

**The Highland Council
No.6 2024/2025**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 31 October 2024 at 9.45 am.

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Joint Democratic Services Managers

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Edmondson, Ms E Knox, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D McDonald, Mrs M Paterson and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Items 5, 7, 15 and 16.ii – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg

3. Presentation: British Sign Language Taisbeanadh - Cànan-soidhnidh Bhreatainn

Ms Sheila Lundberg, Co-ordinator and Mr Andrew Begg, Sign Tutor, from the Highland Deaf Education Service gave a presentation on British Sign Language (BSL) and what Highland had achieved.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the presentation.

4. Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28 Plana Ionmhasail Meadhan-ùine 2025/26 gu 2027/28

There had been circulated Report No. HC/35/24 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance (Section 95 Officer).

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was important to recognise that the budget setting process for the next financial year was at an early stage;
- the positive achievements around income generation such as the Storr Project and the fact the Council was less risk averse in taking forward initiatives to minimise the impact of any budget reductions was welcomed;
- achieving the income and cost reduction targets would reduce the impact on reserves, however it was important the Council continued to seek best value across all its activities;
- while the funding settlement from the UK Government to the Scottish Government was more favourable than anticipated, the significant financial impact of the increase in national insurance contributions on local authorities needed to be impressed on both Governments;
- there was concern that a ‘flat cash’ funding settlement from the Scottish Government would result in a reduction in the Council’s budget and additional savings having to be made to the level detailed in the report;
- it was proposed that a late report be presented to Council on 12 December 2024 providing initial narrative, data and assumptions on the impact the Scottish Government Budget, scheduled for 4 December 2024, would have on Local Government and the Council;
- Members requested that they be provided with details of the proposals arising from the review to be undertaken of savings options or proposals developed for February 2024, but not taken forward;
- the focus on income generation should not be at the expense of community groups being able to afford to rent Council facilities or result in people being excluded from services;

- it was important the Administration factored in engagement with Opposition Groups given the short window between the Scottish Government's grant settlement being confirmed and the Council setting its budget;
- costed information needed to be provided on the impact of the decrease in inflation on the Council's financial assumptions;
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that the forecasted decrease in bank base interest rates had been factored into the Council's borrowings and opportunities to access funds at more favourable rates were actively monitored on a weekly basis;
- confirmation was sought that the Scottish Government provided funding support to the Council for the Refugee Programme and more detailed information could be provided if required;
- following the Highland Housing Summit, the report set out proposals for the LandBanking Fund to support affordable housing development. The Economy and Infrastructure Committee would also consider measures to support housing development and, in taking these forward, it was hoped partners and private sector developers would follow suit;
- there was concern at the burden future year on year Council tax rises, including the element to support the Highland Investment Plan, would place on constituents in Highland and the importance of listening to their views on this issue;
- the Council had to demonstrate to Council taxpayers that it could manage its funding in a responsible manner, concerns being expressed in relation to the Campervan and Motorhome Scheme;
- the scale of the challenges facing local authorities, and recognised by CoSLA, in terms of taking their local authorities forward whilst trying to protect communities in terms of Council tax rises, was highlighted;
- as part of the budget setting process the Council would take all necessary steps to minimise Council tax rises and contributions from Members on further mitigation measures would be welcomed;
- while seeking to achieve best value outcomes, the Council's reserves strategy provided options in terms of providing for its finances going forward;
- a review was being undertaken on what the budget had delivered in the current year and how this information could be fed back to communities and built on going forward;
- direct conversations continued to be held between officers, the Council Leader and with other Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries on the Council's position and priorities and as to how budget decisions at a national level would impact on the Council; and
- there was a need for the Administration, and through CoSLA ,to impress on the Scottish Government that in terms of its settlement from the UK Government as much of this funding as possible should be directed into local authorities.

Decision

The Council:-

NOTED:-

- i. the update provided regarding the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan;
- ii. that a rolling three-year revenue budget planning approach was being adopted, and an updated Medium Term Financial Plan would cover the three years 2025/26 to 2027/28;

- iii. the financial context and financial outlook as described in the report, and the financial risks and uncertainties;
- iv. the need to plan for additional budget savings and other measures to address the financial outlook over the period of the plan;
- v. the outline timetable of key dates;
- vi. the work being taken forward regarding development of saving proposals, consideration of the process of budget engagement, and review of earmarked reserves;

AGREED:-

- vii. that a late report would be submitted to Council on 12 December 2024 providing initial narrative, data and assumptions of the impact the Scottish Government Budget as presented by the Cabinet Secretary (scheduled for 4 December 2024) would have on Local Government and the Highland Council; and
- viii. to the repayment into the LandBanking Fund of £6.308m from funds set aside.

