

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 22 August 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

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

Non-Members also present:

Mrs T Collier (remote)	Mr D McDonald
Mr J Grafton	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mr B Lobban (remote)	Mr C Munro (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)	Mr M Reiss

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager, Estates Management
Ms H Cameron, Housing Development Manager
Mr A McCann, Economy & Regeneration Manager
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Manager
Mr M Bailey, Programme Manager (City Region Deal)
Mr N Young, Active Travel Manager
Mr D Chisholm, Tourism and Inward Investment Team Leader
Mr T Stott, Principal Planner
Ms E MacIver, Principal Engineer
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr L Princ, Sustainable Aviation Manager (Item 5)
Ms R Wallace, Sustainable Aviation Project Officer (Item 5)

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**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following declaration of interest:-

Item 9 – Ms M Smith

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

Item 12 – Mr H Morrison

3. **Recess Powers** **Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 27 June 2024 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

4. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

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

Naver Bridge - Naver Bridge was due to start construction in August and the contract had been awarded to Wills Bros Civil Engineering Ltd for construction of replacement bridge upstream of the existing bridge.

Active Travel Schemes:- Active Travel Schemes had been completed in Riverside Way and Torvean Mobility Hub.

Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards:- The Highland Council Staff Recognition had been awarded to In-House Bus Operation Team for Service Innovation & Improvement award, Roads Response Team for Best Team award and the Storr Project Team with the Convener's award.

5. **Presentation - Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) Findings** **Taisbeanadh – Toraidhean Deuchainn Àrainneachd Itealanachd Sheasmhach**

Mr L Princ, Sustainable Aviation Manager and Ms R Wallace, Sustainable Aviation Project Officer from HITRANS gave a presentation on the SATE project, the technology capabilities, and identified use cases. Insights, reports and data

had helped build a picture of where technology from SATE could be best placed in the near future to improve transportation and connectivity in the region. This was an opportunity to raise awareness of the developments and presented the findings for feedback on any impact further progression or implementation of sustainable aviation would have on the Highlands.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- further information was sought on the suggested fuel types and detail on how they would meet zero emission targets;
- Members requested the presentation be circulated to them;
- it was queried what engagement has been sought from local communities as there was a potential risk they might not welcome the new innovations; and
- thanks were expressed to the Hi-Trans representatives for their informative presentation.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** to circulate the Presentation on the SATE Project to Members.

6. Revenue Budget Monitoring Near Final Outturn 2023/24 Report and Service Performance Reporting for Financial Year 2023/24
Aithisg Toradh Faisg air Deireannach Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach 2023/24 agus Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson na Bliadhna Ionmhasail 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/33/2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- major concern was raised that the Corran Ferry was responsible for the majority of the overspend (£3.34m) and it was therefore queried if any progress had been made with engaging the Scottish Government for any recovery of the income. In addition, it was also queried if there was a contingency plan in place should the Ferry be out of commission again before the replacement vessel arrived. It was felt to be a failure of the Council that further contingencies had not been put in place when the original vessel (the Maid of Glencoe) went out of commission and the substitute vessel had been mobilised;
- it was welcomed that days lost through sickness at work had decreased. In this regard, it was queried if any cross-service work had been carried out to share information on how to reduce days lost through sickness across the Council;
- concern was raised regarding poor Freedom of Information (FOI) performance despite it being a statutory function. In this regard it was queried what additional resource had been put in place to access, collate and resolve more complex information requests. In addition, Members confirmed they should not have to submit any FOI to Highland Council as any information required for them to make informed decisions should be supplied;

