruce (remote)	Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Mr M Cameron (remote)	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs A MacLean (substitute)
Mr L Fraser	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr A Graham	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr R Gunn (remote)	Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr C Ballance	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Dr C Birt (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr K Rosie (remote)
Mr P Logue	Ms M Ross (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh	

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Community Operations and Logistics
 Ms A Clark, Head of Community Support and Engagement
 Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations
 Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
 Mr S Graham, Corporate Improvement Project Manager
 Ms D Sutton, Amenity Services Manager
 Ms L MacGillivray, Community Support Coordinator
 Ms L Gray, Chief Registrar
 Ms D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager
 Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
 Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr M Humphreys, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie 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 R Gale, Mr M Green and Ms M Nolan.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

- Ingrid Jamieson had been promoted from Amenities Officer to Service Support Officer within the Amenities team. She had worked for the Council for 15 years as a Community Works Officer and Amenities Officer and, during that time, had developed a specialism in playparks having gained accreditation in Playground Philosophy and Design.
- The post vacated by Ingrid Jamieson had been filled by Scott Duncan who had been promoted from Assistant Foreperson and Acting up Amenities Officer at the Crematorium. Scott had joined the Council on a youth trainee scheme and had gained many qualifications since then.
- A successful partnership with the Cairngorms National Park Authority had resulted in a new public toilet being built at Glenmore, which would contribute to the visitor experience in that area. The project had been jointly managed by Amenities and the Council's Property Team. There would be an official opening in due course, and thanks were extended to all involved in this successful project; and
- Alf Leslie, Project Coordinator in Bereavement Services, was retiring after a long career with The Highland Council, starting in the former Regional Council in 1987. Alf was commended for his work on the War Memorial Renovation Project for the centenary of the First World War, and best wishes were extended to him for his well-deserved retirement.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

**4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for the period April to September 2023.

The Local Senior Officer for Highland, SFRS, introduced the report, highlighting some key areas including the postponement of the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan, accidental dwelling fires, road traffic accidents, deliberate fire setting, non-domestic fire safety, unwanted fire alarm signals, firefighter training, and recruitment and availability.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the opportunity to attend briefing sessions at Invergordon Fire Station and online;
- concern was expressed regarding availability in North and West Highland, particularly Sutherland and Caithness, although joint mobilisation was helping with this;
- roadworks near Thurso Fire Station were preventing firefighters getting through the area and could impact on the availability of the second Thurso appliance;
- information was sought, and provided, on plans for the relocation of Portree Fire Station, the building of a new Fire Station at Uig and the joint mobilisation procedure;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that joint mobilising was being rolled out across the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that new Fire Station designs were modular which would allow for co-location with other agencies;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that for joint mobilising a crew may rendezvous at an incident and they would not drive past an incident to join up; and
- the new cutting equipment on the new Thurso appliance was welcomed and it was confirmed that new battery powered cutting equipment was being retrofitted to existing appliances.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Highland Performance Report.

5. Communities & Place – Revenue Budget Monitoring and Service Performance Reporting for Q2 – 1 June 2023 to 30 September 2023

There had been circulated Report No CP/25/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was clarified that household waste recycling figures were now being compared against the family group rather than the national average causing the change from red to green on the RAG assessment despite the figures being lower;
- information having been sought as to why the recycling rate was as low as 37% and what was being done to improve it, it was explained that the Recycling Improvement Fund Project would be covered in detail under item 8 on the agenda;
- in response to a question regarding the Stores and Logistics budget, it was explained that staff vacancies had caused an overspend due to the cost of employing contractors.

The Committee:-

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

6. Capital Monitoring – Quarter 2 2023/24 Sgrùdadh Calpa – Cairteal 2 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No CP/26/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecasted capital outturn for the Communities and Place Service for 23/24 as at Quarter 2; and
- ii. the current forecast for the major project for the Communities and Place Service for 23/24.

7. Long-term Waste Management Stiùireadh Sgudail Fad-ùine

There had been circulated Report No CP/27/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- some Members were of the view that investigations into the possibility of an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility in Highland should be ceased due to the likely over-provision of incineration facilities in Scotland within the next few years which could cause gate prices to fall, the possible introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme in the future, the low number of incineration facilities which managed to produce any energy from waste and the lack of money in the capital budget to complete such a project. However, the Chair stated that Members were not yet in a position to make a decision on long-term waste management, that more information was needed and that it was important to be mindful of the best interests of the whole Highland community when considering this issue. Other Members concurred, commenting that the decision on long-term waste management was one of the biggest the Committee would have to make and it would be in a better position to do so in 2024 once more information had been provided. Support was therefore expressed for the proposed next steps set out in the report;
- it was important to remember that should an EfW facility be developed locally it would require to operate as a combined heat and power facility;
- it was queried whether there would be a possibility of transporting waste by rail or sea rather than by road;
- it was necessary to explore all avenues, and to look to other countries for possible solutions;
- in response to a question as to why investigations into building an EfW facility in Highland should continue when the funds were not available in the capital budget and the consultants' report showed that it was the most expensive option, it was clarified that the limited cost of further investigations would come from the revenue budget and that finance was not the only consideration when deciding which option would be most suitable; and
- concern was expressed that continuing to explore the possibility of an EfW facility in Highland was wasting valuable officer time, and it was suggested that consideration be given to implementing simple measures such as local composting of food waste.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the study findings which Council Officers had considered; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed next steps as reported at section 5.2 of the report.

8. Waste Projects Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No CP/28/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- officers were commended for the developments in the report;
- it was queried whether the possibility of composting local food waste to support community food-growing groups or to produce compost for sale could be investigated;
- the proposed trial of accepting vans and trailers with DIY waste at Inverness Recycling Centre was welcomed, and it was queried whether this could be extended to other areas;
- it was important for public health that domestic refuse collections continued to be done well;
- physical adjustments might need to be made, particularly in flatted developments, to accommodate the new bins, and it might be necessary to look at the provision of communal bins. However, it was queried how the standard of recycling would be monitored in communal bins;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that food waste collections would be extended to the areas where this would become a legal requirement as well as some additional areas in Ross and Cromarty;
- the recycling policy was easy to understand and there was a clear plan for the phased rollout of the Recycling Improvement Scheme;
- the importance of communication, education, publicity and waste awareness having been emphasised, it was confirmed that two additional officers were being brought in to assist in the rollout of communication; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Communities and Place Service provided refuse collections for schools and other Council buildings at no cost to the user;
- it was emphasised that reducing waste was the first step in waste management; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the waste collected in food waste bins was required to be taken for thermal treatment and therefore not suitable for composting.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the amended Household Waste Policy as described in section 4 of the report and as shown in full in Appendix 1;
- ii. **NOTED** the updated position on the timeline for the phased introduction of Recycling Improvement Fund collection service changes and the highlighted progress that had been made;
- iii. **NOTED** comprehensive communications and engagement plan for the service change;
- iv. **NOTED** progress being made to secure a Waste Transfer Station in Fort William; and
- v. **APPROVED** the introduction of a trial at a recycling centre as described in section 7 of the report.

9. Playpark Strategy Ro-innleachd Phàircean-cluiche

There had been circulated Report No CP/29/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

Ms L MacGillivray, Community Support Coordinator, gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- while it was disappointing that the revenue budget would not cover all ongoing playpark maintenance, the work of Amenities Officers alongside community groups to fundraise for and design a programme of playpark improvement in Caithness was recognised;
- the importance and success of partnership working was highlighted as communities may have ideas for playparks which officers could offer support to put into action;
- the move away from age segregated play was welcomed;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that when redeveloping individual playparks officers would go into schools to gather children's opinions, and that this was more difficult with secondary school children;
- the need for adequate lighting in playparks and for public conveniences to be located nearby was emphasised;
- literacy, numeracy and environmental awareness activities should be included in playparks, and schools and nurseries should be encouraged to make use of these facilities;
- it was requested that no covered gathering areas for teenagers be located in residential areas due to complaints of noise and mess;
- the emphasis on using natural materials in playparks was welcomed and the benefit of using wild spaces at play areas was highlighted;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the Amenities Service was working closely with colleagues in Planning to ensure that Play Sufficiency Assessments were carried out in new developments and that developer contributions for play areas were properly used;
- information was sought and provided on how a playpark was defined; the involvement of children and young people in place-based planning; the provision and maintenance of play equipment in schools; the dedesignation of playparks; the use of playparks by adults, whether the provision of exercise equipment for older children and adults had been considered; and the lead in times for supply and installation of play equipment; and
- in response to a question about play equipment required at Knockshortie Road play area in Portmahomack, it was clarified that this was not a Council site.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** and adopted the Playpark Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2033 (Appendix 1 of the report); and
- iii. **NOTED** that an annual update on progress would be reported to the Communities and Place Committee.