**5. Highland Investment Plan – Progress Update
Plana Tasgaidh na Gàidhealtachd – Cunntas Adhartais**

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

**Mr A Christie – as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/36/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, who gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) was a sustainable programme that would provide investment in community Points of Delivery (PODs), roads and infrastructure, with reference to procurement, delivery, sustainability and ongoing care and maintenance for the immediate, intermediate and long-term future, and it would be delivered as quickly as possible;
- it was uncertain, at present, what effect the recent budget announcement by the Chancellor in terms of capital funding might have, and what, if any, direct benefit there might be to the Council;
- it was now six months since the launch of the HIP and, ahead of the agreed report to the Council in December, the interim report reminded Members of the overall plan and provided updates on substantive parts of the plan, particularly the Dingwall and Thurso workstreams. Section 5.1 of the report set out the previously agreed categories of projects, and the focus was on better and more efficient use of buildings, co-location of services, and accommodation that could include partners and stakeholders as well as take into account the views of communities. Appendix 1 of the report included information on the developing form of the PODs;
- the Council Leader confirmed the commitment to continue with diarised updates for Local Members, where appropriate, in respect of the local aspects of the various phases of the HIP;
- Members welcomed the positive and ambitious report and looked forward to seeing the outcomes, and the options that would be presented to the Council in December;

- attention having been drawn to section 5.2.4 of the report which stated that full engagement with communities and partners would take place, Members requested sight of an engagement plan, including what engagement was going to be carried out, when it was going to be carried out and what outcomes were expected. In addition, more detail was needed about specific stakeholder groups;
- concern was expressed regarding financial sustainability. The Council's ceiling for debt had previously been set at 10% of revenue turnover, and an analysis of what that ceiling might be in absolute terms in future years would be useful;
- reference was made to instances of secondary school pupils having to eat their lunch outside in inclement weather due to a lack of space in the school building, with particular reference to Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy. It was essential for children's wellbeing that they could eat in a safe, warm and dry environment, and it was intended to move an amendment seeking a survey of the lunch arrangements in secondary schools with the findings to be reported to the next meeting of the Council so they could be built into the HIP. Other Members voiced their support in that regard;
- it was important not to lose sight of St Clement's school in Dingwall, and to recognise the delays that had taken place in that regard. Local Members responded that there was a clear commitment in the HIP, not just to St Clement's School but to the wider educational and other provision in Dingwall, which was very welcome. Communication with Members, the St Clement's stakeholder group and the Parent Councils of both Dingwall Academy and Dingwall Primary School had been excellent. In terms of siting, all those involved were aware of the options and were excited by the potential plans that had come forward;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the proposals for the new Beauly Primary School included a POD and, if so, whether that would delay the plans;
- in relation to Broadford Primary School, one of the conditions of the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) funding award was that the school had to be occupied by the end of 2025. It was clear the new school was not going to be delivered in time to meet that criterion and an assurance was sought, and provided, that the Council would be requesting an extension to the deadline to ensure the Council was not burdened with more debt. Other Local Members added that stakeholders and the wider community were happy with the timeline and the progress that had been made;
- the significant amount of work that had already taken place was recognised, and information was sought, and provided, on the capacity of the staff involved;
- the importance of keeping Local Members informed was emphasised, and a request was made that regular updates be provided to Ward Business Meetings so Members could keep constituents up-to-date;
- it was requested that Inverness East be considered first when looking at the Inverness area. Despite significant housing development in recent years in terms of the Inverness East Development Brief there had been no increase in services, and there was land available;
- in relation to the Thurso workstream, Local Members commended the early discussions that had taken place and the speed of response by officers, and looked forward to regular diarised updates as indicated by the Council Leader. There were unique and transformational opportunities that could be taken by not working in isolation, and it was important to be even more ambitious than set out in the report and get the community to engage with the process as much as possible;

