

The Highland Council
No. 3 2024/2025

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 9 May 2024 at 10.05am.

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Head of Legal and Governance
Joint Democratic Services Managers

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs T Collier, Mr A Graham, Mr A MacDonald and Ms M Nolan.

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the following points were made:

- appreciation was expressed to Mr J McCreath for the Defibrillator training that had been provided to Members immediately prior to the commencement of the meeting; and
- 5 – 11 May 2024 was Lyme Disease Awareness Week. It was explained that the Highlands was a hotspot for Lyme Disease with a survey indicating 70% of participants had been infected in the Highlands. Of this 70%, 42% had been unaware of Lyme Disease prior to infection. Members were urged to promote awareness of Lyme Disease in their Ward to help prevent infection.

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

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

Item 9 – Mr M Cameron and Mr A Christie
Item 10 – Mr A Christie
Item 11 – Mr C Munro
Item 14.viii – Mrs M Reid

3. Confirmation of Minutes Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais

The Council **AGREED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 14 March 2024 (and continued on 15 March 2024) as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately.

4. 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 as undernoted:-

Climate Change Committee	20 March 2024
Audit Committee	21 March 2024
Gaelic Committee	28 March 2024
Comataidh na Gaidhlig	28 Màrt 2024
Housing and Property Committee	1 May 2024
*Economy and Infrastructure Committee	2 May 2024

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

Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2 May 2024

***Starred Item: Item 22 - Appointment to the Flow Country Partnership**

The Council **AGREED** the appointment of Mr R Bremner as a Trustee of the Flow Country Partnership.

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

- i. Redesign Board held on 28 March 2024 which were **APPROVED**.

**5. Question Time
Àm Ceiste**

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

Member Questions

(1) Mr A Christie

To the Leader

Please could the leader detail the key decisions taken at CoSLA Leaders Meetings from 1st January to 30th April 2024 and how he, or the Council representative if not him, voted on the item under consideration in the event there was a vote?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given the rising importance of CoSLA in recent years, what system of briefing could the Leader introduce that would enable Members to be kept informed of the Highland position at CoSLA meetings.

In response, this was on the mind of many Leaders at CoSLA and, if these briefings were in line with CoSLA's policies regarding confidentiality, then they would be considered for briefing.

(2) Mr A Christie

To the Leader

Please could the leader detail the individual posts that are currently vacant within the Health and Social Care Department and the length of time they have been vacant?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, considering the critical nature of the roles listed, it was queried what harm was caused to children and families across Highland with these roles having been not filled.

In response, it was indicated that the service and provision was not seeking to cause any harm to children across the Highlands. This would be followed up on regarding the figures provided to Cllr Christie. It was reiterated that the Leader was very proud of the service being provided.

(3) Mr M Reiss

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Overnight Respite Services have been removed from Thor House Thurso without the consent of Local Members. This facility was purpose built to provide respite care. When will the former excellent service be reinstated?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried the Chair would come north to meet the members of Caithness and Sutherland Respite Campaign.

In response, while it would be considered, it was suggested that a Members' workshop could take place to consider this action before taking things forward.

(4) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Leader

Several residents, mainly from our older population, who use private car parks in Inverness, have raised various issues. This included "poor signage, unreasonable terms, exorbitant fines, aggressive demands for payment and an opaque appeals process.

At the moment there's no specific legislation dealing with parking on private land in Scotland.

The Scottish Government should look at creating a code of conduct which would reassure drivers that private car park operators would treat them in a "fair and proportionate" manner. The RAC and the AA have said the code would increase standards for private parking operators and improve drivers' experiences of private parking. The International Parking Community also said the implementation of the code would help the sector to "address the doubt and scepticism that has plagued the industry's public perception for far too long".

Can Highland Council raise the matter with the Scottish Government to seek action to establish a regulatory framework for the industry?

The response had been circulated.

There was no Supplementary Question.

(5) Mr C Ballance

To the Leader

Given the Government's commitment to consult this summer on introducing a Carbon Emissions Land Tax, could the Leader give the date for the seminar on this proposal which was promised a full year ago in May 2023?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given that the John Muir Trust had suggested that the Carbon Emissions Land Tax Proposal could be worth £20 million per annum to the Council, it was queried if there would be value in organising a workshop to examine these proposals to see whether the Council would support and lobby for it before it became a Scottish Government consultation.

In response, the Leader indicated the Senior Leadership Group and Senior Officers were actively looking at the Carbon Emissions Land Tax. The Leader would communicate with Cllr Ballance about progress. The Leader had recently met with the John Muir Trust. This will be monitored going forward to make sure the proposal fitted with the way the Council was looking forward.

(6) Mrs H Crawford

To the Chair of Education

In line with the Attendance Management Guidance, can you please provide an analysis of staff absences from the past year, including the rate of absence (days lost), the cost of these absences, a breakdown of the absences into categories of long-term and short-term, the most prevalent reason for absence, any link to health and safety breaches, and the percentage of return-to-work interviews that have been successfully conducted?

The response had been circulated.

There was no Supplementary Question.

(7) Mr S Mackie

To the Leader

On the 23rd April, SNP spokesperson and Member of Parliament for West Dunbartonshire, Martin Docherty-Hughes stated that funds allocated for decommissioning by The Department for Energy and Net Zero (DESNEZ) should not be put towards the clean-up of Scotland's nuclear sites, labelling them "unnecessary nuclear projects".

Martin Docherty-Hughes MP attests that funding for sites such as Dounreay, Hunterston or Chapelcross should instead be redirected to fund public services such as "Hospitals, Doctors, Nurses, Teachers and Police Officers", with zero detail on his party's plans for the nuclear communities that host legacy sites.

Given the importance of the civil nuclear industry to Caithness and North Sutherland, does the Leader of the Highland Council recognise:

- The c.£220 million annual spend allocated to decommissioning in Highland (funded wholly through the NDA, a subsidiary of the Department of Energy and Net Zero?
- The 1,232 locals employed by Nuclear Restoration Services in Caithness and North Sutherland?
- The 700 jobs directly supported in the nuclear decommissioning supply chain?

- The £487,000 of direct socio-economic support from the Dounreay site (that funds initiatives like Focus North, STEM activities for young people and the PSO Officer for the Wick to Aberdeen airlink)?
- And the £8.4 million of NDA of grant support that has seen investments into key projects like Caithness ports, the Sutherland Spaceport and Nucleus?

If these facts are recognised, will the Leader of the Highland Council formally correct the SNP's spokesperson in Westminster? And will he outline that the decommissioning industry is integral to the tax-take of not only this local authority but in providing funds that sustain public services across this region?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, the Scottish Parliament recently had convened a cross party group on the civil nuclear industry which would include Elected Members and stakeholders and the Council Leader was asked to explore how the Highland Council could be represented at the table and ensure that one on the area's largest industrial sectors would have a Highland voice at a forum that would explore skills, diversification and waste policy.

In response, the Leader agreed to do this and drew attention to the impact that the longer decommissioning period for Dounreay would have on the availability of a skilled workforce for the Green Freeport.

(8) Mr A Graham

To the Leader

Charleston Academy: please provide details of the extent of areas within the school for which renewal or precautionary works e.g. support beams, repairs, replacement ceilings etc have been required due to the presence of RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete)?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(9) Mr R Stewart

To the Leader

In light of the independent assessment concluding that the Academy Street Regeneration Project provides 'poor' value for money and will deliver a negative return on investment will this administration now agree to scrap this scheme?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether the Council would agree to undertake a local economic impact assessment that did not only focus on transport economics.

In response, the Council Leader confirmed that he would consider Mr Stewart's request.

(10) Mr D Macpherson

To the Leader

In 2009, 6.5% of learners had an additional support need. In 2024, it is 37% - yet teacher numbers are falling!

Between 2010 and 2022, the number of ASN teachers in Scotland fell by 19% - when the number of pupils with ASN increased by almost 24%.

Do you agree with the Educational Institute of Scotland and the need for more, not fewer teachers and more qualified specialist teachers to help our children with Additional Support Needs?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, the Leader was asked if he agreed that considerable investment was needed to ensure that the Council was 'Getting it Right for Every Child' and that sustained effort was needed to enable teachers to work safely, effectively and with the right support to do their job well.

In response, the Leader confirmed the Council wanted to Get it Right for Every Child first time and to employ the appropriate level of resource to be able to achieve that.

(11) Mr R Mackintosh

To the Chair of Communities & Place

Fly-tipping is a blight on our Highland landscape and affects both rural and urban areas. How many reports of fly-tipping is made annually to the Highland Council?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried, how many fly tipping incidents were investigated resulting in the issuing of fines.

In response, the Council staff were engaging with the Scottish Government and local SEPA teams to increase work in this area to act as a deterrent to fly-tipping and litter. Environmental Health and Waste Management within the Council were continuing to work together to support and respond to community concerns by undertaking patrols, providing signage and reviewing waste bin provision.

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

The Convener paid tribute to the late Mr A Rhind (Ward 7 - Tain and Easter Ross) who had been serving his fifth term as a Local Member. A number of tributes were made to Mr Rhind, a Highland gentleman, during which reference was made to his, care, compassion and hard work for constituents and the help and support he provided to fellow Councillors. The Council's condolences were extended to his family and friends at this sad time.

Following the sad passing of the late Mr A Rhind, Members **NOTED** that a By-Election had now been arranged and would be held on 13 June 2024.

Also, the Council **NOTED** that, following the By-Election for Ward 18 (Inverness South) held on 11 April 2024, Mr Duncan Cameron McDonald had been elected as a Member of the Council.

**7. Membership of Committees etc
Ballrachd Chomataidhean msaa**

The Council **NOTED** that as a result of the By-Election the political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

SNP – 21 / Highland Independent – 17 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 14 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 8 / Highland Alliance – 5 / Scottish Green Party – 4 / Labour – 2 / Alba Party – 1 / Non-Aligned - 1.

It was also **NOTED** that the formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees remained as 5/5/4/2/2.

The Council **NOTED** the following changes to Committee memberships:-

Economy and Infrastructure – Mrs M Ross
Housing and Property – Mr R Jones
Corporate Resources – Mrs M Paterson

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

The Council **AGREED** the appointment of Mrs J Hendry as a Director for Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited.

**9. Establishing the Highland Investment Plan and Mechanisms to Fund and
Deliver It
Plana Tasgaidh na Gàidhealtachd**

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the items and any personal connection, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr M Cameron as his wife was a teacher at Charleston Academy
Mr A Christie as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/13/24 by the Chief Executive.

In moving the recommendations, the Council Leader advised that the Highland Investment Plan provided hope to communities by delivering capital financing solutions in response to the challenges the Council faced in relation to capital funding. The Plan provided confidence in relation to roads being continually resurfaced, repaired and maintained over a sustained period of time. The Plan would realise investment in many schools with an immediate focus on those in most urgent need and would enable the assessment and appraisal of projects in order to

plan at pace preparation of options, planned works and to start delivering improvements in the school estate with immediate effect. The Plan provided opportunities for other capital investment and also future projects to generate income streams to potentially replace the need to ring fence Council tax.

The Convener stated that the Highland Investment Plan would remove the Council's reliance on funding from central government, albeit it would continue to engage with government, other third parties and private developers to secure its fair share of funding to improve roads, school estate, infrastructure, and public buildings. The Plan would boost the economy and the Council was taking the lead in providing the infrastructure that communities needed and deserved and in making the Highlands a better place in which to live.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the Chief Executive and officers were thanked for the considerable amount of time and effort involved in the production of the Highland Investment Plan;
- the Plan was ambitious and aspirational and would deliver transformational change through a strategic, evidenced based and real data approach;
- the Plan was worth £2billion over the next twenty years and reflected the key priorities of communities with a high level of investment in schools and roads while ensuring projects were affordable, prudent and sustainable;
- the creation of community points of delivery for a range of public services in one location that could meet community needs as part of a strategic plan for communities was innovative and was welcomed;
- delivering the Highland Investment Plan would be challenging due to the impact of unforeseen factors and circumstances that might arise over the period such as recent changes in interest rates and construction costs;
- engagement with the public and community involvement was key to the success of the Plan as a whole;
- projects had to be sustainable, achievable and time managed to avoid delays and, as a next step, Members be provided with details of start dates and timescales;
- it was important methodology was used to prioritise school projects and the Plan recognised that some schools had reached the point of critical need;
- a proposal was made that St Clements School and Dingwall Primary School be reclassified as Phase One Projects, and setting out a funding proposal to allow work to start on a replacement St Clement's School;
- an assurance was sought there would be full engagement with parents, staff and pupils on a new St Clement's School and confirmation be provided on a start date and timescales for delivery;
- further clarity was required on the implications of the proposal to evolve policy around additional support needs;
- a holistic approach to educational need in locations was sensible and enhanced additional support needs provision might allow more pupils to remain in mainstream learning;
- there was potential to improve engagement processes with parent councils on school projects through their community liaison groups;
- it was also proposed Culloden Academy be reclassified as a Phase One Project due to capacity issues, lack of social spaces, plans for housing expansion within the ward and future demand associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport;

- an analysis needed to be undertaken on the re-purposing of vacant buildings within industrial parks as schools, community led building of schools and whether the Council could facilitate either of those models if relevant communities considered that this was an option;
- it was hoped the Plan would address the condition of many Council depots and enable progress to be made on office rationalisation;
- the focus on retrofitting buildings identified as core assets was welcomed;
- it was questioned how the suitability ratings for schools were calculated, with specific reference to Inverness Royal Academy;
- there was a need to connect capital investment to revenue funding in relation to the continued operation of existing nurseries in communities;
- The Bridge, Inverness should be included in areas of future analysis given the essential support it provided to some of the most vulnerable pupils in Highland;
- the high level of debt the Plan would incur was highlighted and the legacy this would leave for future generations. A detailed report needed to be presented to a Corporate Resources Committee on the financial risks, logistical challenges and strategies that could be used to repay the capital element of any borrowing;
- further clarity was provided on the options around the costs of borrowing, the different mechanisms and the types of rates that might apply;
- the proposed level of borrowing would deliver social returns in terms of schools, roads and paths, low carbon public transport and public access to the services they required;
- investment in transport for all was essential for social inclusion and community points of delivery should be located on accessible public transport routes and provide access to partner organisations such as NHS Highland and the Police;
- it was important the Council made the right choices with regard to solutions that supported net zero and took advantage of funding avenues and the Climate Change Committee needed to be involved in decision making from the outset;
- achieving savings and income generation targets agreed as part of the budget would allow the Council to be more self-reliant and in control of finance to deliver community priorities;
- the Council should approach the renewable energy companies and other private sector organisations for interest free loans or other financial support to assist with the affordability of the Plan and provide the infrastructure and environment to develop a highly skilled workforce for the future;
- the lack of progress with the Stromeferry bypass and associated safety issues and the need for the Scottish Government to take responsibility for this project was highlighted. The Council Leader undertook to raise this matter with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport;
- it was questioned whether the Plan would meet on an annual basis the standstill figure required to maintain the roads in Highland in their existing condition;
- the significant additional investment in roads agreed by the Council in March 2024 and savings that would be generated in the procurement process through a longer term approach were recognised;
- concern was expressed in relation to progress with Inshes roundabout, Inverness and reference was made to an update provided on this issue to a recent City Region Deal Monitoring Group;
- lessons needed to be learned from the past under investment to ensure the proposals delivered longevity in the Council's assets;
- a capital project oversight review board as part of the Corporate Resources Committee needed to be established to take a high level strategic view of the projects coming forward;

- some elements within the Plan were overly optimistic and the Council continued to rely on an annual budget determined largely by government funding. The Plan should not be funded through reductions in services and it was not clear how it would tackle inequalities;
- assurance was sought that the ring fenced funding from Council Tax would be additional funding and the Scottish Government be lobbied on the issue of local authorities having the freedom to set Council Tax levels;
- it was queried what the impact on the Plan would be in the event a further Council freeze was imposed or given there was a near political consensus to abolish the tax;
- there was potential for information to be provided to the public's Council Tax annual statements on the projects being delivered through the ring fenced element; and
- Members were thanked for their constructive comments, many of which would be followed up on in due course or in future reports to Council.

Thereafter, and following summing up by the Council Leader and Leader of the Opposition, Mr R Bremner seconded by Mr B Lobban **MOVED** the recommendations detailed in the report.

Mr A Christie seconded by Mr R Stewart moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Council:

- i. approve, with the reclassification of St Clements School and Dingwall Primary to Phase One Projects (per 5.3 and the consequent reclassification from Appendix 4 to Appendix 5), the Highland Investment Plan as set out in the paper, including the list of schools in scope for development, and the categories in which they will be prioritised (as seen in Appendices 2 to 9);
- ii. approve the progression of work described in section 5.2 to prepare local masterplans and options appraisals;
- iii. approve the initial list of projects described in Section 5.3 to be progressed to design and tender stage;
- iv. approve the approach to place-based planning to deliver a sustainable estate, supported by integrated partnership working on behalf of communities;
- v. approve the strategic approach described to the furtherance of the programme of ASN base provision in section 4.15 to allow young people, where possible, to be educated in their local communities.
- vi. approve the utilisation of £2.8 million of revenue funding in 2024/25, carried over from the budget setting process, for investment to initiate the programme and to commence the necessary works to ensure the replacement St Clements School in Dingwall is finally started.
- vii. approve the policy to ring fence Council Tax income in future budget setting processes to sufficiently enable the Highland Investment Plan, with the actual council tax and budget setting decisions to be made on an annual basis;
- viii. approve as a policy that the Council's ratio (percentage) of General Fund capital financing costs relative to its General Fund revenue budget funding stream should not exceed 10%, thus ensuring capital investment can remain affordable, prudent, and sustainable, and this percentage cap being adopted as a new local prudential indicator;
- ix. approve, in recognition of the financial risks as referred to in section 3.5 and Appendix 1, that a detailed report be presented to a Corporate Resources Committee meeting no later than the 11 September 2024. This report should evidence clearly the financial assumptions contained in the Investment Plan together with an analysis of the logistical challenges associated with the implementation of the Plan. The report should also contain strategies that

could be used in order to repay the capital element of any borrowing. The Report should also include analysis of (1) possible re-purposing of vacant buildings within Industrial Parks as schools, and (2) community led building of schools such as Strontian Primary School and whether Council can facilitate either of those models if relevant communities consider that this is an option for them;

- x. note that future Treasury Management Strategy Statements will be revised to reflect the approved recommendations arising from this report, and the incorporation of the new local Prudential Indicator;
- xi. note the financial modelling, assumptions, risks and implications as described within the report;
- xii. note that the Highland Investment Plan will be underpinned by the ongoing process of medium-term financial planning and annual budget setting, being the process through which phases of the Plan will be released and specific funding allocations agreed;
- xiii. note that a further report will be brought to Council in June outlining place-based asset mapping to further refine the scope of projects, supported via an option appraisal process; and
- xiv. note that there will be further engagement with communities and partners on this plan over the coming months.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 44 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, with no abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mrs S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, 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 W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D McDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED**:-

- i. the Highland Investment Plan as set out in the report, including the list of schools in scope for development, and the categories in which they would be prioritised (as seen in Appendices 2 to 9 of the report);
- ii. the progression of work described in section 5.2 of the report to prepare local masterplans and options appraisals;
- iii. the initial list of projects described in Section 5.3 of the report to be progressed to design and tender stage;

- iv. the approach to place-based planning to deliver a sustainable estate, supported by integrated partnership working on behalf of communities;
- v. the strategic approach described to the furtherance of the programme of ASN base provision in section 4.15 of the report to allow young people, where possible, to be educated in their local communities;
- vi. the utilisation of £2.8 million of revenue funding in 2024/25, carried over from the budget setting process, for investment to initiate the programme;
- vii. the policy to ring fence council tax income in future budget setting processes to sufficiently enable the Highland Investment Plan, with the actual council tax and budget setting decisions to be made on an annual basis;
- viii. as a policy that the Council's ratio (percentage) of General Fund capital financing costs relative to its General Fund revenue budget funding stream should not exceed 10%, thus ensuring capital investment could remain affordable, prudent, and sustainable, and this percentage cap being adopted as a new local prudential indicator;

and **NOTED**:

- ix. that future Treasury Management Strategy Statements would be revised to reflect the approved recommendations arising from the report, and the incorporation of the new local Prudential Indicator;
- x. the financial modelling, assumptions, risks and implications as described within the report;
- xi. that the Highland Investment Plan would be underpinned by the ongoing process of medium-term financial planning and annual budget setting, being the process through which phases of the Plan would be released and specific funding allocations agreed;
- xii. that a further report would be brought to Council on 27 June 2024 outlining place-based asset mapping to further refine the scope of projects, supported via an option appraisal process; and
- xiii. that there would be further engagement with communities and partners on this plan over the coming months.

10. Highland Council Operational Delivery Plan 2024-27
Dreachd Dheireannach de Phlana Lìbhrigidh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd 2024–27

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the items and any personal connection, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr A Christie as a Non-executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr T MacLennan as Chair of Lochaber Care and Repair

There had been circulated Report No. HC/14/24 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the work that had gone into the preparation of the report and Operational Delivery Plan;
- in terms of service provision and investment, it was necessary to begin to look beyond a three-year period and particular reference was made to the need to work with partners and stakeholders to find sustainable solutions to the housing challenges that existed in Highland;

- given the Council's commitment to reach Net Zero by 2045, concern was expressed that Net Zero had been relegated to its own silo and there was no mention of it in several of the other portfolios. The need for cross-Council policy alignment having been emphasised, it was proposed that "To support our Net Zero Strategy" be inserted in the Responsibilities section of the Terms of Reference for each of the Portfolio Boards, and this was accepted;
- the proposals would affect staff at all levels and good communication was the key to change management. In that regard, it was queried why Trade Unions were not included in the Portfolio Boards, even in an advisory capacity, and what the plans were for keeping staff and Trade Unions informed;
- if Highland was to be an employment destination of choice, it was necessary to do more to support the arts and develop a vibrant cultural offering;
- whilst the Delivery Plan was starting to take shape, concern was expressed that there was still a lack of depth to it;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the detachment of Elected Members from much of the proposals and that they would not have the opportunity to robustly scrutinise the work taking place other than by drilling down through the Performance and Risk Management System. Members were actively encouraged to participate in Redesign Board workshops yet it was not expected that they would attend the proposed Portfolio Boards, and it was suggested that more thought needed to be given to Elected Member involvement;
- in relation to the proposed Portfolio Reporting Cycle, Shifting the Balance of Care, for example, would not be reported to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee until Quarter 4 2024/25, and it was questioned what the Strategic Chair would do if the associated savings were not achieved and how other Members would be kept informed. Similarly, it was questioned why the Pathways and Partnerships project would only be reported to the Education Committee once, in 2024/25, when the project was scheduled to be reviewed in 2025 and 2026, and concern was expressed that the Visitor Levy project, on which consultation was scheduled to commence in October 2024, would not be scrutinised by any Committee until 2026/27. In addition, attention was drawn to the number of items that would require to be added to already lengthy Committee agendas and, in relation to projects that reported to two Committees, it was queried what would happen if one Committee was content with a paper and the other wanted to make amendments;
- in relation to the Person Centred Solutions portfolio and enabling older people to live in their own homes for longer, it was necessary to gear the planning system towards developing a wider range of housing that was suitable for all ages. The Council should be looking to set specific targets for housing for older people, and such housing needed to be adaptable;
- the need for transport solutions in rural areas and to better communicate with community transport groups was emphasised, as was the importance of prevention and encouraging people to get fitter to live well for longer;
- it was questioned why the "Ask My GP" service was not available throughout Highland;
- with reference to Net Zero and a proposed new windfarm in North Berwick which, it was understood, would power 6 million homes, it was suggested that it was necessary to give more thought to what the position would be in a few years' time and how the Council could benefit;
- support was expressed for the concept of reusing existing buildings for schools or other purposes;
- in relation to improving the delivery of care to those who required it, there should be a theme running through the Delivery Plan that, wherever possible, care should be delivered locally;

- it was queried how the Delivery Plan linked with the Scottish Government's action planned to address depopulation;
- there was a great deal about heritage and arts in the Delivery Plan, and a request was made for a small section on the unique Norse heritage of Caithness;
- more information was requested to enable Members to do their job in terms of scrutinising and adding value. Particular reference was made to education delivery and whether Additional Support Needs base provision was the best way of doing things; tackling inequalities; and supported employment. It was added that it was necessary to change the delivery model to suit children and young people, not the other way around;
- with regard to the Workforce for the Future portfolio, support was expressed for the approach to employability, including the "Work Life Highland" brand, and information was sought, and provided, in relation to the mentoring programme and whether children were coming into it too late; how it was envisaged senior phase courses would be delivered online; and how to keep young people in school for longer to improve their chances of achieving a positive destination;
- the majority of young people would not aspire to go to university and Modern Apprenticeships were a fantastic alternative;
- the Council's commitment to achieving Net Zero by 2045 and the Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation portfolio were welcomed. However, Net Zero was about much more than renewable energy; it also included nature conservancy, biodiversity enhancement, forestry and woodland creation, community land management, carbon accounting, organic nature-friendly agriculture and sustainable tourism, to name a few. Achieving Net Zero was not just about producing more fossil-free fuel but protecting and restoring the natural environment, enriching communities and building resilience against the challenges to come for current and future generations, and it would not be achieved if the Council continued with business as usual;
- the Delivery Plan allowed Members to reflect on what they, and communities, had asked for and provided a methodology for assessment. It straddled every Strategic Committee, and it was important to closely monitor activity over the next few months;
- some staff/services were doing tremendous work and the Delivery Plan provided an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate that;
- it was hoped that the ambitious Delivery Plan would succeed and Members looked forward to the opportunity to review it in 12 months' time;
- in relation to the Resilient and Sustainable Communities theme, improving access to services and support and providing good health and social wellbeing opportunities, it was highlighted that there was no public transport in many parts of Sutherland and people were being disadvantaged to the point where communities were implementing their own solutions and providing clinic cars to transport people to health services. It was added that the Scottish Ambulance Service did not provide patient transport if the person could walk to a car, regardless of what their ailment was, so many people were being denied access to health services, and Local Members had formed an organisation to address the issue;
- appreciation was expressed to officers for the considerable amount of work that had been done so far in respect of the Council's commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2045. However, Members voiced concern that the wider Highland economy was far from being in a position to achieve Net Zero and it was hoped that the Council might be able to lead a voluntary group of major players with a view to agreeing, together, how that might be addressed. This should be done in a way that was cost neutral to the Council, and other sectors of the economy should finance what they needed to do to reach the goal of Net Zero. However, it was recognised that some sectors, such as farmers and crofters, might need some help, and it was hoped that might be forthcoming by way of a Scottish Government

policy, similar to the agricultural policy recently approved by the Welsh Government. It was added that collectively dealing with climate change should be seen as the first priority amongst the Council's policies;

- the provision of separate measures for each of the portfolios was welcomed. However, in many cases they were not specific or measurable. For example, under the Capacity Building workstream and the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) project, one of the proposed measures was "expand flexibility of childcare and ELC provision across Highland including addressing rural challenges", which was a restated aim as opposed to a measure, and it was questioned how Members would know whether the project had been successful. In contrast, under the Investment and Innovation workstream and the EV Infrastructure project, one of the measures was "increase of 150 charge sites across Highland", and it was easy for Members to know whether this had been achieved;
- in relation to the proposal to roll out an extended handy person scheme to support people to remain in their own homes for longer, Members spoke to the valuable and preventative services the handy person scheme provided and emphasised the need for it to be adequately funded, commensurate with the Council's expansion plans; the appointment of a responsible figurehead; and the scheme to be rebranded to reflect its importance;
- with regard to the Home to Highland programme, there were a large number of aims and project elements and Members looked forward to seeing how they would be broken down to make them manageable over the years to come; and
- with regard to the Supported Employment programme, it was queried whether this would be an expansion of what was already taking place and if it was envisaged that the Council would be an example to other employers.

Thereafter the Council:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Operational Delivery Plan – Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** the resource requirements as set out in Appendix 5 to the report;
- iii. **NOTED** the Portfolio Board Terms of Reference – Appendix 2 to the report, and **AGREED** to insert, in the Responsibilities section of the Terms of Reference for each of the Portfolio Boards, "To support our Net Zero Strategy";
- iv. **NOTED** the engagement activity that has been undertaken – Appendix 3 to the report; and
- v. **NOTED** the same Portfolio Report – Appendix 4 to the report.

11. **Communications Strategy 2024-27** **Ro-innleachd Conaltraidh Chorpóra 2024-27**

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made a Transparency Statement as a director of SkyeConnect. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/15/24 by the Chief Executive.