10. Update on Public Convenience Provision Cunntas às Ùr mu Sholar Ghoireasan Poblach

There had been circulated Report No CP/30/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- given the condition of the public conveniences in Brora, surprise was expressed they were not on the list of sites where improvements were being delivered;
- the re-opening of the public conveniences in Thurso and the ongoing refurbishment of the toilets on Whitechapel Road in Wick were welcomed;
- cleaning staff were commended for the work they did in public conveniences;
- while the stainless-steel public conveniences in Nairn were vandalism-proof in some ways they did still get damaged and people avoided using them due to the unwelcoming environment;
- information was sought, and provided, on Community Asset Transfers of public conveniences; the status of public conveniences in Dingwall and Muir of Ord; and the use of CCTV to prevent vandalism;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that the type of vandalism that often occurred in public conveniences, such as deliberately blocking toilets, leaving large amounts of litter and causing a mess on walls and ceilings, was viewed by the Police as anti-social behaviour and this could cause issues in terms of ensuring such issues were correctly reported;
- the success of honesty boxes at public conveniences was welcomed;
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that some public conveniences accepted contactless payments but these could not be used to identify who had visited the premises;
- teenagers used public conveniences as a warm space to congregate, and providing alternative spaces for them to gather could help combat the problem of vandalism;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the consequences for those caught committing vandalism could be publicised as a deterrent; and
- it was queried whether the provision of public convenience facilities in the High Street and Castle Street area of Inverness would be investigated given that the number of visitors to that area was likely to increase following the completion of the Inverness Castle project.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the improvement projects to date including the resulting environmental benefits, and improvements planned for 2024/25;
- iii. **NOTED** the challenges faced running the public convenience service including financial challenges;
- iv. **NOTED** the community support and involvement including progress with community asset transfer and leasing to communities;
- v. **NOTED** the staff accolades; and
- vi. **AGREED** the closing protocol when required to close any particular Public Convenience.

11. Bereavement Services - Project Updates

Seirbheisean Bàis – Cunntasan às Ùr mun Pròiseact

There had been circulated Report No CP/31/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

At this stage, Members and officers paid tribute to Hugh Gardner who had passed away recently. Hugh had worked for the Council for over 20 years and had been well known to Members and staff through his various roles in Property, Housing, Amenities, and Bereavement Services. He had approached his work in a professional manner, using his wide knowledge and experience, and had always been there to support colleagues.

His most recent post had been as Bereavement Services Project Manager where he had worked closely with Members across Highland on projects to maintain war memorials and provide new burial grounds and extensions. This had included successfully delivering the new burial grounds at Daviot, Dornoch and Chapelhill which had been welcomed by the local communities. He would be greatly missed, and condolences were expressed to his family.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members thanked officers for the report and welcomed the Committee being kept fully informed and given the opportunity to scrutinise Bereavement Services;
- on the point being raised, an assurance was provided that officers were committed to reporting on Bereavement Services at Area Committee level and discussing in more detail the unique challenges that existed within each area;
- the project to review the options for the replacement of the cremators at Inverness Crematorium was welcomed;
- in relation to burial ground extensions, the need for a long-term strategic approach was emphasised, particularly in Inverness which would need another major cemetery within the next decade given Kilvean Cemetery was expected to reach capacity in 2029;
- a request was made for a future report on the maintenance of older cemeteries, such as Tomnahurich Cemetery, which were places of remembrance;
- an assurance was sought that investigations into the possibility of a crematorium in Lochaber would include a renewable energy source of heat and the possibility of heating the swimming pool if the crematorium was sited on land to the rear of the leisure centre. It was confirmed that such matters would form part of the proposed options appraisal;
- information was sought, and provided, on the policy in respect of headstone safety; and
- in relation to the extension to Dores Cemetery, it was understood that the land had been acquired, and information was sought, and provided, on the anticipated timescale for completion of the project.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in Highland;
- ii. the progress for cremator replacement at Inverness Crematorium; and
- iii. the intention to commission a detailed options appraisal on the provision of a crematorium in the Lochaber Area.

12. Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages – Annual Report Clàrachadh air Breith, Bàs is Pòsadh – Aithisg Bhliadhna

There had been circulated Report No CP/32/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

In introducing the report, the Chief Registrar extended an invitation to Members to visit the Registration Centre or their local Registration Office if they wished to find out more about the work of the Registration Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- on Skye more and more people were choosing to get married in remote and rural locations and it was important to take advantage of that. As indicated in the report, work was ongoing to explore new opportunities such as the development at the Old Man of Storr, which would be a pathfinder project;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the opening hours of the Nairn Registration Office;
- the empathy and compassion of Registrars when dealing with families who had experienced a bereavement was commended;
- congratulations were expressed to Annemarie MacAlpine, Customer Service Operations Manager for North Highland and qualified Registrar, on her appointment as Vice President of the Association of Registrars of Scotland, and the Chair confirmed that a letter had been sent to Ms MacAlpine congratulating her on her success; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Registration Offices were able to signpost people to the memorial book for those who had suffered a miscarriage before 24 weeks.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work of the Registration team across the Highland area;
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance of the team for 2022, noting that this latest data had not yet been examined and finalised; and
- iii. **NOTED** the continued efforts to promote and modernise the service in relation to marriage and civil partnership, ensuring that the Highland Council continued to offer a professional and cost-effective service to the public, whilst adapting to keep up to date with the ever changing and growing wedding industry.

13. Community Asset Transfer Request Iarrtas So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd a Ghluasad

There had been circulated Report No CP/33/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, Mr A Baldrey, as a Local Member, expressed his support for the proposed Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

On a separate issue, concern having been expressed regarding the delays that had been experienced in relation to the CAT for Muir of Ord Men's Shed, it was confirmed that the asset transfer had taken place and that this was now a legal

process for finalising the transfer, and the Head of Community Support and Engagement undertook to liaise with Mrs A MacLean outwith the meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** the following Community Asset Transfer request:-

- Sale of the Banavie Rugby Pitch, Car Park and Play Area to Lochaber Rugby Football Club for £1, based upon the terms set out in the report.

14. Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group
Geàrr-chunntas Buidheann Obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail

There had been circulated, and were **APPROVED**, the Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 7 November 2023.

The meeting concluded at 2.25 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 30 November 2023 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Ms J McEwan
Mr C Ballance (remote)	Mr P Oldham
Mr B Boyd (remote)	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr A Sinclair (remote)
Mr S Kennedy	Mr R Stewart
Mr G MacKenzie	Ms M Reid (substitute)

Non-Members also present:

Mr C Birt (remote)	Mr P Logue
Mrs M Cockburn (remote)	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
 Ms A Clark, Head of Community Support and Engagement, Communities and Place
 Mr I Kyle, Head of Performance and Improvement, Health and Social Care
 Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance
 Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance), Performance and Governance
 Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager, Corporate Audit and Performance
 Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Performance and Governance
 Ms S Bailey, Business Manager, Health and Social Care
 Ms A Morrison, Customer Resolution and Improvement Manager, Communities and Place
 Mr M Watters, Corporate Performance and Information Governance Manager, Performance and Governance Service
 Ms L Harrison, Accountant, Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance
 Ms L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
 Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
 Ms G MacPherson, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Ms E Scoburgh, Audit Scotland
 Ms C Gardiner, Audit Scotland
 Ms J McBride, Audit Scotland

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

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr L Fraser, Mr R Jones and Mr K Rosie.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

**3. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report
Ath-bhreithneachaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/20/23 by the Strategic Lead, Corporate Audit and Performance.

In relation to the table detailing Internal Audits in Progress, it was requested that the terms used in the Current Status column, such as 'Being Planned' and 'Fieldwork in Progress' could include further information, such as target dates. It was explained that a number of audits were at the stage of being planned and so dates were unknown at present. However, additional information would be provided once available.