- every person, regardless of where they were in Highland, should have the appropriate settings to learn, live and feel like a valued citizen and, given the recent budget announcements by the Chancellor and the unprecedented tax burden, there should be an expectation of renewal rather than dilution of services and degradation of assets;
- the HIP committed the Council to ongoing investment in roads and transport infrastructure, which was a priority on Skye and across Highland. It was exciting to see the approach to developing new generation community facilities, using PODs, which would see upgrades to the high number of schools that required investment in the years ahead. Members were particularly pleased to see in the report reference to the distinct types of community PODs that might be considered, which included urban and rural examples as well as regional facilities. Thanks were expressed to officers for their hard work to date, and Members voiced their support for the ambitious and aspirational vision of the HIP. It was important to ensure that the aspirations articulated in the report were also being fully integrated into shovel-ready projects such as the LEIP Phase 2 projects including Broadford Primary School and Nairn Academy as well other well-advanced school plans for places like Dunvegan and Beauly. These projects would provide an early opportunity to showcase the innovative work being taken forward, and the learning from them would inform future work. It was an exciting time for Highland, and Members endorsed the positive direction of travel in terms of the development of the HIP;
- in response to comments regarding the 3D POD designs which had formed part of the presentation, it was explained that they were intended to demonstrate the concept and were not definitive. They would be fleshed out as work progressed, and the elements included in the final designs would be driven by what the community wanted and what was affordable;
- in relation to PODs, whilst the practical benefits of having a pharmacy and a care home, for example, on the same site were evident, it was questioned whether having a secondary school and a GP and/or pharmacy on the same site would be acceptable to teenagers seeking contraceptive advice, and it was necessary to include teenagers in the planned engagement; and
- in responding to points raised, the Council Leader explained that there would be continued and ongoing review of the HIP, and the issues raised could be incorporated into future reports to the Council or the appropriate Strategic Committee. The ongoing updates would include updated financial models that would inform the decision-making process, and he undertook to reflect on the comments regarding community engagement.

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

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr D Gregg, moved that an analysis of all secondary schools be initiated detailing which schools could not presently provide a sheltered, dry, warm, and safe space for our young people to take lunch, and that the findings of this analysis be reported to Council as part of the next update on the Highland Investment Plan together with options as to how to address the matter.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 34 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 28 votes, with no abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr S Coghill, Ms L Dundas, 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 L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Ross.

For the Amendment:

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Ms H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the progress in developing the place-based master planning approach and the option appraisal process for delivering new Community Points of Delivery across Highland, and the further updates that would be reported to the Council meeting on 12 December 2024.

6. Council Motion on Renewables – Follow Up Report Gluasad Comhairle air So-ùrachaidhean – Aithisg Leanmhainn

There had been circulated Report No. HC/37/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members welcomed the original motion, and thanked officers for the prompt preparation and presentation of the report, given the tight timescales. It was hoped the cost of the project might be reflected in future planning application fees and, in relation to the joint UK and Scottish government consultation on removing barriers to the creation of electricity infrastructure, it was suggested that an extension to the 30 November 2024 deadline be requested to allow the matter to be considered by the South and North Planning Applications Committees.

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the commitment to expand the real time live mapping to include all types of energy generating applications and for this to be updated on a monthly basis;
- ii. **AGREED** to the funding of this mapping as an in-year budget pressure funded from reserves, with a need to consider the provision of longer term funding as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process;
- iii. **NOTED** the difference in what community engagement could be undertaken by the Council, depending on who was the determining authority for the application;
- iv. **AGREED** to the funding of further community engagement resources separate from the Planning Service as an in-year budget pressure funded from reserves, with a need to consider the longer term funding as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process;

- v. **AGREED** that additional community council training be progressed with reference to electricity generation and renewable proposals, with the cost pressures arising met from reserves as an in-year pressure, and the need to consider longer term funding as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process; and
- vi. **NOTED** that the Leader would write to the Scottish Government to ensure that the full cumulative aspect of developments, including the potential grid connection, was considered within the submission of an application under section 36 of the Electricity Act for an energy generation station, and for all Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) applications of whatever scale.

7. **Review of the Scheme of Delegation** **Ath-sgrùdadh dhen Sgeama Thiomnaidh**

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

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

Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland

There had been circulated Report No. HC/38/24 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

The Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance drew Members' attention to a suggested update to paragraph 128 which would be extended to include "*to deal with misconduct up to and including dismissal raised by and in relation to the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executives*".

Decision

The Council:-

AGREED:-

- i. the changes to the Scheme of Delegation to Committees and Sub-Committees as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, including the suggested update to paragraph 128;
- ii. that the Scheme of Delegation including its format be reviewed, brought forward and be reported to March 2025 Council;
- iii. that amendments to post titles could continue to be made without recourse to Council as long as the level of delegation remains unchanged;

NOTED:-

- iv. that the authority currently delegated to Executive Chief Officers within the current Scheme would be exercised principally by Chief Officers and, when necessary, Assistant Chief Executives; and
- v. page references would be updated once the substantive changes to the Scheme had been approved.