Members supporting the recommendations in the report explained that the strategy set out a strategic approach to corporate communications for the next three years. It built on achievements of previous strategies such as building and developing the digital communication capacity on social media platforms; developing livestreaming of elections, Council meetings and other events to allow improved access and transparency to the public; improving customer contact methods; promoting community resilience and behavioural change for climate change initiatives; promoting the highland culture and Gaelic language. The strategy would support the strategic priorities of the Council and would provide effective communication for both

internal and external stakeholders and promote the area to help attract inward investment. Communications required to be accurate and accessible and therefore the strategy required to be flexible to respond to a dynamic environment on social, economic and political changes.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed that the social media platform X (formally Twitter) was being used as part of engagement as it was becoming increasingly toxic. Also, given social media was becoming increasingly fragmented, it was queried if some other social media platforms were being considered for engagement. The number of Social media followers was being used as a measure of success and it was queried if other targets for success were being considered. Also, for those who did not engage in social media whether other platforms were being considered for engagement, such as communications being delivered direct to mailboxes;
- there was a lot to boast about in Highland culture and it was disappointing that, so far, there was no reference in the strategy to Eden Court Theatre which was a centre of excellence in Highland and more reference could have been given to Highland music groups. It was advised that Eden Court had its own communications and marketing team and the Council's communications team did support many events and festivals across Highland;
- the strategy offered no information on who the Council was communicating to, why were we doing it, how this was measured and how to build relationships to achieve this;
- plans for dedicated social media in the Gaelic language were welcomed. However, the Council's website was not bi-lingual and this needed to be improved;
- it was highlighted that the communications team did keep up to date with social media platforms being used and focused on the most popular platforms. The team also issued quarterly reports on the number of people reached and followers of Council communications. The team had very good relationships with the local media;
- there were service users who did not have internet access and it was queried if there was a strategy for communicating with them. Also, communications in different languages for the benefit of tourists was queried;
- there was a need for better focus on positive news stories from the Council;
- the work of the communications team was recognised in what was a very difficult job in challenging times;
- it was emphasised that the Council communications should be concise and in plain English where possible;
- the Council's website did need to be improved and, in particular, there were far too many pdf documents on the site, which were difficult to link to for sharing information. It was noted that there was a project on redeveloping the website;
- the strategy did not refer to responses to comments on social media and, where there were negative comments, positive responses on good news stories should be provided; and
- consideration would be given to public information being provided using British Sign Language videos.

Thereafter, the Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the achievements to date; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Communication and Engagement Strategy 2024-27.

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

There had been circulated Report No. HC/16/24 by the Head of Legal and Governance/Monitoring Officer.

Speaking to the findings of the Standards Commission, Mr A Jarvie felt it was a vindication of his actions on the day in question and that additional advice had been added to the Code of Conduct in regard to how Elected Members could challenge issues, taking into account the need to reflect the views and concerns of constituents.

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

**13. 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**.

**14. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid**

Transparency Statement: Mrs M Reid made a Transparency Statement in respect of item 14.viii as a respite provider. 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 Legal and Governance; –

- i. Council notes that in just a week, over 5000 people signed the petition to ban the Inverness march by the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the Apprentice Boys of Inverness, notes that Orange Order marches are founded on anti-Catholic sectarianism, believes that this has no place in the Highlands, and therefore asks officers to examine means by which they could refuse permission for any future Orange Order marches in the Highlands.

Signed: Mr C Ballance Mr A Baldrey

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

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

In speaking in support of the motion, Mr C Ballance summarised the philosophies of the Apprentice Boys of Derry and provided evidence to suggest their marches supported sectarianism and sought Officers to prevent the planned march. Other Members, whilst not necessarily agreeing with the sentiment of Orange Order marches, felt that there was a right to demonstrate peacefully on a case by case basis.

Mr C Ballance seconded by Mr A Baldrey **MOVED** the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Mr B Lobban, seconded by Ms L Niven, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Council agree to continue to work in collaboration with Local Members, Police Scotland and others to consider applications to hold marches on a case by case basis.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 6 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 54 votes, with 4 abstentions. The **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baldrey, Ms M Hutchison, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mrs S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs H Crawford, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Ms M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:

Ms S Fanet, Mr J Grafton, Mr P Logue, Dr C Birt.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the **AMENDMENT** as follows:-

“The Council agree to continue to work in collaboration with Local Members, Police Scotland and others to consider applications to hold marches on a case by case basis”.

ii. “Dangers of Spiking Drinks

That the Council requests:

- That licenced venues include drink and injection spiking training to all staff to improve public safety, ideally with yearly refresher courses. This would give staff the knowledge to identify victims, to spot potential acts of spiking, to know how to protect members of the public and get them to safety and, if needed, to call the police and/or an ambulance.
- That with Partners the Council produces a training video to be used by venues rather than rely solely on face to face training.
- That licenced premises carry testing kits, so that if a member of the public reports a suspicion of being spiked, that their drink can be tested and the offending drink kept for police investigation.
- That if a suspicion of spiking is reported to a member of staff, that the venue retain that night’s CCTV for 6 months on a memory stick or disc (this is requested at minimal expense for the venue as there will be no addition cost to upgrading CCTV systems but will vastly assist police

investigation). The reason for 6 months is at the request of the police - as that is often how long it can take victims to come forward. That posters raising awareness of spiking are displayed on the premises - especially during freshers weeks

- For PSE to review the curriculum to ensure an adequate awareness of drink and injection spiking."

Signed: Ms M M MacCallum Mr A Christie Mrs J McEwan Mr J Grafton
Mr P Logue Mr A Graham Mr R Gunn

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

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

In discussion, it was said that the Scottish Women's Rights Centre described drink and injection spiking to be at epidemic levels. In a survey of 23,000 students, it was found that 11% of them had been spiked, with 8% having reported the incident to police or doctor. Of the 1,840 women who had reported being spiked, only seven of those women's perpetrators were convicted of a spiking offence. It was confirmed that the issue of drink, injection and vape spiking was not exclusive to women alone, and Members shared personal experiences where either they, or a family member, had experienced being spiked.

In her role as Licensing Board Convener, Mrs J Hendry had the opportunity to liaise with key partners that the motion referred to, such as Police Scotland via their Licensing Representative, and it was confirmed that in addition to CCTV footage at the premises or surrounding area being held, the glass and liquid would be held for evidence, with the customer's drink being replaced without question.

Thereafter, Mrs J Hendry, in support of the motion, suggested an alteration to the motion as follows:

"That the Council recognises the criminal activity of drink spiking in Highland Licensed establishments. That the Licensing Board will continue to support Police Scotland in their work to mitigate these incidents, in their bystander training, reviews to the Board, publicity, reporting of incidents, including seizure of CCTV, and care of the victims involved. That the Board will liaise with the Highland Licensing Forum, including calling on the expertise of NHS Highland representatives, to discuss ways in which awareness can be raised by a multi-partnered approach of further training and knowledge for out in the community and any premises not already supported. The partners to source additional posters for licensed premises and explore future, simplified reporting methods, including a new Highland-wide app for Licensee use. For schools to continue to include awareness of drink and vape spiking as part of their PSE programme."

It was asked if the point pertaining to testing kits in the motion could be added to the amendment and Mrs J Hendry agreed. Thereafter, Ms M M MacCallum was happy to accept this. It was understood that testing kits would be inadmissible in Court and that the glass and liquid must be retained as evidence.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the following:-

“That the Council recognises the criminal activity of drink spiking in Highland Licensed establishments. That the Licensing Board will continue to support Police Scotland in their work to mitigate these incidents, in their bystander training, reviews to the Board, publicity, reporting of incidents, including seizure of CCTV, and care of the victims involved. That the Board will liaise with the Highland Licensing Forum, including calling on the expertise of NHS Highland representatives, to discuss ways in which awareness can be raised by a multi-partnered approach of further training and knowledge for out in the community and any premises not already supported. That licenced premises carry testing kits, so that if a member of the public reports a suspicion of being spiked, that their drink can be tested and the offending drink kept for police investigation. The partners to source additional posters for licensed premises and explore future, simplified reporting methods, including a new Highland-wide app for Licensee use. For schools to continue to include awareness of drink and vape spiking as part of their PSE programme.”

- iii. We are aware of further reductions in banking services with the closure of the Royal Bank of Scotland in Inverness and particularly the loss of the Mobile Bank Service by the Bank of Scotland covering rural areas of Sutherland including Lairg, Bonar Bridge, Dornoch and Helmsdale at the end of May 2024.

This is evidence of a further erosion of vital services across the Highlands with a significant detrimental impact on our elderly population. Quite simply if you live in any of the areas affected and you don't have access to the Internet you are effectively denied access to anything other than the most basic banking services and even then, only if you can access a post office.

That being the case this Council asks that the Leader write to the Scottish Government to express our concerns, particularly relating to age discrimination, about the removal of this most important service and ask for the First Minister to intervene and plead the case in the strongest possible terms for the retention of the mobile banking service across the rural Highlands.

Signed: Mr M Baird Mr R Gale

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

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

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the Motion.

- iv. The New School visit protocol that has been introduced has driven a wedge between local Council Members and their schools. To introduce a protocol that insists that Members have to have prior approval from the Education ECO is totally unnecessary and overly bureaucratic.

The burden that this places not only on Members but also on Teaching Staff is excessive and unnecessary. It also prevents Teachers being able to have an open and frank discussion on the needs of any particular school without senior managers being party to that conversation.

While it is agreed that Head Teachers should have the right to sanction or deny a school visit as they see fit, it is not appropriate to mandate that Members should have to go through the ECO in order to arrange a school visit.

Most members will have a good working relationship with the schools in their ward and this protocol hampers that relationship.

That being the case the Council will amend the protocol to allow Head Teachers total control of school visits. In addition, Council Members will only visit a school once prior approval has been agreed by the Head Teacher and at a suitable time that will not cause any disruption to the staff or pupils.

Signed: Mr R Gale Mrs H Crawford Mr D Gregg Mr M Baird Mrs J McEwan Mr J McGillivray Mr A Graham Mrs T Roberston Mr J Grafton Mr R Gunn

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:-

- Members had special relationships with the schools in their Wards and would do their best to support them, therefore being denied direct access to schools without prior agreement from the Assistant Chief Executive would be detrimental to the relationships and trust already built between Members and Head Teachers;
- as schools were publicly funded and publicly accountable institutions and Elected Members had a responsibility for all the premises run and owned by the Council, access to these buildings was a basic democratic principle;
- school visits needed to be organised for times that were convenient and caused minimal disruption and the appropriate person to liaise with on that matter was the Head Teacher;
- a workshop would give all Members a chance to express their points of view and ensure that a suitable protocol was put in place;
- if Members were restricted from visiting schools they would be unable to bring matters, such as unsuitability of buildings, to the attention of officers;
- it was queried whether help was being turned away by not allowing Members and MSPs to visit schools and how many disruptive visits there had been to schools;
- disappointment was expressed at seeing this issue covered by the press;
- it was queried whether a workshop was necessary and highlighted that workshops were often not accessible to all Members;
- FAQs had been sent to Members highlighting that nothing had really changed concerning school visits;
- a protocol was needed so that Members could visit school and to ensure that schools and pupils were protected;

1092

- it was highlighted that not all visits had been carried out in a responsible and appropriate manner and that some Head Teachers felt the need for a protocol due to having had bad experiences, including Members bringing unexpected visitors with them to arranged visits; and
- it was suggested that a survey or email request might be more appropriate than a workshop in this situation.

Thereafter, Mr R Gale, seconded by Mr D Gregg, **MOVED** the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Ms S Atkin, seconded by Mr D Millar, moved as an **AMENDMENT**:-

“Mindful of the need for a Schools’ Visits protocol, this Council proposes that a workshop involving all Members be held to review and propose a revised protocol that is then agreed at Full Council. That the revised protocol will recognise the principle that Elected Members should have access to schools and that the Head Teacher is the point of contact to arrange and manage visits, at a time convenient to them and to the smooth running of the school”.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 30 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 33 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr H Morrison, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mrs S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D 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, Mrs P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid.

Abstentions:

Mr L Fraser.

Decision

Mindful of the need for a Schools’ Visits protocol, this Council proposes that a workshop involving all members be held to review and propose a revised protocol that is then agreed at Full Council. That the revised protocol will recognise the principle that elected members should have access to schools and that the Head Teacher is the point of contact to arrange and manage visits, at a time convenient to them and to the smooth running of the school.

- v. Noting that Highland Council has a record of showing solidarity to groups who endure great struggles and highlighting their plight, such as the action of flying the Ukraine flag in sympathy with the people of Ukraine against Putin's Russia. This Council agrees to fly the Palestinian flag for a period of one week to demonstrate the Highlands support for the Palestinian people.

Signed: Mr R MacKintosh Mr C Ballance

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

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

The proposer of the Motion stated that the Palestinian people had faced decades of conflict, displacement and struggle and that flying the Palestinian flag would provide visual representation of the Council's unwavering support of the Palestinian people.

It was acknowledged that the Motion did not condone or endorse any form of violence or extremism and that the Council's support for the Palestinian people was not an endorsement of Hamas or any other extremist group.

Referencing the challenges faced by the Israeli people who have also endured acts of violence and terror, it was said that security and stability was required for all parties involved.

Thereafter, Mr R MacKintosh, seconded by Mr C Ballance, **MOVED** the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Mr B Lobban, seconded by Mr K Gowans, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the Council continue with the existing Flag Flying Protocol.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 6 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 54 votes, with 3 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr D Gregg, Ms M Hutchison, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr M Baird, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs H Crawford, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr M Green, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Ms M M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Siggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:

Dr C Birt, Mr P Logue, Ms M Smith.

vi. Rewilding Nation Charter Motion

Scotland now ranks as one of the most nature depleted countries on Earth. In 2019, the Highland Council declared a climate and ecological emergency, and in 2022 the ecological emergency was added to the Council's Corporate Risk Register. In 2023, the Council became a signatory to the Edinburgh Declaration, underlining on the world stage its commitment to tackle the ecological emergency and reverse biodiversity loss.

This Council recognises that we have a key role to play in tackling the ecological emergency in Highland and agrees to sign the Rewilding Nation Charter urging the Scottish Government to declare Scotland a Rewilding Nation, committing to nature recovery across 30% of our land and seas, to benefit nature, climate and people.

<https://www.rewild.scot/charter>

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.

The proposer of the Motion highlighted that the latest state of nature report showed that Scotland was one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Restoring nature's landscapes and habitats had clear benefits for nature and it would also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. The importance of ecosystems was emphasised and the impact of climate change would have unprecedented implications for our way of life and that of future generations. Rewilding offered the chance to breathe new life into the land, sea and building resilience to environmental challenges to come. It would also align with the Scottish Government's biodiversity strategy. Therefore, the Council was asked to support the Motion as presented.

Those not in favour of the Motion were concerned that it was likely to undermine the Council's neutrality as a planning authority. This area already had a significant number of national and international designations such as National Scenic Areas, National Parks and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. These designations were supported through the National Planning Framework 4 and the various policies contained therein. Further, the Council already supported rewilding opportunities and continued to do so without formal membership of any lobbying body, so it showed the Council could be trusted and objective on planning matters and grant awards. Therefore, an amendment to the Motion was proposed as follows:-

"This Council recognises that we have a key role to play in mitigating climate and ecological challenges on land, in lochs and seas, throughout the Highland Council Area. We will work with our local communities and partners towards maximising nature recovery, continuing to encourage community involvement in a targeted way that will be adapted to our geographic circumstances."

Continuing, everyone understood the importance of biodiversity and nature to the climate. There was also a need to be mindful of the depopulation emergency and other emergencies and it was not felt that the Council could sign every charter that came along. In addition to the amendment, it was requested that when consulting with communities, this includes land managers.

Further, the public consultation on the Motion had not taken place and it would not be appropriate for the Council to sign up to this Charter. Also, it would have a much more significant effect on coastal communities given the significant area sought for rewilding. There was also a very fragile rural community in Highland that had considerable difficulty in retaining young people in rural areas, part of which was caused by an extreme lack of sites for house building. This should be considered prior to signing up to the Charter.

Also, rewilding the seabed would not be easy and not all sites were suitable and there was concern about meeting arbitrary targets. Rewilding should take place in a targeted way, where it worked.

Thereafter, Ms K Willis, seconded by Mr C Ballance, **MOVED** the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr R Stewart, moved as an **AMENDMENT**:-

“This Council recognises that we have a key role to play in mitigating climate and ecological challenges on land, in lochs and seas, throughout the Highland Council Area.

We will work with our local communities, and partners towards maximising nature recovery, continuing to encourage community involvement in a targeted way that will be adapted to our geographic & economic circumstances”.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 5 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 57 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr D Gregg, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr M Baird, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs H Crawford, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr M Green, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Mr D Loudon, Ms M M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:

Mr D Macpherson, Mr M Reiss.

Decision

This Council recognises that we have a key role to play in mitigating climate and ecological challenges on land, in lochs and seas, throughout the Highland Council Area.

We will work with our local communities, and partners towards maximising nature recovery, continuing to encourage community involvement in a targeted way that will be adapted to our geographic & economic circumstances.

vii. We the undersigned move the HC to agree to a full review over the closure of the Avonlea Children's facilities for the following reasons:-

1. Given the recent information on the STV news and newspapers regarding a manager at the centre were senior officers aware of this users complaint?
2. Were senior officers open and transparent with local councillors on the facts and circumstances surrounding their reasons for the closure of Avonlea.
3. At the time senior officers had the capacity, time and resources to improve the Avonlea management care issues raised in the first Care Inspector report to the final report and nothing was improved.
4. Highland Council have broken "The Promise" to the children of Caithness by not listening to children in their care and their decision making.

Signed: Mrs J McEwan Mr J Grafton Mr R Gunn Mr M Reiss Mrs T Robertson Mr A Graham Ms M M MacCallum

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council. It was assumed that a review would be undertaken within existing resources/officer time.

Following a summary of the motion by Mrs J McEwan, Members raised the following issues:

- attention was drawn to the Family First strategy demonstrating commitment to the Promise, which set out the new approach to looking after children, including residential accommodation being small and homely, resembling a family home and with a maximum of four bedrooms. Avonlea did not align with the new policy. The Council was committed to supporting children to stay at home with their families whenever possible, which reduced the need for residential homes;
- a summary of the Promise was provided and it was suggested that institutional care was not the way to achieve the aims of the Promise;
- some Members called for an independent review, ideally with the involvement of the Chief Executive, and attention was drawn to the local controversy and contradictory media information that had circulated about the closure of Avonlea, which had been purpose built as a children's home in 2014. In contrast, Thor House had been built 30 years earlier as an overnight respite centre, and it was queried why Thor House was being used for residential care, when Avonlea, which had been designed for residential care and was more homely than Thor House, was not.

Concern was expressed at the lack of information that had been provided to residents and their families, to local Members, and to the local community about decisions taken relating to Avonlea. A review would help to understand and learn lessons from the process that had been undertaken, including follow up actions from the Care Inspectorate reports;

- the sensitive nature of the issue and the importance of trusting the professional multi-disciplinary teams working on it were highlighted, as was the need to keep the needs of young people at the heart of all decisions, noting Members' role as corporate parents; and
- some Members suggested a review was important to provide a sense of completeness for the people of Caithness, while others called for a workshop first.

Ms J McEwan, seconded by Mr J Grafton, **MOVED** the Notice of Motion as detailed, with the addition of the word 'independent' between the words 'full' and 'review.'

Mr D Fraser, seconded by Mrs M Cockburn, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, that the Highland Council remained committed to the Family First Strategy as this was enabling the Promise to be delivered across Highland. A Members' workshop would be arranged to describe the changing picture in Highland and improve understanding of the Family First strategy. The Council recognised that our commitment to our children, young people and families, and with the support of our staff, we would ensure the ethos of the Promise was at the heart of what we were doing.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 31 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 31 votes, with no abstentions. In accordance with Standing Order 29, the Convener used his casting vote in favour of the amendment, and the **AMENDMENT** was **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Siggers, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

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

viii. We, the undersigned, call on Highland Council to reinstate the former Respite Services at Thor House, Thurso which were stopped, without consultation, during 2019 and 20220. The background reasons for this Motion include:

1. at present no similar service is available in Highland except, possibly, in Inverness.

2. This unacceptable situation harms both children and their families who find themselves in an impossible and stressful situation.
3. Thor House is being partially converted into a Childrens Home but is a building that does not conform to Scottish Government guidance or The Promise. It was specifically built to a design to provide overnight respite care for young people with additional needs.
4. There is a purpose built Childrens Home in Wick that is only 9 years old but this, too, has been closed without the consent of local Members”.

Signed: Mr M Reiss Mr R Gunn Ms M Smith Mr D Macpherson

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion was anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Following a summary of the motion, Members raised the following issues:

- the Convener reminded Members that the financial advice of the Section 95 Officer should not be questioned;
- following cessation of respite care services due to the pandemic, work was being undertaken regarding respite care provision across Highland, including extensive work with communities and the third sector to establish patterns of use and demand;
- the increasing use of Self Directed Support (SDS) reduced the need for traditional respite, but overnight respite remained a priority for many families Highland-wide and this was being tackled by the professional review which would be reported to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing (HSCW) Committee;
- the traditional model for respite care had changed since the Covid pandemic, and SDS was the new model for respite care in many situations, to provide families and carers with funding for flexible assistance, noting that some parents sought a break from caring but preferred to keep their children in their home rather than in residential care. However, it was acknowledged that for some families, true respite required residential care;
- the situation with Avonlea and Thor House was complex, with attention drawn to the wide variety of care children required. It was important that resources were being used for appropriate purposes;
- attention was drawn to the two campaign groups in Caithness who were highlighting the lack of respite care in the area and who represented many of the families who needed assistance and a return of the services that had previously been available;
- concern was expressed that in remote and rural areas such as Caithness, even if SDS funding was available, it was often challenging for families to source any services due to lack of appropriately skilled staff. Full-time staff in the local community were required;
- the lack of overnight respite care was disappointing and the immense need for overnight respite services in Caithness was emphasised;
- it was suggested that a motion to the Council was not the most appropriate means of tackling this issue, which should have been considered in the first instance by Local Members at Ward and Area Committee meetings;
- it was considered that communication with local Members about key decisions had not been sufficient; and

- the importance of completing the review for all of the Highlands, not only Caithness, was emphasised.

Mr M Reiss, seconded by Mr R Gunn, **MOVED** the Notice of Motion as detailed.

Mr D Fraser, seconded by Mrs M Cockburn, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, that the Council asked that officers complete their respite review and report back to the HSCW Committee. The aim should be to ensure that the short break provision met the level of Highland need, and was financially viable, ensuring best value to the council and the community.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 29 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 33 votes, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr R Gunn, Mr D Gregg, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr H Morrison, Mrs P Munro, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart, Ms M Smith, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs Jackie 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 L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie.

15. Additional Urgent Item

At this point in the meeting, and in line with Standing Order 8, it was advised that the Convener had agreed that the following should be considered as an urgent item of business due to the timescales involved:-

The Council **AGREED** that a Special Meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee be held on 11 June 2024.

The meeting ended at 6.15pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday 13 May 2024, at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Ms M MacCallum
Ms T Collier	Ms P Munro
Ms L Johnston	Ms M Ross
Mr D Louden	Ms M Smith

Participating Officials:

Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager
Mr M Rodgers, Chief Officer, Housing and Property
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
Ms A Jansson, North Area Education Manager
Mr A Byrne, Principal Housing Officer – East Ross
Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager (North)
Ms J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Mr S Freireich, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr J Thrower, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Ms L Johnston in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, and on behalf of the Council, the Chair lead tributes to Mr Alasdair Rhind who had recently passed away and extended deep condolences and sympathy to his family.

1. **Appointment of a Second Vice Chair Cur Cathraiche an Dreuchd**

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms M Ross as a second Vice Chair of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee, noting that at the meeting on 22 January 2024, Ms L Johnston had been appointed as Chair, and Ms M MacCallum as Vice Chair.

2. **Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

Apologies were intimated for Ms M Nolan.

3. **Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement**

Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

4. Fire – Area Performance Summary Report Smàladh – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BIER/09/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- ultra lightweight fire appliances were due to be received on a phased basis, and their delivery would be communicated to Members;
- the reduction in the number of unwanted call-outs was welcomed and the reasons for this were sought and provided;
- Mr Louden thanked retiring officers D MacLeod and A Duff for their long service;
- the importance of planning recruitment to align with officers retiring was emphasised;
- information was sought and provided on the age of the children attending fire skills courses, and the connection between providing courses for young people and future recruitment to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) was highlighted. Attention was drawn to funding challenges for this type of activity and information was sought on whether they would be extended to youth groups;
- the SFRS's rapid response to call-outs was welcomed;
- the recent car wash fundraiser in Invergordon was praised, as was the SFRS attendance at similar events;
- a Doors Open Day at Invergordon Fire Station was scheduled for 25 May 2024 and Members would be invited;
- information was sought on the need for new risk assessments, with reference to changes to industrial activity, and increased housing, in the area. Attention was drawn to the ongoing responsibilities for risk assessments under the Operational Assurance Policy, and to community risk index modelling;
- attention was drawn to the SFRS Strategic Service Review Programme for which a consultation was underway and for which a link would be sent to Members;
- assurance was provided to address Members' concerns about SFRS cover in the area;
- information was sought and provided on the Rider Refine Programme, which was a Police-led one-day course aimed at improving the safety of motorcyclists on the roads;
- SFRS officers were congratulated on the high number of home fire safety visits that had been undertaken;
- the distress and trauma caused by attendance at road traffic accidents was acknowledged and assurance was sought and provided that officers were provided with appropriate debriefings and support; and
- the Chair planned to attend the James Braidwood Commemoration Service in Fortrose on 23 June 2024.

The Committee thanked the SFRS officers for their attendance, **NOTED** the Area Performance Report, and **AGREED** the link to the SFRS Strategic Service

Review Programme consultation would be emailed to the Committee and shared with Corporate Communications.

5. Invergordon Common Good Fund – consultation on the proposal to sell the bust of Sir John Gordon
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain – co-chomhairleachadh mun mholadh gus ìomhaigh-bràghad Sir Iain Ghòrdain a reic

There had been circulated Report No BIER/10/24 by the Executive Chief Officer (Communities and Place), and the Acting Executive Chief Officer (Performance and Governance).

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

- the good response to the consultation was welcomed, however Members reported that Invergordon Community Council had expressed concern that there had been insufficient responses to the consultation, with specific reference to their requests for a drop-in facility, and that information be delivered to homes. An issue with this approach was that it was necessary to verify the identity of each respondent. There was no legal or statutory requirement to hold a public meeting and, even if there had been one, any representations would have been required in writing. Clarity was provided on the information provided to the community council who had been encouraged to disseminate it further;
- a summary of how the Common Good Fund was established, operated, and monitored was requested and provided, including how the Fund came to own the Bust, and the financial and statutory responsibilities that would control how the capital receipt from the possible sale of the Bust could be used;
- some reservations were expressed at the prospect of disposing of the Bust, and it was hoped it would at least remain on display in Scotland. Given the low responses to the consultation and the lack of funds the community council had to publicise the consultation, seeking a second opinion might be beneficial to maintain the public's trust;
- it was thought that many people felt the Bust should remain in Scotland, either in an Edinburgh or Invergordon Museum, should insurance be possible. However, it was also suggested that the Bust being given to a museum for less than the market value would not benefit the people of Invergordon. Attention was drawn to the offer from an anonymous buyer that had been received through Sothebys and, although it was suggested that they would receive a commission on any sale, the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property, referred to paragraph 4.3 of the report which stated that Sotheby's would not deduct any commission from the sale price if the offer was accepted. He drew attention to paragraph 4.6 of the report which informed of the problems with displaying the Bust in Invergordon due to insurance requirements that could not be met, and reminded Members there was no minimum threshold with regard to response rates for consultations. The liabilities in relation to property ownership were also highlighted;
- in relation to calls for a second opinion on how to sell the bust, it was queried who a second opinion would be obtained from;
- the need for a business case to decide on an investment strategy for any capital receipt from a sale was referenced, as was the importance of generating an ongoing income from the capital sum;

- it was suggested the consultation response was positive when compared to average returns for similar surveys, and nearly 80% of the responses were in favour of a sale. A summary was provided of the publicity given to the consultation;
- the Bust was an historic asset, but one that nobody had seen for many years and, while it would be nice to see it in a museum, the receipt of £2.5 million for the Invergordon Common Good Fund was more important. The Bust was not well enough known to generate a reasonable income from tourists paying to view it, and many would be happy to view a high-quality replica, and to know the story behind the replica;
- it was disappointing that some of the recording from the Area Committee meeting in October 2023 was missing and reference was made to requests that had been made for in-person consultations. Reference was also made to the need for proper consultation on asset valuing to facilitate an informed decision and ensure transparency. If more information had been available on how the Bust would be sold and what would happen to the payment for it, the community might have found the decision on whether to sell it easier to make. In this regard a second consultation with face-to-face meetings was suggested. However, it was pointed out that the report provided detailed information on the sale process, the pros and cons of a public versus a private sale, and the triggering of the Waverley criteria;
- Members were reminded that the decision on the sale rested with the full Council;
- information was sought and provided on a potential buyer paying to loan the Bust for an extended period of time, however given the complexities around this scenario, it was unlikely to be viable;
- tribute was paid to the community council for their interest in the matter; and
- the value of the funds that could be raised from the sale of the Bust to the people of Invergordon was emphasised, although it was also pointed out that it would be disappointing for such an historic artefact to disappear behind the closed doors of a private collector.