The update included copies of the following final reports issued:-

a) Education & Learning – Secondary School (Reasonable Assurance)

Information was sought, regarding the delay in the secondary school report coming to Committee. It was explained that the final report had been issued in September but missed the cut-off date for publication of the papers for that Committee. Furthermore, the draft report had been issued in July so a timely report had been provided to management. In relation to action H1 of the report, it was requested that schools were reminded for the need for inventories to be maintained and kept up to date.

b) Health & Social Care – Review of the control and usage of imprests and other cash in Health & Social Care Establishments (Reasonable Assurance)

Concern was raised regarding the standard of record-keeping of imprests and the use of petty cash tins in general, and it was hoped that pre-payment cards would be feasible in the future.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Final Reports referred to in Section 4.1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at sections 5 and 6, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that schools be contacted requesting that their inventories be kept up-to-date.

4. Review of Corporate Risks Ath-sgrùdadh de Chunnartan Corporra

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the completion of Risks CR9.13 (Full Implementation of a Corporate Property Landlord Model) and CR22.1 (Building Access Policies), as both were past their target dates;
- it was asked, in relation to Risk CR22.4 (NETs Failure and Planned Interruptions to power supply), if amber was the appropriate rating;
- an update and assurances were urgently sought in relation to Risk CR2.18 (Backup Hardware and Email Service), in light of the recent cyber incident in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's;
- concerns were raised in relation to Risk CR7 (Climate Change), as the target date had already been delayed for CR7.4, and the Council Natural Environment and Ecological Strategy referred to in CR7.6 was not included in the Climate Change Committee papers for 5 December 2023. It was asked if CR7.7 (Mitigate potential increases in both use and cost of energy by enhanced investment in renewable energy and transformational projects) could have some attention as this was now several months overdue;
- the description paragraph of Risk CR10 (Condition of our Roads) provided data from 2016 and it was asked if more up-to-date indicators could be provided before the next committee. In response it was confirmed that this would be done;
- it was asked if recruitment had been successful in relation to Risk CR32.4 (Providing Technical Resources) and it was confirmed that an update could be provided;
- it was confirmed, in relation to Risk CR29 (Lack of Occupational Health Provider), that a new provider was now in place and confirmation of this would be provided to Members; and
- it was felt that although Risk CR31 (Failure to deliver Statutory Services due to staffing levels within Social Work Services) remained a concern, early indications showed that progress was being made.

The Committee, having scrutinised and **AGREED** the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1 of the report, also **AGREED** the risk profile at Appendix 2 of the report.

5. Complaints Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Ghearanan

There had been circulated Report No. AC/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussions, the following issues were raised:-

- confirmation was provided that the report outlining complaints considered by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO), and referenced in this report, had been considered by the Audit Committee on 28 September 2023;
- when trying to contact the Council many individuals became frustrated and contacted Elected Members instead;
- there had been a significant increase on the previous year in the number of Freedom of Information and Data Rights requested and it was queried if there were particular workstreams generating these. It was confirmed that there were more Freedom of Information requests but this was a national trend. Members were assured that where themes were identified the Council proactively tried to publish information online, making it easier for those seeking the information in the first place and saving officers' time in responding;
- 903 complaints were validated in 2022/23 but an additional 1828 contacts to the team were not in fact complaints but more the reporting of matters such as potholes or first request for service etc. If there was a clearer path as to how such issues could be reported it would help reduce these numbers;
- through the My Council Programme, there were several strands of work focused on improving telephony and the Council's website to support improvements in access to information for the public; and
- clarification was sought as to the correlation between the number of complaints validated and the table detailing the ranking order by function of the Council.

The Committee having scrutinised the performance outlined in the Annual Complaints Report for 2022/23, **AGREED** to publish the report on the Council's website and submit the report to the SPSO.

6. External Audit – Annual Report 2022/23 and Independent Auditor's Report Sgrùdadh on Taobh a-muigh – Aithisg Bhliadhna 2022/23 agus Aithisg Neach-sgrùdaidh Neo-eisimeileach

a) Audited Trust Accounts 2022/23

There had been circulated Report No. AC/23/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance in respect of the audited trust accounts 2022/23.

The administrative charges imposed by the Council had been set at £7,521. In arriving at this figure cognisance had to be taken of any costs incurred but also the relatively modest reserves of these Trusts and if they could bear the proposed costs.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the audited accounts for signature;
- AGREED** that the letters of representations be signed by the Treasurer on behalf of the Trustees; and
- NOTED** the auditor recommendations to consider for future years, joining the accounts of the charitable trusts under the connected charities provision.

b) Report to Those Charged with Governance on the 2022/23 Audits

There had been circulated Report No. AC/24/23 from Audit Scotland in respect of their 2022/23 audits of the Highland Charities Trust and Highland Council Charitable Trusts.

The Committee **NOTED** that Appendix C of the reports would be included within the 2022/23 Highland Council Annual Audit Report.

c) Update on the 2022/23 Highland Council annual audit

There had been circulated an update Report AC/25/23 from Audit Scotland on their annual audit work which included a revised timetable for the annual accounts.

The Committee **NOTED** the update provided and that the annual report would be presented to the special meeting of the Audit Committee on 24 January 2024.

**7. Progress Report on the Review of Commissioned Children's Services
Aithisg Adhartais mun Ath-sgrùdadh de Sheirbheisean Chloinne
Choimiseanaichte**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/26/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussions, the following issues were raised:-

- while recognising there was still work to be done, the progress made to date was welcomed;
- handovers were now being recorded and this was part of the enhanced monitoring taking place;
- the two High Priority issues highlighted had a completion date of 31 December 2023. It was acknowledged that this was an ambitious target but it reflected the hard work taking place; and
- clarification was sought as to the skills and qualifications required to work in Children's Services in Highland. This was dependent on the specific role but qualifications were universal across Scotland.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

The meeting ended at 11.20am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday 5 December 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken (Remote)	Mr A Graham (Remote)
Ms S Atkin	Mr P Logue (Remote)
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Louden
Mrs I Campbell (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Ms S Fanet (Remote)	Mr K Rosie (Chair)
Mr D Fraser	Ms K Willis (Vice Chair) (Remote)

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt	Mrs T Robertson (Remote)
Ms K McLean	Ms M Ross
Mr D Macpherson (Remote)	Mr P Oldham (Remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive
 Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
 Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Project Manager
 Ms N Wallace, Service Lead-Environment Dev Active Travel
 Mr B Cameron, Service Interim Head Housing & Building Maintenance
 Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
 Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Coordinator
 Ms R Burbaite, Climate Change Coordinator
 Ms I MacMillan, Project Manager
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Operations and Logistics
 Mr A Collins, Strategic Procurement Manager
 Ms F Conti, Category Manager Procurement
 Ms S Barrie, Service Lead Design & Construction
 Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead for Waste Strategy and Operations
 Ms L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
 Mrs O Bayon, 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 K Rosie 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 Grafton and Mrs P Munro.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. **Good News Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** updates on the following issues:

- MockCOP28 at Highland Council; and
- Highland Council was the first UK local authority to be utilising energy benchmarking software and a demonstration of this was available in the foyer.

