

Highland Council: Questions: 27 March 2025

Public Questions

1. Mr R Thompson

To the Leader of the Council

Which councillors will be required to leave the room for any vote on a Visitor Levy, due to a Declaration of Interest?

RESPONSE

The Code of Conduct for Councillors makes clear that it is the individual responsibility of every elected member to consider if they should submit a Declaration of interest in respect of a particular item of Council business.

2. Ms A Robertson

To the Leader of the Council

St Clement's School is very unique. It's a primary and secondary school with the most amazing pupils from the ages of 5 to 18. These learners are some of societies most disadvantaged and vulnerable and face challenges with all aspects of their activities of daily living. Give the history surrounding the years of unmet promises of a new school for St Clement's students and The Highland Councils commitment to GIRFEC and the principles it underpins, what assurances can be given that a new stand alone, fit for purpose school with its own identity and management structure will be built/delivered on the already acquired site at Docharty Brae?

RESPONSE

Proposals for the new St Clements School will be discussed as part of the Highland Investment Plan report coming to this meeting of the Council and Members will decide which option to progress.

Member Questions

1. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

In the Budget passed on the 29th February 2024 a reserve of £20m for Adult Social Care Redesign was established. The purpose of the reserve was "to support the Adult Social Care budget on a multi-year basis, and the process of change and transformation."

Please could you detail, with a descriptive analysis and value that would enable a good understanding of the aims of the project, the proposals that have been approved up to the 6th of March and any that are due to be decided by 31st March 2025?

RESPONSE

At the time of writing the following investments have been agreed over the 3-year lifetime of the programme: -

- Programme Resource - £204 000
- Project Management Resource (to include proposed pilot work in Lochaber and associated work linked to the TOM) - £482 454
- Local Care Model Work - £1.15m
- Invernevis Support (to support care delivery in Lochaber pending agreement re new care model) - £726 000
- Contractual Support pending new contract re handyperson and associated telecare services - £91 238

There are also ongoing conversations with NHS Highland about some digital, and associated, opportunities which are likely to be brought forward which will attract funding from the resource identified.

In addition, the Partnership has, in principle, also agreed to commissioning a Shared Lives Service. At the time of writing that has been agreed and figures in the pipeline amount to a likely ask of the fund of in the region of £750 000 to support the set-up of a service including associated project and commissioning costs as well as service delivery for a 3-year period.

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

The Learning Estate Strategy approved at the last Education Committee states that:

Occupancy Levels: The optimum occupancy level across all settings is generally around 90% of the Planning Capacity. This level is used as a benchmark to assess the sufficiency of the estate in general, and to support the consideration of future options around individual schools or groups of schools.

Could the Leader name all the schools above the 90% threshold after modular and temporary buildings are deducted from the planning capacity figure?

RESPONSE

Only one school currently has temporary accommodation as defined in the recently approved Learning Estate Strategy; Craighill Primary School in Tain, where two double modular classroom units are on hire until new Tain Campus building opens (1 nursery class and 3 primary classes). This accommodation has not been included in the Planning Capacity calculation for that school.

3. Mrs T Robertson

To the Leader of the Council

When will we see the outcome of the Area Committee Review?

RESPONSE

The scope and outcome of the Area Committee Review will be a matter to be determined by the Working Group made up by political balance with nominations sought from Group Leaders. Finalised proposals will come forward at the meeting of the full Council in May

4. Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

As repeatedly requested by community representatives on the Corran Ferry Steering Group will you publish the detailed high level programme for the replacement Corran Ferry? This information should include:

Infrastructure Milestone Dates:

- Final funding approval
- Design
- Land and wayleaves
- Contractor tender
- Purchase order complete with contractor
- Access date
- Construction start on site
- Breakdown of civil works
- DNO connection and procurement of transformer
- Energisation
- Contact completion
- Handover

Electric Ferry Milestone Dates:

- Final funding approval
- Design
- Tender
- Purchase order
- Marine builder starts build of ferry
- Completion (including sea trials)

RESPONSE

I have provided the following dates and information on the ferry replacement programme.