Following further summary of the points made, Ms L Johnston, seconded by Ms M Smith, **MOVED** to propose the recommendations as detailed in the report with the following additional clause, provided by Mr D Louden, to be added before iv.(d):-

That a re-sale clause be inserted stating if the bust is re-sold for a sum in excess of the sale price that 20% of the increase will be payable to Invergordon Common Good Fund.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Ms S Atkin, seconded by Ms T Collier, moved that in addition to the insertion of a resale clause, the Highland Council elicit a second opinion to strengthen public trust in the process.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 5 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 3 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms L Johnston, Mr D Louden, Ms P Munro, Ms M Ross, Ms M Smith

For the Amendment:

Ms S Atkin, Ms T Collier, Ms MM MacCallum

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at Appendix 1;
- ii. **APPROVED** the responses to the representations received within the consultation period for publication on the Council's website as contained in the document at Appendix 2;
- iii. **NOTED consider and balance** the representations received together with the responsibilities for the Invergordon Common Good fund; and
- iv. following consideration of the representations received and best interests of the Invergordon Common Good Fund:
 - a) **AGREED** to recommend to full Council that the proposal to dispose of the bust of Sir John Gordon by sale should go ahead (see paragraph 5.3 of the report);
 - * b) **AGREED** that the disposal should proceed by way of private sale (see paragraph 5.4 of the report);
 - c) **AGREED** that a museum quality replica be commissioned (see paragraph 6.1 of the report);
 - d) **AGREED** that, if the bust is re-sold for a sum in excess of the sale price that 20% of the increase will be payable to Invergordon Common Good Fund; and
 - e) **NOTED** that, if approval is recommended, it will be necessary to seek Sheriff Court consent because the bust is considered to be inalienable.

6. **Housing Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- in relation to the recent announcement of £80million of funding for housing from the Scottish Government, it was queried how much of this would be likely to come to Highland, noting that Highland usually received around 4% of national funding. It was also asked whether this funding could be used to purchase houses on the open market, rather than building new homes, and whether it could be used to tackle the backlog of void repairs, which could impact positively on the housing waiting list. A comprehensive response was provided, highlighting the importance of best value and the differences between capital and revenue funding, as well as some of the challenges around tackling void properties, some of which require significant investment;
- the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property, and the Repairs Manager (North) were thanked for their work and wished well for the future, as both were leaving the Council;
- clarity was sought and provided on whether an inherited tenancy could be considered as a void, which it would not, and any queries about specific incidences could be dealt with offline;

- it was suggested that, given the extent of the housing waiting list, there might be potential tenants willing to take on a property that was not fully up to standard, and it was queried whether policy could be amended to facilitate this. A summary of current policy was provided, including decorative standards, and attention was drawn to the minimum statutory standards the Council was obligated to adhere to;
- it was queried whether more rent arrears notices had been issued following legal changes, and it was pointed out that although the rent arrear figures were problematic, the compassionate approach to rent arrears was endorsed; and
- information was sought and provided on action that could be taken when tenants behaved in an anti-social manner, with information provided on breach of tenancy, enforcement and eviction action, including the multi-dimensional complexities around these issues, such as the need for action to be reasonable and proportionate. Police, social work and mental health services were involved when necessary.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

**7. Associated School Group – Invergordon and Alness
Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte – Inbhir Ghòrdain agus Alanais**

Items 7a and 7b were presented and debated simultaneously.

**7a. Alness Academy Associated School Group Attainment Overview
Foir-shealladh Buileachaidh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte
Acadamaidh Alanais, and**

**7b. Invergordon Academy Associated School Group Attainment Overview
Foir-shealladh Buileachaidh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte
Acadamaidh Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Reports No BIER/12/24 and BIER/13/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- the new Headteachers of both academies were having a positive impact on the schools, and the work of the primary school Headteachers was praised, including their proactive work across the ASGs. It was hoped more Headteachers would be able to attend ward meetings;
- it was suggested that more detailed data was required to facilitate scrutiny for the Members and the public. Particular reference was made to the importance of adequate detail in relation to the achievement of national qualifications, including by subject, to facilitate scrutiny off issues relating to pupils and school leavers. It was thought the SQA would have this level of data. It was also suggested that the term 'positive destinations' was not sufficiently precise, noting that Highland performed less well than the Scottish average for higher and further education, but better for school leavers going straight into employment. This suggested that some young people in Highland were not achieving their full potential. A summary was provided of the data that was presented to the Scottish Government;
- in relation to the Alness ASG, exclusion and absence rates were higher which was a challenge. Attainment levels were praised, with particular

reference to improvements at Kiltearn and Obsdale Primary Schools. Although there were challenges in the senior phase, it was welcomed that 40% of pupils at Alness Academy in 2022-23 had gone on to Further Education;

- in relation to the Invergordon ASG, Park Primary school was praised for its successes, and exclusion levels were lower at Invergordon Academy;
- assurance was sought and provided that areas of best practice were shared across schools, and a summary was provided of the work undertaken by Collaborative Leads in this regard, as well as spotlight events for Headteachers and HMI reports; and
- the Chair wished all pupils well in their exams.

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

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

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** details of the Discretionary Budget applications that have been approved.

9. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 22 January 2024, which had been approved by the Council on 14 March 2024.

The meeting ended at 2.25pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn/Remotely on 13 May 2024 at 10.30am

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Mr J Mitchell, Housing Manager, Housing and Property
Ms F Shearer, Area Education & Learning Manager, Education and Learning
Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager, Communities and Place
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
Mr M Nixon, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

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

Mr M Green in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

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

Item 6 – Mr M Green

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

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

- the inaugural meeting of the Nairn Common Good Stakeholder Engagement Group had been a great success and attracted people from across Nairn;
- the Taste of Nairn Street Market had been a very successful event, and thanks were extended to the Business Improvement District and the Nairn Community and Arts Centre; and
- congratulations were extended to Mr Mike Davis, Club Chairman of Nairn County Cricket Club, who had played at the Over 60s World Cup in India as a member of the Rest of the World team which won the competition.

4. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais - 1 An Giblean 2023 gu 31 Am Mart 2024

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- although the level of rent arrears had improved, concern was expressed that they were still significant, and it was recognised that this was a legacy from Covid. The Housing Team was commended for their efforts to reduce the arrears whilst endeavouring to avoid using evictions which was a last resort; and
- the homelessness presentations appeared to be on an upward projection, but it was clarified that the figures shown in Table 5 (paragraph 8.4) of the report were representative of households rather than people. This emphasised the need for housing within Nairn. It was further confirmed that although single person accommodation was most in demand, there remained a need for family accommodation as well.

Thereafter, the committee **NOTED** the information provided on Housing Performance for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

5. Nairn Academy Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Acadamaidh Inbhir Narann

During discussion, the following points were raised: -

- disappointment was expressed that the report did not contain descriptions for the many acronyms that were used throughout the report which would have been particularly helpful for members of the public. As this was a set report template, the Area Education & Learning Manager advised that she would pass on this feedback. It was also confirmed that the Area Education & Learning Manager was the author of the report;
- reference was made to Cawdor Primary School and the outstanding Standards and Quality reports received;
- it was asked that following Rosebank School's attendance at a Ward Business meeting, whether it would be possible to have other Schools within the area attend future meetings and that Cawdor Primary School should be invited next;
- confirmation was provided that Headteachers across the Nairn Academy Associated School Group met up regularly to enable staff time to share learning and best practice to increase attainment;
- concerns were raised regarding poor attendance levels and whether the reason for absence had any connection to children missing key vaccines. It was explained that the Attendance Policy had recently been updated and assurance was provided that attendance data was monitored with a view to supporting schools and providing intensive individual support if required;
- Exclusions were not necessarily a reason to view a School negatively, and they could be used as a tool for Schools and the pupil to receive appropriate support;
- further information was sought and provided on the improvements that had been made to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. The Area Education & Learning Manager explained that this was undertaken continuously throughout the year via the Local Authority Tracking and Monitoring system. There was a focus on data to observe where interventions might be required, and senior management met regularly with teachers to discuss this;

- credit was given for the good work creating career fairs and confirmation was provided that after leaving school young people proceeded onto a range of further education courses and employment opportunities to suit all needs. The Area Education & Learning Manager advised that the Nairn Academy Headteacher would be able to attend a future Ward Business Meeting to provide more detail on the positive destination data;
- clarification was sought and provided on the confidential information in Table 6 of the report which had been withheld and it was clarified that this information would be made available;
- in regard to using external benchmarks, it was explained that comparisons were made at a national level using a virtual comparator and also against Highland wide data. It was suggested that UK comparators would be helpful. The Area Education & Learning Manager advised that there was an overall improvement but if a school fell below the national or Highland average then intensive support was provided; and
- it was requested that future reports include information on staff absence and recruitment. It was clarified that this information would be submitted to the Education Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED** that:

- a representative from each of the schools in the Nairn Academy Associated School Group be invited to attend the Ward Business Meeting on a quarterly basis commencing with Cawdor Primary School; and
- the information that had been withheld in Table 6 of the report be provided.

6. Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Transparency Statement: Mr M Green made a Transparency Statement as a Co-Chair of Nairnshire Community Newspaper. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The following Ward Discretionary Fund payments had been made:-

- Cawdor Primary School, Reading Culture, £1,000
- NICE, Nairn Area Local Place Plan – Gap funding, £3,000
- Nairn Bowling Club, Supporting Junior Bowlers, £1,000
- Nairn Coastal Rowing Club, 2024 Regatta, £250.68
- Auldearn FC, Recreation Ground changing facilities, £30.00
- Nairnshire Community Newspaper, Establishment of Newspaper, £3,000
- Nairn BID, Town Centre Improvements, £2,724.98

During discussion, the following points were raised: -

- the Chair clarified that he took no part in the discussion/decision to award funding to Nairnshire Community Newspaper; and
- reference was made to the positive support the Ward Discretionary Fund provided to local communities even though the level of funding available had decreased over the years.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

7. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 22 January 2024 and 4 March 2024 which were approved by the Council on 20 March 2024.

The meeting concluded at 11am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held remotely on **Tuesday, 14 May, 2024 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)
Mr J C Grafton
Ms S Fanet
Mr A MacDonald

Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Ms L Siggers
Ms K Willis

Officials in Attendance:

Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager, West and Mid Highland, Communities & Place
Mr D Wood, Principal Housing Officer, Housing & Property
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer, Housing & Property
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Performance & Governance
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health & Bereavement Services
Mr J Maclean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Ms R Robertson, Project Co-ordinator (Burial Grounds)
Mr A MacLeod, Policy Officer, Performance & Governance
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance Service

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

BUSINESS

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

There were none.

**3. Housing Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No. LA/8/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 March 2024.

Reference was made to the poor condition of the properties at Claggan Quadrangles and the need for major refurbishment was acknowledged. An update to Members on these properties was to be provided at a Ward

Business Meeting by the Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance.

There was a shortage of properties suitable for people with disabilities across Lochaber. When new builds were proposed, the Housing Development team was informed that more properties of this type were required. However, there were budgetary constraints that affected how achievable it was to provide more of these properties. The team did work closely with Occupational Therapists in installing adaptations into homes.

It was queried if tenants were sufficiently equipped and informed on how to deal with mould in their properties. It was advised that Maintenance Officers dealing with these issues, would inform tenants on how best to prevent condensation which can lead to mould. They would also issue leaflets on the subject, information to deal with this problem was highlighted in the tenants newsletter and on the Council's website.

It was queried what advice was given to tenants who had to endure anti social behaviour by other tenants. It was hoped most tenants would be aware of how to report such incidents i.e. report it to their Housing Management Officer and it was also recommended tenants report it to the Police. Before any action could be taken, there needed to be evidence and any action would have to be proportionate to the level of anti social behaviour involved.

Reference was made to the Lochaber care and repair service being in jeopardy due to a cut in funding being proposed. Officers were reviewing this and further developments on this should be known soon. It was advised that the Housing repair team did undertake adaptations to tenants homes. A potential reduction in service from Lochaber care and repair could increase the amount of work for the Council's repair team.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April, 2023 to 31 March, 2024.

**4. Fort William Common Good Fund – Asset Register
Maoin Math Coitcheann a' Ghearasdain – Clàr So-mhaoin**

There was circulated Report No. LA/9/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Acting Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance. The report provided information on the title and ownership investigations that have taken place with a view to identifying Common Good property relating to the former Burgh of Fort William. It also detailed what steps will be necessary to commence a public consultation leading to the establishment of the Fort William Common Good Asset Register.

In discussion, with regard to the public consultation it was suggested that maps outlining the land assets should accompany the Asset Register, as it would make it easier to visualise where the land assets were.

In relation of the West End car park, it was queried what portion of this was common good land and what portion of income from this could be diverted to a common good fund. It was advised that while exact measurements would require to be undertaken, it was around half to two thirds of the car park was common good and formed the car park extension. This would create a significant income for the common good and a definitive date when revenue

could go into a common good fund would require to be decided by Members. It was also noted that there would be a cost to the common good for looking after common good fund assets and there was a corporate review ongoing of what payment should be made by the common good funds for maintaining their assets.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the list of property proposed to be included in the Common Good Asset Register for Fort William (Appendix 1);
- ii **AGREED** that maps outlining the land assets would accompany the Asset Register; and
- iii. **AGREED** the commencement of the public consultation on the list of proposed property in accordance with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (the Act).

**5. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd**

There was circulated Report No LA/10/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

The report detailed 3 community regeneration fund applications received for consideration. There was a total request of funding of £89,495.00, with an available budget of £90,620.01. All 3 applications were eligible for support.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** all the applications for Community Regeneration Fund grant award and the grants requested.

**6. Bereavement Services – Project Update
Cunntas às Ùr mun t-Seirbheis Chaoidh**

There was circulated Report No. LA/11/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which provided an update on the work being undertaken on burial ground capacity and new burial grounds in the Lochaber area.

In discussion, it was advised that Officers were discussing with the land owner a site adjacent to the existing burial ground at Glen Nevis, for additional burial ground capacity. Reference was also made to the burial ground at Kiliharrol near Roy Bridge as potential for expansion. This was an historic site and details of this would be provided to Officers so that records could be updated. Also, details would be provided to Officers over possible land for extending Blairour cemetery. Further, the community in Arisaig felt that their cemetery could be expanded.

It was advised that restrictions were introduced on burial grounds, generally when they had less than 10 years capacity which allowed the Service to manage the remaining space. Burial grounds that had more capacity, may be considered for advanced sales.

It was noted that the Council had commissioned a feasibility report on the possible operation of a crematorium in the Lochaber area. Members requested that this be discussed at an Area Business Meeting prior to the

report on this being submitted to Communities and Place Committee in September, 2024.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i the progress of burial ground extensions in the Lochaber area;
- ii the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development; and
- iii Officers would discuss further with Members their suggestions for possible land for burial ground development.

**7. Islands (Scotland) Act 2018
Achd nan Eilean (Alba) 2018**

There was circulated Report No. LA/12/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance which provided an update on the implementation of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. It also detailed the projects that had benefited from the Islands national plan.

In discussion, it was requested that the Isle of Rum should be considered as part of the national Islands plan as it had some significant problems in terms of a low population, education and housing provision. Both Scottish and UK Governments were aware of the need to give Island Councils as much notice of funding in order that the money could be spent on projects within the timeframes set. The criteria for this year's Islands funding, in terms of the bidding process and when money had to be spent, had still to be received.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i the update and acknowledged the work that had taken place; and
- ii that a request to consider the Isle of Rum as part of national Islands plan would be looked at by Officers.

**8. Parking Income and Tariffs
Cìsean Parcaidh Loch Abar**

There was circulated Report No. LA/13/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which provided an update on parking income generated in 2023/2024 and future additional car parks. Members were also invited to deliberate on any changes to current tariffs in Lochaber car parks.

In discussion, in relation to the new mandatory pay and display car parks in Lochaber these were to be included in a master traffic regulation order that would be published soon and would include other car parks throughout the Highlands. Any objections to any of the proposals in the order would be addressed through a statutory process and Members would be asked for their views on any objections. In addition, it was possible to make these car parks invitation to pay (a donation). It was intended that these car parks would become operational this summer.

There was discussion in relation to the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre car park which was operated by High Life Highland and the West Bay Mallaig car park, income of which had been received from 2022/23. In terms of the latter car park an undertaking was given to look at lining parking bays for a section that was currently not lined. In relation to Achintee Road End, this was currently

on street parking and free to park. An undertaking was given to consider delisting the on street car parking so it could be classed as a car park.

Further, for consistency purposes, it was requested that all car parks with 24 hour parking, the charge be increased to £10 for up to 24 hours parking. Also, the Fort William Viewforth Car Park, this be increased from 3 to 4 hours minimum stay parking, to allow people to stay a bit longer in the town. These changes should be reviewed in one year's time.

In terms of regulating car parks that prohibited overnight parking of motorhomes, Parking Enforcement Officers did random evening and early morning patrols, and tried to educate people that they could receive a penalty charge notice for unauthorised overnight parking.

In relation to the West End Car Park, income from this would be of great benefit to the common good. Common good sites see 100% of income deposited with the relevant common good fund and the Service submit expenses for recovery on an annual basis. Discussions would require to be held on how this site was divided between common good land and core service land and an agreement reached.

It was advised that all penalty charge notices were published on the Council's website. This was not classed as income, and the money was used to pay for the Parking Enforcement Service.

It was explained that vehicles parked in mandatory display car parks must display a parking ticket. Failure to do this would amount to a contravention. In terms of electric vehicle bays there was a limited period allowed free for charging purposes. Overstaying this period and without displaying a parking ticket for any additional time over the free period, would result in a penalty charge notice.

The issue of laybys being full, preventing HGV drivers from parking and resting was raised. This could not be regulated as laybys were a place of safety for all vehicles. Also, 25 small isles permit bays were to be provided for Islanders in the east bay, Mallaig area.

It was queried if one of the laybys on the A82 between Corran and Fort William could be designated for HGV vehicles for road safety purposes. It was advised that this request would require to go to Transport Scotland as it was a trunk road.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the income reporting in section 4;
- ii. **AGREED** the further increase in Tariffs in section 5, with the addition that:-
 - a) all car parks with 24 hour parking, the charge be increased to £10 for up to 24 hours parking;
 - b) Fort William Viewforth Car Park an increase from 3 to 4 hours minimum stay parking;
 - c) these changes in Tariffs would commence as soon as practically possible, with a further review of Tariffs in one year's time from the commencement of these changes; and

- iii. **NOTED** the proposed tariffs for Glencoe Village Visitor Car Park in paragraph 5.2;
- iv. **AGREED** the regulation of the car park sites in section 6.

9. **Ward Discretionary Fund** **Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund grant awards from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Ward 11

HLH Archive Centre – contribution to travelling exhibition costs Tir nan Og - £750
Lochaber Wheeled sports society – for purchase of bikes & helmets - £1,000
Knoydart Trading Limited – purchase of freezer - £2,350
Remembrance Day - £302.50
Nevis Landscape Partnership - National Park Working Group - £1,500
Repairs to viewforth toilets - £3,500
Knoydart Tree Nursery - project costs - £3,300
Lochaber Environmental Group - new website - £500
Nevis Community Radio Ltd - storm damage repairs - £469
Cruise Ship Maiden Visit Plaques - £187.50
CFINE - Fareshare in Highland - £1197

Ward 21

Kinlochleven Primary School Council – School trip - £250
South Lochaber Community Association – Contribution to Bus repairs - £1750
Lochaber wheeled sports society – for purchase of bikes & helmets - £1000
West Ardnamurchan Community Council – for purchase of IT kit - £450
Remembrance Day - £302.50
West Highland Way signs cleaning - £370
Nevis Landscape Partnership - National Park Working Group - £1,500
Repairs to viewforth toilets - £3,500
Voluntary Action Lochaber - Kinlochleven & Fort William CAGs - £3,000
Kentallen & Duror Community Centre - replacement seating main hall - £1,000
Nether Lochaber Community Association - North Ballachulish Water Tank Acquisition - £880
Lochaber Environmental Group - new website - £500
Nevis Community Radio Ltd - storm damage repairs - £469
Cruise Ship Maiden Visit Plaques - £187.50
Morvern Community Council - Local Place Plan Morvern - £1,000

10. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 23 January, 2024 which were approved by the Council on 14 March, 2024, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

11. Appointment to the proposed West Highland Way Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Board of Trustees

The West Highland was Scotland's first long distance route established under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967. It remained the most well-known route and walked by around 50,000 people end-to-end every year. The Council had been a member of West Highland Way Management Group since the 1980's, this is currently led by Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority. There was increasing need to source external funds for the improvement, maintenance and administration of the route. The establishment of a SCIO was being proposed, this would have representation from each local authority involved in the management of the Way.

Nominations were invited to appoint one Member, from the Lochaber Area as an Interim Trustee of the West Highland Way SCIO for the first year of establishment and the first term once established.

Ms K Willis was nominated by Mr A Baldrey and this was seconded by Mr A MacDonald.

There being no other nominations, the Committee therefore **AGREED** that Ms K Willis be appointed as Interim Trustee of the West Highland Way SCIO for the first year of establishment and the first term once established.

The meeting ended at 12.46 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie, Golspie on Tuesday 14 May 2024 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird

Mr R Gale

Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison (remote)

Ms L Niven

In attendance:

Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager

Ms A Jansson, Area Education & Learning Manager

Ms M Grant, Principal Housing Officer

Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager

Ms P Betts, Project Officer (Community Regeneration)

Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander D Bell, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service

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

Mr R Gale in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 6: Mr R Gale

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/06/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members expressed concern at the figures for station availability in some locations in Sutherland. A specific concern was the potential for a major road traffic collision on the NC500 in remote locations and the delay that may rise due to the unavailability of local stations and distance from the nearest appliance that could be deployed.

In addition, it was suggested a different model for recruitment and training was required in the area and for innovative measures to be considered. This included the potential for training of recruits to be undertaken over a longer period to accommodate

their main employment and lowering the recruitment age in remote and rural areas to 16/17 years old to capture school leavers. The potential through community benefit schemes to pay recruits for the time involved in training and other duties and the opportunity to have discussions with employability officers also be considered.

In response, the Station Commander provided an update on the joint mobilisation pilot being trialled on the NC500 in North and West Sutherland which he indicated was providing resilience in the area. Recruitment continued to be actively pursued and he would feedback the comments in relation to training to the Area Commander.

Further comments from Members related to the need to investigate the lack of water pressure in hydrants in Durness and Scourie. The Station Commander undertook to establish responsibility for this matter.

In conclusion, the Chair extended an invitation to the Station Commander to attend a Ward Business Meeting for further discussion on the points raised.

In the meantime, the Station Commander confirmed he would feedback the points raised by Members to the Area Commander, relevant Group Commanders and also the Station Commander in Skye who was overseeing feedback on the joint mobilisation pilot.

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

4. Attainment Overviews – Kinlochbervie, Farr, Dornoch and Golspie Associated School Groups
Foir-sheallaidhean Buileachaidh – Buidhnean Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte
Cheann Loch Biorbhaidh, Farr, Dhòrnaich agus Ghoillspidh

There had been circulated Report Nos SCC/07/24 to SCC/10/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- an explanation was sought and provided on the standards and quality rating for Farr Primary School and it was confirmed further clarification would be sought from the Head Teacher;
- an update was sought and provided on the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on smaller rural schools in the area;
- concern at the school roll forecasts for Kinlochbervie High School and how a full curriculum would be delivered going forward, reference being made to the emphasis on digital education;
- the attainment overviews were mainly positive across the Associated School Groups (ASGs) and Members thanks be passed to all head teachers and staff for their hard work and the quality of education being delivered;
- the school roll forecasts reflected the challenges around depopulation in the area and the provision of new housing in communities was essential in tackling this issue;
- an invitation be extended to the new Head Teacher of Kinlochbervie High School to attend a future ward business meeting;
- in response to a query, the Manger confirmed she would provide Ms M Hutchison with the definition of 'training' under positive destinations; and

- attainment reporting to the Committee should include pupils from Ardgay and Assynt who attended Tain Royal Academy and Ullapool High School respectively. The Area Education & Learning Manager confirmed she would share with Members the respective reports for both ASGs.

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

5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 31 Màrt 2024

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the Repairs Team be commended for performance on repairs being well below target times;
- the impact on rent arrears figures as a result of benefits being paid in arrears and noting the Housing Manager would be asked to provide more details on this issue to the next Ward Business Meeting which he was due to attend;
- the Principal Housing Officer and staff be commended on their hard work in ensuring rent arrears in Sutherland were well below the Highland average;
- it would be helpful for Members to be provided with details of void properties within their wards so they could pass this information onto community councils to raise awareness;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed Members would be provided with an organisational chart for the Service and full contact details for officers;
- further clarity was sought and provided that it was not anticipated there would be a significant impact on the number of evictions in the area associated with the ending of the Cost of Living (Scotland) Act on 31 March 2024. The Service's focus was on providing intensive support to tenants with evictions being a measure of last resort;
- in response to a query, information was provided on the number of void properties in the area and specifically pockets of very low demand in North and West Sutherland; and
- clarification was sought and provided that currently there was no cyclical gutter cleaning programme and works were undertaken on reactive basis. However, consideration was being given to establishing an inhouse gutter cleaning team in the longer term.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

6. Community Regeneration Funding – Assessment of Applications Maoineachadh Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd – Measadh Iarrtasan

Declaration of Interest: Mr R Gale declared an interest in the application by the Go Golspie Development Trust on the grounds he was Trustee of the organisation and he left the meeting for the determination of the award for this application and the other applications detailed in the report. Mr H Morrison, Vice Chair, took the Chair for the determination of each of the undernoted applications.

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members were advised that the available funding remaining from the 2023/24 allocation was £195,872.38 and that total value of grant requests was £219,982.33. The application by the Embo Trust had been withdrawn as they had been successful in securing a match funding request.

The Committee **APPROVED** the applications presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Applicant	Project	Grant awarded
GoGolspie	Increasing Capacity and Resilience within Go Golspie Development Trust	£30,071
Scourie Community Development Company	Gearing Up 2 - Continuation of Freelance Development Officer Post	£18,309
Durness Golf Club	Golf Course Machinery	£10,025
Highland Council	Sutherland Access Rangers	£100,000
Kinlochbervie Community Company	Loch Clash Regeneration Phase 3	£21,341.71
Embo Trust	Embo Old School solar panels & battery backup	Application withdrawn
Assynt Leisure	Assynt Learning Hub	£16,125.67
TOTAL		£195,872.38

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

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

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

Lairg Community Council - Lairg Bird Hide upgrade	£2,000.00
Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds	£800.00
Farr Youth Development – High Life Highland - Day Trip to Durness	£240.00

1122

The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange	£500.00
Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust - Kyle Feeds	£1,000.00
Lairg & District Community Initiative - Replace Flag Pole	£500.00
North West Training Centre - Learning Programme 23-24	£1,750.00
TYKES - Programme of Residential Respite	£2,500.00
Farr Edge 2000 - Continue Service	£1,240.00
Culrain Hall – Heating upgrade	£1,200.00
Scourie Community Devt Co. – Safe Parking for Affordable Housing and School	£1,000.00
North West Schools PC – Extra-curricular Activities	£1,000.00
East Sutherland Schools Sports Association – Transport	£1,000.00
Scourie Community Devt. Co. - Spring Wellbeing (Scourie)	£440.00
Total	£15,170.00

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

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

Clyne Heritage Society – Aultcraggie Roundhouses Archaeological Excavation	£500.00
Dornoch Bowling Club – Victorian Benches	£700.00
East Sutherland Camera Club – Highland Challenge 2023	£600.00
Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds	£800.00
Go Golspie - Caretaker Post	£500.00
The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange	£500.00
Dornoch Academy - Edinburgh Book Festival Literacy Trip	£1,175.00
The Embo Trust - Old School Reset	£600.00
HLH - Dornoch Youth Services Summer Activity Programme	£1,000.00
Tykes - Programme of Respite Residential	£3,000.00
Embo Trust (Urras Euraboil) - Embo Community Centre Resilience	£ 999.99
East Sutherland Schools Sports Association – Transport	£2,560.00
Golspie Youth Action Project - Office	£1,415.00
Helmsdale PS Parent Council – Crossing Patroller Shed	£850.00
Total	£15,199.99

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 23 January 2024, which were approved by the Council on 14 March 2024.

The meeting concluded at 12.30pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of the meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 16 May 2024 at 10.30am.