8. Question Time Àm Ceiste

The following Questions had been received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance –

Public Questions

(i) Mr W Morrison

To the Leader of the Council

As it has been decided by Council that the bollards on Academy St be removed together with the ones on Eastgate, I would be obliged to know the proposed timescale for same to be completed?

As the busy Festive season will soon be upon us I feel that this should be carried out as a matter of urgency with no further delay.

The response had been circulated.

Member Questions

(i) Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

How many fines/penalty notices including total value and geographical location has the Highland Council issued on the following subject areas between April 2024 and September 2024?

- Penalty Charge Notice car parking on restricted road markings or overstaying in car park.
- Penalty Charge Notice vehicles parking on a pavement?
- Fly tipping
- Dropping litter
- Dog fouling
- Smoking fines
- Environmental health

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked how enforcement could be resourced in terms of litter and dog fouling.

In response, the Leader confirmed this would be discussed in due course.

(ii) Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

In the Budget passed on the 29 February 2024 a saving was included (CS:29) Redesign of Adult Social Care of £12,600,000 of which £7,000,000 was in 24/25. Please could the Leader list, as we are past the half way stage of the financial year,

the potential areas identified for delivering this saving together with the value as well as including a copy of the detailed draft/final integrated impact assessment?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked when Councillors would receive details of the savings/transformation proposals.

In response, the Leader confirmed this would be discussed once further information was available.

(iii) Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

Charleston Academy has been included in the Highland Investment Plan as a "Phase One, Years 1-10 Project" with potential delivery within 3 to 5 years, subject to the availability and profiling of funding.

Can you advise of the main steps that require to be taken to progress from the project status at the date of this meeting to the award of contract to the successful bidder?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, a schedule of works carried out at Charleston Academy during the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years, including work in relation to RAAC concrete issues was requested.

In response, the Leader confirmed that this information would be circulated.

(iv) Mrs H Crawford

To the Leader of the Council

At the continued Full Council of 30 September 2024, a majority of Highland Councillors approved Motion item 22 (3), entitled Major Electricity Development Applications and Community Engagement. Can you please confirm the anticipated timelines for implementation of the respective outstanding actions referred to in that Motion?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(v) Mr M Reiss

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee

Overnight Respite care is a vital service to some of our most needy families. This service has not been available in any practicable sense for several years in the Far North. SDS payments are not an effective alternative.

Can you provide a straightforward, cast-iron assurance to residents in Sutherland and Caithness that the Highland's Council's recent public commitment to reinstate Respite services at Thor House, Thurso or it's replacement, will include overnight care?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(vi) Mr D Gregg

To the Leader of the Council

The Inverness and Ross and Cromarty access panels are listed as inactive on the council website.

Access panels provide a keyway for people with disabilities to engage with changes to their streets and towns.

Please can the council detail any actions it has taken to help reactivate either of these panels within the last 6 months?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if an update on the progress of reinstating the access panels could be added to relevant area committee agendas.

In response, the Leader confirmed that he would speak with the relevant Chairs.

(vii) Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

The Council is responsible for coordinating Bikeability training in Highland. Please can the Chair provide a breakdown of the number of schools and children participating in Bikeability training for each area in Highland last year, including the number of children who achieved Level 1, 2 and 3 awards.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked how the Council planned to increase participation in Bikeability in Highland going forward.

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure stated that further detailed information would be shared in due course.

(viii) Mr R Mackintosh

To the Leader of the Council

Highland Council's Net Zero Strategy was launched in October last year. The Net Zero Strategy replaces the 2014 Carbon CLEVER programme and Action Plan, so when does Council plan to replace the implications section heading 'Climate Change / Carbon Clever' with 'Climate Change / Net Zero' in all Council reports?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

9. Membership of Committees etc Ballrachd Chomataidhean msaa

As a result of the By-Elections the political make-up of the Council was as follows:-

SNP – 21 / Highland Independent – 16 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 13 / Highland Alliance – 7 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 6 / Scottish Green Party – 4 / Labour – 2 / Alba – 1 / Non-Aligned - 3.

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees was 6/4/4/2/2.

On that basis, revised Committee memberships were tabled at the meeting.

10. Appointment of Office Bearers Cur an Dreuchd Luchd-oifis

The Council **AGREED** that Mr D Loudon be appointed as Chair of the Pensions Committee

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

The Council **AGREED** that Mrs I Campbell be appointed as a new Director for Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited.

