

Highland Council: 14 December 2023: Questions**1. Mr A Christie**

To the Leader of Council

Please can you detail all positions within the Council from the level one below Head of Service, Head of Service, Executive Chief Officer and Depute Chief Executive where the postholder is interim, acting or temporarily carrying out the role including the date the arrangement started?

Details are shown in the table below.

Interim Post Title	Interim Post Grade	Start Date
Head of Revenues & Business Support	HC15	20/05/2019
Head of HR	HC15	02/09/2019
ECO	C037	13/03/2023
Depute Chief Executive	CO52	30/10/2021
Head of Corporate Finance	HC15	06/03/2023
Head of Support Services	HC15	20/02/2023
Head of Housing & Building Maintenance	HC15	26/06/2023
Area Education & Learning Manager	HC14	01/01/2020
Area Education & Learning Manager	HC14	15/08/2022

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of Council

At Council on 26th October in reply to the request for a Special Meeting of Council to be held in January to discuss the Budget and the progress being made you undertook to review this suggestion with your colleagues in the Senior Leadership Group. To date I have not heard any outcome from your deliberations – What was the decision?

The SLG have been keeping this under review.

3. Mr M Reiss

To the Chair of Housing and Property

With reference to the recently completed review of Highland Council buildings, what is the approximate estimated financial cost of carrying out repairs to the School estate that have been identified as necessary within the next 17 months (to the end of the financial year 2024/25)?

The survey has reviewed 37% of the school estate and found that in relation to priority 1 (immediate action) and priority 2 (undertaken within 24 months) the estimated financial cost was £23.4m which extrapolated to the full school estate would add a further projected cost of £38.1m, giving a total of £61.5m. These figures are subject to further revision as the programme of surveys progresses to completion.

The report on the Council agenda (item 10) - A Review of Property Assets Maintained by Highland Council and a Future Approach to Strategic Capital Planning highlights this matter at paragraph 4.7.

4. Mr R Gale

To the Chair of Housing and Property

Given that the loan charges associated with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is sitting at over half a million pounds per week what is the total outstanding level of debt being serviced by the HRA?

The current level of HRA debt is £350m.

5. Mr M Baird

To the Leader of the Council

What checks are being carried out to ensure Highland Council owned Charging Points are fit for purpose?

The Council has 105 Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers and the day-to-day operation and monitoring of all the Council's charge points is handled through Charge Place Scotland (CPS). All charge points are network linked and monitored 24 hours a day.

In the majority of cases, as long as a fault is logged directly with CPS at the time it arises, a remote reset of the unit allows the caller to charge without leaving the ChargePoint. It is not necessary for the Council also to be informed for the fault to be logged and fixed.

In a small number of cases, when parts require to be replaced, repairs can take a number of weeks to be completed due to supply chain issues. The maintenance for all Council owned chargers is undertaken by SWARCO under a contract awarded directly from Transport Scotland. This is because Transport Scotland funded and delivered the original project to install the public EV charging network in Highland, including the provision of ongoing repair and maintenance, prior to handing over to the Council.

The report on the Council agenda (item 11) - Highland Council Energy transformation: Unlocking Renewable Energy Prospects includes a section at paragraph 6.5 on the development of EV Charging Infrastructure.

6. Mr A Baldrey

To the Chair of Communities and Place

As part of Highland Council's declared policy called 'Growing Our Future' it was stated that existing project officer time would be expanded to include food growing with a trial demonstration site using biochar to illustrate the combined benefits of improved produce yield and long term carbon sequestration, via the simplest and most widely accessible process known to mankind (i.e. that of controlled partial combustion of wood). Could you please update Members on the progress to date?

The proposal to progress the biochar and carbon sequestration project was dependent upon external funding which was unsuccessful. This has therefore not progressed as reported to the Communities and Place Committee in May 2023. At this stage, the work of the Climate Change team is focused on other areas of priority and there is no intention to take this strand of work forward.