Present:

Dr C Birt	Mr A MacDonald
Ms K MacLean (sub for Mrs M Cockburn)	Mrs I Mackenzie
Mr D Fraser	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R Gale	Mr T MacLennan
Mr R Gunn (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Ms L Johnston	Mrs M Reid
Mr D Louden (sub for Ms E Knox)	Ms M Smith
Ms L Kraft	

Non-Members present:

Mr C Ballance	Mr D McDonald
Mr B Boyd	Mr R Stewart
Mr J Grafton (remote)	

NHS Highland representatives:

Dr T Allison, Director of Public Health, NHS Highland
Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing
Mr S Steer, Director of Adult Social Care

Third sector representatives in attendance:

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

Participating Officials:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care and Chief Social Work Officer
Ms F Malcolm, Head of Integration Adult Social Care, Health and Social Care
Ms M McIntyre, Head of Children and Justice Social Work, Health and Social Care
Ms D Munro, Lead Officer (Child Protection Committee)
Ms M Cano, Principal Officer (Criminal Justice Services)
Mr J Maybee, Independent Chair Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

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

Mr D Fraser in the Chair

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Cockburn, Ms E Knox and Mrs P Munro.

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

Transparency Statement

Item 5 - Ms L Johnston

**3. Service Achievements
Coileanaidhean Seirbheis**

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

- **My Journey Journal**, which allowed young people aged 12 and above with care experience to record important information about themselves;
- Highland's multi-agency approach to the roll out of the **Safe & Together Model** funded by Scottish Government through the Delivering Equally Safe fund managed by Inspiring Scotland;
- The SASW (the professional association for social work and social workers) **Mental Health Officers Conference – 28 February 2024**, the theme of which had been Embracing the Unknown: Finding Hope. Feedback had been positive; and
- **Mind your Ps and Qs – Language Academy Session – 17 May 2024**, to facilitate organisations with responsibility towards care experience children and young embedding destigmatising language and practices across the way they work.

**4. NHS Highland Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023: Medication and Public Health – Do the Right Thing
Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2023 Stiùiriche Slàinte a' Phobaill aig NHS na Gàidhealtachd: Cungaidhean-leighis agus Slàinte a' Phobaill – Dèan an Rud Ceart**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/06/24 by the Director of Public Health and Health Policy.

Following a presentation of the Public Health Annual Report 2023, the theme of which was medication and public health, Members raised the following issues during discussion:

- the statistics for deaths from suicide and drugs were concerning and it was hoped strategies would be put in place to tackle health inequalities;
- the improvements in treatment for Hepatitis C were welcomed and assurance was sought and provided that treatment was provided equitably, with a summary provided of the testing and treatment programme across the Highlands;
- depression and isolation were key health issues, especially since the pandemic, and attention was drawn to the benefits of social prescribing, including working with the third sector, community groups and the community planning partnerships;
- it was important to encourage people to eat a better diet and to address the increasing use of food banks;

- the ageing population, and the increasing population, were concerning, and the importance of maintaining a good quality of life when approaching and passing retirement age was emphasised;
- in relation to life expectancy, especially in areas of poverty, the Council was urged to consider all the determinants of health that could be affected by their policies. Particular reference was made to efforts that were required to tackle rising levels of obesity, including recent pharmaceutical treatment, and current health promotion policies to improve diets;
- it was disappointing that the gaps between various health indicators for deprived areas versus the average were widening and a key challenge for the future was how to avoid this situation worsening;
- accessibility to nature and transport were key challenges in areas of deprivation and reinstating wellbeing funding would be useful in this regard. The Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care would provide more detail to the Committee on whole family wellbeing funding outwith the meeting;
- equitable access to healthcare in remote and rural areas, including transport services, required signposting;
- attention was drawn to recent healthcare challenges on the Isle of Skye and it was queried when 24/7 urgent care would be resumed; and
- social prescribing required appropriate structuring to be an effective measure in tackling deprivation-led issues, including mental health problems. The value of arts therapy and nature was highlighted.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the 2023 Director of Public Health Annual Report.

**5. Adult Social Care Assurance Report and Strategic Update
Aithisg Barantais agus Cunntas Ro-innleachdail air Cùram Sòisealta
Inbheach**

Transparency Statement: Ms L Johnston declared a connection to this item as an employee of Connecting Carers but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No HCW/07/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

Attention was drawn to a recent Care Inspectorate report, which had not been available at the time of writing the report, and which was available on the Care Inspectorate website. The workforce competency risk, which was ragged red, was expected to be downgraded shortly.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- attention was drawn to the amount of care at home being undertaken by families and unpaid carers and the impact this could have on their lives. Many complex issues fed into the challenges in the care sector including staff shortages, residential home closures, and social work recruitment and retention. Carers should be involved in the hospital discharge process;
- families and Members were not always aware of the various Self Directed Support (SDS) options and a Members workshop and report on SDS was requested;

- the Head of Integration Adult Social Care would check that the funding for the Well-being Fund for Unpaid Carers had not been reduced;
- attention was drawn to two examples of social care transformational change in remote and rural areas of Wester Ross. The Howard Doris Centre in Lochcarron was highlighted as an example of a good practice model;
- the care sector was the biggest threat to wellbeing in the Highlands, and one of the key issues was the relatively low salaries, especially in comparison to the hospitality sector. Attention was drawn to the high cost of keeping someone in an acute hospital, compared to them being cared for at home or in a care home, but as the Council lacked funds to address the shortage of beds and staff, it was vital the Scottish Government provided further funding to address the looming crisis. This had been raised at CoSLA;
- in relation to chronic staff shortages in the Dail Mhor and Macintosh care homes, Members would be kept informed of decisions;
- information was sought and provided on reference in paragraph 5.2.2 of the report to unmet mutual aid requests, and unmet in-house service demands, and on the use of battery operated wheelchairs and mobility scooters. It was queried how much of unmet need was the result of delayed discharges;
- in response to concern about young carers transitioning to adult services, more detail on this would be included in a future report;
- the marketing and rewards for social care careers required more work, and carers required more recognition for the essential and excellent work they undertook, as well as full employment rights. Housing provision was a key challenge;
- assurance was sought and provided that policy was moving away from having fixed time limits on care visits, for example 15 minutes four times per day. However, the pressure on staff meant that they were often not able to stay for additional time with service users, and it was hoped communities would be able to assist with alleviating loneliness and isolation for people receiving care at home. Ideally care should be tailored to meet individual's needs;
- the value of handyperson schemes to help to keep people out of hospital and to facilitate their discharge and return to their home was emphasised. Investment in such schemes would save money as they could reduce the number of people having avoidable stays in acute hospitals. A handyperson scheme champion, ideally within NHS Highland, would be helpful. It was acknowledged that handyperson schemes and telecare were key early intervention measures and a summary of the funding model was provided;
- the third sector was keen to assist in providing support to unpaid carers and questions on how this could be achieved would be emailed to officers. The urban model of care delivery did not meet the needs of remote and rural Highlands;
- some Members considered that immigration restrictions were exacerbating workforce shortages, while others pointed out that Brexit and immigration were not the root causes of the workforce challenges, and salaries needed to improve to attract people into care careers;
- it was important to bust myths around social care, especially those circulating on social media that were inaccurate. This would be further explored offline;

- it was suggested that autism and other neuro-divergent issues were included in the implications section of future reports, as they could be relevant to the recruitment and retention of social care staff. The Chair pointed out that this was not within the remit of the Committee;
- in relation to SDS, consideration should be given to people struggling to provide care while working in full time employment;
- it was important to keep people in familiar communities where they were more likely to have a support system; and
- it was suggested that research into how other areas and countries were handling the Adult Social Care crisis would be helpful, as might the possibility of enticing retired people back to work with a flexible work pattern.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- NOTED** the contents of the report;
- AGREED** to hold a workshop for Members and bring a report to a future committee on Self Directed Support; and
- NOTED** that more detail on transitions would be provided in a future report.

6. **Justice Service Update and Community Payback Order Annual Review Cunntas mun t-Seirbheis Cheartais agus Ath-sgrùdadh Bliadhnaì Òrdugh Pàigheadh Air Ais Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/08/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- the review was welcomed and demonstrated the huge amount of work that had been undertaken. It was requested that the report be shared to ensure all Members and the public were made aware;
- information was sought and provided on rehabilitation and intervention, on projects on hold due to lack of staff or funding, on the activities that might previously have been undertaken by the Council, on whether males and females worked together, and whether vacancies had resulted in a budget underspend;
- it was queried whether Smart Recovery and Decider Skills could be delivered remotely, for example in pharmacies or police stations, to remote and rural areas;
- the work was exemplary as it benefited not only the community but the people themselves;
- the percentage of male versus female beneficiaries was queried; and
- the type of work that could be undertaken was queried, with suggestions including tackling Japanese knotweed and cutting back greenery from roadsides, both of which would require training but would provide people with employability skills for the future.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the report and that the positive outcomes of the work of the payback group be circulated to Members and communicated to the public.

**7. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements Annual Report 2022-23
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Ullachaidhean Dìon Poblach Ioma-Bhuidhneach 2022-23**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/09/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

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

**8. Health and Social Care Budget Assurance and Performance Reporting for Q4 2023/24 – 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024
Barantas Buidseit agus Aithris Coileanaidh Slàinte agus Cùraim Shòisealta airson R4 2023/24 – 1 Faoilleach 2024 gu 31 Màrt 2024**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/10/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, Dr Birt sought additional information that was not included in the performance reporting, such as the specific health problems facing children in Highland, and the Head of Integration Adult Social Care offered to discuss this further outwith the meeting. In response to a question, it was explained that the Solihull approach was an evidence-based parenting programme.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. that the Q4 outturn position would be reported to Members at the next meeting on 29 August 2024;
- ii. that savings for 2024/27 were being developed and would be delivered under the People Centred Solutions Portfolio as part of the Council's new Delivery Plan programme; and
- iii. the Service's performance, improvement and risk information.

**9. Children's Service Joint Inspection Improvement Update
Cunntas mu Leasachadh Co-sgrùdadh Seirbheis na Cloinne**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/11/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

- the successful multi-agency support to bringing teams together was welcomed and information was sought on plans for a repeat event, noting that some education staff struggled to take time away from work to attend events. The balance between the need for face to face versus online meetings was highlighted, with advantages to both;
- the refresh of the Getting it Right For Every Child approach was welcomed, as were the improvements, although it was noted there was much work still to be undertaken;
- Child Protection training should be rolled out to anyone who came into contact with children or vulnerable people, and Members were urged to complete the appropriate model on Traineasy, or attend any of the training awareness sessions listed on the Child Protection website;
- more detail on transition issues for children with disabilities was sought;

- the change in language use was welcomed, as was the involvement of young people in that change process. Information on the language guide would be circulated to Members;
- Members sought and received confirmation they could attend a Bairn's Hoose - a transformational, whole-system approach to delivering child protection, justice, and health support and services to child victims and witnesses of abuse and harm - in Inverness or Wick; and
- the level of child exploitation in the Highlands was concerning, and information was sought and provided on how this was being tackled.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- NOTED** the progress to date;
- NOTED** and scrutinise the inspection improvements and developments noted in the report; and
- AGREED** to continue to support the work of Child Protection in Highland.

10. Registered Services Inspection and Improvement Update Cunntas mu Sgrùdadh agus Leasachadh nan Seirbheisean Clàraichte

There had been circulated Report No HCW/12/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

Members welcomed the work and improvements, and the Committee:

- NOTED** the contents of the report;
- NOTED** and comment/scrutinise improvements across services, including those areas where improvement needed to accelerate to enable sustained progress across all areas of service delivery; and
- AGREED** an annual Registered Services report came back to committee covering 2024/25 inspection outcomes.

11. Champions Updates Cunntasan nan Curaidhean

The following updates were provided:

Trauma – Cllr Liz Kraft

- the embedding of trauma in committee reports was welcomed;
- on 20 March 2024 there had been an event for the Network of Trauma Champions and Leads, which had included how to embed a trauma-informed approach. Quarterly workshops were planned to bring champions and leads together, to ease access and avoid duplication; and
- in Highland, plans for a Trauma Summit were being progressed, with an aim for August or September 2024. This event would support Highland achieve its aspiration to become a Trauma Informed council. Agreement had been reached that the Trauma Lead Officer role would progress and would be hosted by NHS, but it would be a partnership post. Various training events had taken place for staff across the Highlands, including Newly Qualified Social Workers, and there was upcoming training Level 3 training for Criminal Justice.

Older Adults – Cllr Bill Boyd

The Scottish Older People's Assembly, which focused on the needs and aspirations so older people was introduced. The eight domains of the WHO Age-friendly Communities Framework were summarised and would be circulated to the Committee. Examples of projects under each domain were provided.

Children – Cllr Pauline Munro

This was postponed to a future meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the updates.

**12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

The following Minutes had been circulated and were **NOTED**:-

- i. Highland Child Protection Committee held on 23 November 2023;
- ii. Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 15 December 2023; and
- iii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group held on 8 November 2023.

The meeting ended at 3.10pm.

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held remotely on Monday 20 May 2024 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner, Mr R Gunn, Mr W Mackay, Mr S Mackie, Ms J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mr K Rosie.

Officials in attendance:

Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager
Ms A Jansson, Area Education & Learning Manager
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer
Mr C Sutherland, Principal Repairs Officer
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
Mr M Johnstone, Principal Estates Surveyor
Ms J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

In Attendance:

Mr J West, Director of Culture & Learning, High Life Highland

Mr R Gunn in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Liesgeulan**

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

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

Item 4: Mr S Mackie (Transparency Statement).

**3. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated and **NOTED** minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 29 January 2024 which were approved by the Council on 14 March 2024.

**4. North Coast Visitor Centre Update
Cunntas mu Ionad Luchd-Tadhail a' Costa a Tuath**

There had been circulated Report No CC/06/24 by the Director of Culture and Learning, High Life Highland.

Mr S Mackie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as Chair of the Dounreay Stakeholders Group. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- High Life Highland be commended on the progress achieved in partnership and through collaborative working with organisations to deliver solutions. In particular, NRS Dounreay and the Council be thanked for their support;
- the increase in visitor numbers and the fact the Centre had retained its four star accreditation be welcomed;
- information was sought and provided on the main challenges around staff recruitment and the variety of approaches being pursued;
- the potential to liaise with Thurso High School and North Highland College to provide opportunities for young people, support career choices and provide flexibility in terms of staffing and opening hours;
- the potential for other services to co-locate in the premises given the benefits this could deliver for High Life Highland, partner organisations and the public;
- confirmation was sought and provided that a range of local community groups used the premises delivering benefits in terms of room hire or increased footfall through events and programmes;
- it would be helpful for Members to receive updates at area business meetings on the Centre and all High Life Highland managed facilities in Caithness and to discuss the potential to maximise opportunities;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed a regular maintenance regime was in place and there were no issues with the condition and maintenance of the building. The Council's Maintenance Team were commended for their work in this regard;
- a query in relation to High Life Highland's proposals for increasing visitor numbers at the Centre and how any increase would be accommodated. It was confirmed key issues were the café being open and having the flexibility to respond to community and other events including traffic from cruise liners;
- the current plan for reversing the financial deficit to deliver a more positive financial outcome and the type of funding requests required to make the facility sustainable. It was explained that discussions were ongoing with NRS Dounreay and the Council on the business model going forward and to develop options for the future and as part of which any potential innovative funding mechanisms would be considered; and
- Members would welcome the opportunity to have further discussions on measures to further advertise and publicise the Centre and to fly the Caithness flag at the premises.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the current position with regards to finance and performance;
- ii. the progress that has been made in terms of partnership and programming;
- iii. the challenges in terms of the current operating model;
- iv. that funding is in place as per the initial three-year agreement until November 2024; and
- v. that discussions are underway between partners to consider options for the future of the facility.

5. Wick Associated School Group Attainment Overview Foir-shealladh air Buileachadh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Inbhir Ùige

There had been circulated Report No CC/07/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- the attendance figures for rural primary schools were excellent given the small number of pupils on their school rolls;
- information be provided on the work ongoing around attainment in small rural primary schools and how attainment at secondary level could be maintained and improved upon;
- the attendance at Wick High School was just marginally below the national and Highland average and inclusion rates excellent. The Area Education and Learning Manager and Head Teacher be invited to attend an area business meeting to discuss with Members the range of work ongoing, concerns and future plans;
- in terms of positive destinations, the need to reflect in future reports the higher than average number of pupils from Wick High School going into direct employment with some being supported by higher and further education;
- work be undertaken with other organisations such as Focus North to understand the training needs and address the skills gaps in the area going forward;
- more context be placed in the public domain in relation to school roll forecasts given the changes that could occur over time, reference being made to Wick High School which had now exceeded capacity despite previous forecasts;
- the Manager, Head Teachers, staff and pupils be commended on what was a positive report overall, specific reference being made to quality and standards and level of positive destinations achieved; and
- Members may not always agree fully with all aspects of Education Scotland inspection reports and it was recognised these reports captured a particular point in time.

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

6. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Deferred Applications
Measadh air Iarrtasan Dàilichte airson na Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh
Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CC/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the applications presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Organisation	Project Title	Grant Approved
John O' Groats Development Trust	John O' Groats Hall Refurbishment	£25,000.00
Home Start Caithness	Volunteer Coordinator and Family Hub	£68,142.00
Thurso Community Cafe	Helping Hub	£27,520.00
Wick Harbour Authority	Harbour Entrance Improvement Works - Phase 1	Not Approved. Members requested that the applicant be invited to a future area business meeting to discuss how they could support the Wick Harbour Authority in other ways.

7. Community Regeneration Fund - Assessment of Application from Ringfenced Funding

Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd – Measadh air Iarrtas airson Maoineachadh air Fheansadh Dheth

There had been circulated Report No CC/09/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the application presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Organisation	Project Title	Grant Approved
The Highland Council	Wick Town Centre Regeneration Project	£50,000

8. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 31 Màrt 2024

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- officers be commended on the level of performance achieved against targets as set out in the report;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed a specific case in relation to a delay in a non-emergency repair of a fence would be investigated;
- an update was sought and provided on the Service's focus on early intervention in relation to rent arrears and tenants facing financial hardship including the advice and assistance offered by officers, third sector and specialist services;
- the potential to further improve performance on housing repairs; and
- whether there was a seasonal element to the variations shown in rent arrears and noting the position at the end of Quarter 4 reflected the ongoing work within the Service in response to the challenges faced.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

9. Wick Common Good fund – Consultation on proposal to dispose by ribbon leases of small parcels of Common Good land at Riverside Park (south of River Wick) to wind farm developers for the oversail of turbines and other equipment necessary in connection with wind farms

Maoin Math Coiteachann Inbhir Ùige – Co-chomhairleachadh mun mholadh faighinn cuidhteas, tro mhàil ribeanan, de phìosan beaga fearainn leis a' Mhaoin Choitichinn aig Pàirc Taobh na h-Aibhne (deas air Abhainn Inbhir Ùige)

There had been circulated Report No CC/11/24 by Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Acting Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- further clarity was sought and provided in relation to the short term work around detailed at section 4.3 of the report;

- concern that preparatory work for a wind farm development had commenced in Wick prior to the lease for the short term work around having been concluded;
- the Common Good Officer be commended on her responses to those who had submitted representations to the consultation; and
- Members had a responsibility to balance the issues raised in the representations and the benefits to the Common Good Fund through income generation opportunities.

Thereafter, and in terms of the public representations received, it was queried whether there was an option to progress this matter on a case by case basis as had been done with other wind farm developments in the area. It was confirmed that each development would be considered on a case by case basis and a general oversail, involving small portions of land, was being sought so that a full and lengthy consultation did not have to be carried out in each case. Council Members would ultimately continue to have the final decision on these matters.

Following on from the above, it was suggested there was a need to improve communication with the public and make it clear the disposals related to the air space above Common Good Land and not the actual land, in return for which the Fund would receive considerable financial benefit. There would be no occupation of the parcels of amenity Common Good Land under the proposals.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at **Appendix 1**.
- ii. **APPROVED** the responses to the representations received within the consultation period for publication on the Council's website as contained in the document at **Appendix 2**.
- iii. **NOTED** the possibility that as some of the future lease arrangements may exceed 10% of the full value of Wick Common Good fund, governance provisions require it must be referred to a meeting of full Council for a decision.
- iv. **NOTED** the representations received together with the responsibilities for the Wick Common Good fund.
- v. following consideration of the representations received and the best interests of Wick Common Good fund:
 - a) **AGREED** to recommendation to full Council that the proposal should go ahead (see paragraph 6.3).
 - b) **NOTED** that, if approval is recommended, it will be necessary to seek Sheriff Court consent because the area of land is classed as inalienable.

10. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved since 1 April 2023:

Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Thurso Community Benefit Society – Socially Growing Project	£2,500.00
Thurso Football Academy – Professional Coaching Event	£1,500.00
Sidhchailleannart – Legends of Caithness	£675.00

1136

Feis Ghallaidh/Caithness Feis – Traditional Music Workshops	£1,250.00
Pennyland Primary School – Pennyland Wellbeing 60	£580.00
Association of Caithness Community Councils – Village Officer Fund	£1,876.50
RBLs Thurso Branch – Poppy Wreath	£70.00
Vikki Mackay School of Dance – 1 st Annual Easter Festival	£500
CastleTown Youth Club – Community Sharing Shed	£1800
Caithness Voluntary Groups – Befriending Green Health Walks	£250
Thurso Festive Lights – Christmas Tree Support Improvements	£1500
Dwarwick Pier Association – Picnic Area	£2000
Total	£15,001.50

Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

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

Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Dunbeath and District Centre – Back Office Support	£2,500.00
Pentland Parish Church of Scotland – Flower Festival	£800.00
Sidhchailleannart – Legends of Caithness	£675.00
Highlife Highland – Schools Out 2023	£630.00
Feis Ghallaidh/Caithness Feis – Traditional Music Workshops	£1,250.00
Association of Caithness Community Councils – Village Officer Fund	£1,876.50
RBLs Wick, Canisbay and Latheron Branch – Poppy Wreath	£120.00
Wick Development Trust – Campsite Toilet Block	£4800.00
Highlife Highland – Where We Live Street Arts	£200.00
Caithness Voluntary Groups – Befriending Green Health Walks	£250.00
Dunbeath & District Centre – Emergency Status – Community Resilience	£2450.00
Total	£16,051.50

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on 20 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mr G MacKenzie

Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Mr P Waite, Outdoor Access and Long Distance Route Manager
Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager (North)
Mr A Byrne, Principal Housing Officer
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr P Young, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests or Transparency Statements.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn

There had been circulated Report No DSA/07/24 by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

In response to a request from Members during a previous meeting of this Committee, it was confirmed that the performance indicators had been updated and that performance reports would cover a 6-monthly period thereby aligning with SFRS attendance at this meeting.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was confirmed that SFRS reports were presented to the Audit Committee once per year, in addition to regular presentation to the Communities and Place Committee;
- the Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) Policy had been in effect since July 2023 and, since implementation, there had been a significant decrease in UFAS;
- Members commended the 99.97% availability of the first appliance and enquired about the 0.03%. This accounted for approximately 15 minutes of downtime over the 6 month period reported;
- the refurbishment of the station was well underway and Members were welcome to visit the station at any time;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding joint mobilising;
- in response to a question about wildfires, it was confirmed that preventative measures included risk assessments, social media campaigns, and providing safety messages to tourists such as those hiring motorhomes;
- Members were encouraged to participate in, and share details of, the SFRS 'Shaping Our Future Service: Your Say' online survey; and
- Members were touched by the generous donation from the family of the late Mr D Munro to The Fire Fighters Charity, and the support that this would provide, and thanks and best wishes were forwarded to the local firefighters for their continued presence and dedication.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report.

4. The Peffery Way, (Dingwall to Strathpeffer) Path Agreement / Path Order Proposal
Slighe Pheofhair (Inbhir Pheofharain gu Srath Pheofhair), Aonta Ceuma / Moladh Òrdugh Ceuma

There had been circulated Report No DSA/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the work of the Peffery Way Association (PWA) was commended, and it was stated that the Peffery Way was a well used path;
- the purpose of the path was to offer a safe route between Dingwall and Strathpeffer to pedestrians, cyclists and families;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the change of use of land after a railway line was no longer in use, and Members were informed of the benefits of repurposing old railway lines as paths. In this case, the landowner claimed he was already using the land for grazing;
- the PWA had offered to erect gates and fencing;
- the landowner had blocked the path, and had the right to do so, as the blockage was in place before the Land Reform Act was established, and the path was not a right of way. This meant no action could be taken without agreement;

- it was felt that the public interest was the provision of a safe route for citizens to travel from one place to another, including prams, wheelchairs and cycles;
- in response to a question regarding the time and resource required from the Council to seek a Path Order, it was confirmed that this would be discussed by the Legal and Outdoor Access Teams, but a previous case where work was outsourced proved successful; and
- the advice from the Ross and Cromarty Local Access Forum was to seek a Path Order.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the two options available to the Council to enable the completion of the Peffery Way, which were:-
 - a) seek a Path Order along the old railway track bed (Route B in Appendix 1 of the report); or
 - b) pursue a Path Agreement with the landowner for the alternative route (Route A and C in Appendix 1 of the report); and
- AGREED** that the Path Order would result in a more accessible route and deliver the best outcomes for local communities (in accordance with the advice of the Local Access Forum) and **APPROVED** the option to seek a Path Order.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved between 16 February and 31 March 2024.

- i. Dingwall Fire Brigade Community Group – Christmas meal - £500
- ii. Dingwall Art Group – Exhibition display boards - £250
- iii. Killearnan Community Council – Venue Hire - £150
- iv. Community Food Initiatives North East - Fare Share in Highland - £500
- v. Muir of Ord Men's Shed – Installation and equipping of cabins - £2,709.89

6. Housing Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to why Dingwall and Seaforth Housing Service took an average of 14.8 days to complete a non-emergency repair, when the target was 8.9 days, and Members were informed that this was due to the impact caused by reduced budgets, in addition to the large area covered, whereby travelling distances affected the

number of hours worked. They also had the second smallest workforce in the Highlands;

- in terms of void properties, information was sought, and provided, regarding the use of in-house tradesmen and subcontractors, and it was confirmed that working time was planned and well-utilised, with a limited amount of work subcontracted in order to cost save;
- Members relayed comments from concerned constituents regarding difficult tenants in homeless units and asked of the possibility of changing property use from homeless to mainstream housing. In response, Members were advised that homeless units were determined by need in an area and the Council had a legal statutory duty to house, but that officers sensitively re-let properties wherever possible;
- it was asked if the term 'homeless unit' could be changed to 'temporary house' and it was confirmed that this was already the case;
- concern was raised, and frustration shared, regarding new buildings being used to temporarily house tenants known for damaging and vandalising properties, when other good paying tenants were being left in substandard properties. An example was to be provided to the Principal Housing Officer outside of this meeting;
- Members were concerned that Housing Officers were covering the work of other Services due to their lack of capacity and it was asked what amount of support they were able to provide their tenants;
- Members had seen an increase in contact from constituents who were being evicted due to their landlord choosing to sell up, as well as those experiencing financial difficulties;
- there would be pressure on the Council moving forward as the number of properties available might not meet the capacity the Council was expected to provide for;
- in terms of sections 7.4 and 7.5 in the report, information was sought, and provided, regarding when and how the Council would intervene;
- in the case of a broken relationship, it was found that it most often left a single male without accommodation and it was asked whether there might be an option to house single males together;
- in response to a question regarding downsizing, Members were informed that there was a downsizing policy in place and that the Housing Service was trying to meet the housing demands as best they could with the supply held; and
- concern was raised regarding the effect the Green Freeport would have on housing in the Dingwall and Seaforth area.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 19 February 2024 which were approved by the Council on 14 March 2024.

At this juncture, the Committee **AGREED** to add the following items to the agenda of the next and/or future meetings:-

- Green Freeport, namely implications of the final business case for Dingwall and Seaforth, including housing;
- Flood Alleviation;
- Highland Investment Plan;
- Education, particularly St Clements School and primary schools; and
- Youth Work update from High Life Highland, Highland Youth Network or Youth Highland

The meeting ended at 11.45 am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 20 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Birt

Mrs I Campbell

Mrs L Kraft

Mr P Logue

In attendance:

Mr C Sharp, Housing Repairs Manager North

Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager

Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer

Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander Mr B Liversedge, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Item 3)

Chief Executive Mr M Dickson, Scottish Ambulance Service (Item 4)

Interim Head Mr S Gorman, Scottish Ambulance Service (Item 4)

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

Ms L Kraft in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/07/24 by the Local Senior Officer for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the increase in Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) staff numbers was welcomed;
- Members would encourage community councils to contact and engage with the SFRS in their local areas;
- it was queried if the SFRS carried out First Responding;

- it was questioned if callouts for fire alarms had reduced due to the installation of modern type alarms, such as heat detectors in kitchen areas rather than smoke alarms; and
- regarding wildfires, information was sought as to what preventative works were planned to combat these especially in view of Access Rangers funding not currently in place this year.

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

4. Presentation – Scottish Ambulance Service Update Taisbeanadh – Cunntas às Ùr mu Sheirbheis Ambaileans na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/08/24 by the Interim Head of Service (SAS) (Highland).