Infrastructure Milestone Dates:

- Final funding approval – 26 Sept 2025
- Design – 7 March 2025
- Land and wayleaves – 26 Sept 2025
- Contractor tender – 14 August 2025
- Purchase order complete with contractor – 30 Sept 2025
- Access date – 3 Nov 2025
- Construction start on site – 10 Nov 2025
- Breakdown of civil works – these dates will be provided by the contractor as part of their works programme following contract award.

- DNO connection and procurement of transformer – by March 2030 (current estimate from SSEN)
- Energisation – March 2030 (current estimate from SSEN)
- Contact completion – 10 May 2027
- Handover – 10 May 2027

Final Funding Approval

As part of the Inverness Highland City Region Deal (IHCRD) governance arrangements the Council has requested a time extension beyond the original deal end date of March 2027 to align with an estimated spend profile timeline for a new ferry up to 2028/29.

In accordance with IHCRD governance arrangements, funding will only be released after the Final Business Case (FBC), which will include the final tender prices from the appointed shipyard. The Council continues to collaborate closely with lead consultants, Stantec, to develop the FBC for the new vessel.

Design

Naval architects, naValue, completed the design for the new Corran Ferry in February 2024 as part of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme (SVRP) Phase 1.

Timeline

It will take a few months to pull together the vessel procurement options appraisal for 29/05/25. The lead time will be determined by the option agreed by members.

However, a minimum procurement and build period is as follows:

Stage 1 (Single procurement document - SPD): 3 months

- 6 to 8 weeks for tender returns
- 4 to 6 weeks for evaluation and approval to move to Stage 2

• **Stage 2 (Invitation to tender - ITT): 6 months**

- 3 to 4 months for tender returns
- 2 to 3 months for tender evaluation, site visits, leading bidder negotiations, and approval to award the contract

• **Detailed Design and Build: 24 months**

- Based on CMAL's experience with similar projects it is anticipated to be 24 months, from contract signing to delivery.

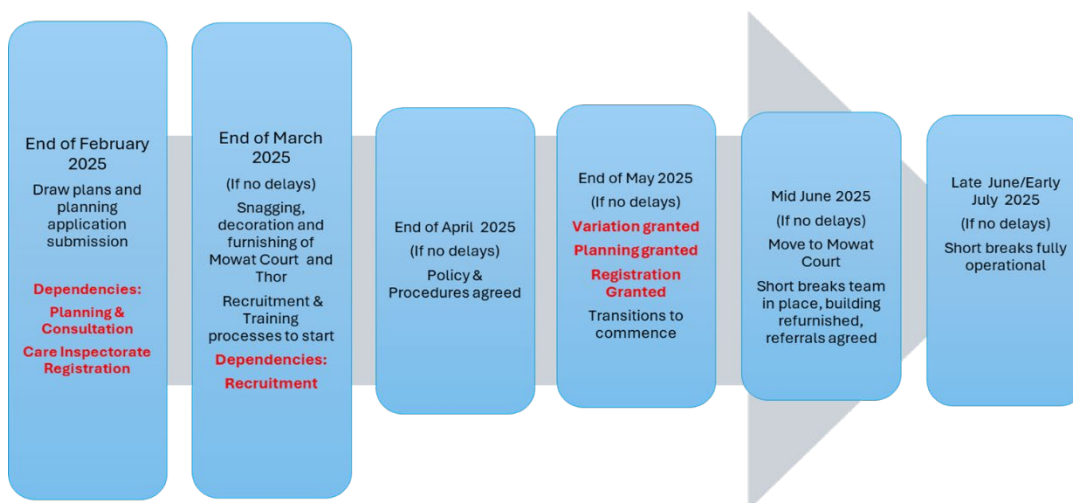
5. Mr M Reiss

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

What is the planned date for the reopening of Thor House, Thurso for respite breaks?

RESPONSE

An elected members briefing was held on 13th March 2025, where a timeline was presented for Thor House (see below)



6. Mrs H Crawford

To the Leader

The undernoted Motion on MAJOR ELECTRICITY DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT was approved by this Council on 30th September 2024, with the backing of over 60 Community Councils across The Highlands and cross-party support from our Councillors. Can you please provide an update in detail, outlining what action has been taken to implement the Motion, including the likely date that the Real Time Mapping will go live?