4. **Net Zero Strategy – Action Plan Progress Report Ro-innleachd Neoni Lom – Aithisg Adhartais Plana-gnìomha**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/19/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

Built Estate & Energy

- appreciation was expressed for all the hard work which officers had undertaken;
- regarding key risks/issues, clarification was sought and provided on how the process could be streamlined to improve the fee-income when staff were working on the net zero strategy;
- climate impacted every service, therefore the right resources must be allocated to the right activity to ensure success and deliver change;
- there was a need for collaborative working with partners and to understand the full costs to enable leverage of external funds;

Planning, Land Use & Environment

- concern was raised whether the Council would have the sufficient financial resources to meet the climate change objectives; it was noted that the Council did not, but that this was the case for all local authorities. However, understanding what the full cost would be was important for bidding into the funds that were available and prioritising spend where it would have most impact.
- as the UHI had was unable to provide resource as intended, it was queried if the Council would consider an alternative University to ensure the project progressed;
- it was hoped that the repurposing of land would save money normally spent on maintenance;
- Members welcomed the ecological focus within the Plan;
- the desperate need for Housing across the Highlands was emphasised. In this regard, it was stressed that rural and remote areas needed to be included in the Plan, and houses in these areas must be affordable;
- regarding the mapping of highland carbon resources and the assessment process, it was queried what the costs were anticipated to be and how soon this would take place;

- Members highlighted that sea grass had a high rate of carbon capture and should be considered as part of the environmental plan. In this regard it was queried how much engagement there had been with organisations such as the Scottish Association for Marine Science for their guidance;

Procurement & Community Wealth Building

- it was queried if small local suppliers would have an opportunity to be included in the procurement frameworks and it was clarified that they would;
- it was felt that community wealth building could be a stand-alone item in terms of addressing their own climate change opportunities, and this should be considered as the plans moved forward;
- it was important that the procurement structure gave contractors the opportunity to bid in specific procurement lots and it was clarified that they were;
- it was confirmed that the Council would engage with the Highland and Islands Climate Action hub on Thursday 7 December 2023, and Members thanked officers for their input and looked forward to a future update;
- information was sought if carbon output would form part of procurement weighting process when awarding works and it was clarified that they would;
- as the timeframe for developing a fully costed plan was dependant on available staffing resources, it was queried what dependant staffing resources would be required, and what current issues surround Capital procurement and HRA procurement;

Sustainable Business Travel

- it was queried what areas of Highland the electric powered gritter unit would be deployed to;
- it was felt that Members needed improved appreciation of climate change overall and it was suggested that the workshops would be a good mechanism to provide further information regarding combatting climate change. In this regard, it was highlighted that Members had many responsibilities inside and outside of the Council which placed heavy restrictions on their time;
- regarding the installation of additional electric chargers, it was queried if these would be available for public use and help generate additional income and it was clarified that they would;
- it was confirmed that the Council provided updates to the press to promote the progress made towards combatting climate change;
- appreciation was expressed for the additional fleet which had been included during the covid 19 pandemic as part of the fleet rationalisation;
- an electric mobile library vehicle would be welcomed in Highland especially if it was funded by a third party grant payment;
- by way of reducing staff travel costs, it was suggested that local communities were empowered to take on minor works, such as grass cutting or car park line marking;
- in order to achieve the national target of 2030 to phase out all new petrol and diesel vehicles within Council fleet, a costing exercise and the identification of external grant funding would be required;
- it was queried if Members travel was included in the Action Plan and it was clarified that it was;
- information was sought and provided whether depots were able to facilitate electric, diesel, and petrol heavy plant vehicles simultaneously and it was clarified that they were;

- concern was raised that Highland Council was not engaging with all other seven Councils for the Pathfinder procurement exercise, in addition suggestion was made that Hi-trans could provide assistance; it was clarified that the procurement involved Highland, Moray Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and other councils and public authorities had been invited to participate.

Social Housing/HRA

- it was felt that the HRA energy investment procurement process should be split into Lots, and it was requested that suppliers could be added to the framework throughout the framework's lifespan and it was clarified that they would;
- regarding Appendix 6 section 7 of the report, further information was sought if this referred to properties where energy investment works costs were considered excessive and therefore would not be undertaken;
- in terms of housing energy efficiency works, it was queried if learning was being shared with other social landlords across Highland to encourage them to carry out similar works to their housing stock and it was clarified that they were;
- it was expressed that housing efficiency works to improve heating, make houses warmer and provide a better overall environment, added additional benefits to tenants such as improved health and reducing their costs. In this regard it was felt that these benefits should be included in the list of measured outcomes;
- regarding energy efficiency investment works which were not technically feasible at specific housing stock, it was requested that these costs were still to be included within the report so they could be referred to when setting the capital programmes, applying for external funding applications, and so Members were informed;
- it was queried what works would be undertaken at properties considered technically unfeasible to meet the energy efficiency standard;

Waste

- further information was sought to explain the comment that a number of workstreams related to behavioural changes for schools, and what would this mean for teachers and pupils;
- it was felt that in order to reduce food waste at schools, food menus should be designed to promote food that was up to the nutritional standard but more in line with what pupils would eat. In this regard it was highlighted that pupils should be involved in this process;
- it was queried if the waste team had sufficient resources to develop a fully costed Action Plan;
- regarding recycling waste material, it was queried how the Council was going to improve the recycling infrastructure across the estate;

General

- regarding section 3.1 of the report, it was queried what the terms of reference would be for the Net Zero Programme Board. In this regard it was confirmed that the terms of reference would be circulated to all Members; and
- regarding section 6.3 of the report, it was queried if a fully costed Action Plan would be developed. In this regard it was confirmed that non-cost indicators would be used only where costs were unable to be measured.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress to date;

- ii. **NOTED** the draft Thematic Group Action Plans;
- iii. **NOTED** the new actions identified by the Net Zero Programme Board; and
- iv. **AGREED** the approach to costing the Action Plan.

**5. Raising awareness of external funding opportunities
A' togail aire mu chothroman maoin eachaidh on taobh a-muigh**

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was suggested and agreed that PDF copies of the posters could be sent to community councils to advertise within local communities;
- regarding housing sited within conservation areas, it was queried if members of the historic team could recommend contractors or organisations to work with owners to carry out property repairs, maintenance or improvements and it was clarified that they could; and
- it was queried if works such as external cladding would qualify for funded improvements and it was clarified that they would.

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

**6. Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and Delivery Plan
Ro-innleachd agus Plana Lìbhrigidh Ionadail Teasa agus Èifeachdais Lùtha**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/21/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion Members expressed thanks for the report and requested that the next phase of the pilot included non-gas grid areas.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to Full Council approval of the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy and Delivery Plan.

**7. Annual Report Under Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2022/23
Aithisg Bhliadhnail fo Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde nam
Buidhnean Poblach 2022/23**

There had been circulated No CCC/22/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

The Committee **NOTED** the Highland Council's return submitted for reporting year 2022/23 under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties.

The meeting concluded at 12:57pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday 7 December 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr D Louden
Mr R Bremner	Mr A MacDonald (remote)
Mr J Bruce (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (remote)	Mr S Mackie (remote)
Mr A Christie	Mr D Millar
Mr R Gale	Mr C Munro
Mr A Jarvie (remote)	Mr P Oldham
Mr B Lobban	

Non-Members also present:

Mr C Ballance (remote)	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mr K Gowans (remote, 11:20-12:10)	Mr K Rosie
Ms J McEwan (remote)	Mr R Stewart (until item 7)
Mr J McGillivray (remote)	

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
 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
 Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
 Ms A MacRae, Senior Committee Officer, Performance & Governance (remote)
 Mrs G MacPherson, 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

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Green, Mr S Kennedy and Mr A Rhind.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Declaration of Interest: Item 10 – Mr D Louden

Transparency Statement: Items 4, 5.a, 5.c, 6.b, 8.a and 12 – Mr A Christie

3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news story:

Fiona Morgan (Health, Safety & Wellbeing Technician) was congratulated by the Committee on achieving an SVQ in Occupational Health and Safety (Level 7). Fiona achieved the SVQ through the modern apprenticeship route in an impressive 10 months. Fiona demonstrated how the approach to 'grow and retain our own talent' could be used to address difficult to fill posts.

4. **Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report to 30 September 2023** **Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh 30 an t-Sultainn 2023**

a. **Corporate Revenue Monitoring to 30 September 2023** **Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 30 Sultain 2023**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of 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 items and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/35/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern that scheduling the Corporate Resources Committee after the agenda and financial reports for the full Council had been issued limited the debate. Further clarity was provided on the reasons the Committee was held towards the end of the meeting cycle and the difference in the type of financial reporting to the Council;
- any general concerns around the timetabling of meetings was a matter for the full Council;
- assurance be provided to future Committees around the RAG status of the savings to be delivered on the Health and Social Care budget, with particular reference to Service redesign and impact on the budget in the next financial year; and
- the impact the Corran Ferry had on the budget position, and confirmation that Members would be provided with an update in relation to the Scottish Government providing full revenue funding for Councils who provided their own ferry Services.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 September 2023 and the estimated year end forecast; and
- ii. status of budgeted savings in the year.

b. **Corporate Capital Monitoring to 30 September 2023** **Sgrùdadh Calpa Corporra gu 30 Sultain 2023**

There had been circulated Report No RES/36/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the proportion of spend to date under the Health and Social Care budget and that broadly the level of spend was not out of line with previous years and that a more accurate and up to date position would be available in Quarter 3;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the reasons for the underspend on the heating/energy efficiency budget and actions being taken to accelerate spend where possible; and
- querying that the report had no climate change implications.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. net spend to the end of Q2 2023/24, the forecast year end outturn and the funding profile; and
- ii. updated position of approved major capital projects.