The Interim Head of SAS gave an overview on the service across Highland focusing on Triaging, Mental Health, Community Responders, Advanced Practice and performance measurements.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the informative and comprehensive presentation of the SAS;
- information was sought on how many times a defibrillator had been used in Highland or at local Ward level within the last year and how many persons had been discharged from hospitals successfully. In this regard SAS confirmed they would source this information, which would likely be a Highland wide statistic, to share with Members;
- information was sought, and provided, on the typical waiting time for ambulances to arrive when called for and if the SAS liaised with any First Responders who had been dispatched in order to give the patient the best care when they arrived;
- regarding response times for Wester Ross, information was sought whether these had increased or decreased;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on how local communities could get involved with the provision of First Responders, who would they contact and what the governance was around this provision; and
- Members welcomed the defibrillator location application (app) and endorsed its use in Highland.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Scottish Ambulance Service Triage and Response model;
- ii. resources available across remote and rural Highland; and
- iii. the establishment of a National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Care through NHS Education for Scotland as the strategic delivery partner.

5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 31 Màrt 2024

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members thanked officers for the report;
- regarding homelessness, information was sought, and provided, on the Policy for identifying and management of homeless persons;
- regarding rough sleepers, it was queried if there was a systematic way to identify them, counsel and care for them;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on how tenants reported issues with repairs or request new installations, such as kitchens;
- it was queried if the Housing Service liaised with local Housing Associations, and if the joint register was still in place; and
- regarding anti-social behaviour, it was queried what mechanisms the Housing Service had in place to deal with this issue. In this regard it was suggested that a follow up MS Teams session with officers to discuss this issue would be arranged.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024; and
- ii. **AGREED** to set up an MS Teams discussion session with Members regarding Housing mechanisms for anti-social behaviour.

6. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat fo Ughdarras Uàird Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved since January 2024:-

- Achnasheen Amenities Association Consultation - £30.00
- Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association - Dornie Community Garden – £128.99
- Skye & Lochalsh Community Care Forum - Young Carers New Building Project - £300
- Wester Loch Ewe Community Council - Local Place Plan - £400
- South West Ross Drama Association - One Act Play Festival - £500
- Auchtertyre Primary Parent Council - Faces and Stories - £1,565
- Community Food Initiatives North East - Fare Share in Highland - £132
- Kyle Community Council - Kyle Spruce Up 2024 - £1,924.90
- Coigach Community Development Company Ltd – Growing Achiltibuie - £500
- Strathpeffer Community Council - £300
- Sheildaig Community Association – Multi-use Games Area Maintenance - £400

7. **Minutes**
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 29 January 2024 which had been approved by the Council on 14 March 2024.

The meeting concluded at 11.35am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 22 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)
Mr J Bruce (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)
Mr J Finlayson
Mr L Fraser
Mr R Gale
Mr A Graham
Mr M Green

Mr R Gunn (remote)
Mrs J Hendry
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)
Mr M Cameron
Mr S Kennedy
Ms K MacLean (remote)

Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr D McDonald
Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms M Ross

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Ms C Campbell, Head of Community Operations and Logistics
Ms A Clark, Head of Community Support and Engagement
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Mr M Mackay, Community Development Manager, Inverness and South
Ms K Ellen, Community Support Officer
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Group Commander M Colliar, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair paid tribute to former Councillor Bren Gormley following his recent death. Mr Gormley had been elected in 2007 and again in 2012 as a Councillor for Fort William and Ardnamurchan, and had served as Vice-Chair of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and as a Member of the Adult and Children's Services Committee and Ross, Skye and Lochaber Licensing Committee and Board. He had also chaired Lochaber District Partnership and served on the Police Board. His commitment to the Lochaber community had been evidenced by the numerous directorships he had held. Condolences were extended to Mr Gormley's family and friends.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms M Nolan and Ms M Smith.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the following items of good news:-

- Lynn Wooley had recently retired from her position as Area Cleaning Supervisor with responsibility for the public conveniences in the North Area. Her career with the Council had started as a public convenience cleaner and she had been promoted in 2017 to Area Cleaning Supervisor. She was commended for her dedication, flexibility and hard work in ensuring the public convenience service was delivered to the highest possible standard, and was congratulated on her retirement;
- Peter Kelly would be retiring from his position of Amenities Officer at the end of June. He had been leading the Inverness Amenities team for over seven years and had a wealth of knowledge about all things horticultural. His career with the Council had begun in 1992 as the Council's Horticultural Officer in the Bught Nursery, where he had managed many of the Council's most high-profile flower beds such as the well-loved floral clock, the commemorative bedding at Cavell Gardens and the various carpet bedding displays at the Old High Church and Castle banks. He had also produced the plants for the city's numerous hanging baskets for many years. He was congratulated on his retirement;
- Meg Maclean from the Diriebught Depot had been successful in the post of Amenity Officer and would take over from Peter Kelly when he retired at the end of June. She would move from her operational support role, bringing a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and knowledge to the position, and was congratulated on her promotion;
- Neil Mackenzie, also from the Diriebught Depot, had been successful in the post of Foreperson for Inverness Amenities. He had been acting up for a period of time and was congratulated on securing this post on a permanent basis; and
- the Amenities team had been shortlisted for a Silver APSE Award in the category of Striving for Excellence. This was in recognition of the work and deliverables of the Amenities Review. All Silver Award Councils for the Parks, Grounds and Street Scene category would be competing for the Gold Award and would be interviewed by the awards panel on Wednesday 22 May with all awards presented to participants at the annual dinner the following evening. Congratulations were extended to the Team on being shortlisted and they were wished the best of luck for their interview.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for the period 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Group Commander Collier, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), provided a brief introduction to the report, drew attention to the current SFRS survey seeking views on shaping the service for the future and confirmed that the development of a new Local Delivery Plan had been postponed until these views had been collected.

The Chair reminded Members that there would be a briefing on the SFRS survey on 6 June at 2.00 pm.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the comprehensive and readable report;
- concern was expressed regarding the 0% availability of appliances in Scourie and Lochinver and how that might affect attendance at road traffic accidents in the area given that other crews were a considerable distance away;
- it was queried whether the change in the most common types of incidents being responded to would have an effect on recruitment;
- information was sought, and provided, on staff retention rates, whether there would be merit in undertaking exit surveys, how fires at battery storage units would be managed, joint mobilisation protocols in the event of roads being blocked, what could be done to help with the problem of low availability in rural areas, the possibility of extending the Balintore fire station to allow for larger appliances, and whether there was any evidence that the installation of interlinked smoke alarms was connected to the decrease in the number of dwelling fires;
- it was queried whether breathing apparatus training should be mandatory for all firefighters and whether there was a case for reducing the minimum age and fitness requirements for retained firefighters;
- congratulations were extended to Group Commander Richard Dibble and Watch Commander Mark Poe on their retirements;
- in response to a query concerning the licensing of short-term lets and whether the SFRS had the resources to deal with this, Mr Collier undertook to liaise with the fire safety team and ask them to respond; and
- it was suggested that some of the issues raised by Members be fed into the SFRS review.

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

5. Communities and Place – Service Performance Reporting for Q4 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024 Coimhearsnachdan agus Àite – Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson R1 1 Faoilleach 2024 gu 31 Màrt 2024

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the higher levels of sickness absence within the Communities and Place Service than the Council as a whole; what could be done to reduce the number of Freedom of Information requests; and the anticipated increase in the percentage of household waste recycled following the implementation of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements.

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

6. Waste Management Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Stiùireadh Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair and several other Members commented on the effects of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements in their households and areas. The roll-out so far had been successful and well received, and tribute was paid to officers;
- the communication around the new waste and recycling collection arrangements was commended. However, some Members commented that there was still a need for education as people did not understand why the changes were being made and what happened to the recyclate collected;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that stickers would be provided to clarify what should go in each bin;
- it was queried whether the Council had any plans to work with groups setting up local food composting in order to minimise the carbon emissions from the collection of food waste;
- in response to a question, it was explained that there had not been a Members' workshop on Scotland's draft Circular Economy and Waste Route Map to 2030 consultation due to time constraints;
- in response to a question concerning Energy from Waste, it was confirmed that a meeting of the Waste Strategy Working Group would be organised in the near future and that it was intended to bring a report to the Committee later in the year;
- information was sought, and provided, on what would happen if waste was put in the wrong bin; the improvements to the Seater Waste Transfer Station; the possibility of food waste collections being extended to more rural areas; ways to prevent bins blowing open in the wind; and glass recycling; and
- it was queried whether the Lochaber waste transfer station was expected to be completed on time.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the updated position on the service change project (Recycling Improvement Fund);
- ii. **AGREED** to homologate the response to Scotland's draft Circular Economy and Waste Route Map to 2030: Consultation, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** the updated position on Fort William Waste Transfer Station.

**7. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Seirbheisean Caoidh – Cunntasan Pròiseict**

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was good to see that a new burial ground for Inverness was on the list of sites being reviewed for projects in the next 10 years as a new large cemetery was needed to future-proof the city;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the replacement of the cremators in Inverness crematorium was on track for completion in 2025;
- it was queried whether the service had the resources available to carry out all the work needed going forward;
- information was sought, and provided, on the memorial safety budget and National Assistance Burials; and
- in response to a request from the Chair of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee, the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, undertook to provide a report on Bereavement Services to the September meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of current projects on burial ground extensions and at Inverness Crematorium; and
- ii. future burial ground extension projects in Highland.

**8. Growing our Future – Community Food Growing Annual Report
A' Fàs ar n-Àm ri Teachd – Aithisg Bhliadhnail Fàs Biadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the legacy left by the Community Food Growing Coordinator post was commended;
- progress was being made on a community food growing project in Nairn; and
- in response to a question the Community Support Officer undertook to provide Mr A Baldrey with the number of individual allotments facilitated by the Council in the previous 12 months.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made to implement the Growing our Future strategy and deliver the community food growing action plan.

**9. Update on Improvements to Public Conveniences
Cunntas às Ùr mu Leasachaidhean do Ghoireasan Poblach**

There had been circulated Report No CP/12/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the refurbishment of the public conveniences in Wick was welcomed, and congratulations were extended to the project board;
- concern was expressed over the limited budget for future improvement works, and it was hoped this might increase due to the Highland Investment Plan;
- it was important to recognise the importance of public convenience provision to communities, and Members commended the efforts to maintain the services being delivered and the improvement works set out in the report;
- there had been very little investment in public convenience provision on Skye, which was the second busiest tourist destination in Scotland, and it was requested that this be looked at in consultation with Local Members. Particular reference was made to the need for toilet facilities in Dunvegan;
- work done in partnership with community groups, such as the community toilets in Elgol and Broadford, should be recognised;
- officers and Members needed to continue work together to identify funding to develop public convenience provision;
- thanks were expressed for the refurbishment and upgrade projects that had been completed in north-west Sutherland, and it was requested that the projects that had not yet commenced be postponed until after the summer season;
- the new timed door lock on the Thurso public conveniences was welcomed, and thanks were extended to the local business that had been opening and closing the building prior to the lock being installed;
- information was sought, and provided, on the effect of external and internal CCTV cameras on decreasing instances of vandalism;
- in relation to the possible impact of the Inverness Castle Project on the need for public conveniences in the city centre, the Head of Community Operations and Logistics undertook to look into the matter and respond to Mr A Graham;
- the importance of members of the local community in making sure public conveniences were looked after was emphasised - for example a member of the community opening and closing the public conveniences in Golspie had helped reduce vandalism and keep the facilities operational;
- the completion of the upgrade works at Whin Park public conveniences was welcomed; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that, in 2023/2024, income of £22,328.49 had been generated from honesty boxes, £67,490 from paddle gates and £4,375.12 from showers, and this would be absorbed into the overall budget.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the content of the report;
- ii. the improvement projects to date including the resulting environmental benefits, and improvements planned for 2024/25; and
- iii. the case studies relating to Glenmore and Wick sites.

10. Comfort Scheme Annual Survey Results Toraidhean Suirbhidh an Sgeama Chofhurtachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/13/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was suggested that the payments to comfort scheme providers should be reviewed as the number of people using the facilities could put a lot of pressure on businesses, and the expenses involved, such as cleaning charges, were increasing;
- there was only one comfort scheme provider in the North West and Central Sutherland ward, which it was suggested could be because businesses were too busy to take on the additional responsibility; and
- the success of the comfort scheme in Balintore was highlighted, and thanks were expressed to the Head of Community Operations and Logistics in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the results of the 2023/24 survey undertaken with Comfort Scheme providers; and
- ii. that opportunities to promote the Comfort Scheme would continue to be explored.

**11. Community Asset Transfer Request – Braes of Balvonie
Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd – Bruthaichean Bhaile a’
Mhonaidh**

There had been circulated Report No CP/14/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

The Committee **AGREED** to the sale of the land comprising two fields between Braes of Balvonie, Inverness and the A9 Trunk Road, Inverness to Balvonie Park Association for £1, based upon the terms of transfer as set out in the report at 7.1.

At this stage, the Chair congratulated Allan Gunn on his promotion to Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate, and paid tribute to his leadership of the Communities and Place team, attention to detail and work on the staff development programme.

Mr Gunn responded in suitable terms.

The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 23 May 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
Mr A MacKintosh
Ms L Niven (remote)
Ms M Ross (remote)
Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr R MacKintosh
Ms K MacLean (remote)

Mr D Millar (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead, Environment, Development and Active Travel (remote)
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager (remote)
Mr A Puls, Environment Team Leader
Ms I MacMillian, Project Manager
Mr S McLaughlin, Technical Data Analyst
Ms R Burbaite, Climate Change Coordinator
Ms M Murray, Principal 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

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair spoke to two items of good news as follows:-

Heat Network Support Unit

The Council had been awarded Strategic Heat Network Support by the Heat Network Support Unit to complete the feasibility study for the city-wide heat network in Inverness. The funding would cover up to 90% of the cost (capped at £150,000), requiring a 10% contribution from the Council. This support would help the Council understand commercial and financial analysis of a heat network opportunity for the whole of Inverness, identify the estimated scale of investment and investment opportunities, and understand whether the project was viable for further progression.

All Energy Glasgow

The Council had taken the opportunity to present the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy and Delivery Plan alongside the Scottish Government and two other Councils at

the All Energy conference in Glasgow. All Energy was the largest low carbon energy and supply chain renewables event aimed at private and public sector energy end users.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

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 and Ms P Munro.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Net Zero Action Plan – Proposed Revised Approach Plana-ghnìomha Neoni Lom – Dòigh-obrach Ùr ga Moladh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/04/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the proposed format for reporting was welcomed, and it was hoped that RAG ratings could be incorporated so Members could clearly see where projects were in terms of delivery;
- it was good to see the inclusion of Net Zero in the Terms of Reference for all of the Operational Delivery Plan Portfolio Boards;
- the circular economy was key to achieving Net Zero and, on the point being raised, it was confirmed that officers would arrange a Members' workshop with Zero Waste Scotland and a date would be announced in due course;
- in response to a question regarding the calculation of Scope 3 emissions through procurement spend, it was confirmed it was intended to present a report in that regard to the next meeting of the Committee;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the Fleet and Staff Travel project would include travel by Elected Members;
- food waste in schools and the new recycling and waste collection arrangements being rolled out across Highland being cited as examples, information was sought, and provided, on the process in terms of implementing cross-service actions and achieving behavioural change;
- further information was sought, and provided, regarding the statement in the report that a number of thematic groups were not in a position to fully unlock the full costs of their operational decarbonisation;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the reporting templates appended to the report were examples, and key actions would be incorporated in future reports; and
- with reference to section 3.1 of the report, information was sought, and provided, on the current position in terms of securing funding to meet the Council's climate change ambitions.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the approach for the development and reporting of the Net Zero Programme;
- ii. **AGREED** the more focused approach to project development and reporting; and
- iii. **NOTED** the alignment of future reporting with the Operational Delivery Plan.

4. **Draft Ecological Strategy Dreachd Ro-innleachd Eag-eòlasach**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/05/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the work that had gone into developing the Ecological Strategy and for the two constructive Members' workshops that had already taken place, and it was welcomed that the Strategy would come back to the Climate Change Committee for consideration following the consultation phase. In relation to the proposed Members' workshop in June, it was suggested it would be more beneficial for it to take place at a later date following receipt of the public consultation responses, and it was confirmed that would be arranged;
- there was a lack of understanding about how critical the ecological crisis was. It was interlinked and on a par with the climate crisis, and it was necessary to raise awareness across the board;
- it was suggested that consideration be given to consulting with schools/young people, possibly at the beginning of the session in August;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that engagement regarding the possible introduction of a Carbon Emissions Land Tax would take place once there was greater clarity as to the Scottish Government's intentions in that regard;
- the success of one species could have an impact on another – for example, the success of the Pine Marten had possibly affected the Capercaillie population. Deer fences had also had an impact, and there were things that could and should be done to prevent further loss;
- the Strategy stated that 1 in 9 species were threatened with extinction but, taking climate change into account in addition to the ecological crisis, it was suggested the figure was much higher;
- the people of Caithness were fully behind the efforts for further designations in respect of the Flow Country, and the leadership in that regard was welcomed;
- with regard to the statement in the Strategy that the Council would support the action in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to designate 30% of Scotland by 2030, information was sought, and provided, as to whether that was close to being achieved, and if 30% of Scotland meant 30% of land and 30% of marine areas;
- in terms of accessing funding to help with the restoration of peatlands and tree-planting, it was queried who the Council would and would not work with. It was added that there were significant conflicts in some rural areas about what purpose land should be used for, and this had impacted on accessibility to young people who wanted to get into crofting or farming;
- the need to bring communities along and keep them informed as to the discussions and work taking place was emphasised;
- the difficulties associated with balancing ecological issues with the need to keep grassed areas tidy and safe were recognised;

- it was questioned whether there might be an influx of people wanting to live in Scotland in the future because the rest of the planet was degrading and becoming much hotter, and it was suggested the Committee should look further forward and put plans in place for future generations;
- reference was made to the increasing number of mosquitoes in Scotland and the probable effect on local species as well as the potential for Malaria;
- the Council was doing its best, but it was questioned how much work could continue to be done in the future due to a possible lack of funding;
- in relation to Local Development Plans, it was important to ensure that information was clear and conveyed to local residents and Community Councils;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether plans were in place to monitor and control invasive species, such as Rhododendron, within the Council estate;
- the action to lobby government to work with coastal communities to mitigate the impacts of rising sea levels was welcomed, and it was requested that Members of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee be advised of or be asked to feed into any action being taken in that regard so they could keep communities informed;
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to the felling of woodland and the need for Members to be kept informed in that regard so they could reassure their constituents;
- climate change affected everyone, and linking in across all Council services was critical;
- reducing the Council's carbon emissions was a much greater challenge than had been anticipated, and there was a constant tension between economic development and protecting the environment;
- the Council could do better in terms of leading by example; and
- concern was expressed that areas that were not flood plains at present would soon become flood plains, and it was necessary to work with the Planning Service in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the content of the draft Ecology Strategy and Actions contained therein;
- ii. the public consultation exercise outlined in Section 8 of the report;
- iii. that a further report providing feedback from the consultation would be presented to a future meeting of this Committee before being taken to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for approval; and
- iv. that, taking into account Members' feedback, the proposed workshop for all Council Members would take place at a later date following receipt of the public consultation responses.

5. The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) Delivery Plan Progress Report
Aithisg Adhartais Plana Libhrigidh Ro-innleachd Teas agus Èifeachdas Lùtha Ionadail

There had been circulated Report No CCC/06/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Climate Change Coordinator (LHEES) drew attention to an error on page 62 of the papers, clarifying that the Ward Area in respect of Project No. 1 should be Caol and Mallaig, not Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- off gas grid communities faced particular difficulties, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether they could be prioritised;
- it was important that the actions the Council was taking to encourage greater use of electricity and reduce carbon heating in homes were not being offset by the actions being taken by energy providers such as OVO and Octopus. For example, Quantum storage heaters, which the Council used extensively, were based on a low overnight tariff but that tariff was in the process of being eliminated, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether such matters were being factored in;
- the new Belford Hospital in Fort William, which was currently on hold, was a superb opportunity for a local heat network, and an assurance was sought that this would be considered when development work resumed. Similarly, it was queried whether any discussions had taken place regarding a potential heat network using excess heat from the aluminium smelter in Fort William; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the next stage of the Inverness Heat Network project, and it was queried what analysis had been done in terms of carbon and heat generation from a potential Energy from Waste facility in the Inverness area.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. progress to date;
- ii. a workshop would be scheduled in summer 2024 to provide Members with the opportunity to input to the development of the LHEES Delivery Plan; and
- iii. that the detailed Delivery Plan would be brought to the Climate Change Committee for consideration in November 2024.

6. 2023/24 External Funded Project Overview, Planning of Future Domestic Retrofit Projects and Domestic Power BI
Foir-shealladh Pròiseact Maoinichte bhon Taobh A-muigh 2023/24, a' Planaigeadh Phròiseactan Iar-fhiotaigidh Dachaigheil san Àm ri Teachd agus BI Cumhachd Dachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No CCC/07/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In addition to the report, a demonstration of the Domestic Power BI was provided.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the Domestic Power BI was commended, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was available to the public;
- with reference to the £2.4m of Scottish Government funding awarded to the Council in 2023/24 to deliver energy efficiency improvements to privately owned and rented properties, it was queried whether a similar amount of funding was available in 2024/25;
- in relation to future domestic retrofit projects, it was welcomed that there would be a project in Caol and that there would be a consultation. In addition, clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether funding had been secured for this work and the reason some properties had been carried over from 2023/24;

- thanks were expressed for the work that had taken place in the Tain and Easter Ross Ward;
- it was vital for Highland residents that their homes were made more liveable, and thanks were expressed to officers for the work they had done to source funding and shorten the amount of time it would take to upgrade all domestic properties;
- the volume of enquiries was a measure of the demand for energy efficiency improvements;
- the importance of the work taking place in terms of helping families who could not afford to heat their homes was emphasised; and
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether renting out a spare room via Airbnb would impact eligibility for energy efficiency improvements, and whether there was any flexibility around Council Tax bands, which were a crude proxy for income.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the contents of the report; and
- ii. the development of externally funded projects across the region and the opportunity to scale up.

7. Climate Change Impact Assessment Measadh Buaidh Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde

There had been circulated Report No CCC/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- it was welcomed that carbon emissions would be considered at the outset as projects were developed;
- thanks were expressed for the workshop that had taken place, and the report provided further clarity on the impact assessment process;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the weighting that carbon emissions and impacts would be given within an overall project assessment; the procedure in respect of returns that stated there was no impact; the scope of the impact assessment process, and whether it applied to closing a school, for example; the impact, in terms of workload, on the staff reviewing the assessments; what proportion of proposals it was anticipated would proceed to Stage 2 – Full Impact Assessment; whether some groups of the population would be more impacted by climate change than others; and when the Climate Change Impact Assessment would go live;
- drawing out the positive impacts of adapting to climate change was as important as focussing on mitigating the negative impacts;
- on the point being raised, the Assistant Chief Executive – People undertook to follow up on the suggested inclusion of neuro-difference in the equalities element of the Integrated Impact Assessment; and
- the inclusion of islands in the Community implications section of committee reports was welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Climate Change Impact Assessment and supporting guidance; and

- ii. the integration of the Climate Change Impact Assessment into the Integrated Impact Assessment tool, which would be presented to Full Council for approval.

**8. Climate Change – Draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan 3: Consultation
Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde – Dreachd Plana Freagarrachaidh Nàiseanta na h-Alba 3: Co-chomhairleachadh**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/9/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, thanks were expressed for the workshop which had taken place, and it was requested that as much notice as possible be provided in respect of future workshops to facilitate Members' attendance.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the Council's response to the draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan 3: Consultation which closed on 24 April 2024.

**9. Renewables Framework: Increasing Supply Chain Capacity in the Highlands
Frèam So-ùrachaidh: A' Meudachadh Comas na Sèine-solair sa Ghàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/10/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, about what discussions were taking place with colleges and schools with a view to addressing skills shortages;
- reference was made to the extensive range of work and services set out in Appendix 2 of the report, and it was commented there might be some things a joint procurement agency or Scotland Excel could help with;
- accrediting contractors could be an onerous task, and it was hoped the Council would work with Skills Development Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and University of the Highlands and Islands to try to fill any gaps identified;
- there were local companies and small traders that specialised in renewable energy, and it was queried whether they were being included and supported to take on apprentices;
- in addition to air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps could be installed by qualified local contractors; and
- many homes in Highland were old, and the time and bureaucracy involved in implementing the installation of solar panels and other energy saving measures was seen as an issue. It was asked if discussions around this topic had been taking place.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and the proposed Highland Energy Efficiency Framework.

**10. Heat in Buildings Bill: Next Steps
Bile Teas ann an Togalaichean: Na h-Ath Cheumannan**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/11/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager referred to section 6.2 and suggested, in light of changes within the Scottish Government and the announcement of a General Election on 4 July, the Members' workshop be held in August 2024 at the earliest.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- in relation to section 4.1 of the report, it was suggested a media strategy be included as the Highland perspective and voice needed to be heard in the national debate;
- support was expressed for holding the proposed workshop in August and, on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the workshop would be cross-service and open to all Members;
- the UK government had banned multi-fuel stoves in new homes, and information was sought, and provided, regarding the use of such stoves in Highland and whether wood was considered to be a polluting heat source; and
- concern was expressed regarding the impact of the Bill on young people, who had difficulty competing when houses came up for sale, and it was queried whether it would be possible to allow a longer period for them to make adaptations.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the possible routes for engagement set out in the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed approach for delivering a workshop; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the proposed workshop take place in August 2024 at the earliest.

The meeting concluded at 2.00 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 27 May 2024 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr B Boyd	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr I Brown (remote)	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr M Cameron	Ms K MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (remote)	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Christie	Mrs B McAllister
Ms H Crawford	Mr D McDonald
Mr D Gregg	Mrs M Reid
Ms E Knox (remote)	Mrs T Robertson

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
Mr G MacCormick, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Planning, Infrastructure & Economy
Ms L Mateer, Principal Housing Officer
Mr L Macdonald, Repairs Manager (South)
Mr M Mackay, Community Development Manager, Inverness & South
Mr G Munro, Revenues Manager
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager
Mr C MacFarlane, Inverness Victorian Market Manager
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer
Mr M Nixon, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr A Holden, Scottish Fire and Rescue

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

As Mr I Brown was unable to attend in person, Mr C Ballance was in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair welcomed Mr McDonald to his first meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee. He also reminded Members this would be the last meeting of Mrs McAllister and, on behalf of the Committee, he paid tribute to her 17 years of service.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Hendry and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Item 6 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 7 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 8 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 10 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 12a – Mr A Christie
Item 12b – Mr A Christie
Item 14 – Mr A Christie

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**3. Military division of The King's Birthday Honours
Roinn Armailteach Urraman Co-là-breith an Rìgh**

The Committee **NOTED** that Captain Bartholomew Philip Lucas had been awarded the MBE, for his long devoted service to Army Cadets UK and the Young People of the Highlands, in the Military division of The King's Birthday Honours List 2023.

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

There had been circulated Report No CIA/11/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following points were raised: -

- a more detailed geographical break-down of the statistics on home fire safety visits was requested to establish in which areas the uptake was lower, noting that older people who lived alone were more vulnerable and might not be aware of the visits. This would be provided outwith the meeting;
- information was sought, and provided, on staffing issues in Cannich (where one candidate was about to start training) and in Drumnadrochit, where regular training and support was being provided from training officers and others. The distinction between officers on a full or reduced retainer was clarified and reference was also made to the joint mobilisation policy which facilitated a shared crew from different stations. Recruitment efforts in Drumnadrochit and Fort Augustus were summarised;
- advice as to the storage of electric bikes and their batteries was sought, and provided, and assurance was also provided that policy on battery storage plants was being developed by the SFRS legislative department; and
- it was clarified that a primary fire involved a building and that Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal (UFAS) statistics did not relate to domestic buildings.

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

**5. Inverness Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) Action Plan
Plana-gnìomha Sgìre Stiùiridh Càileachd Èadhair Inbhir Nis**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/12/24 by the Strategic Lead Environmental Health & Bereavement Services.

During discussion, and following a presentation, the following points were raised: -

- the success in improving air quality as detailed in the report was welcomed and should be publicised;
- clarification was sought, and provided, that Academy Street/Queensgate, Inverness, was the only area in Highland which had been subject to an AQMA Action Plan. Assurance was sought, and provided, that air quality would continue to be monitored through a Council strategy;
- information was sought on Electric Vehicle Charging Points but this was not within the remit of Environmental Health;
- the electrification of buses had positively impacted the air quality on Academy Street and efforts should be made to change the Council-owned buses to electric vehicles, with reference to the declared climate emergency. Attention should also be given to the type of buses being depicted on the Council's social media accounts. The Chair clarified that the redesign of Council buses should be directed to the Redesign Board;
- it was queried why some cities, such as London, Glasgow and Dundee, charged certain types of buses a fee to enter the city centre and it was explained this was because they were subject to a low emission zone as a result of exceeding government maximum levels of pollution, whereas Inverness was not;
- concern was voiced about other areas of Inverness which were thought to have poor air quality and these could be reported to Environmental Health for consideration, with information provided about portable monitoring equipment which could be used as and when appropriate. Real-time automatic monitoring took place in the Telford Street area of Inverness and could be viewed online. Further detail on this could be discussed outwith the meeting;
- information was sought, and provided, on monitoring efforts that took place around schools, including awareness raising of key issues such as having car engines idling for periods of time. Assurance was provided that all levels monitored outside schools had been significantly below the Scottish Government air pollutant criteria. It was requested that Millburn Academy be added to the action plan and that regular reports on air quality be provided to the Committee;
- noise as well as air pollution was of concern;
- there were free electric bike charging stations in Fort William and Fort Augustus and consideration should be given to arranging this for Inverness, with a possible location in the Victorian Market suggested; and
- Inverness's prosperity depended on good air quality.

At this juncture , Mr Christie indicated he wished to move an amendment as follows: "Our City Centre is key to the economic prosperity of our whole region. We recognise that the experience visitors, residents and workers enjoy whilst in the city is a key factor in achieving this prosperity. Therefore Committee agrees to hold a special meeting of the this committee prior to the summer recess so members can be updated and discuss "making Academy Street a place for everyone".

However, this amendment involved information relating to a current Application for Judicial Review and the Chair suggested a private briefing or workshop, instead of a formal meeting. This was declined by Mr Christie so the Chair deemed the amendment not competent.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the improvements to air quality in the city centre since the first publication of the Draft AQMA Action Plan for Inverness in 2016;

- ii. **APPROVED** the Inverness AQMA Action Plan with the 2024 action measures table;
- iii. **AGREED** to hold a private briefing for Members about projects impacting Academy Street.
- iv. **AGREED** to investigate the provision of a free electric bike battery charging facility in Inverness;
- v. **AGREED** to add Millburn Academy to the Action Plan for temporary air quality monitoring; and
- vi. **AGREED** to regular reporting of air quality issues to the Committee.

6. Environmental Health – Annual Report & Activity 2023/24
Slàinte Àrainneachdail – Aithisg Bhliadhnail & Gnìomhachd 2023/24

Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg made Transparency Statements in respect of this item in their capacity as a Non Executive Director and employee of NHS Highland respectively. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/13/24 by the Strategic Lead Environmental Health & Bereavement Services.

During discussion, the following points were raised: -

- in response to a query about the 880 contaminated land screening service requests, it was explained these related to planning application verifications by scientific officers for issues such as contaminated land;
- information was sought, and provided, on policies around air filter replacements, for which there were many complex variables;
- in response to a query about public availability of catering establishment remedial notices, these were available online (Food Hygiene Information System) and showed if an establishment was subject to an improvement order. Catering facility enforcement was undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive;
- it would be helpful if some of the information in the report could be further broken down geographically;
- information was sought, and provided, on what enforcement action could be taken in relation to littering, especially around secondary schools, and dog fouling etc. A summary was provided of current enforcement policies and resources, including targeted intensive enforcement and education;
- concern was expressed about the numbers of abandoned vehicles and how their removal could be expedited. Issues included the strict definition of an abandoned vehicle which the Council was permitted to remove. Vehicles that remained in someone's ownership were dealt with through the DVLA. A report on this was due to be presented to the Communities and Place Committee;
- the prohibition order against shops in Inverness to prevent the sale of vapes to under-18s was welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on the number of staff available to administer the Short Term Let licences;
- it would be helpful if future reports could include comparison data from previous years, and benchmarking against other local authorities;
- it was queried whether traffic enforcement officers could be upskilled to also deal with litter offences. A summary was provided of the criteria required to prosecute littering offences;

- a more aggressive approach to enforcement, with a pilot area, was suggested to try to change culture around offenses;
- fly tipping was of concern, and joined up working between Environmental Health, Waste Management and Trading Standards was encouraged;
- dog fouling on beaches was concerning and a ban on dogs during the bathing season on popular beaches was proposed but was not thought likely to be possible;
- the Inverness FOG project, detailed in the report, to tackle the threat of fatbergs in Inverness city centre sewers was welcomed; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the increasing problem of rats in Inverness, with some being displaced by development along the A96. Attention was drawn to the responsibilities of home and landowners in this regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the current structure of the Environmental Health team;
- ii. the range and volume of work that was being undertaken locally by the team;
- iii. the Highland wide issues; and
- iv. the report format and content.

7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 31 Màrt 2024

Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg made Transparency Statements in respect of this item in their capacity as Chief Officer and Board Member of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau respectively However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/14/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following points were raised: -

- it would be helpful for total figures to be provided on rent arrears in future reports;
- there was potential for homelessness to increase due to the lifting of the legislative embargo on evictions and repossessions;
- there was concern that delays in re-lets due to spending controls might be causing unnecessary harm for individuals and families in emergency or temporary accommodation and there was a need to explore this matter in more detail at a future meeting. In response, it was explained a priority approach was taken to the re-let of empty properties taking account of individual or family circumstances;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that Members would be given information on the delays caused by utility companies in relation to re-lets;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the challenges faced around the recruitment of trades. This included the action being taken to offer work experience and apprenticeships to young people and to promote more widely the packages and benefits available with the Council. A main issue continued to be that the Council could not compete with the hourly pay rate offered by the private sector;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that there were currently around 6,100 applicants on the Highland Housing Register, the bulk of which were seeking a property in Inverness;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that tenants were being actively contacted by the Service's housing teams to discuss if they wished to downsize. The Council also had a right sizing policy and some incentives were offered;

- further clarity was sought, and provided, that more one-bedroom properties were required in Inverness to meet current demand in relation to homelessness; and
- concern was expressed at the performance for emergency and non-emergency repairs, re-let times and rent arrears in Quarter 4 relative to the previous year and the plans to address this situation. In response, an explanation was provided on the challenges involved in achieving a balance between performance and affordability in terms of the available budget.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

**8. Community Asset Transfer Request – Fort Augustus Memorial Hall
Iartas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd – Talla Cuimhneachaidh Chille
Chuimein**

Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg made Transparency Statements in respect of this item in their capacity as a Non-Executive Director and employee of NHS Highland respectively. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/15/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the sale of Memorial Hall, Fort Augustus to Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Company for the sum of £40,000, based upon the terms set out in the report within paragraph 7.1.

**9. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iartasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/16/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **APPROVED** the application presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Applicant	Project	Grant awarded
Sea Cadets	Improvement works to facility including heating, electric and kitchen upgrades	£50,000

**10. Scheme for Winter Payments 2024/25
Sgeama airson Phàighidhean Geamhraidh 2024/25**

Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg made Transparency Statements in respect of this item in their capacity as Chief Officer and Board Member of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau respectively. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/17/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate which proposed to maintain the same arrangements for the Inverness Winter Payments Scheme for 2024/25 to reflect economic impacts within Inverness and surrounding area.

In discussion, it was advised that that the Inverness Benevolent Funds were not generally used for anything other than for the winter payments scheme. Also, similar to last year, it was suggested that a review take place at the City of Inverness and Area Committee on 18 November 2024 to gauge if there was any underspend in the Inverness Common Good Fund that could be reallocated to the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme. Further, there was a need to give better advice to the public on energy efficiency in homes and Officers undertook to look at what more assistance could be provided.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to provide an Inverness Winter Payments Discretionary Scheme for 2024/25 having regard to the financial support available from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Social Security Scotland (SSS) as set out in sections 6 and 7 of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to accept applications from 1 December 2024 to 31 March 2025 inclusive;
- iii. **AGREED** to provide a budget of £0.200m for the 2024/25 Scheme noting that payments for Landward Areas would be sourced from available income within the Inverness Benevolent Funds first, with the ICGF being utilised for the Landward Areas, in the event that officers decide it financially prudent to do so;
- iv. **AGREED** to apply a Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase to the £106 award rate for 2023/24 in order to determine the 2024/25 single tier payment rate;
- v. **AGREED** to use the annual CPI of 4.2% (March 2024 rate), noting this would establish the 2024/25 award amount at £111 for eligible applicants;
- vi. **AGREED** that the criteria utilised for the 2023/24 scheme as set out in paragraphs 8.2 to 9.6 of the report shall be used as the basis for the 2024/25 Scheme;
- vii. **AGREED** this discretionary scheme was to be made available to residents in the City of Inverness and the Landward areas of the seven City Wards;
- viii. **NOTED** BACS payments were to be used for this discretionary scheme as this was the most secure method of payment for recipients of the payment and the Council alike; and
- ix. **AGREED** to re-review the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme at its meeting on 18 November, 2024 to look at repurposing any underspend in the Inverness Common Good Fund into an increased payment award for the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme.

11. Ward Discretionary Budget Applications Iarrtasan Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that the following City of Inverness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 5 February 2024:-

2023/2024

- **Ward 12**
 - Kilmorack Community Council: Teanassie School ASN Room - £750
 - Strathglass Community Council: Loch Ness and Affric National Park Consultation - £999

- Beaulieu Community Council for Beaulieu Community Trust: Drop in Sessions – Talks to Village Groups - £500
 - Aird Community Trust: KCC Football Project - £4,000
 - Aird Community Trust: Newtonhill Defibrillator - £500
 - Glen Urquhart High School Parent Council: Interactive Display Screen for the Maths Department - £868.76
 - Glen Urquhart Shinty Club: Shiny Memories Group - £100
 - Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) - £184
- **Ward 13**
 - Active Schools Inverness High School: Winter Primary Football for Inverness High School Cluster - £1,299.38
 - St Andrew's Cathedral: InSpire - £760
 - Charleston Academy Community Complex: Gala Fun Day 2024 - £1,545
 - Camanachd Association: Creating a tartan for Scotland's Community Sport - £500
 - Central Primary School: Active Play Equipment - £992.34
 - Muirtown Polycrub - £760
 - Charleston Academy: Ocean Youth Trust Employability Voyage - £667.31
- **Ward 14**
 - Active Schools Inverness High School - £2,598.77
 - Rokzkool Academy - £1,400
 - St Andrew's Cathedral: InSpire - £760
 - Merkinch Community Centre: Room Hire - £21
 - Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) - £363.67
- **Ward 15 – None**
- **Ward 16**
 - Crown Primary School: Literacy Project - £950
 - Hilton Primary Parent & Friends: School Trip to Fairburn Activity Centre - £950
 - Culcabock and Drakies Community Council: Contribution to Drakies Hall Improvement Works - £4559.50
- **Ward 17**
 - Culloden Academy: Supporting the Inclusion of Free School Meals to Pupils - £1,250
 - Culloden Academy: Supporting Families in Crisis - £750
 - Project Linus UK – Inverness and Surrounds Sewing Group - £250
 - Ardersier Primary School: Developing the Outdoors - £1,000
 - Smithton Primary School: Transportation Support for P7 Outdoor Education Residential - £1,000
 - Croy Primary Parent Council (CPPC): Christmas 2024 Pantomime Visit - £1,000
 - Duncan Forbes Primary School: Outdoor Pioneers - £959.92
 - Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) - £1,776.08
- **Ward 19**
 - Culloden Academy: Supporting the Inclusion of Free School Meals to Pupils - £1,250
 - Culloden Academy: Supporting Families in Crisis - £750
 - Cradlehall Primary School: School Residential Excursion 2024 - £1,950
 - Inshes Library: Developing a Creative and Nurturing Community Space - £2,000
 - SNAP: Cost of Living and Specialist Support - £5,067.96

2024/25

- **Ward 12**
 - Friends of Kilchuimen Academy: Senior Pupils (S5/6) New Common Room - £500
- **Ward 13**
 - Charleston Academy: Ocean Youth Trust Employability Voyage - £839.69
- **Ward 14**
 - South Kessock Residents Association: Play Park Opening - £1,350
- **Ward 15**
 - Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) - £329.72
- **Ward 16**
 - Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) - £329.72
- **Ward 17 – None**
- **Ward 19 – None**

In terms of Standing Order 9, with the consent of the Committee, item 12a had been taken after item 4 on the agenda.

12. Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF) Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

a) Victorian Market and Inverness Town House Update Cunntas mun Mhargaidh Bhictòrianach agus Taigh Baile Inbhir Nis

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Board Member of Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/18/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place which provided an update on the progress made on the delivery and further development of two key assets of the Inverness Common Good Fund, the Victorian Market and the Town House.

A video promoting the Victorian Market was shown to the Committee and highlighted the many new businesses now in the market since completion of the redevelopment. There was an average of 6000 visitors per day and the aim was to support small businesses located there, so the Market was a must visit destination in the City centre and also a great benefit to the wider community. The video showed positive feedback on the transformation of the Market from some of the business owners.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the team behind the transformation of the Victorian Market were congratulated for their work. Businesses was exceptionally busy and it was a vibrant and welcoming area to visit and shop;
- a plan was being worked on with Inverness College/UHI to bring the train back to the market;
- it was queried how the footfall to the Victorian Market was collated. Members were informed that a company had been hired to install cameras on the entrance doors to the market to count people entering. A further breakdown of footfall information would be provided to a future meeting;
- i was queried how the programme for music was funded and if this was to be an ongoing feature in the Market. In response it was explained that there was a budget set aside by the Committee for the music programme and this was part funded from contributions from businesses in the market, through their service charge;
- there were currently only 3 vacant units in the Market and this was evidence of the tremendous success of the redevelopment. However, due to constraints on energy supply, no further street food outlets were currently allowed and work was ongoing to identify other uses for these vacant units. It was confirmed that discussions were taking place with the energy supplier to bring at least one of the vacant units up to full power use. Also, working with the Council's energy team, the use of solar power was being investigated to increase energy supply and further information on this would be provided at a future meeting;
- concern was expressed that the electricity supply issue in the Market had not been considered in a more practical way as it would have been better to assess the electricity supply as the redevelopment took place. Further, battery storage should be considered if solar panels were to be introduced. The success of the redevelopment of the Market had been underestimated and, going forward, when projects were being planned, the aspirations should be much higher;
- improvements to heating, seating and provision of drinking water in the Market were highlighted. An information point was also proposed;
- the Stakeholder Group continued to play a key role and its focus going forward would be on the development of the action plan and ongoing work and support to the rest of the City centre;
- as part of the report on the Common Good Fund to the next meeting, comparative information would be provided on projections for the use of the Market since plans to redevelop it were first proposed in 2015 and up to the current period;
- in collaboration with Inverness College/UHI a new logo for the Town House was displayed. In terms of the cost of producing the logo, it was value for money and benefited students in the design of the logo. It had not been an easy design to create and the design was commended;
- the move out of the Town House had generated a saving of £370,000 to the Council, but was a loss of the same amount to the Inverness Common Good Fund. It was advised that work was ongoing to improve the letting of accommodation in the Town House but it was not yet at the stage where income was covering the operating costs of the building. By agreeing the recommendations in the report, this would be a significant step forward to raising more income; and

- a report on the work and costs involved in refurbishing the Town House following the Council's departure from it was requested. The Town House continued to be work in progress and the need to address the challenges around its condition would be covered in the recommended feasibility study into its future use.

In relation to the Victorian Market, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the progress in respect of the work agreed through the Victorian Market Action Plan since the last report to the City Area Committee and the success in the letting of all available Units in the Market;
- NOTED** the success of the marketing programme presented to the Committee as shown by the increase in footfall detailed in the report provided at Appendix 3 of the report.
- AGREED** that the current management arrangements continue for a further year, until May 2025, in order to consider what operating and management structures were required for both the Victorian Market and Town House;
- NOTED** that a further report would be presented to Committee in 2025; and
- NOTED** that comparative information would be provided on projections for the use of the Market since plans to redevelop it were first proposed in 2015 and up to the current period.

In relation to the Town House, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the work of the Estates Team to attract tenants into the rear part of the Town House; and
- AGREED** to instruct officers to prepare a Feasibility Study into the future use of the Inverness Townhouse which accounts:
 - for its status as a Civic building in the heart of the City
 - the need to undertake renovations of the interior which are respectful of its status
 - flexibility regarding the type of activity that can be undertaken subject to it being complimentary to the status and heritage of the Townhouse.
 - the need for the Council to achieve Best Value for the ICGF
- NOTED** third party contractors would be engaged to provide the Feasibility Study, the cost to be met from the ICGF Townhouse Future Planning budget with updates on the progress of the study being provided to the ICGF Sub-Committee. The Feasibility Study would be completed no later than December 2024.

**b) Grants Applications over £10,000
Iarrtasán Tabhartais thar £10,000**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Board Member of Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/19/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. A copy of supporting documentation had also been circulated as Booklet A.

The Committee considered the following grant applications and decided as follows:-

1. Poverty & Inequality Grant Applications

- i. Inverness Blitz – **AGREED** a grant of £16,000
- ii. UHI Inverness

The Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee had recommend refusal of a grant of £23,145 towards the Caring Conversations Project. The Sub-Committee felt that the project would be more appropriately funded from UHI core funding.

Mr B Boyd proposed an amendment to this decision as the project was about end of life issues, a neglected area in health and care communications. It disproportionately impacted those facing the cost of living crises. Bereavement in families affect everyone, young and old. The Caring Conservations Project was widely supported by the Member's ward constituents and was a worthy application. The project was led by the Highland Hospice with input from UHI and Highland Council. It was felt that the Sub Committee did not have all the information when making their decision as they had felt that there was not sufficient money available to approve the application. However there was sufficient funding for poverty and inequality applications. He suggested that a decision on this application for funding of £23,145 be deferred to allow resubmission of the application from the Highland Hospice, involving UHI, Highland Council and NHS Highland, specifically to clarify the deliverables, the applicability to the City of Inverness, emphasis on the benefits to target groups and work with the project team to clarify the application form and process.

The Committee **DEFERRED** a decision on this item to allow the resubmission of the application to the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub Committee.

- iii. UHI Inverness (Community Food Larder) - **REFUSED** a grant of £14,000 noting that there was insufficient community benefit and that it would set a precedent which would not be sustainable.

2. Conference Funding Applications

- i. Hands Up for Trad - **AGREED** a grant of £8,110.

3. Partnership Working Applications

- i. Visit Inverness Loch Ness - **AGREED** a grant of £20,000
- ii. Inverness BID/Visit Inverness Loch Ness - **NOTED** that there were insufficient funds remaining to consider this application.

4. Other Properties

- i. Inverness Sea Cadets – **AGREED** a grant of £20,000
- ii. Apex Scotland – **AGREED** a grant of £17,096

**13. Membership of Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee
Ballrachd Fo-chomataidh Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis**

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr D McDonald, as put forward by the Scottish Liberal Democrats, to the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee.

**14. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Board Member of Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The following Minutes had been circulated for noting or approval as appropriate:-

- i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 24 February 2024 - **NOTED**;
- ii. Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 23 February 2024 and 4 April 2024 – **APPROVED**; and
- iii. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 22 April 2024- **APPROVED**.

**15. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail**

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

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

There had been circulated to Members only Joint Report No CIA/20/24 by the Head of Economic Development & Regeneration and Property Manager – Estates.

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

The meeting concluded at 2.40 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 29 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner	Ms K MacLean (substitute, remote)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Mr J McGillivray
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Mr C Munro
Mr P Logue	Mrs M Paterson
Mr W MacKay (remote)	Mr R Stewart

Non Members Present:

Mr J Finlayson (remote)

In attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
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
Ms A Smith, Corporate Improvement Project Manager – Storr Project
Mr D Chisholm, Tourism and Inward Investment Team Leader
Ms S Paterson, Community Learning and Development Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms A Armstrong and Ms L Hamilton, Visit Scotland
Mr M Campbell, Culturlann
Mr D Steele, Active Schools Co-ordinator, High Life Highland

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

Mr C Munro in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr I Brown and Ms M Nolan.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 5 – Mr C Munro

3. Good News

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News audio visual presentation and thanks were afforded to Mr R MacKay for the preparation involved.

4. Cultarlann – Presentation

Mr M Campbell made a presentation to the Committee on Cultarlann, a gathering place for people with an interest in the Gaelic language and culture. Cultarlann Inbhir Nis had recently purchased the former East Church and was transforming it into a hub with a café, retail area, meeting space etc.

Thanks were afforded to Mr Campbell for his introduction and Members welcomed the news of, and were inspired by, the upcoming developments planned for the old church building.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the church made a beautiful wedding venue and it was exciting that the historical building had been put to good use;
- in response to questions regarding what Cultarlann could offer, it was confirmed that there were plans to hold Gaelic speaking classes and events where locals, tourists and overseas students would be welcomed;
- there were limited opportunities for children in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) to speak Gaelic socially outside of school and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that there were plans to further develop social speaking, with Cultarlann already working with a local GME School; and
- it was asked if there was a plan to have an audio visual display, such as an immersive experience, and it was confirmed that this was in the early stages of development and dependent on funding.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Gaelic Tourism Strategy and GLP – Report and Presentation

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Director of Skye Connect. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. G/05/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

Ms A Armstrong of Visit Scotland made a presentation to the Committee on the Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was queried whether the Council had the ability to include the Gaelic Tourism Strategy on the agendas of Area Committees or Council-fed forums. Further, it

was said that Ward Business Meetings and Community Councils might have the ability to highlight this focus;

- with some areas having a greater relationship with the Gaelic language than others, it was important to focus locally too;
- with pressure on budgets for services and infrastructure, and with the Gaelic language included in Council considerations, it was asked how the Gaelic Committee might feed into ongoing discussions;
- it was said that the Tourism Visitor Levy should be considered, given that the Visitor Levy Bill was passed in the Scottish Parliament on 28 May 2024;
- referring to section 4.1 in the report, Members were glad to see that Gaelic and culture were considered an asset, especially in the promotion of food and drink;
- Members were reminded that the BLAS Festival boosted local economy and extended the tourist season. The festival could be seen to generate income for Highland communities, High Life Highland and the Council. It also used remote venues such as Kinlochleven Theatre and, if this ceased, it was a missed opportunity to bring Gaelic culture and income to such communities. It was queried what plans the Council had to make sure the festival remained sustainable thereby generating income for both the Council and local communities;
- there was a suggestion to link with communities of similar cultures, such as Irish, Breton and Welsh;
- it was asked if weddings could be included in the Strategy. In addition to being a multi-million pound industry, it was an important aspect of Highland culture, with visitors travelling to the Highlands from all over the world to get married in traditional Scottish ceremonies, with pipes, clarsachs, quaichs and kilts;
- it was also asked if sub aqua exploration, namely scuba diving, could be showcased as it was an industry ripe for development across Highland, most particularly in the west of Scotland; and
- Ms Armstrong introduced Ms Hamilton to the Committee. Ms Hamilton would be working with the delivery group to take the Gaelic Tourism Strategy and delivery plan forward.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and presentation.

6. Performance against Gaelic Language Plan 3

There had been circulated Report No. G/06/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the report; and
- ii. that the next PRMS report available would be a transitional report between the current GLP and the refreshed GLP.

7. Gaelic Language Plan Update and Strategic Funding

There had been circulated Report No. G/07/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. Choose to Lead Gaelic Leadership Programme

There had been circulated Report No. G/08/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was the responsibility of this Committee to encourage everyday use of the Gaelic language;
- the Programme was an important extension of school life for GME pupils, allowing young people to meet with other communities and make friends for life. It was hoped that the Council would continue its support;
- Mr Steele was an example of the success, speaking both languages;
- young people who had attended leadership courses like these in the past had gained confidence and had earned the respect of their peers, and to have the facility in the Gaelic language was important;
- Members welcomed the use of Gaelic in sports and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that in Skye young primary-aged pupils participated in multi-sport, which included a mixture of activities, and, in Lochaber, senior pupils led football and multi-sports;
- in terms of numbers of GME pupils taking part, it was felt that more GME pupils could be involved and it was asked if secondary schools that did not provide GME in senior phases were included (as there might have been senior pupils who had an interest in attending);
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that 50 young people had attended the courses but many more pupils were on the Leadership Programme. The courses were at full capacity at the moment with staff limited to Mr Steele and one assistant; and
- Learners of Gaelic were welcome to attend and an example was provided regarding bilingual delivery of the course.

This Committee **NOTED** the report.

9. Gaelic Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/09/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members were directed to section 6.1 of the report, and reminded of the successful partnership between workforce planning, education officers and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and the successful recruiting to GME posts. This progress was seen to be a victory and staff were thanked for their hard work in this regard;
- in section 3 of the report, it was asked if neurodivergence could be included in the considerations and an example was provided where a young person struggled to learn two secondary languages at the same time;
- the recruitment of probationer teachers in primary schools should be celebrated but the number of Gaelic speaking secondary teachers was still an issue. The Council should continue to encourage young people in GME to consider teaching and it was asked what this Committee could do to support probationer teachers in general;
- a barrier for teachers coming to Highland was housing and Services across the Council must work together to accommodate young people who wanted to work in

GME in Highland. An example was provided whereby vacant nearby accommodation, in this case the school house, was kept available and formed part of the advertisement of a teaching post. The post was recruited and the teacher moved into the school house;

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the consideration of turning small schools in rural areas, threatened with closure, into digital hubs;
- in terms of the Gaelic Specific Grant, it was asked if the grant kept up with inflation and clarification was sought, and provided, regarding any restrictions. The Grant could not be used for capital projects and was subject to competing demands from other local authorities;
- in terms of section 4.1 of the report, it was confirmed that the one term post had been a successful pilot and the position now offered a one year secondment; and
- it was suggested that Kate Forbes MSP be invited to discuss Gaelic matters relating to Highland, with a focus particularly on teaching.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the areas of development and progress in Gaelic Education and Gaelic Education teacher recruitment; and
- ii. the 3 projects outlined in the Gaelic Specific Grant bid and award from Scottish Government for 2024/2025 that the grant will help to support.

The meeting ended at 12.50 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 Diciadain, 29 Cèitean 2024 aig 10.30m.

An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner
A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul (air astar)
A' Bh-uas S Fanet
Mgr I Grafton
Mgr P Logue
Mgr U MacAoidh (air astar)

A' Bh-uas C NicIleathain (ball-ionaid, air astar)
Mgr S MacIleBhrath
Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir (air astar)
Mgr C Rothach
A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais
Mgr R Stiùbhart

Neo-Bhuill an làthair:

Mgr I MacFhionnlaigh (air astar)

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr D MacIleDhuinn, Àrd-Oifigear
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 A Nic a' Ghobhainn, Manaidsear Pròiseict Leasachadh Corporra – Pròiseact an Stòir
Mgr D Siosalach, Ceannard Sgioba Turasachd agus In-thasgaidh
A' Bh-uas S NicPhàdraig, Oifigear Ionnsachadh agus Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd
A' Bh-uas S NicIlinnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach
A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Oifigear Comataidh

Cuideachd an làthair:

A' Bh-uas A Armstrong agus a' Bh-uas L Hamilton, VisitScotland
Mgr M Caimbeul, Cultarlann
Mgr D Steele, Co-òrdanaiche Sgoiltean Gnìomhach, High Life na Gàidhealtachd

Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnaidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.

Mgr C Rothach anns a' Chathair

Gnothach

1. **Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Ghabhadh leisgeulan às leth Mhgr I MhicilleDhuinn agus na M-uas M Nolan.

2. **Foilseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

Cha robh Foilseachaidhean Com-pàirt sam bith ann.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dha na h-Aithrisean Follaiseachd a leanas:-

Nì 5 – Mgr C Rothach

3. **Naidheachdan Matha**

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan taisbeanadh lèir-chlaistinneach leis na naidheachdan matha agus chaidh taing a thoirt do Mhgr R MacAoidh airson sin ullachadh.

4. **Cultarlann – Taisbeanadh**

Thug Mgr M Caimbeul seachad taisbeanadh dhan Chomataidh mun Chultarlann, àite-cruinneachaidh do dhaoine le ùidh ann an cànan is cultar na Gàidhlig. Bha Cultarlann Inbhir Nis air an t-seann Eaglais an Ear a cheannach o chionn ghoirid agus bhathar ga h-atharrachadh gu bhith na co-ionad le cafaidh, bùth, àite-coinneachaidh is eile.

Chaidh taing a thoirt do Mhgr Caimbeul airson an fhiosrachaidh agus chuir Buill fàilte air an naidheachd mhisneachail mu na leasachaidhean a bha san amharc airson seann togalach na h-eaglaise.

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

- b' e aitreabh àlainn airson banais a bh' anns an eaglais agus bha e fìor mhath gun robhar a' dèanamh deagh fheum dhen togalach eachdraidheil;
- mar fhreagairt do cheistean a thaobh na dh'fhaodadh an Cultarlann tabhann, chaidh dearbhadh gun robh planaichean ann clasaichean agus tachartasan Gàidhlig a chumail far an deigheadh fàilte a chur air muinntir an àite fhèin, luchd-turais agus oileanaich bho thall thairis;
- cha robh mòran chothroman ann do chloinn ann am Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig (FtG) a' Ghàidhlig a bhruidhinn gu sòisealta taobh a-muigh na sgoile agus, mar fhreagairt do cheist, chaidh dearbhadh gun robh planaichean ann tuilleadh leasachaidh a thoirt air labhairt shòisealta, agus gun robh an Cultarlann mar-thà ag obair còmhla ri sgoil FtG ionadail; agus
- chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a bha plana ann taisbeanadh lèir-chlaistinneach a chur air dòigh, a leithid taisbeanadh bogaidh, agus chaidh dearbhadh gun robh seo aig ìre thràth leasachaidh agus an crochadh air maoineachadh.

