

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 19 August 2024 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance

Mr B Boyd

Mr I Brown

Mr M Cameron

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair

Mr A Christie

Ms H Crawford

Mr D Fraser

Mr K Gowans

Mr A Graham

Mr D Gregg

Mrs J Hendry

Ms E Knox

Mrs I MacKenzie

Mr A MacKintosh

Mr R MacKintosh

Ms K MacLean

Mr D Macpherson

Mr D McDonald

Mrs M Reid

Mrs T Robertson

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager

Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services

Ms R Robertson, Project Coordinator, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services

Mr S Grant, Senior Engineer, Roads & Infrastructure

Mr I Ross, Maintenance Technician, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services

Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Mr M Nixon, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector J Hill, Area Commander (Inverness Area Command), Police Scotland

Mr C MacPherson, Chief Executive Officer Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport

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

Mr I Brown was in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:

Declarations of Interest:

Item 12.d – Mr D McDonald

And the following Transparency Statements:

Items 5 and 7 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg

Items 10 and 12 – Mr A Christie

Item 12.d – Mr K Gowans

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 City of Inverness Area Committee.

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

The Committee **NOTED** that Retired Special Constable Francis John Sutherland (known as Iain Sutherland) had been honoured with an MBE in recognition of his service to the police force.

Thereafter, the Chair congratulated Megan Keith on being selected to compete in the 10,000m in the Olympics in Paris. He advised that she was an inspiration to all Highland athletes and showed what could be achieved and wished her well in her career and every success in future.

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

Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg made Transparency Statements in respect of this item in their capacity as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland 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/21/24 dated 7 August 2024 by the Inverness Area Commander.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the City Leader thanked the Police for their work and attendance at the meeting, and referred to the helpful, regular themed meetings that were taking place with the Police, to which all Members of the Committee were welcome, with the next meeting scheduled for 23 September 2024;
- Members reported that some Community Councils had expressed disappointment that police officers no longer attended their meetings as a matter of course and assurance was provided that the Police Scotland committee report would be circulated to City and Area Community Councils. Police attendance at Community Council Forum meetings was highlighted;
- in order to provide reassurance to communities, information was sought and provided on work being undertaken to monitor and prevent the far-right demonstrations that some areas in the rest of the UK had been experiencing;

- information was sought on measures being taken to tackle shoplifting, including monitoring the various reasons for such thefts, such as for the reselling of goods, to fund addiction or poverty. Particular reference was made to rural shoplifting, which increasingly related to tourism, and the concerns of rural shopkeepers who would welcome advice from the Police on CCTV and other preventative measures;
- concern was expressed about fraud and theft against older and vulnerable people, particularly sophisticated online scams which could result in the loss of considerable amounts of money. It was thought these crimes could be under-reported due to people feeling embarrassed at having been tricked, and the relatively low rates of detection. While tackling online fraud was often a national or international initiative, prevention and education could be done at a local level and various options were suggested, including the Police undertaking visits to vulnerable people in their homes, possibly in conjunction with Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and NHS Highland, and collaborating with third sector organisations that worked with vulnerable groups to provide information and education. Information was sought and provided on fraud prevention work undertaken with banks at a local level;
- information was sought and provided on initiatives being undertaken to tackle anti-social behaviour and vandalism, including in rural areas, and in conjunction with County Lines initiatives. This could be further discussed outwith the meeting;
- it was noted that the figures for sexual crimes were reducing, although still above the three and five year averages, and the improved trauma-informed approach being taken by Police officers was welcomed;
- attention was drawn to staffing numbers and current vacancies, with particular reference to Police visibility in rural areas, and an assurance was sought that Members would be kept updated on progress with recruitment;
- information was sought and provided on procedures for dealing with missing people, including work with social services and other agencies;
- in response to a query about CCTV systems in Inverness and on the Kessock Bridge, the Senior Community Development Officer explained that the Inverness CCTV system had been recently upgraded. Briefings on issues related to the Kessock Bridge had been provided to Members; and
- serious acts of vandalism against Hi-bike equipment in Inverness was the subject of an ongoing police investigation and would be reported on in due course.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2024 Year 1 attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 01 April 2023 – 31 March 2024; and
- ii. change in format necessitate by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports.

6. Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Shaor-phort Uaine Chaolas Chromba

There had been a presentation by the Chief Executive Officer of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF).

In discussion, Members raised the following main issues:-

- the ICFGF had already raised the profile of the Highlands across the UK and Europe and it was important to guide the pace of development so it delivered for communities in Highland;

- housing was a major issue in relation to incoming workers associated with the ICFGF and reference to the importance of a partnership approach, investment and industry involvement to deliver good quality accommodation and the right mix of housing in an appropriate timeframe;
- the Council planned to host a housing summit in Inverness in October 2024 and had progressed the Highland Housing Challenge and Highland Investment Plan and therefore action was being taken at the right pace to support the ICFGF with housing and infrastructure;
- discussions be held with the Crofters Commission on the allocation of new crofts across the Highlands which in turn would create opportunities for housing;
- in addition to housing, there was a need for a partnership approach and investment in essential services to support an increase in population in areas such as child and health care;
- the need also for the NHS to forward plan for the expansion of GP practices and other health services;
- highlighting that the partners or relatives of incoming workers would likely bring skill sets in education, child and health care and other areas of demand;
- in response to a query, the ICFGF Chief Executive Officer confirmed he would be willing to attend the Inverness Community Partnership and the Inverness Community Councils Forum;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the interactions with local trade unions to date;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the ICFGF hoped to sign the Armed Forces Covenant in the near future;
- the Buy Social Scotland Pledge was one of the key areas that underpinned and differentiated the ICFGF deal from the rest of the UK;
- the support provided to the Camanachd Association's initiative in respect of female pupils from Highland schools was important on the basis these types of initiatives also helped promote careers and apprenticeship programmes to young people in the area;
- the need to allay community concerns on the knock on effects of the ICFGF by demonstrating the ongoing action being taken in relation to issues of displacement, growing skills and impact on housing, hotel and other types of accommodations in communities;
- the positive message be reinforced that the ICFGF represented a major long term opportunity for the area. Communication was key particularly with communities, and it would also be helpful for regular updates to be provided to the Committee;
- the need to focus on the long term legacy of the ICFGF for the Highlands. It was explained this would include manufacturing businesses creating sustainable employment for the longer term and leading on the transition to renewables;
- an assurance was sought and provided that given the scale of opportunity associated with the ICFGF, all areas would play a part including the Port of Inverness;
- information was sought and provided on the work being undertaken with young people in schools and further/higher education to inform them of potential career choices and prospects available through the ICFGF and incentives to retain and attract them to the area. This included plans for a large scale apprenticeship scheme of national significance;
- it was hoped the grid connection for the Port of Cromarty Firth was prioritised in SSEN's planning. It was confirmed this issue and the charging regime was actively being considered;

- further information was sought and provided in response to the concerns around the impact of workers camps on communities and the road network; and
- further clarity was sought on the transportation required for workers moving around the area. It was explained opportunities were being considered for active and marine travel, and a centralised transport point and for these to be environmentally effective and from which local people could also benefit.

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

**7. 2024/25 Annual Report on Inverness Business Improvement District
Aithisg Bhliadhnaid 2024/25 mu Sgìre Leasachadh Gnòthachais Inbhir Nis**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland and Non-executive Director of Inverness Business Improvement District. Mr D Gregg made a Transparency Statement in this item as an employee of NHS Highland. 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/22/24 dated 2 August 2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place. The report provided a summary of the activities and proposed activities of the Inverness BID Ltd, operating as Inverness City Centre Business Improvement District (BID) for the period 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2025.

Following an introduction to the report by the Senior Community Development Manager for the City of Inverness & South, there was discussion on the growth of the gull population and the problems associated with this. Due to the impact of Avian flu on gull numbers, changes had been made to licensing requirements by NatureScot which meant it would be more challenging to obtain licences to control gulls. This would result in more issues with nuisance/aggressive gulls. It was requested that NatureScot be invited to the next meeting to give a presentation on their policies and procedures on this matter, which was at odds with what the Council wanted to do.

The Inverness Common Good Fund had funded the gull management project, with a contribution from Inverness BID, but had not been able to proceed with it due to the change in licence requirements by NatureScot in respect of all but a very few locations. Therefore, any unused funding from this project would be available for reallocation. It was suggested that this funding be used to rectify some of the problems left behind by gulls, such as litter with gulls accessing bins. It was queried if the design of bins could be changed to prevent this. Practical ways of utilising these funds in addressing the gull management problem would be looked into and reported to the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub Committee.

Further, the work of the Inverness Business Improvement District was commended in improving the area as a great place to live, work, visit and shop.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the work detailed in the report;
- NOTED** the ongoing development of partnership working in the key areas identified;
- NOTED** that a Members Briefing would be arranged to provide for further discussion with BID Board representatives;

- iv. **AGREED** that NatureScot be invited to the next meeting to give a presentation on their policies and procedures on gull management; and
- v. **NOTED** that a report would be submitted to the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee on the feasibility of funds being used to implement gull management measures.

8. **Bereavement Services update** **Cunntas às ùr mu sheirbheisean bàis**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/23/24 dated 5 August 2025 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which provided an update to Members on the work being undertaken on burial ground capacity and new burial grounds in the Inverness area.

Following a summary of the report by the Lead Officer, the new extensions and new burial ground developments were welcomed. Amenity Services were aware of the additional work with grass cutting at these sites. It was requested that there should be an annual report on Bereavement Services and this be expanded to include other areas such as cremators maintenance, funeral poverty and funeral payments, so a holistic view of bereavement services was provided in order to see where improvements could be made.

Continuing, the Council needed to be in a position where it could ensure it would maintain its cemeteries to a high standard. The extension to Kilvean cemetery would provide 10 plus years of additional capacity, but the process to identify land for another large cemetery for the City should begin in the near future. Also, the cemetery at Old Petty (Castle Stuart) had fallen into disrepair and while some work had been undertaken at the site there would be further safety checks. Further, the Council had a duty to inspect all memorials every five years and inspections were underway. The need to communicate to Members when the cremators at the Crematorium were out of action was highlighted.

It was highlighted that the Inverness Burial Grounds Commutation Fund provided extra resources for the maintenance of burial grounds. It was intended that this fund would finance a programme of capital burial ground projects in the near future.

In relation to further queries from Members, it was advised that once an access road had been completed work would commence on Dores cemetery; there had been discussion on woodland/natural burials but no firm outcomes as yet; the suggestion of old cemeteries having areas for recreational use had been done in other areas and could be considered here; community involvement in maintaining smaller cemeteries had been done successfully in several areas and the Council was willing to assist community groups wishing to do this.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress of burial ground extensions in the Inverness area;
- ii. **NOTED** the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development; and
- iii. **AGREED** an annual report on Bereavement Services, to include wider aspects of services provided such as cremations and funeral poverty, be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

**9. Petition for Speed limit change on A833
Athchuinge airson casg astair atharrachadh air A833**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/24/24 dated 31 July 2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. The report provided details of a petition requesting that the Highland Council re-classify the section of the A833 road stretching south from Belladrum to the Convinth junction from national speed limit to 40mph.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the petition and the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to grant approval for officials to carry out a review and analysis of the relevant section of road with a view to considering implementation of an appropriate speed limit over an appropriate length of the A833. All in accordance with relevant criteria for setting local speed limits with any proposed implementation of speed limits following relevant procedure in terms of consultation advertising etc.

**10. Winter Service Plan for 2024/25
Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh airson 2024/25**

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

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/25/24 dated 22 July 2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which provided details of the 2024/25 Winter Service Plan for City of Inverness and Area.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- assurance was provided that the road to Ness Castle Primary School was a primary route, and that the inclusion of Broom Drive and Balnakyle Road, Lochardil would be investigated for inclusion as primary routes as they were now bus routes. Attention was drawn to two footpaths that provided essential links to shops and community facilities (from Harris Road to the Hilton shopping centre, and from Drakies to the Inshes Retail Park) and it was asked whether these could be included in the winter maintenance programme as a priority. Members could email details of any other roads or footpaths they felt required reclassification. Adopted Council footpaths would be included;
- several Members expressed concern about the poor state of many gullies, which required regular clearing to avoid build-up of debris which could cause flooding, and icy conditions during cold weather. It was explained that the current gully clearing machine required replacement, however the preferred larger capacity machine had an 18-month waiting list to order, whereas the purchase of two smaller capacity machines was possible much sooner. However, there was insufficient budget at present to purchase two smaller machines. Members asked that a report on this be presented to the next meeting of the Committee;
- concern was expressed at the number of complaints received about insufficient levels of grass-cutting and related maintenance and, in response to a call for a report on this prior to the start of the 2025 growing season, it was suggested that this might be best incorporated into the capital road resurfacing report;

- Mr D Gregg asked for information on responsibility for the winter maintenance of the bus gate at Raigmore Hospital, and this would be provided outwith the meeting;
- the importance of Council services communicating and co-operating with one another on the issues discussed was emphasised;
- attention was drawn to the pavement surface near Ness Bridge, and other similar sections of pavement which had been constructed with a material that was prone to be more slippery than usual during cold weather. Assurance was provided that this was being investigated;
- it was confirmed that the Council collaborated with Bear Scotland and other relevant agencies on winter maintenance;
- information was sought and provided on responsibility for ensuring trees etc did not encroach on the public pavement or obscure road signs etc, with particular reference to a piece of land near the Leonardo Hotel which belonged to the hotel but which the Council was responsible for keeping vegetation clear of the Council's signage; and
- a Q&A page on the Council's website containing information for Members on the issues discussed would be helpful.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2024/25 and **NOTED** that there would be further investigation to determine the inclusion of Balnakyle Road and Broom Drive as priority one routes, the bus gate at Raigmore Hospital and the strategic footpaths referred to at the meeting; and
- AGREED** that a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee on:
 - gully clearing issues, including equipment; and
 - grass cutting schedule and consideration be given to including summer maintenance issues into the Capital Resurfacing Programme report for 2025-26.

11. Allocation Process for Area Share of Invitation to Pay Scheme Pròiseas Riarachaidh airson Co-roinn Sgìreil den Sgeama Cuireadh airson Pàigheadh

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/26/24 dated 22 July 2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the low income from parking at Whin Park was queried but the reason was not known.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the options set out for distribution in paragraph 6.1 of the report;
- APPROVED** the proposed process for the area allocation of invitation to pay income, with income being given for distribution to the ward within which the car park was located with decisions being taken by the appropriate Community Development Manager in consultation with relevant Ward Members;
- NOTED** that the process would be reviewed after the first year of implementation; and
- NOTED** that in line with the Scheme of Delegation, the delegated powers for the authorisation of spend up to £10,000 would be assigned to the Senior Community Development Manager and over £10,000 would be subject to Committee approval.

12. Inverness Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

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

a) Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee Annual Report 2023/24 Aithisg Bhliadhnail Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/27/24 dated 5 August 2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the City Leader thanked the Chair and Members of the Sub-Committee for their work;
- the Chair of the Sub-Committee summarised the benefits of Inverness's sizeable common good fund, which was used for the benefit of the residents of the former burgh but provided benefits to the wider Inverness area as a result. He thanked the Members of the Sub-Committee and officers for their work;
- in response to a proposal to fill the vacancy on the Sub-Committee, it was pointed out that this had not been on the agenda, and that it would be preferable to fill this after the forthcoming by-election, at the next meeting of the Committee;
- in relation to the increasing costs of providing civic hospitality, attention was drawn to procurement measures and processes that were being put in place to ensure best value was achieved;
- in response to a query about the work of the town twinning committee, a brief summary of activities was provided, and a report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee; and
- it was confirmed that citizenship ceremonies were not being held at the Town House.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the work of the ICGFSC as described within the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to the replacement of the reference to Director of Development and Infrastructure with Assistant Chief Executive – Place in “clause h” and to the inclusion of new “clause j” within the Powers delegated to the ICGFSC shown in Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** the vacancy on the Common Good Fund Sub-Committee would be filled at the next meeting of the Committee, after the by-election.

b) Financial Monitoring – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/28/24 dated 2 August 2024 by the Inverness City Area Manager.

The Committee **NOTED** the near final monitoring report (Appendix 1 of the report) for the Inverness Common Good Fund for the year ended 31 March 2024.

**c) Inverness Common Good Fund – Town House Car Park
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – Pàirc Chàraichean Taigh a’ Bhaile**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/29/24 dated 10 July 2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** that £4,085.00 costs incurred by the Council’s Parking Services Team to operate the Town House Car Park as a Common Good site was charged against the Inverness City Common Good Fund.

**d) Grants Applications over £10,000
Iarrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000**

Mr D McDonald declared an interest in this item as President of Kings Golf Club and left the Chamber for the determination of this item.

Mr K Gowans and made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as an employee of Inverness College UHI. 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/30/24 dated 2 August 2024 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

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

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the following grant applications for funding;
 - a. UHI Inverness - £5,743
 - b. Hilton Family Support - £14,100
 - c. New Start Highland - £30,550
 - d. Volocity Café & Bicycle Workshop - £7,261
 - e. Apex Highland - £14,581
- ii. **NOTED** that no further applications would be considered during the financial year 2024/25 under the Poverty and Inequality or Other Grants Budgets unless further funding was allocated to the relevant budgets; and
- iii. **AGREED** the Grants budget be closed to further applications for the remainder of financial year 2024/25.

**13. Inverness Local Holidays 2025/26
Saor-làithean Ionadail Inbhir Nis 2025/26**

The Committee **AGREED** the following dates as Local Holidays for the City of Inverness for years 2025 and 2026:

2025

Wednesday 1 January 2025 (New Year’s Day)
Thursday 2 January 2025 (2nd January Holiday)
Monday 3 February 2025

Monday 3 March 2025
Monday 21 April 2025 (Easter Monday)
Monday 5 May 2025 (May Day Holiday)
Monday 7 July 2025
Monday 6 October 2025
Monday 3 November 2025
Thursday 25 December 2025 (Christmas Day)
Friday 26 December 2025 (Boxing Day)

2026

Thursday 1 January 2026 (New Year's Day)
Friday 2 January 2026 (2nd January Holiday)
Monday 2 February 2026
Monday 2 March 2026
Monday 6 April 2026 (Easter Monday)
Monday 4 May 2026 (May Day Holiday)
Monday 6 July 2026
Monday 5 October 2026
Monday 2 November 2026
Friday 25 December 2026 (Christmas Day)
Monday 28 December 2026 (Boxing Day)

14. Minutes **Geàrr-chunntas**

The following Minutes were:-

- i. **NOTED** - City of Inverness Area Committee held on 27 May 2024;
- ii. **APPROVED** - Inverness Common Good Fund Grants Sub-Committee held on 1 August 2024; and
- iii. **APPROVED** - Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 28 June 2024.