5. Revenue, Capital and Performance Monitoring - 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023

Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach, Calpa agus Coileanaidh: 1 Giblean 2023 gu 30 Sultain 2023

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

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of 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 items and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/37/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

An update was sought and provided on the number of days lost through sickness absence, the action being taken in response and level of support being provided to staff. The Service had a relatively small number of staff, there were no overall concerns around attendance and this was kept under regular review.

The Committee **NOTED** the Service's:

- i. revenue monitoring position; and
- ii. performance and risk information.

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/38/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Service's:

- i. revenue monitoring position; and
- ii. performance and risk information.

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

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/39/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

Arising from the report, the Chair thanked the Service on exceeding targets in relation to the level of income that had been collected, particularly in the current financial climate.

At this point, the Head of Revenues and Customer Services advised that local authorities had very recently received notification of the UK Government's plans to migrate at scale some benefit claimants to Universal Credit. This included some claimants who were currently in receipt of housing benefit. Further updates on this matter and its impacts would be provided to Members going forward.

In discussion, Members expressed concern at the 'at scale' nature of the changes with there being no opportunity for a phased approach. This would have a serious impact on residents in Highland, the Council's Welfare Team and the CAB, and a negative financial impact on the Council. There were concerns around the build up of rent arrears as claimants transferred over to Universal Credit.

Thereafter, it was proposed that the Welfare Reform Working Group be reconvened to consider the changes in more depth and report back to a future Corporate Resources Committee. The Chair advised that consideration would be given to the proposal and a response provided to Mr A Christie.

The Committee **NOTED** the Service's:

- i. revenue monitoring position; and
- ii. performance and risk information.

**6. Treasury Management
Rianachd Ionmhais**

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/40/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 July 2023 to 30 September 2023.

**b. Mid-year Treasury Management Report 2022/23
Aithisg Stiùireadh Ionmhais Meadhan-bliadhna 2022/23**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of 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 items and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/41/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023/24.

**7. Workforce Planning – Depute Chief Executive Service
Plana Sgioba-obrach - Seirbheis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigeir**

There had been circulated Report No RES/42/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, a point was raised as to whether reports on workforce planning had been brought to all strategic committees and the associated timescales. It was clarified that Members would be provided with information on the approach taken to reporting on workforce planning at each committee.

Thereafter, a point was raised on the impact of staff working at home on productivity and the Council's policy on there being a return to the office to work. It was confirmed that Members would be circulated with the links to the Council's flexible and hybrid working policies. A report on the hybrid/flexible working policy would be brought to a future Council meeting and this would include the impact on productivity where data was available. However, assurance was provided that there had been no evidence of a reduction in productivity.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Depute Chief Executive Service's Workforce Action Plan at Appendix 2 to the report.

**8. Service Plans
Phlanaichean Seirbheis**

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

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of 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 items and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/43/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, the number of climate change actions set out in the Service Plan was welcomed and it was queried whether the Service had sufficient resources to deliver the actions. It was clarified that while the current level of resource was considered to be adequate, progress on delivery and any mitigation actions required would be monitored through the quarterly performance reports presented to the Committee.

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

b. Resources and Finance Service
Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais

There had been circulated Report No RES/44/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

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

9. Local Discretionary Housing Benefit Scheme for War Pensioners and War Widows

Sgeama Sochair Taigheadais fo Ùghdarras Ionadail airson Pheinnseanairean Cogaidh agus Bhantraichean Cogaidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/45/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- i. to continue the policy to operate a discretionary local Housing Benefit Scheme for war pensioners, war widows and war widowers;
- ii. that the policy would operate on an ongoing basis until such time as there was a change in regulations, subsidy or budgetary related matters which required a review of the Council's policy; and
- iii. that the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee write to the Department for Work & Pensions seeking the equivalent of 100% funding to be made available by the Department for Work & Pensions when disregarding war pensions in the calculation of Housing Benefit, thus removing the requirement for 25% contributions by implementing local authorities.

10. Non-Domestic Rates – Empty Property Relief Scheme
Reataichean Gnothachais – Sgeama Faohaidh airson Thogalaichean Falamh

Mr D Louden made a Declaration of Interest in respect of this item as he was connected to a charity, and he left the meeting for this item. Mr C Munro took the Chair.

There had been circulated Report No RES/46/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the scheme and phased approach be fully supported on the basis this would give property owners time to plan for the end of rates relief;
- the scheme would have a positive impact on the build up of empty properties across the Highlands that had deteriorated over time, become a liability and an eyesore, and create employment;
- a contrary view that if properties could not be rented or sold as there was a liability in terms of the non-domestic rates payable then they would remain empty and become derelict, particularly in rural areas; and
- the scheme provided the incentive to actively reintroduce properties to the market and might encourage property owners to reduce their rents to allow them to be occupied.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the policy intent of the Council's Empty Property Relief Scheme from 1 April 2024 was to encourage ratepayers to bring their properties back into use either through self-occupation or by letting to a third-party;
- ii. **AGREED** the Council's Empty Property Relief Scheme effective from 1 April 2024, and associated additional income net of costs, as set out in section 6 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the Scheme would continue on an annual basis, beyond the 4-year period set out in Section 6, and until such time that a review was considered necessary;
- iv. **AGREED** the Scheme would apply on a Highland-wide basis and would apply to all empty/unoccupied non-domestic properties with the exception of the classes of properties as set out in paragraph 6.4 of the report; and
- v. **AGREED** the Scheme effective from 1 April 2024 replace the Scheme agreed for financial year 2023/24.

At this point, Mr D Loudon resumed the position as Chair.

11. ICT User Satisfaction Survey (SOCITM) Suirbhidh Riarachas Luchd-cleachdaidh ICT

There had been circulated Report No RES/47/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

The Chair thanked the relevant officers on the survey results and for the work undertaken in terms of the improvement in service satisfaction levels.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. and acknowledged the level of service improvement and increase in user satisfaction levels; and
- ii. that due to the minimal number of organisations carrying out this benchmarking, no comparison with others could be provided at this point.

12. Equally Safe at Work (ESAW) Employer Accreditation Scheme
Sgeama Barantachaidh Luchd-fastaidh airson Co-ionannachd
Sàbhailteachd aig an Obair

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of 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 items and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/48/23 by the Head of People.

Members commented that this was often a difficult time of year for gender based violence and it was appropriate Members had the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to this issue through the report. Support was expressed for the work being undertaken and officers be thanked in this regard. There were some concerning issues as set out in the report and the policy represented a step forward in terms of the Council improving as an employer.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the work activity to date and planned activity going forward; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the Gender Based Violence Policy at Appendix 1 to the report.

13. Grievance Policy and Guidance Review and Update
Ath-sgrùdadh is Ùrachadh den Phoileasaidh is den Stiùireadh Ghearanan

There had been circulated Report No RES/49/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- it was noted that further engagement was planned with teaching unions. An assurance was sought and provided that all the other trade unions were supportive of the Policy and direction of travel set out in the policy;
- the timescales set out in the report for dealing with grievances was being exceeded by a significant margin in some cases. Further clarity was provided on the action taken to engage with all parties and to ensure it was clearly communicated that good reasons had to be provided for any delay; and
- the link between disciplinary, grievance and relationship matters in terms of resolving grievances and the need to be clear as to how this was handled.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the new Grievance and Resolution Policy and Guidance as outlined in Section 5 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** progress to date; and
- iii. **AGREED** to extend the pilot and report back to March 2024 Resources Committee.

14. People and Finance Systems Programme
Prògram Daoine agus Siostam Ionmhais

There had been circulated Report No RES/50/23 by the Depute Chief Executive.