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

5. **Ro-innleachd Turasachd na Gàidhlig agus Plana na Gàidhlig – Aithisg agus Taisbeanadh**

Aithris Fhollaiseachd: thug Mgr C Rothach seachad Aithris Fhollaiseachd a thaobh an nì seo mar Stiùiriche air Skye Connect. Ach, às dèidh dha an deuchainn neo-chlaon a chur an gnìomh, cha robh e dhen bheachd gun robh ùidh aige ri fhoillseachadh.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/05/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

Thug a' Bh-uas A Armstrong bho VisitScotland seachad taisbeanadh chun na Comataidh air Ro-innleachd Turasachd na Gàidhlig airson Alba.

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

- chaidh ceist a thogail a thaobh co-dhiù a bha comas aig a' Chomhairle Ro-innleachd Turasachd na Gàidhlig a thoirt an lùib chlàran-gnothaich chomataidhean sgìreil no fòraman air an stiùireadh leis a' Chomhairle. Cuideachd, chaidh a ràdh gum faodadh comas a bhith aig coimhearsnachd gnothachais uàird agus comhairlean coimhearsnachd am fòcas seo a shoilleireachadh;
- seach gun robh dàimh na bu mhotha aig cuid de sgìrean le cànan na Gàidhlig na feadhainn eile, bha e cudromach fòcas ionadail a chumail cuideachd;
- le cuideam air buidseatan airson seirbheisean agus bun-structair, agus le cànan na Gàidhlig ga ghabhail a-steach ann am breithneachaidhean na Comhairle, chaidh faighneachd ciamar a dh'fhaodadh Comataidh na Gàidhlig cur ri còmhraidhean leantainneach;
- chaidh a ràdh gum bu chòir beachdachadh air Cìs Luchd-tadhail Turasachd seach gun deach Bile Cìs an Luchd-tadhail aontachadh le Pàrlamaid na h-Alba air 28 Cèitean 2024;
- a thaobh earrann 4.1 san aithisg, bha Buill toilichte faicinn gun robhar a' beachdachadh air Gàidhlig agus cultar mar sho-mhaoin, gu h-àraid a thaobh a bhith a' cur air adhart biadh agus deoch;
- chaidh cuimhneachadh do Bhuill gun robh Fèis Bhlas a' toirt spionnadh dhan eaconamaidh ionadail agus a' leudachadh ràith an luchd-turais. Bha e follaiseach gun robh an fhèis a' togail teachd-a-steach airson coimhearsnachdan na Gàidhealtachd, High Life na Gàidhealtachd agus a' Chomhairle. Bha an fhèis cuideachd a' cleachdadh thogalaichean iomallach a leithid Taigh-cluiche Cheann Loch Liobhann agus, nan stadadh seo, bhiodh cothrom air a chall cultar Gàidhlig agus teachd-a-steach a thoirt gu ruige coimhearsnachdan a leithid seo. Chaidh ceist a thogail mu na planaichean a bh' aig a' Chomhairle airson dèanamh cinnteach gun robh an fhèis fhathast seasmhach, mar sin a' cruthachadh teachd-a-steach an dà chuid airson na Comhairle agus coimhearsnachdan ionadail;
- bha moladh ann ceangal a thogail le coimhearsnachdan le cultaran coltach ri cultar na Gàidhlig, a leithid Gàidhlig na h-Èireann, Breatnais agus Cuimris;
- chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a dh'fhaodadh bainnsean a bhith air an gabhail a-steach san ro-innleachd. A bharrachd air a bhith na gnìomhachas le luach iomadh millean, bha seo na phàirt chudromach de chultar na Gàidhealtachd, le luchd-tadhail a' siubhal chun na Gàidhealtachd bho air feadh an t-saoghail airson pòsadh ann an searmoin thraidiseanta Albannach, le pìoban-mòra, clàrsaichean, cuachan agus fèilidhean;
- chaidh faighneachd cuideachd co-dhiù a dh'fhaodadh rannsachadh fo-uisge, gu h-àraid sgùba-dhaibheadh, a bhith air a thaisbeanadh seach gur e gnìomhachas

a bha seo a bha deiseil airson leasachadh air feadh na Gàidhealtachd, gu h-àraid ann an taobh an iar na h-Alba; agus

- chuir a' Bh-uas Armstrong fàilte air a' Bh-uas Hamilton chun na Comataidh. Bhiodh a' Bh-uas Hamilton ag obair còmhla ris a' bhuidhinn libhrigidh gus Ro-innleachd Turasachd na Gàidhlig agus am plana libhrigidh a thoirt air adhart.

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

6. Coileanadh mu choinneimh Plana na Gàidhlig 3

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/06/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

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

- i. dhan aithisg; agus
- ii. gur e aithisg eadar-ghluasaid, eadar am Plana Gàidhlig làithreach agus am Plana Gàidhlig teachdail, a bhiodh san ath aithisg PRMS a bhiodh ri faotainn.

7. Plana na Gàidhlig agus Maoinachadh Ro-innleachdail

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/07/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

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

8. Tagh Ceannardas – Prògram Ceannardais Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/08/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

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

- b' e dleastanas na Comataidh seo cleachdadh làitheil na Gàidhlig a bhrosnachadh;
- bha am prògram na leudachadh cudromach air beatha sgoile airson sgoilearan FtG, a' toirt cothrom do dhaoine òga coinneachadh le coimhearsnachdan eile agus caraidean a dhèanamh a bhiodh aca fad am beatha. Bhathar an dòchas gun leanadh a' Chomhairle air adhart le a cuid taic;
- bha Mgr Steele na eisimpleir dhen t-soirbheachas, agus e a' bruidhinn an dà chànan;
- bha daoine òga a bha air cùrsaichean ceannardais a leithid seo a fhrithealadh roimhe air misneachd a thogail agus air spèis a chosnadh am measg an co-aoisean. Mar sin, bha e cudromach gum biodh an goireas ri fhaotainn sa Ghàidhlig;
- chuir Buill fàilte air cleachdadh na Gàidhlig ann an spòrs agus, mar fhreagairt do cheist, chaidh dearbhadh gun robh sgoilearan òga aois bun-sgoile san Eilean Sgitheanach a' gabhail pàirt ann an ioma-spòrs, a bha a' gabhail a-steach measgachadh de chleasan, agus, ann an Loch Abar, bha sgoilearan aig an ìre as àirde a' gabhail pàirt ann am ball-coise agus ioma-spòrs;
- a thaobh àireamhan sgoilearan FtG a' gabhail pàirt, bhathar a' faireachdainn gum faodadh barrachd sgoilearan FtG a bhith a' gabhail pàirt agus chaidh faighneachd

an robh àrd-sgoiltean nach robh a' toirt seachad Gàidhlig FtG sna h-ìrean as àirde air an gabhail a-steach (seach gum faodadh ùidh a bhith aig cuid de sgoilearan aig an ìre as àirde a bhith an làthair);

- mar fhreagairt do cheist, chaidh dearbhadh gun robh 50 neach òg air na cùrsaichean a fhrithealadh ach gun robh mòran sgoilearan a bharrachd air a' Phrògram Cheannardais. Bha na cùrsaichean làn aig an àm seo agus cha robh luchd-obrach ann ach Mgr Steele agus aon neach-cuideachaidh; agus
- bha fàilte air luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig a bhith an làthair agus chaidh eisimpleir a thoirt seachad a thaobh a bhith a' libhrigeadh a' chùrsa gu dà-chànanach.

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

9. Cunntas às Ùr mu Fhoghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/09/24 leis an Àrd-Oifigear Ghnìomhach Eadar-amail airson Coileanadh agus Riaghlachas.

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

- chaidh Buill a stiùireadh gu earrann 6.1 dhen aithisg, agus chaidh an com-pàirteachas soirbheachail eadar planadh feachd-obrach, oifigearan foghlaim agus Sabhal Mòr Ostaig a chur nan cuimhne, agus gun robhar air a bhith soirbheachail a' fastadh luchd-obrach airson dhreuchdan FtG. Bhathar a' faicinn an adhartais seo mar bhuannachd agus chaidh taing a thoirt do luchd-obrach airson an cuid obrach chruaidh a thaobh seo;
- ann an earrainn 3 dhen aithisg, chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a dh'fhaodadh niùro-eug-samhlachd a bhith air a ghabhail a-steach nuair a bhathar a' beachdachadh air cùisean agus chaidh eisimpleir a thoirt seachad far an robh e doirbh do neach òg dà chànan àrd-sgoile ionnsachadh aig an aon àm;
- bu chòir gairdeachas a dhèanamh a thaobh na bha de thidsearan pròbhaidh air am fastadh ann am bun-sgoiltean, ach bha an àireamh thidsearan àrd-sgoile le Gàidhlig fhathast na dhùbhlan. Bu chòir dhan Chomhairle leantainn air adhart a' brosnachadh dhaoine òga ann am FtG beachdachadh air teagasg agus chaidh faighneachd dè b' urrainn dhan Chomataidh a dhèanamh airson taic a thoirt do thidsearan pròbhaidh san fharsaingeachd;
- bha cion taigheadais a' cur bacadh air tidsearan bho bhith a' tighinn chun na Gàidhealtachd agus dh'fheumadh seirbheisean air feadh na Comhairle obrachadh còmhla airson àite a thoirt do dhaoine òga a bha airson obrachadh ann am FtG anns a' Ghàidhealtachd. Chaidh eisimpleir a thoirt seachad far an deach àite-fuirich falamh faisg air làimh, taigh-còmhnaidh na sgoile, a chumail agus far an robh seo na phàirt de shanas na dreuchd teagasg. Chaidh an dreuchd a lìonadh agus ghluais an tidsear a-steach do thaigh-còmhnaidh na sgoile;
- chaidh fiosrachadh iarraidh agus fhaotainn a thaobh a bhith ag atharrachadh sgoiltean beaga ann an sgìrean dùthchail, a bha ann an cunnart dùnadh, gu bhith nan hubaichean didseatach;
- a thaobh Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig, chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a bha an tabhartas a' cumail suas ri ìre na h-atmhorachd agus chaidh soilleireachadh a shireadh agus fhaotainn a thaobh chuingealachaidhean sam bith. Chan fhaodadh

an tabhartas a bhith air a chleachdadh airson phròiseactan calpa agus bha seo an crochadh air iarrtasan farpaiseach bho ùghdarrasan ionadail eile;

- a thaobh earrann 4.1 dhen aithisg, chaidh dearbhadh gun robh an dreuchd aon teirm air a bhith soirbheachail mar phaidhleat agus bha an dreuchd a-nis a' tabhann fo-fhastadh aon bhliadhna; agus
- chaidh moladh gum bu chòir cuireadh a thoirt do Cheit Fhoirbeis BPA airson bruidhinn mu chùisean Gàidhlig a' buntainn ris a' Ghàidhealtachd, le fòcas sònraichte air teagasg.

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

- i. do na raointean leasachaidh is adhartais ann am foghlam Gàidhlig agus fastadh thidsearan airson foghlam Gàidhlig; agus
- ii. do na trì pròiseactan a tha air am mìneachadh ann an iarrtas agus duais Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig bho Riaghaltas na h-Alba airson 2024/25 ris am bi an tabhartas a' cur taic.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 12.50f.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 30 May 2024 at 10.35 am.

Present:

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

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Ms S Lamont
Mr I MacDonald

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms O MacLeod

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mr B Lobban (remote)	Mrs M Reid
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms F Grant, Head of Education, Learning and Teaching
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning and Gaelic Services
Ms A MacPherson, Head of Resources
Ms B Brown, Senior Lead Manager, Performance and Improvement
Ms T Mackie, Senior Lead Manager, Additional Support for Learning
Ms T Stones, Senior Lead Manager, Professional Learning
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager (South)
Ms M Garson, Senior Lead, Employability and Skills 3-18
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer
Ms F Jamieson, Collaborative Lead Officer
Ms E Ross, Quality Assurance Moderation Support Officer
Ms J Kean, Head Teacher, Merkinch Primary School
Ms R MacCormick, Head Teacher, Dalneigh Primary School
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms S Fowler, Thriving Families (Third Sector)
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms R Holt, Chief Executive, Eden Court

Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Ms H MacLeod, Community Learning and Development Support Officer, High Life Highland

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Macpherson and Mr W Skene.

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

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

Item 4: Ms S Atkin

Item 6: Ms L Johnston and Mr D Millar

Item 10: Ms S Atkin

Mr J McGillivray made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that he was still registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and as a retired member and former Highland District Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association.

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

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

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

**4. Positive Destinations
Cinn-uidhe Mhatha**

Transparency Statement: Ms S Atkin declared a connection to this item as a My Future My Success Mentor but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/7/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report was about the progress that had been made in improving positive destinations for all school leavers as well as the work being done to support the most vulnerable young people through work-related learning and mentoring.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the positive and encouraging report;
- the uptake in work experience was welcomed. It was added that it would be good to see every young person in Highland undergo work experience as it made a big difference to confidence amongst other things;
- with reference to the number of young people in Highland that went into employment compared with the national position, it would be helpful to break down the statistics and provide the context behind them so Members had a clear picture of the choices young people in Highland were making;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that a more detailed breakdown of the approximately 4% of young people that were not going on to a positive destination could be provided in future reports;
- it was important to reflect on the multi-agency work that went into producing the statistics in the report and the aims and ambitions going forward;
- in relation to the Healthcare Pathway Pilot, the fact that 84% of the cohort intended to go on to a healthcare profession was significant and it was questioned how that success could be built upon going forward;
- the range of opportunities in terms of apprenticeships and further education was welcomed, and it was good to see so many employers offering work experience;
- the positive impact of the My Future My Success program was recognised;
- it having been queried whether a follow-up survey of school leavers could be carried out in 12 months' time, it was explained that this sat with Skills Development Scotland and was recorded in the Participation Measure. The Senior Lead, Employability and Skills, undertook to provide further information in that regard to Mr R Gale;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether all local authorities classed 16 hours per week as full-time employment in relation to positive destinations, and why 16 hours had been chosen; the willingness of businesses to offer work experience placements and whether there was strong representation across Highland; and whether there was a way of tracking and engaging with young people who had left school early, for example, and signposting them to advice and support. In relation to signposting, the Senior Lead, Employability and Skills, undertook to share a link to the Highland Employability Service, which was a self-referral process, with Committee Members.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the content of the report and the progress made in improving positive destinations for all; and
- ii. the work developed to support the most vulnerable young people to secure positive destinations through work-related learning and My Future, My Success.

5. Curriculum for Excellence Assessment and Moderation Measadh agus Measarrachd a' Churraicealaim airson Sàr-mhathais

The Chair explained that, as promised at the previous meeting of the Committee, a presentation would be provided which it was hoped would help Members understand how moderation and assessment worked, whilst also improving understanding of Curriculum for Excellence and the roles of teachers, schools, Associated School Groups (ASG) and service staff in ensuring support and challenge were built into the processes that took place in the many diverse school settings in Highland.

He then handed over to Fiona Jamieson, Collaborative Lead Officer, Emily Ross, Quality Assurance Moderation Support Officer, Jillian Kean, Head Teacher, Merkinch Primary School, and Rhona MacCormick, Head Teacher, Dalneigh Primary School, who gave a detailed presentation as described.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the thorough presentation, which the Chair confirmed would be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- the provision of support for teachers was welcomed, as was the focus on learning and teaching and pupils' strengths, and the Highland Assessment and Moderation Toolkit was commended; and
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the accessibility of the Central Moderation Program and the two Moderation Collaborative modules referred to; whether there were checks in place to ensure that high-achieving pupils were working within their capacity and were not at risk of burnout; which elements of the work described were compulsory; whether the Assessment and Moderation Toolkit was designed to minimise bureaucracy; whether any Highland-specific challenges had been identified in terms of ensuring consistency; how the timing of assessment affected consistency; where probationer teachers were in terms of their knowledge of assessment and moderation, and whether they saw the approach in Highland as innovative and supportive; and whether it was expected that every primary school would have an element of assessment and moderation as part of their school development plan.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

6. Young Carers Statement and Strategy 2024-2026, Education and Learning Aithris agus Ro-innleachd Luchd-cùraim Òga 2024–2026, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh

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

Ms L Johnston, as an employee of Connecting Carers within the adult carer service

Mr D Millar, as a family member worked for Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers

There had been circulated Report No EDU/8/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the encouraging report, and Members welcomed the Young Carers Strategy and the engagement that had taken place with Young Carers organisations in that regard;
- feedback from Young Carers organisations was that sometimes schools were not the best place to prepare Young Carers statements as Young Carers might not wish to disclose current stresses and struggles to teachers. In addition, it was questioned whether schools would have the capacity to meet the needs of Young Carers and review and update Young Carers Statements. It was therefore proposed that, where a Young Carer was working with a Young Carers organisation, they be given the opportunity to have their statement prepared with the support of that organisation rather than with the school if they so wished. This was accepted, subject to there being no resource or legislative implications;
- concern was expressed about overloading the system, and it was necessary to differentiate between the role of schools and the wider services involved in supporting young people with significant caring roles;
- the Chief Officer, Thriving Families, welcomed the development of a Young Carers Statement as a first step, and that it was in a format that reflected the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. She also welcomed the inclusion of the third sector in the Young Carers Improvement Group and looked forward to seeing the Young Carers Strategy come to fruition; and
- it was highlighted that 10 to 16 June was Carers Week, the theme for which was “Putting carers on the map”;
- the number of Young Carers in Highland was potentially huge given the number of young people who, for example, looked after a sibling with Additional Support Needs (ASN), a parent with a disability or addiction issue or a grandparent with dementia;
- Young Carers were amazing young people who gave up major parts of their childhood, including time to access education and study, because of the sacrifice they made to look after family members;
- the right to a Young Carers Statement was enshrined in law, and it was welcomed that information in respect of Young Carers would no longer just be held in a Child’s Plan or on SEEMiS, and that Young Carers would have ownership and direction over their Young Carers Statement;
- it was emphasised that Young Carers and Care Experienced Young People were two very different things, and The Promise was made to all Care Experienced Young People in Scotland; and
- support for Young Carers was an ongoing journey and required a multi-agency collaborative approach, and Members looked forward to updates on progress at future meetings.

The Committee:-

- i. recognised and **NOTED** the progress made by Education and Learning with regards the enhanced support for Young Carers;
- ii. **AGREED** the Young Carers Strategy and Statement for Education and Learning; and
- iii. **AGREED**, subject to there being no resource or legislative implications, that where a Young Carer was working with a Young Carers organisation, they be given the opportunity to have their statement prepared with the support of that organisation rather than with the school if they so wished.

7. School Roll Forecasts and Capacity Modelling Ro-mheasaidhean Chlàran Sgoile

There had been circulated Report No EDU/9/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report provided the most accurate 15-year school roll projections the Council had ever been able to produce, which would clearly feed into all the services the Council provided as it allowed a consistent approach to capacity modelling for all educational settings to be established. It also fed into the Highland Investment Plan, and he was sure Members would find the presentation accompanying the report interesting and informative.

The Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy, and the Development Plans Manager then gave a presentation in amplification of the report, including information on the Housing Land Audit and the impact of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the significant amount of work that had been undertaken in terms of school roll forecasting and capacity modelling;
- the comments regarding developer contributions were welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, regarding the use of developer contributions and how Members could interact directly with the Developer Contributions Action Group;
- concern was expressed regarding depopulation and low school roll numbers in areas such as North Wester Ross, North West Sutherland and the Dornoch Firth, which were outwith the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport area, and it was commented that it was necessary to look beyond the school roll numbers in such areas;
- the need for a more age-friendly housing strategy for Highland was emphasised;
- it was queried whether developments that might lead to an influx of people to a particular area in the future, such as the new Belford Hospital development which was currently on hold, were taken into account;
- as southern areas became hotter due to climate change, there was a slow trend of people moving north, and Scotland was becoming increasingly attractive. Plans in terms of climate change and coastal erosion were looking as far forward as 2050, and it was queried whether the Council was looking that far forward and taking such matters into consideration in school roll forecasts;
- in relation to school capacity modelling, it was queried whether consideration was given to the role of private and third sector Early Learning and Childcare providers;
- housing development in a particular area did not always lead to the school roll increasing; it was dependent on the tenure of the housing;
- forecasting was useful but a lot could change, and the Council could make a lot happen in terms of how it planned for the future; and
- there was a perception that there was no demand for housing in some areas as families seeking to move there had not put their names on the housing register; and
- the improved accuracy of school roll forecasts was welcomed, and it was reassuring that they were reviewed annually.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated 15-year School Roll Forecasts and the recent work to establish a consistent approach to capacity modelling for all types of schools.

8. Service Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 4 – 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024

Aithris Coileanaidh Seirbheis – 1 Faoilleach 2024 gu 31 Màrt 2024

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service performance and risk information; and
- ii. **AGREED** the suggested change to the planned target in respect of the High Life Highland Contract review, as set out in paragraph 5.2 of the report.

9. High Life Highland Progress Report

Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/24 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland (HLH).

The Chair reminded Members that, in November 2023, as well as presenting the Community Sports and Leisure Facility Strategy, the six-monthly High Life Highland report had focussed on the impact High Life Highland had had on the health and wellbeing of communities in Highland. This time, in addition to reporting on the usual Key Performance Indicators and detailing how High Life Highland contributed to the Council's Corporate Plan, the report focussed on how the partnership between the Council and High Life Highland had facilitated consistent growth in charitable, trading, grant and partnership income since the Council had created its Arm's Length External Organisation in 2011. He was sure Members would view all of this as a good example of how partnership working, based on the foundations of trust and positive relationships, could deliver excellent outcomes.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the comprehensive report, which built on the promising work in previous reports. It was clear things were progressing in the right direction, and thanks were expressed to the Chief Executive and his team for their efforts and for making High Life Highland a flagship organisation;
- in addition to the good news in Appendix 2 of the report, it was highlighted that Inverness Harriers, who were hosted by High Life Highland at Queens Park Athletics Stadium, had produced an Olympian, Megan Keith, and Members wished her the best of luck at the Paris Olympics;
- Members spoke to the success of High Life Highland since its inception. Music Tuition, for example, had been under threat in the past due to budgetary constraints, but was now delivered by High Life Highland to hundreds of children throughout the Council area;
- it was encouraging that volunteer recovery was at 80% of pre-Covid levels;
- it was queried how Active Schools Coordinators ensured there was equity between smaller and larger schools;

- the arts was somewhat neglected in schools, and it would be good to see parity with sports as drama had as much to offer in terms of benefits to mental health and developing character and resilience; and
- Members commended the Young Persons' Leadership Programme and the work High Life Highland did in relation to the My Future My Success project and to support the needs of veterans through the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 31 March 2024, including HLH's contributions to the implementation of the Highland Council Corporate Plan in Appendix A;
- ii. general updates provided in section 2 of the report;
- iii. that HLH continued to deliver Public Service Obligations on behalf of the Highland Council as set out in the Service Delivery Contract;
- iv. progress on the Service Delivery Contract Review; and
- v. information in section ten, income growth and development in partnership with the Highland Council.

10. Eden Court Update

Cunntas às Ùr mu Chùirt an Easbaig

Transparency Statement: Ms S Atkin declared a connection to this item as a Member of Eden Court Board but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

The Chair welcomed Rebecca Holt, Chief Executive, Eden Court, who gave a presentation on the work of Eden Court, including the work being done with schools, young people and the wider community.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the work being done by Eden Court to support local cinemas, particularly in the Seaboard villages; deliver programmes; secure funding; and promote intergenerational activities was commended;
- it was queried whether experienced music teachers from areas such as Lochaber were involved in creative programmes;
- it was great to see young people involved in Inverness Musical Theatre;
- in response to a question, it was explained that while Eden Court Under Canvas would not be touring the Highlands in 2024 there were plans to take the work of Eden Court to other parts of the Highlands through projects such as In on the Act;
- the importance of encouraging children to become involved in creative industries was emphasised; and
- the Chair proposed that further updates on the work of Eden Court be provided on an annual basis.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation; and
- ii. **AGREED** that further updates on the work of Eden Court would be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

11. Counselling in Schools Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Chomhairleachadh ann an Sgoiltean

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the updated information on school counselling in Highland schools; and
- ii. the training available in relation to Promoting Positive Relationships, Mental Health Awareness and Becoming Trauma Informed, which could be signposted as appropriate to schools and services within communities.

12. Parental Engagement Strategy Ro-innleachd Com-pàirteachadh Phàrantach

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the Parental Engagement Strategy and Improvement Plan were based on engagement that had taken place with parents and carers across the authority as well as representatives from Parent Councils and the third sector.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was a tension between parents wanting involvement in their own child's education and the wider role of the Parent Council;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Parent Councils and Parent Forums could, and did, communicate directly rather than via their school;
- it was hoped that the Strategy would make the boundaries to parental involvement clear as it could be difficult for parents to understand how far their rights in decision-making extended;
- the multi-agency relationships associated with this area of work were highlighted;
- parents had a deeper understanding of their children than schools did, and it was important to be aware that, in the case of children with ASN, their behaviour could vary greatly between school and home and schools;
- children who were neuro-diverse often had parents who shared their condition, and it might be more difficult for these parents to engage with schools;
- information was sought, and provided, on the number of parents who had said they would like more information about careers and post-school pathways and opportunities, and what could be done to improve this;
- the Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, thanked officers for their collegiate approach and involving the third sector in the development of the Strategy;
- the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP) provided an opportunity for Parent Councils from across Highland to share information and it was queried whether further HPCP conferences could be held as these had previously proved very helpful; and
- one issue in terms of parental involvement was that secondary school pupils often found it embarrassing for their parents to be involved with the school.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Parental Engagement Strategy – Appendix 1 of the report; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy Improvement Plan – Appendix 2 of the report.

13. Community Learning and Development Year 2 Report – October 2022 to September 2023

Aithisg Bliadhna 2 Ionnsachadh agus Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd – Dàmhair 2022 gu Sultain 2023

There had been circulated Report No EDU/14/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that work was being done to improve impact assessments for committee reports, and a report on the Integrated Impact Assessment tool that was being developed would be presented to the Council in June;
- it was hoped that Community Learning and Development (CLD) would include education on climate change as this was an important subject that had a big impact on people's lives; and
- the importance of third sector groups in the wellbeing of communities was emphasised, and it was queried if there could be greater involvement of third sector groups in CLD.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress, including key achievements, made in year two of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan;
- ii. the priorities and focus for year three of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan, and;
- iii. that the annual inspection visit from His Majesty Inspectors of Education for Community Learning and Development had been advised to The Highland Council for Monday 3rd to Wednesday 5th June.

14. Statutory Consultation Exercise – Badcaul Primary School: Request to Proceed to Consultation on Permanent Closure

Eacarsaich Co-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Bun-Sgoil a' Bhad Chall: Iarrtas a Dhol air Adhart gu Co-chomhairleachadh mu Dhùnadh Maireannach

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were extended to Council officers and the Scottish Government, particularly the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, for answering questions and providing information around the closure of rural schools;

- in most previous cases of school closures, the closure had been a practical choice based on the proximity of an alternative school which pupils could attend, whereas in this case the nearest alternative schools were 31 miles and 13 miles away;
- there was a presumption in Scotland against the closure of rural schools, and if an application for closure was rejected it could not be re-submitted for five years thus providing some stability for the community;
- a full consultation to look at all the issues, particularly those concerning depopulation, would be the best way forward in this case, and it would be important for all members of the community to engage with the consultation process to achieve a positive outcome;
- the consultation would not necessarily lead to closure of the school but was an opportunity to look at possible developments within the community to keep the school open and the community thriving;
- with reference to the earlier item on school rolls, it was encouraging that schools and school rolls would not be looked at in isolation;
- rural depopulation was a core element of Council forward-planning and should be reflected in consultations around the future of schools;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Scoraig Primary School and community could be included in the list of consultees;
- a consultation on school closure was preferred to continued mothballing;
- it was encouraging that the Education Service was looking at different options rather than focusing solely on school closure; and
- school closures had become too common in recent years and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that a list of school closures in Highland in last 10 years could be provided.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal Paper attached to the report;
- ii. that Scoraig Primary School be added to the list of consultees in the report; and
- iii. that a list of schools in Highland that had closed in the last 10 years be circulated to Members of the Committee.

The meeting concluded at 2.30 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in **Courtroom, Grantown Courthouse, Grantown-on-Spey/Remotely** on 3 June 2024 at 10.30 am

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Mrs M Cockburn

Mr R Jones
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mr M MacKay, Community Development Manager
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Manager
Mr L Marchi, Principal Housing Officer
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer
Ms A Tanner, City Heritage Project Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr N Nethercott, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following transparency statement:-

Item 9 – Mr B Lobban

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Report Aithisg Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/04/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Mr N Nethercott, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service provided a brief introduction highlighting the key points of the report and drawing Members' attention to additional items of good news including the successful Anthony Nolan Trust event at Kingussie High School and an event with local rangers concerning wildfire safety and community engagement.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, an update was provided on wildfires in the area as well as upgrades to equipment and training being undertaken to improve the ability of stations to respond to wildfires;
- the youth development programme, working with young people around driving safety, was commended and it was queried whether these sessions should take place more than once a year;
- in response to a question concerning the recruitment of women to the service it was clarified that the physical test remained the main obstacle to recruitment and that some aspects of the test were more suited to men while some were more suited to women. It was also confirmed that capital funding was being sought to update changing facilities within stations as they were originally designed for single gender use;
- information was sought and provided on recruitment and sustainability in the area; the three tiers of station classification regarding wildfire response, and the use of the Community Asset Register; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the first of the new style light-weight fire engines was due to be delivered to the Highlands in July 2024 and would hopefully be used by the station at Carrbridge.