- reduced time to determine major planning applications was welcomed. In this regard it was queried if the improved performance would be expected to continue due to recruitment progress and reduced staff caseloads;
- regarding Winter Maintenance forecast and overspend, it was queried if spend was anticipated to reduce due to climate change weather conditions or if the overspend should increase as it was often overspent;
- it was queried if there had been any impact from short-term lets within the planning figures;
- it was requested that reports utilise the British format for numbers when reporting monetary figures for clarity;
- Members requested quarter one budget reports be sent to them as soon as they were available in the normal committee report format and sought a guarantee that quarter two budget report be available for the 14 November 2024 Economy & Infrastructure Committee;
- it was queried if a new Roads gulley sucker machine had been ordered, as some gulleys had not been emptied for approx. 4 years in the Inverness area. In this regard concern was raised that substantial costs might be incurred if there were flash floods;
- regarding section 8.2 of the report, Service performance information from the Service plan, it was queried what the annual update in June for Roads Network – B, C, and U class would be concerning as it was unclear;
- it was queried when the annual version of the Scottish Road Condition Maintenance Survey Report would be published and made available; and
- it was requested that Caithness roads white-lining works be prioritised due to the Health & Safety implications for drivers.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

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

and **AGREED**:-

- iii. that the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2024/25 quarter one be circulated to Members when available and that quarter two information be provided to the next Economy & Infrastructure Committee on the 14 November 2024.

7. Capital Monitoring – Quarter 4 2023/24 Sgrùdadh Calpa – Ràith 4 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/34/2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members requested that the format of the Capital Monitoring report be reviewed to allow for improved detailed scrutiny and a better overview of financial year expenditure.

The Committee **NOTED** the near final out-turn for 2023/24 and **AGREED** to review the format of the Capital Monitoring reports to enable better scrutiny.

8. UK Shared Prosperity Fund - Delivery Plan Progress Update Maoin Soirbheachas Co-roinnte na RA – Cunntas air Adhartas a’ Phlana Lìbhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/35/2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- there was support for the Chair to seek an extension of the May 2025 deadline from the UK Government or, failing this, a risk assessment be considered by the Committee; and
- it was disappointing the e-bikes that had been introduced, after significant public investment, had been vandalised. To go part way to prevent this from reoccurring again the front baskets had been removed but this hindered those potential users with shopping. There was merit in discussing with other local authorities which operating similar schemes, to ascertain how they avoided such damage.

The Committee **NOTED** the UKSPF Delivery Plan progress update.

At this juncture, appreciation was expressed to Mr A McCann, Economy & Regeneration Manager, on his imminent retirement, and special recognition was made across the Chamber of his dedication, hard work and his substantial commitment with communities over many years.

9. Fort William Business Improvement District (BID) Sgìre Leasachadh Gnìomhachais a’ Ghearasdain

Declaration of Interest – Ms M Smith made a Declaration of Interest as an owner of a business in Fort William and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for this item

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/36/2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Chair clarified two errors in the report:-

In relation to paragraph 5.1 of the report, he explained that, for a BID to be successful, there needed to be a minimum of 25% turnout of eligible businesses in the area both by number and aggregate rateable value. And, of those voting, there needed to be a majority of 50% or more in favour, both by number and by combined rateable value of the properties voting.

Also, in relation to paragraph 5.2, it was clarified that the Council was an eligible levy payer as there were several Council owned properties in the proposed Fort William BID area which would be liable for the levy.

These errors did not affect the assessment of the Fort William BID, the merits of which were to be discussed at the Lochaber Committee on 27 August 2024.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the assessment made in Appendix 2 of the report relative to the Fort William BID Proposal; and
- ii. **AGREED** not to exercise the Council's right of veto.

10. Delivery Programme for Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 and wider Highland
Prògram Lìbhrigidh airson Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh 2 agus airson na Gàidhealtachd san Fharsaingeachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/37/2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** and adopt the Local Development Plan Delivery Programme at Appendix 1 of the report noting that the Inner Moray Firth element of it will fulfil the Council's duty to publish an Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 delivery programme by 27 September 2024;
- ii. **AGREED** to consult more widely on the Highland Delivery Programme in line with the Council's Developer Contributions Protocol; and
- iii. **NOTED** the transition towards the new Highland Delivery Programme being approved by Full Council and becoming the principal corporate and cross agency tool for coordinating investment in Highland.

