

# Minutes of Meetings

To be submitted to the Council

On

9 May 2024

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**The Highland Council  
No. 2 2024/2025**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 14 March 2024 at 9.35am.

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

***Meeting on Thursday 14 March 2024***

**Present:**

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

***Meeting on Friday, 15 March 2024***

**Present:**

Ms S Atkin	Ms E Knox
Mr M Baird (Remote)	Ms L Kraft (Remote)
Mr A Baldrey (Remote)	Mr B Lobban

Mr C Ballance	Mr P Logue
Mr B Boyd	Mr D Louden
Mr R Bremner	Ms M MacCallum
Mr I Brown	Mr A MacDonald
Mr J Bruce (Remote)	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr M Cameron (Remote)	Mrs I MacKenzie (Remote)
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Remote)	Mr S Mackie (Remote)
Mr A Christie	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr R MacKintosh
Ms T Collier (Remote)	Mrs A MacLean
Ms S Fanet	Ms K MacLean
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Mr D Macpherson
Mr L Fraser	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr H Morrison
Mr J Grafton	Mr C Munro
Mr A Graham	Mrs P Munro (Remote)
Mr M Green	Ms L Niven
Mr D Gregg (Remote)	Mr P Oldham
Mr R Gunn	Mrs M Paterson (Remote)
Mrs J Hendry	Mrs M Reid
Ms M Hutchison	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)	Mr K Rosie (Remote)
Ms L Johnston (Remote)	Mrs M Ross
Mr R Jones	Mr R Stewart Remote)
Mr S Kennedy	Ms K Willis

**In Attendance:**

Chief Executive

Interim Deputy Chief Executive

Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care

Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy

Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

Apologies for absence, on 14 March 2024, were intimated on behalf of Mrs H Crawford, Ms J McEwan and Ms M Nolan and, on 15 March 2024, from Dr C Birt, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs H Crawford, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Jarvie, Mr W MacKay, Mrs B McAlister, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Ms N Nolan, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair and Ms M Smith.

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

The Council **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 3 – Mr R Bremner, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mrs J Hendry, Mr A MacKintosh and Mrs M Reid

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

Item 3 – Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair  
 Item 4 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg  
 Item 6.i – Mr A Christie  
 Item 7 – Mr A Christie  
 Item 11 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg  
 Item 12 – Mr A Christie  
 Item 13 – Mr K Gowans and Mr H Morrison  
 Item 14 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg  
 Item 15 – Mr A Christie  
 Item 16 – Mr A Christie, Mr K Gowans and Mr D Gregg  
 Item 23.ii - Mr M Cameron  
 Item 23.iv – Mrs MacLean and Mr P Oldham

**3. Notice of Amendment (Planning) – Planning Application (23/00497/FUL)  
 Brath Atharrachaidh (Dealbhadh) – Iarrta Dealbhaidh (23/00497/FUL)**

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

**Mr R Bremner – as he had a long standing association with one of the principals of Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club.**

**Mr A Graham – due to his longstanding connections to Inverness Caledonian Thistle (season ticket holder, member of the supporters' club, member of the social club).**

**Mr D Gregg – as an Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football supporter.**

**Mrs J Hendry – as a family connection was on the Board of Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club and had enjoyed hospitality at the Club.**

**Mr A MacKintosh – as he was a close friend to members of the Inverness Caledonian Thistle Trust.**

**Mrs M Reid – as a member of the Inverness Caledonian Thistle Women's Football Academy Committee.**

**Transparency Statement: Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair made a Transparency Statement in this item as a close family member had, in the past, been a sponsor of Inverness Caledonian Thistle. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.**

**Applicant:** Intelligent Land Investments Group Plc (23/00497/FUL) (PLS/02/24)

**Location:** Land 75M SE Of Camas House, Fairways Business Park, Inverness (Ward 19).

**Nature of Development:** Battery energy storage facility comprising access track, compound of battery and electrical equipment, meter building, stores, fencing, security cameras, and associated landscaping.

**Recommendation:** Refuse

The South Planning Applications Committee (SPAC) had granted planning permission for the above application at its meeting on 7 February 2024. The following Notice of Amendment was then received on 12 February 2024:

“We the undersigned, being Elected Members of the Highland Council, hereby declare our wish that the decision of the South Planning Applications Committee at its meeting on 7 February 2024 on the above applications (Agenda Item 5.1) be reviewed at the next scheduled meeting of the full Council.

**Signed:** Mr T MacLennan, Mr P Oldham, Mr C Ballance, Mr M Cameron, Mr A Baldrey, Ms K Willis, Mr A Christie, Ms T Collier, Ms K MacLean, Mr R Gale, Mr A MacDonald, Mr A Millar, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Gowans, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Ms M Hutchison, Ms S Atkin, Mr A Jarvie, Dr C Birt, Mr M Reiss, Mr S Kennedy, Ms L Kraft, Ms S Fanet, Ms E Knox, Mr C Munro, Mr J Grafton, Mrs L Siggers and Mr A Sinclair.

In this context, there had been circulated separately in Booklet A the following:

- i. Report Nos PLS/02/24, by the Area Planning Manager – South; and
- ii. copy of the draft Minute from the meeting of the South Planning Applications Committee held on 7 February 2024.

It was clarified that Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club was the applicant, via Intelligent Land Investments Group Plc, and that the application had been deferred by the South Planning Applications Committee on 20 November 2023 for a site visit, which took place on 7 February 2024, after which the application was approved by the Committee, and then became the subject of a Notice of Amendment.

A presentation of the application was provided, including video footage of the site, and a summary was given of the recent additional representations received. Issues raised by the additional representations were included and addressed as part of the presentation, with several of them not being material planning considerations.

Members queried whether a site visit should be undertaken by the Council, and the Convener drew attention to the fly-by video footage of the site that had not previously been available to the Committee.

## Questions

Members sought and received further information on the following issues:-

- no response had yet been received to the letter sent to the Scottish Government's Chief Planner seeking formal planning guidance on battery energy storage facilities and reference was made to the guidance that had been produced in England;
- the discrepancy in the information provided in the report on a similar battery storage facility was highlighted;
- information was sought, and provided, on the monitoring of noise, drainage, water courses and possible contamination, including into the River Ness, and whether these issues were material planning considerations and could be included in the conditions;
- compensation and mitigation for the possible loss of the green space;
- the nature of the paths across the green space, with one being formal, the others the result of footfall;
- confirmation that 2-3% of the green space would be required for the facility;
- the distance from the facility to the nearest house, which was 90m;
- the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) lack of response to the application and the need for an emergency response plan. It was queried whether the application should be deferred pending a response from the SFRS and whether fire safety issues were materially relevant to the application;
- the nature and uses of bunding and swales;
- whether there were other battery storage facilities in Highland;
- whether a building warrant and/or a license would be required for the facility;
- whether there was a hierarchy of planning policies, which there was not, with the most recently, in general, being given more weight in the event of a conflict;
- it was queried whether other sites had been considered;

- the functioning of the battery storage system was queried;
- the role and designations of the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan were summarised;
- information was sought, but was not available, on the cooling load calculations for the proposed facility;
- clarity on Class 4 and Class 5 land uses were sought, and provided;
- it was confirmed the applicant had not sought formal pre-application advice; and
- it was queried, but not known, what percentage of the electricity that would be stored in the proposed facility would be from renewable sources.

## Debate

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Notice of Amendment had been brought to the Council because, as a result of the application being deferred on 20 November 2023, then subject to a site visit on 7 February 2024, the number of Members of the South Planning Applications Committee eligible to participate in the final decision had been reduced to five, which was considered too few for a significant application, which had generated considerable public interest, including from four Community Councils;
- several of the original objections had been resolved or addressed;
- concern was expressed at the possibility of thermal overload at the facility, and the risk of fire. It was disappointing the Scottish Government had not yet produced formal planning guidance on battery energy storage facilities, as there was in England, and that, as a result, no response had been obtained from the SFRS in relation to the application;
- concern was expressed about various issues which were not in the report as they were not material planning considerations, such as the prevailing wind, given the proximity of the proposed facility to houses and businesses, and the need for two entrances, to provide an alternative in the event of a fire;
- the issues of water containment after a fire due to possible toxicity was of concern;
- Members had received considerable correspondence from both objectors and supporters of the proposed facility and while some Members reported having felt intimidated by the tone of some of the correspondence, others felt it had been acceptable and a welcome part of democracy;
- Members were urged to ensure the application was decided on the basis of Planning policy only;
- the loss of green space and loss of amenity for local residents was emphasised;
- with reference to Policy 11 of the National Planning Framework, attention was drawn to the importance of encouraging the efficient use of energy, which this facility would offer, and some Members felt the advantages of this outweighed the loss of green space;
- attention was drawn to the number of jobs that would be created at the proposed facility, although it was also pointed out that most of these would be during the construction phase only;
- objections had been received from four Community Councils, representing around 13,000 residents, and it was suggested that while the facility itself was beneficial and necessary, this was not the appropriate place to locate it. The green space allocated in the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan should be respected;
- other Members pointed out that many of the objections raised by the Community Councils were not material planning considerations and that in view of the declared climate emergency, it was appropriate to lose a small percentage of green space for this facility;
- the need for supplementary planning guidance on this type of facility was urgently required; and

- in response to concerns about safety, Members pointed out that there was energy infrastructure of different types across the city, and that appropriate mitigation would be put in place to address safety risks. It was suggested that all areas should have a renewable energy project plan to assist with applications such as this.

Mr T MacLennan, seconded by Mr P Oldham, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Ms M Smith, seconded by Mr K Rosie, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that, acknowledging that NPF4 Policy 11 Energy lent support for development proposals for all forms of renewable, low carbon, zero emissions technologies, including battery storage facilities, the proposal was approved because while it was acknowledged that the development would result in the loss of a small amount of open space, the development would encourage, promote, and facilitate renewable energy storage and so would comply with policy 11 of NPF4. It was considered that the benefits gained under policy 11 of NPF4 outweighed the loss of open space and therefore the application should be granted, with power delegated to officers to draft conditions in consultation with Local Members.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 30 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 23 vote, with 3 abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

**For the Motion:**

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms S Fanet, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr D Louden, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr C Munro, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs M Ross, Mr A Sinclair, Ms K Willis.

**For the Amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mr D Fraser, Mr J Grafton, Mr R Gunn, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr J McGillivray, Mr H Morrison, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Saggars, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart.

**Abstentions:** Ms M Hutchison, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Macpherson.

**Decision**

The Council **REFUSED** planning application 23/00497/FUL subject to the conditions laid out in the report.

**4. Presentation – Director of Public Health – Annual Report  
Taisbeanadh – Stiùiriche Slàinte Phoblaich – Aithisg Bhliadhnail**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections 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  
Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No HC/02/24 by the NHS Highland Director of Public Health and Health Policy, accompanied by a presentation on the NHS Highland Director of Public Health Annual Report.

In the first part of the presentation the Director of Public Health highlighted several areas of health inequality within Highland including life expectancy, number of years spent in poor health, causes of ill health later in life, deaths from certain conditions and drug deaths. He then addressed the topic of medication covering the areas of environment, where the problem of pharmaceuticals in the water was highlighted; hepatitis C, where the good news of a new effective oral treatment was welcomed; social prescribing which could be used alongside, or as an alternative to, medication; and prescriptions for pain, where the involvement of prescription medications, including opiates, in drug deaths was highlighted.

The Council **NOTED** the 2023 Director of Public Health Annual Report.

**5. 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 December 2023 (continued on 11 January 2024) and the Special Council held on 29 February 2024 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

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

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

	<b>Date</b>
Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee	22 January 2024
Nairnshire Committee	22 January 2024
Lochaber Area Committee	23 January 2024
Sutherland County Committee	23 January 2024
Audit Committee (Special Meeting)	24 January 2024
Caithness Committee	29 January 2024
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee	29 January 2024
Housing and Property Committee	31 January 2024
City of Inverness and Area Committee	5 February 2024
Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	12 February 2024
Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee	12 February 2024
Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee	14 February 2024
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	15 February 2024
Dingwall and Seaforth Committee	19 February 2024
Education Committee	21 February 2024
Pensions Committee	22 February 2024
Nairnshire Committee (Special Meeting)	4 March 2024
Communities and Place Committee	6 March 2024
Corporate Resources Committee	7 March 2024

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded were, except as undernoted, **APPROVED**, matters arising having been dealt with as follows:-



**Sutherland County Committee, 23 January 2024****\*Starred Item: Additional Urgent Item – Winter Maintenance**

The Sutherland County Committee had agreed to call upon the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy to arrange an urgent review of current resources and to look at developing a partnership arrangement with the many farmers and contractors who had machinery capable of clearing snow from the roads that were not prioritised across Sutherland and any of the remote and rural parts of the Highlands. One way that this could be done was by a simple memorandum of understanding with anyone with the appropriate equipment who is willing to be called in as necessary.

However, it was pointed out that Workshops had been held on such arrangements and this was to be considered further at the Redesign Board.

Accordingly, the Council **AGREED** that this matter be referred to the Redesign Board.

**Audit Committee (Special Meeting), 24 January 2024****\*Starred Item: Item 5 – Risk Management**

The Council **AGREED** the updated Risk Management Strategy and new Risk Appetite Statement and that it be named the Corporate Risk Management Policy.

**Education Committee, 21 February 2024****\*Starred Item: Item 10 - Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise- Closure of Gergask Primary School**

The Council **AGREED** that education be discontinued at Gergask Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Newtonmore Primary School. Gergask Primary School had not been operational since September 2022 and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

**Nairnshire Committee, 4 March 2024**

The Council **AGREED** that the Minutes be amended to read as follows –

Item 3, Fifth bullet point - “the invitation to pay scheme for the NCGF Links amenity facilities was welcomed but the CCTV in the area needed to be updated”.

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

**Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of Item 6.i as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

- i. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 17 November 2023 (approved by the Board on 9 February 2024) which were **NOTED**; and
- ii. Community Planning Board held on 5 December 2023 (approved by the Board on 1 March 2024) which were **NOTED**.

7. **Question Time**  
**Am Ceiste**

**Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance:-

**Public Question**

**(1) Mr D MacKenzie**

To the Leader of the Council

Are the terms of reference for the Economic Impact Assessment on the Academy Street project intended to seek support for the council's proposals?

The response had been circulated.

**Member Questions**

**(1) Mr A Christie**

To the Leader of the Council

Please could the Leader detail the rationale or calculations that led to the Budget sums that were included in the papers that were presented to Council on 29<sup>th</sup> February in respect of Transient Visitor Levy £10m in 26/27, Strategic Operating Model Saving (CS:4)£1.67M across three years, Income from campervan and motorhome charging (CS:18) £1.5m across three years and the Earmarked Reserves of £20m for Adult Social Care -Redesign?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked that, in achieving the adult social care saving of £12.6million, whether an assurance could be given that no additional adult care packages would be cut?

In response, the Leader of the Council stated that there was no guarantee of the shape of any service and how these might look in the continued future.

**(2) Mr A Christie**

To the Leader of the Council

Please could the Leader explain on the following budget items presented to Council; Reconfiguring School Assets (CS:28) and Childrens Services - Family First Approach (CS:22) the schools likely to be mothballed or closed and any children's homes that potentially could be closed?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(3) Mr M Baird**

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

As a result of the recent snow falls and many of the roads in Sutherland being effected, is it not time to assist the normal council gritting staff to be joined by a voluntary workforce of Crofters/Farmers (those with JCB's and tractors with blades) to assist in lesser road clearances?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(4) Mr J Grafton**

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Can the chair please clarify what percentage increase in the income generated from EV charging has been made by the council, since the increase in charges. As against the income prior to the increase?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried that, with regards to the net income and the negative figure, could it be clarified that this figure was caused by infrastructure costs?

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure explained that this information was not available at the time of asking but that this had been requested and would be circulated to all Members.

**(5) Mr A Baldrey**

To the Chair of Communities and Place

Under the Community Empowerment Act ( Scotland) 2015 one of the duties placed on Local Authorities is the provision of land for allotments.

Notwithstanding the report to the recent C and P Committee which largely dealt with allotment policy and rules, please can you tell me what actions Highland Council is taking to actively increase the availability of allotment plots?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**(6) Mr C Ballance**

To the Leader of the Council

In view of the recent press reports that there are 334 potential breaches of planning law currently under investigation in the Inverness area alone, including 50 in my ward of Aird and Loch Ness, how many planning enforcement officers are currently employed in the South Planning Area?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked that, given there were three planning Enforcement officers across the Council, whether there were enough Enforcement officers and if there were plans to increase the number of Enforcement officers?

In response, the Leader of the Council explained that if the Council could employ many more officers, they would. There needed to be a balance between affordability and availability and that this was constantly reviewed. The Leader did not advocate that planning conditions should be ignored.

**(7) Mr R MacKintosh**

To the Chair of Housing and Property

Since it is a requirement for all short-term premises to obtain a short-term licence, including those accommodations that are shared with residents, can the Highland Council give me the full break down of all short-term licences that have been applied in every local area, a breakdown of the number of applications received, the number processed and the number still outstanding by local ward area?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how long it would take the Council to get through the backlog of short term lets applications?