“MOTION - MAJOR ELECTRICITY DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This Council:

NOTES there are a number of major proposed electricity generation, storage and transmission developments, which have been or are likely to be presented to The Highland Council for planning permission, or for a response as a Consultee, in the near future.

ACKNOWLEDGES that, without prejudice to future determinations, such major infrastructure developments are very likely to have significant scheme specific and cumulative environmental and socio-economic impacts upon communities and landscapes within the Highlands.

RECOGNISES it is desirable that communities across Highland are fully engaged in the consultation and planning process and are suitably empowered to respond on an equal basis given the resources deployed by the developers, SSEN and statutory consultees.

NOTES that currently these major development applications are not considered in a Highland wide context, rather they are lodged individually in a piecemeal, fragmented fashion and therefore considered individually, without reference to the effects from the entirety of developments across Highland being considered and therefore with a lack of understanding as to what the totality will mean for our communities and our environment.

THEREFORE, this Council AGREES:

- (1) **REAL TIME MAPPING** - To produce a real time map, publicly available online, showing all the major renewable energy related developments within Council's knowledge, existing and proposed, including those which are or will come to Council for planning and or the Energy Consents Unit, be they operational, permitted developments or otherwise. In so far as legally permissible, the map will also include an indication of anonymised approaches made to Highland Council for pre-planning advice. This map will therefore present a holistic overview of the applications that are currently in the pipeline, including but not limited to, all proposed electricity generation, storage and transmission developments, grid connection, energy generation stations, BESS, and wind farms.

- (2) **THE APPROACH TO APPLICATIONS**
 - (i) The Leader will continue dialogue with the Scottish Government to ensure that the full cumulative aspect of developments, including the potential grid connection, is considered within the submission of an application under S36 of the Electricity Act for an energy generation station, and for all BESS applications of whatever scale, and the Leader to report regularly to Group Leaders regarding progress, and
 - (ii) If an increase in the MW threshold for applications under S36 of the Electricity Act is implemented so that some additional generating stations would fall within the Town and Country Planning Acts, the Council will update its Planning Guidance for such developments to ensure that the cumulative impacts are considered in full, including the grid connection aspects of a development.

- (3) **COMMUNITY COUNCIL MAJOR APPLICATION PLANNING TRAINING**

To take urgent action to better equip communities regarding the planning process and how to present their case, by providing planning training to Community Councils by the Planning Advisory Service and external experts specifically regarding such major applications.

- (4) **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Without ever expressing a prior opinion on the determination of any application, to engage with our communities regarding the anticipated environmental and socio-economic impacts, given that some within our communities are concerned about a wide range of issues, and to review what actions the Council can legally take to further ensure that local community views are considered in the planning process and for Officers to present a paper to the next Full Council for consideration.

Proposer: Cllr Helen Crawford, Aird & Loch Ness Ward"

RESPONSE

The following provides an update on the implementation of this motion.

1. Real Time Mapping

A single consolidated map of all energy related development will be available mid-April. This will form the basis of a dynamic map that will extract details automatically from the planning application back-office system. The recruitment process for an officer to assist with the further development of this map and its maintenance is ongoing, with the closing date for applications reached on 17 March.

2. Approach to Applications

The Strategic Lead for Planning and Building Standards is current chair of the Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) Climate Change, Energy and Resources sub-committee and represents HoPS on the Scottish Government's Transmission Steering Group. The cumulative impact of development has been discussed in these forums with Scottish Government officials. As it stands the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations require cumulative impacts to be considered. While it is often the case that grid connection will not always be known at the time that an application is lodged, officers are requesting that the grid connection, even if only indicative, is included within assessments.

3. Community Council Training

Officers have been discussing a programme for delivery of training for community councils with Planning Aid Scotland (PAS). PAS indicates that a session lasting approximately 90 mins can be provided. It is envisaged that this would be a virtual training session to enable maximum attendance and reduce the need for travel. Indications are that this can be provided mid-May with an exact date yet to be agreed.