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

15. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The following Minutes of Meetings had been circulated and:

- i. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee held on 15 September 2023;
- ii. **NOTED** - Appeals & Disputes Committee held on 1 September 2023, 11 September 2023, 19 October 2023 and 27 October 2023; and
- iii. **NOTED** – Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee held on 13 November 2023; and
- iv. **APPROVED** - Staff Partnership Forum held on 15 November 2023.

16. Late Submission of Expenses Claims
A' Cur A-steach airson Cosgaisean Anmoch

It had previously been agreed by the Corporate Resources Committee that late submissions of Elected Members expenses claims would be presented to the Committee for approval.

The Committee **APPROVED** the following claim:

- Mrs Morven Reid £396.45 mileage for the months of April, May, June, July and August 2023.

The meeting was closed at 12.13pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 8 December 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr I Brown	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Mr C Munro
Ms S Fanet (remote)	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mr P Logue (remote)	

Non-Member also present:

Mr J Finlayson

In attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
 Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
 Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
 Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
 Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
 Mr R MacKay, Development Officer, Education and Learning (remote)
 Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager (remote)
 Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
 Ms G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr D Mackenzie, Skills Development Scotland

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 C Munro in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr C Aitken, Ms M Nolan and Mr R Stewart.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 7 – Mr C Munro

3. Good News

A presentation was shared with the Committee and the Chair conveyed the following items of good news:-

- Duolingo was now available on all the Highland Council's chromebooks/Devices;
- Royal National mod success for Highland pupils were reported;
- Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar Eco School success – Primary 4/5 had worked hard to achieve Green Flag status for the school at the end of last session;
- Culturlann success – the Gaelic Cultural Centre had opened after the purchase of the East Church in Inverness;
- Sgioba na Gàidhlig were developing a training course for Gaelic Committee Councillors initially which would then be rolled out across the Council;
- Siuthad 2023 – jointly delivered by Skills Development Scotland and the Highland Council, over 120 pupils attended the GME Careers event, travelling from 7 Secondary schools across Highland;
- Gaelic Medium Education information sessions for parents had been held in Tain and Dingwall;
- Facal's Fearran place names project – Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig PR, Sgoil Stàfain and Àrd-sgoil PR;
- Spòrs Gàidhlig Outdoors event with Gairloch High School;
- Island Communities Impact assessment – Highland Council had developed a template to consider the impact of future developments on Island communities;
- SMO@50 – a concert to mark the event had taken place on 1 December 2023;
- An Deasbad Nàiseanta – congratulations were extended to Portree High School; and
- an attractive new Gaelic interpretation panel had been erected at the Hydro Ness scheme on the River Ness to improve Gaelic representation at the site. One side of the panel provided information about the river and its associated place-names, and the other provided Gaelic words and phrases connected with rivers.

Members applauded the fantastic activities, successes and achievements taking place. This demonstrated the work the Council was doing as part of Gaelic Language Plan 4 and the positive impact it was having for young people and communities. In regard to Duolingo, 1.5 million people were now learning Gaelic on Duolingo since it had been launched and this was to be warmly welcomed.

4. Presentation – Skills Development Scotland: Gaelic Skills Pathways and Career Opportunities

Mr D MacKenzie, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) gave a presentation to the Committee on Gaelic Skills Pathways and Career Opportunities during which it was explained that SDS were currently on its third edition of its Gaelic Language Plan, building on its previous editions. SDS actively promoted Gaelic Career pathways and promoted Gaelic in the workplace through various means, but particular mention was made of Siuthad 2023 – a Gaelic Careers event now in its tenth year. The aim of Siuthad was to encourage pupils to continue studying Gaelic and to show the range of

rewarding careers available. This was augmented by a YouTube video highlighting Siuthad 2023's success.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Mr MacKenzie was thanked for his interesting and informative presentation which had demonstrated excellent partnership working;
- it was good to see the wide range of organisations coming together to promote Gaelic;
- while aware of the opportunities that were available, it was important to also highlight those careers which might not be Gaelic focused, such as plumbers, joiners etc, to show Gaelic was present in everyday work. In response, it was confirmed that those involved in healthcare and Police Officers had presented to Siuthad to highlight the ability to use Gaelic on a day-to-day basis;
- it was queried, and confirmed, that job vacancies were advertised at Siuthad 2023; and
- when expanding services, it was suggested that when people needed support with healthcare, it was often easier for them to discuss issues in their native tongue.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. **Siuthad! Go On! – Gaelic Careers Event 2023**

There had been circulated Report No. G/18/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

Following on from the above, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report and their support of the Siuthad! Event; and
- ii. **AGREED** to continue to encourage and promote all Secondary schools in Highland who delivered Gaelic curriculum pathways to attend the event.

6. **Performance against Gaelic Language Plan 3 (GLP3)**

There had been circulated Report No. G/19/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

The report highlighted the good news as to how Highland Council was performing and, again, the excellent work of the Council in promoting Gaelic and implementing the aims of the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. However, the Council was only a month away from the launch of Gaelic Language Plan 4 (GLP4) and it was widely recognised that Highland Council was the leading Council in terms of per capita funding for Gaelic Medium Education. Consequently, some response from Bòrd na Gàidhlig would be welcomed as would an indication as to how they proposed to help the Council put GLP4 in place. GLP4 was a strong plan but some certainty from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as to when it would be accepted would be appreciated.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the report.

7. **BLAS Festival 2023**

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro declared a connection to this item as a trustee of a venue which hosted two Fèis BLAS events and as a family member

had appeared in one of these events but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. G/20/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was good to see BLAS continuing and that, over the years, it had gone from strength to strength. However, it was important that Fèis BLAS were promoted throughout Highland and it was reassuring that some of the artists went into local schools during the event;
- hosting an event benefited a community and it was queried as to the process to achieve that. However, it was explained that there were various factors including artist availability, if halls were appropriate and available funding. Events were also available online; and
- Members were encouraged to attend BLAS events and to witness the high quality of performances.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. Gaelic Education Update

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed around Croileagan Inbhir Pheofharain. The Council had an obligation to promote Gaelic but it was contended that it was failing to do so in Dingwall at present. Croileagan Inbhir Pheofharain had been established over 30 years ago and it had very much been a community effort. It was disappointing therefore that its premises could not be used and the children had been relocated elsewhere but to units where there was no total immersion of Gaelic. It was feared therefore that their language skills would be interrupted. In response, it was confirmed that the Council was in the process of recruiting two early years practitioners. However, in the interim, it was important to meet the Care Commission's standards and work was on-going to make the necessary changes to the building. As a result, initially the early years practitioners would have to work peripatetically. Nevertheless, the Council recognised the importance to ensure there was a streamlined pathway for 3-18 Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in Dingwall. It was important that Members and parents were kept informed of progress of re-establishing the Croileagan back in its premises and officers were working hard to have this up-and-running as soon as possible;
- it was important to appreciate that introducing Gaelic in the early years would encounter challenges and therefore cognisance was needed to take measure of them in order to support communities. Sustainability was important and was a focus of GLP4;
- Members were looking forward to the 3–18 GME Provision feasibility study for Inverness with the final report expected in February 2024; and
- in November 2023, the Council had received a request from parents for GME Primary Education in Lochaline. In line with statutory guidance an initial assessment was to be carried out with the Gaelic Committee being updated of progress at future meetings. This reflected the great efforts of individuals who

had worked hard to promote Gaelic and to ensure it had a presence in the area. The provision of GME in Lochaline had the potential to bring more children to the school but the availability of housing in the area was proving to be a challenge. GME provision would be a good opportunity to address the situation.

At this point the Chief Executive addressed the Committee, speaking in both Gaelic and English, where he emphasised the importance of the language to the economy of the Highlands.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the interim update on the Inverness 3-18 Gaelic Education Feasibility Study; and
- ii. the catchment consultation process and update for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall and Nairn Gaelic Medium provisions.