In response, the Chair of Housing and Property did not have the requested information to hand but would contact Mr MacKintosh and circulate to other Members when possible.

**(8) Mr D Macpherson**

To the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader of the Council please detail how much money Highland Council received in European funding in each of the last 3 years of the European funding programmes, compared to how much this Council has been awarded from the replacement funding schemes from the UK Government of the Levelling Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund, since their introduction?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Leader of the Council would consider writing to the UK Government asking if they could give a more accurate comparison of the European money invested in the Highlands and what had been considered as its replacement funding stream for the area?

In response, the Leader of the Council thanked the Member for their initial question as it highlighted how it was very difficult to make comparisons. He would also like to see how the Council benefitted now it did not have these funds available. The Leader of the Council would be more than happy to work with Mr Macpherson to get a more accurate response.

**(9) Mr A Graham**

To the Leader of the Council

Charleston Academy: please provide details of the present situation with survey work being undertaken in connection with RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) including expected date of receipt of final report(s) and when they will be reported to Housing & Property Committee?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried that, given the continued use of Charleston School, despite ongoing survey work in connection with RAAC, what did the think Leader would give the pupils and parents hope of improvements in the school environment?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the challenges that teachers and pupils faced across the Highlands was wholeheartedly understood. It was clarified that plans for education would be discussed at Agenda item 13. The Leader was more than happy to work with Mr Graham to see what could be done to specifically help Charleston Academy alongside other Schools across the Highlands.

**(10) Mr P Logue**

To the Leader of the Council

Do you agree that there should be equity in educational provision across Scotland and, if so, is that being delivered by Highland Council?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if a meeting time had been agreed with representatives of the Save Our Rural School's Campaign?

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that a meeting had not been agreed. The Leader was more than happy to follow up and take action regarding this question.

**8. Membership of the Council  
Ballrachd na Comhairle**

The Council **NOTED** that Mr Colin Aitken had tendered his resignation as a Member of the Council with effect from 12 February 2024. In this regard, a By-Election for Ward 19 (Inverness South) would be held on Thursday 11 April 2024.

**9. Membership of Committees etc/Appointment of Chair of Climate Change Committee  
Ballrachd Chomataidhean msaa/Cur an Dreuchd Cathraiche Comataidh  
Atharrachadh na Gnàth-shìde**

The Council **NOTED** that Mr P Logue had joined the Scottish Liberal Democrats and that Mr K Rosie had left the SNP and was now a member of the Alba Party. On that basis, the political make-up of the Council was as follows:-

SNP – 21 / Highland Independent – 18 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 14 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 8 / Highland Alliance – 5 / Scottish Green Party – 4 / Labour – 2 / Alba Party – 1.

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

On that basis, the Council **AGREED** revised Committee memberships which were tabled at the meeting.

Nominations for appointments to South Planning Applications Committee in respect of Wards 19 and 21 were also tabled at the meeting.

The Council **AGREED** to appoint Mr D Macpherson and Ms S Fanet to the South Planning Applications Committee with Mr A Sinclair and Ms K Willis as substitutes respectively.

The Council also **AGREED** Ms S Fanet be appointed as Chair of the Climate Change Committee.

**10. Appointments to Companies - Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited  
Cur an Dreuchd gu Companaidhean - Cothrom dhan Ghàidhealtachd (Tasgaidhean)  
Earranta**

Following the resignation from the Company of Mrs H Crawford, the Council were invited to appoint a Director for Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited.

In this regard, nominations were received as follows:-

Mrs J Hendry  
Mrs M Ross

On a vote being taken, Mrs J Hendry received 24 votes and Mrs M Ross received 38 votes, with 2 abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**Votes for Mrs J Hendry:**

Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr D Louden, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Ms K Willis.

**Votes for Mrs M Ross:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr B Boyd, Mr J Bruce, Ms B Campbell, Ms A Christie, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr J Grafton, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mr W MacKay, Ms I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Ms A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr H Morrison, Ms P Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mrs T Robertson, Ms L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart.

**Abstentions**

Mr A Baldrey, Mr B Lobban.

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** Mrs M Ross be appointed as a Director for Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited.

**11. Resetting the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP)  
Ag ath-shuidheachadh Plana Leasachaidh Buil na Gàidhealtachd**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections 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  
Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/03/24 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the work that had gone into it;
- the strategic direction set out provided an excellent framework for partnership working in terms of supporting people, ensuring sustainability of communities and enabling a prosperous and thriving Highland;
- the original iteration of the HOIP had been agreed in 2017. The world was now a different place and it was necessary to respond to that;
- it was pleasing to see the opportunities for alignment with the Council's Delivery Plan;
- it was emphasised that the HOIP was a strategic plan and would be followed by the delivery plan, the development of which it was hoped all Members would get involved in;
- it was welcomed that the engagement events had resulted in tackling inequality remaining as part of the overarching ambition of the HOIP. However, it was difficult to hold back the tide of poverty, inequality and deprivation being imposed by central government. In addition, it was queried whether it might be necessary to define "inequality" as it was a broad term;
- in relation to the design principle "to be ambitious and bold in vision and action within the resources available", it was easy to be bold and ambitious in vision but in action it was more difficult when there were no spare resources available. Other Members suggested that "within the resources available" should be removed as this was limiting and it was necessary to investigate all possibilities;
- the Community Partnership that had been most successful had been resourced by a Development Trust with enough income from wind farms to provide significant staffing support. If the HOIP was to be effective all Community Partnerships had to be properly resourced. This had not been addressed in the review of the HOIP and it was questioned how the delivery plan was going to address it;
- it was necessary to start to address the depopulation crisis Highland was facing and it was queried whether it should somehow be woven into all the themes of the HOIP delivery plan;
- the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Board purported to support the aspirations and ambitions of communities across Highland and concern was expressed that, having considered the Council's recommendation that it should meet in public in future, it had agreed to continue to meet in private. If there were agenda items that were of a private nature the Board could go into private session, and the decision was not acceptable;
- the report stated that the next step was to develop the delivery plan and that it, and the final HOIP, would be considered by the CPP Board in June. However, there was little hope of the delivery plan being delivered if the Council did not agree with it and it did not align with the Council Programme. It was therefore proposed, for good governance, that the delivery plan be an agenda item and discussed at the Council meeting on 27 June 2024, and this was accepted;

- the aspirations set out in the report were to be applauded. However, some of the statistics in the evidence summary at Appendix 2 to the report were cause for concern. Particular reference was made to the percentage of people in Highland who lived in remote and/or rural areas. Highland was, by nature, spread out and made up of small diverse communities, and it was necessary to focus on that going forward. Reference was also made to the reduction, in 22 years, in the number of 0-15 year olds in Highland, and the need to address depopulation was reiterated. In 2021, 43% of children had been identified as having Additional Support Needs yet the algorithm agreed by the Education Committee was geared towards reducing Pupil Support Assistant provision. Similarly, 75% of referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) were for young people between 12 and 17 years of age yet it was known from previous reports that referrals were taking up to a year to come to fruition. Finally, 24.5% of people of working age were neither employed nor seeking work, which was a distressing statistic, and it was necessary to understand why that was the case and put actions in place to try and resolve it;
- it was known that transport, childcare and housing provision were key factors in addressing depopulation, but it was questioned what was being done about them;
- the Community Partnership system worked very well. However, they did not have a budget to employ people and provide services so were dependent on the third sector and the input of councillors to drive things forward, and it was necessary to look at how they might evolve. Sutherland Community Partnership was looking at setting up a company that would work hand in hand with it to deliver services, and it was suggested that was the way forward;
- given the 70% increase, in 22 years, in people aged 75+, and the 9% reduction in the working age population, it was questioned what future-proofing was being done. If the plan was to provide care at home where possible, it would be necessary to depend more on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other services to address some needs. Loneliness and isolation were badly affecting mental health, and technology was already providing some companionship, information and reassurance via Telecare and voice assistants such as Alexa. Third sector services such as Morning Call also helped. It was suggested that all new builds should have built in Wi-Fi and plug in points near beds and in kitchens so people with mobility issues and cognitive impairment could easily access help. It was necessary to encourage future community workers with shared skills, whether they looked after children, disabled people or older people. Care should be local and on a salary scale commensurate with training. Combined with intelligent digital care, it might be possible to address the increase in need;
- there was a landscape of many partnership plans across Highland and it was questioned how partners could address the challenges facing communities, avoiding duplication, and ensure that the ideas in the report were effectively implemented, particularly in light of the current economic pressures;
- in relation to participation requests, a plea was made that community experts be viewed as good partners, their local knowledge be respected and there be transparency in any dealings with them;
- there were many components of the HOIP which sat best with individual Strategic Committees such as the Education and Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committees;
- it was questioned whether reports such as this should have a rurality impact assessment;
- the importance of prevention, which was a key enabler in the HOIP, was emphasised;
- it was queried why the educational attainment outcomes were not more explicitly connected to Prosperity and People. They also fed into tackling inequality and mental health issues in young people, and the importance of not thinking in silos was emphasised;



- the increase in the number of infants with developmental concerns recorded at the 27-month Health Visitor check was alarming. Information having been sought on the timeframe and whether it was related to Covid, the Head of Community Support, Contact and Engagement undertook to liaise with colleagues and respond to Ms S Atkin outwith the meeting;
- delivering adult social care was going to become increasingly difficult if rural depopulation was not addressed, and the ideas in the report were very much needed;
- in relation to CAMHS referrals for young people between 12 and 17 years of age, it was queried whether these needs emerged at these ages and were there opportunities to intervene earlier. The Head of Community Support, Contact and Engagement undertook to respond to Mr D Gregg outwith the meeting;
- in relation to CAMHS referrals, it was also necessary to support the parents but Adult Services were already under-resourced so it was questioned how that could be done;
- the report highlighted that a 10-30% higher income was needed to achieve a living wage in a rural area, and it was queried whether the Council and other public sector organisations factored that in when setting wages for rural employees;
- in relation to the vision set out in the HOIP, it would be helpful to include measurable objectives rather than broad aims, and information was sought, and provided, as to how it was intended to measure success or otherwise and how this would be presented;
- the statistics in the report were an unfavourable assessment of the current position but they provided an opportunity to improve, and the success of the HOIP would be measured in terms of seeing the benefits being delivered on the ground in communities;
- concern was expressed regarding the response to a letter to the First Minister asking for a review of the Care Home Contract. There was a lack of understanding from both the UK and Scottish Governments about the unique challenges Highland faced in terms of its large landmass and low population density, and how a “one size fits all” model did not work in Highland, and it was necessary to be aware of that when looking at how it was intended to deliver on the HOIP;
- it was necessary to target resources at biggest opportunity and the biggest threat, and the biggest opportunity in Highland was renewable energy. The Secretary of State for Scotland and the UK Government Minister for Energy were key to the prosperity of Highland and, reference having been made to a previous Motion to Full Council, a call was made for the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to secure an appointment with them and ensure the Council had a seat at the top table. The biggest threat was the shortage of care home beds, which was an impending crisis;
- it was necessary to teach the subjects employers wanted, and the need for more STEM subjects in schools was emphasised. STEM jobs paid £10k a year more than jobs in humanities, and more young people studying STEM subjects would enable them to stay, live and work in Highland;
- the importance of communicating what was taking place at the Community Planning Partnership Board was emphasised;
- it was important to engage with older people and encourage them early in life to take steps to live well for longer. There were an amazing number of community groups in rural areas, and it was queried how they would get involved in providing feedback. Inverness, although very large, was cut off in some ways, and many older people were not digitally able;
- it was necessary to think about age-friendly communities at an early stage in the housing development process, and consider aspects such as outdoor space, transport, social participation, community support and health services etc;
- tackling depopulation and many aspects of the HOIP required numerous organisations to work together, but it was right for the Council to reflect on the part it played;

- it was questioned whether some of the language used in the HOIP would be understandable to communities, and it was suggested that the use of Plain English would help;
- with particular reference to Caithness and the significant reduction in the number of young people over the past 22 years, it was suggested the “Prosperity” theme should be more practically focussed – for example, speed up the rollout of superfast broadband; small improvements to the A9, which could be done by Transport Scotland without any other agency being involved; reinstate consultant-led maternity services at Caithness General; improvements to mental health services, particularly for young people; and apprenticeship provision;
- rural communities would no longer be designated as “remote” in the Scottish Government’s Depopulation Plan, and the terms “Inner Highland”, where the population was growing quite quickly, and “Outer Highland” where the population was rapidly dropping, were suggested. Other Members added that the use of the word “remote” was a sign of a centralised culture, and that no community was remote depending where you started from;
- further to earlier comments regarding renewable energy, Drew Hendry MP had managed to arrange a meeting with the Energy Minister specifically to discuss the issue of energy prices in the Highlands, and this was welcomed;
- the intention to tackle the root cause, rather than the symptoms, of inequalities and depopulation was welcomed;
- in relation to school closures, keeping a school open was not enough to sustain a rural community, and it was necessary to look at the reasons why rural school rolls had declined and address aforementioned issues such as housing, transport and childcare;
- it had been said there was no demand for housing in some parts of Highland, but not all families who wanted to move to the area were on the Housing Register;
- it was welcomed that consideration was being given to how to attract investment into communities;
- it was queried what was being done about the 8% of school leavers not mentioned in the chart on page 35 of the papers;
- on the point being raised, an assurance was provided that third sector partners would be a key part of the Partnership Development Day referred to in the report;
- the need to work closely with the third sector and communities had been highlighted and, on the point being raised, an assurance was provided that third sector partners would be a key part of the Partnership Development Day referred to in the report;
- when Community Partnerships had been established, it had been understood they were going to be combined with Area Committees. If consideration was being given to reducing duplication and sharing resources, it was suggested this should be looked at again as it was often the same people that attended both meetings; and
- there were organisations that were lifting communities out of poverty, and it was necessary to work with them given many Highland residents were in poverty, and in-work poverty was on the increase.

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the engagement work that had been undertaken to date and the feedback received to reset the HOIP;
- ii. **AGREED** the revised draft HOIP;
- iii. **NOTED** the next steps for developing a delivery plan which would set out the actions for delivering the revised HOIP; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the delivery plan referred to at section 7.2 of the report be an agenda item and discussed at the Council meeting on 27 June 2024.

**12. Highland Council Delivery Plan 2024-2027  
Plana Lìbhrigidh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd 2024 – 2027**

**Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of Item 6i as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/04/24 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- the Council Leader explained that the delivery plan took forward the budget that had been approved in February 2024, and addressed some of the region's biggest issues, including growing the economy, developing the workforce, promoting net zero and energy security, and looking after the vulnerable. The plan demonstrated how the Council could make best use of its resources for a successful and sustainable future for Highland communities. The plan represented a unique joined-up, strategic approach, linking the Council's programme, the Highland Outcome and Investment Partnership budget, and the performance plan to provide a framework for governance and delivery. Extensive engagement and partnership working across all areas was expected;
- turning to the mentoring programme, the Leader provided assurance that, despite media reports to the contrary, the programme for young people would continue to deliver its valuable work, but was transitioning from a Glasgow-based to a Highland-based third sector organisation. It was hoped the mentors would be retained;
- the Leader of the Opposition highlighted the number of strategic, delivery and service plans that had been developed, and suggested it was important to ensure action and delivery. He welcomed the high-level service delivery plan but considered that it lacked detail on how the desired outcomes would be achieved. The issue of depopulation was not adequately addressed in the plan and, as an example, he highlighted the effect on remote and rural communities of the loss of a school, and the positive impact of creating community hubs. A quarterly rather than an annual review was requested;
- the reference in the plan to protecting families and ensuring opportunities for all school leavers was welcomed;
- plans for income generation, including augmented visitor experiences, were welcomed;
- the plan had been delivered late to Members. It lacked detail, with particular reference to workforce outsourcing and redeployment; reductions to childcare and carers, which should be discussed with trade unions; the future plans for the High Life Highland Ranger Service; lack of information in relation to the assessment of the school estate, noting this could cause worry to parents; insufficient information on solar PV panels and whether the milestones would be achieved within a two year period;
- important issues included the use of plain English, the provision of suitable homes, especially for the elderly, and continued engagement with the third sector;
- it was important to follow up on ensuring energy investment and innovation in the Highlands brought financial benefit to the Highlands;
- transformative change was key to future success and should be embedded across all services. The net zero portfolio was welcomed and the action plan should be considered by the Climate Change Committee on a regular basis;
- it was acknowledged that a more detailed plan would be presented in May 2024 and, in the meantime, the commitment to align with partners for a progressive and ambitious future was welcomed;
- capacity building for early learning and childcare was important to support communities and ensure sustainability. Pathways to positive destinations for the senior phase of education were also vital;

- education was not only about preparing young people for the work force, and the value of primary skills was highlighted. The academy model was summarised;
- in relation to plans for a single property service, it was important to support local contractors;
- the format of the report was welcomed;
- it was hoped there would be no cuts made to the MCR Pathways programme;
- effective communication with third sector partners was vital;
- more milestones were required for some initiatives, with specific reference to the motorhome scheme;
- Members were reminded that the detail of the plan would be presented to the relevant Strategic Committees, with points of clarification to the Full Council in May 2024;
- work with NHS Highland on Adult Social Care was referenced, and it was explained that this was reported regularly to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee. The importance of shifting the balance of care to the community was emphasised and, in relation to this, carer burn-out should be addressed. Inappropriate reduction in care packages should be avoided. More should be done to entice young people into careers in the care sector, noting that the provision of care at home packages were less costly than care home places;
- further detail on roads investment was sought; and
- the Leader reiterated the draft nature of the plan and that all Members would be involved at strategic committee level.

Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr R Stewart, moved as an **AMENDMENT** to delete the word “annual” and” insert the word “quarterly.”

On a vote being taken , the **MOTION** received 40 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, with no abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion**

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, Ms B Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, 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 G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr C Munro, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr A Rhind, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

### **For the Amendment**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr J MacGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart.

### **Decision**

The Council **NOTED**:-

- i. the Draft Council Delivery Plan for 2024-2027 as presented;

and **AGREED**:-

- ii. that following engagement with partners, the Final Delivery Plan come forward for Member approval at Council on 9 May 2024.

The Council also **NOTED**:-

- i. the Council Delivery Plan 2024-2027 would underpin the implementation of Council Programme 2022-2027, the Performance Plan 2022-2027 and the Budget Strategy for 2024-2027 and support the delivery of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan;
- ii. Delivery Plan progress would be reported on an annual basis to Council, with workstreams reported to the appropriate Strategic Committees and Boards; and
- iii. resources for the delivery of the workstreams were provided in part from core Service budgets, including the Strategic Improvement Team, augmented by earmarked reserves, as agreed at Council on 29 February 2024.

**13. Place Based Approaches to Strategic Capital and Asset Management**  
**Dòighean-obrach Stèidhichte air Àite a thaobh Stiùireadh Ro-innleachdail Calpa agus So-mhaoin**

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

**Mr K Gowans - as a close family member was an employee of HLH**  
**Mr H Morrison - as a close family member was employed with the Council's local Road section**

There had been circulated report No. HC/05/24 by the Chief Executive Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- the challenges with the current Capital Programme and those faced annually by successive Council Administrations in relation to capital funding were recognised. Innovative ways of realising funding had to be considered to provide for a long term investment plan to remedy roads infrastructure, school estate, Council depots and other infrastructure across the Council's asset base. This included creating sustainable income streams;
- a proposal was suggested that, no earlier than the Council meeting on 9 May 2024, a report be brought forward for Member consideration on a Highland Investment Plan, including a strong focus on the school estate;
- concern was expressed that Members needed to receive the above report in advance of the Council meeting on 9 May 2024 for their consideration;
- concern at the equity of educational provision for the vulnerable children attending St Clement's School, Dingwall was highlighted due to the poor condition of the estate and lack of facilities for pupils and staff;
- there was an opportunity to take immediate action on St Clement's School by supporting an amendment that outlined how a new school could be built with no impact on the Council's budget and to use the same funding source to agree, at the next Council meeting, on the next school to be constructed from the LEIP 3 list, namely Beaully Primary, Dunvegan Primary and Park Primary Schools;
- the Council had to take ownership of, and deliver, a plan to provide solutions for St Clement's School and other schools in priority need in Highland and there was a need to move forward in a considered manner;

- the proposals in relation to Corran Ferry infrastructure and approach to funding a replacement vessel was excellent news in the current economic and budgetary climate. Council Members and officers, UK and Scottish Governments and partner agencies were commended on the concerted work undertaken on this issue;
- the Corran Ferry proposals were a step closer to a sustainable solution which had to be achieved through a creative approach and working together with the UK and Scottish Governments and local communities;
- the above did not negate the need for a short term solution for a new vessel for the Corran Ferry rather than relying on ageing or chartered vessels;
- the proposed Corporate Asset Management strategy together with service specific strategies would achieve a more strategic, structured and efficient approach;
- the proposed approach to area mapping and consultation, and the development of a network of community hubs to support future service delivery, was highlighted;
- in progressing the approach to developing a community hub network for Highland, concern around the use of SIMD was recognised as a flawed concept regarding where need really might be in communities;
- there was concern the East Link proposal was a backward step in terms of climate change and rural depopulation. Building more roads encouraged car use and there was a need for additional investment in public transport and the potential to request the repurposing of this element of the City Region Deal;
- the East Link would improve connectivity, open up the area for development and provide much needed housing in Highland, including the demand associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport which would help tackle depopulation;
- the more prosperous an area was the more likely it would benefit from good biodiversity schemes;
- there was a query on the prioritisation matrix set out in the report and the weighting applied to improving sustainability and carbon impact compared to improving infrastructure;
- investment priorities should be based on improving the condition of the Council's school estate ahead of roads infrastructure, reference being made to the above mentioned schools and Charleston Academy;
- the significant additional investment in roads was essential in many areas and would improve connectivity for people in the Highlands and tourists visiting the area;
- it was queried how and where road infrastructure works would be progressed given capacity issues with current staffing levels;
- further information was required on the benefits of the Single Property Service given that the same staff and budgets under current arrangements would move into the new model;
- the increase in letting fees for school premises needed to be reviewed given the impact on the ability of voluntary organisations and charities to continue to use these community facilities;
- the Drumbuie Council Office was important for jobs and the Sutherland economy and should be retained and potentially considered for further investment;
- there was support for the repair and rationalisation of the Council's depots. This had been a concern for a number of years;
- there was a need to facilitate conversations on improving the Thurso school estate, on the basis the Council owned it, and for communities to explore the opportunities;
- it was queried how funding for maintenance programmes for Thurso High School and others with structural issues was decided if there was no timescale for their replacement;
- more detail needed to be provided to Members on how additional capital spending was affordable for the Council given its current budgetary challenges;

- the backlog that existed in terms of the maintenance of buildings and schools was highlighted and concern voiced that the challenges were not addressed by the strategy; and
- a capital investment plan was required that would deliver all needs over a period of time and not some projects in the short term.

Thereafter, 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:-

- ix. that no earlier than the Council meeting on 9 May, a report be brought forward for Member consideration on a Highland Investment Plan; to provide a strategic approach to delivering major capital investment in Council assets across the Highlands, including a strong focus on the school estate.

Mr A Christie seconded by Mrs A MacLean moved as an **AMENDMENT** to insert a new recommendation iv. as shown below and re-number the other recommendations set out in the report accordingly:-

- iv. the Council note that Scottish Government have confirmed an additional baselined 24/25 revenue funding of £62.7m Scotland wide as a consequence of the UK Spring Budget. Whilst the Council was awaiting clarification of our share of the funding it was expected to be in the order of £2.8m per annum on a recurring basis.

In view of the new revenue stream available the Council agree to approve the sum of £20m to build a new St Clement's School and include a fully funded scheme in the Capital Programme. The loan charges for St Clement's at the peak were in the order of £1.18m well within the anticipated funds mentioned above.

The phasing of the build and loan charges to be presented to the relevant Committees at an early meeting in the future together with a target completion date. The Council further agree to receiving a report at the next Council Meeting on utilising the balance £1.62m (£2.8m less £1.18m) to decide on the next school to be constructed from the LEIP 3 list namely Beaully Primary, Dunvegan Primary and Park Primary Schools.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 39 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, with 1 abstention. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion:**

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Ms B Campbell, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, 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 Loudon, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Ms M Reid, Mr A Rhind, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

### **For the Amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Ms B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Ms I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr J McGillivray, Ms P Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart.

**Abstention:**  
Mr C Ballance

## **Decision**

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the updates and next steps for rationalisation and/or cost reduction approaches across the Council's property and non-property assets, in line with the budget agreed at Council on 29 February 2024;
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed investment in Corran Ferry Infrastructure, Roads and other Non-Building Capital Projects as set out in Section 6 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the approach to funding a replacement Corran Ferry vessel based on the option set out in Section 6 of the report;
- iv. **APPROVED** the development of a Corporate Asset Management strategy covering all Council assets, and the development of Service-specific Asset Management strategies as might be appropriate;
- v. **APPROVED** the proposals in respect of a strategic capital planning approach across all Council assets;
- vi. **APPROVED** the proposed approach to area mapping and consultation, and the development of a network of community hubs to support future service delivery;
- vii. **NOTED** the draft Strategic Capital Bid Application Process and Prioritisation Matrix attached as Appendix 1 to the report;
- viii. **NOTED** the updated position with regards to the creation of and implementation of a Single Property Service (SPS) and that the final detail on the shape of the SPS required to be linked to the restructuring of the Council's senior management team; and
- ix. **AGREED** that no earlier than the Council meeting on 9 May, a report be brought forward for Member consideration on a Highland Investment Plan; to provide a strategic approach to delivering major capital investment in Council assets across the Highlands, including a strong focus on the school estate.

## **14. Developing a Community Wealth Building Strategy A' Leasachadh Ro-innleachd airson Saidhbhreas Coimhearsnachd a Thogail**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections 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  
Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/06/24 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- this strategy was about keeping the Highland pound in Highland, using local resources, building resilience within communities, supporting local enterprise and addressing the issue of depopulation by enabling people to thrive in Highland;
- there had already been conversations with partners, third sector organisations and local businesses and there would be a Member workshop, which all Members were encouraged to attend, to help develop the strategy;
- it was hoped that the organisations contacted would look at this meaningfully;
- community wealth building provided a people-centred approach to economic development;



- the importance of fair employment by recruiting from priority groups, paying the living wage and building progression routes for workers was emphasised;
- it was hoped that the Highland Employability Partnership, My Future My Success and the Council's apprenticeship and graduate programmes would see further support from this strategy; and
- although the Council would no longer be using the external agency MCR Pathways, a more bespoke programme to improve transition planning between schools, partners and adult employability services would now be created.

The Council **AGREED** the draft Community Wealth Building Strategy found at Appendix 1 to the report and **NOTED** that a period of public engagement on the draft would now commence, with a final strategy coming back for consideration in September 2024.

## 15. Highland Council Digital Strategy and Ambition Ro-innleachd agus Àrd-amas Didseatach Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

**Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/07/24 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation for the report, and for addressing Members' concerns about some of the technical risks in advance of the meeting;
- the Digital Strategy stated an aspiration to reach level 5 of the Gartner Digital Maturity model by 2027, which meant that the Council would get to a point in 2027 where accurate real-time data, which was needed to make good decisions, was available, and there was a focus on the end user, the customer. Attention was drawn to other methodologies in the report including The Open Group Architecture Framework (TOGAF), Lean 6 Sigma and the Define/Measure/Analyse/Improve/Control method;
- three words that were key to the report were strategy, ambition and benefit;
- to achieve streamlined processes, gain maximum benefit from income generation and give the people of Highland an accessible, straightforward user experience, it was essential to keep the Digital Strategy on the agenda;
- people were at the heart of what the Council did, and Members wanted to be at the stage where automated processes, which benefited both customers and the Council, were commonplace. Giving customers the option of being able to opt out or continue with their renewal using automated direct debit or card payment would give the customer the freedom of not having to reapply each year, and the Council would not have the additional administrative tasks of sending reminders and chasing for payments. Natural drop offs would be reduced and resource time would be better spent. Streamlining processes took time, resource and needed to be future-proofed, but it was necessary to proceed steadily and carefully. The data foundations were essential and would take time and specialist input to work effectively and be secure for customers and the Council. It was necessary to have a greater understanding of AI and be in control of it. The "My Council" programme was progressing on target with strategic steps to fulfil an advanced end-to-end customer journey, not just digitally but by other channels, to ensure accessibility for all. The programme would work because the My Council Board were putting the citizen at the centre of customer engagement. There was a lot of work being undertaken to progress with the Council's digital ambition, which would be monitored regularly at the Redesign Board. Confidence was

expressed that the Digital Strategy was realistic and achievable within the next couple of years, and support was expressed for the recommendations;

- if the Strategy was successful, Members would be able to monitor performance indicators in real time and address issues as soon as they started to arise, which would help the Council to improve performance;
- services such as NDAS (Neuro Developmental Assessment Service) and CAMHS were done in partnership yet the Council and NHS Highland were using different IT systems, and it was questioned where the digital ambition was in terms of them using the same system so notes could be shared and services for children with severe challenges and needs could be improved;
- it was important to remember that many people, such as those who were living in poverty or homeless, did not have tablets or smartphones and visited agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau to use the telephone. It was questioned what was being done to ensure that disadvantaged people were not further excluded from society and suggested that there should be a major strand in the Strategy in that regard. As an example, it was suggested that terminals could be provided in Council buildings that people could come in and use, perhaps with some mentoring or support;
- TOGAF was comprised of a number of pillars, one of which was data, and it was essential for the Council to get better at using and sharing data to support the outcomes it wanted to achieve;
- one of the biggest ways digital technology impacted service delivery was the Council's website and, it having been queried whether there were any plans to make it easier to navigate, it was confirmed that the redesign of the website was within the scope of the "My Council" programme;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether consideration had been given to the provision of case management software for Elected Members, which would help in gathering information when subject access requests were received;
- it was hoped that the "My Council" programme would make it easier for the public and groups such as Community Councils and Parent Councils to contact the right person;
- reference was made to intergenerational work that had taken place elsewhere whereby young people had attended lunch clubs, for example, and shown older people how to use laptops, tablets etc;
- with reference to the earlier item on community wealth building, it was queried how, through the Digital Strategy process, the Council could help communities and whether there was a way of increasing digital connectivity by supporting community groups that could not afford to purchase the digital equipment they needed;
- it was queried how many citizens had been involved in health-checking the Strategy;
- 14% of households in Highland still could not access superfast broadband and many did not have a good mobile phone signal;
- the more things were digitised the greater the legal risk and the risk of cyber attack, and information was sought, and provided, as to what assessments had been made in that regard;
- the Council should be capturing information once and using it for greater efficiency, and examples were provided in that regard;
- it was important to be aware that digital carbon was a real cost in the current climate emergency, and statistics were cited on the carbon cost of working from home using digital technology and of mobile phones versus landline phones;
- information was sought in relation to recruitment and whether there was a robust process in place to ensure that the Council did not lose IT staff to other public sector agencies after investing in their training;
- a plea was made that the Council adhered to the first line in the proposed Digital Ambition, namely, to design Council services with customers at the centre, supporting the customer journey through to its outcome. It was added that this should not just be

digital customers, and the importance of answering phone calls and letters and keeping Service Points available was emphasised;

- it was suggested that lessons could be learned from NHS Highland and the integration of GP and hospital IT systems;
- it was queried whether the Council was looking at what other local authorities were doing in terms of digital efficiency as there might be an existing blueprint that could be adapted;
- reference was made to the pop-up chat window that appeared on some websites, and it was queried whether there was scope for something similar on the Council website;
- for approximately the next 20 years there was going to be a proportion of society that was not digitally able, and it was questioned how the Council could work with third sector organisations such as AbilityNet and Red Chair Highland in that regard;
- landlines would be obsolete by 2025 and, whilst telecommunications companies would have a responsibility to advise people, there would be those who would not be keen to use digital technology;
- speaking to a human adviser was what many people wanted;
- it was important to engage with groups such as the Highland Senior Citizens Network which represented older people across Highland;
- there was a good deal of distrust of digital technology in terms of data security, and people also feared catastrophes such as the Post Office scandal. An assurance was therefore sought that there would be sufficient human oversight of IT systems to identify any issues in good time;
- digital technology should be viewed as providing additionality to the customer experience rather than a replacement for traditional service delivery methods;
- the use of the term “customer” implied an element of choice, and it was suggested that taxpayer, citizen or resident would be more fitting;
- as websites became more advanced there was a tendency to include more interactive media such as videos, and it was important to be mindful that this rendered such websites unusable by those with very slow broadband, which was the case for many people in Highland;
- examples were provided of data being used to inform service delivery and make efficiencies, such as three local authorities overlaying their procurement services data which had led to huge economies of scale;
- with reference to comments regarding older people not using digital technology, it was commented that it was not all about typing and screens; voice assistants such as Alexa could be used to great effect;
- reference was made to complaints that forms on the Council’s website were in PDF format which meant they had to be printed out to complete, and it was suggested that forms should be digital, allowing online completion, and people could be taught how to attach electronic signatures;
- concern was expressed regarding instances of digital discrimination in Nairnshire where pockets of poor signal meant that people could not access the mobile internet and those who could afford were paying excessive sums for satellite internet. Not having Wi-Fi also excluded people from having electric vehicles; and
- the need to learn about digital technology was not restricted to older people, and it was suggested there was a need for in-person classes in local areas.

Thereafter, the Council:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed Digital Ambition in section 6.3 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the proposed implementation approach in section 7 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** the proposed approach to deliver Digital Foundations could be fully resourced for two years from ICT earmarked reserves; and

- iv. **NOTED** that, during the two year period, an assessment would be made of the effectiveness of the use of resources and a case made for continuation if justified.