12. Timetable of Meetings Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with reference to the importance of the work of the Climate Change Committee (CCC), it was proposed that coupling the CCC with the Economy and Infrastructure Committee was not appropriate, given the significant issues considered by both. The CCC would be better paired with either the Communities and Place Committee or with the Housing and Property Committee, to facilitate proper scrutiny and discussion;
- attention was drawn to the new Audit Committee dates not being compatible with the timetables of the external auditors; and
- it was queried whether appropriate consultation had been undertaken with the Planning Applications Committee (PAC) Chairs and Planning officials on the feasibility of holding North and South PACs on consecutive days.

Mr B Lobban, seconded by Mr R Bremner, **MOVED** the Timetable of Meetings for 2025 as circulated, with the exception of the Climate Change Committee being coupled with the Communities and Place or Housing and Property Committees, this to be confirmed in due course.

Mrs T Robertson, seconded by Mrs J McEwan, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that, as the Audit Committee had reports from Auditors, some of which had statutory times for submission, the dates in the timetable did not correspond with the relevant dates and might result in late reports requiring a special meeting of the Committee. Revised dates proposed were 19 February, 19 June, 25 September and 26 November.

On a vote being taken, **MOTION** received 34 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, with 3 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion: Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Mrs M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr J McGillivray, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr W MacKay, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Ms M Ross.

For the Amendment: Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr R Gunn, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Sagger, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions: Mr C Balance, Mr S Mackie, Mr R MacKintosh.

Decision

The Council:

- i. **AGREED** that a Special meeting of the:
 - a. Pensions Committee be held on 6 December 2024 at 2pm;
 - b. Highland Council be held on 12 December 2024 at 9.30am;
- ii. **APPROVED**, following a vote, the Timetable of Meetings for 2025 as circulated, with the exception of the Climate Change Committee being coupled with the Communities and Place or Housing and Property Committees, this to be confirmed in due course; and
- iii. **AGREED** to discuss with Planning Officers and the Planning Applications Committee Chairs whether it was feasible to hold North and South Planning Applications Committees on consecutive days and, if not, to reschedule them.

13. Deeds Executed Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

The Council **NOTED** the list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 19 September 2024.

Additional Urgent Items (14 and 15)

14. Exclusion of the Public

The Council **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for item 15 only on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Lochaber Care Provision Solar Cùrain - Loch Abar

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

**Mr A Christie – as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/39/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations as set out 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 -

(1) Since the regionalisation of local government in 1973, Community Councils form the most local tier of statutory representation in the Highland region.

Bridging the gap between the local authority and the 156 communities they represent, Community Councils provide a vital forum for putting forward local opinions and community needs.

Although the vast majority of Community Councillors make positive contributions and represent their community to a standard befitting public office, it is regrettable that the local authority must deal with infrequent incidents where that is not the case.

Despite publishing a cohesive Code of Conduct within the Highland Council's scheme of establishment, instances of improper interactions with the local authority (its elected Councillors and Staff), community groups and the general public have and will continue to arise.

When an issue of Community Councillor conduct (either collectively or as an individual) is raised, the guidance refers the matter to the Community Council to address in the first instance, with the only recourse in escalating the matter through the Ward Management structure (now Local Community Development Manager). Even where clear breaches of the Code of Conduct can be demonstrated, there is no such mechanism for the local authority to exert enforcement action.

It is evident that these isolated, but no less significant, incidents therefore present significant challenges to the cohesiveness of Community Council groups, the reputation and credibility of Community Councils with unresolved standards matters and the likelihood of members of the public putting forward their names for future consideration.

This Council therefore agrees to make representation to the Minister for Local Government, asking that Community Councillors be considered within the Ethical Standard in Public Life (Scotland) Act.

Signed: Mr S Mackie Mr A Christie Mr R Stewart Mr M Reiss

The proposer of the Motion highlighted that the Council did not have a satisfactory mechanism to adequately and transparently deal with complaints that might come from members of the public, community councillors or community councils. This applied not only to the complainant but also to those subject to a complaint. This was of no fault of the Council or officers many who were called away from their core roles to try and deal with complaints, grievances and general issues that might arise with Community Councils. Community Councillors' roles could be made more difficult when disputes and complaints could not be resolved satisfactorily. As a result, the attractiveness of the role of a Community Councillor could be diminished. It was therefore important that representation be made to the Minister for Local Government asking that this matter be addressed. It was also welcomed that the Council had an ongoing review and might well impact on its Community Council arrangements and this activity would supplement the Motion.