9. Gaelic Plan Fund and GLP Outcomes

There had been circulated Report No. G/22/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Gaelic Plans Fund had replaced what had previously been known as the Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund (GLAIF). These projects were important as it supported the other work the Council did in delivering opportunities to children and families and offering the opportunity for exposure to Gaelic;
- there were challenges and opportunities facing the Council in regard to how it supported GME. Funding was important but the Council could only deliver on projects where resources, such as staff, were available;
- these projects highlighted the additionality and what could be done in partnership with communities;
- Gaelic learners needed to be able to speak the language on a daily basis to progress and it was suggested that Corporate Communications could consider having a Gaelic Word of the Day; and
- Gaelic learners were keeping the language alive and it was hoped that when pupils left 3-18 GME they continued to speak Gaelic.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh ann an Seòmar na Comhairle, Prìomh Oifis na Comhairle, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis air Dihaoine 8 Dùbhlachd 2023 aig 10.30m.

An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner

Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn

A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul (air astar)

A' Bh-uas S Fanet (air astar)

Mgr I Grafton

Mgr P Logue (air astar)

Mgr U MacAoidh (air astar)

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir (air astar)

Mgr C Rothach

A' Bh-uas L Niven (air astar)

A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais (air astar)

Neo-bhuill cuideachd an làthair:

Mgr I MacFhionnlaigh

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr D MacIlleDhuinn, Àrd-Oifigear

Mgr P Nevin, Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomhach Eadar-amail, Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas

A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas M A NicLeòid Mitchell, Oifigear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas E Rodgers, Oifigear Poileasaidh Gàidhlig

Mgr R MacAoidh, Oifigear Leasachaidh, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh (air astar)

A' Bh-uas S NicIllinnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach

(air astar)

A' Bh-uas M Mhoireach, Prìomh Oifigear Comataidh

A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Oifigear Comataidh

Cuideachd an làthair:

Mgr D MacCoinnich, Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba

Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.

Mgr C Rothach anns a' Chathair**Gnothach****1. Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Ghabhadh leisgeul às leth Mhgr C Aitken, na M-uas M Nolan agus Mhgr R Stiùbhairt.

2. Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

Cha robh Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt sam bith ann.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan Aithris Fhollaiseachd a leanas:-

Nì 7 – Mgr C Rothach

3. Naidheachdan Matha

Chaidh taisbeanadh a thoirt dhan Chomataidh agus thug an Cathraiche seachad na [naidheachdan](#) matha a leanas:-

- Bha Duolingo ri fhaotainn a-nis air innealan Chromebook uile na Comhairle;
- Chaidh innse mu shoirbheachas sgoilearan na Gàidhealtachd aig a' Mhòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail;
- Soirbheachas Sgoil Eco Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar – bha Clas 4/5 air obrachadh cruaidh gus inbhe Brataich Uaine a choileanadh airson na sgoile aig deireadh an t-seisein mu dheireadh;
- Soirbheachas a' Chultarlainn – bha an t-Ionad Cultair Gàidhlig air fosgladh às dèidh dhan Eaglais an Ear ann an Inbhir Nis a bhith air a ceannach;
- Bha Sgioba na Gàidhlig a' cur cùrsa trèanaidh air dòigh do chomhairlichean Comataidh na Gàidhlig an toiseach agus dheidheadh a leudachadh an uair sin air feadh na Comhairle;
- Siuthad! 2023 – air a cho-libhrigeadh le Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba agus Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd, bha còrr is 120 sgoilear an làthair aig an tachartas dreuchdail FtG, a' siubhal bho 7 àrd-sgoiltean air feadh na Gàidhealtachd;
- Chaidh seiseanan fiosrachaidh Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig a chumail do phàrantan ann am Baile Dhubhthaich agus Inbhir Pheofharain;
- Pròiseact ainmean-àite Facal is Fearann – Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh, Sgoil Stafainn agus Àrd-Sgoil Phort Rìgh;
- Tachartas Spòrs Gàidhlig air a' bhlàr a-muigh le Àrd-Sgoil Gheàrrloch;
- Measadh Buaidh air Coimhearsnachdan nan Eilean – bha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd air teamplaid a leasachadh airson beachdachadh air buaidh leasachaidhean san àm ri teachd air coimhearsnachdan nan eilean;
- SMO@50 – chaidh consairt a chumail airson seo a chomharrachadh air 1 Dùbhlachd 2023;
- An Deasbad Nàiseanta – chaidh meal an naidheachd a chur air Àrd-Sgoil Phort Rìgh; agus
- Chaidh pannal-fiosrachaidh ùr Gàidhlig a chur suas aig sgeama Dealan Nis air Abhainn Nis. Tha fiosrachadh air aon taobh dhen phannal mun abhainn fhèin agus mu ainmean-àite a' buntainn rithe, agus tha abairtean is faclan Gàidhlig a' buntainn ri aibhnichean air an taobh eile. Tha am pannal ùr a' cur ris a' Ghàidhlig air an làraich.

Rinn buill moladh mòr air na gnìomhan, soirbheachasan is coileanaidhean a bha a' gabhail àite. Bha seo a' sealltainn gun robh a' Chomhairle a' dèanamh obair mhòr mar phàirt de Phlana na Gàidhlig 4 agus gun robh buaidh mhath aig a seo air daoine òga agus coimhearsnachdan. A thaobh Duolingo, bha 1.5 millean neach a-nis ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig air Duolingo bhon a chaidh a chur air bhog agus b' e deagh naidheachd a bha sin.

4. Taisbeanadh – Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba: Slighean agus Cothroman Dreuchdail Gàidhlig

Thug Mgr D MacCoinnich, Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba (SDS), seachad taisbeanadh dhan Chomataidh mu Shlighean agus Cothroman Dreuchdail Gàidhlig agus chaidh mìneachadh gun robh SDS an-dràsta air an treas deasachadh dhen Phlana Ghàidhlig aca, a' togail air na dreuchdan roimhe. Bha SDS a' cur shlighean dreuchdail Gàidhlig air adhart agus a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig san àite-obrach ann an grunn dhòighean, ach chaidh iomradh sònraichte a thoirt air Siuthad! 2023 – tachartas dreuchdan Gàidhlig a bha a-nis san deichead bliadhna aige. 'S e amas Siuthad! sgoilearan a bhrosnachadh gus leantainn air adhart leis a' Ghàidhlig san sgoil agus sealltainn dhaibh gun robh raon farsaing de dhreuchdan fiachail ri fhaotainn. Chaidh bhidio YouTube a bha a' sealltainn soirbheachas Siuthad! 2023 a chluiche.

Rè na deasbairich, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- Chaidh taing a thoirt do Mhgr MacCoinnich airson taisbeanadh inntinneach is fiosrachail a thoirt seachad agus seo cuideachd a' sealltainn gun robh sàr obrachadh com-pàirteach air a bhith ann;
- Bha e math gun robh raon farsaing bhuidhnean a' tighinn còmhla gus a' Ghàidhlig a chur air adhart;
- Ged a bhathar mothachail mu na cothroman a bha rim faotainn, bha e cudromach aire a tharraing cuideachd gu na dreuchdan aig nach robh fòcas sònraichte air a' Ghàidhlig, a leithid plumaireachd is saorsainneachd, airson sealltainn gun robh a' Ghàidhlig an lùib obair làitheil. Mar fhreagairt, chaidh innse gun robh feadhainn a tha ag obair ann an cùram-slàinte agus oifigearan poileis air taisbeanaidhean a thoirt do Shiuthad! airson sealltainn gum b' urrainnear a' Ghàidhlig a chleachdadh air stèidh làitheil;
- Chaidh faighneachd, agus chaidh dearbhadh fhaighinn, gun robh beàrnan obrach air an sanasachd aig Siuthad! 2023; agus
- Nuair a bhathar a' leudachadh sheirbheisean, agus nuair a bha daoine feumach air cùram-slàinte, chaidh togail gun robh e gu tric na b' fhasa dhaibh còmhradh nan cànan dùthchasach.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan taisbeanadh.

5. Siuthad! – Tachartas Dreuchdan Gàidhlig 2023

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/18/23 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghniomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Às dèidh sin:-

- THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg agus thug iad taic do thachartas Siuthad!; agus
- DH'AONTAICH** iad leantainn air adhart a' brosnachadh àrd-sgoiltean sa Ghàidhealtachd a bhios a' libhrigeadh curraicealam Gàidhlig an tachartas a fhrithéaladh.