**16. Annual Report – Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs), Benchmarking and Best Value 2022/23**

**Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh – Taisbeanairan Coileanaidh Reachdail, Tomhas-mheasaidh agus an Luach an Fheàrr 2022/23**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections 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  
Mr K Gowans - as a close family member was an employee of HLH  
Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/08/24 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the detailed and informative report. Members appreciated the easy-to-read layout;
- the challenges in gathering timeous data for the report was acknowledged;
- significant improvements were highlighted within the report, although there was still room for further improvement. In this regard special thanks were conveyed to officers for their part in improving the Council's performance;
- as 20% of the targets had no significant progress, it was felt that regular review of these services would be important;
- the KPI for sickness - days lost per employee - was concerning as it was 50% higher than 2021. In this regard, it was queried why this was and what was being done to address the issue;
- information was sought and provided how carbon emissions had risen since last year but the performance was marked as 'on target'. In this regard, it was queried if the targets had been aligned with the Administration's 2035 target and also if the emissions targets could be revised downwards to reach Net Zero earlier. Members were reminded that Net Zero was not the end goal as this only meant that things would not get worse;
- it was highlighted that the target for accidental injury was significantly higher than the actual figure. It was suggested that the target be reduced as part of striving for continual improvement;
- it was felt that targets set by benchmark figures with other local authorities could be changed to benchmark against our own previous years' performance;
- regarding planning application performance, significant concern was raised against the poor performing major development category as this might contribute to a suggestion of Highland being closed for business, or anti-business. However, praise was conveyed to the Planning Service for their ongoing hard work despite challenges faced such as staff shortages and complex cases;
- information was sought and provided on how the reduction of costs for School Meals had been achieved;
- regarding School Transportation it was queried if the Council would be able to achieve the target and make the required savings;
- clarification was sought why the net cost per visit to Libraries performance was red despite performance being below the target;

- it was confirmed that, as of 1 March 2024, the performance of Kinship was at 26% of children in formal kinship care which exceeded the 2026/27 target. Commendation and congratulations were expressed to officers for their hard work;
- it was queried if blank data performance cells would be updated in the next report. In this regard it was highlighted that missing data would be included at future meetings for local governance;
- concern was raised regarding School Attendance performance indicators of 90% and the target of 90.2%. It was felt that 10% school absenteeism every day was too high and the Council should strive to improve this. In this regard it was queried how the target of 90.2% compared to other local authorities and if Friday absenteeism was affecting the overall performance. Further to this it was suggested that Area Committee data for school attendance figures should be standardised across Highland with reference to the whole of Highland and Scottish figures;
- further background statistics were sought regarding school absenteeism data, such as condoned absenteeism. In addition, the Council was urged to not forget the small percentage of absenteeism cases even if attendance percentage targets were met;
- it was requested to include clear cross referencing between the same measures within appendices 1 & 2 of the report for additional clarity;
- it was felt that the performance indicators were remarkable in view of the local authority funding provided by the Scottish Government;
- the delivery plan should include meaningful stretch aims to strive for continuous improvement;
- regarding the now closed Avonlea care establishment for children and young people, it was queried what had happened to the residents housed there for care and what the reason for the closure was;
- regarding the Care Inspectorate Report it was queried if the actions were derived from self-assessment, and what date the next Care Inspectorate Report was due. In addition, concern was raised that reported weak performances could negatively impact on the recruitment of new foster care families;
- the value of the KPI data in guiding the Council to care for the community was highlighted;
- congratulations were expressed to local housing officers for their hard work to reduce rent arrears. In this regard, it was confirmed that the Cost of Living (Scotland) Act, passed on 6 October 2022, had suspended evictions in most circumstances and this would run to the end of March 2024;
- information was sought why streetlighting energy consumption had dropped by approximately 10%;
- whilst women managers in top 2% of earners was 41.1%, it was queried why this was not 50%;
- further information was sought on NHS care delivery contracts which had been handed back by the providers and what the strategy was to overcome this;
- it was suggested that Housing Repairs prioritise maintenance plans to reduce the need for emergency type repairs. In addition, it was hoped that void house repairs would be prioritised to have the properties readily available as soon as possible;
- concern was raised regarding a number of unintended consequences of operational decisions which had impacted on the Council's performance figures;
- regarding Adult Services, it was queried what percentage of adults 65+ who required care, were receiving it. In addition, further data was sought at Area or Ward level how performance had dropped to 31<sup>st</sup> despite the target being 16<sup>th</sup>;
- it was queried if some Council Services were suffering from a lack of Scottish Government (SG) guidance to support them and if the Council should urge SG for guidance when required; and
- considering community values was emphasised when contemplating changes to amenities or services within a community.

Thereafter, the Council **NOTED**:-

- i. performance of the Council's SPIs for 2022/23 outlined in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
- ii. Local Government Benchmarking Framework emerging trends set out in section 5.4 of the report; and
- iii. new approach being undertaken by Audit Scotland with regard to the audit of Best Value as detailed in section 6.1 and the outcome of their reported work for 2022/23 in section 6.2 of the report.

## 17. **Contract Standing Orders** **Gnàth-riaghailtean Cùmhnaint**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/09/24 by the Interim Head of Corporate Finance.

During the discussion the following main points were raised:-

- the inclusion of Sustainable Procurement in the Contract Standing Orders was commended, particularly the Council's commitment to working towards embedding the principles of sustainability at all stages of procurement activities;
- in relation to Sustainable Procurement, information was sought, and provided, regarding whether the best value economic and environmental outcomes listed were given equal status in terms of evaluating tenders, and how they would be weighted. Further, it was asked how environmental and community outcome successes would be measured, if officers would be evaluated when carrying out procurement processes and if the Climate Change Team would be involved to give advice in terms of carbon emissions; and
- in response to a question regarding supporting local businesses and communities, the Chief Executive advised Members that as processes were nuanced, the team aimed to get value at macro level out of contracts, and there was ambition to support local businesses. It was stated that it was an ongoing challenge but one the team was aware of, and they would continue to think about how best they do it.

The Council **APPROVED** the changes to the Contract Standing Orders and **AGREED** that these become effective from 1 April 2024.

## 18. **Treasury Management Strategy Statement** **Aithris Ro-innleachd Stiùiridh Roinn an Ionmhais**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/10/24 the Interim Head of Corporate Finance.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- in terms of the Scheme of Delegation, and while acknowledging the CIPFA Code of Practice, consideration needed to be given to the potential for the report to be presented to the Corporate Resources Committee in future;
- concern was expressed at the overall amount of debt the Council was carrying and that more should be done to either curtail the level of borrowing or increase repayments;
- more focus was required on the repayment of capital given the significant and increasing impact of loan charges on the Council's revenue budget and to protect communities and future generations;

- in common with all local authorities, borrowing was essential to fund new schools, roads and bridges and other infrastructure and a balance had to be achieved. It was recognised the cost of those borrowings had increased as a result of the cost of living crisis;
- a key issue was improving the understanding of the complexities around managing the Council's debt and its affordability to make it work for the Council and communities to improve infrastructure and to adjust levels according to need;
- various scenarios should be provided to the Corporate Resources Committee on the impact of refinancing the debt if interest rates increased to very high levels and what the Council should be doing to protect its position;
- a key change for the Council might be around the general power of competencies and the ability of local authorities to borrow and lend money;
- in relation to the Council's investment strategy it was queried how environmental, social and governance factors were balanced against the need to maximise returns on investment; and
- an update was sought, and provided, that as a consequence of the UK Spring Budget additional revenue funding would be allocated to Scottish local authorities in 2024/25 and that confirmation was awaited on the Council's share of this funding.

The Council **APPROVED** the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Statement for 2024/25 and the Prudential Indicators as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

## 19. Decision of Standards Commission for Scotland – Hearing Co-dhùnaidhean Coimisean Inbhean na h-Alba – Èisteachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/11/24 by the Head of Legal and Governance/Monitoring Officer.

The Council **NOTED** the decision of the Standards Commission of Scotland.

## 20. 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 December 2023 which were **NOTED**.

## 21. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Council **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public were excluded from the meeting for item 22 only on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

## 22. Reconfiguration of the Senior Leadership Team of Highland Council Ath-rèiteach Prìomh Sgioba Ceannardais Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

There had been **circulated to Members only Confidential** Report No. HC/12/24 by the Chief Executive.

Following detailed discussion, the Council **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

**23. Notices of Motion  
Brathan Glusaid**

**Declarations of Interest – The undernoted Members made Declarations of Interest in respect of item 23 iv as owners of campervans and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for this item:-**

**Mrs A MacLean  
Mr P Oldham**

**Transparency Statement: Mr M Cameron made a Transparency Statement in respect of item 23 ii as a croft owner and a member of the Scottish Crofters Federation. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

The following Notices of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance:-

**(i) This Council:**

- Abhors the attack, killing, raping and kidnapping carried out by Hamas in Israel on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023;
- Is horrified and appalled by the excessive loss of life in Gaza since the Israeli attack on it;
- Recognises the gravity of the 26<sup>th</sup> January order by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to the State of Israel regarding the right of the Palestinian people to protection from genocide;
- Acknowledges that the UK government, as a signatory to the 1948 Genocide Convention, is obliged to take all steps to prevent genocide, and calls on the UK government to ensure that the State of Israel complies with the interim measures issued on 26th January by the ICJ;
- Is further appalled by the spreading violence and killing spreading from Gaza across the Middle East;
- Calls for a complete bilateral ceasefire at the earliest opportunity;
- Hopes that a two state solution for Israel and Palestine may emerge after subsequent international negotiations

**Signed:** Dr C Birt Mrs A Maclean Mrs K MacLean Mrs T Robertson  
Mr D Gregg Mr R MacKintosh Mr A Baldrey

**Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:**

This Motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Following a summary of the Motion, reference was made to the humanitarian disaster currently taking place in Gaza and of the horrors that had taken place in Israel on 7 October 2023 when innocent civilians, going about their daily business, were killed and kidnapped. It was highlighted that the first duty of any government was to protect and defend its citizens and to ensure that those who had been kidnapped were returned safely to their families and the state of Israel's right to do so was acknowledged. However, the world had witnessed the indiscriminate killing of people who were victims of the war. The world could only watch the daily struggles of the people caught up in the war, while trying to find safe routes into Gaza to provide essential humanitarian aid. It was important that the views of people in Highland about this conflict be known and Council was asked to support the Motion.



It was highlighted that a ceasefire would save lives and that it had to happen now and it was requested that the Motion be amended to reflect that a ceasefire be immediate and permanent. This was supported by the Council.

The Council **AGREED** the amended Motion as follows:-

This Council:

- Abhors the attack, killing, raping and kidnapping carried out by Hamas in Israel on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023;
- Is horrified and appalled by the excessive loss of life in Gaza since the Israeli attack on it;
- Recognises the gravity of the 26<sup>th</sup> January order by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to the State of Israel regarding the right of the Palestinian people to protection from genocide;
- Acknowledges that the UK government, as a signatory to the 1948 Genocide Convention, is obliged to take all steps to prevent genocide, and calls on the UK government to ensure that the State of Israel complies with the interim measures issued on 26th January by the ICJ;
- Is further appalled by the spreading violence and killing spreading from Gaza across the Middle East;
- Calls for a complete, immediate and permanent bilateral ceasefire;
- Hopes that a two state solution for Israel and Palestine may emerge after subsequent international negotiations

- (ii) Highland Council recognises; the contribution made by the farmers, crofters, growers, and the wider food and drink industry to the Highland economy, environment, and community.

Agrees, as part of tackling the environmental priorities for Highland Council, the Council will consider ways to encourage residents, where possible, to shop locally, taking advantage of home-grown, affordable, and nutritious produce, including meat, dairy, and plant-based options, thus reducing food miles and boosting the local economy. Agrees, to further enhancing our partnerships alongside our arable, livestock, and dairy farmers. by, where possible, encouraging that all food and drinks provided by the council are sourced from local suppliers, and always include meat and dairy option, alongside plant-based produce.

**Signed:** Mr R Stewart    Mr A MacDonald

### **Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:**

This Motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

During discussion, Mr MacDonald, as seconder, spoke in support of the Motion, but suggested the following revision:

“I call for Highland Council to consider what could be done to improve the opportunity for local buying to help crofters and other producers in the Highlands.”

In addition, Ms Willis also suggested a further amendment in that the second paragraph be deleted and replace with the following:

“Agrees, as part of tackling the environmental priorities for Highland Council, that Council will continue to work with the Highland Good Food Partnership to develop the Highland Good Food Nation Plan, and will consider responding to the Scottish Government Good Food Nation Bill consultation.”

Both these additions were accepted and the Council **AGREED** the amended Motion as follows:

Highland Council recognises; the contribution made by the farmers, crofters, growers, and the wider food and drink industry to the Highland economy, environment, and community.

Agrees, as part of tackling the environmental priorities for Highland Council, that Council will continue to work with the Highland Good Food Partnership to develop the Highland Good Food Nation Plan, and will consider responding to the Scottish Government Good Food Nation Bill consultation.”

And for Highland Council to consider what can be done to improve the opportunity for local buying to help crofters and other producers.”

- (iii) In the Holyrood Stage 3 budget debate in February, the Deputy First Minister announced that the Scottish Government will now explore options for introducing a Power of General Competence to give local authorities significantly greater powers to act in the way they think fit for their area.

This Council agrees to ask the Leader to write to the Deputy First Minister to express our support for such a Power to be introduced as soon as possible, and to engage actively with COSLA, as a matter of urgency, to explore all the viable options, including in particular, the ability to raise revenue from activities which cause harm to our land, or disbenefit our people.

**Signed:** Mr C Ballance Ms K Willis

### **Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:**

This Motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Following a summary of the Motion, it was highlighted that a Power of General Competence was potentially transformative that could have positive changes to local democracy and Councils. At present Councils could not do anything unless they were specifically empowered to in legislation. The Power of General Competence would allow Councils to do things unless it was specifically prohibited in legislation and was an immense change. The Motion would authorise the Leader of the Council to lobby the Deputy First Minister to express the Council's support for such a power and engage with CoSLA to explore viable options.

The Council **AGREED** the Motion.

### **(iv) Tourist Tax and Motorhomes**

In January, MSPs voted to exclude motorhomes and campervans from the new Tourist Tax unless they are staying at a campsite. This will further incentivise roadside parking and camping in the Highlands, where overnight parking by motorhomes and campervans, and “wild camping”, is already creating significant problems in many rural areas.

Local Authorities will be given the powers to administer the Tourist Tax and introduce their own charges, therefore this Council agrees to write to Scottish Ministers asking them to reconsider their decision to exclude motorhomes and campervans from the Tourist Tax, and to allow Local Authorities to decide what is excluded from the Tourist Tax in their area, and how the tax revenue is spent.

**Signed:** Ms K Willis Mr C Ballance

## **Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:**

This Motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- an estimated 200,000 motor homes (etc) visited the Highlands every year and already many did not stay overnight in caravan sites, partly due to the lack of facilities to deal with this volume. Anecdotal evidence suggested that for every night staying on a camp site, another 2-3 nights would be spent in car parks, laybys or other non-payment areas. This was likely to increase if the Tourist Tax was only charged to those staying at camp sites;
- due to end of NatureScot's Better Places funding, there would be no Highland Council seasonal rangers patrolling tourist hotspots and consequently problems of inappropriate parking and behaviour would be further exacerbated;
- the inclusion of all motor homes in the Tourist levy, not just those staying in camp sites, would generate considerable revenue for Highland Council to invest in infrastructure, facilities and services which would improve the visitor experience and the lives of Highland residents. Revenue could also be used to rebuild the Ranger Team and to supplement the Team with seasonal Rangers;
- not all motor homes using car parks caused problems and, instead of a regional response, perhaps a local Area approach would be more appropriate;
- it was acknowledged that the levy would be harder to implement for those motor homes not staying in camp sites. Although modern technology could be a way forward, there had to be a well thought out process in place;
- the decision as to what was and was not included in the Tourist Tax should be a decision for local authorities;
- these proposals were already being considered by the Administration but it was important to take into account that the effect this had on Bed and Breakfast establishments who were obliged to collect the Tourist Tax;
- the current voluntary proposal of £40 disadvantaged the formal camp sites and drove camper vans into off site locations, thus increasing littering and waste;
- it was suggested that camper vans, motor home and caravans users spent less than other tourists in the local economy but yet used ferries, very much to the disadvantage of locals, and also benefited from the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) which, it was argued, Scottish Tax payers were subsidising. It was suggested therefore that a mechanism be put in place to ensure that such vehicles displayed a disc indicating they had paid the levy and that they would not then be entitled to the RET on ferries. It was suggested that the Council write to CalMac in this regard;
- it was contended that there was economic benefit to the Highland economy, given the cost of hiring motor homes locally and many would also visit local restaurants etc;

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- sometimes motor homes were used due to the lack of available holiday accommodation and there was a potential, therefore, of having an unintended negative economic consequence; and
- it was questioned how to define Highland residents using camper vans and how were these identified.

Mr A MacDonald, seconded by Mr A Graham, moved the following amendment to be added to the motion:

“That all vehicles with sleeping accommodation, i.e. caravans and campervans are required to have a carnet/disc displayed on their windscreen to verify that £40 tourist tax has been paid via the Highland Council website, that authorises that vehicle to travel in Highland Region for a week or part thereof.

Furthermore these vehicles will no longer be entitled to the low price ‘road equivalent tariff’ on Caledonian MacBrayne ferries.”

However, this amendment was ruled as not competent and consequently Mr A MacDonald withdrew his amendment.

The Council **AGREED** the motion as presented.

- (v) This council recognises the importance of meaningful debate when discussing matters relating to the business of the Full Council. That being the case an amendment to standing order 19 will be made to increase the time allowed for each speaker from 5 minutes to 10 minutes.