4. Community Engagement

In line with the Council decision of October 2025, interviews for three Community Support Officers – Renewables Engagement will take place on 25 March 2025.

7. Mr C Ballance

To the Chair of Corporate Resources

How much paper has been saved since June 2023 when Council agreed to end the practice of automatically copying all committee papers to all members, together with the approximate financial savings in resources and officer time.

RESPONSE

There is no record of this information. However, reasonable financial savings have been achieved as a result of this.

As an indicator, the printing costs for April 2019-March 2020 were £10,704. Our postage provider, Pitney Bowes, does not retain records over five years so we are not able to provide details of these costs. Although there is a saving on staff time and resources, we are not able to quantify this.

8. Mr R Stewart

To the Leader

Is the council content that bodies under its control are following their legal obligations to provide single-sex facilities?

RESPONSE

In terms of guidance, formed by current legislation, the Council complies with the Equalities Act 2010 and the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

9. Mr A Graham

To the Leader

For the most recent dates available, what is the average time taken to answer customer phone calls at the Service Centre?

RESPONSE

For the past 6-week period 03 Feb to 14 March 2025, the average speed of answer at the service centre is 7 minutes.

10. Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Leader

What is the total financial cost incurred by Highland Council over the past five years in defending legal actions brought against the council.

This should include all legal costs (both in-house and external counsel), court costs, settlements, compensation payments, and any other related expenditures.

RESPONSE

A single figure cannot be produced. The scope of the question is very broad and will encompass a huge variety of legal actions. In many instances the Council will be represented by external solicitors and/or advocates. The financial records which detail expenditure on such external legal assistance do not distinguish between actions raised by the Council and those where it is the defender.

11. Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Can you please advise me and fellow members with the production of a timetable for the rollout for the replacement of old inefficient amber streetlights in my ward and others, in favour of the much more economical LED lights, in order to cut costs, improve efficiency and to achieve Net Zero in the Highland Council's self-proclaimed Climate Emergency?

RESPONSE

The attached information provides a summary of the LED replacement programme.

Local Council Area	Total Number of Lamps	Non LED Lamps Remaining EOFY 2025	Lamps to be Upgraded to LED between April 2025 and EOFY 2026	Non LED Lamps remaining EOFY 2026	Lamps to be Upgraded to LED between April 2026 and EOFY 2027	Non LED Lamps remaining EOFY 2027	Lamps to be Upgraded to LED between April 2027 and EOFY 2028	Non LED Lamps remaining EOFY 2028
01 - North, West and Central Sutherland	1624	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
02 - Thurso and Northwest Caithness	3145	5	0	5	5	0	0	0
03 - Wick and East Caithness	2440	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
04 - East Sutherland and Edderton	2238	12	0	12	12	0	0	0
05 - Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	2522	66	18	48	48	0	0	0
06 - Cromarty Firth	3883	17	0	17	17	0	0	0
07 - Tain and Easter Ross	2177	100	9	91	91	0	0	0
08 - Dingwall and Seaforth	3424	37	0	37	37	0	0	0
09 - Black Isle	2123	29	0	29	0	29	29	0
10 - Eilean A' Chèo	1631	268	198	70	38	32	32	0
11 - Caol and Mallaig	1682	22	0	22	22	0	0	0
12 - Aird and Loch Ness	1810	42	0	42	42	0	0	0
13 - Inverness West	2910	276	7	269	150	119	119	0
14 - Inverness Central	2904	671	192	479	320	159	159	0
15 - Inverness Ness-side	2792	345	147	198	124	74	74	0
16 - Inverness Millburn	2695	583	238	345	234	111	111	0
17 - Culloden and Ardersier	3207	851	573	278	227	51	51	0
18 - Nairn and Cawdor	2913	912	377	535	346	189	189	0
19 - Inverness South	4602	598	250	348	247	101	101	0
20 - Badenoch and Strathspey	3921	1129	556	573	363	210	210	0
21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	2632	98	13	85	54	31	31	0
Totals for Local Council Areas Combined	57275	6061	2578	3483	2377	1106	1106	0