6. Coileanadh mu Choinneimh Plana na Gàidhlig 3 (PnG3)

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/19/23 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Thug an aithisg seo am follais an naidheachd mhath a thaobh mar a bha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a' coileanadh agus, a-rithist, sàr-obair na Comhairle ann a bhith a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig agus ann a bhith a' buileachadh amasan Riaghaltas na h-Alba agus Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Ach, cha robh ach mìos air fhàgail gus am biodh a' Chomhairle a' cur Plana na Gàidhlig 4 (PnG4) air bhog agus bhathar ag aithneachadh fad is farsaing gur i Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a' phrìomh chomhairle a thaobh maoinachadh gach pearsa airson Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig. Mar thoradh, chuireadh a' Chomhairle fàilte air fios bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig a thaobh mar a bhiodh iad an dùil a' Chomhairle a chuideachadh a thaobh PnG4 a chur air bhonn. B' e plana làidir a bh' ann am PnG4 ach bhiodh fàilte air fiosrachadh bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig, a thaobh cuin a dheidheadh gabhail ris.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

7. Fèis BHLAS 2023

Aithris Fhollaiseachd: thug Mgr C Rothach seachad Aithris Fhollaiseachd a thaobh an nì seo seach gun robh e na urrasair air aitreabh anns an deach dà thachartas Fèis BHLAS a chumail agus seach gun robh ball teaghlaich air nochdadh ann an aon de na tachartasan seo ach, às dèidh dha an deuchainn neo-chlaon a chur an gnìomh, cha robh e dhen bheachd gun robh ùidh aige ri fhoillseachadh.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/20/23 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè na deasbaireachd, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- Bha e math faicinn gun robh BLAS a' leantainn air adhart agus gun robh an fhèis air a dhol bho neart gu neart thar nam bliadhnaichean. Ach, bha e cudromach gun robh BLAS air a cur air adhart air feadh na Gàidhealtachd agus bha e na adhbhar misneachd gun robh cuid dhen luchd-ealain air a dhol gu sgoiltean ionadail tron tachartas;
- Bha a bhith a' toirt aoigheachd do thachartas a' toirt buannachd do choimhearsnachd agus chaidh ceist a thogail mun dòigh san robhar a' coileanadh sin. Ach, chaidh mìneachadh gun robh grunn nithean ann air am feumaiste beachdachadh, a leithid luchd-ealain a bha rim faotainn, co-dhiù a bha tallaichean freagarrach, agus am maoinachadh a bha ri fhaotainn. Bha tachartasan rim faotainn air-loidhne cuideachd; agus
- Chaidh brosnachadh a thoirt do bhuill tachartasan BLAS a fhrithealadh agus faicinn dhaib' fhèin cho math 's a bha iad.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

8. Cunntas às Ùr mu Fhoghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/21/23 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghniomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè na deasbaireachd, thog na Buill na puingeann a leanas:-

- Chaidh dragh a thogail mu Chròileagan Inbhir Pheofharain. Bha dleastanas aig a' Chomhairle a' Ghàidhlig a chur air adhart ach chaidh beachd a thoirt seachad nach robh i a' dèanamh sin aig an àm seo ann an Inbhir Pheofharain. Chaidh Cròileagan Inbhir Pheofharain a stèidheachadh o chionn 30 bliadhna agus bha i gu mòr na h-oidhirp coimhearsnachd. Bha e na bhriseadh-dùil, mar sin, nach b' urrainnear an togalach a chleachdadh agus gun deach a' chlann a ghluasad gu àite eile ach gu aonadan far nach robh bogadh iomlan sa Ghàidhlig. Bha eagal ann gun toireadh seo briseadh air an sgilean cànan. Mar fhreagairt, chaidh dearbhadh gun robh a' Chomhairle a' fastadh dà neach-stiùiridh thràth-bhliadhnaichean. Ach, san eadar-àm, bha e cudromach coinneachadh ri inbhean Coimisean a' Chùraim agus bha obair a' dol air adhart gus na h-atharrachaidhean riatanach a dhèanamh ris an togalach. Mar thoradh, dh'fheumadh an luchd-stiùiridh thràth-bhliadhnaichean obrachadh le bhith a' siubhal eadar àiteachan an toiseach. A dh'aindeoin seo, bha a' Chomhairle ag aithneachadh cho cudromach 's a bha e dèanamh cinnteach gun robh slighe cheart ann airson Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig (FtG) 3-18 ann an Inbhir Pheofharain. Bha e cudromach gun robhar a' cumail fios ri buill agus ri pàrantan mun phròiseas a thaobh a bhith ag ath-stèidheachadh a' Chròileagain air ais san aitreabh aice agus bha oifigearan ag obair cruaidh gus am biodh seo stèidhichte cho luath 's a ghabhadh;
- Bha e cudromach toirt fa-near gum biodh dùbhlain an lùib a bhith a' toirt a-steach Gàidhlig sna tràth-bhliadhnaichean agus mar sin bha feum air tuigse mun a seo gus taic a thoirt do choimhearsnachdan. Bha seasmhachd cudromach agus bha seo na fhòcas a thaobh PnG4;
- Bha buill a' coimhead air adhart ri sgrùdadh so-dhèantachd solar 3–18 FtG airson Inbhir Nis agus bha dùil ris an aithisg dheireannaich anns a' Ghearran 2024; agus
- Anns an t-Samhain 2023, bha a' Chomhairle air iarrrtas fhaighinn bho phàrantan airson FtG bun-sgoile ann an Loch Àlainn. A rèir stiùireadh reachdail bha measadh tùsail gu bhith air a dhèanamh agus dheidheadh fiosrachadh mu adhartas a thoirt do Chomataidh na Gàidhlig aig coinneamhan san àm ri teachd. Bha seo a' sealltainn gun robh daoine fa leth air obair mhòr a dhèanamh airson a' Ghàidhlig a bhrosnachadh agus airson dèanamh cinnteach gun robh i follaiseach san sgìre. Dh'fhaodadh solar FtG ann an Loch Àlainn barrachd chloinne a thoirt chun na sgoile ach bha cion taigheadais san sgìre na dhùbhlain. Bheireadh solar FtG cothrom math dèiligeadh ris an t-suidheachadh.

Aig an àm seo bhruidhinn an t-Àrd-Oifigear ris a' Chomataidh, a' bruidhinn an dà chuid sa Ghàidhlig agus sa Bheurla, agus chuir e cuideam air cho cudromach 's a bha an cànan do dh'eaconamaidh na Gàidhealtachd.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

- i. dhan chunntas eadar-amail a thaobh Sgrùdadh So-dhèantachd Foghlam Gàidhlig 3–18 Inbhir Nis; agus

- ii. dhan phròiseas cho-chomhairleachaidh agus dhan chunntas às ùr a thaobh solar Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig airson Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Inbhir Pheofharain agus Inbhir Narann.

9. Maoin nam Planaichean Gàidhlig agus Builean PnG

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/22/23 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè na deasbaireachd, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- Bha Maoin nam Planaichean Gàidhlig air a dhol an àite Maoin Buileachaidh Achd na Gàidhlig (GLAIF). Bha na pròiseactan seo cudromach seach gun robh iad a' cur taic ri obair eile a bha a' Chomhairle a' dèanamh a thaobh a bhith a' libhrigeadh cothroman do chloinn is do theaghlaichean agus a' tabhann cothrom air ceangal a thogail leis a' Ghàidhlig;
- Bha dùbhlain agus cothroman mu choinneimh na Comhairle a thaobh mar a bheireadh i taic do FtG. Bha maoin eachadh cudromach ach cha b' urrainn dhan Chomhairle pròiseactan a libhrigeadh mura biodh goireasan, a leithid luchd-obrach, rim faotainn;
- Bha na pròiseactan seo a' toirt am follais nan nithean a bharrachd a bha seo a' tabhann agus na ghabhadh dèanamh ann an com-pàirteachas le coimhearsnachdan;
- Dh'fheumadh cothrom a bhith aig luchd-ionnsachaidh an cànan a bhruidhinn air stèidh làitheil airson adhartas a dhèanamh agus chaidh moladh gum bu chòir do Chonaltradh Corporra beachdachadh air facal Gàidhlig an latha fhoillseachadh; agus
- Bha luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig a' cumail a' chànain beò agus bhathar an dòchas gun cumadh sgoilearan 3-18 FtG orra a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig nuair a dh'fhàgadh iad an cuid foghlaim.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 12.10f.