**Signed:** Mr R Gale    Mr A Christie

This Motion was not accompanied with a financial assessment. Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order No.12, this Motion was therefore not debated and was deferred until the next Council meeting.

The meeting ended at 2.43pm.

**The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 20 March 2024 at 10.30 am.

**Present:**

Ms S Atkin

Mr J Bruce

Mrs I Campbell

Ms S Fanet (Chair)

Mr J Grafton

Mr P Logue

Mr D Louden

Ms M Ross

Ms K Willis (Vice Chair) (remote)

**Non-Members also present:**

Mr M Baird (remote)

Mr C Ballance

Ms L Kraft (remote)

Mr R MacKintosh

Mr J McGillivray (remote)

Mr P Oldham (remote)

Mrs T Robertson (remote)

Mr K Rosie (remote)

**In attendance:**

Ms K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive

Mr B Cameron, Interim Head of Housing and Building Maintenance

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager

Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Project Manager

Ms I MacMillan, Project Manager

Ms S James-Gaukroger, Climate Change Coordinator

Ms R Burbaite, Climate Change Coordinator

Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer

Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

Mr M Nixon, 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.**

**Ms S Fanet 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 A Graham, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs P Munro and Ms L Niven.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

### 3. Presentation – Highlands and Islands Climate Hub Taisbeanadh – Hub Gnàth-shìde na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean

Joan Lawrie, Highlands and Islands Climate Hub Manager, explained that Highlands and Islands Climate Hub (the Hub) was part of a growing national network of climate action hubs, funded by the Scottish Government, which supported community organisations to carry out community-led climate action activities. She then introduced a film, “Climate Action: Highlands and Islands”, which told the story of a selection of the Hub’s inspiring members as they showcased the action they were taking to combat the climate emergency.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- it was great to see climate action activity happening in every part of Highland and the Northern Isles, and thanks were expressed for the inspiring and well-made film;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including whether community hydro schemes provided electricity for the communities they served; whether there was anything the Council could do to support more community energy schemes across Highland; links with other organisations such as Community Energy Scotland; and whether there was a directory of funding sources for community groups/projects;
- climate change was beyond the point where a little bit of action was sufficient, and there was a need for serious leadership from public bodies;
- the island communities of Eigg and Gigha had long-established community energy schemes, and were very helpful to other community groups looking to set up similar ventures;
- in relation to the Polycrub tunnels seen in the film, information was sought on where the plastic was sourced, the life expectancy, and what would be done with it afterwards. Ms Lawrie undertook to find out and revert to Members;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the film was available online and a link would be shared with Committee Members. Community screenings could also be provided if community groups were interested, and a projector and cinema-size screen was available to borrow for that purpose. Members added that there was a cinema at the Seaboard Centre, and an invitation was extended to screen the film at the Fisherfolk Festival in May. Interest was also expressed in screening the film at Bonar Bridge Community Hall, and attention was drawn to another excellent film, “Riverwoods”;
- coastal erosion was an issue in the Black Isle and the Seaboard Villages, and interest was expressed in the coastal erosion work taking place in Golspie;
- there would be businesses and commercial organisations that would want the services offered by the Hub, and it was queried whether consideration had been given to a subscription model;
- it would be good to consider how the Council might develop its working relationship with the Hub and better understand how community wealth building and climate action might be enabled;
- in relation to renewables and how to better develop opportunities in and directly for communities, it was explained that the role of the Hub was to build

capacity and confidence within communities to take the opportunities that might be afforded to them; and

- it was highlighted that the Highlands and Islands Climate Festival, which was run by the Hub, would be running from 1 September to 30 September 2024.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the film.

#### **4. Net Zero Strategy – Action Plan and Supporting Workstreams Progress Report** **Ro-innleachd Neoni Lom – Plana-gnìomha agus Aithisg Adhartais a Thaobh Taic do Shruthan-obrach**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/1/24 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- officers were thanked for the detailed report;
- it was confirmed that the Net Zero Strategy was considered to be one of the core workstreams of the Council;
- it was necessary to think outside of silos, and it was disappointing to note the difficulties highlighted regarding cross-service collaboration;
- it was queried if section 7.4 of the report referred to establishing a hierarchy of more readily achievable actions;
- behavioural change required a sophisticated communications strategy, and an update was sought in that regard;
- school buildings were large carbon emitters, and it was queried how children's energy awareness education was progressing;
- it was felt that nature restoration projects could be scaled up at speed in each Council ward. In addition, an update was sought on the Council's ecological strategy and it was queried if the Council was reaching out to other organisations such as Scotland: The Big Picture and Trees for Life for guidance;
- food waste in schools was an ongoing concern, and it was suggested that focus be placed on primary schools improving from bronze to silver status in the Soil Association Food for Life awards;
- concern was expressed that matters could drift if firm dates, actions and responsibilities were not clearly specified. It was added that it was necessary to be careful regarding reputational risk if target dates were seen to keep changing. The Interim Depute Chief Executive acknowledged that there was a need for greater rigour in terms of indicators and targets, and explained that it was anticipated that, by the May Committee, officers would be in a position to provide greater assurance around the activity taking place and the impact it was having;
- it was requested that Elm Trees be included in the action relating to Ash dieback. In this regard it was queried if there was a replanting plan with similar but disease-free or more resilient strains;
- regarding mapping of Highland carbon resources, it was suggested that the possibility of utilising the Planning Service's database be explored;

- in relation to procurement and community wealth building, it was felt there was a gap as capital procurement and Housing Revenue (HRA) procurement were not in scope;
- regarding sustainable business travel, a regular report comparing the number of petrol/diesel vehicles purchased/leased each year with the number of zero emissions vehicles was suggested. In addition, information was requested on the average mileage of the 750 cars and light commercial vehicles referred to in the report as the greater the mileage the greater the opportunity to offset the increased lease costs associated with EVs. The Interim Depute Chief Executive undertook to circulate the available data to Members;
- in response to concern that 50% of HRA housing stock was not technically viable for full retrofit measures to meet the required energy standards, it was clarified that these properties could be retrofitted but they would not achieve the Band B target;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the lack of progress in terms of helping Council tenants reduce energy consumption, and it was hoped that the Heat in Buildings legislation would be taken into account in looking at possible solutions for social housing;
- regarding waste, it was queried if there were any plans for composting or furniture recycling;
- information was sought, and provided, on funding sources and whether the Energy Team would seek to produce its own revenue streams;
- whilst the timeline for determining the cost of Net Zero Energy Surveys was 24 months, it was queried what the target was for completion of the identified works;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that officers would seek to organise a workshop for all Members with Zero Waste Scotland regarding the circular economy;
- regarding section 5.2 of the report, as the Scottish Government's independent advisers had stated that Scotland's climate target was now unreachable it was queried what implications this would have for the Council's interim 2030 target. The Interim Depute Chief Executive confirmed that officers would take stock following the recent announcement and respond at the next meeting of the Committee;
- it was queried what enforcement or encouragement could be implemented regarding the replanting of trees as part of agreed planning applications;
- it was highlighted that rewilding also included bodies of water, and reference was made to the announcement by NatureScot regarding seagrass planting programmes; and
- information was sought, and provided, as to why the fully costed Net Zero Action Plan had not been part of the budget setting process rather than entirely separate.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** a revised approach to the development of the Net Zero Action Plan would be brought to the Committee in May for consideration;



- ii. **NOTED** a workshop was scheduled in April 2024 to provide Members with the opportunity to provide input to the development of the Climate Change Impact Assessment;
- iii. **NOTED** a bespoke Climate Training workshop would be delivered to the Council's Corporate Management Team in March/April 2024 prior to wider roll out; and
- iv. **NOTED** the updates provided for all of the Net Zero Strategy Workstreams set out in the appendices.

**5. The Council Response to Social Housing Net Zero Standard: Consultation Inbhe Neoni Lom Taigheadais Shòisealta: Co-chomhairleachadh**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/02/24 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the Government would provide extra funding to the Council to aid in the installation of clean heating systems, and on the availability of grants for private tenants;
- it was questioned whether the funding could meet the ambition of the proposed new Standard given the circumstances those who lived in Highland had to contend with, such as higher electricity costs, lower wages, older housing stock and less well insulated homes; and
- support was expressed for the consultation response. However, it would have been helpful to have had the chance to review it prior to submission, and an assurance was sought that Committee Members would be granted the opportunity to contribute to future consultation responses. In that regard, it was explained that the timescale for the consultation had not allowed the opportunity for the response to be brought before the Committee prior to submission. However, it was recognised that that was not ideal and confirmed that if there were specific points Members wished to add following the submission date officers would be happy to do so.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the response to the Social Housing Net Zero Standard: Consultation attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

**6. The Council Response to Heat in Buildings Bill: Consultation A' Libhrigeadh Neoni Lom airson Togalaichean na h-Alba – Bile Teas ann an Togalaichean: Co-chomhairleachadh**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/03/24 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed that some of the proposals in the consultation were unrealistic and the costs involved could lead to properties being abandoned;
- the challenge of replacing fossil fuel heating would not be overcome unless there were achievable and realistic proposals in place;

- it was questioned whether the consultation allowed sufficient consideration to be given to the serious and complex nature of the issues raised by the proposals;
- it was recognised that officers had to respond to the questions on a practical basis. However, other Members commented that responding to a consultation such as this was inherently political, it was the role of councillors, not officers, to make policy, and it was important that Members had an input;
- it was suggested that some of the responses seemed arbitrary, and it was questioned how the timescale at Question 10, for example, had been chosen;
- the proposals were predicated on the affordability of electricity, and it was necessary to focus on finding ways to reduce the cost of electricity, either directly or by lobbying government, so that communities in Highland were not even more adversely affected by making the alterations necessary to respond to climate change;
- Members wanted to hear more about the cost of not acting compared to the cost of adapting; and
- it was explained that there would be further opportunities to contribute to the passage of the Bill, and the Interim Depute Chief Executive undertook to come back to the next meeting of the Committee with a proposal as to how Members could be engaged in the Bill's progress.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the Council's Consultation response to the Proposals for a Heat in Buildings Bill: Consultation which closed on 8 March 2024.

The meeting concluded at 1.00 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 21 March 2024 at 10.30am.

### Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr G Mackenzie
Mr C Ballance	Ms J McEwan
Mr B Boyd	Mr P Oldham
Mr L Fraser	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Jarvie (remote)	Mrs M Ross (remote)
Mr R Jones	Mr R Stewart
Mr S Kennedy	

### Non-Members also present:

Mr R Gale	Mrs A MacLean (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Paterson

### Officials in Attendance:

Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance  
Mr S Fraser, Head of Legal and Governance, Performance and Governance  
Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance  
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance), Performance and Governance  
Mr M Watters, Corporate Performance and Information Governance Manager, Performance and Governance Service  
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager, Performance and Governance  
Mr P Hankinson, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit, Performance and Governance  
Mr J MacDonald, Senior Auditor, Corporate Audit and Performance  
Ms A MacPherson, Interim Head of Service Resources, Education and Learning  
Ms C Maxwell, Service Finance Manager, Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance  
Ms M Mackenzie, Strategic Commercial Manager, Commercial and Procurement Shared Services  
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management, Property and Housing  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance  
Mrs 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 Ms J McEwan and Mr A Sinclair.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

## 3. External Audit – Highland Council Annual Audit Plan 2023/24 Sgrùdadh on Taobh a-muigh – Plana Sgrùdadh Bliadhnail Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. AC/07/24 by the Council's External Auditors (Audit Scotland) which contained their 2023/24 Annual Audit Plan, setting out their planned work to be undertaken for the 2023/24 Audit.

During discussion, it was asked of Audit Scotland how confident they were in getting Audits back on schedule, given this would be the second year the reporting of the Audit would be late. In addition, information was sought, and provided, regarding financial sustainability in the longer term (longer than 5 years) in terms of Council assets, loans and the deterioration of housing assets and schools over time. In terms of the wider scope of auditing statutory requirements, it was also queried if there were plans to audit the Council's progress towards the statutory targets on Net Zero, and it was confirmed that it did form part of the 5 year plan.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the 2023/24 Annual Audit Plan; and
- ii. **NOTED** the Local Government in Scotland: Financial Bulletin 2022/23

## 4. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated Report No. AC/08/24 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance). This included copies of the following final reports issued:-

- Education and Learning – ICT Arrangements in Schools (Substantial Assurance)
- Education and Learning – Review of Financial Procedures in Schools (Reasonable Assurance)
- Communities and Place – Waste Management Income (Substantial Assurance)
- Performance and Governance – Verification of Statutory Performance Indicators (Substantial Assurance)
- Housing and Property – Corporate Landlord (Limited Assurance)

Regarding the **Review of Financial Procedures in Schools**, Members were deeply concerned that it was the fourth occasion that the Internal Audit had reported similar findings, despite recommendations having been made previously. Members asked for an explanation as to why this had not been addressed, as well as how the audit team planned to progress it, and emphasised the importance for recommendations to be addressed with urgency. Further, the following points were raised:-

- it was asked, should future audits report the same concerns, with no action having been taken, what sanctions would be appropriate;
- there was concern that the recommendations were not trickling down from area management and a more direct approach was suggested, such as raising it as an agenda item at the next available in-service training day at schools to make sure that the information reached the staff directly involved;
- in terms of staffing, it was asked if it was appropriate to raise with the Education Committee concern regarding workload of both school office staff and Head Teachers, and their availability to do auditing and accounts, and the pressure applied to Head Teachers. It was felt that morale was low, evidenced by resignations and early retirements, and it was stated that support should be provided to Head Teachers so they could comply with these actions;
- the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance) confirmed an update would be provided to Committee as matters progressed. Officers also planned to liaise directly with Head Teachers with the purpose of embedding training so that staff understood what was required of them;
- it was acknowledged that it would be challenging but it might have been less challenging had actions been taken sooner. Members looked forward to an update in September; and
- an explanation was provided by the Interim Head of Service Resources, Education and Learning, which included the plan to clarify roles and responsibilities in terms of finance with all Head Teacher Groups and to reinforce the importance of timeous completion of financial returns and inventories.

Regarding the **Waste Management Income** report, the Waste Management Team were congratulated on the results of their audit report, with only 2 minor suggestions. It was queried if the Team were aware of any businesses disposing of commercial waste via personal waste, to avoid uplift charges. In response, it was agreed that a reply on this matter would be sent to the relevant Member by the Service.

Regarding the **Corporate Landlord Model** report, the following comments were raised:-

- it might take 8 years for all assets to be fully surveyed. Members were concerned for a number of reasons, including the resources and maintenance involved, and it was suggested that Housing and Property consider the disposal of some vacant premises to allow concentration on assets in constant use, such as schools and depots;
- there was concern regarding the condition of the Highland estate and that some buildings were not adequately maintained. This could lead to a risk of somebody getting hurt and if the Council's insurance premiums might then be affected;
- despite the Council having taken the decision to adopt the Corporate Landlord Model, it was felt that insufficient progress had been made. Members looked forward to hearing that targets were met soon;
- it was asked, given the huge changes that were likely to be taking place, if the Audit Team would consider re-auditing in 2025/26, and it was confirmed that would be the case;
- reporting to Housing and Property Committee had been reinstated and it was confirmed that a report would be presented to Full Council in May which would

set out what Housing and Property would be doing in regards to remaining assets when they migrated to a Single Property Service: and

- an explanation was provided by the Head of Property and Facilities Management, which included reducing the number of assets, investment programmes, and taking corrective action to ensure the safety of the users and occupiers.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Final Reports referred to in Section 4.1 of the report;
- APPROVED** the deletion of the Community Regeneration and Gaelic Language Plan audits from the audit plan as set out in section 5.2 of the report; and
- 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.

## 5. Action Tracking Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Thracadh Ghnìomhan

There had been circulated Report No. AC/09/24 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance).

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the amendment to the tracking process was welcomed and Members hoped that Services would take the actions on board and achieve set target dates;
- it was asked if the original action date could also be included on the tracker, to gauge any degree of slippage; and
- in regards to section 5.2(i) of the report, Governance of Arms-Length External Organisations and Partnerships, there was concern with the statement 'if this can be accommodated within the agenda'. It was of utmost importance that this was actioned timeously, and it was asked that the relevant Chair took this on board when agreeing to the agenda.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the action tracking information provided, which included the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions; and
- AGREED** to include the original action date on future tracking updates.

## 6. Risk Management Cunntas às Ùr mu Stiùireadh Cunnairt

The Committee **NOTED** that no Corporate Risk Register report had been presented to this meeting of the Committee.

Members were reminded that the updated Risk Policy had been presented to Committee on 24 January 2024 and then presented to Council on 14 March for agreement. The Policy had been agreed and the existing Corporate Risks and Service Risks would now be analysed using the new process, with a view to presenting a new Corporate Risk Register to this Committee on 13 June 2024.

## 7. PSIF Reviews Ath-sgrùdaidhean PSIF

There had been circulated Report No. AC/10/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the self-assessment which was taking place using the Public Service Improvement Framework ; and
- ii. the next steps set out in section 6 of the report.