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

4. Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund – consultation on proposal to change the use of the Market Square to allow for mandatory charging for events, pitches and stalls
Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile nan Granndach – co-chomhairleachadh mun mholadh gun tèid cleachdadh Ceàrnag na Margaidh atharrachadh airson 's gun urrainnear cosgaisean a bhuileachadh airson thachartasan, làraich is stàlaichean

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/05/24 by the Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place and the Acting Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- surprise was expressed at the recommendations as they seemed to be based on a small number of consultation responses;
- it was highlighted that only 23 people out of Grantown on Spey's approximately 2500 residents had responded to the consultation, which called into question how such consultations were conducted;
- the recommendations were based on the views of only 16 Grantown on Spey residents;
- although some responses to the consultation warned against commercialisation of the square, it was highlighted that it was already used for a commercial purpose as most of the stall holders who used the square, for example as part of the farmers market, were commercial businesses looking to make a profit;
- the village green in Aviemore which was much smaller than the square in Grantown made a profit of £5,000 last year from stall holders;

- any money raised from use of the square would be accumulated into a Common Good Fund which would be used for the benefit of the people of Grantown on Spey;
- doubt was expressed that the very small number of consultation responses was representative of the wider community;
- it was confirmed that requests for charitable use of the Square would be decided by the Community Development team in consultation with Local Members;
- on the point being raised it was confirmed that there would be no charge for educational use of the Square;
- disappointment was expressed concerning the reporting around this issue, particularly in relation to the suggestion that money raised from use of the Square would go to Highland Council, and it was once again confirmed that any money raised would be used for the benefit of people in Granton on Spey;
- it was emphasised that only Badenoch and Strathspey Committee members would be trustees of the Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund; and
- Mr B Lobban, seconded by Ms M Cockburn moved that the Committee agreed to proceed with the process to introduce mandatory charging for the use of the Square in Grantown on Spey and all Members were in agreement.

Thereafter the Committee :-

- NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at Appendix 1 to the report;
- APPROVED** the responses to the representations received within the consultation period for publication on the Council's website as contained in the table in Appendix 2 to the report;
- NOTED** and balanced the representations received together with the responsibilities for the Grantown on Spey Common Good fund in order to decide whether to *Agree* the proposal should proceed or *Should not* proceed;
- AGREED** to proceed with the process to introduce mandatory charging for the use of the Square in Grantown on Spey; and
- NOTED** that it would be necessary to seek Sheriff Court approval because The Square was considered to be inalienable

5. Kingussie High Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/06/24 by the Area Education & Learning Manager, Education & Learning.

During discussion disappointment was expressed that no one from the Education Service was available to answer questions on the report and it was asked that the item be deferred to the next meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** this item be deferred to the following meeting of the Committee on 26 August 2024.

**6. Grantown Grammar Associated School Group Overview
Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Sgoil Ghràmair Bhaile nan Grandach**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/07/24 by the Area Education & Learning Manager, Education & Learning.

The Committee **AGREED** this item be deferred to the following meeting of the Committee on 26 August 2024 as no officer was present at the meeting to answer questions on the report.

**7. Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iartasan na Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the approved CRF grant award to Highland Council for the Glenmore Subway Footway Link up to the value of the ring-fenced funds of £80,000 as set aside.

**8. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 31 Màrt 2024**

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

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was explained that Badenoch and Strathspey had longer waiting times for urgent repairs and shorter waiting times for non-urgent repairs than the Council average due to not having an in-house repairs team and having to employ contractors;
- information was sought and provided on the action being taken to help tenants in rent arrears, the monitoring of anti-social behaviour, the rates of rent for people in emergency accommodation, and plans to upgrade heating and insulation in older properties;
- the quick re-let times were commended;
- in response to a request, the Principal Housing Officer undertook to provide figures on the age demographics of people experiencing homelessness;
- it was queried whether the shortage of available sub-contractors in Badenoch and Strathspey was a result of the frame-work agreement;

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

**9. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved since the previous Committee:-

1200

Organisation	Project	Amount
Cairngorm Mountain Trust	Badenoch & Strathspey School Skiing	£2,568
Newtonmore Tennis Club	Tennis Table Costs	£126.08
Grantown Grammar School	Winter Jackets and Waterproof Shoes	£2,000
Newtonmore Business Association	Community Defibrillator	£1,000
Badenoch Shinty Memories	Supporting Social Activities	£850
Feis Spe	The Gaelic Names and Legends of our Mountain and Landscape	£900
Badenoch & Strathspey Food Hub	Supporting Food Poverty in B&S	£971.92

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 12 February 2024 which were approved by the Council on 14 March 2024 which were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 11.45am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held remotely on Monday, 3 June, 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr J Finlayson

Mr D Millar

Mr C Munro

Mr R Stewart

Officials in attendance:

Mr J Mitchell, Housing Manager (North), Housing & Property Service

Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager (North), Housing & Property Service

Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager, Communities and Place

Mr A MacLeod, Policy Officer, Performance & Governance

Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Community Regeneration, Infrastructure & Environment

Ms M Gray, Project Officer Community Regeneration, Infrastructure & Environment

Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr J Geary, Treasurer, Ms C Davis, Ms N Morrison, Community Coordinators
Broadford and Strath Community Company

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

Item 7 – Mr C Munro (Transparency Statement)

**3. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 12 February, 2024 which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 14 March, 2024, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

**4. Community Trust Presentation
Taisbeanadh Urrais Choimhearsnachd**

By way of introduction, the Chair acknowledged that community companies were very active across many areas in Skye and Raasay and had been in receipt of community regeneration funding from the Council through this Committee to support various projects. It was important that this Committee should hear of the

work on projects being progressed by community companies/trusts and it was the intention to invite them to local committee meetings.

Representatives from Broadford and Strath Community Company (BSCC) were in attendance to give a presentation in relation to projects that the company deliver in the community. The company was formed in 2003 and were an environmental group and had purchased a community forest which had been transformational in terms of the development of the site and the various projects arising from this. The company currently had 33 live projects, such as Broadford and Elgol toilets, Elgol path and Skye event space. They organised activities such as Corry Capers outdoor learning, Community Gardener and undertook fundraising, supporting people and projects as well as community engagement & communications. There were around 11000 volunteer hours over the year and the activities were funded from a mix of sources such as public sector, donations and from its own activities such as fees from the campsite. The Council were thanked for their support to the company particularly through funding from the community regeneration fund.

Members were impressed with the diversity and number of projects the BSCC were involved in, as was the number of volunteer hours to support projects which was commended. It was acknowledged that funding was a continuing pressure on the company to ensure there were enough funds for all the activities. It was noted that the company had a 5 year strategic plan to ensure that it was sustainable in future.

It was noted the BSSC partnership working with Council officers was very important and was of great benefit to the community. The company represented a point of contact for the community which was an important role and the importance of Members interacting with the company was highlighted. The benefit to young people taking part in various activities was welcomed and engagement with young people would help with succession planning in driving forward the various projects of the company in future.

Having congratulated the BSSC on their work, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation from Broadford and Strath Community Company in relation to projects that the Company deliver in the community.

5. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No. SR/10/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing which provided information on how the Housing section performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 March 2024.

In discussion, it was noted that homelessness presentations shown in the report were those managed by the Skye team for wards 10 (Skye and Raasay) and 5 (Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh. The data between the 2 wards would be split in future reports as it was misleading in terms of the numbers of presentations shown for Skye and Raasay. It was clarified that homelessness presentations on Skye/Raasay were similar to those in previous quarters (32 in quarter 4). The process for supporting people who presented themselves as homeless was explained and all housing options were looked at in this process.

Further, it was positive to see the good progress being made on performance targets, particularly rent arrears were reducing. There was a concern that amenities work was not being aligned with housing work with the consequence of creating an environment for rodents and it was noted that this was partly due to a reduction in grass cutting due to the team concentrating on essential works. A meeting with Members to discuss works to be undertaken under the environmental budget for the area was to be held later in June.

Also, maintenance issues over council houses at Seafield Place, Broadford, Cullin Drive, Portree were raised and in respect of Macfarlane buildings, Portree there appeared to be no drying facilities for residents and there were safety issues with a steep slope at that site. Officers undertook to look at these various issues and do what they could to alleviate them. The housing team had been concentrating on emergency and routine maintenance and were trying to do things in innovative ways for the best outcomes for tenants.

The pressures the housing team were under to re-let properties and the maintenance work required was acknowledged and a reassurance was sought that properties were brought up to an acceptable standard before they were re-let. It was advised that all houses being re-let had to meet the empty home standard. Also, it was queried if the team were having difficulty obtaining the services of external contractors to do work on properties. It was advised that there was difficulty in obtaining electricians and air source engineers when servicing and maintenance was required. There was better provision in the area with other trades for maintenance. The difficulty in recruiting trades staff to the in house team was highlighted.

The issues with recruiting key workers to this area were well known and one of the biggest barriers to recruitment was the lack of accommodation for key workers, particularly in the NHS. The housing team had discussions with other services and partner agencies about this issue and the difficulty was the limited housing stock the Council had and in the right locations to alleviate the situation. However, there were a small number of new properties being built in Portree and Sleat which would help.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

- i the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and that the number of homeless presentations managed by the Housing team on Skye would be split between Wards 10 and 5 in future reports; and
- ii that various property maintenance issues raised by Members would be looked into by Officers.

6. Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 Achd nan Eilean (Alba) 2018

There was circulated Report No. SR/11/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance which provided an update on the implementation of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 as it related to the Highland Council area for the financial year 2023/24.

In discussion, it was disappointing that no funding had been received last year for Skye and Raasay roads infrastructure improvements from Islands programme funding, as the local Committee were being responsive to the communities requests and Skye was the 2nd most popular tourist destination and 2nd biggest Island in Scotland and this should be recognised. Also, it was concerning that a significant number of people in communities new little about the Islands plan.

Continuing, there was a need for a more local approach to ensure that solutions were tailored to each Islands specific circumstances. The new Islands plan should reflect some of the significant issues being faced on Skye and Raasay such as housing, tourism and roads and it was hoped that this area would be more successful in its funding applications next time around.

It was noted that The Islands Strategic Group met quarterly and it was important that local members had sight of the agendas for these meetings so they could give briefings to the Council's representatives on that Group. The next meeting of this Group was on 12 June. Also, an update on the new place based investment framework for the area known as Skye and Raasay Future would be helpful in order to understand the benefits this would bring to the area.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and acknowledged the work that had taken place.

7. **Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd**

Transparency Statement - Mr C Munro declared a transparency statement in relation to the application from Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations. Mr Munro was a Director of Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisation, by means of being a Council appointee. He had no financial benefit or incentive to the application and having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare

There was circulated Report No. SR/9/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy. The report detailed community regeneration fund allocations received. There were 3 applications for consideration at the meeting and a total request of funding of £72,952.81 with an available budget of £163,941.54. All 3 applications were eligible for support.

The Committee decided on the applications to be considered as follows:-

i Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations (Empower Skye & Lochalsh Programme – **approved** £30,767.57

ii Skeabost Memorial Hall Association (Re-roofing Skeabost Memorial Hall) – **approved** £7,185.24

iii Skye Connect (Tourism Strategy Project Manager). Changes to the RAG rating and grant requested since the report was published were highlighted. The applicant had now increased the grant requested to the full project cost (£35,000). The Committee **deferred this application** for further information on the Visitor Economy Sustainable Tourism Strategy and an update on any match funding for the application.

The Committee also **agreed** to ringfence up to the balance of remaining funding for a project to repair the River Rha Foot Bridge, in Uig, subject to a full application being brought to a future committee meeting for consideration.

Urgent Item

The Chair, drew Members attention to an urgent item of additional business that had been raised in relation to a previously approved Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) project – CRF 2176, Skye Connect Sustainable Transport, which was approved CRF funding by the Committee at its meeting on 12 February, 2024. Match funding for this project was to be sourced from this Committee's share of parking income. Members agreement was sought to ringfence £57,081.20 from parking income as match funding for this project, to ensure it can deliver the approved outcomes over a two year period as outlined in the original application.

The Committee **agreed** to ringfence £57,081.20 from parking income as match funding for the Skye Connect Sustainable Transport project (CRF 2176).

8. Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

Highlife Highland Skye & Lochalsh Archive Centre £500
Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association (2) £500
Skye Youth Pipe Band £1,000
Waternish Community Garden £500
Portree & Braes Community Trust £1,500
New Pads for Tigh na Sgìre Defibrillator £55
Helping Hands Skye & Lochalsh £2000
Skeabost & District Community Council £530
Poppy Scotland Wreaths £160
Portree & Braes Community Trust £6000
Skye & Lochalsh Care Forum £500
Portree & Braes Community Trust £1995
CFINE £760

The meeting ended at 12.20 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday 6 June 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr Michael Baird	Mr Graham Mackenzie
Mr Raymond Bremner	Mr Struan Mackie (remote)
Mr John Bruce	Mrs K MacLean (substitute)
Mr Alasdair Christie	Mr T MacLennan (substitute) (remote)
Mr Richard Gale	Mr Calum Munro
Mr Andrew Jarvie	Mr Paul Oldham
Mr Sean Kennedy	Mr Matthew Reiss (remote)
Mr Bill Lobban	Mrs Trish Robertson
Mr Derek Louden	

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Ms M Ross (remote)
Mr J McGillivray (remote)	

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer - Performance and Governance
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR, Resources & Finance
Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources & Finance
Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources & Finance
Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT & Digital Transformation
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance
Ms A MacRae, Senior Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

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

Mr D Louden in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Paterson and Mrs M Reid.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Transparency Statement: Item 5 – Mr A Christie

Prior to the commencement of the business, the Convener invited Members to take part in a moment of silence to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings and in memory of those who gave their lives in defence of the freedoms valued today.

Thereafter, the Chair paid tribute to Mr Alasdair Rhind for his many years of devoted service to the Council, local community and organisations, and advised his sad passing was deeply mourned.

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news:

- Holly Quinton had been successful in completing a Modern Apprenticeship SVQ Level 3 in Business Administration and she was commended for being a hardworking and conscientious member of her team;
- Katie Ross, Natasha Finlay and Jordan Martin were congratulated on completing their SVQ Level 3 in Business Administration;
- there were three shortlisted submissions for the Staff Recognition Awards from the Resource and Finance Service. The 'Management Connections Programme for Managers' had been shortlisted in the 'Excellent Outcomes, Excellent People category' and Revenues and Business Support Income Generation shortlisted in the 'Best Team Award'. Two apprentices, Mr Miller Gamble and Ms Eve Carnson, had been nominated for the "Apprentice of the Year Category". Members extended their best wishes to all nominees in advance of the Awards being held on 21 June 2024.

4. Appointments to Sub-Committees, Working Groups, etc Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidhean, Buidhnean-obrach is eile

The Committee **AGREED** the following appointments:

- Mr S Kennedy and Mr P Oldham replace Mr M Green and Mr D Millar on Employment Release Sub Committee; and
- Mrs M Reid replace Mr M Green on the second stand-alone Non Domestic Rates Appeal Committee agreed by the Committee on 8 June 2023 to consider and determine a current appeal.

5. Performance Monitoring - 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024 Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – 1 Am Faoilleach 2024 gu 31 Màrt 2024

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as Chief Officer of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and as a Non-executive member of the Inverness Business Improvement District Board. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the items and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

**a. Depute Chief Executive's Service
Seirbheis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigeir**

There had been circulated Report No RES/11/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's performance and risk information; and
- ii. **AGREED** the suggested changes to the planned targets as set out in paragraph 5.2 of the report.

**b. Performance and Governance Service
Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais**

There had been circulated Report No RES/12/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's performance and risk information; and
- ii. **AGREED** the suggested removal of action as set out in paragraph 6 of the report.

**c. Resources and Finance Service
Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais**

There had been circulated Report No RES/13/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In discussion, reference was made to the importance of direct debts in terms of Council tax collection rates and the potential for payments by this method to be increased going forward.

Thereafter and in response to a query, it was explained the figures shown for sickness and absence reflected the increase being observed nationally. Work continued on understanding the reasons for this and to support staff, and the results of the recent staff wellbeing survey would also be used to improve support where required.

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

**6. Treasury Management – Summary of Transactions
Rianachd Ionmhais - Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/14/24 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 January to 31 March 2024.

**7. New Corporate Financial System Replacement – Update Report
Sìostam Ionmhais Corporra Ùr – Aithisg Ùrachaidh**

There had been circulated Report No RES/15/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the update provided regarding the project to replace the Council's core corporate financial systems;
- ii. that the target go live date of April 2024 had been achieved; and
- iii. ongoing project activity to progress the project from 'go live implementation' to 'business as usual' status.

**8. Carer's Positive Policy Review
Ath-sgrùdadh Poileasaidh Deimhinneach Neach-cùraim**

There had been circulated Report No RES/16/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In response to a query, it was explained that work was ongoing to improve the collection and collation of data in relation to staff leave under the terms of the policy. Staff engagement sessions had also been held with a view to delivering ongoing improvements through shared experience.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the statutory provision of up to five days unpaid leave per year which came into effect from 6 April 2024 and was in addition to the maximum five days paid leave where an employee met the qualifying criteria; and
- ii. **AGREED** paid carers leave be provided to individual employees who were eligible and not shared between employees if they were caring for the same dependant who required long-term care.

**9. Disclosure Scotland Fee Consultation
Co-chomhairleachadh Cìse Foillseachadh na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No RES/17/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED** the forthcoming changes to disclosure checks and the content of the officer response as contained in Appendix 1 to the report.

**10. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan**

The following Minutes of Meetings were:

- i. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee held on 27 March 2024; and
- ii. **NOTED** - Appeals & Disputes Committee held on 10 April 2024.

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

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

12. Debt Management
Stiùireadh Fhiachan

There had been circulated to Members only Report No RES/18/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report subject to the 6th party listed on Appendix 2 being removed.

The meeting was closed at 11.40am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Special Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday, 11 June 2024 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr M Baird (Remote)

Mr I Brown

Mr A Christie

Mr K Gowans

Mr M Green

Mr R Jones (Remote)

Mr P Logue

Mr D Macpherson (Remote)

Mr H Morrison (Remote)

Ms L Niven (remote)

Mrs T Robertson

Mr R Stewart

Ms M Smith

Mrs M Ross (Remote)

Ms K Willis (Remote)

Non-Members also present:

Ms S Atkin

Dr C Birt (Remote)

Mr B Boyd (Remote)

Mrs I Campbell (Remote)

Mr R Bremner

Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Mr B Lobban

Mr D Louden

Ms Emma Knox (Remote)

Mr G MacKenzie (Remote)

Mr R MacKintosh (Remote)

Ms K MacLean (Remote)

Mr D McDonald (Remote)

Mr J McGillivray (Remote)

Mr D Millar (Remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive

Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration

Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance

Ms S McKandie, Head of Revenue and Customer Services

Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Fin & Commercialism

Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager

Mr D Chisholm, Tourism, and Inward Investment Team Leader

Mr A Coyle, Corporate Comms & Engagement Officer

Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

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

Mr K Gowans in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron and Mr W MacKay.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

3. **Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport – Full Business Case update (FBC)** **Saor-phort Uaine Inbhir Nis agus Chromba – Cunntas mun Chùis Ghnòthachais Iomlan**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/31/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Attention was drawn that there had been no material changes to the strategic direction set out in the FBC from the Outline Business Case (OBC) and that the approval of the FBC by the Scottish and UK Governments would mean that the ICFGF officially existed with all customs and tax powers for a period of 25 years.

It was clarified that the £25M seed funding projects had been agreed under the OBC and had undergone the scrutiny panel process with individual OBCs submitted and approved prior to submission of the FBC to the UK and Scottish Government.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Executive Summary of the Full Business Case for the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport enclosed at Appendix 1 of the report noting the environmental, social and economic benefits which were expected to be achieved for the region;
- ii. **AGREED** that the Council's obligations, under its Accountable Body role, would continue after the FBC had been completed. These obligations include the ongoing monitoring and verification that the operation of the Green Freeport ensures propriety, compliance with regulations and value for money;
- iii. **AGREED** that the proposed NDR Investment Plan (and subsequent reviews) referred to in Section 5 of the report were reported to future meetings of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group and formally considered by the Economy & Infrastructure (E&I) Committee for response to the Green Freeport Company; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Assistant Chief Executive - Place continues as the Council's nominated Director on the Green Freeport Company Board until such time as the Memorandum of Understanding between UK/Scottish Governments, the Green Freeport Company and the Council had been signed and agreed (anticipated to be November 2024).

4. **Exclusion of the Public** **Às-dùnadh a' Phobail**

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A (4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following 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.

5. **Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport – Full Business Case** **Saor-phort Uaine Inbhir Nis agus Chromba – Cùis Ghnòthachais Iomlan**

1213

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/32/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

- * Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to recommend that Council approve the Full Business Case (FBC) for the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) as shown in Appendix 1 of the report to allow for submission to the UK and Scottish Governments.

The meeting ended at 3.40 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 13 June 2024 at 10.30am.

Present:

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

Non-Members also present:

Mr R Gale (remote)	Mr P Logue
Mr K Gowans	Mr C Munro (remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mr M Macleod, Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance)
Mr M Watters, Corporate Performance and Information Governance Manager
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager, Performance and Governance
Mr P Hankinson, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit, Performance and Governance
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit, Performance and Governance
Ms E Barrie, Head of People, Resources and Finance
Ms S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services
Ms A Mackenzie, Interim Pay and HR Transaction Manager
Mr T Murdison, Service Lead – Corporate Property
Mr R Pope, Policy and Programmes Manager, Planning, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr A MacDonald, Project Manager, Planning, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mrs M McIntyre, Head of Children and Justice Social Work Services
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Ms C Gardiner, Audit Scotland

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

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr L Fraser and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Item 8: Mrs J McEwan

There were no transparency statements.

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

There had been circulated Report No. AS/13/24 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance).

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

In-house bus income systems

- the Chair congratulated the team for having the in-house bus operation up and running so quickly;
- the favourable time of the audit allowed for any improvements to be made before processes became too inset, and it was felt that the audit highlighted and addressed Members' concerns;
- it was evident that any required actions were in place and it was hoped that the necessary amendments would be made. It was stated that the operation should be considered a business and officers should remain business-minded;
- it was important to monitor and record any income/expenditure, and it was suggested that cash reconciliation be carried out daily to avoid any discrepancies;
- it was disappointing that first year running costs were not available, however, it was acknowledged that they would be available in the future;
- Members felt the report's conclusion was very fair and staff were applauded for completing two of the actions before the target date. Members looked forward to the continued success and it was hoped that the bus network might extend into Badenoch and Strathspey in the near future;
- bus drivers were not immediately alerted to declined customer payments but it was explained that not all payments were processed at the time of boarding the bus due to lack of wifi signal in some areas. It was explained that any repeat offenders would be flagged;
- it was stated that the report needed to be looked at in context, having started as a pilot project to becoming a serviceable bus company in a very short period of time. It had been a huge success thanks to the team that ran the bus company, and it was said that this was a good news story. Any issue outlined in the report could and would be addressed; and
- thanks were afforded to those behind the bus service as the Council would continue to accrue cost savings.

Cessation of Utilities

- it was concerning that the Council continued to pay utilities at estimated rates in the case of unoccupied buildings, where meter readings could not be provided, and it was asked if the target date of 30 November 2025 could be brought forward; and
- it was asked if the team held a list of places where smart meters didn't work. It was confirmed that smart meters were not installed where they did not work.

Review of Payroll Control Environment

- in terms of the overpayments totalling £863,000, it was confirmed that they related to 2022/23 and the Committee was assured that outstanding overpayments were being pursued;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the budget holder and manager training and it was asked that a record of attendees was kept to ensure that any staff who missed the training would be given the opportunity to take part;
- in terms of irrecoverable debts, it was clarified that the date of 1 June 2024 was to invoke the current policy for write offs;
- concern was expressed in relation to mistakes having occurred due to human error and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Service had a full complement of staff. Further, it was explained that manual processing was required where finances related to previous financial years;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the Service-led process for managers informing HR and Payroll when an employee left the Council;
- in response to a question regarding how many cost centres Payroll used, it was confirmed that the Head of Corporate Finance would provide this information to Members outside of this meeting;
- in relation to the overpayments, it was confirmed that an update would be provided in the 6-monthly report to this Committee;
- it was presumed that the main reason for writing off overpayments would be that the employee was no longer with the Council, making it more challenging;
- it was confirmed that the £863,000 was a gross figure and any writing off of debts would be taken to the Corporate Resources Committee for further scrutiny and governance; and
- Members looked forward to the progress reports and the update at the next Committee.

Cheque Control

- in response to a question, Members were informed that cheques were no longer issued to staff and that all staff were paid by BACS;
- regarding uncashed and cancelled cheques, it was stated that there was a need to review and tighten up the process of cheque cancellation and it was confirmed this was in hand; and
- it was asked if winter payments could be paid into council tax accounts, thereby eliminating the use of cheques and it was confirmed that upcoming winter payments would be paid by BACS. If no bank details could be provided, funds would be transferred via the council tax account.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Final Reports referred to in section 4.1 of the report; and
- ii. the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined in sections 5 and 6, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1 of the report.

4. Action Tracking update Cunntas às Ùr mu Thracadh Ghnìomhan

There had been circulated Report No. AS/14/24 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance).

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- there were a number of actions which were years past their action dates and it was important to impress upon the Services involved that this was unacceptable;
- it was intended to centralise policies and procedures through the Residential Care SharePoint site and it was hoped the revised target date of 30 May 2024 had been achieved;
- similarly, it was hoped the Procurement Manual would be completed and published on the Internet by 30 June 2024 and that the Health and Social Care Service had been able to close those imprests rarely used, or were no longer needed, by 30 April 2024; and
- in relation to Climate Change Plans and Implementation, four high priorities had been identified but only one had been carried out. These remaining priorities had been put back a year, in part due to the development of budgets, and it was hoped these new targets would be met.

The Committee, having scrutinised, otherwise **NOTED** the action tracking information provided, including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions.

5. Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/24 Aithisg Bhliadhnail In-Sgrùdaidh 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. AS/15/24 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance).

There were two high grade recommendations in the commissioned children's services audit and they had been due to be completed by 30 April 2024. It was confirmed that progress was to be monitored and would be fed back to Members through the action tracking process.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and the audit opinion provided.

6. Fraud and Whistleblowing Annual Report 2023/24 Cunntas Bliadhnail Foille agus Innsireachd 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. AS/16/24 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance).

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** details of the fraud investigations and activities undertaken as detailed in section 4.1 of the report;
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the information at section 4.2 of the report including the low number of whistleblowing concerns requiring investigation;
- iii. **NOTED** that where a fraud or whistleblowing investigation identified any control weakness, fraudulent activity or areas for improvement, this would be addressed through an Internal Audit report which would be provided to Committee for scrutiny purposes;
- iv. reviewed and **NOTED** the self-assessment against the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption set out at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- v. **APPROVED** the revised Counter Fraud Policy provided at Appendix 2 of the report.

7. Risk management update Cunntas mu stiùireadh cunnairt

There had been circulated Report No. AS/17/24 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- CR6, Sustainable and Adaptable Workforce, was a significant corporate risk with many services citing a lack of resources. This was particularly relevant to CR31, Failure to deliver Statutory Services due to staffing levels within Social Work Services, and yet it had been RAG'd as Green. However, it was explained that, while the lack of Social Workers was both a local and national issue, Highland Council had made significant efforts and progress in recruiting Social Workers, hence it being RAG'd as Green; and
- CR10, Condition of our Roads, had been transferred to the Place Service but information was sought as to target dates.

The Committee **APPROVED** the approach being undertaken in relation to applying the new Risk Management Policy, and the reassessment of the existing Corporate risks with the appropriate links being made with the Operational Delivery Plan.

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

Declaration of Interest: Mrs J McEwan declared interest in this item as she knew personally an individual involved and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, she left the meeting for this item.

There had been circulated Report No. AS/18/24 by the Chief Executive.

Whilst it was contended that similar incidents occurred regularly in the Health and Social Care Service, it was pointed out that there had been very few Ombudsman reports to the Audit Committee where they had partially or fully upheld complaints against the Council. This included Health and Social Care. The issues raised in the complaint were exceptional and unusual and the Service had complied with the

investigation and all agencies involved were satisfied that all points had been addressed. It was wrong to suggest that there was an endemic problem.

The Committee **NOTED** the outcome of the upheld case and that the SPSO's recommendations have now been carried out.

The meeting ended at 11.50 am.