In discussion, there was general support for the Motion and the intent and consideration behind it was well meant. The Council was supportive of Community Councillors, who were volunteers, who did their best in contributing to the role of governance in this country. Community Councils faced several challenges in terms of membership, financial and operational sustainability and representing community views. All organisations, whether voluntary or not, required a code of conduct that had to be adhered to and a system in place that was robust when conduct undermined those basic principles.

Thereafter, the Council **APPROVED** the Motion as presented.

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

Mr A Christie – as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland

- (2) This Council notes that Highland Council has been a major beneficiary of the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF), disbursing £676,000 in the last year alone to community groups, and notes that;
- Highland Council itself received over £21,000 to deliver biodiversity enhancement and habitat restoration projects such as replacing trees killed by ash dieback;
 - The nature and biodiversity crisis particularly affects rural and wildland areas such as Highland;
 - Scotland is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, as highlighted in the 2023 State of Nature Report, with 1 in 9 species threatened with extinction,

75% of our peatlands degraded, swift, curlew, lapwing and kestrel populations declined by more than 50% in the last 30 years;

- Action to tackle the ecological crisis and reverse biodiversity loss is urgently needed.

Whilst recognising the right of public service workers to receive a fair pay settlement, this Council therefore condemns the Scottish Government decision to divert money from this capital fund to revenue spending and asks the Council leader to write to the Cabinet Secretary to the Treasury Kate Forbes MSP to request that the Nature Restoration Funding be reinstated.

Signed: Mr C Ballance Ms K Willis

The proposer to the Motion provided a summary and highlighted that, despite a long period of austerity in the country, there were always choices to be made and, given that the Nature Restoration fund had much to offer communities in the biodiversity of the Highlands, this fund should be reinstated. An amendment to the Motion had been proposed to amend paragraph 3 which the proposer was happy to accept. Paragraph 3 would now read "*Whilst recognising the right of public service workers to receive a fair pay settlement, the Council Leader write to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance Shona Robison MSP to request that the Scottish Government consider the reinstatement of the Nature Restoration Fund as part of their December budget statement*".

In discussion, it was queried where the money would come from to fund this proposal as it was known how difficult it was to make tough choices. Also, if the Nature Restoration Fund could make Highland a more attractive place for visitors and local communities this was to be commended. The Ranger Service had ceased this year and they had done a tremendous job in terms of the natural environment in Highland. If there was any way to reinstate this service this should be supported.

Continuing, 75% of species at risk were located in the Highlands and even in urban areas there were many diverse species to be seen. Biodiversity was an essential part of our quality of life and the motion should be supported.

The Council **AGREED** the Motion as amended.

- (3)** This Council notes the difficulties that can be caused when complex amendments are presented during a debate and suggests that amendments to motions should be shared with the motion proposers at least 24-48 hours before the commencement of Council meetings, so that the motion proposers have time to understand the implications and to discuss them with the amendment proposers.

Furthermore, that where motions have to be accompanied by a financial assessment and an integrated impact assessment, it is only sensible that amendments be subject to the same requirements.

Council therefore calls for the group which to consider appropriate changes to standing orders, and to recommend them to Full Council at the 2025 annual review.

Signed: Ms K Willis Mr C Ballance

The proposer of the Motion provided a summary and was happy to accept an amendment to the final sentence to read '*Council therefore calls for the Governance Review Group to consider appropriate changes to Standing Orders, and to recommend them to Full Council at the December 2025 Council meeting*'.

The Council **AGREED** the Motion as amended.

**17. Confirmation of Minutes
Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais**

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 19 September 2024 as contained in the Volume which has been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

**18. 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 Minutes of Meetings of Committees contained in Volume circulated separately as undernoted:-

Audit Committee	26 September 2024
Pensions Committee	9 October 2024

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

- i. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 20 June 2024 (approved by the Board on 23 September 2024) which were **NOTED**;
- ii. Community Planning Partnership Board held on 5 June 2024 (approved by the Board on 20 September 2024) which were **NOTED**;
- iii. Chief Officer Recruitment Panel held on 30 September 2024 which were **NOTED**; and
- iv. * Redesign Board held on 2 October 2024 which were **APPROVED**.

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

Redesign Board, 2 October 2024

*Starred Item 4 – Customer Experience Strategy

The Council **AGREED** that the Strategy be adopted.

The meeting concluded at 2.30pm.