The report on the Council agenda (Item 13) - Developing a Strategy to Enable a Future Workforce – A Strong and Fair Economy for all, makes reference at paragraph 4.3 to Food Production/Agriculture, Aquaculture, in that it recognises the importance of facilitating the growth of businesses who can enable food and aquaculture production locally.

7. Mr C Balance

To the Leader of the Council

In 2014 the Highland Council agreed a Community Benefit policy which promised that communities across the Highlands would benefit from renewable energy developments by 1) developers being required to pay a minimum £5000 per MW, RPI- linked to a baseline of 2011 and 2) the establishment of an arms length organisation, Highland Trust Fund, to ensure that the development of onshore renewable energy would benefit all Highland communities. Could the Leader outline how successive administrations have progressed these commitments over the past 9 years?

It is not for me to comment in respect of previous administrations, however communities across Highland have been benefitting from community benefit from renewables over the last nine years, in line with the voluntary policy put in place by the Scottish Government. In addition, SSE Renewables have been operating a Highland wide fund since 2014 which distributes funds more widely than directly affected communities.

8. Mr R MacKintosh

To the Chair of Communities and Place

To ask how much Glyphosate has been purchased and used by The Highland Council in the last 12 months.

845 ltrs has been purchased and 769 ltrs has been booked out.

9. Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Communities and Place

I welcome in Council's food growing strategy "Growing Our Future", the commitment to improving food systems through signing the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration, and the actions identified to address the challenges and opportunities across Highlands.

Please can the chair provide an update on progress that has been made by Highland Council towards meeting the commitments of the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration?

The key action from The Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration was to produce an integrated food strategy. This has been encompassed within the Good Food Nation Act. As reported to Council on 14 September, work is being progressed to scope out the development of a Good Food Nation Plan for Highland along with local partners. At this stage formal guidance to support implementation of the Act from the Scottish Government is awaited. Following discussions at a partnership meeting, the Highland Good Food Partnership have advised that it was agreed to await the Scottish Government's publication of their National Food Plan and associated guidance which it is anticipated will be published early next year. This will then support the development of a local plan for Highland aligning with the objectives set out in the National Plan.

10. Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Leader of the Council

Landlines in the UK are going digital by 2025. Here in Highlands, we need to support residents who may not be aware or prepared for some consequences of this change; eg, their Alarm Call systems stopping working.

Please may I ask how Highland Council will work with all telecoms providers, charity partners and our health care sector to ensure that senior citizens and vulnerable groups know about the change, how they will be impacted and what they need to do as a result - with appropriate signposting services?

The Analogue to Digital switching of phone lines is fully under the responsibility of BT however there is a need to respond to this with a change of Telecare devices as the current analogue devices can't be guaranteed to work with the digital lines.

There is an NHS project in place for procurement of digital devices and replacement of existing analogue devices. Where people's lines have already been replaced with digital, they have already been provided them with digital devices. There are currently 100 users with digital devices as the first phase of switching everyone from analogue to digital and the plan is to complete the transition over the next year.

Those in receipt of Telecare (or family/carers/guardians as appropriate) have had several letters to advise them of the ongoing switch to digital by BT and to explain what it means for them as Telecare users. Telecare social media has also been used to communicate messages about this.

Next year BT will carry out engagement events in local buildings, such as libraries, across Scotland. Clarification on who they will contact locally is awaited but we have asked that the Telecare teams be informed to ensure that we are able to support these events. From 5th September BT issued a 'stop sell' on analogue lines. This means anybody switching provider or package will automatically be switched to a digital phone line.

The Council will highlight BT publicity over the change to digital through its network of contacts.

11. Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

Charleston Academy: please provide full details of survey work being undertaken in connection with RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) including nature and extent of survey, number of companies involved, and expected date of receipt of final report.

I attach a link which provides the survey reports with background information.

[Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete \(RAAC\) | School Estate Management | The Highland Council](#)

12. Mr A Jarvie

To the Education Committee

What good news do you have to share about the council's next steps for a replacement of St Clemente school?

I can advise that the land for the site of a new school has been secured which would enable construction of the school should funding become available.