11. Highland Council Airfields
Raointean-adhair Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/38/2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- if airfields were to be leased, given the presentation earlier in the meeting in relation to the future potential use of drones, it was questioned if this would allow such proposals to progress;
- it was hoped the long-term lease of the Plockton Airfield would still result in it being used for aviation purposes and not used for anything else;
- the Council's retention of Ashaig airfield was important to develop the air service there and ensuring it was kept in good condition for air ambulances;
- discussions about community land transfers was important; and
- it was questioned how developing the aviation capacity aligned with the Council's Net Zero and Sustainable Tourism strategy.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress made towards a lease on Dornoch Airfield and works remaining to be undertaken to enable this;
- ii. **NOTED** the resolution of an historic title issue at Plockton Airfield, enabling progress to be made towards a long-term lease or sale of the site;
- iii. **AGREED** that the Council should progress discussions with interested parties at Plockton Airfield and report back to Members with a recommended approach to long-term lease or sale of the site; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Council should continue to operate Ashaig airfield in a manner which meets all necessary legal obligations and ensures the airfield is maintained to a level which will support development of potential future aeronautical activities.

12. Road Policies Update Cunntasan às Ùr mu Phoileasaidh Rathaid

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

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/39/2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Variable and Vehicle Activated Signs Policy as contained in Appendix 2;
- ii. **APPROVED** the introduction of a one-off fee of £300 for variable and vehicle activated signs that are externally funded, to be paid upfront, before installation;
- iii. **NOTED** that after the policy is approved, the “Variable and Vehicle Activated Signs Manual” will be finalised and distributed accordingly;
- iv. **APPROVED** the Grit Bin Policy as contained in Appendix 3 of the report;
- v. **APPROVED** the updated Cattle and Deer Grid Policy as contained in Appendix 5 of the report ;
- vi. **APPROVED** the proposed change to the cattle and deer grids charge to 10% of the construction cost with £2,500 as a minimum;
- vii. **APPROVED** the updated Coast Protection Policy as contained in Appendix 7 of the report; and
- viii. **APPROVED** the updated Roadside Hazards Policy as contained in Appendix 9 of the report.

13. Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited Annual Accounts 2022/23 Cunntasan Bliadhna Earranta Coimhearsnachd Tuathanas-gaoithe na Beinne Tarsainn 2022/23

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/40/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- community benefit from windfarms in Highland was now £5k per MW and yet Beinn Tharsuinn windfarm donated £2k per MW, for historical reasons. As a result of the Council's Social Value Charter renewable energy firms had been contacted identifying expectations in regard to voluntary contributions and it was suggested that Beinn Tharsuinn's developer should review their contribution;
- it had previously been suggested that community benefit from windfarms be increased to £12.5k, divided between communities and the Council. Other countries sought even higher amounts and the benefit to Local Authorities enabled infrastructure improvements;
- the relatively low rate of interest received was questioned given the level of funds in the account and it was suggested there might be a more prudent way of managing that fund; and
- the Assistant Chief Executive – Place was asked to contact the developer of the Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm seeking an increase of the community benefit paid per MW and that community councils, where funding was eligible, be copied in.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the activities of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited;
- AGREED** to accept, on behalf of Highland Council, the Financial Statement of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited for year ending 31 March 2023; and
- AGREED** that the Assistant Chief Executive – Place write to Scottish Power, the developer of the Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm, seeking an increase of the community benefit paid per MW.

14. Membership of the Harbours Management Board Ballrachd Bòrd Stiùiridh nan Calachan

- * The Committee **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to the Highland Council to appoint Ms M Hutchison to the Harbours Management Board.

15. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

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

- South PAC – 19 March 2024;
- North PAC – 16 April 2024;
- South PAC – 30 April 2024;
- North PAC– 4 June 2024;

and also **APPROVED**:-

- Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group held on 21 May 2024;

- vi. Harbours Management Board held on 31 May 2024; and
- vii. City Region Deal Monitoring Group held on 15 August 2024.

16. 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 should be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

17. Housing Development Initiatives **Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/41/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

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

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/42/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

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

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

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/43/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

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

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm