

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 18 November 2024 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance	Ms E Knox (Remote)
Mr B Boyd (Remote)	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr I Brown	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr A Christie	Ms K MacLean
Mr D Fraser (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Graham	Mr D McDonald
Mr D Gregg	Mrs M Reid (Remote)
Dr M Gregson	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs J Hendry	

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager
Ms J Cromarty, Team Leader (Sustainable Transport)
Ms L Mateer, Principal Housing Officer
Ms J Johnston, Accountant
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr A McLean, Station Comander, Scottish Fire and Rescue
Mr McAulay, Station Comander (Cannich), Scottish Fire and Rescue
Mr C Donald, NatureScot

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

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chair welcomed Dr Gregson to his first meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee.

Also, he paid tribute to former Highland Councillor Janet Home MBE who sadly passed away on 5 October 2024. Mrs Home served as a member of the former District Council from 1995 to 2007, then being elected to Highland Council. During her time as a Councillor she played an active role, serving on numerous Committees and, in 2001, she took the role of Convener of the Northern Joint Police Board and, in 2003, chaired the Licensing Board. She was deeply involved in youth work and played a major part in the construction of the Culcabok and Drakies Hall as well as serving on her local Community Council.

Other Members shared their memories of Mrs Home and condolences were expressed to her friends and family

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Cameron, Ms H Crawford, Mr K Gowans and Mr A Sinclair

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:

Declarations of Interest:-

Item 7a – Mrs J Hendry
Item 14 - Mr D Gregg

and the following Transparency Statements:-

Items 6 and 7c – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg

**3. 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/31/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- advice was sought as to what Members could do, in association with communities and schools, when there was a pattern of deliberate fires, to ensure it could be eradicated;
- information would be useful as to the impact interlinked fire and smoke alarms was having in domestic properties;
- individuals accessing a number of Council benefits and NHS services should be signposted towards Fire Safety visits. It was also suggested officers could be trained to provide other advice, such as trip and fall hazards;
- fire officers were sometimes mobilised to assist with those who had fallen;
- it was hoped that by March/April 2025 the Cannich Crew station would be back to full strength and able to respond to call outs; and
- it would be interesting for Members to know the reasons behind accidental dwelling fires.

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

**4. Presentation - Inverness Gull Management programme-NatureScot -
Licencing update
Taisbeanadh – Prògram Stiùireadh Fhaoileagan Inbhir Nis – NàdarAlba –
Cunntas às ùr mu cheadachd**

Chris Donald, NatureScot, following the request by Members of the Inverness City Area Committee held on 18 August, gave an update on the application of the licencing system undertaken under the wildlife and countryside act 1981. This would be with particular reference to Gull management within the city which had

been undertaken by Inverness BID and supported by the Inverness Common Good Fund, since 2012.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Recognising that an overall decline in gull populations was reported, Members referred to many anecdotes and concerns from local residents, schools and business owners, about a perceived increase in problems caused by gulls, particularly during 2024. These including children being unable to eat outside at school, catering businesses being unable to use their outdoor seating, cars being damaged by corrosive gull faeces and members of the public, particularly the elderly, being attacked and dive-bombed by gulls. Concrete data was required to fully understand the situation with gulls in the centre of Inverness;
- given the amount of public concern about the problems gulls were causing, a public presentation explaining the legalities around the gull situation would be beneficial;
- it was reported that the problems being faced in the city centre with gulls was spreading to the suburban areas of Inverness and preventative measures taken in one area tended to move the problems into another area;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the legal situation which was that, as soon as the birds started nesting, they were protected and a licence was required to interfere with them. Challenges around the reporting and action timescales were summarised, recognising the gestation period could be as little as 21 days, and a licence could take 28 days to be issued, by which time the chicks were hatched. Members highlighted the importance of making an area less attractive to gulls for nesting at an earlier stage;
- clarification on the diet of gulls was sought, noting that they were opportunistic in nature and would generally eat what was most readily available;
- electronic litter bins were effective;
- various hotspots for gulls around the city were highlighted by Members, although others pointed out that the whole city was affected;
- data on the extent of the gull problem in Inverness was required, with particular reference to the need to establish if the problem was increasing, and if gulls were becoming increasingly aggressive;
- it was suggested a report should be prepared on the possibility of providing Common Good Fund grants to businesses to take preventative measures against gulls nesting on their buildings;
- it was disappointing the licensing requirements had changed and had led to a perceived increase in gull problems in Inverness. The licencing process needed to be speeded up and preventative measures permitted;
- residents and visitors should be provided with more comprehensive information on how to minimise gull problems, and on the associated public health risks; and
- it was suggested NatureScot could develop an online portal for people to report gull incidents, as part of data gathering.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

**5. Sustainable Transport Update - Mobility Hubs
Cunntas às ùr mu Chòmhdhail Sheasmhach – Co-ionadan So-ghluasadachd**

There is circulated Report No CIA/32/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the positive anecdotes in the report were welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on efforts undertaken to reduce vandalism to ebikes following problems in the summer and this included the installation of CCTV in certain locations and changes to the docking stations. More information would be provided to Mr Brown outwith the meeting;
- the progress at the Torvean Mobility Hub was welcomed. It was queried if solar panels had been considered for EV charging there and this information would be provided to Mr Ballance outwith the meeting. Assurance was sought, and provided, that the Hub at Torvean would not hinder visitors to the park or the operation of the popular Park Run;
- information was sought on the likely timescales for the STAG appraisal for the North Kessock and Torr Mobility Hub; and
- disappointment was expressed that the funding for the bus partnership had been paused, with reference made to the £1.4b in funding received by the Scottish Government for local projects.

The Committee **NOTED** the Sustainable Transport Update – Mobility Hubs.

**6. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024
Aithisg Dèanadais Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2024 gu 30 Sultain 2024**

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

Mr A Christie - as a General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr D Gregg – as a member of the Board of the Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

There was circulated Report No CIA/33/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- one case of anti social behaviour could have a significant detrimental impact on many other tenants. Therefore, information was requested in the next report to Committee on how many incidents of anti social behaviour led to evictions. It was advised that evictions were a last resort. The housing team worked with the Council's legal services to look at whether there were other measures that could be taken instead of eviction. A briefing on anti social behaviour and actions to address this issue would be provided at a future Ward business meeting;
- in terms of anti social behaviour cases and how the Council compared to other local authorities, information would be provided to Members. The

- housing team were more focused on this issue and it was hoped incidents would reduce going forward;
- the number of homeless presentations remained flat and this was reassuring in some ways. For example, there were not large numbers of evictions from the private sector or repossessions from mortgage lenders;
 - in relation to time spent in temporary accommodation information on whether single men under the age of 30 were spending longer in temporary accommodation was requested;
 - reassurance was sought that people who were working were not put in temporary accommodation as it was likely they would end up with rent arrears. Also, the amount of rent arrears for those in temporary accommodation should be provided. It was advised that there were people who were classed as working homeless and the team were looking at whether additional benefits for them could be applied for and options for types of accommodation that could be offered to them, such as social housing where rents were lower;
 - in terms of housing allocation, a large percentage of those allocated housing were from homeless presentations and there was a need to reassure those who were homeless at home, in overcrowded accommodation or in unsatisfactory accommodation that help was available. It was advised that the housing team were managing to assist those people in these situations and a breakdown of information on homeless presentations would be provided at a Ward business meeting;
 - the work of the housing team was commended. They were very helpful and informative and willing to go that extra mile to help people who were in very difficult situations;
 - the work by the housing team to help those in rent arrears was highlighted. This included working with Welfare Support colleagues and the Citizen's Advice Bureau;
 - contact details of the homeless prevention team would be provided to Mr D Gregg;
 - in terms of who would pay the rent if a tenant was sent to prison, this depended on whether they were remanded or convicted, whether they were on universal credit or had the means to pay their rent. The housing team worked with the Prison service on a case by case basis; and
 - information on how the Inverness South area was performing with their rent arrears would be provided to Mr D Macpherson.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April – 30 September 2024.

7. Inverness Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

a) Inverness Common Good Fund, Inverness Town House – Update Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis, Taigh Baile Inbhir Nis – Cunntas às Ùr

Declaration of Interest – Mrs J Hendry made a Declaration of Interest in this item as a shareholder Teclan Ltd, who designed and built the new website and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting.

There had been circulated No CIA/34/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Inverness Town House project was very impressive and staff involved on it were commended for their work on the project. There were still some challenges to overcome but, in the next few years, the Town House would be in a much better place and was a great asset for Inverness and Highlands for a long time to come.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress in respect of 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. Further, that due to the number of submissions, additional time was required to select the successful tender with completion of the feasibility study being re-scheduled to March 2025;
- ii. the progress made on the establishment of the website, extension of civic commercial use and in particular the success in letting parts of the Town House to small businesses; and
- iii. the progress of works in relation to the former Town Clerk's office and the transformation of the Town House into a multi-functional venue without detriment to its primary civic use.

**b) Financial Monitoring
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/35/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an assurance was sought, and provided, that the Council's new financial system was operating to the degree required for the financial monitoring of the Common Good Fund;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, on the spend to date shown on the Town House Utilities and Cleaning budget, noting the cleaning element was carried out in-house by the Council and the costs recharged towards the end of the financial year; and
- in relation to cleaning costs, an assurance was provided that a joint procurement exercise was currently being undertaken for cleaning in respect of the Town House and Victorian Market.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 30 September 2024 and that overall expenditure is within agreed budgets excepting estimated outturns detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

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

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

Mr A Christie - as a General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr D Gregg – as a member of the Board of the Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/36/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

The Committee **APPROVED** the grant application of £25,000 from Blythswood Care for the Highland Foodbank (Inverness) and that the funds be drawn from the Winter Payments budget.

8. 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 27 May 2024:-

Ward 12

- Charleston Academy: School Tie for Incoming S1's - £480
- International Sheep Dog Society Local Committee: Scottish National Sheepdog Trail 2024 - £500
- Beaulieu Community Council: Beaulieu Primary School Garden - £200
- Kilmorack Community Council: Defib Pad Replacement - £320
- Beaulieu Community Council: Local Place Plan - £750

Ward 13

- Charleston Seniors Club: Seniors Summer Trip - £702.75
- Charleston Academy: School Tie for Incoming S1's - £490
- Highland Hockey Club: Second Storage Unit - £750
- St Joseph's RC PS: Our Outdoor Learning Space - £1,302.07
- Inverness High School: Poverty Proofing Activity Day - £754
- Littering Picking - £250
- Inverness High School: Beekeeping Project - £153.88

Ward 14

- Inverness High School: Poverty Proofing Activity Day - £1,506
- Dalneigh Play Park Project: Fun Day August 2024 - £750
- Friends of Merkinch Local Nature Reserve: Nature Volunteer Programme Insurance Costs - £640
- Inverness High School Beekeeping Project - £307.80
- Inverness Festival Association: Inverness Music Festival 2025 - £750
- Highland Schools Wind Orchestra: Orchestra 2025 Tour to Augsburg Germany - £300

Ward 15

- 27th Inverness Brownies: Assistance with Let Fees - £822.66
- Cable Runway Repairs: Esk Road Play Area - £300
- See Saw: Holm Play Park - £120
- Highland Schools Wind Orchestra: Orchestra 2025 Tour to Augsburg Germany - £300

Ward 16

- 7th Inverness (Crown) Camping Trip - £400
- HLH Millburn Associated Schools Active Football Groups - £2,254.35
- Community Action for Raigmore (CARE): Upgrade of Shack - £2,000
- Raigmore Primary School: P7 Residential Trip and Class Trips - £3,000

Ward 17

- Balloch Primary Parent Council: Fundraising Project Reading Programme - £1,600
- Croy Community Garden Group: Polytunnel / Water Pump Installation - £420
- Highland Schools Wind Orchestra: Orchestra 2025 Tour to Augsburg Germany - £300

Ward 19

- Balloch Primary Parent Council: Fundraising Project Reading Programme - £400
- Parkour Repairs Inshes Park - £500
- Balvonie Park Association: Balvonie Community Woodland and Land Acquisition - £6,000

9. Appointment to Sub-Committee, Working Groups etc Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidh, Buidhnean Obrach is eile

The Committee **AGREED** that the Group Leaders on the CIAC Committee discuss and appoint Members to the Common Good Fund Sub-Committee (*Consequently the following membership was determined by Group Leaders:- Mr C Ballance, Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mrs I MacKenzie Ms K MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs M Reid*).

10. Appointments to Outside Bodies Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean on Taobh A-muigh

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- a) defer an appointment to the Inverness Town Twinning Committee; and
- b) to appoint Ms K MacLean to the Highland Disability Sport.

11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

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

- i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 19 August 2024 - **NOTED**;
- ii. Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 15 August 2024, 26 September 2024 and 24 October 2024 - **APPROVED**; and
- iii. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 28 October 2024 - **APPROVED**.

12. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for items 13, 14 and 15 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

13. Town House Feasibility Study – Update
Sgrùdadh Iomchaidheachd Taigh a’ Bhaile – Cunntas às Ùr

There had been circulated to Members only Report No CIA/37/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place

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

14. Lease Proposal for Hydrogen Development, Longman
Moladh Aonta-màil airson Leasachadh Haidridein, An Longman

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Gregg made a Declaration of Interest in this item as a close family member was a civil servant involved in hydrogen policy and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No CIA/38/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **NOTED** and **AGREED** the amended recommendations as detailed and in the report and tabled at the meeting.

15. Inverness Common Good Account Sites and Premises Transaction Report
Aithisg Gnothachais Làraich agus Togalaichean Chunntasan Maoin Math Choitcheann Inbhir Nis

There had been circulated to Members only Report No CIA/39/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place

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

16. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid

The following Notices of Motion had been received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance –

- (i) “Noting the significant issues in 2024 with maintenance of open spaces, parks, play areas, verges, river banks and other areas, that this Committee will consider and review the Maintenance Plan for 24/25 at its next meeting.”

Signed: Mr A Graham Mr A Christie Mrs T Robertson

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- as a result of the reduction in the budget for the maintenance of amenity areas agreed by the Council in March 2024, there had been issues in Inverness with the level of service. The fact staffing levels for this activity were significantly lower than previously was also highlighted;

- in particular, Council housing estates had been affected and concern that some new housing developments had not been included in the maintenance list;
- it was important that the City was smart, tidy and attractive for both residents and visitors alike and the Motion had been put forward so there was more visibility and discussion on how open space maintenance was handled going forward; and
- support was expressed for the terms of the Motion and confirmation was provided that a report would be submitted to the next meeting in February 2025.

The Committee **AGREED** the Motion.

(ii) **Additional Urgent Motion**

In line with Standing Order 8, it was advised that the Chair had agreed that the following should be considered as an urgent Motion due to the recent Post Office announcement and the public consultation proposal.

“The Committee notes with concern the announcement by the Post Office that the central Inverness Post Office on Queensgate is threatened with closure along with 115 other branches nationwide. The Committee is concerned any reduction in services available to Inverness would negatively impact city centre businesses and residents. The committee requests that the City Leader writes to the Chief Executive of the Post Office asking them to:-

1. review all possible options to keep the Inverness branch open
2. confirm the planned dates for the 6 weeks of community consultation to hear residents and business views as suggested in the Post Office Principles of Public Engagement’

Signed: Mr D Gregg Mr I Brown

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Post Office was a service the City of Inverness needed and it was unthinkable for any city not to have a Central Post Office;
- Sub Post Offices were not in a position to provide everything a Central Post Office could. The Post office on Queengate was a well used facility by businesses and the public and for those sending sensitive documents such as banking, passports and visas and all options should be considered as to how it could be kept open including co-location with other services;
- the Post Office needed to provide the dates of the proposed consultation; and
- given there was cross-Committee support for this Motion a Press Release from all the Area Group Leaders should be issued.

The meeting ended at 1.40pm.