**8. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Cases Upheld  
Cùisean Ombudsman Seirbheisean Poblach na h-Alba gan Cumail Suas**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/11/24 by the Chief Executive.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the outcome of the upheld case; and
- ii. that the SPSO's recommendations had been carried out.

**9. Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 (RIPSA)  
Achd Riaghladh Chumhachdan Sgrùdaidh (Alba) 2000 (RIPSA)**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/12/24 by the Head of Legal and Governance.

In response to questions, the Head of Legal and Governance explained that RIPSA was used following a test purchase or acting on intelligence, to undertake further directed activity and surveillance in respect of a particular retailer. The sale of disposable vapes to young people was a concern and there had been an increase in the use of authority in terms of directed surveillance, and a number of businesses remained of particular concern to Trading Standards.

It was also explained that Covert Human Intelligence Source (CHIS) allowed officers to use identities to undertake online test purchases of suspected counterfeit and illegal goods.

The Committee **NOTED** the Council continued to make appropriate use of the powers and that a further report would be forthcoming to the September 2024 meeting.

The meeting ended at 11:15 am.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 28 March 2024 at 10.30am.

### Present:

Mr R Bremner  
Mr I Brown  
Mrs I Campbell  
Mr J Grafton  
Mr P Logue

Mr W Mackay  
Mr C Munro  
Mr P Oldham (substitute)  
Mrs M Paterson

### In attendance:

Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance  
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning & Gaelic Services  
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  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

### Also in attendance:

Mr S Thoumire, Hands Up for Trad

**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 Ms S Fanet, Mr D Millar, Mr J McGillivray, 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 Statements:-

Item 3 – Mr R Bremner and Mr C Munro

#### Presentation – Good News

At this juncture, the Committee **NOTED** a presentation of Naidheachd Mhath A'Mhàirt 2024/25 by Mr R MacKay and the Chair conveyed the following items of good news:-



- the schools participating in the Week of Gaelic were thanked. In addition, many community and family events, ceilidhs and classroom learning had taken place;
- 37% of competitors in this year's FilmG competition came from Highland, the largest number from any other Council area in Scotland. This showed the commitment and support of school staff and the creativity, confidence and capability of young people;
- Culturlann had recently picked up the keys to their building in Inverness;
- The Trads were coming to Inverness, as would be explained further during the presentation. The Scottish Government had given Highland £6,000 to take this opportunity forward;
- Christopher Miller-Craig, Head Teacher at Ardnamurchan High School, had retired. The Committee sent their best wishes, recognising how he had driven Gaelic forward in the curriculum and the impact his leadership had had for the language and culture in the area; and
- congratulations were expressed to the students of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig who had received a Comhairle ne Gàidhealtachd bursary to support their studies.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News.

### 3. Presentation – Hands Up for Trad, Scots Trad Music Awards

**Transparency Statements: Mr Bremner and Mr Munro declared connections to this item, both having previously been nominees at the Trad Awards but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare.**

There had been provided a presentation by Mr Simon Thoumire, Creative Director of Hands Up for Trad.

Mr Thoumire shared the success of the Trad Awards, and informed the Committee that Hands Up for Trad had been involved with many Gaelic and Scots language projects. This year, they would be working with High Life Highland's Young Musicians and it was confirmed that since their partnership with BBC Alba in 2008, the Trad Awards had benefitted from international exposure, helping to promote Scottish traditional music and Gaelic culture to a global audience.

It was stated that the next World Gaelic Week would run from 24 February to 2 March 2025, and that this year's MG Alba Scots Trad Music Awards were to be held in Inverness on 30 November 2024. The event hoped to bring huge benefits to Inverness and the surrounding areas.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- it was recognised that the event would be a huge opportunity to profile, and reflect upon, Highland culture and traditional music, in a scene that was world renowned and recognised. The Scots language as well as Gaelic had been profiled at Na Trads since its inception and thanks were provided to Mr Thoumire for having steered the Trads in that direction;
- in response to a question, Members learned that there was much more to the event than the night itself and that it was important to involve members of the public from the early stages, which included the opportunity to choose award nominees;

- it was felt that events such as the Trad Awards were important and it was hoped that communities throughout the Highlands could be included in the future;
- it was asked if Hands Up for Trad had kept in touch with the musicians since its inception and it was confirmed that they had, many of whom had become successful in a variety of ways;
- it was felt that the timing of the event was excellent, with November being a quieter tourism month; and
- Hands Up for Trad had applied to the Inverness Common Good Fund for a grant of £16,220 to cover various event costs, and it was hoped relevant Members would look favourably on the application.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

#### 4. Performance against Gaelic Language Plan

There had been circulated Report No. G/01/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members were reminded to complete a survey which had been shared prior to the meeting as it reflected on their own knowledge of Gaelic, the Gaelic Committee, opportunities to learn Gaelic and how Gaelic worked across the Council;
- officers were thanked for their hard work which had been evidenced by the high percentage of completed and on-target actions in the analysis report. Officers were asked to aim future targets as high as possible in terms of achieving the Gaelic Language Plan;
- the Senior Leadership Group would be evaluating community charging as rental prices for out-of-hours activities had been quite steep;
- an update was sought, and provided, regarding the provision of Gaelic education for adults in Lochaber and any difficulties experienced with school staffing. Members were informed of the Gaelic Language Tutor posts currently advertised. Difficulties were acknowledged but with the Mod coming to Lochaber next year, it was felt that would bring momentum and visibility;
- it was felt that Gaelic education and the use of the language could be further publicised and made more visible in Council buildings, and that face-to-face learning sessions would be a welcome addition to the online sessions;
- it was acknowledged that creating opportunities Highland-wide required funding and resources, however it was hoped this would allow people to come together, using Gaelic as a natural every day language; and
- the Committee was grateful for the support of their partners and stakeholders in facing these challenges.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

#### 5. BLAS Festival, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

There had been circulated Report No. G/02/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

Information was sought, and provided, regarding the data in section 6 of the report, and it was asked how the percentages of audience satisfaction were measured, and if the online audience attendance was known.

Officers were requested to include numerical amounts in future reports, to support the percentages.

In terms of funding, it was asked how the BLAS Festival and Fèisean nan Gàidheal planned to become more commercial.

The Committee **NOTED** the success of the 2023 BLAS Festival.

## 6. Gaelic Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/03/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members were pleased to learn that Mathain Bheaga Gaelic Playgroup, Dingwall, had established successfully and it was hoped that the number of children attending would increase. Recognition was given to those involved with Cròileagan Nursery, Dingwall, over the past 30 years and Members thanked parents, officers and volunteers for their contribution;
- the Highlands still led the way in terms of numbers and contribution per capita despite the geographical challenge faced. Ongoing challenges included recruitment and retention of Gaelic-speaking teaching staff, as well as teacher numbers in general;
- it was asked that the sustainability of the Gaelic programme be reflected upon. Challenges would increase as the number of children increased, as well as the movement and growth of the population. Staff within the Gaelic programme should feel supported and confident that their investment over the years was not going to be lost;
- in terms of the support required, funding from Scottish Government could be reflected upon; and
- in terms of innovation it was suggested that Gaelic teachings could be broadcast online at the same time as they were being given face-to-face and it was confirmed that this was currently under development.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the key messages from the Inverness 3-18 Gaelic Education Feasibility Study;
- ii. the increase in Gaelic pupil numbers across Highland; and
- iii. the next steps as detailed in paragraph 4.7 of the report.

## 7. Gaelic Language Plan – Bòrd na Gàidhlig Assessment

There had been circulated Report No. G/04/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

Information was sought, and provided, regarding next steps after Gaelic Language Plan 4 (GLP 4) and it was confirmed that GLP 4, having been approved last year, would be in place for the next 5 years.

It was stated that the Scottish Languages Bill had provision for a National Gaelic Strategy. It was unclear how that would look but would likely be a more strategic model.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to **HOMOLOGATE** the decision taken by the Chief Executive and Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Gaelic Committee, to accept the revised changes to the GLP proposed by Bòrd na Gàidhlig within the required timescale; and
- ii. **AGREED** to the submission of the revised GLP itself, the deadline for which was 9 April 2024.

The meeting ended at 12.25 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 Diardaoin,  
28 Màrt 2024 aig 10.30m.

### An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner

Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn

A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul

Mgr I Grafton

Mgr P Logue

Mgr U MacAoidh

Mgr C Rothach

Mgr P Oldham (ball-ionaid)

A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais

### A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr P Nevin, Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomhach Eadar-amail, Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas

A' Bh-uas C Macklin, Ceannard Foghlaim, Ionnsachadh Fhad-bheatha & Sheirbheisean Gàidhlig

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

A' Bh-uas S NicIlleInnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach

A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Oifigear Comataidh

### Cuideachd an làthair:

Mgr S Thoumire, Hands Up for Trad

**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 leisgeulan às leth na M-uas S Fanet, Mhgr D Mhic a' Mhuilleir, Mhgr S MhicGillebhrath, 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** dha na h-Aithrisean Follaiseachd a leanas:-

Nì 3 – Mgr R Bremner agus Mgr C Rothach

## **Taisbeanadh – Naidheachdan Matha**

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do thaisbeanadh de Naidheachd Mhath a' Mhàirt 2024/25 le Mgr R MacAoidh agus thug an Cathraiche seachad na naidheachdan matha a leanas:-

- chaidh taing a thoirt do na sgoiltean a ghabh pàirt ann an Seachdain na Gàidhlig. Cuideachd, bha iomadh tachartas coimhearsnachd is teaghlach air gabhail àite, a bharrachd air cèilidhean agus ionnsachadh clasa;
- bha 37% de dh'fharpaisich FilmG na bliadhna sa às a' Ghàidhealtachd, an àireamh as motha bho sgìre Chomhairle sam bith ann an Alba. Bha seo a' sealltainn dealas agus taic luchd-obrach sgoile agus cruthachas, misneachd is comas nan daoine òga;
- bha an Cultarlann air na h-iuchraichean fhaighinn o chionn ghoirid airson an togalaich aca ann an Inbhir Nis;
- bha Na Trads a' tighinn a dh'Inbhir Nis, mar a dheigheadh a mhìneachadh san taisbeanadh. Bha Riaghaltas na h-Alba air £6,000 a thoirt do Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd airson seo a thoirt air adhart;
- bha Christopher Miller-Craig, Ceannard Àrd-Sgoil Àird nam Murchan, air a dhreuchd a leigeil dheth. Chuir a' Chomataidh an deagh dhùrachdan thuige, ag aithneachadh mar a bha e air a' Ghàidhlig a thoirt air adhart anns a' churraicealam agus a' bhuaidh a bha air a bhith aig a' cheannardas aige a thaobh cànan is cultar san sgìre; agus
- chaidh meal-an-naidheachd a chur air oileanaich Shabhal Mòr Ostaig a bha air bursaraidh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd fhaighinn gus taic a chur rin cuid sgoilearachd.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dha na Naidheachdan Matha.

### **3. Taisbeanadh – Hands Up for Trad, Duaisean Ceòl Traidiseanta na h-Alba**

**Aithrisean Follaiseachd: dh'fhoillsich Mgr R Bremner agus Mgr C Rothach ceanglaichean a thaobh an nì seo, seach gun robh an dithis air an ainmeachadh roimhe aig Na Trads ach, às dèidh dhaibh an deuchainn a chur an gnìomh, cho-dhùin iad nach robh com-pàirt aca ri fhoillseachadh.**

Thug Mgr S Thoumire, Stiùiriche Cruthachail Hands up for Trad, seachad taisbeanadh.

Thug Mgr Thoumire seachad cunntas mu shoirbheachas nan Duaisean Traidiseanta, agus dh'innis e dhan Chomataidh gun robh Hands Up for Trad air com-pàirt a ghabhail ann an iomadh pròiseact a' buntainn ri Gàidhlig agus Albais. Am-bliadhna, bhiodh iad ag obair còmhla ri Luchd-ciùil Òga High Life na Gàidhealtachd agus chaidh innse gun robh Na Trads air buannachadh

bho luchd-èisteachd eadar-nàiseanta bhon thòisich an com-pàirteachas aca le BBC Alba ann an 2008, a' cuideachadh gus ceòl traidiseanta agus cultar Gàidhlig na h-Alba a chur air adhart am measg luchd-èisteachd air feadh an t-saoghail.

Chaidh innse gun deigheadh Seachdain na Gàidhlig a chumail bho 24 Gearran gu 2 Màrt 2025, agus gun deigheadh Duaisean Ceòl Traidiseanta MG Alba a chumail ann an Inbhir Nis air 30 Samhain 2024. Bhathar an dòchas gum biodh buannachdan mòra an lùib an tachartais do dh'Inbhir Nis agus do na sgìrean mun cuairt.

Rè na deasbaireachd, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- chaidh aithneachadh gun toireadh an tachartas seachad cothrom air leth gus cultar na Gàidhealtachd agus ceòl traidiseanta a thaisbeanadh ann an àite a bha ainmeil is aithnichte air feadh an t-saoghail. Bhathar air Albais agus Gàidhlig a thoirt am follais aig Na Trads bhon thòisich iad agus chaidh taing a thoirt do Mgr Thoumire airson Na Trads a stiùireadh air an t-slighe sin;
- mar fheagairt do cheist, chuala Buill gun robh fada a bharrachd an lùib an tachartais na an oidhche fhèin agus gun robh e cudromach buill a' phobail a chom-pàirteachadh bho na h-ìrean tràtha, agus bha seo a' gabhail a-steach a bhith a' taghadh an luchd-ealain a bha air an ainmeachadh airson duaisean;
- bhathar dhen bheachd gun robh tachartasan mar Na Trads cudromach agus bhathar an dòchas gum biodh coimhearsnachdan air feadh na Gàidhealtachd air an com-pàirteachadh san àm ri teachd;
- chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a bha Hands Up for Trad air ceangal a chumail suas le luchd-ciùil bho chaidh a chur air bhonn agus chaidh innse gun robh, agus gun robh mòran dhiubh air soirbheachadh ann an grunn dhòighean;
- bhathar an dùil gur e àm air leth freagarrach a bh' ann airson an tachartais, seach gun robh an t-Samhain na bu shàmhaiche a thaobh turasachd; agus
- bha Hands Up for Trad air iarrtas a chur a-steach gu Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis airson tabhartas de £16,220 airson cosgaisean an tachartais a chòmhdach, agus bhathar an dòchas gun coimheadadh Buill iomchaidh air an iarrtas ann an dòigh fhàbharach.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan taisbeanadh.

#### 4. Coileanadh mu Choinneimh Plana na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/1/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè na deasbaireachd, thog na Buill na puingean a leanas:-

- chaidh cur an cuimhne nam Ball gun robhar ag iarraidh orra suirbhidh a lìonadh, a bha air a sgaoileadh ron choinneimh, agus a bha a' meòrachadh air an cuid eòlais fhèin air a' Ghàidhlig, Comataidh na Gàidhlig, cothroman gus a' Ghàidhlig ionnsachadh agus mar a bha a' Ghàidhlig ag obrachadh thar na Comhairle;
- chaidh taing a thoirt do dh'oifigearan airson an cuid obrach chruaidh a bha follaiseach tron àireimh àrd sa cheud de ghnìomhan a bha air an

crìochnachadh no a bha air targaid san aithisg mhion-sgrùdaidh. Chaidh iarraidh air oifigearan targaidean san àm ri teachd amas cho àrd 's a b' urrainnear a thaobh a bhith a' coileanadh Plana na Gàidhlig;

- bhiodh an t-Àrd-sgioba Stiùiridh a' dèanamh luachadh air cosgaisean coimhearsnachd seach gun robh prìsean màil airson chleasan taobh a-muigh uairean àbhaisteach air a bhith gu math àrd;
- chaidh cunntas às ùr a shireadh, agus a thoirt seachad, a thaobh solar foghlam Gàidhlig do dh'inbhich ann an Loch Abar agus mu dhuilgheadasan sam bith a thaobh feachd-obrach sgoile. Chaidh innse do Bhuill mu na dreuchdan oidean Gàidhlig a bhathar a' sanasachd an-dràsta. Chaidh aithneachadh gun robh duilgheadasan ann ach seach gun robh am Mòd a' tighinn a Loch Abar an-ath-bhliadhna, bhathar an dùil gun toireadh seo spionnadh agus follaiseachd dhan chànan;
- bhathar a' faireachdainn gum faodadh foghlam Gàidhlig agus cleachdadh a' chànain a bhith air an toirt am follais barrachd agus air an dèanamh nas follaisiche ann an togalaichean na Comhairle, agus gum biodh fàilte air seiseanan ionnsachaidh aghaidh ri aghaidh a bharrachd air na seiseanan air-loidhne;
- bhathar ag aithneachadh gun robh feum air maoineachadh is goireasan gus cothroman a chruthachadh air feadh na Gàidhealtachd, ach bhathar an dòchas gun toireadh seo cothroman tighinn còmhla, a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig mar chànan nàdarra làitheil; agus
- bha a' Chomataidh taingeil airson taic nan com-pàirtichean is an luchd-ùidhe ann a bhith a' dèiligeadh ris na dùbhlain seo.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

## 5. Fèis Bhlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/02/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh, agus a thoirt seachad, mun dàta ann an earrann 6 dhen aithisg, agus chaidh faighneachd ciamar a bha na h-àireamhan sa cheud de riarachas luchd-èisteachd air an tomhas, agus co-dhiù a bha fios air àireamhan luchd-èisteachd air-loidhne.

Chaidh iarraidh air oifigearan sùimean àireamhan a chur ann an aithisgean san àm ri teachd, airson taic a chur ris na h-àireamhan sa cheud.

A thaobh maoineachadh, chaidh faighneachd ciamar a bha dùil aig Fèis Bhlas agus Fèisean nan Gàidheal fàs nas coimeirsealta.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do shoirbheachas Fèis Bhlas 2023.

## 6. Cunntas às Ùr mu Fhoghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/03/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeon a leanas a thogail:-



- bha Buill toilichte cluinntinn gun deach Buidheann-cluiche Gàidhlig Mathain Bheaga, ann an Inbhir Pheofharain, a stèidheachadh gu soirbheachail agus bhathar an dòchas gun tigeadh àrdachadh air an àireamh chloinne a bha ga fhrithealadh. Chaidh aithne a thoirt dhaibhsan a bha air a bhith an lùib Cròileagan Inbhir Pheofharain thairis air na 30 bliadhna a chaidh seachad agus thug Buill taing do phàrantan, oifigearan agus saor-thoilich airson na rinn iad;
- bha a' Ghàidhealtachd fhathast air thoiseach a thaobh àireamhan agus tabhartas a rèir gach pearsa a dh'aindeoin nan dùbhlann cruinne-eòlasach. Am measg nan dùbhlann leantainneach bha fastadh is gleidheadh luchd-teagaisg le Gàidhlig, a bharrachd air àireamhan luchd-teagaisg san fharsaingeachd;
- chaidh iarraidh gun deigheadh meòrachadh air seasmhachd a' phrògram Ghàidhlig. Bhiodh dùbhlain a' fàs mar a bhiodh àireamh na cloinne a' fàs, a bharrachd air gluasad agus fàs an t-sluaigh. Bu chòir do luchd-obrach taobh a-staigh a' phrògram Ghàidhlig a bhith a' faireachdainn gun robh taic aca agus bu chòir dhaibh a bhith misneachail nach robh na chuir iad na lùib thar nam bliadhnaichean gu bhith air a chall;
- a thaobh na taic a bha a dhìth, bu chòir meòrachadh air maoinachadh bho Riaghaltas na h-Alba; agus
- a thaobh ùr-ghnàthachadh, chaidh moladh gum faodadh teagasg sa Ghàidhlig a bhith air a chraoladh aig an aon àm 's a bhathar ga thoirt seachad aghaidh ri aghaidh agus chaidh dearbhadh gun robhar a' leasachadh seo.

#### **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

- do na prìomh theachdaireachdan bho Sgrùdadh So-dhèantachd Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig (FtG) 3–18 airson Inbhir Nis;
- dhan àrdachadh ann an àireamhan sgoilearan Gàidhlig air feadh na Gàidhealtachd; agus
- do na h-ath cheumannan mar a bha air an toirt seachad ann am paragraf 4.7.

#### **7. Plana na Gàidhlig – Measadh Bhòrd na Gàidhlig**

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/04/23 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Chaidh fiosrachadh iarraidh, agus fhaotainn, a thaobh nan ceumannan às dèidh Plana na Gàidhlig 4 (PnG 4) agus chaidh dearbhadh gum biodh PnG 4, a chaidh aontachadh an-uiridh, stèidhichte airson nan còig bliadhna air thoiseach.

Chaidh innse gun robh solar ann am Bile nan Cànan Albannach airson Ro-innleachd Nàiseanta Gàidhlig. Cha robh e soilleir fhathast dè an coltas a bhiodh air seo ach bhathar an dùil gur e modail ro-innleachdail a bhiodh ann.

Às dèidh sin **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh:-

- gun deigheadh **AONTA** a thoirt dhan cho-dhùnadh a ghabh an t-Àrd-Oifigear agus an t-Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas, ann an co-chomhairle le Cathraiche

## 1048

- agus Iar-Chathraiche Chomataidh na Gàidhlig, gabhail ris na h-atharrachaidhean dhan Phlana Ghàidhlig a bha air am moladh le Bòrd na Gàidhlig taobh a-staigh an raoin-ama riatanaich; agus
- ii. gun deigheadh am Plana Ghàidhlig ùraichte a chur a-steach, gun a bhith nas anmoiche na an ceann-latha dhen 9 Giblean 2024.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 12.25 f.

**The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 1 May 2024** at 10.30 am.

**Present:**

Ms S Atkin	Mr D Macpherson
Mr B Boyd	Mrs B McAllister
Mr R Bremner (Remote)	Ms J McEwan
Mr I Brown	Mr C Munro
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr M Paterson
Mr L Fraser	Ms M Ross (substitute)
Mr A Graham	Ms M Smith
Mr R Mackintosh	Mr R Stewart (Remote)
Ms A MacLean	

**Non-Members also present:**

Mr M Baird (Remote)  
Mr R Gale (Remote)  
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)  
Mr J McGillivray (Remote)  
Mrs L Sagers (Remote)

**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  
Mr B Cameron, Interim Head of Housing & Building Maintenance  
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management  
Ms H Cameron, Housing Development Manager  
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner  
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

**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**

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs I Mackenzie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Good News  
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

Thereafter, the Chair advised that Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property, was leaving the Council to take up a new post with East Renfrewshire Council. Members thanked Mr Rodgers for his significant contribution and the support, guidance and expertise provided during his time with the Council and wished him well in his future career.

**4. Housing Performance Report to 31 March 2024  
Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais gu 31 Am Màrt 2024**

There had been circulated Report No HP/09/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members comments included the following:

- the impact of lifting the moratorium on evictions on the statistics going forward in relation to homelessness;
- the approach taken to offer temporary accommodation to vulnerable young persons who were sleeping rough or presented as homeless;
- the multi-agency protocols and support in place to help prevent homelessness involving children and young people in respect of relationship breakdowns;
- further details be provided on the 'other reasons' for homelessness as referred to in Appendix 2 of the report;
- the impact across the Service associated with repairs and maintenance being undertaken in house;
- repairs and maintenance should be undertaken in house where possible while recognising the ongoing recruitment challenges associated with increasing in house provision;
- issues around staff not being able to gain access to properties to carry out repairs or safety checks and that officers have further discussions with Members and tenant representatives on this issue;
- the impacts of Universal Credit and other welfare benefit changes on the level of rent arrears;
- further context was sought and provided on the current level of rent arrears and it was explained this included technical arrears, the figure was approximately half of the Scottish average and the Council was in the top six of best performing local authorities in Scotland;
- in response to a query, it was explained the Service worked closely with the Welfare Team, partner agencies and third sector with a focus on early intervention and wrap around support for tenants. It was confirmed that Members would be circulated with the Rent Account Management Policy;
- concern at the safety of pathways in the Kinmylies Estate, Inverness, no alternative to glyphosate having been identified for weed control;
- an update on the Amenities Project including a more holistic approach to weed control had been provided to the Redesign Board and Members input on this issue was encouraged;

- responsibility for maintenance of common areas and stair wells in mixed tenure blocks of properties and the opportunity for the Council to engage with the Scottish Law Commission's consultation on the law of the tenement. The Chair requested that a Member workshop on this issue be scheduled going forward;
- Members be provided with contact points for housing associations to assist in dealing with enquiries from constituents;
- a greater focus be placed on windows and doors in Council estates and the opportunity for continued engagement on the Capital Programme through local committees and ward business meetings;
- specific issues raised by Mrs J McEwan in relation to a non-essential repair and by Ms M Smith in respect of a heating installation by an external contractor and confirmation these cases would be investigated;
- the increased repairs budget in 2024/25 should make a notable difference to delivering lower priority repairs going forward;
- the fact many agencies and private companies no longer built houses across the Highland had placed significant additional pressure on local authorities;
- confirmation was sought and provided that as at 31 March 2024 there were 8,618 applicants, on the Highland Housing Register. A report on housing allocations was to be brought to the Committee in August 2024;
- young people were not applying for housing due to the large number on the waiting list and this was compounded by difficulties experienced in securing affordable housing in the private sector in Highland; and
- in response to a query, information was provided on the main reasons for private landlords ending tenancies.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Housing Performance Report as circulated; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a Member workshop on the maintenance of communal areas be scheduled going forward.

## 5. **Service Performance Monitoring Report - Quarter 3 2023/24** **Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Seirbheis - Cairteal 3 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No HP/10/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the increase in staff sickness absence in Quarter 3, how this was being monitored and the support being provided to staff and confirmation officers would report back to Members on the actions being taken;
- in response to a query, information was provided on the risk to school meals provision from cost and staffing highlighted in the report;
- in response to a query, an explanation was provided on the criteria used to measure the suitability and condition of the Council's assets;
- the challenges for the budget going forward associated with climate change and increased investment required in energy efficiency. A report on the Capital Programme to a future Committee would provide more detail, particularly in relation to net zero standards;

- the impact of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child on Council budgets going forward;
- how the Council's asset rationalisation fitted with the place based planning being undertaken in many communities in Highland and reference to the significant opportunities presented by the Highland Investment Plan to be considered at full Council;
- the progress being made and challenges in delivering the Corporate Landlord model, noting that it was understood reports on a single property service would be brought to the full Council;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided on the number of serving and ex-armed forces personnel allocated housing;
- it would be helpful for Members and the public if abbreviations were not used in future reports;
- the mitigating actions being progressed in relation to the risk highlighted in relation to property staff vacancies and effect on income generation.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

**6. Service Workforce Plan Annual Progress Report  
Aithisg Adhartais Bhliadhna air Plana Obrach an t-Seirbheis**

There had been circulated Report No HP/11/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- information be provided on the Service's annual agency spend as a percentage of salary costs, noting this was low in comparison to the rest of the Council;
- the need to ensure multi social media platforms including TikTok were used to attract school leavers and graduates into the Council and confirmation this would be raised with Corporate Communications;
- the importance of working with universities, colleges and schools in relation to careers and key vacancies in the Council and also to promote loyalty and career paths to young people as a measure to retain staff;
- cross geographical recruitment through a hybrid and creative approach particularly in rural areas be promoted while continuing to ensure young people were mentored;
- the potential to improve the uptake of exit interviews given the valuable information generated and confirmation that a new exit process operated by HR had been introduced and it was recognised more engagement was required;
- some employees left the Council as the actual job was not the post they thought they had applied for and the potential for this to be raised as part of the Employee Review and Development process;
- the importance of improving working conditions for staff across the Council as a measure to boost recruitment;
- it would be helpful for Members to be provided with a gender breakdown of roles within the Service;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that as part of workforce planning there was close working with ICT colleagues to promote smarter working and attract younger generations into the organisation.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the four-year action plan and the progress report.

## 7. **Housing Strategy Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Ro-innleachd Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No HP/12/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the review process for the Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 and noting that an annual update would be brought to the Committee;
- in response to a query, it was explained a whole system approach involving partners and the private sector was required to meet the significant demand for housing associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport;
- the collaborative working undertaken with the Police and other partners in relation to anti-social behaviour across Council estates and the complex challenges involved. Members were encouraged to contact the local housing team, amenities and environmental health in relation to issues within their wards and also local tenant participation groups;
- the significant benefits being delivered to tenants through the Wick District Heating project and the ongoing partnership work with contractors to create more apprenticeships in the area;
- the potential for companies locating in Caithness to take over and invest in the significant number of void properties in the area;
- the potential to build modular style units to accommodate Ukrainian displaced families that wished to remain in Highland and that efforts were ongoing to support these households in moving to areas and tenures of their choice and housing need;
- in response to a query, an update was provided on progress with the redevelopment of Meiklefield, Dingwall which had been highlighted to the Scottish Government as a priority;
- concern at the lack of progress in relation to empty homes on High Street, Muir of Ord which was considered a priority;
- in relation to place based planning, consideration be given to raising awareness of the potential for people to downsize to free up larger properties in communities; and
- further clarity was required from the Scottish Government on its policy on the installation of wood burning stoves in new builds. It was understood there would be a dispensation for rural areas and biomass continued to be an option.

Thereafter, the Committee heard from Mrs L Richardson, Tenant Representative on the importance of tenant engagement and participation and the wide range of work being undertaken by tenant organisations at a regional and national level, including with the Scottish Housing Regular, Scottish Government and key stakeholder groups. She stressed the need for there to be more partnership working in Highland, and in terms of recruitment, the focus should be on promoting housing to young people as a vocation as it was part of a much wider picture.

The Chair thanked Mrs Richardson for her contribution and advised she would feedback her comments to the Council's Senior Leadership Group.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. progress made in 2023/24 in achieving agreed priorities in the Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028;
- ii. significant achievements in 2023/24 to increase housing supply, to deliver essential housing services and to support Highland's tenants and service users;
- iii. aspects of positive performance and the successful engagement with the Scottish Housing Regulator in 2023/24; and
- iv. proposed changes to national housing policy and that further updates would be provided to Members and Committee ahead of their implementation.

**8. Heating Policy for Non-Domestic Estate**  
**Poileasaidh Teasachaidh airson Oighreachd Neo-Dhachaigheil**

There had been circulated Report No HP/13/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In response to a query, an explanation was provided on the process for requesting a variation in temperature through the submission of a Change Control Form. A reasonable response time was not yet defined but would be confirmed in due course.

The Committee **APPROVED** the adoption and application of the proposed Heating Policy for the non-domestic property estate.

In conclusion, Members were advised this was Mrs B McAllister's last meeting of the Committee and they expressed their appreciation for her long service to the Council and dedication and support for the residents and Council tenants in the Inverness Central ward over the period. Members extended their best wishes to Mrs McAllister for the future.

The meeting was closed at 1.35pm.



## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 2 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mr M Baird	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr I Brown	Mrs A MacLean (substitute)
Mr J Bruce (remote)	Mr D Macpherson
Mr M Cameron	Mr H Morrison (remote)
Mrs I Campbell (substitute)	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr K Gowans	Mrs T Robertson
Mr M Green	Mr R Stewart (remote)
Mr R Jones	Ms M Smith
Mr P Logue (remote)	Ms K Willis (remote)

### **Non-Members also present:**

Ms S Atkin	Mr D Louden
Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr L Fraser	Mr J McGillivray(remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr D Millar(remote)
Ms B Jarvie (remote)	Mr C Munro(remote)
Mr S Kennedy	Mrs M Ross (remote)
Mr B Lobban	

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive - Place  
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration  
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport  
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead, Environment, Development and Active Travel  
Mr McCann, Economy & Regeneration Manager  
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager  
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Manager  
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager  
Mr A McCann, Economy, and Regeneration Manager  
Mr N Young, Active Travel Manager  
Mr T Stott, Principal Planner  
Mr A Puls, Environment Team Leader  
Mr D Chisholm, Tourism and Inward Investment Team Leader  
Ms J Cromarty, Sustainable Transport Team Leader  
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance  
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

### **Also in attendance:**

Ms S Reynolds and Mr K Smith, Spider Entertainment

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**

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

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

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

Item 5 – Mr M Green  
Item 16– Mr D Louden

And the following Transparency Statements:-

Items 7 and 9 – Mr H Morrison

### **3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the following items of Good News:-

#### **Qualified Chartered Surveyor**

William Crombie joined Highland Council in July 2021 as a Graduate Estates Surveyor. William was primarily based in the Industrial and Investment Estates team and managed investment property on behalf of the Council, securing new tenants, negotiating rent reviews and dealing with general lease management. William had his formal interview with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors on the 16 April and received confirmation he had passed this week on his first attempt.

#### **B9176 Struie High Bridge**

On 19 April the High Bridge on the B9176 Struie Road reopened to traffic a week ahead of schedule, following a six-week closure to carry out essential bridge repairs and road safety improvements. The works were designed and supervised by the Highland Council's Project Design Unit and undertaken by Diack and Macaulay Ltd.

#### **Outdoor Access Team**

Two popular upland paths in Wester Ross were improved using £20,000 of Place Based funds. The Flowerdale waterfall path and parts of Ullapool Hill path were

suffering badly with water damage and needed specialist path construction techniques.

#### **4. Inverness Castle Experience Update Cunntas mu Chaisteal Inbhir Nis**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/10/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Following an introduction, during which progress on the Castel Project was reported, Ms S Reynolds, Spider Entertainment, gave a presentation in amplification of the report providing information on the proposed visitor attraction. Inverness Castle, when completed, would be a World Class attraction and visitors would experience their visit using the latest technology. She outlined the attractions and facilities that would be incorporated in the gardens, the North, South and West Tower Experience, and the Link Building.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Inverness Castle, a truly collaborative project, would benefit the whole of Highland;
- Members were encouraged, should the opportunity arise, to visit the Castle Project as it evolved. After a number of years it was now becoming a tangible reality. Working with the community and using the knowledge of staff formally employed by the now-closed Tourist Information Centre was encouraged;
- the use of the £100,000 UK Government Shared Prosperity Funding for a training programme was commended. This provided an opportunity for young people to be upskilled and would provide them with training and skills that would remain with them;
- it was suggested that the “Gathering Together Room” be renamed the “Gathering Room”;
- such world class attractions and events brought people back from abroad. Visitors wanted to come to Highland so it was important that facilities were made available;
- the Inverness Castle Experience would have a wide, and positive, impact on the local economy, benefitting businesses such as restaurants;
- an exhibition highlighting the success of Runrig was part of the Experience but it was also important to incorporate Feis Rois and, moving to the winter months, Highland Ceilidhs. Also, with the stories, it was important these were rotated so visitors returning had a new experience. It was important to keep the attraction fresh;
- shinty and Scottish Country Dancing were also important parts of the culture of Highland and confirmation was sought, and provided, that these were part of the Experience.
- the entire tour would take 2½ hours;
- once in profit, Highland Council would receive 50% and it was queried how this money would be reallocated;

- as the project had received Inverness City and Region Deal money it was important that visitors were also signposted elsewhere; and
- there would be limited parking at the Castle apart from a Drop-Off zone but parking would be available elsewhere in Inverness and visitors would be encouraged to use Park and Ride.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress on the project;
- ii. **NOTED** the Executive Summary of the Operating Plan;
- iii. **AGREED** to the use of £100,000 UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund for the training programme proposed in section 8.13 of the report; and
- iv. **AGREED** to the proposed governance arrangements outlined in section 9.4 of the report, to commence in November 2024 once the Head of the Inverness Castle Experience had been appointed.

## **5. Draft Sustainable Tourism Strategy Dreachd Ro-innleachd Turasachd Sheasmhach**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr M Green made a Declaration of Interest as himself and his wife were owners of Seaview Lodge holiday let and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/11/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was reassuring the Council was working with and listening to partners in the development of this strategy;
- concerns were raised about having a large enough workforce to deliver the plan as the tourism and care industries were competing for the same workers, especially in rural areas;
- in response to a question it was confirmed that local tourism organisations had been invited to participate in consultations around the strategy;
- information was sought, and provided, on the provision of wifi for tourists especially in areas where local people did not currently have good internet access;
- there had been a surge in motorhome and camping tourism post Covid which would not have been reflected in the data from the 2019 consultation and this could have a negative effect on the environment and the overall experience for visitors to the area; and
- it was suggested that camping management zones such as those at Loch Lomond be created to ensure camping was managed sustainably and over-tourism in certain areas was avoided.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work done in recent months in preparation of the draft Sustainable Tourism Strategy;
- ii. **AGREED** the contents of the draft Sustainable Tourism Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report which had been developed for public consultation; and
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed approach to engagement as set out in Section 7 of the report and the proposal to refer a final draft strategy to a future Committee meeting for approval.

## 6. Masterplan Consent Areas Sgìrean Aonta a' Phlana Mhaighstir

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/12/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy which explained the Scottish Government's proposed introduction of discretionary powers to establish Masterplan Consent Areas (MCAs) under new planning legislation and a recommended response from the Council to the consultation on this proposal.

Following commentary on the report from Officers, the following main points were raised:-

- the open and responsive nature of the early engagement with the Local Plans Team was welcomed;
- the MCA would help the Council prepare for the support of strategic employment growth associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport project and specifically the Green Freeport Tax Sites. The MCA would streamline development processes whilst ensuring the integrity of the development plans and place plan. This was a consultation, the first stage in a long process which would involve significant engagement with interested parties. There would be a further report to this Committee to clarify how MCAs would be managed and scrutinised.
- it was highlighted that the opportunities arising from the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport were well recognised as was the requirement to build houses across Highland to support the project and maximise its potential. However, there was a risk that MCAs were seen as a way of bypassing the Local Development Plan process and circumventing stakeholder consultation, and no one wanted this. It was welcomed that the response to Question 5 would be amended to read "Any specific MCA proposal should involve stakeholder consultation including community councils and consideration of any Local Place Plan";
- the challenge would be to ensure MCAs work for all concerned and to ensure local aspirations and plans were not sidelined;
- the consultation and other stages in the MCA process should reflect the need to ensure that community wellbeing was actually taking place, such as the delivery of schools, health care facilities, houses and all the other important facilities that were required and delivered on time.

- the capacity of Officers within the Planning team to undertake work on MCAs was queried. It was highlighted that the costs of staff work involved must be fully recovered;
- there were concerns about the MCAs proposal given the potential implications for communities in Highland. It was highlighted that the Scottish Government and the Council wanted communities to become more involved in local decision making, but the proposed MCAs looked like they would take decision making away from communities. In this respect, it was queried how MCAs might align with the Community Empowerment Act and Local Place Plans;
- MCAs would help meet the needs of local communities, inward investors, housing developers, and would enable collaborative consensus building by engaging with communities on MCA proposals. MCAs would help developers/agencies with projects to help tackle climate change, by speeding up the climate transition plan;
- the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan would hopefully be adopted soon which had space for around 4800 housing units, so there were sites that would continue to be supported through the development plan process. However, given the pace of change that there might be with the Green Freeport, the MCA was a tool to react quickly to proposed developments. An MCA would not be developer led, but had to be done in partnership with the local authority and the community;
- the guidance contained in the report covered a number of the points raised by Members;
- community engagement was intended as part of the ongoing process on MCAs and once details on MCAs had been confirmed consideration would be given to the practical approach on involving communities; and
- it was suggested that the consultation should be included on the Council's social media sites for greater public awareness.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Council's response to the current Scottish Government MCAs consultation as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report, subject to consideration being given to points raised at the meeting and the consultation response being amended appropriately;
- ii. **AGREED** that the statement in Paragraph 5.3 of the report was published to indicate the Council's intent, as required by the legislation;
- iii. **NOTED** the potential application of the MCA model within Highland; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Council continues to investigate the role of MCAs to address emerging development requirements, and that further reports on this matter would be brought to this Committee before any commitment was made.

## 7. Performance Monitoring Report Q3 2023-24 Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R3 2023-24

**Transparency Statement: Mr H Morrison made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as his son was an employee of the roads department**

**However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/13/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy which provided performance information for Quarter 3 2023/24 regarding Corporate Indicators; Contribution to the Corporate Plan; Service Plan Progress; Mitigation of Service Risks; and Service updates out with the Corporate Indicators or Service.

Reference was made to the Service complaints response times and that it took a lot of time to investigate complaints. This put more pressure on the Planning team and it was queried what could be done to alleviate this pressure. It was advised that Service planning performance was not as good as it should be and this was due to staffing resources. Recent appointments would help alleviate the pressures on the team and should be reflected in the performance indicators going forward.

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

## **8. Active Travel and Road Safety Update Cunntas às Ùr air Siubhal Gniomhach agus Sàbhailteachd Rathaid**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/14/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were expressed to the officers for the report;
- it was queried if the early adoption of 20mph speed limits should be continued given the lack of public support;
- questions were raised about the Active Travel Strategy and there were concerns about the impact on rural communities. In many parts of the Highlands, cars remained the most realistic option for travel and people should not be discouraged from driving;
- it was suggested that this issue could potentially be deferred to allow the public time to reflect;
- it was raised that the lack of a plan for a path from Inverness Airport to Dalcross Industrial Estate was disappointing and it was queried whether this could be included in the future;
- the Council was applauded for its work with SUSTRANS and HITRANS, and it was expressed that collaboration between different groups on this project had been impressive;
- Members resolved that the process of encouraging Active Travel took time, but the willingness and determination existed to deliver this if facilities were available;
- maintenance was a vital consideration and, in some bike lanes, drop kerbs were not flush which had the potential to damage bicycles;
- speed limit issues were highlighted on the A82 and it was suggested that limits were inconsistent throughout the country;

- lower speed limits were welcomed by some Members and consultation should allow for adjustments if required;
- it was queried, and confirmed, that this was the team responsible for new cycle path developments; and
- it was considered that lower speed limits were working well within Inverness, and it was remarked that Active Travel projects within the city were developing well.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the Draft Active Travel Strategy;
- NOTED** the Achievements of the Active Travel Team in 2023 – 2024 and the Active Travel Workflow Programme for 2024 – 2025;
- APPROVED** the Draft Road Safety Plan;
- NOTED** the long-term reduction realised in all injury severity collisions in Highland within the lifecycle of the previous national casualty reduction targets which ran to 2020; and
- APPROVED** the adoption of the 2030 Casualty Reduction Targets and note the use of the Safe Systems Strategic approach to Road Safety and Casualty reduction in Highland that had been adopted with a view to delivering these reductions.

**9. Service Workforce Plan Annual Progress  
Adhartas Bliadhnaì Plana Feachd-obrach Seirbheis**

**Transparency Statement: Mr H Morrison made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as his son was an employee of the roads department. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/15/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **NOTED** the four-year action plan and progress report.

**10. In-house Bus Service  
Seirbheis Bhusaichean Ion-Taigh**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/16/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- all staff involved with the in-house bus service were thanked for their positive attitudes and efforts in making the project a success. The project had achieved savings and received positive feedback from users of the service,



and consideration now required to be given to future progression of the service;

- expansion of the bus service to Badenoch and Strathspey would be welcomed;
- attention was drawn to the value of in-house community transport facilities, which could provide flexibility of service to meet the needs of the ageing and the young population. This could be further taken forward through the Community Planning Partnerships;
- it was hoped that any future investment in buses would take into account the climate emergency; and
- attention was drawn to the need for coaches with toilet facilities for longer journeys, although caution was also advised in respect of the accessibility of coaches for people with mobility issues.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the financial and operational achievements of the in-house bus operation; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a report be brought to a future committee on the implications of moving the operation to an Arm's Length External Organisation.

#### 11. Draft Ecology Strategy and Action Plan Dreachd Ro-innleachd agus Plana-gnìomha Eag-eòlais

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/17/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the draft Ecology Strategy and Actions contained therein; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the draft Ecology Strategy and Action Plan for an 8-week public consultation.

#### 12. Nature Restoration Fund Update Cunntas mun Mhaoin Ath-nuadhachaidh Nàdair

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/18/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Chair welcomed the positive way forward, recognising how this fund helped many communities and organisations across Highland.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** update on 2023/24 Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) scheme;
- ii. **AGREED** the funding proposals for the 2024/25 NRF scheme as set out in section 6 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that funding decisions in respect of the 2024/25 NRF grant scheme be delegated as outlined in section 7 of the report.

**13. Draft Biodiversity Planning Guidance  
Dreachd Stiùireadh Dealbhadh Bith-iomadachd**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/19/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members queried if consultation and partnership working with the UHI was included within the process.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to adopt the revised Biodiversity Planning Guidance (BPG) as non-statutory planning guidance; and
- ii. **AGREED** to the principle of the Council accepting financial payments to include a management fee to deliver biodiversity enhancement, as per 5.11-5.15 of the revised BPG, and that following the development of a detailed methodology and with the agreement of the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy, this would be implemented as part of the BPG.

**14. Biodiversity Duty Report 2021-2023  
Aithisg Dleastanas Bith-iomadachd 2021-2023**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/20/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members queried if there were sufficient biodiversity staff to process the large amount of detail and information required for the processes including meeting legislative requirements. In response, it was explained authority to recruit two new Ecology officers had been granted and, while there was pressure, this was being managed.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the breadth of work undertaken across the Council to further the conservation of biodiversity; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the Biodiversity Duty Report 2021-2023 for publication on the Council's website.

**15. Wildfire Working Group  
Buidheann-obrach Theintean Fiadhaich**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/21/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were expressed to the Working Group for their hard work and for producing the recommendations. It was felt that a focus on necessary resources should be maintained;
- thanks were also expressed to the Officers involved in supporting the Wildfire Working Group;
- it was disappointing that financial constraints meant some worthwhile ideas were unviable;
- thanks were conveyed to the many agencies including Highland Council, led by Scottish Fire Rescue Service (SFRS), who responded to the two major wildfire incidents in Highland in 2023; and
- Members felt that there was insufficient funding from National Government towards the threat of wildfire, and it was hoped that this would be evaluated in the near future.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** background to wildfires, roles and responsibilities of lead agencies, the work of the Wildfire Working Group (WFWG), and Highland Council;
- NOTED** and agree the actions arising from WFWG, subject to funding being available to support those actions with a revenue implication; and
- AGREED** to continue liaison with Partners involved in dealing with Wildfire responses.

#### **16. Community Regeneration Fund Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr D Louden made a Declaration of Interest as a Director & Company Secretary of the Tain Heritage Trust which has been a beneficiary of the Community Regeneration Fund and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/22/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for their hard work and efficiency in the way they handled the various funds to maximise the number of projects that could be supported, especially as it was a difficult task with tight deadlines;
- the NICE's Team Hamish social gathering space at the Links was highlighted as a successful project which built on the success of the Links Splash Pad and further reinforced Nairn as a major tourist destination. Also, the Nairn BID Heritage Trail was a vital part of the Town Centre Improvement Plan and would be of long term benefit;
- section 5.7 of the report sought to extend the remit of the Community Regeneration Fund Strategic Sub Committee and this was welcomed;
- Members highlighted the tremendous work involved with officers supporting local communities. Section 4.3 of the report confirmed there were 798

expressions of interests from community groups, with 378 full applications, and 200 groups were supported;

- Community Groups expressed thanks to officers for their good communication and the way the process had been managed; and
- it was confirmed that deferred projects would not be covered in this round of funding but were able to be resubmitted with strengthened applications in the next round of funding in the future.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** that the current priority in the Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) programme was to address the outstanding unclaimed balance of funding sitting with approved projects; and to take steps when setting criteria, at assessment stage and when making grant award decisions to ensure that going forward this issue was not repeated; and
- AGREED** to widen the remit of the CRF Strategic sub group as proposed in section 5.7 of the report.

## 17. Islands Connectivity Plan Consultation Co-chomhairleachadh air Plana Ceangal nan Eilean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/23/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

It was disappointing that the Mallaig to Small Isle ferry was operated by Highland Council because the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service timetable did not tie in with the school timetable. It was important to make a case for extra resources so that these ferries could continue to run services but, with only operating costs being covered, this was unsustainable going forward.

The Committee **APPROVED** the draft response which was attached as Appendix 1 within the report.

## 18. Flood Risk Management Policy Poileasaidh Stiùireadh Cunnart Thuiltean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/24/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- while welcoming the update to the policy, it was felt the issue was not with the management policy but the devastating cost of inaction. For Nairn alone, inaction would result in the loss of holes 1-7 at Nairn Golf Club, the loss of large areas of the links seafront, including the putting green, and Fishertown, a conservation area, facing the possibility of widespread flooding;
- the flood risks in many other areas were highlighted by Members and it was suggested that the Leader write to both Scottish and UK Government highlighting the plight;

- the management of burns and rivers would involve monitoring and maintenance and the frequency of this was queried;
- the introduction of flood alleviation works was sometimes lengthy but it was better to persevere with it rather than encounter flooding;
- the Scottish Government needed to accept flood risk as a priority and allocate resources accordingly;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that landowners were reminded of their riparian responsibilities; and
- there was less funding available since the UK had left the European Union.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the Flood Risk Management Policy as contained in Appendix 2 of the report which accords with the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009; and
- NOTED** that the previous Flood Prevention Policy was now obsolete.

#### **19. Abnormal Load Policy Poileasaidh Luchd Neo-àbhaistich**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/25/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Abnormal Load Policy as contained in Appendix 1 of the report.

#### **20. Management of Sub-Standard Structures Policy Stiùireadh Poileasaidh nan Structaran Fo-Ìre**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/26/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

With reference to the Council's duty to maintain adopted roads, some communities had made representations as to the poor condition of some roads.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Management of Sub-Standard Structures Policy as contained in Appendix 2 of the report, as a replacement for the existing policy.

#### **21. Membership of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and North Sea Commission (NSC) Ballrachd Co-labhairt Roinnean Mara Iomallach na Roinn Eòrpa agus Coimisean a' Chuain a Tuath**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/27/2024 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The Committee was informed membership details of Member representation would follow. The benefits which would be gained were outlined in the report

and was particularly pertinent to Highland given that the length of coastline was similar to that of other countries such as France.

The Committee **AGREED** to seek membership of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and North Sea Commission (NSC).

## 22. Appointment to the Flow Country Partnership Cur an Dreuchd gu Com-pàirteachas nam Flobhachan

The Peatlands Partnership was formed at the end of 2006 following the completion of the EU LIFE funded Peatlands Project and aimed to develop and build on that project. The Partnership changed its name in 2021 to the Flow Country Partnership to emphasise the wider links in the landscape and its focus on the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland.

\* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the appointment of Mr R Bremner from the Caithness or Sutherland Areas as a Trustee of the Flow Country Partnership.

## 23. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

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

- i. North PAC –30 January 2024;
- ii. South PAC – 7 February 2024;
- iii. North PAC– 5 March 2024;

and also **APPROVED**:-

- iv. Wildfires Working Group 16 February 2024;
- v. Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group of 22 February 2024;
- vi. Harbours Management Board 23 February 2024;
- vii. Community Regeneration Strategic Fund Sub Group 27 March 2024; and
- viii. City Region Deal Monitoring Group of 25 April 2024.

## 24. 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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

## 25. Housing Development Initiatives Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/28/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

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

**26. Property Transactions Monitoring Report**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/29/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

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

**27. Land and Property**  
**Fearann agus Seilbh**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/30/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

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

The meeting ended at: 1.55pm